

Jesus on Prayer and Fasting

Text: Matthew 6:9-18

Introduction: Is there any subject in the Christian life more guilt-inducing than prayer?

It doesn't have to be that way. In fact, it shouldn't be that way.

I think most of us would say that we want to pray more than we do. We know prayer is important. We know that the Bible teaches us that followers of Jesus should pray. And yet, it's so easy for prayer to become just one more thing on the list of things we're supposed to be doing.

But what if we learned to view prayer more as an invitation than an obligation?

The God of the universe invites you to come to Him in prayer. You don't deserve that kind of access to God. In fact, you deserve exactly the opposite. You deserve separation from God and punishment from God because of your sin. But God made a way, through His son Jesus and His death on the cross, for you to be reconciled to Him.

The Bible teaches us that, as followers of Jesus, we have full access to God. We can boldly approach His throne of grace because of Jesus. And we can call Him our Father. He has adopted us into His family as His children.

Isn't that amazing?

In Matthew 6, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus doesn't simply tell His followers that they are supposed to pray. He invites them to pray. He tells them how to pray. How they can approach God as their Father in heaven.

Go ahead and turn there in your Bible. Matthew 6. We're going to be looking at verses 9-18 and thinking about prayer and fasting. You can find Matthew 6 on page 761 in the black pew Bible in front of you. If you don't own a Bible, we invite you to take the pew Bible with you when you leave.

(Read Matthew 6:1-18...Pray)

Followers of Jesus pray and fast in dependence on God our Father.

Last week we looked at Jesus' emphasis on hypocrisy in the Sermon on the Mount. Followers of Jesus are not to give, pray and fast for our own glory. Instead, we give, pray and fast for God's glory.

But Jesus had more to say about prayer than just a warning against hypocrisy. In fact, He taught His followers how to pray by giving them a model. He said, "Pray then like this..." The prayer that Jesus then gives is typically called The Lord's Prayer. Some have suggested that it should be called The Disciples' Prayer instead since it wasn't actually prayed by Jesus. Rather, it was given by Jesus to His disciples as a model to teach them how to pray.

See, Jesus did not intend the Lord's prayer primarily as something for you to memorize and recite. We know because He has just gotten done warning against "empty phrases" and "many words." He's giving His followers a model to follow as they pray.

Have you ever felt like you didn't know how to pray? I'm sure we've all been there at some point. Well, I've got good news. Jesus teaches us how to pray.

And He tells us first that...

I. We pray to God as King (Matthew 6:9-10).

The prayer Jesus gives contains six petitions. It is easily divided into two sections with three petitions each. The first three petitions focus on God. And then the other three petitions focus on our needs.

A. But before we get into the petitions, notice the way that Jesus says we are to approach God.

1. He says, "Our Father in heaven."
2. Jesus referred to God as Father 43 times in the Gospel of Matthew (Quarles, 187). When speaking of His own relationship to God, Jesus said, "MY Father." And when speaking to the disciples about their relationship to God, He said, YOUR Father."
3. Isn't that such a wonderful biblical truth? That God is our Father. We are His children. And we can approach Him in prayer as our Father.

4. Goshen, don't miss the significance of that. If you are in Christ, God in heaven is your Father. You are His child. And you come to Him in prayer as your Father.
5. See, the Bible teaches us that God has adopted us as His sons and daughters.
6. What a wonderful gospel reality that is! We were separated from God. The Bible says we were enemies of God. But because of Jesus, we've been adopted into God's family. We are His sons and daughters. And we can come to him as our Father.
7. Paul writes in Romans 8, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:15-16).
8. Many of you have or had a wonderful father. And thinking of God as your Father is a sweet, sweet thing.
9. Others of you may have had a difficult or even bad father. If that's you, don't think of your own father here. Think of the best father you know.
10. And realize that God is an infinitely better Father than any earthly father. When we come to him in prayer, He welcomes us with open arms as sons and daughters.
11. When I come home from work, unless they're engrossed in something on TV, my kids will often run to the door shouting, "Daddy!" I'll often pick them up, hug them, and tell them how glad I am to see them. Those are sweet, sweet times that one day I'm certainly going to miss.
12. But I have to admit that I'm not always as glad to see my kids storming towards me as soon as I walk through the door. Sometimes, between the kids and the dogs, it seems as if I can't get through the door.
13. Goshen, God is not like me. When we come to Him in prayer, He never greets us with a grumble. He is an infinitely better Father than me. When we approach His throne of grace in prayer and call Him Father, He's never tired after a long day at work. He never has His hands full. He's never distracted by other things.

14. He's always ready to receive us as His children. So, we pray, "Our Father in heaven..."

B. Jesus also teaches us to pray to God, "Hallowed be your name."

1. The CSB says, "Your name be honored as holy."
2. Honoring God's name as holy is the opposite of profaning God's name (Quarles, 189).
3. We do not take the name of the Lord our God in vain. Instead, we honor God's name as holy. Both with our words and our lives.
4. The idea is that we are to admire, esteem, honor, revere, treasure, and value God's name above everything else and everyone else (Akin, 93).
5. I think when we pray, we like to get down to business, don't we? We skip right to our list of wants and needs.
6. But Jesus teaches us that when we pray, the first thing we should do is worship God. He is worthy of our worship.
7. He longs for our worship. He delights in our worship. After all, He is God.
8. And this is worship to God that impacts our lives as Christians. You can't honor God's name as holy in your prayer closet, or in the prayer meeting, and then go out and profane God's name with your life.
9. God, let everything I say and do bring honor, and praise, and glory to your name.

C. We also pray, "Your kingdom come."

1. Too often when we pray, our hearts and minds are set on our own kingdom. We're so focused on our little lives that we fail to give adequate attention to God and His work in the world.
2. But the prayer for God's kingdom to come is a prayer for Christ to return and establish His kingly rule in all the earth.

3. And we know as Christians that He will return. He will establish His kingdom forever. He has promised that He will. And He always keeps His promises. He always does exactly what He says He's going to do.
4. So, we wait for His coming. And we long for it in prayer. "Your kingdom come."
5. This of course has implications for our lives now. If Jesus is King, and He's going to return to establish His kingdom forever, shouldn't we live like it now? In preparation for our coming King.
6. Reminding ourselves of the return of Jesus and setting our hearts and minds on heaven should motivate us as we fight against sin and strive for righteousness in our lives.
7. It should also motivate us in our evangelism. There is coming a day when Christ will return and establish His kingdom forever. Since that's true, we must proclaim the message of the coming King. Your neighbors need to know of the return of Christ. Your friends and family need to know of the return of Christ. Your coworkers need to know of the return of Christ. People need to know that the way to prepare for the coming King is to turn from their sin and place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
8. What about you? Are you ready for the coming King? Are you in Christ? Have you turned from your sin and placed your trust in Jesus? Don't wait until it's too late. Come to Jesus in faith today. While there's still time.
9. As followers of Jesus, we pray for God's kingdom to come.

D. We also pray, "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

1. As we look at the world around us, we can clearly see that God's will is not done here on earth as it is in heaven.

2. God is sovereign over all the earth, but many on earth reject God's authority and even seek to oppose God's work in the world. As followers of Jesus, we long for a day when that isn't so. We long for a day when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. So we pray for that. We ask God for it. Because ultimately, He is the one who is going to bring it to pass, isn't He?
3. Do you feel powerless in this world sometimes? I know I do. I look around and see all the brokenness in the world. I wish I could fix it all. But I know that I can't.
4. But do you know who will one day fix it all? God will! His will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven.
5. Still, even though we are powerless to accomplish this work on our own, God has chosen to use us to accomplish His purposes in the world, hasn't He? We don't just sit around and wait, do we? No, we get to work. We seek to ensure that God's will is done in our own lives. We seek to ensure that God's will is done in our church. We work for the good of our community and the world. We proclaim the gospel in our community and to the ends of the earth.
6. And we trust that there is coming a day when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

That's the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer where we focus our attention on God as King. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Jesus teaches us to pray to God as King. He also teaches us that...

II. We pray to God as Provider (Matthew 6:11-15).

God cares about us. He cares about our needs. Jesus is going to say later in the Sermon on the Mount, "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

It is good and right for us when we pray for us to focus our attention on God and His kingdom. But it is also good and right for us to bring our needs before Him in prayer. He loves you. He cares about you. He is not just your King. He's your Provider. Your heavenly Father. So...

A. Jesus teaches us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

1. Goshen, God knows your needs. He cares about your needs. And God is the source of everything that you have.
2. Why is there food on your table? Because you go to work and earn money and go to the grocery store and buy food? Or is it because God, who owns the cattle on a thousand hills, is your provider?
3. Hard work is a good thing. There is a direct relationship between work and God's provision. The Bible says that if you don't work, you don't eat.
4. But in our self-sufficient, self-absorbed culture, we can so easily deceive ourselves into thinking that WE are our provider.
5. Goshen, you are not your provider. God is.
6. Why do we pray before we eat? Because we're thankful for God's provision. We know that every good gift comes from God. And food on the table is a good gift.
7. Don't take this for granted. Cultivate in yourself a heart of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving to God for His faithful provision for you.
8. Remember, God knows your heart. He's not interested in vain repetition before a meal. He desires a heart of gratitude.
9. "Give us this day our daily bread."

B. Jesus also teaches us that when we pray, we are to seek God's forgiveness.

1. "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."
2. The Bible teaches that if you have turned from your sin and placed your trust in Jesus, God has already forgiven you of your sin.

3. So, why do we pray asking God to forgive us?
4. This is a daily recognition of our sin. A daily recognition of the salvation that we've received in Jesus. And a daily recognition of God's mercy and grace in our lives.
5. We need mercy and grace and forgiveness from God each and every day, don't we? We fall short. We don't measure up. We need God to forgive us.
6. Thankfully, the Bible says that if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
7. And not only are we to receive forgiveness from God, but we are also to forgive others as God in Christ has forgiven us.
8. Jesus tells a parable in Matthew 18 of an unforgiving servant. The servant was brought before his master with a debt he could never repay. Ultimately, the master showed the servant mercy and forgave his debt. But immediately after that, the servant went and found someone who owed him some money. And instead of extending to his debtor the same mercy he had received, he had him thrown into prison.
9. May we never be like that unforgiving servant. As people who have been forgiven much, we must extend that same forgiveness to others.
10. Jesus says... (Read vs. 14-15)
11. If we are truly in Christ and have experienced the forgiveness of God ourselves, we will extend that same forgiveness to others.
12. "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

C. Then at the end of the prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

1. Goshen, we need God's help. Specifically, we need God's help in our fight against sin.
2. It's not just forgiveness that we pray for regarding sin we've already committed. We also ask God to help us in our fight against sin. We ask God to protect us from future potential sin.

3. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”
4. You don’t have to fight against sin on your own, Christian. You don’t have to depend upon your own strength and your own ability to overcome sin.
5. Sometimes we have a tendency to think that our initial salvation is all about God and His work in our lives but that our sanctification and growth as a Christian is solely dependent on us. That couldn’t be further from the truth. We need God’s help every moment of every day.
6. Where we are weak, He is strong.
7. So, we pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

We pray to God as King. We pray to God as Provider. And finally...

III. We fast for God alone (Matt. 6:16-18).

(Read Matthew 6:16-18)

A. We looked at this passage last week in the context of Jesus’ teaching on hypocrisy.

1. Jesus warns against hypocritical fasting. Fasting for show. So that others will look at you and take notice of how spiritual you are.
2. But fasting was a big deal in first century Judaism. Jewish fasting consisted of both corporate public fasts and individual fasts. The OT law required self-denial of all Israelites on the Day of Atonement. Fasts were also required for the Jewish New Year, anniversaries of particular tragedies in Jewish history, and during times of national crisis (Quarles, 224).
3. Apparently, it was not uncommon for people to use fasting as a way to show how spiritual they were. Look at me. I’m fasting. I must be really close to God.

4. Isn’t it amazing how our sinful hearts can take any good thing and turn it into something bad? Giving, praying, fasting. Whatever it is. Our sinful hearts will take it and corrupt it.
5. So, Jesus warned against fasting as the hypocrites do. Fasting for show to be seen by others.
6. That’s the main idea behind what Jesus says here concerning fasting.

B. But there’s also something implied by Jesus’ teaching on fasting here that we should take note of.

1. Jesus says, “When you fast.” Jesus assumes that His followers will fast.
2. I wonder when the last time you fasted was. I know that for me it has been quite a while and has never been a consistent spiritual discipline in my life.
3. Fasting is going without food and/or drink for the purpose of prayer and spiritual devotion (Akin, 88). It’s a spiritual discipline that we don’t often talk about.
4. But it’s a spiritual discipline that we see in the Bible and one that Jesus assumed His followers would practice.
5. In fact, in Mark 2, we see that now is actually the time for God’s people to fast.
6. There in Mark 2 we see that Jesus’ disciples did not fast while He was physically present with them. But now that He has ascended into heaven, now is the time for followers of Jesus to fast.
7. Because fasting is a means to God. Not a means to right standing with God. Jesus accomplished that on the cross. There’s nothing we can do to make ourselves right with God.
8. But we can draw near to God in total dependence on Him. And how do we draw near to God? Through the spiritual disciplines that He has given us: reading His Word, prayer, and yes, fasting.

9. **We don't fast to impress. We don't fast to make God love us more. We fast because we recognize that we are completely dependent on God. We do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.**
10. **We fast because we want God. We want intimacy with Him. We want to express our reliance upon Him. We want to confess that we need Him more than we need food.**
11. **That's why I say that we fast for God alone.**

Conclusion: I wonder if you've ever fasted. And if you have, when was the last time you fasted?

We said at the beginning that **followers of Jesus pray and fast in dependence on God our Father.**

That's what this teaching from Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount is about. Dependence on God our Father.

When we fail to pray and fast, we communicate our independence. Our self-sufficiency. We pretend as if we don't need God. We've got this. We have everything under control on our own.

How foolish. The truth is that you and I are wholly dependent on God whether we recognize it or not. We need Him. Everything we have is from Him.

There's an old hymn that we sing sometimes: I Need Thee Every Hour.

I need Thee ev'ry hour,
Most gracious Lord;
No tender voice like Thine
Can peace afford.

I need Thee, O I need Thee;
Ev'ry hour I need Thee!
O bless me now, my Savior,
I come to Thee.

I need Thee ev'ry hour,
Stay Thou nearby;
Temptations lose their pow'r
When Thou art nigh.

I need Thee, O I need Thee;
Ev'ry hour I need Thee!
O bless me now, my Savior,
I come to Thee.

Do you know that you need God? More than anything else in the world?

Have you ever come to Him in total dependence? Asking Him to save you? You can today. He invites you to come. Set aside your sin and all the things that try to convince you of your independence. And come to Him in repentance and faith.

If you are already in Christ, would you renew your dependence on Him this morning? You need Him every hour. Every hour you need Him.