

DON'T GO QUIET

Starting a two part'er today and the week following Easter.

Looking at what Jesus called Practicing Righteousness.

We know it more commonly as Spiritual Disciplines.

Which have often been undervalued but until recently have never been controversial.

So often Christianity has pendulum swings. Stuff that is good gets misused or abused so we stop using it.

If you are not a Christian you probably are going to learn a lot about how messed up we are. (thinking ... already knew that ... fair enough :))

So many of us experienced a Christianity that was all about behavior modification.

While we did all the “right things” on the outside ... reading Bible, going to church, saying our prayers ...

On the inside we were REALLY unhealthy.

Some of us are still there and pretending ...

Other's of us discovered grace!!!

God doesn't love us b/c we do those things.

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The problem is we may have swung the pendulum to far the other way.

“I’m not going to do those things!!!” → those are anti-grace.”

This is amplified by the rampant individualism and consumerism that has crept into our Christianity.

I do things my way according to my needs.

So not only are fewer Christians reading the Bible, praying, and going to church ... it is being celebrated as freedom in Christ.

The idea is, God loves us as we are.

Now that is true!!! God loves us how we are.

But Spiritual Disciplines aren’t about God loving us more.

They are about US experiencing MORE of God’s love.

PIC: Manna ... evidence of God’s loving provision ... sustaining ...

Another way to re-think the Spiritual Disciplines is to call them “Means of grace.” → avenues by which we experience the grace of God.

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Who wants grow in the knowledge and experience of the grace and love of the Father?

And if you are exploring Christianity this can really be a benefit to you in your journey.

So today we are going to look the Spiritual Discipline of prayer and fasting.

These things are done in tandem.

Since prayer is clouded in so much confusion and fear I want to take most of the time to speak into prayer and then will touch on fasting at the end.

So we are going to look at Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew 6.

Matthew 6:1,5-6

- 1 **"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.**
- 5 **"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father**

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who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

It's interesting that Jesus speaks first to our hearts motive and posture before he gets to the practicals of how to pray.

In his day the spiritual gurus liked to pray loud and long.

But that isn't prayer ...

It looked LIKE prayer ... but from God's perspective it wasn't.

Prayer Is Coming and Speaking To The Audience of One

We live in a competitive culture.

Christianity is filled with it as well.

We feel the need to "one-up" each other.

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Posting our perfect morning prayer on social media for all to see and applaud. (look how many likes I got!!! PRIDE)

Feel so good, until our friend post his and it's better ... and gets more likes than ours. (DESPAIR)

Instead of being blessed by his prayer our ego get's bruised.

That isn't coming and praying to the Audience of One, but the audience of everyone.

The danger of this motivation to pray is that you are seeking the reward from others.

It's why many of us don't come to prayer meetings or don't like praying out loud.

We are more aware of others than we are of God.

I was there!! But you can't wait for that fear to go away. The only way to get over it is to pray in front of others.

“Hold up!! Didn't you just contradict yourself?”

Jesus wasn't saying praying in front of people was wrong. Praying to be impress people was wrong.

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But you can still have a heart that wants to impress people even though you don't pray in front of them.

So not praying is just not facing the facts.

One of the best ways to get over impressing people is failing in front of them.

Of course, this is a human's perspective of failure.

We've constructed false ideas about what prayer should be.

Which is probably why we don't want to pray out loud.

We think our prayers have to sound like we've been on the mountain top with God for 40 days.

We want our prayers to sound so impressive ... not only to people but to God.

Matthew 6:7-8

7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

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What Jesus is saying here is ...

Prayer Requires A Sincere Heart Not A Sophisticated Mind

The church has not done a good job discipling people to pray.

I know I'm guilty.

I think back on my public praying here on Sundays or at prayer meetings or in community groups.

Too many times I've prayed to impress people or to impress God.

Essentially what I've done is disciplined you into a Gospel of works instead of grace.

I AM SO SORRY!!

God isn't demanding long eloquent prayers.

He is waiting to respond until we have the perfect tone and verbiage.

We need to change the goal of good prayer to being direct with God.

More like ...

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“Jesus, I’m afraid about the results of my doctors appointment. I need your peace.”

Not ...

“Lord, oh Great Awesome Almighty Benevolent Creator of All ... you have all the victory over every hardship ... you calmed the storms, healed the sick, raised the death ... you overcame death and the grave ... [5 MINUTES LATER] ... will you, OH merciful and gracious Father, now grant me peace for my doctor results, if it be in accordance with your will.”

I don’t enjoy it when my kids come to me this way asking for stuff. I’m like ... “I love you ... just get to what you want to ask.” Most of the time I’ve already guessed what they are going to ask for.

Jesus is saying the same thing to us ... “Dude (or Dudette) // God already knows what you want.”

We don’t have to butter him up. We don’t have to appease him with words of flattery.

God tells us in the Bible that His eyes are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer.

We don’t need pretentious prayers!

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We can be bold knowing that God prefers simple straightforward sincere requests!!!

Here is something that helps me.

I don't put a timer on my private prayer times.

I don't check the clock for when I started or when I ended.

I'm sure you've heard plenty a Christian brag on themselves about their prayer time. (I'M GUILTY!!!)

“So, brother Shamus, I was laboring in prayer this morning at 5am and before I knew it the wife was calling me for breakfast at 8am. And I bring this up b/c God brought you to mind ...”

We do that junk all the time. And all that it does it create hypocrites or hopelessness.

A good prayer time isn't how long you pray or how well you pray, BUT how present and authentic you are with God.

This should be encouraging and freeing for all of us.

I hope it encourages you to practice prayer each day.

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For some of you I hope you now realize you can stop wasting 2 hours of your life. :)

It's freeing to know that God cares about a sincere heart.

But what if we are sincerely praying for the wrong things?

I remember when I first wanted to start praying my first question was ... "What do I pray for?"

We should do what Jesus' disciples did. They came asked him to teach them how to pray.

Now that wouldn't be a strange request, except for the fact that they grew up in a culture that practiced prayer to God all the time.

It's not like Jesus was inventing something new.

So why would his disciples need teaching on prayer?

I think it's B/C they watched him pray.

And his prayers must have been different both in authority and content.

People said the same thing about his teaching. [different / more authority and power]

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Jesus' didn't tell them "Keep praying like you've always done." or "Go watch a Pharisee pray."

He gives them a template to follow ...

Matthew 6:9-13

9 Pray then like this:

**"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.**

**10 Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.**

11 Give us this day our daily bread,

**12 and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

**13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

So let's start by focusing on that first part ...

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

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Prayer Is The Practice Of Putting God First.

So we start by coming to a loving Father.

But we aren't to treat him in a familiar lowly sense.

He is our exalted Father.

There is this word Hallow ... which is an uncommon word.

Punk rock points if you can slip that into conversation at work tomorrow.

What does it mean to hallow God's name?

To hallow something is to treat it as sacred and supreme.

So Jesus wants us to get to this first in prayer.

He is saying our primary motive for prayer isn't to seek God for what He can do for me.

Jesus says, "Seek God b/c he is worthy to be sought."

Why? Because God's glory and presence and nature frames everything else. It puts all our problems in the right perspective and proportion.

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Most often we come to God under stress and duress with our grocery list of big and impossible things.

This makes sense ... our minds are preoccupied and filled with problems and pain.

They breed anxiety, fear, stress.

“How can I praise God under these heavy burdens?”

So we often pray to God for what he can do for us and neglect to pray to God simply for who he is.

But Jesus knows best ...

He knows what is going to happen when you take your eyes off your life and its problems and look to God.

God's greatness will grow to overshadow our issues.

Those burdens that were once so big fall into their proper proportion.

This is what Jesus was saying, “My yoke is easy and burden is light.”

“When you come to me it isn't so much that I remove all your problems and give you exactly what you want.”

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“It’s that these things become light in comparison to the glory, power, and grace found in my presence.”

So we seek God first b/c He is worthy.

We want our vision to be full of Him.

We want the reality of His glory and truth to invade us and transform us.

We not only want more of God; we want more of what he wants.

So the next natural step in prayer is ...

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

God’s kingdom is the place where He dwells with his people that are surrendered to his good and perfect will.

His kingdom is described as the place of righteousness, peace, and joy.

This is fully realized in heaven now.

No one in heaven is living on their own agenda or fighting against God’s supremacy.

Everyone is happily enjoying God.

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So how does this Kingdom break more into earth?

The best way to understand this is looking at revivals in church history.

These are periods where God's presence is more real and active both in and outside the church.

It's like a tide coming in and everything is getting caught up in it.

There are stories of people would be walking past churches and be hit by the power of the Holy Spirit, fall under conviction, surrender their will, and be saved. (Like spiritual collateral damage.)

You see this in Acts 2 at Pentecost.

[3000 innocent bystanders caught up in God's presence and activity. 3K convicted, saved, baptized, added to church, and practiced spiritual disciplines.]

So when we pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done..."

We are actively putting God and his kingdom first.

We are actively surrendering our will to his will.

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But we are also asking for more of His kingdom to break in.
More of his presence and activity.

We think about our cities and our neighbors ...

They are in bondage to a false hope ...

They need God's kingdom of power and truth to break into
their hearts and rescue them and heal them.

So, why doesn't God just do it then?

Why do we need to pray for that?

"God has determined to work through the prayers of His
people."

Think about the last 2K years of church history.

How many millions of prayers like this went up to
heaven???

Some prayers got to behold revivals with their own eyes.
Others sowed in prayers while others reaped the harvest.

Our job isn't to predict ... it is to pray.

We pray for His glory and His will and leave the details up to
Him.

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[PAUSE]

Practicing prayer Jesus' way will significantly change your priorities.

Which ends up affecting what we ask God for.

We become less independent and selfish. → More God dependent and surrendered.

Matthew 6:11-13

11 Give us this day our daily bread,

12 and forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

Prayer Is The Practice Of Depending On God

The second half of Jesus' prayer template is all about asking God for help.

It reminds us that God is our provider.

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One pastor said, "Prayerlessness is the church's declaration of independence from God."

It is so easy to get too busy for prayer.

In fact that is one of the main reasons we don't.

In a recent survey of pastors in America it was found that on average we spend between 5-10 minutes in prayer a day.

STORY: A church in Utah was in the process of hiring a new pastor. So they asked the congregation what attributes they desired the next pastor to have. Of the 85 qualities given not one involved prayer.

Administration, leadership, communication, pleasant personality were among the most desirable qualities.

We overvalue the work we can see with our eyes.

Prayer doesn't offer us that.

So end up giving too much of our time to church activities.

We do the Great Commission (go make disciples), and forget the Great Commandment (Love God with all your heart, soul, strength).

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We overvalue slick programs, entertaining services, in quality environments.

(Those aren't necessarily bad things ...)

But the idea of a pastor tucked away in a study seeking God and interceding for the church doesn't register as good leadership to the average churchgoer.

The pastor or disciple too busy to pray may see results ... but just what is being built?

"It is better to let the work go by default than to let the praying go by neglect. Whatever affects the intensity of our praying affects the value of our work. "Too busy to pray" is not only the keynote to backsliding, but it mars even the work done. Nothing is well done without prayer for the simple reason that it leaves God out of the account. It is so easy to be seduced by the good to neglect the best ... Satan has effectively disarmed us when he can keep us too busy doing things to stop and pray." - E.M. Bounds

Friends, where do you and I need to make a correction?

- Busyness can't be an excuse anymore ... too busy to pray is a call to adjust our daily rhythm.

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- 5 minutes ... 10 minutes ... surely we can find that amount of time. → Start there ... grow into more.

[PAUSE]

Before we end, I want to have us all engage in a fun little exercise. But first, I want to touch briefly on fasting and it enhances our prayers.

Fasting is the practice of abstaining from food or something significant in your life for a period of time.

What is the benefit of fasting with prayer?

Think about it this way...

PIC: When you close your eyes ... your hearing sense heightens. (Teenagers you know this b/c parents falling asleep can hear the TV better than you can.)

It is fascinating how eliminating one sense heightens others. They have found that blind people have developed this sense called “echo imaging.” (Think bats). They can make out dimensional space around them. Without their blindness this sense would remain undeveloped.

That is what fasting does ...

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It weakens our flesh to make us spiritually stronger and heightens our sensitivity to God's presence.

It is a strong tool for spiritual warfare.

I was 25 and our church did a 5 day corporate fast. Prayer every evening. I struggled with purity, lust, pornography. By the end of that fast I had encountered God in such significant ways that my lust and addiction to porn had severely diminished.

Now you can fast privately as well. I would commend it as a regular rhythm in your life.

But there is something powerful about corporate/public prayer that private prayer can't match.

So let's talk about that a little bit b/c so often we think prayer should be private.

A recent survey found that 80% of self-identifying praying adults only pray silent and solo.

13% ever pray audibly.

2% ever attend a church prayer meeting.

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The question isn't which is more important: private or corporate prayer. That's like choosing which leg is more important to walk on.

Private and corporate prayer fuel each other.

- Private prayer will prepare you for public prayer.
- Corporate prayer will fuel and instruct your private prayer.

There is a power and authority that happens when the church prays together.

We need you all to join us when we have those moments.

Prioritize it!!! God works through our prayers!!!

Okay ... I've talked enough ... now I want to do a simple practice.

It won't take long ... I'm not going to put anyone on the spot.

You have a paper and pen on your seat.

The first statement says ...

- "Father, I praise you b/c you are ..." → (This is equiv. to Hallow be your name). → write down a word or short phrase to finish that statement. [faithful]

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- Now I want to hear from 10 different people what they wrote down.
 - NOTE: how many learned new words to give God adoration with? (Power and benefit of corporate prayer that influences private prayer).

Next statement says ...

- “Jesus, thank you for saving me. In you I am ... “ → (more hallowing). → write down a word or phrase. [set free from sin].
- Okay ... 10 different people share.

Next statement ...

- “Father, give me and your church more of your ...” → (This is equiv. to “Your kingdom come/will be done). → [Holy Spirit / love / truth / grace ...]
- Let’s have 10 people share ...

Final statement ...

- Holy Spirit, help me today to ... (God dependence). → [give grace / be satisfied in your provision / keep from temptation / be more worshipful / be more forgiving ...]
- Let’s hear from 10 people ...

Tada!!! We just had a prayer meeting.

This week is our 1 year celebration.

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We are meeting at Walter B. Jones park at 6pm.

Going to kick the celebration off by spending a few minutes praying to God. Simple sincere adoration & thankfulness for what he's done and asking him to do more.

This Friday is Good Friday. MHC is having a Good Friday service at 7pm if you want to attend. All the sites of our church will be fasting Friday. We are not having a corporate prayer meeting.

But we invite you to fast and pray that God would prepare all the hearts coming Easter Sunday to be transformed by the hope of the resurrection.

[BAND COME UP]

As we come to communion let's be reminded that prayer is coming to a God who invites us to come to him.

Prayer is feasting on God for who he is and for his perfect provision.

Jesus paid it all so that we could come to the Father who sees and hears us and loves us.

This is a moment for Christians to come and enjoy God.

If you aren't a Christian, consider the sacrifice Jesus made so that we could know God as Our Father. Put your faith and dependence on Him as your Lord and Savior.

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It is simply a matter of saying Jesus save me, have mercy on me a sinner. If you confess that ... you will be saved. God will be your Father. This is the first prayer we all pray.

LETS PRAY.

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