

Paul Harvey told about a three-year-old boy who went to the grocery store with his mother, and before they entered the store, she said to him, “Now you’re not going to get any chocolate chip cookies, so don’t even ask.”

She put him up in the cart and he sat in the little child’s seat while she wheeled down the aisles. He was doing just fine until they came to the cookie section. He saw the chocolate chip cookies and he stood up in the seat and said, “Mom, can I have some chocolate chip cookies?” She said, “I told you not even to ask. You’re not going to get any.” So, he sat back down.

They continued down the aisles, but in their search for certain grocery items they ended up back in the cookie aisle. “Mom, can I please have some chocolate chip cookies?” She said, “I told you that you can’t. Now sit down and be quiet.”

Finally, as they were approaching the checkout line, the little boy sensing this may be his last chance, stood up on the seat of the cart and shouted in his loudest voice, “In the name of Jesus, may I have some chocolate chip cookies?”

Everybody around the checkout area laughed, some even applauded, and according to Paul Harvey, due to the generosity of several shoppers, the little boy and his mother left with 23 boxes of chocolate chip cookies.

We are continuing to make our way through the *Sermon on the Mount* where Jesus has told the crowd who have tagged along, that their theology was all wrong because they had no regard for matters of the heart. They were wrong about murder and anger. They were wrong about adultery and lust. They were wrong about their oaths and vows and promises, and they were wrong about love and hate.

From God’s point of view, Jesus explained what was wrong with their theology, and then He addressed another problem of the heart, and He tells the crowd that the way they practice their faith was also wrong – their motives were wrong – they had turned their worship and their service into a performance – just to be seen, and to make His point, Jesus expressed His concerns with these words:

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.”

If you recall from last Sunday, these words served as the theme for the Lord’s teaching on *giving* to those in need, and as we press on this morning, the same theme runs through His teaching on *praying* and *fasting*.

So, if you have your Bible, let's pick up where we left off in **Matthew 6** beginning with **verse 5**. Jesus says,

“And when you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they will be seen by people. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”

Just like Jesus said about giving, He begins with an assumption. He says, **“when you pray”** – not *if* you pray, but *when* you pray. Jesus takes it for granted that believers pray, and similar to the practice of giving, it was common for the self-righteous religious leaders to go to where the people were, especially during the busy times of the day, and make some loud dramatic prayer. It was all for show. They did it just to be seen so people would be impressed and say *“Wow, that was an awesome prayer. You must a righteous man. Surely, you are close to God.”*

Well, they weren't close to God – in truth, they weren't even seeking God, they were seeking the applause from people, and according to Jesus, they get their **reward in full**. They will get their egos stroked – that's all, and on the heels of that thought, Jesus offers a better way, and in **verse 6**, He says,

“But as for you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

Now, Jesus is not speaking against public prayer – it just isn't the subject here, but in regards to our alone time with God, Jesus simply encourages us to seek a place that is private and free from distraction, so that we might enjoy a personal conversation with God. In a nutshell, that's what prayer is – it's a personal conversation with God whether it be in *private* or in *public* for that matter – and if you noticed, once again, Jesus mentioned there is a **reward** for praying, and just for clarification, that doesn't mean God will just give us what we ask, otherwise, we would all be healthy and wealthy. No, the reward is actually better and we will get back to that a little later.

Jesus continues, and in **verses 7-8**, this is what He says,

⁷“And when you are praying, do not use thoughtless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”

In those days, a **Gentile** – who was probably influenced by Roman pagan theology thought:

“Hey, if I say the right words, and I say a bunch of them, over and over again, somehow I will be able to wear down my god and get what I want.”

They repeated meaningless and thoughtless words, over and over, for a long time – they were babbling – it was mechanical, and Jesus said don’t pray like that.

You know, prayer should be one of the simplest and easiest things we ever do, but like so many things, we make it harder than it has to be. Listen, we don’t have to impress God with our many fancy words. And God doesn’t need a long explanation from us to help Him understand our situation – and we know this because He already knows us through and through. Jesus says, **“your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”** Before we ever bow our heads, God knows our *real* needs better than we do. We aren’t informing Him of anything.

Now that prompts a good question. **If God already knows what we need, then why do we need to tell Him what we need? Why pray?**

Well, there are all kinds of really good answers to that question – but ultimately, we pray because we need to pray – it’s for our own good. We pray because He is God and we are not. We pray because He has chosen prayer as a way to share our concerns, to seek His help, to express our gratitude, and to carry out His will in this world, but maybe more importantly, we pray because God desires fellowship with us.

This is why we pray, and it’s on that note that Jesus guides us in how we should do it. Beginning with **verse 9**, Jesus says,

⁹“Pray, then, in this way:

**‘Our Father, who is 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 do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’ [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”]

I suspect this is a prayer that many of you are all familiar with. Some might call it the “*Lord’s Prayer*” – others might call it the “*Model Prayer*” but it might best be called the “*Believers Prayer*” because it is a prayer for us – and before we dig into it, I want to say something about it.

What Jesus tells us is not a formula for prayer, and it’s not something that we have to say just like Jesus said, otherwise, if we’re not careful, we can turn this into mechanical babble which Jesus just told us not to do. So, what Jesus is giving us is simply a pattern – it’s something to think through as we pray.

Jesus begins with “**Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name**” and let me say this first piece is very important because it sets the tone for the entire prayer. If we get this right, everything else will fall into place.

Simply put, Jesus is saying I want you to think about who you are talking to. You are talking to the Creator of all things in the universe. He spoke it into existence. He is the Lord God Almighty, He reigns supreme over all – and yet, He has invited you and me to call Him “**Father**” – in Aramaic it’s *Abba* – which means *Daddy* – a word the Jews thought was way too personal and way too intimate to describe God, but here Jesus wants believers to understand this is a family thing – God is our Father and we are His children, and just like children – we can come to our Father just as we are, and we can speak to Him *anytime* about *anything* because we know He loves us and cares for us.

“**Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name.**” There is no one like our God. He is set apart, He’s holy – He’s in heaven, and yet, at the same time as our Father – He’s very near. He is our gracious and loving and caring Father, and the longer we stay here in thought – the smaller everything else seems to get.

Then Jesus moves to another part that we should also stay longer in thought. He says, “**Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**” Now, maybe this is a reference to the *future* Millennial Kingdom where Jesus will establish His earthly reign – that could be it – it’s definitely something to pray for, but with that said, I think this speaks more so to the *present* – it’s a recognition of our Father’s rule – His will – and our need to give up control.

In the 1980s, Jim Bakker was one of the most influential Christian leaders in America. As the founder of PTL Ministries, he presided over one of the largest broadcasting empires in the world. Millions of people watched him on television every day. Then came the fall. First there was the revelation of the affair with Jessica Hahn. Then came accusations of greed, fraud, further sexual misconduct,

and tabloid headlines. It all eventually led to a trial that ended in a prison sentence. Jim Bakker suffered a nervous breakdown that was trumpeted from coast to coast. After going to prison, he suffered the final blow when his wife Tammy Faye divorced him and married one of his former best friends.

When he went to prison, most simply forgot about him, but God didn't. That much is evident from a book he wrote called "I Was Wrong". After being released from prison, Jim Bakker wrote about the events leading up to his fall and the things that happened while he was in prison. After writing at some length about the total despair and humiliation he felt, he described a singular moment when he simply began to read the Bible. He cried out, "God, why am I here? There are so many dying men in prison. How can I help them?" The answer from the Lord surprised him. "You are arrogant. You think you are the only person I have in this prison. I have many others here. I am God. I did not bring you to prison to minister. I brought you here to know Me."

That was the turning point. By his own admission, he had been an extremely ambitious man. After climbing to the pinnacle of success, he ended up losing everything. Little by little, God stripped it all away and left him with nothing but guilt, and pain, and failure. When he finally hit rock bottom, Jim Bakker met God in a new way.

What Jim Bakker learned in prison, we must all learn sooner or later. God knows us and He wants us to know Him – to experience Him as we submit and He takes control of our lives. When we pray "Your kingdom come, Your will be done" – this is a call for us to put *first things first*, and that's easier said than done.

Let's be honest. You have a will and I have a will. You have a kingdom and I have a kingdom, and we have issues and problems in our kingdoms. So, we plead with God to help us *fix* our kingdoms and to *follow* our will, but Jesus says:

"Hold on. Before you make this all about you – about your kingdom and your will, have you first considered His kingdom and His will?"

This is hard because when we sincerely pray like that, we are committing to His kingdom, and His rule, and His will, and His purposes, and His plans more than we are to our own.

"So, God, Your kingdom come. Your will be done, even if I don't understand it, even if I disagree with it, even if it hurts, even if it costs me everything."

I think that's what Jesus is teaching us and you know what – there is **reward** for that kind of prayer, and it's the *peace* that comes from trusting that our Father will always do what is best.

Now Jesus moves on to the part we are typically most interested in, the part we generally speed off to, because it starts with the words, “**give us**” – **but isn't that what little children do?** Absolutely, and this is so comforting because – He knows. He understands we have needs and wants and desires. Jesus gets it, and so He includes it.

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

Even though God knows our needs before we ask – here is something we continually need: We need to recognize, step by step, moment by moment, day by day, that we are dependent upon God. This is an acknowledgment of God as our Provider for every need, and it reminds us to trust Him as the needs arise.

Jesus continues and says,

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

Before I attempt to explain what Jesus is saying here, I need to provide some clarification, because some of you might be wondering why Christians should ask for God's forgiveness, since the Bible clearly teaches that God forgave all of our sins – our past, present, and future sins when we were saved and declared righteous through the finished work of Christ.

Well, without going into too much detail here, this is not about *judicial forgiveness* that is connected to our salvation, instead this is *parental forgiveness* which is connected to our fellowship with our Father in heaven. Sin breaks fellowship with God, it grieves our Father, and parental forgiveness is needed to restore that fellowship. Jesus knew, that on a regular basis, we would have to ask our Father for forgiveness, and because our Father forgives us, we can and should extend that same forgiveness to others.

You know, this might force us to pray a little longer because it's surely easier to accept forgiveness than it is to give it. So, Jesus finishes the believer's prayer with these words:

“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]”

Every time we are tested with a difficulty where God is drawing us into a deeper relationship with Him – every time we go through a trial to grow our faith, Satan will try to turn those tests and trials into temptations. It's what Satan did with Jesus in the wilderness, and he uses the same tactics with us. We know this to be true in our lives, and as children coming to their Father, we also know that He can deliver us.

Now beginning with **verse 14**, Jesus seems to add this piece to further explain His previous statement of *forgiving our debtors*. He says,

¹⁴ For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Again, the context here is fellowship – not salvation, and we know this because don't get saved because we forgive other people.

This is about fellowship with our Father – and it's hard to go to our Father if we refuse to forgive others. Think about this. If we refuse to forgive someone because of something they did or didn't do, **then how in the world can we come to the Forgiver to experience fellowship with Him? What fellowship can there be if we are acting the complete opposite of our Father?** Think about that.

So, this is the pattern of prayer Jesus gave to believers, and now He moves to fasting, because they are linked together. Beginning with **verse 16**, Jesus says,

¹⁶ “Now whenever you fast, do not make a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they distort their faces so that they will be noticed by people when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ¹⁷ But as for you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that your fasting will not be noticed by people but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

As was before, we see the same motive of the self-righteous in their fasting – it's to be seen.

Traditionally, the religious leaders fasted on Monday and Thursday because they believed those were the days that Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. If you remember, Moses broke the first set and had to go back up the mountain again for the second set.

Anyway, when the religious leaders fasted, they looked disheveled and miserable and sad. If they were fasting, everybody knew it because they wanted to appear righteous, but Jesus said don't be like them – don't draw attention to yourself.

In the Bible, fasting generally means to go without food and sometimes drink for a period of time – it was practiced for various reasons – all of which that seemed to boil down to two main things – *humility* and *clarity*. At its most basic level, fasting is an expression of humility before God, where one seriously draws near to Him in times of special need, but it's also used for clarity in our thoughts when seeking guidance and direction from God in prayer.

Scientists tell us when we fast, there is an increase in our cognitive function. Apparently, you can actually think clearer when you're not digesting burgers and fries – and once you've dealt those initial hunger pains, you're thinking processes are more focused and you're able to concentrate on those matters that require prayer.

So, Jesus gave us several things to think about when it comes to praying and fasting, but if I could only take one thing away this morning, I think it would be this:

Your Father knows you through and through, and He wants you to know Him. He desires fellowship with you, and He is honored that you seek Him with all of your heart.

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