

PRAY FROM YOUR HEART – Matthew 6:5-18

These days we have a remote control for everything: TVs, VCRs, CD players, camcorders, cable boxes, stereos, satellite dishes, model airplanes ... even lawn mowers! Tired of having to move your body to change the channel, or lower the volume? No problemo! With a remote control, you can operate your TV from 100 feet away!

How about that irritating irrigation and industrial equipment? Do you want to control your water system, pump, conveyor, light or alarm from a distance? A company called Remote Control Technology can set you up with just about any type of long-range, license-free, rugged, low-cost wireless handheld remote control device.

Remote control even allows us to dial into our desktop PCs and act as if we were working at the terminal. New technology enables us to have complete control, and run PC applications, file transfers and system maintenance from a distance.

So remote technology allows us to gain complete control, and we love it. But this craziness for controllers raises a troubling issue: some come to God expecting to be in control. They pray using a wish list putting no real effort into their prayers as if God will grant every whim. Some people pray as if they can program God?

Have we grown too accustomed to the idea of being in control?

Sometimes it seems we have. And this is not a convenience issue -- it's a big problem. We all want to be in control, but Jesus says that if we really want a powerful life, then we have to put Him in control! This is why we have the Sermon on the Fat Hill. These are Jesus' instructions for those who would claim to be Christians. If you claim that Jesus is your King, then you need to follow what He says (even if His instructions are uncomfortable).

Today, we are going to look at where Jesus warns us against praying to be in control and impress others. He challenges us to pray and fast from our hearts with sincerity. This means that each of us has to get real in our prayers. No more fake prayers OR prayers that don't have meaning allowed!

So far in his Sermon on the Fat Hill, Jesus has raised the bar for right living. He has redefined what it means to live a righteous life. In Matthew chapter 6 Jesus raises it again! He teaches us that living a righteous life is not just a matter of what we do, but also involves our motivations. Jesus is not just concerned with us doing the right things, he wants us do the right things for the right reasons. For Him the "why" is just as important as the "what."

Last week and this week we're looking at the first part of Matthew chapter 6. The question the whole passage asks is, "Who's your audience?" Are you motivated by the approval of men or the applause of God? In Matthew 6:1 (NIV) Jesus says, "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." A life of integrity is motivated by God's approval.

In Matthew 6 Jesus gives at least 3 "acts of righteousness" where we need to make sure we're not trying to impress others. Last week, we looked at giving. This week, Jesus teaches us to pray and fast from the heart.

READ Matthew 6:5-6

Jesus begins by telling us, that when you pray and fast:

1. Don't show off!

- a. Right off the bat, Jesus again tells us to not act when we pray. To keep it real. To make sure that we are praying for God's glory and not for men's approval.
- b. Jesus tells us to not show off when we pray. He says again, don't be a hypocrite. Like we talked about last week, a hypocrite is simply an actor. He is a person who can change characters and longs for the audience's reaction. When Jesus tells us to not be like the hypocrites, He is saying, "Don't put on show. Don't pretend to be someone in public that you are not in private."
- c. Jesus isn't saying that public prayer is wrong. Otherwise, we should ban all prayer in our Sunday morning services. He is saying that praying to be noticed by others is sinful.
- d. It is easy to turn our spiritual life into a performance, but Jesus wants you to be real when you come to church. He wants the words that come out of your mouth to be directed towards God and no one else.
 - i. When we come to church our words can become a Script with no heart behind them.
 - ii. When we come to church our clothes can become our costumes that are worn to make others know you are the man!
 - iii. When we come to church our worship can become entertainment. If we don't feel good coming out of church, then we think God did not show up. Jesus is saying that church, prayer, and fasting is not a show.
 - iv. Jesus wants us to put an end to these performances.

Jesus says that when we pray and fast:

1. Don't show off!

2. Don't babble! READ Matthew 6:7-8

- a. Jesus again goes right to our heart when he says to not babble like the pagans. The pagans of Jesus' time repeated themselves over and over to get their gods' attention. They thought that the more they said, the more their god would answer their prayers.
- b. We can do this too. When we simply recite a memorized formula like the Doxology we are just babbling. When we slip into repetition we are just babbling. When it does not come from your heart, then we are just like those who do not know God.
- c. Jesus wants you to know that if you are a Christ-follower, then your Heavenly Father is already intimate with you. He knows your needs. He knows your desires. He knows your heart. Jesus, however, wants each of us to ask ourselves, "do you know God's heart?"
- d. If you knew God's heart, you would understand that YOU are at the center of thoughts. That is why Jesus says that your Heavenly Father knows what you need even before you ask!
- e. Jesus does not want you to babble, because you already have God's attention!
- f. Imagine with me for a minute: How much does God have to take care of? He holds the cosmos in His hands and has to keep the planets in orbit. Yet, God cares intimately about your problems, needs, desires, and wants!
- g. We don't have to repeat ourselves over and over again to get God's attention.
- h. God cares about your heart when you pray, and Jesus wants you to be real, to not put on a show, nor babble.

After telling us what we should not do in prayer and fasting, Jesus turns to the positive side of the coin and gives us a model of what we should do.

Jesus gives us an example to follow, a model to build our prayer and fasting after. He tell us how to pray. I really believe that Jesus was laying the ground work for the every day man, the average joe, to be able to pray. He was not giving a command, but was inviting everyone to share in the relationship He had with God the Father.

This is why that when we pray and fast, we should:

3. Follow Jesus' Model

Pull out the card that is found in your bulletin. This is what you are being challenged to memorize this week. This challenge is done so that you will grow in God. It is not given so that you will be able to mechanically repeat some words on a card.

The problem is that for many of you, this is an easy assignment. You already have it memorized, because you said this prayer every day when you went to school. Right

after the bell rang, THE VOICE came over the intercom. THE VOICE belongs to the school principal, who was known only by name and never by sight (except by the unfortunate rule-breakers). It is THE VOICE that begins the daily routine. First, you stood for the Pledge of Allegiance, hand over heart, facing the classroom flag. No sooner has "with liberty and justice for all" ceased its echo than you each bowed your head and recited in unison the Lord's Prayer. No one asks to leave the room; no one dares raise any objection; no one thinks twice about the appropriateness of this exercise.

The recitation of the Lord's Prayer was certainly not meant to offend anyone - for whom could it have offended? Most of the people you probably went to school with was either Brethren, Baptist, or Methodist. Maybe there was a few Presbyterians, Catholics or Episcopalians thrown in for variety. To you, Jews were some historic people of the Old Testament, and most had never even heard of Muslims. Since it was presumed that everyone was a Christian, who was there to object to the Lord's Prayer?

In that earlier era, the Lord's Prayer, was for many just a recitation -- a memorized script mumbled forth on cue. No thought as to its meaning, no reflection on its implication for your life, just a recitation.

I grew up in a time that was completely different. We didn't have prayer in school, and there were plenty of other religions in my class. There wasn't even a moment of silence, let alone the Lord's Prayer.

That doesn't mean, however, that the Lord's prayer didn't become just rote words at some point or another. I have seen the Lord's Prayer become just words:

1. In worship, the Lord's model becomes the one thing that Jesus didn't intend for it to be: just words. We stand up together or kneel together and then just say the words of the prayer without really thinking about it.
2. In Seminary, we study it to death. It becomes a text book, rather than a source of life.

Probably the biggest argument today is not that more people should follow Jesus in this model, but it is whether you should say, "debts", "sins", or "trespasses" when you say it. You get to the part where Jesus told us to pray, "And forgive us our... as we forgive those who... against us." There seems to be a competition that goes on when this prayer is said in church.

Perhaps it is time that the Lord's Prayer is dusted off and looked at again.

We are going to do just that! Matthew 6:9-13 is model prayer. It is the one place in Scripture where Jesus was serious about people not quoting this mechanically in vain

repetition. This is not a prayer to repeat. This is not a prayer that you just say. You should use it as a model that will help you go deeper with God.

During our times of Praises and Concerns, we are going to do just that. Instead of me just telling you about the ins-and-outs of this prayer, we are going to use it as a model during our prayer time in our service. Keep that card out for when we will be praying together.

The Lord's Prayer is something that most of us is very familiar with. Jesus, however, moves on to something that is quite the opposite. Most Christians have never fasted and Jesus wants to talk to you about it.

READ Matthew 6:16-18

In this last section, Jesus reminds us again what having a relationship with God is all about. He tells us that when we pray and fast, we should:

4. Keep it One-On-One!

Most Christians seem to just ignore that Jesus assumed you would fast. In fact, there are over 74 separate references to fasting in the Bible.

Fasting was never about weight loss, nor about getting brownie points with God.

Fasting is the practice of abstaining from something we like in order to grow spiritually. We say to God, "I love you and need you more than this thing I am giving up." It is a sacrifice to God and a tool that when coupled with prayer is powerful.

The Jewish people were required to fast once a year on the Day of Atonement. In Jesus' day, the average Jew was fasting two days a week. Some of them were using this as a way to show off.

They'd make their faces look pale and they'd put ashes on their head,

People would say, "You don't look well." They would get attention and people would feel sorry for them.

Jesus just shakes his head and says, they've received their reward - they have gotten the attention they wanted.

Jesus reminds us that true fasting revolves around intimacy with God.

You see, Fasting grows our relationship with God by doing three things:

1. It humbles us before God.

Fasting allows us to be empty ourselves before God. This emptiness means that we can be filled up with what God wants. We place ourselves beneath God with open hands to receive from Him. When we fast, we recognize that we need His filling, His power, His answers.

The prophet Ezra built his people and nation back up by beginning by fasting. Ezra 8:21 says, "I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God." Ezra called for others to fast so that they would be humble before God. Jesus does the same today with our church.

2. It helps us focus on God.

Doing without food for a period of prayer helps us put away distractions and turn to Jesus. Fasting can call us back to not just read about Him, not just listen to others speak about Him, but allow us to come directly to Jesus and know Him deeply.

One preacher shared that his friend had fasted and did not receive an answer to prayer. The preacher asked him, "did you receive the guidance you were seeking when you fasted?" The friend answered, "Probably not, but I do know the Guide better now." Fasting helps us focus on God.

3. It gives us power to serve more faithfully.

I don't know how it works, but there is a release of power when fasting and prayer are combined. The great men and women of God down through the ages have come to God in prayer and fasting and GREAT things have happened! Whole countries have been saved through fasting and prayer.

When we humble ourselves and we focus on God, God gives us true power to handle whatever situation is coming.

This is why Jesus assumes that His followers will fast. Jesus is calling each of us here today to begin to fast.

I know that taking advice on fasting from a chubby man might be hard. You have to understand though that fasting is important, whether I look like I fast or not. Jesus wants each of us to use this tool to grow in God.

Everyone can fast to some extent. Even if you have medical reasons such as diabetes where you can not fast from food, you can fast from TV or anything else that gives you pleasure so that you can work on your relationship with God.

The point Jesus is making is that you should fast in order to seek God. You should keep your fast one-on-one. You should keep it between God and you.

Jesus tells us, that when you pray and fast:

1. Don't show off!
2. Don't babble!
3. Follow Jesus' Model
4. Keep it One-On-One!

People are watching us. Jesus wants us to consider who our audience is. Are we giving, praying, and fasting, so that others will be happy with us. OR are we giving and praying and fasting because God is awesome? Jesus wants you to do the right things not to impress other people, but to express your love to him.

Jesus wants you lay down your remote into the hands of God, so that you will receive a deep relationship with your Heavenly Father.

There are all kinds of remote controls in our life that all point to one thing: you are in control. Jesus is calling each of us to give up our controllers. To give up our control and give it to God. When the wife asks for the remote, family argument might break out. We each need to realize that it is hard to give up the remote!

Jesus, however, reminds us that giving up the remote is what the Christian life is all about. We say to God, "I will go where you want. I will be who you want. I will live the way you want." Are you willing to give up your remote on your life?

If so, here is what you have to do:

1. Believe
2. Repent
3. Confess
4. Be Baptized
5. Don't try to take the remote back – live always for Him!

As the Deer – Song Folder #21

During the prayer time:

Let's take each section of the prayer and make it our model during this time:

It begins with "Our Father in heaven." When Jesus started this model by stating that God was your Father, He was doing something revolutionary. This was like calling God, "Daddy." This had never been done before. There was never anyone before Jesus who was bold in claiming intimacy with God.

Romans 8:15 - For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

Abba is not a singing group from the 70's. Abba is a Hebrew term meaning "Daddy." We are to pray just like we talk to our dads – there is closeness that we can claim.

Let's do that right now, when we pray silently right now, start by saying "Hello" to your heavenly Daddy.

Jesus then moves on to "hallowed be your name."

--One little kid prayed, "Our father who art in Heaven, Howard be thy name."

What does that word Hallowed mean? Literally it means to be holy. Jesus is calling you to simply say, "God I worship you. You are worthy of my worship."

Let's share why God is worthy of worship.

The next phrase is "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." This is a statement of priorities--In it we say, "God I'm committed to You and Your Kingdom, not mine." We are saying that Nationality, Skin Color, Culture, Language, Politics, Money – all of these don't matter. Only God's Kingdom matters.

This is where we begin to lay down our remote controls. This is where we begin to say to God, that I want your will be done, not mine.

Ask God right now for direction in your life. Ask Him for direction in your health, your finances, your marriage, your job, your nation, etc.

The next part of the prayer, "Give us today our daily bread."

By praying this we are saying, "God, I need You. God, I'm going to completely trust in You for my needs. God, I'm going to trust in You on a daily basis."

Here is where we can pray for our concerns and health problems of others. We pray that God will provide healing. Let's lift others up.

Then Jesus says to pray: “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,” This is one of the hardest parts of this model prayer. We are reminded by Jesus Himself that God hates unforgiveness. Do you know why?

When we refuse to forgive we display lack of gratitude for God forgiving us. God has forgiven us even though we don’t deserve it and He asks us to do the same thing

Jesus warns us later in Matthew 6:14-15 – “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Let’s pray for those right now that we need to forgive and for those who we need to ask for forgiveness.

Jesus then finishes by telling us to pray: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

1 Peter 5:8 - *Our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

Since the beginning of man, Satan has desired to lead us astray. He wants to kill, destroy, and hurt every person he can.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NLT) – *But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can’t stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it.*

God wants us to pray “deliver us from the evil one” so that we will seek His will and guidance

If we’ll trust in the Father, His Spirit will show us how to avoid the Devil’s traps and schemes.

Let us pray for the temptations that Satan is going to throw at us this week.