



WHEN YE FAST

This is part 10 of the PrayER – Learning From Jesus How To Pray sermon series

SUMMARY

God knew that as we make our way through life that there would be certain elements and circumstances that would come into our life that were simply greater than we are. His solution to the problems of our life was to make Himself and His resources available to His people. The means by which we can tap into the presence, the provisions, and the power of God is prayer, and yet, most of prayer lives are struggling to show any signs of life. In this series of thoughts, we are taking our prayer life to the emergency where we will learn from the Great Physician how to pray.

REVIEW

In this study, we're journeying through the model prayer and we're discovering how to pray. So far, we've considered the following:

We looked at the phrase "...Our Father which art in Heaven..." and we found that when we pray, we should pray according to our **ADOPTION**, according to our Father's **AUTHORITY**, and according to a right **AFFECTION**.

We looked at the phrase "...Hallowed be thy name...." and we found that our prayers should consist of two parts: the **VERTICAL** part (our relationship with God) and the **HORIZONTAL part** (our relationship with the world around us). Prayer is more than just a way for us to **GET**

SOMETHING FROM GOD; prayer is a way for us to **GIVE SOMETHING TO GOD**. We give God glory when we recognize the holiness of God when we enter into His presence.

We looked at the phrase “*...Thy kingdom come...*” and we found that it is an expression of the heart that desires for the **WORD** of God and the **WORK** of God to become a reality.

We looked at the phrase “*...Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven...*” and we found that the goal of our prayer life must be our surrender to the Lord’s will. There is nothing that we **WANT** that is more important than God’s **WILL** for our life – **NOTHING!**

This marked a shift in the model prayer from the vertical (our relationship with God) to the horizontal (our relationship with the world around us). We found that the latter portion of this model prayer is focused on the needs of our life: our **PROVISIONS**, our **PARDON** (forgiveness), our **PROTECTION**, and our **PRAISE-GIVING**.

We looked at the phrase “*...Give us this day our daily bread...*” and we found that God is a good God Who is ready and willing to give good things to His children. He cares about the **DESIRES** of our heart, the details of our life, and the day-to-day needs of our life, and we should bring **ALL** of them to Him in prayer.

We looked at the phrase “*...And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors...*” and we found that our prayer life is an **EXAMINATION** of what is going on in our mind, in our heart, and in our life and whether or not those things match up with what is pleasing to the Lord. We are to **CONSIDER** the sins that are in our life and confess them to our Father Who is ready and willing to forgive us restoring both our fellowship with God and our function before Him.

We looked at the phrase “*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...*” and we found that God often allows our faith to go through seasons of **INSPECTION** (to reveal weaknesses in our faith) and seasons of **IMPROVEMENT** (to strengthen, or temper, our faith), reminding us of the fact that God has the ability to **LIMIT** and to **DELIVER US OUT** of our temptations.

We looked at the phrase “*...For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen*” and we found that we are to “*Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise...*” (Psalm 100:4). God **HAS BEEN GOOD**, God **IS BEING GOOD**, God **WILL BE GOOD**, and I should praise Him greatly and often for the **GRACE**, the **GREATNESS**, the **GOODNESS** that God pours into my life.

MESSAGE

When it comes to the study of this model prayer, most stop with the word *Amen* at the end of verse 13. Oh, there are many that will include verses 14 and 15, but they largely stop at the end of verse 13. Let me say it this way: when it comes to the study of prayer, it is easy for us to get

so focused on the **FUNCTION** of the prayer that we neglect two other components – the **FUEL** of prayer and the **FREQUENCY** of prayer.

We don't often consider these other two vital components of prayer, in all likelihood because one impacts our **COMFORT** and **CONVENIENCE** while the other impacts our **TIME**.

When it comes to these two components of prayer, we find the former in Matthew chapter 6 and we the latter in Luke chapter 11.

Matthew 6:16-21 says, *"Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."*

If you're in the habit of marking things in the Word of God, I'd like to draw your attention to two statements that we just read:

Verse 16 where the Bible says, *"...when ye fast..."*

Verse 17 where the Bible says, *"...when thou fastest..."*

For a few moments, I'd like to consider this thought: **WHEN YE FAST.**

Let's first establish that there is indeed a connection between prayer and fasting. Verse 16 begins with the word *moreover*. It is a word that means "in addition to or furthermore." It is used to introduce a piece of information that adds to or that further supports the previous statement or instruction. And so, what Jesus is getting ready to say is connected to what Jesus has just taught about prayer. Perhaps it would be better to say it this way: what Jesus is getting ready to say is either impacted by what He is getting ready to say or it is impacted by what He has just said. In this case, it's the former.

Don't miss this statement: proper fasting can produce powerful praying. Now the key word in that statement is the word *can*. Proper fasting does increase our prayer-life, but the reality is that not all fasting is proper. If we're honest, most of us have never practiced the principle of fasting, and those of us who have were either borderline prideful if not full on prideful when we did. As a matter of fact, Jesus calls out the pride of these hypocrites in the area of fasting.

While there has been in recent years a resurgence of discussion on the subject of fasting, I would suggest that a large portion of them have been a waste of time. Now, I don't say that because I don't believe that a Christian should fast or that fasting is not a powerful thing.

Quite the opposite is true. The reality is that if fasting and praying were an easy thing to do, then there would be many more that did it.

Without being disrespectful to the subject, let me attempt to be overly clear about what I'm saying: prayer and fasting is next level Christianity. It is the fruit of much spiritual progress in one's life. And again, without intentionally being disrespectful to anyone of us, most of us aren't at a level of Christian maturity where we can and will practice the proper kind of fasting that produces powerful praying.

We find an example of this over in Matthew chapter 17. After Jesus and His disciple came down off of the Mount of Transfiguration, a father came to Jesus out of great concern for his only son that is identified as lunatic, meaning that he was a constant danger to himself and needed constant supervision and care (demon possessed).

Matthew 17:14-21 says, "And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."

And so, what we find here is that there are certain things in our life that cannot be answered and things where victory will not be found in and over without prayer and fasting. Now, the reality is that the majority of Christian's today have never participated in this level of Christian praying because our faith has not increased to the point where this could or would be a reality in our life.

Let's dig into a couple things about this subject of prayer and fasting. Throughout the Bible we find that prayer and fasting is a major part of our Bible.

Moses fasted and prayed before receiving the Ten Commandments

David fasted and prayed as his son was dying.

Elijah fasted and prayed while he was fleeing from Jezebel.

Ezra fasted and prayed over the heart condition of the nation of Israel.

Esther fasted and prayed for the deliverance of the Jewish.

Jesus fasted and prayed for forty-days and for forty-nights while He was in the wilderness being tempted by the Devil.

The leaders of the church in Antioch fasted and prayed before sending Barnabas and Paul out on their first missionary journey.

While there are other examples of individuals in the Bible fasting and praying, there still are relatively few examples of those who properly fast and who prayed powerfully and productively as a result.

I think we need to take and define what fasting means. In the very basic sense, fasting is the withholding of food and drink for a certain period of time. Now, with that being said, we find that there were differences in the **KINDS** of fasts and there were difference in the **LENGTHS** of fasts, and the reality is that not one of them was any more right or any less right than any of the others.

Psalm 35:13 says, *“But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.”*

Leviticus chapters 21 and 23 describes fasting as the affliction of our soul.

When we consider prayer and fasting in the Bible, we find that the motive behind fasting and praying matters. The **WHAT** isn't as important and the **HOW LONG** isn't as important as the **WHY**.

Zechariah 7:1-6 says, *“And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Darius, that the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, even in Chisleu; When they had sent unto the house of God Sherezer and Regemmelech, and their men, to pray before the LORD, And to speak unto the priests which were in the house of the LORD of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years? Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?”*

We find that the proper motive of prayer and fasting in the Scriptures fall into a few categories:

People fasted and prayed in the Bible because there was a great need in their life that they fully believed that God was the only One that could do something about it (Proactive).

People fasted and prayed in the Bible when they were sincerely seeking for clarity about God's will for their life.

People fasted and prayed in the Bible when they were convicted about the need to repent of some great sin that was in their life.

People fasted and prayed in the Bible out of a sense of desperation (Reactive) about the circumstances that were in their life.

People fasted and prayed in the Bible when they felt like their walk with the Lord and their fellowship with the Lord wasn't what it could be.

People fasted and prayed corporately (as the people of God) to give God proper worship (worship that was not tainted by sin and self) and to pursue His will.

Throughout the Bible, we find that the result of prayer and fasting is **INCREASED FAITH, INCREASE WORSHIP, INCREASED GIVING**, and **INCREASED SERVICE**. Simply put, fasting and praying is not primarily about me getting something that I want from God; prayer and fasting is about my life being so altered by my relationship with God that I want nothing more than God's glory and God's will to be accomplished.

Isaiah 58:5-9 says, "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity."