

One of the really fun things that happened for us this Thanksgiving was that Julie and I were able to enjoy almost a week with our daughters in town. It was great to have some one-on-one conversation with each of my daughters and check in about their lives. And the weather was great!

Many of you know that my youngest daughter, Holly, is a student at Azusa Pacific in southern California. My oldest daughter Katie is living in Wisconsin, married and working as a busy professional. So the first day here, Katie said to me, "Dad, I have a proposition for you." "Uh... What is it sweetheart?" "I want you to try out this really good shampoo I'm selling." "What? After your graduate degree, marriage and landing a really good job, you have time to sell hair products online?"

"Yeah dad. Just try it for one month. It is the best shampoo ever. First you rub a little in your hair and let it sit for a minute and it won't suds up." "Won't suds up? What's good about that? That's all the fun of shampooing." "Listen to me dad. First, you work the application deep into your hair and scalp and you let it sit there for a minute or so. It will tingle a bit, and that is the shampoo working to remove deep down deposits of old cells, old soap, and environmental pollutants on your head. Then rinse off the old layers and your head is ready to be restored. Then you repeat using the same small amount and it will suds up and you will have super clean hair, your scalp and follicles will be stimulated, your hair will be shinier and have more lift and bounce."

She took a picture of my head Thanksgiving Day and then she said she will take a picture again on Christmas Day; before and after pictures to show how healthy my hair will become using this shampoo. My head will be posted on social media and maybe on brochures and websites. So I am now a male model. I am a scalp and hair model!

This study on the Sermon on the Mount has taught us that there are things we need to unlearn in order to live well in the kingdom of God. There are things that need to be washed and rinsed away to make room for new growth, new power, and new shine to our lives as Christians.

Jesus kept repeating for us in chapter 5, "you have heard it said, but I tell you this." In other words, you have been taught the mechanics of the law, but you have only seen it lived out in superficial ways. We are not to ask ourselves, Did I get through the day without murdering or committing adultery? That's a pretty low bar for holiness because the law addresses the deeper impurities

in our heart such as hate and lust. Instead we are to ask ourselves, Has God been supreme in my life today? Have I lived to the glory and honor of God? Do I know him better? Have I a desire to honor and glorify him?

The key for us to get this deeper meaning is to understand that none of us measures up. All of us fall short of this high standard, and therefore can only choose surrender and come to Him poor in Spirit. As Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit" (that means coming to God empty-handed, offering no argument or no work that God should trade for His acceptance of you into His kingdom). God's only condition for entrance into His kingdom is a humble heart, a broken spirit, a posture of surrender, and then, and only then, will He say, Blessed are you for you will see the kingdom of God. This kingdom of God is not built on my righteousness, not on my love, but **His** love; not on my sacrifices but the sacrifice of **His** perfect Son, Jesus, and the grace and mercy His Son shows us.

From that place of surrender we are welcomed to enter the kingdom of heaven. With that citizenship comes the Holy Spirit to live in us. And the Holy Spirit gives us the capacity to engage and obey the deeper meanings of the law and experience heart change, the deeper cleaning and rinsing that produces a luster, a lift, a bounce that stimulates our spiritual growth.

Today we move to the deeper meaning of the law as it relates to our Christian devotional practices. Our text describes a washing and rinsing out of shallow religious practices and applying new and deeper religious practices that stimulate spiritual growth. Verse 1 introduces the next 18 verses. Jesus said,

**"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."  
(Matthew 6:1)**

In this verse, Jesus addresses a fundamental human need we all have. It's the need to be noticed, affirmed and blessed.

I remember when my girls would play in a swimming pool and I would be watching them from a lounge chair. *Daddy, watch me... Watch this.... Dad? Dad? You're not looking.... Watch what I'm about to do.... Did you see? Did you notice? Didn't I do a good job on my dive?* Craving affirmation is as normal as pumpkin pie at Thanksgiving.

Jesus is telling us that God doesn't reward man-pleasers; he rewards God-pleasers. George Constanza is the lovable loser on

*Seinfeld*. Watch what happens when your heart is set on pleasing man instead of God (*George Costanza clip*).

But didn't Jesus tell us a couple of weeks ago to be salt in our community and to be lights that can be seen by men? Yes, our good works are to be noticed by others based on Matthew 5:13-16. But our motives for our good works are to come out of our connection with our heavenly Father and our desire to please Him. God alone is to be our affirmer, our satisfaction, and He is the only one whose applause matters. And we grow this connection with God through our devotional practices. Jesus brings up three common devotional practices to illustrate what needs to be washed, rinsed and restored: Giving to the poor, prayer and fasting.

So it's right this morning to check our motives. First he tells us to check our motives when it comes to giving to the needy.

### **Checking Our Motives When it Comes to Giving**

**"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full." (v. 2)**

Jesus says, don't toot your own horn. And yes, you will get noticed, even applauded by men, but that will be your only reward, and it's a temporary reward. Here is how a Christian devoted to pleasing his heavenly father gives.

**"But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (verses 3-4)**

How do we avoid hypocrisy when we give? By giving generously and secretly for the approval of God alone.

Jesus has mentioned the word "reward" 7 times in these 18 verses. He is telling us that rewards are a good thing. But God's rewards are not a silver cup for giving. God's rewards here may be eternal and revealed when we stand before Jesus and are welcomed into heaven.

Quite likely the rewards Jesus is talking about here flow out of a simple love for God. God's love for me compels me to love the needy around me. And when I give to the needy around me, the reward I get is that I get to see the hungry getting fed, the naked getting clothed, the sick receiving medicine, and the gospel being shared. This kind of experience brings great joy for any of us who practice this kind of devotion, and the joy of seeing a need met is the reward in itself. Jesus is telling us that when we seek the rewards from other people we will get likely get them, but those rewards from others leave no lasting joy and we forfeit the joy of eternal rewards.

We see a pattern forming. Check your motives, practice your devotion in secret... with a sincere desire to please God... and do it all for the greatest reward—an eternal reward from God.

### **Checking Our Motives When it Comes to Praying**

The Jews were a praying people. They had prayers for every occasion. The "really spiritual" had 18 prayers they prayed. The "really really spiritual" would pray all 18 morning, afternoon and evening. That's 54 prayers a day! And like religious rituals tend to go, these prayers for most who delivered them became corrupted. They were memorized in the brain but not imprinted on the heart. They were just said, but not delivered with belief or passion or life. So these prayers became tools to be used in order to look spiritual to others.

**"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full." (v. 5)**

Jesus revealed that these kinds of prayers made them look pious but they were not pious; they were prideful. And they were receiving their earthly reward in full.

John Bunyan, who wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* said this: "When you pray, it's better to let your heart be without words than your words without heart." Here is how Christians should practice their prayer devotions.

**"But when you pray, go into your room close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." (verses 6-8)**

Literally, go into an inner storeroom where your treasures are kept. How appropriate because God makes special treasures available to us when we pray. Pray in a private place. This is where we get the term prayer closet. It's a place where we can close the door and concentrate and connect and gain confidence in our relationship with Christ. Do you have a special spot where you can pray without interruption? Our Father rewards what is done in secret.

Earlier this year while our team was in India we visited a place called Bodgaya Rampur. It was a place made famous because it's where prince Buddha supposedly received his enlightenment 2,600 years ago under the banyan tree and the belief of Buddhism was born.

There were literally thousands of pilgrims and sightseers on this site. Many were there seeking relief and help, some kind of

truth to set them free. Our hearts broke over the people there. We actually stood in this area and we prayed together for God's truth to bring true relief to those who were seeking God in that Buddhist temple; that people would see the folly and find relief in surrender to Jesus Christ. We watched large groups of people circle the temple 10 times in a clockwise fashion with the Buddhist monks leading them in chants. We didn't want to join in with them and walk with them and give offering to the priests, so our little CPC group walked the opposite direction trying to show respect and stay out of the way of the people. But I have to admit, we stuck out from the crowd and we were not trying to. Eventually a monk said to us in a kind voice in perfect English, "You are going the wrong way." I couldn't help but think about the wide gate and the narrow gate that leads to Christ that Jesus talks about later in later in His Sermon on the Mount.

Another famous person from India is Mother Teresa. She said this, "Perfect prayer does not consist in many words, but in the fervor of the desire which raises the heart to Jesus."

Another thing Jesus teaches us on prayer is this: God doesn't need to be badgered or convinced by us of our needs. He knows our need before we ask him. The purpose of our prayers are to share our needs, our burdens, the hunger in our hearts with our heavenly Father who already knows what we want. Why does this matter to God? Because God wants to hear from us. He wants to have community with us. He wants this more than we will ever know this side of heaven.

Jesus teaching on prayer here is a gut check for any of us who are called to pray publicly. Whether we pray on a stage, in a kid's classroom, or in our small group, we need to assess if we spend as much time working out our public prayers as we spend praying privately in our prayer closets. "Prayer is my blog with God that only He reads." (Michael Quicke)

The real reward comes through private prayer. I want to skip over for just a minute verses 9 through 15, which is our framework for prayer titled The Lord's Prayer. I want to end our time together on this prayer.

Let's jump down to verses 16-18. Jesus has given us the example that our motive for our Christian devotion should compel us to give in secret, pray in secret, and finally practice spiritual disciplines in secret. What is a spiritual discipline? It's certain spiritual practices we put in place in our lives and if we practice them with right motives pleasing to God, the practice can help us grow spiritually.

I think many of us can come up with our own lists of spiritual disciplines that can become good habits to help us grow spiritually. Your list of disciplines might include consistent private prayer and bible study, breaking away for times of intentional solitude and intentional silence, regular Sabbath rest, worship, and the example Jesus uses in verses 16-18—fasting.

## **Checking Our Motives When it Comes to Spiritual Disciplines Including Fasting**

**"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (verses 16-18)**

The first thing here is that Jesus expects us to fast. What is fasting? We fast when we abstain from something for a period of time for the purpose of becoming more focused and less distracted on connecting with God. Jesus refers to fasting from food for a period of time in order to hear more clearly from God, to humble one's self before God as one who is dependent, and trust God to satisfy when the body cries out for food. We see examples in the Old Testament of fasting that accompanies confession, repentance and mourning sin. We see other examples, especially in the New Testament, of fasting and prayer linked together when one needs important direction from God. Peter fasted before he received a vision from God. The Christians at Antioch fasted before they sent Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. And here, the religious folk in Jesus' day would fast twice a week. Again, it's about motive of the heart, secrecy, and true reward and true satisfaction that comes from God.

I do not know how the specific discipline of fasting applies to your situation right now, but I assume there will be occasions when we all need this reminder to set aside time to fast and seek God, and I am confident that God will reward those who fast with right motives.

Finally, we want to land on this very familiar prayer traditionally referred to as the Lord's Prayer found in verses 9-15. Jesus laid out this model prayer that has equipped millions of people over the past 2000 years to pray in a way that pleases God. May this teach us devotion through prayer in a way that pleases God and brings rewards from God.

## **Checking Our Framework When it Comes to Prayer**

**"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...'" (verses 9-10)**

This prayer aligns us to be most concerned about the building of God's kingdom here on earth and in heaven. This gets our minds off of our earthly kingdoms that we are tempted to invest in and sacrifice for, and build at the cost of what really matters to God.

**"Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." (verses 11-13)**

This word bread is a broad term meaning all our physical needs. He promises to meet our daily needs, and usually it looks like one day at a time. I like what Proverbs 30:8 says, *“Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.”* Not necessarily what I want but what I need every day.

Finally Jesus says, “Pray to be protected from temptation. Pray that you will grow to hate sin and all the trouble it creates. And pray that if you fall into sin God will rescue you from it.” Jesus recognizes that there is a devil who prowls around seeking to cause trouble for His followers. And Jesus says pray. Pray with confidence that God will intervene and deliver us with His supreme power from the lies and temptations and strongholds of the evil one.

Terry is a man I met 25 years ago. I was a very young church planter in Minnesota and Julie and I had the privilege of serving with this man and his family. Terry lived on his parent’s old dairy farm. He was a therapist by trade. And I soon came to understand that Terry understood not just the power of prayer, but also the right motives behind prayer. I remember it was a beautiful summer night and everyone was out enjoying the weather, and we had a prayer meeting scheduled that night in his farm house. I was about 30 minutes late and I pulled up his long dirt driveway and when I got to the top of his hill I saw that there were no other cars there; no one had shone up. I got out of the car and approached his front porch. His door was open and I looked through the screen door and there was Terry with his back to the door sitting in a chair with chairs around him in a circle and no one in them. And Terry was praying. Well, as you might expect with men like Terry at the helm, that church plant took root and became a healthy church in southeast Minnesota.

Terry modeled for me what I see in Jesus’ sermon. He understood to check his motives. He understood the importance of private devotion, eternal rewards, and doing it all for the praise of an audience of one—his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I’d like you to bow your heads and let the Spirit of God wash and rinse away what needs to be removed, and make room for new growth and devotion that pleases God. Recently I came upon a great summary of the Lord’s prayer by an unknown author. I thought of my old friend Terry sitting in that old farmhouse when I read this meditation this week.

- I cannot pray, “Our Father” if I live only for myself.
- I cannot pray, “Our Father” if I do not endeavor each day to act like His child.
- I cannot pray, “Hallowed be your name” if I am playing around with sin.
- I cannot pray, “Your kingdom come” if I am not allowing God to reign in my life.
- I cannot pray, “Your will be done” if I want my way all the time.
- I cannot pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” if I am trusting myself instead of in God’s provision.
- I cannot pray, “Forgive us our debts” if I am nursing a grudge or withholding forgiveness from someone else.
- I cannot pray, “Lead us not into temptation” if I deliberately place myself in its path.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*