



**PRAYER: COMMUNICATING WITH GOD
AND GROWING IN YOUR FAITH**

Praying: Communicating with God and Growing Your Faith.

Key Terms:

- **Prayer:** Talking to God
- **Hypocrite:** An actor under an assumed character (stage-player)
- **Secret:** Concealed, private, hidden, inward, secret.
- **Careth (cares):** To be of interest to; to concern; it matters; to take care.
- **Casting:** Holding nothing back; fully expressing how you feel
- **Offering:** Anything extra that you give beyond the tithe.
- **Fasting:** Abstinence from food and/or drink as a spiritual discipline to focus on prayer

Matthew 6:6 “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

Prayer simply is talking to God, but we still struggle with prayer. We know that prayer is our connection to God. We know that prayer is how we seek the face of God for help in the midst of difficulties. We know that prayer is powerful, and we can experience God's touch when we seek Him. The question is, “Why don't we pray more if we know all this?” It is vital that we understand prayer and why we pray. If prayer is how we fight spiritual battles, you should know that Satan will do whatever it takes to convince us not to pray or distract us from praying. We not only need to understand the importance of prayer, we must make it a daily and regular part of our lives.

Questions being answered tonight:

- What is prayer?
- How do we pray?
- What is fasting?

What is Prayer?

- How would you define prayer?
- Prayer is simply talking to God.

Prayer is about our relationship with God

- Salvation is about being born into the family of God.
- He is our Father, and we are His children.
- A relationship requires communication!
- It is how we grow in our walk with others and in our walk with God!

Prayer is communication between us and our heavenly Father

- You were created by God to communicate with God
- You need to be connected to God
- We grow through communication
- Our communication with God goes both ways:
 - God speaks to us through His Spirit and His Word
 - We speak to God through prayer

Prayer is our way to ask for help

Philippians 4:6 “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

- Prayer is more than just talking to God. Prayer is asking and seeking after God to intercede in your affairs
- It is true that God already knows our needs.
- God wants us to go to Him, and God wants us to rely on Him.
- Our prayer should not just be, “Dear Lord, please get me out of this mess” but instead, **“Dear Lord, I need you – please keep me from getting into a mess!”**

Prayer is a way to Worship

Psalms 95:6 “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.”

1 Thessalonians 5:16 “Rejoice evermore. 17 Pray without ceasing. 18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

- We sing to God to worship Him
- We pray to God to worship Him

Prayer is simply spending time with God

- As our Heavenly Father, He wants time with you.
- It is not just about asking Him for things.
- It is about fellowship with Him. **Remember: He delights in you!**
- You were formed by God and created in His image.

Revelation 4:11b “.....for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

Psalms 149:4 “For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation.”

- We forget that God delights in US!
- He delights in having your attention
- He delights when your focus is on him
- He delights in hearing everything that is on your heart

Matthew 6:6 “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father....”

- “Father” – we are talking to our heavenly Father!

How Do You Pray?

- Prayer is simple, but God does instruct us on how to pray.

Matthew 6:5 *“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. 7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. 8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.”*

- Jesus is having an honest conversation about prayer:
- They lived in a culture of **Pharisees—Religious leaders that did what they did for attention! It was a performance! Prayer is NOT a performance!**
- Prayer is talking to your Heavenly Father; it's not to impress people
- This is why Jesus points out the Pharisees.

Matthew 6:5 *“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.”*

Be real with God

Matthew 6:5a *“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are...”*

- Don't be a hypocrite!
- Hypocrite = an actor under an assumed character (stage-player)

Matthew 6:7 *“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.”*

Speak from the Heart

Matthew 6:6 *“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”*

- SECRET = concealed, i.e. private:--hid(-den), inward(-ly), secret.
- SECRET = Safe place.
- “No one else has to know”.
- “No one else will understand”

Matthew 6:8 *“Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.”*

- He already knows, and He wants to hear it from you!

Romans 8:15 *“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”*

1 Peter 5:7 *“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”*

- He CARES for you
- Careth (cares) = to be of interest to, i.e. to concern (it matters):--(take) care.

- When you know He cares about what you are feeling, then you can be open with Him
 - “God, I’m hurting”
 - “I’m scared” – “I don’t get this”
 - “I don’t get what You are doing”

1 Peter 5:7 *“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”*

- Casting: Holding nothing back; fully expressing how you feel

Philippians 4:6 *“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”*

- You were created to be connected to GOD
- You were not CREATED to carry the worries of this world

Set aside time with God.

- A lot of Christians struggle with setting aside time with God

Matthew 6:6 *“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”*

- Do you have time, each day, planned out to spend with God?
- If you don’t set a time, time will slip away, and we will forget

Have time away from distractions

- “shut the door” – Private; without distractions

Be real and honest with God when you get alone

- “pray to your Father in secret”

1 John 1:9 *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

- Spending time alone with God is a Spiritual discipline, which means, we have to fight our flesh

Galatians 5:17 *“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”*

Practical advice

1. Find a time that works for you
 - If you are not a morning person, don’t try to force it in at 5 AM
 - Don’t wait till the end of the night if you know you will be too tired
 - Work around your kid’s schedule – do it at a time when you know it will be quiet
2. Make a plan to do it; don’t wait for time to open up
 - Set an alarm
 - Put it on your calendar
 - Put your Bible on your bed or nightstand to remind you
3. Find someone to hold you accountable
4. Have a devotional plan
 - Have a prayer list
 - Have a devotional or reading plan
 - Have a journal – write out what you learned

5. Start off simple
 - **Don't try to read 10 chapters if this is all new to you**
 - Start off in the Psalms or Proverbs
 - Read through the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)
 - Read through I, II, and III John
 - Go for quality or quantity. **Read for understanding!**
 - Don't start off with a prayer list of 100 people or problems
6. Use a physical Bible, when possible, to eliminate distractions
7. When you pray, have a conversation with Him
 - Don't just pray through a list.
 - Share your heart
 - Praise Him and thank Him!
8. If you miss a day, just pick up the next day – Don't quit!

What is Fasting?

Fasting is part of our prayer life

- It should be part of the Christian life
- The Bible does not present it as an optional idea, but a practice just like prayer

Instructions to pray

Matthew 6:5 *“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.”*

Instructions to fast

Matthew 6:16 *“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. 17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; 18 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.”*

- Fast = to abstain from food (religiously):--fast.
- Root word for fast = not eating, i.e. abstinent from food (religiously):--fasting.

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that helps us control our flesh

- We will often forget to pray, but we never forget to eat.
- Fasting redirects our hunger for food to our focus on God.
- Fasting is very important because we are all made of flesh.
- WE struggle with our flesh.

1. Our flesh is corrupt

Romans 7:18 *“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.”*

2. Our flesh is weak

Matthew 26:41 *“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

3. Our flesh holds us back from praying like we should

- You don't know how weak your flesh is till you tell your flesh, “NO”
- Fasting is a way of telling God, “I want you more!”

Matthew 5:6 *“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”*

- Fasting is a weapon for Spiritual breakthroughs

Matthew 17:21 *“Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”*

- Daniel (Daniel 9)
- Esther (Esther 4:16)
- David (Psalm 35)
- Anna (Luke 2)
- Paul (Acts 14)

How to fast

1. Have a fasting plan before you start
 - Pre-decide what you are going to do
 - Don't just say, “I'm going to fast sometime this week”
 - Something will always come up
2. Plan it out and stick to the plan
 - I'm going to fast all week till 2 pm
 - I'm going to fast on Mondays
 - Fast through lunch every day
 - Fast on weekends
 - Plan it out around family events, birthday dinners, etc.
 - Don't set yourself up to fail, plan ahead

Types of fast

- Fasting in the Bible is an absence of food
1. Absolute Fast: abstaining from all food
 2. Partial fast: abstaining from a particular food
 - Daniel fast
 - Cut out coffee, sugar, carbs, processed foods
 3. Liquid fast: abstaining from all solid foods
 4. Alternate fast:
 - Fasting could be refraining from Netflix, social media, screen time, playing video games

If you have never fasted, just start!

Group Discussion Questions

As a group, read the following questions and discuss. Be sure to give everyone an opportunity to answer.

- Read Matthew 6:1-8 and answer the following questions.
 1. According to verse 5, why do the Pharisees pray in public?
 2. What are some examples of the “vain repetitions” we are warned about in verse 7?
- Give people in the group an opportunity to talk about their personal time with God.
- Discuss as a group some of the most common challenges we face when it comes to being consistent in prayer.
- How can the group pray for you?