

Not If, but When: 4 Essential Behaviors Christians must practice.

1.2.22

Giving, Praying, Fasting, and Forgiving

Matthew 6:1–18 (CSB)

HOW TO GIVE

6 “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward with your Father in heaven. ²So whenever you give to the poor, don’t sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. ³But when you give to the poor, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.’

HOW TO PRAY

⁵“Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. ⁶But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.’ ⁷When you pray, don’t babble like the Gentiles, since they imagine they’ll be heard for their many words. ⁸Don’t be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him.

THE LORD’S PRAYER

⁹“Therefore, you should pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,
your name be honored as holy.

¹⁰Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And do not bring us into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.'

¹⁴ "For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. ¹⁵ But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses.

HOW TO FAST

¹⁶ "Whenever you fast, don't be gloomy like the hypocrites. For they make their faces unattractive so that their fasting is obvious to people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that your fasting isn't obvious to others but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

1. Jesus expected every believer to practice certain behaviors:

A. Matthew 6 addresses four of those behaviors.

1. Every believer, Jesus assumed, would Give.
2. Every believer, Jesus assumed, would Pray.
3. Every believer, Jesus assumed, would Fast.
4. Every believer, must Forgive.

B. These are not the only essential behaviors.

1. Thankfully, we all have copies of Scripture so we must read Scripture.
2. We all have the opportunity to gather together as the Church, so we should gather together often.

3. Compared to most religions, the essentials and expectations of Christianity are pretty minimal.

a. Truly, Jesus meant it when He said "my yoke is easy and burden is light."

b. Still, there are essential elements that belong in every believer's life.

C. This series examines Jesus' teachings and provide ways to implement these elements in our daily life.

2. Whenever you pray...

A. 3 times, Jesus says "when you pray..."

1. Not if you pray, but when you pray.

2. Honestly, we all know that we are supposed to pray.

3. Sometimes prayer comes easy.

a. Some people practice prayer easier than others.

b. Just like some people find it easy to start a conversation, others find it easy to pray.

c. For others, prayer and conversation do not come easily or naturally.

B. Prayer is not easy for me.

1. No one here believes me, but I'm not naturally an extrovert.

a. I remember when I started working for Hirsch Feed, we had 7 phone lines and 5 registers at the service counter.

b. At first, I was hired to do inventory, which meant I worked by myself.

c. I loved that.

d. But I didn't realize that there would be times I had to interact with people and answer the phone.

e. I would stress over that.

2. Up until a couple years ago, I would wait until last minute to make phone calls.

a. And when I would call, I would rehearse what I would say, or write it down, and then stare at the phone number making sure it was right.

b. But guess what? I learned to make phone calls, help customers, and answer the phone because IT WAS EXPECTED OF ME.

c. Like any spiritual discipline, prayer can be learned.

d. If you wait till it's easy to pray, you may never pray.

e. That's why the best time to start praying is now.

3. You don't have to pray like someone else, but you do have to pray like yourself.

a. God wants to hear your voice in prayer.

b. And part of Christianity is growing in prayer.

C. We are called to grow in:

1. The intensity of our prayer.

2. The regularity of our prayer.

3. The clarity of prayer.

3. Jesus teaches the importance of clarity within prayer.

A. Don't be like the hypocrites and don't be like the Gentiles.

1. Get this: Hypocrites do pray.

a. Just because someone prays, that does not mean they are right with God.

b. Lots of people pray.

c. That doesn't mean they love Jesus or are following Him.

2. Hypocrites pray in public but not in private.

3. They display a false piety because **prayer depends upon relationship to be effective.**

- a. Most of humanity prays in some way or another.
- b. But prayer must be rooted in relationship to the one true God to be meaningful and effective.
- c. **Good vibes or meditation is not prayer.**

4. Jesus condemned the religious hypocrites because they prayed in public but not in private.

5. Jesus condemned the religious elite because their reason for praying was to impress people, not connect with God.

B. Jesus also condemned the Gentiles for babbling.

1. Not only do hypocrites pray, but so too do "pagans".

2. Most of the religions followed by "Gentiles" believed they had to get God's attention and they did so by using lots of words.

3. Jesus stressed clarity because our Father in heaven already knows what we need.

a. God is not impressed by fancy words or even lots of words.

b. **To think that we can impress God or manipulate God into answering our prayers is not what God asks from us.**

4. Some of us believe that if we can just find the right words, and pray at the right time, in the right voice, then God will hear us.

a. That is not true prayer.

b. That is spiritual manipulation.

c. God is not impressed by our flowery words, or our intellect, or our creativity.

d. God desires relationship.

4. Jesus gave us a pattern for prayer.

A. Protestants, like us, don't like patterns or rituals.

1. But this rejection has more to do with us "protesting" the influence of the Catholic church than it does with the Bible.
2. Jesus taught His disciples to pray using a specific, repeatable prayer.
3. **All of your prayers do not have to be spontaneous.**
 - a. Jesus could have taught his followers to pray anyway he wanted, and so he taught them this pattern.
 - b. "Therefore, you should pray like this..."
 - c. Spontaneous prayers are not more spiritual than some practice prayers.

4. When Jesus gave His disciples a pattern for prayer, He was building upon what was already common practice.

- a. Every Jew prayed the Shema three times a day. "Hear Oh Israel, YHWH is God."
- b. They prayed the same prayers at the same festivals each year.
- c. The priest blessed the people with the same priestly blessing, that was passed down from Aaron to Jesus' day.
- d. Often, the prayer I pray before I am ready for service comes from the Prayer Book called Psalms: May the Words of my Mouth and the Meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, My strength and Redeemer.
- e. The benefit of repeating prayers is that it connects us to Saints in the past.

5. Sometimes, our spontaneous prayers reflect more of our individualism than it does the biblical pattern.

B. Jesus taught the importance of praying aloud.

1. Of course we can pray to ourselves, internally.
2. But again, that reflects our individualism more than it does the biblical pattern.
 - a. Even in private, Jesus expected prayer to be spoken aloud.
 - b. That is why Jesus said to go lock yourself in the closet, so what is done in secret can be promoted publicly by God.
 - c. **If we were meant to always pray silently, there would be no reason to hide ourself.**

C. **Jesus taught the importance of persistent prayer.**

1. How did Jesus teach prayer?
2. Jesus taught we are to pray until God answers.

Luke 18:1–8 (CSB)

18 Now he told them a parable on the need for **them to pray always and not give up**. ²“There was a judge in a certain town who didn’t fear God or respect people. ³And a widow in that town kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’

⁴“For a while he was unwilling, but later he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or respect people, ⁵yet because this widow keeps pestering me, I will give her justice, so that she doesn’t wear me out by her persistent coming.’ ”

⁶Then the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷Will not God grant justice to his elect who cry out to him day and night? Will he delay helping them? ⁸I tell you that he will swiftly grant them justice. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

Luke 11:1–13 (CSB)

11 He was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples."

²He said to them, "Whenever you pray, say,

Father,

your name be honored as holy.

Your kingdom come.

³Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves also forgive everyone

in debt to us.

And do not bring us into temptation."

ASK, SEARCH, KNOCK

⁵He also said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I don't have anything to offer him.'⁷ Then he will answer from inside and say, 'Don't bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I have gone to bed. I can't get up to give you anything.'⁸ I tell you, even though he won't get up and give him anything because he is his friend, **yet because of his friend's shameless boldness**, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

⁹"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? ¹²Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

The Greek construction is not past tense but present, active. Keep on asking, Keep on Seeking, and Keep on knocking until what you ask for is given, and what you seek is found, and the doors you need opened are open.

D. There is a strong and vocal element within the church that teaches that we should “ask once, and then thank Him for it...”

1. *Based upon 3 Scriptures involving Jesus’ express teachings on prayer, that teaching is not what Jesus said.*

a. Jesus could have taught prayer anyway we wanted.

b. Jesus could have illustrated prayer with anything.

c. Yet, this is how Jesus taught His followers to pray.

d. Jesus taught the value and importance of persistent prayer.

e. “Give us This DAY our Daily bread.”

1. Not tomorrow’s bread, but today’s.

2. Jesus invites us to participate in this kind of prayer daily.

3. The Apostle Paul said for us to “pray without ceasing.”

2. **How should we pray? Pray until God answers.**

a. We pray until our prayer is answered and we are ready to be obedient.

b. Both Jesus and Paul prayed 3 times for situations they did not want.

1. Jesus asked God 3 times to remove the cup of suffering and wrath from Him.

a. The answer from God was the same each time.

b. Jesus prayed until he was obedient.

2. Paul prayed 3 times for the thorn in his flesh to be removed until God answered with a no.

c. We can never respect God's yes' if we don't respect God's NO.

d. Some people love and follow Jesus as long as the answer is yes.

1. The test of obedience involves obeying the NO.

2. It's easy to follow when we are always getting what we want.

3. The test of obedience is when God speaks and we want to say, "NO".

Close: 2022 is a great time to evaluate your prayer life.

A. Some of us here, prayer is a struggle.

1. Let me encourage you to not give up.

2. Do whatever you need to do to prioritize prayer.

a. If you a morning person, pray before the day gets started.

b. If you are more alive in the evening, turn the phone of 15 minutes early to pray.

c. Go for a walk and pray.

d. Pray on your drive to work.

e. Pray during your kids nap time.

3. Don't try to pray for an hour if you've never prayed for 5 minutes.

a. If your mind is always running, take a notebook with you.

b. Write all the stuff that comes to mind:

- a. Todo.
- b. Things you've forgot.
- c. Impressions.
- d. Feelings.
- e. People who come to mind.

c. You may find yourself uncluttered about 5-10 minutes into it and then you can really connect.

4. Remove the things that hinder you. (No, not your spouse or kids).

a. Just as if you are dieting, you cleanse the cupboards of the junk food, clear your house and electronics of the junk.

b. You will struggle in prayer if you are surrounded by junk and sin.

c. **You don't have to be perfect but don't guarantee your failure.**

B. Some of us here are being called to persistent prayer.

1. Instead of praying once and walking away, we need people who will bombard heaven until God answers.

2. We need mature believers to be mature in prayer.

3. If you don't know what you can do in this season, you can pray.

a. Touch heaven for us.

b. Call upon Jesus to fill us with His Holy Spirit.

c. Pray for deliverance from oppression and the attacks of the enemy.

4. Be persistent and be clear.

God is calling every one of us to pray, fast, forgive, and give like never before.

So who are you going to pray for?