



Worship – Part 15
Acts of Worship – Part 3
Prayer & Fasting – Part 2
GCSP – 08/18/2007

When you have lunch with a good friend, how is the conversation? Are you formal and starched in your approach to speaking with them or is more relaxed? How is your conversation different when you are talking with someone you don't know very well, or don't know at all? What about if you had the opportunity to speak with the president of the United States or the emperor of Japan or someone like Bill gates or Warren Buffet?

Our style of conversation changes depending on our comfort level with whom we are speaking doesn't it? Each of us would adjust how casually or formally we act and speak depending upon how well we knew the person or possibly even based upon who was observing the conversation. An example of that last statement happened to me just recently. As I mentioned a few weeks ago to most of you, I visited my cousin's church in Minnesota. My little cousin is now the pastor of that church. I spoke to him differently at the church service in front of his congregation than I did sitting around the pool at his father's house. He was my little cousin Mike at the pool but he was Pastor Mike at the church.

Based on this understanding of how we act and speak depending upon how comfortable and intimate we are with the person, rate in your own mind how you speak to the Lord in prayer. Are you excited to talk to Him? Are you somewhat boring when you speak to Him? Do you ever have fun talking to the Lord? If someone could overhear your conversations with the Lord would they be able to observe an intimate friendship or would they be more likely to think you didn't know this person very well?

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Matthew 6**.

We are continuing our study on worship by looking at several acts of worship or expressions of worship. I started a few weeks ago by looking at church attendance as an act of worship. I proposed that most Christians are much too casual in their church attendance – they allow far too many activities in their life crowd out joining together with the rest of Christ's body on a regular basis. They also fail to recognize the harm that is caused to the rest of the church when they are not there. They also do not see the lost opportunities to minister to, to encourage, to edify, and to give testimony to the rest of the church and those visitors who attend on any given week.

Last week we began to deal with the topic of prayer as an act of worship. I started at the beginning of **Matthew 6** so that we would be careful to grasp the entire context of Jesus' teaching on prayer. That context is revealed in **verse 1** and then illustrated in **verses 2-8**. In **verses 9-15** Jesus gives us a model prayer and then He wraps up this section by briefly teaching about fasting in **verses 16-18**.

So let's read the entire section again, let's take a moment to pray, and then let's zero in on the passage that is widely known as the Lord's Prayer, or the Disciple's Prayer by some.

Matthew 6:1-18

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left

hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."

"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.' For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

"Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you" (NASB).

Let's pray.

The context of this entire section is in our motives. Jesus speaks about giving to the poor, praying, and fasting. He admonishes us to not be hypocritical in any of these acts of worship. When giving to the poor, make sure your attitude is one of true humility and not one of looking for a pat on the back. When praying in public, make sure you are not using flowery words and words you think hold some special power or meaning so that others will think you are something special. And we will see the same thing when we briefly look at fasting again in the near future.

After making sure we understand this principle then Jesus gives us a model prayer to help us see the general components of a God-honoring prayer

The Lord's Prayer is misunderstood by most people and misapplied or misused by many others. It is not a prayer that was designed to be repeated, although there is absolutely nothing wrong with praying it word-for-word. Praying the Scriptures back to God is a very beneficial form of prayer, but praying **Matthew 6:9-15** is no better than praying **Psalms 91**, or **Romans 8**, or any other passage in the Bible. Praying the Lord's Prayer is not a magic incantation nor does it hold any special favor with God.

There are some people in this world, possibly even genuine Christians, who would label me a heretic or a blasphemer for talking like this. While the words of this passage are indeed sacred, along with every other word in this Book, we are mistaken if we attach any greater significance to these inspired words of God above everything else He said in His Word. ALL of God's Word is inspired, and perfect, and useful, and important, and beneficial to us. When we focus too intently on any one part of His Word at the exclusion of the rest, we are in danger of missing the whole counsel of God, and we can easily fall into the sin of picking and choosing what we believe.

Jesus Himself tells us this is a model for prayer right up front.

v. 9a

"Pray, then, in this way."

Jesus does not tell us to pray these exact words, but to pray in this way, or pray like this, or pray after this manner, or use this as an outline to pray, etc. And if you take the time to absorb the principles Jesus puts forth, if you incorporate the components of this model into your daily prayers, if you grasp the wonderful truth of what we see here, you will begin to experience the same power of prayer Jesus and the saints of old displayed for us in the pages of the Bible.

If we would pray then in this way, we could pray like Abraham's servant, and before we were even finished the answer could appear like Rebekah did as he prayed for Isaac's bride to be would be made known to him.

If we would pray then in this way, we could pray like Jacob when he wrestled with God and saw twenty years of revenge melt away from his brother Esau's heart.

If we would pray then in this way, we could pray like Hannah and be given the desire of our heart as her soon to be son Samuel was to her.

If we would pray then in this way, we could pray like Elijah when he caused the rains to stop for three years and the prayed again and it immediately rained.

If we would pray then in this way, we could pray like Isaiah and Hezekiah did when they saw the Lord strike down 186,000 of their enemies in the span of twelve hours.

James tells us flat out, "**The effective prayers of a righteous man can accomplish much**" (**James 5:16** – NASB).

If we would pray then in this way, we too would see much accomplished. But most Christians do not pray then in this way.

Most Christians use prayer like a sailor uses a pump – only when the water is pouring into the boat. Most Christians treat prayer like the ax and the fire alarm behind the glass – break in case of emergency. Most Christians aren't intimate with God so they don't experience all that He has for them through prayer. Most Christians skip every component of this model prayer except the component of making requests. We somehow have come to the faulty conclusion that God is required to take care of our current situation in the way we want it taken care of and in the time we want it taken care of. All too often most Christians definitely do not pray then in this way.

Before we dive into what the components of powerful God-honoring prayers are, I believe it would be helpful for us to understand God's purpose in prayer. And that purpose is found in **John 14**. So hold your place in **Matthew 6** and turn to **John 14:13**.

John 14:13

"Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

God's glory is the purpose of prayer. And before you get your mind focused only on what you want to see, this verse is not the magic genie in a bottle that is going to grant your every wish. Adding "In Jesus name, amen" to the end of your prayers is not a magic formula for seeing all of your prayers answered. The Father's glory is the focus of this verse, not you receiving everything you want.

1 John 5:14-15 gives us a better understanding of what we receive in response to prayer. John says, "**This is the confidence we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to**

His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him."

Praying in Jesus' name is simply praying according to God's will. When we pray according to God's will we see our prayers answered in great detail and in miraculous ways.

God is not restricted to answering our prayers in the finite, somewhat pathetic, ways our human minds can scheme. God is infinite in the ways He answers prayers according to His will. God will employ means that defy description. God will suspend the laws of the universe to answer prayer. The bottom line is that God will use whatever means that will best glorify Him, because the primary purpose of prayer is to bring glory to His name.

True prayer, just like true worship, centers on God's glory, not on man's needs. Although we should lay claim to the promises He makes in His Word, we must recognize His sovereignty, declare His glory, obey His will, and thus assign to Him the latitude to do as He pleases in how He fulfills His promises. We simply have no right to make demands upon God as some are prone to do.

So make a habit of praying according to God's will and you will begin to see the impossible and the miraculous happening in your life and in the life of His church.

The question running through many of your minds right now is, "How do I pray according to God's will if I don't always know what His will is?"

First of all, the more you increase in the knowledge of the Bible, the more you will truly know God and the more you will develop an intimate relationship with Him. I don't always know what my wife wants, but I have gotten pretty good at it over the years. Why? – Because I have developed an intimate relationship with her. I have discovered what she likes and dislikes. I can more easily predict how she will respond to certain things and certain situations. I know her habits and her tastes. And because I know all these things about my wife, I can do a pretty good job of figuring out what her will is.

In a similar way it is the same with our Heavenly Father. We must get to know Him more intimately through the reading and studying of His Word. The Bible tells us that this Book not only contains His Word, but is His Word; and it also says that His Word and He are one and the same. So by getting to intimately know His Word you are getting to intimately know Him.

Secondly, we can pray God's will even when we do not specifically know it, through the intercession of His Holy Spirit.

Turn to **Romans 8**.

Romans 8:26-27

"In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

Wow, did you catch all of that? Did you see the beauty of how God works in the lives of His children as they genuinely seek His will in their prayers? Did you also see the qualifier there? He searches our hearts. We are not going to sneak some prayer through that is selfish and lacking in the proper attitude that God is going to mistakenly answer. Only the pure in heart and the genuine worshippers can expect to see consistent answers to their prayers, because it is only

these seekers of God's will that will intimately know Him as they should and thus consistently be in line with His will.

Well, we are almost out of time this evening, so let's get back to Matthew 6 and at least look at one component of a God-honoring prayer.

v. 9b

"Our Father who is in heaven..."

The first component of a God-honoring prayer is recognizing God as your Father and recognizing His place in heaven.

In a crowd even as small as we are, I am sure that at least some of you do not or did not have much of an earthly father. He was maybe abusive or indifferent or maybe you hardly even knew him. If I have described you in any of this, or if your situation was even worse, you are going to have to remove your concept of what a father is before you go any further.

A real father shows unconditional love for his children. A real father always does what is best for his children even if they do not recognize what is best. A real father is caring and compassionate. A real father protects and provides. A real father gives wise advice, administers proper correction, and creates an environment for learning. A real father allows you to fall at times but is always right beside you to pick you up. A real father does not abandon you but encourages you.

These are just some of the qualities of a real father. Now take all of these characteristics and then increase the depth and the breadth and the length and the width of each of them to infinite proportions and you will just begin to scratch the surface of the character and quality of God as our Father.

Replace any concept you have in your mind of what a father is – what your earthly father was – with what God the Father is. So even if you did not have any semblance of a relationship with your earthly father, accept the fact that you can have an unbelievable relationship with your Heavenly Father. Accept unconditional love and protection and provision and comfort and joy. Learn to laugh with Him and play with Him and learn from Him.

He is your Father. Crawl up into His lap and tell Him about your day. Whisper your dreams and desires into His ear. Smile. **Romans 8:15** says we are to cry out Him, "Abba Father!" Probably the best English translation of the word "Abba" would be "Papa" or "Daddy." And while we must keep a proper reverence, awe, and respect for our Father God (which we will go into in depth next week), we also have the unbelievable privilege to look upon Him as daddy.

Let me close with a few benefits we enjoy because God is our Father:

- It means the end of fear. Pagans fear for their lives when they refer to their deities. We don't have to fear our Father.
- It gives us hope. If most earthly fathers will go to excessive lengths to protect and care for their children, how much more will our Heavenly Father do so?
- It removes loneliness. Our Heavenly Father will never leave us or forsake us – He is always with us even if the whole world rejects us.
- It settles the matter of resources. All the resources of heaven and earth are His and He distributes them freely to His children to fulfill their needs.
- It gives us an eternal inheritance. We have been given all of the privileges of being a child of the King, and one day we will see the fulfillment of being an heir of the Father and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

So I trust the next time you begin a prayer with Father, or our Father, a new understanding of who God is to you personally will flood your mind. And I trust knowing this about God will cause you to take whatever steps are necessary to spend more time with Him and develop an intimate relationship with Him.

Let's pray.