

VIII.HAVE A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

71.Don't Pray Like This. Read Mt 6:5-15

v 5 Whereas the hypocrites want to be seen praying by men so as to win their praise. In being seen by men they accomplish their objective. Couldn't they also be rewarded by God? They don't pray to be rewarded by God. The focus is not on God. There is no relationship with God in their prayers. They are not talking to God and God is not listening.

v 6 Jesus contrasts God, His Father, with the hypocrites. They pray to be seen, God is unseen by human eyes. If you pray in secret then only you and God know you are praying. To whom are you

talking to? You could be talking to yourself. I inevitably get distracted by my own thoughts when I pray and end up talking to myself. Other than that you are talking to God because He is the only one to hear. In talking to Him you are building a relationship with Him.

v 7 We need to think we will be heard only because God is listening. The pagans hope to influence their god's by manipulation. We are not to be like them trying to manipulate God by the volume of our praying. We are not to manipulate God at all. As a parent it has been comical to hear my children ask me for something, trying all the while, to influence me with subtlety. But, how subtle can a child be? God knows your thought before you do. You may wish to influence Him by all means. But you will influence Him by loving and trusting Him alone.

God wants to build a relationship with each of His people. Attempts to manipulate or control God break down the respectful loving trust relationship and build a relationship based on knowledge, power, and control. In this instance I mean knowledge of someone so as to be able to control them, not knowledge of someone as the result of a love based relationship.

Trying to control God is the same as using magic. Magic is power and control based on a knowledge of a supernatural world. I loath things that smack of, some kind of control or manipulation of God, which is, magic. If we would not attempt to get what we want by chanting incantations, mixing potions, or sticking needles in something inanimate, then let us stop trying to influence God by praying using a certain formula, many words, writing our request on our hand, or any other way.

How do you feel when you realize that you are being manipulated? You feel diminished, disrespected and demeaned. You do not want to be treated this way. Therefore don't do to God what you don't want done to you.

72.Pray Like This. Read Mt 6:5-15, Lk 11:1-4

The Lord's Prayer divides into two halves. The first is about God and our relationship to Him. It is right that it come first as "Our" not "The". "Our" means possession and relationship. "Father" means a familial relationship. When Jesus appeared to Mary the Magdalene at the tomb He said "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Jesus has opened the way to a closer relationship with God. God is happy to belong to us. And God is willing to be our Father. If you were raised by a good father you know that God will take care of you. He will love you. To Him you are precious. And, he wants you to grow into spiritual maturity.

We are reminded that God is in heaven. He is greater than we are. We will never have a relationship as equals. It would be wrong because we are not equal.

I wonder how many American adults know what "hallowed" means. But it is popular to use this word because it comes to us from the King James Bible, and has been repeated so often. Similarly we may wonder what makes God's name different from Himself. "Hallowed be Thy name" could be better rendered as, "May everyone remember that who You are and Your reputation, and everything about You

are set apart and above everything we know."

The kingdom of God is the nation of all His people, whether dead or alive, whether now or when Jesus comes again. It is frequently called the "kingdom of heaven" in the gospels. The Jews were careful not to take the name of God in vain. So careful that they did not refer to Him directly. So they called His kingdom the kingdom of heaven. We are wishing and asking for the kingdom of God to come as well as blessing it and Him.

We are wishing and asking that God's will, what He desires and has chosen, be done as well as blessing it and Him. It is important to remember that we have asked that what He wants is done when we do not want to do what He wants us to do. If you think as the world thinks, and we all do, doing what God asks us to do is scary.

Now we enter the second half of the prayer where we ask for what we need. First we ask for food, and I think that this can be extended to asking for everything we need to physically survive. Note that we ask for daily bread and not long term security. We may be more content and at peace when we have security, but it makes us complacent and less trusting of God. We need God to build our love-faith relationship with Him. Being dependent on Him and having Him bring us through great difficulties will build a much greater relationship with Him than being set for life.

We ask that our sins be forgiven, but more specifically we ask that we be forgiven to the extent that we forgive others. If we are not forgiving others we are in effect cursing ourselves. We really must, must, and must forgive everyone everything. We really really need to ask God to help us to forgive everything done by everyone.

I much prefer to render "don't lead us into temptation", as "Do not put us to the test." As in "don't test us the way you did Abraham." God can and does test people. If you start boasting about your strength you can expect God to test how strong you are. The vast majority of our strength comes from God. When He tests us He takes away some, most, or all of His strength in us. Don't boast of anything but the Lord. Let Him be all the strength in you. In contrast James tells us that God does not tempt anyone. It seems pointless to ask Him not to do that which He will never do.

See Mt 26:31-45, Mk 14:27-41, Lk 22:39-46, Jn 13:36-38. The disciples did not see the need to pray for the strength not to fall to the temptation to do whatever needful to save themselves. They really did not believe Jesus when He told them how the night's events would unfold. They definitely did not believe they would run away. They thought they were strong. This is easy to do when danger is far away. We can imagine ourselves strong. When danger is near it is easy to consider for the first time the many aspects, facets, and subtleties of bodily danger and fear. I have seen and experienced irrational fear. I have seen a man froze with fear who in his own mind was not froze but was still moving.

The best portrayal of this I have seen was in the film, "Saving Private Ryan", The clerk who knew languages was froze with fear. Watch that scene closely and more than once if you can. Someday you may be faced with your own fear. Recognize that you do not think straight in those circumstances of "flight or fight" as it is called. Prepare yourself by praying that you will not fall into the temptation to save your self at the cost of everything else.

The evil one is strong. You want protection from him. You may think you are strong enough to resist him. But, are all your loved ones strong enough too. He messes with us by messing with the people around us. So ask for protection from him for yourself and the people around you.

73.About Praying and not giving up. Read Lk 11:5-13

Some of this I have heard and some I surmise. At night it was dark in Israel. There were no street lamps. Inside a house it was darker at night. There was no window glass so the wall openings were

large enough to let out smoke. But were small enough to not let out all the heat. There was no light in the house. No candles or lamps would have been used as night lights. Clothing was expensive. Poorer people might wear hand me downs. There was no bedding for poor people. People slept on mats on the floor. Perhaps only the parents had cloaks. The whole family would sleep together under them when it was cold. To try to get up in the dark would be difficult as the whole family would have to be awakened and then the stumbling around in the dark would begin. Houses had one or two

rooms and few possessions but one had to avoid stepping on the wife and kids. This would be a huge inconvenience.

Pretend that the above describes your reality at night. So now someone you know comes to your door to pound on it to get you to wake up and give him some bread. You are not going to do it. You will tell him to get lost. Because getting up in the dark is a huge inconvenience.

But there is a bigger inconvenience. Having someone pounding on your door all night. Eventually you realize that he is not going away on his own. So to get rid of this guy you will give him what he wants. Or perhaps you will open the door and beat him.

What is Jesus saying. He is saying keep praying for something until God realizes that you are never going to quit. Then He will give you what you ask. God knows how long you will pray. If you are never going to quit He knows this. If you will eventually give up, He already knows this. But, do you know it. You need to be resolved that you can never stop praying. For some things, we know we will never stop praying.

It is not the effort required that keeps God from extending Himself to save people or to grant some other request. It is that God already has a perfectly righteous plan that flows from His perfectly righteous will. We are asking Him to do something that is less than what He has planned. But there are two things that might cause Him to change His mind.

The first is that we are doing all we can to live holy and righteous lives. The righteous must listen to the righteous, perhaps not accede, but at least listen. If we are righteous God will listen to us. We may not get what we ask but He will listen. If we are not living holy and righteous lives then we are not listening to Him. Why then should He listen to us?

The second is trust. We trust in God as our loving Father our hero as it were. If we are truly His children following Him as best we can, it pains Him not to give us the good and completely unselfish thing that we ask for.

For me, I will pray for the salvation of my family members until I am dead, they all are dead, or some are dead and all the rest are saved. Christians do not abound in my family. If I don't pray for them who will? They are getting old and are hopelessly resistant to change. Only God can save them now. And why should He. These people have been turning their backs to Him for decades. Unless God moves Himself and puts forth His power they will die in their sins. I am asking God to get up out of bed and save these people. When God and I both know I won't give up then He will begin to go to work.

God won't make a choice for someone, but He can make life pretty difficult until someone gives in.

Consider Jonah and Paul.

74. Have Faith and do anything, Mt 21:18-22, Lk 17:5-6, Read Mt 7:7-11, Mt 17:14-20, Mk 9:14-29, Lk 9:37-42, Mk 12:41-43, Mt 8:23-27, Mt 13:54-58, Mt 14:21-36, Mt 15:21-28

I probably struggle with the Mt 21 passage more than any other. I think many people at times have believed 100% that God will answer a particular prayer, but He did not. I know I have had that experience. I suppose the problem can be solved by saying that I only thought I believed 100%.

The mustard seed is the smallest of seeds. It's size is what matters here in Jesus' metaphor. If you have the tiniest amount of faith the mulberry tree will obey you. But, this would seem to contradict Jesus saying you must have complete non-doubting faith.

I can't help but believe that God is not going to answer many prayers said without doubt when those prayers are selfish. I don't think that my faith without doubt can over rule His sovereignty. He rules the universe not me.

See NIV James 4:2-3

You do not have, because you do not ask God.

3. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Perhaps there is a true faith, about which I know nothing, of which the tiniest amount can move a mulberry tree, and a large amount of which can move mountains. This true faith is completely non-doubting.

Perhaps what Jesus is saying is that the tiniest amount of faith can accomplish things but we have none at all. He laughs at the concept of increasing faith when there is none to start with.

This is what I can take from this passage: It is useless to ask God for selfish things. It is disrespectful to God to ask Him for anything if you don't believe He listens to you or there is no "chance" He will do it. Do your part to build your relationship with God. Trust that He loves you and hears you. Understand that there are times when His completely righteous will can be changed just because one of His children trusting in His love and living in accordance with His will has asked Him for something unselfish. The asking has made God's changed will more righteous than His unchanged will. So the prayer has moved God.

Above all the preceding, remember there is nothing God can not do. But that there are many things He will not do. God will never do what is wrong and He will never break a promise.

75. Pray and don't give up Read Lk 18:1-8

In the first verse Luke tells us what the lesson of this parable is. Perhaps Luke did not think everyone could figure it out so he added the meaning to be certain.

Again to unpackage the parable we must assign roles to the characters. In verse 7 we read that God will bring about justice for His chosen ones. In the parable the one with the power of delivering justice is the judge. So the Judge is God. The widow is the one pleading to the judge for justice. In v 7 it is the chosen ones who cry out to God. So the widow represents the people of God. In v 3 another character is mentioned. That is the adversary. He has wronged the widow or at least she thinks so. But, we have no reason to doubt her so we assume he has in fact wronged her. V 7 assigns no one to the adversary. The biggest adversary of the people of God has always been Satan. His "spirit" in the world hates Christians and Jews alike.

The widow (God's people) continuously pleads for justice from the judge (God) against her enemy (Satan). The judge (God) gets wearied of hearing it so He grants her (God's people) justice against her enemy (Satan).

Now Jesus makes the judge out to be an unrighteous person. As such he is not a good metaphor for God. But that is the point. The judge can be moved by persistence alone. How much more will God be moved by love, by His promises, by His Son, by His Spirit, by justice, by mercy, by compassion, as well as our persistence.

But, what about our faith? What must weary God much more than our persistence is our lack of faith.

We ask but we assume God will not answer. We can all make lists of things we asked for and didn't receive. I suspect we more quickly forget what we did receive than what we didn't.

Would it be discouraging to have someone ask you to do something? So you go about getting it done only to find that they made some other arrangement. Now your effort is wasted and it is clear they don't think much of you at all. Now how do you feel? Hurt, disappointed, insulted, diminished Well God must certainly be disappointed in us when we ask expecting not to receive and not waiting. Jesus bewailed the lack of faith in people more than once.

I pray for the salvation, discipleship, maturity and blessing of people. I recognize that I am asking for something huge. I know God can do anything, but what if God's righteous justice has already judged so many people, (just as so many people stop thinking about God) and that He has given them their last chance, and that they have turned away from Him. Justice demands that those who have turned away from God so many times eventually lose their ability to choose.

Now how much prayer with persistence, compassion, mercy, a life of holy obedience and faith will it take to make granting me my request more righteous than condemning those who have slammed the door in God's face? I don't think I can do it. But if God saves none of these people I know that He is righteous in all His ways.

Notice that Jesus does not say we will get what we request. He says God will give us justice.

Getting justice is getting what is deserved. Mercy is getting better than what is deserved. I deserve punishment for my sins. Jesus saving me is pure mercy. I would be better off if I received a little mercy and my enemy a lot of mercy. Than I would be if my enemy received full punishment for his evil doing and God gave me only a little of the punishment I deserve.

It also occurs to me that I could have a stronger relationship with God if I also asked for things that God can grant without negating His righteous justice with regard to those who turn their backs on Him.

76. Spend some time alone with God. Read Lk 5:12-16 Read Lk 6:12, Read Mk 1:35-37, Mt 6:6

V 16 is what we focus on now. Jesus was alone when He went out to some wilderness places to pray. I can only assume that He went alone. Clearly He was alone in Mk 1:36. In Mt 26:36 He has the disciples wait while He prayed alone. In Mt 6:6 Jesus recommends we be alone in secret. So I think it established that Jesus prayed alone in wilderness places. So what is the advantage of praying alone?

When a person really needs to have important communication with a spouse or child or whoever, they will seek an opportunity to speak to that person alone. Communication can be the most honest when it is not done before an audience. Try as we might we are so accustomed to behaving in a certain way in front of people that the presence of anyone else will have an effect on how we present what we are trying to say. I think this true also with our relationship with God.

My prayers are different before other people. I think of myself as eloquent and I can put some words together. I can't help but try to choose my words and word order so as to sound deep. I must ask myself whether I am praying to God or performing for men. Even so I don't think we can abandon corporate prayer no matter how well or poorly we speak or no matter how distracted we are.

When alone I usually pray using the Lord's prayer as an outline and going into a little, or a lot more, detail. I feel that I should spend some time speaking to God at length. I feel it is an offering. A little offering would be cheap.

My best praying is when I am alone and my thoughts have run through some issue of life and I realize that I or someone else will need God's help. Or perhaps I have a question for God. Or perhaps I have figured something out. These are the times when I feel that my speaking to God is the most direct and

focused. These times are short and don't happen every day. These prayers seem to me to be the best, because I have no other goal than to communicate directly and specifically to God.

If there is a principal here I think it is this. Do what it takes to focus completely on God with no other agenda but to say something to Him.