

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 27 August 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Prayer and Fasting 101

Matthew 6:9-18

When I went off to my first year of Bible college, there was something that I soon discovered about my courses: many of the courses began with the three-digit number “101.” My courses included “World History 101,” “New Testament Survey 101,” “Old Testament Survey 101,” and several others. (If you’ve ever been through college, you’ve observed this same thing about your courses, as well!) The number “1” at the beginning of the course number means that this is a first-year course (freshman level); and the “1” at the end of the number indicates that this is the first in a series of courses. For example, “World History 101” is a first-year course; and it is the very first course in a series of history courses. To say that something is “101” means that “This is basic, elementary, beginner-level instruction in this subject.”

So, what’s my point? The point is that this morning, we will be doing an “introductory level” study on two aspects of Kingdom righteousness—prayer, and fasting. Our main focus will be on a famous prayer that Jesus taught His disciples—a prayer that people all over the world know as “The Lord’s Prayer.” As we study the Lord’s Prayer, we will see that this prayer is *not* the “end-all” for prayers. The Lord’s Prayer was never meant to be repeated again and again. It is simply a *sample prayer*—a *model* prayer. In this prayer, Jesus gave us the basic, essential elements that should be in every believer’s prayers. If you want to have real communication with the Lord, you need to learn the elements of this prayer, and put them to practice. We will also be learning about *fasting*. Fasting is a powerful auxiliary of prayer, which is often overlooked and forgotten. We will be learning about *both* these aspects of Kingdom righteousness in this morning’s message, which I am entitling ***Prayer and Fasting 101***.

Read Matthew 6:8-18.

I. Prayer 101 (vv. 8-15)

In last week’s message, we learned two important aspects of prayer. First, we saw that prayer should be done in secret, and not for the purpose of being seen and admired by others.

Secondly, we saw that our prayers should be simple, clear conversations with God, and not empty, repetitive mantras. Prayer is not repeating certain “holy words” over and over: it is simply talking to God, as friend with friend.

With this in mind, let’s see what *kinds of things* we should be talking about with the Lord. In this model prayer, we see seven distinct things that we should include in our prayers. First, our prayers should start off with **worship**. Jesus instructs us to pray, **“Our Father, which art**

in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” What does “**hallow**” mean? To “**hallow**” means to “treat as holy; to set apart; to honour or revere.” And *what* are we to hallow? The Father’s *name*.

In Old Testament Israel, a person’s name was very important. The Hebrew word for “name” is *shem*; but to the Jews, this word *shem* implied far more than a “label.” To the Jews, a “name” referred to the *nature* of a person—*who He is*. To the Jews, a “name” was not merely a pretty-sounding label that you gave to a child; a name spoke of *who that person is* (or who his parents *intended* him to be). Many times, God gave a person’s name as a prophecy, to indicate something significant about that person’s life. The name “Methuselah,” for example, means “when he dies, it shall be sent.” This name was a prophecy that after Methuselah’s death, the Flood would be sent. My own, name, Stephen (which means “crown”) reminds me that I should serve God, so that I will have crowns to cast at Jesus’ feet.

Now, if *our* names are important, how important is *God’s* name? We often fail to live up to *our* names; but *God* never fails to live up to His name! Every one of God’s wonderful names speaks of some aspect of His perfect character; and every one of them is extremely holy, and worthy of our worship. That is why you are *not* to take God’s name lightly, by saying things such as “O my ---” (unless you are reverently addressing God in prayer). To use God’s name in a flippant way is to take God’s name in vain (in an empty, meaningless way). However, *verbally* using God’s name in an empty way is not the *only* way to profane His name.

Read Proverbs 30:5-9.

Did you notice what Agur said about “stealing”? He said that it is the same as “taking God’s name in vain”! How did he figure that? Because when you steal, you are saying that God is *not* “Jehovah-jireh” (“the LORD will provide”). You are declaring that God *cannot* provide for you, and that you must steal; and thus, you are profaning that holy name, Jehovah-jireh. Whenever you sin against God in *any* way, you are profaning His name, because you are speaking against His holy character. You are doing just the *opposite* of “hallowing” His name!

What does this mean in regard to prayer, then? It means that whenever you pray “**Hallowed be thy name,**” you aren’t just saying words. You are asking (or, at least, you *should* be asking) the Lord to help you to imitate His holiness, so that you can *truly* sanctify His name! When the citizens of Christ’s Kingdom live in obedience to God, they are sanctifying, or “hallowing,” His name. We should sanctify His name as we pray, by acknowledging and praising Him for His holiness; but then, we should go out and *live* in obedience to Him.

God’s name is holy, and set apart! Yet, God’s name is *not* universally set apart by men, is it? All over the world, God’s name is constantly being profaned, as people live in lust and rebellion against God. Tragically, it isn’t only the Gentiles who are profaning His name, either; God’s covenant nation, Israel, is profaning His name through their apostasy and rebellion, and their rejection of their Messiah. Because of their rebellion, Israel has been

exiled from their land for centuries; and that, in itself, brings dishonour to God's name. However, one day, all that will change! At the time of Jesus' return to earth, when all Israel is gathered back to her land *in a state of repentance and faith in Jesus the Messiah*, God's name will be *wholly* sanctified! All Israel will be saved; and God will be sanctified in them!

Read Ezekiel 36:17-27.

The words "**Hallowed be thy name**" apply to us in a very personal way. However, the *ultimate* application of this verse is this: as we pray, we should ask God to hasten the day when His name will be *universally sanctified*, by the ushering in of the Kingdom! None of us are Jews; but that shouldn't keep us from making this request. *We* will reign with Christ in the Kingdom, too; thus, *we* should pray that God's name will soon be magnified in *all* the earth!

This leads to the *second* thing we should include in our prayers: and that is **expectation**. Particularly, our prayers should be filled with expectation of Christ's return to earth. Jesus instructs us to pray, "**Thy kingdom come.**" This *kingdom* of which Jesus is speaking is the same "Kingdom of Heaven" which is mentioned throughout the book of **Matthew**; and it is the 1,000-year Kingdom of which John spoke of in **Revelation 20**.

Now, one might wonder: why does Jesus command us to *pray* for the Kingdom to come? Since He already *knows* exactly when He will come, does He really want us to *pray* that His Kingdom will come? Yes! In the close of his letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul prayed the simple prayer, "**Maranatha,**" which means "Come, O Lord!" At the end of the book of **Revelation**, the Apostle John prayed, "**Even so, come, Lord Jesus.**" Obviously, the Apostles took Jesus' command to pray "**Thy kingdom come**" seriously; and so should we. Yet, *why* does God need us to make this request? Because *God has chosen to accomplish His will through us*. Remember the time when Herod cast Peter into prison, with the intent of executing him after Easter? *God* knew that He would release Peter from prison; yet, He led the Jerusalem church to *pray* for Peter's release. This was not a pointless exercise, because if they *hadn't* prayed, Peter wouldn't have been delivered! Why did God *need* them to pray, when He could have delivered Peter anyway? Because He has chosen to co-labour with us!

In the same way, God knows when He will come; yet, He wants us to *pray* for the coming of His Kingdom. Remember, the Kingdom *could* have been established nearly 2,000 years ago. Jesus repeatedly said, "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand." He wasn't making empty promises. The Kingdom really *was* near, and it *could* have been established in the Apostles' lifetimes. However, there is something that hindered the coming of the Kingdom: Israel wouldn't repent. Before Jesus returns, **Israel must repent and believe on Jesus!**

Read Matthew 23:37-39.

Israel is God's "prophetic clock." God, knowing all things beforehand, knows when Israel will repent, and when He will return. Yet, the fact that He *foreknows* when He will return does not change the fact that Israel has the *responsibility* to repent, and that *we* have the responsibility to take the Gospel to them. It's the same way with the salvation of the Gentiles. According to **Romans 11:25**, the "*fulness of the Gentiles*" (the full number of Gentiles who will be saved in this present age) has not yet come in. What this means is that God is waiting for Gentiles to be saved before His Son returns! God is *not* slack concerning the promise of His return. The reason that God is tarrying His coming is that He is longsuffering, and not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Just as God is waiting for *Israel* to repent, God is also waiting for Gentiles to repent. This means that we need to take the Gospel to as many people as possible! Do you want Jesus to come back soon? Then pray for His soon return; pray that God will send forth labourers into His harvest; and then put "feet" to your prayers by going out into the harvest, and gathering souls for Christ's Kingdom!

Now, the third thing that we need to include in our prayer is **submission**. Every day, we should pray, "*Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*" You don't have to repeat those exact words in your prayer; but there must be a *submission* to God's will.

Now, this request is really an extension of the first two requests, because this request *also* has to do with the coming Kingdom. How so? Well, think about it. In Heaven, there is *no* opposition to God's will. The saints and angels in Heaven serve God day and night, and carry out His commands with perfect obedience. In stark contrast, evil and rebellion abound here on earth; and Satan wields great power over the kingdoms of this world. Now, we know that God's will *is* being carried out here on earth. The evil and rebellion here on earth are *not* outside God's control. God is *perfectly* in control. God *permits* evil men to abound and flourish to whatever extent He chooses; and He uses their very rebellion against Him to accomplish His own purposes. Despite Satan's and man's constant war against Him, He *is* moving history toward the consummation that He had planned from eternity past.

Yet, even though God is perfectly sovereign at all times, it is not His desire that *any* sin should exist. Sin angers Him, and breaks His heart. It is His desire that *His will* be carried out down here on earth with complete obedience, just as it is in Heaven. When will *that* ever happen? When Christ returns and sets up His Kingdom! (That's why we should pray for the Kingdom to come!) During the 1,000-year Kingdom, the rebellious kingdoms of this world will be no more; and Satan and his demons will be locked up. *No* rebellion will be allowed, because Christ will rule with a rod of iron. Now, sin will still exist, because the people who are born to the survivors of the Tribulation period will still have sin natures. Also, at the end of the 1,000 years, God will allow Satan and his demons to be released from prison, and will allow one last rebellion to take place. However, this rebellion will be quickly squelched with fire from heaven. God will then destroy this sin-cursed heaven and earth, and will create a *new* heaven and earth, in which there will be no sin at all. This means that the Kingdom that Christ will establish at the time of His Second Coming will, in fact, endure "*forever.*" There will be no interruption in Christ's rule, because the 1,000-year Kingdom will "roll over" into the *eternal* Kingdom in the new earth; and *everyone* in that Kingdom will be perfectly sinless and holy.

Read Daniel 2:37-45.

These things seem so far off, and so otherworldly, and so stupendous, that they almost seem to be outside our realm of involvement. If all these things will surely come to pass, then why do we need to pray for God's will to be done? First, because God chooses to *involve us* in the accomplishment of His will, by using us as vessels *to pray* for the things that He has determined to do. Secondly, our individual lives are part of His overall plan for the ages; and God wants us to *submit* to His will in our daily lives. Christ submitted to His Father's will, even though He dreaded the suffering He would endure on the cross. Three times He asked that the cup might pass from Him; yet, each time, He prayed, "***Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.***" Christian, is this how *you* pray? Do you sincerely ask God to accomplish His will in your life, even if it should mean that *your* plans and ambitions be surrendered? Or do you ask Him to rubber-stamp everything that *you* want to do?

Now, let's examine the next element of our prayers. The fourth thing that should be included in our prayers is **petition**. (Read Matthew 6:11 again.) Christ instructs us to pray, "***Give us this day our daily bread.***" Yet, what does the word "***daily***" imply? It implies that there is the potential for a *shortage* of bread—that bread might not always be readily available. This is a prayer that is much needed in this present age, as we are awaiting the coming of the Kingdom! During the Kingdom, there will be *no* shortage of bread! **Isaiah 35** says that the desert will blossom as a rose; that the parched ground will become a pool; and that the thirsty land will be filled with springs of water. **Amos 9: 13** says that "***the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed.***" In other words, crops will grow so quickly, that things will scarcely be planted before they are ready to be harvested—and that in enormous quantities! The mountains, Amos says, will "***drop sweet wine.***" In **Isaiah 26**, the whole Kingdom age is described as "***a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees.***"

Of course, even during the Kingdom Age, God will still expect His people to depend on Him, and to ask Him for their needs. However, the reality is that during this church age, as we are awaiting the Kingdom, God's people are often hard pressed for their daily bread. The believers in Niger and in Pakistan right now are in *tremendous* need, due to the Muslim terrorists that are slaughtering many of them, and burning their homes. Violent persecution and destitution have been the reality for Christians for the last 2,000 years. Even in our free and affluent Western society, tragedy and hard times often come upon God's people suddenly, and unexpectedly. As for believers that will be saved during the Tribulation, it will be the most horrible time for believers in human history. Because they won't be able to buy or sell without taking the mark of the Beast, and will be constantly running for their lives, they will need to rely on God for daily food in a way that we can't possibly comprehend. Yet, no matter at what point in history believers happen to live, God urges us to bring our daily physical needs before Him. He already knows our need; yet, He wants us to *ask*. He wants us to *rely on Him*. Sadly, we often don't ask God to provide our physical needs. When we have a steady income, and food is easily available, we forget how much we need the Lord to provide our necessities. Even worse, we often forget to ask for the most *important* bread—the Bread

of Life! Christian, how much do you value that Book that you hold in your hand? Do you thank God every day for providing it for you? And do you ask Him to *keep* it available to you, so that you can spread its precious, life-giving Gospel to others? Do you ask Him to break the Bread to you every day, and to teach you its precious truths, and to help you to hide it in your heart? If you are not asking God for these physical and spiritual needs, you *need* to start doing so! You have not, because you ask not! Let's look at what Jesus said on another occasion toward the end of His ministry, when His followers asked Him to teach them to pray.

Read Luke 11:1-13.

What is the fifth thing that we must include in our prayers? Let's look again at **verse 12**. (**Read Matthew 6:12.**) The fifth element of our prayers should be **confession**. Every day, throughout the day, we should be asking God to forgive our sins. Christ isn't talking about the *judicial* forgiveness of sins that takes place at the time of salvation; He's talking about believers' receiving *daily cleansing* from sin, so that they can stay in *fellowship* with the Lord. He's talking about the truth of **1 John 5:9**—"*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"

Brethren, we *must* confess our sins daily. However, please notice the full statement. Jesus instructs us to ask for God to forgive our debts, "*even as we forgive our debtors.*" That word "*as*" could be said "*according as we forgive our debtors.*" What is Jesus saying? He's saying, "Don't ask God to forgive your sins until you ask those whom you've wronged to forgive you." It's impossible to walk in fellowship with God if you harbour a grudge against anyone. This matter of forgiving others is so important, that Jesus went out of His way to mention it again, just after He had finished giving the model prayer. Let's read **verses 14 and 15 again**. (**Read verses 14 and 15.**) Folks, the prerequisite heart condition for prayer is **forgiveness**. Until you get right with others, your sins will block communion with God.

Now, let's look now at the sixth thing that should be included in our prayers. Jesus says that we should pray, "*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*" What does this mean? We know that God does not "*tempt*" us, in the sense of *enticing* us to sin, or trying to cause us to sin: so what, then, does this request to "*lead us not into temptation*" mean? It means, "Lord, please remove all stumbling blocks from my path. Please don't allow me to be put into a situation in which I could fall into a snare." Of course, God often *does* allow us to go through temptations, to test, mold, and strengthen us; but when He does, He promises that He is "*faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*"

Temptations *do* often come. Nonetheless, it is right and proper to pray that God will not *allow* tempting situations to arise. We should pray, every day, that God will bind the enemy. We should pray that there would be no "beachheads" in our lives, from which Satan can launch further attack. By the way, the word for "*evil*" (*ponerou*) literally means "the evil one." This could apply in several ways. It could refer to Satan and his demons; or, it could refer to our

own sinful flesh, or to the world system, which is opposed to God. We should ask God to deliver us from the corruption and lusts of this world. We should ask God to deliver us from sins that we have already fallen into. We should ask God to deliver us from evil men, who are trying to stop the Gospel, and to fight against God's will. (Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray for him and his coworkers, that ***“we might be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men.”***) We should ask God to deliver us from our own deceitful hearts. Also, we should pray that God will soon deliver us from the ***“hour of temptation,”*** which will come upon the whole world (the Tribulation). In **Revelation 3:10**, Jesus promises the faithful believers of this age, ***“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”*** Really, this is another way of saying, ***“Lord Jesus, come quickly!”***

We have now come to the seventh element that should be in our prayers. By the way, there isn't any particular order in which to make these requests; but we should definitely *end* our prayer the way we began—with *worship*. Jesus instructs us to end our prayers with words of praise: ***“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.”*** As we pray, we should spend time acknowledging that the Kingdom is God's; that the power to maintain and support that Kingdom is His; and that all the glory for our acts of service belongs not to ourselves, but to *Him*. He is the King; we are His servants; and He deserves all the honour and glory. *This*, brethren, is how we should pray! This...is “Prayer 101”!

II. Fasting 101 (vv. 16-18)

(Read verses 16-18.) Perhaps one of the least understood exercises of the Christian life is fasting. Fasting is something that we read about throughout the Bible; yet, rarely do you see a specific command to fast. Fasting is not something that God commands New Testament believers to do at such-and-such time, or for such-and-such a length of time. There *were* times in the Old Testament when God required the children of Israel to fast (such as in the three days before God came down on Mount Sinai). However, in the New Testament, you see people fasting voluntarily. Jesus says, ***“When ye fast.”*** God leaves the “when” and “for how long” up to us. Fasting is a private matter between the believer and God. It is like the Old Testament “freewill offering,” which could be done whenever one sensed that it was needed.

Now, in general, the time of Jesus' earthly ministry was a time of rejoicing. The years of Jesus' ministry were like a giant wedding feast, in which Jesus was the Bridegroom; and at a wedding feast, you don't fast in the Bridegroom's presence!

Read Matthew 9:14-15.

Jesus' ministry was a time of feasting, as Jesus went to people's homes and dined with them, so that He might preach the Gospel to them. Now, this was confusing to John the Baptist's disciples, because John had taught them to fast. However, there was no conflict between

Jesus' and John's teaching. Jesus never told His disciples, "Don't fast": He simply pointed out that one day He would be taken from them, and that *then* there would be a great desire (and need) to fast. Here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus *is*, in fact, teaching His disciples to fast. Jesus also taught His disciples that casting out demons should be accompanied by prayer and fasting. Now that Christ has gone back to Heaven, we need to fast often!

Many Christians have a dim view of fasting, because they've never really understood its purpose. Many Christians, when they think of fasting, think of the Pharisees, who boasted about their fasting. However, it wasn't the fact that the Pharisees *fasted* twice per week that was the problem. The problem was that they *flaunted* the fact that they were fasting, so that people would admire them. This is Jesus' whole point: don't be *like the Pharisees* as you fast! Conceal the fact that you are fasting, and keep it between you and God.

Fasting is an extremely important exercise; but when you do it, you'd better make sure you're doing it for the right reasons! First, fasting should *not* be done to try to earn salvation! Countless priests and nuns through the centuries have starved themselves to death in the attempt to earn eternal life; but God says that it is "***Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.***" Secondly, we should not fast simply because it's a ritual. In ***Zechariah 7:5-6***, God asked the children of Judah *why* they had fasted in the fifth and seventh month during the seventy years of the captivity; and then, He proceeded to answer His own question. God said that they had fasted for *themselves*, and not for Him! Rather than fasting for the *right* reason (which was to humble their hearts before God), they had done it as a sorrowful "national memorial" day. It was all about *them*!

Another wrong reason to fast is to try to eradicate the flesh, or to make yourself more "spiritual." Folks, not only is this a wrong reason to fast: it is downright dangerous! No amount of bodily punishment can *eradicate* the sin nature, or make you right with God. Only the power of Christ can mortify the sinful flesh. Fasting for the purpose of eradicating your sin nature makes you even *more* prideful, and thus even *more* enchained by sin!

Read Colossians 2:20-23.

There are many wrong reasons to fast. What, then, is the *right* reason? Simply this: fasting accompanies prayer, as a means of *preparing our hearts*, and *reminding us of the seriousness* of what we doing. When you are eating and drinking as usual, you tend to have more of a casualness about your business. That's why Paul said, in ***1 Corinthians 7:5***, that husbands and wives should have physical intimacy regularly, *except* during times of prayer and fasting. A time of prayer and fasting is no time for the pleasure of intimacy; and for the same reason, it is not a time for the pleasure of eating. The gnawing hunger in your stomach reminds you that you have a serious matter to pray about. By the way, according to extrabiblical records, the Apostle John, the Apostle Andrew, and other believers fasted together for three days before asking the Lord who should write a Gospel of Jesus' life. After those three days, it was revealed to Andrew that John should write it. Countless millions of souls have been impacted because of that decision, which was made by prayer and fasting! On a personal level, when I

had to decide whether to marry my wife, I fasted for three days. I knew that this was a life-changing decision, and that I shouldn't enter into it with a casual attitude.

Denying yourself physically for a time is a discipline that tends to spill over from your spiritual life. A believer who is disciplined to deny himself physically for a time (*and* who is doing it for the right reason) is more likely to deny himself sinful pleasures. Likewise, *not* ever being willing to deny yourself (and especially *gorging* yourself) is a lack of self-control which probably reflects upon your relationship with God. If you won't resist the temptation to stuff your face with food all the time, would you really resist the temptation to indulge your sinful desires? Paul was "*in fasts often*"; and he kept under his body, and brought it into subjection. Brethren, let's follow Paul's example, and make fasting a periodic part of our walk with the Lord. We have serious things to pray about. Christ's church must be built, and souls must be saved! However, as you fast, do *not* let anyone in on it. Make it between you and God.

Conclusion: Christian, do you need help in your prayer life? I have my hand up to confirm that *I* need help! Christian, why not take a few moments this morning to ask the Lord to teach you to pray and fast, so that you can have greater communication with Him, and have God's power on your life? I would also ask, "**Are you saved?**" If you are trusting in *your* prayers or *your* self-denial to get you to Heaven, you won't make it! You must trust in Christ *alone* to save you. Ask Him to come into your heart, and to be your Lord and Saviour; and then *He* will begin to teach you how to talk to your heavenly Father!