

4. The Heavenly Rewards of the Believer

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 6:1-18

Have you ever had a close brush with death? There is nothing like it to make a person think about Eternity. In my early life as a commercial fisherman off the East Coast of England, I had many close calls where death came knocking on my door. There's nothing like having an unexploded German magnetic mine twelve-foot-long lying on the deck to prompt such thoughts! That was when I began to first think about what would happen to me when I died. Thoughts such as: Is there something beyond the grave? Contemplating Eternity changes one's perspective. When I became a Christian, I totally and unreservedly gave my life into His hands and found that my goals in life changed. My vision of my future changed. After my conversion, the lure of money, things, and success as a commercial fisherman had no appeal to me. What's the point of working six days a week, fifteen hours a day? Chasing after money is as pointless as chasing the wind. I wanted my life to have meaning.

That's the big question for many people today—What's the Point? What is the meaning of life? When one looks at the creation and the natural world with a critical eye, a logical person concludes that there has to be a God, a Creator. If there is a Creator, He must have a plan which is being fulfilled on Earth. The plan is to train and transform individuals who will walk with Christ to go against the flow and the status quo of this world. God wants us to labor with Him to influence and invite others to be part of the people of God—the called-out ones of God.

There will come a time when God ends the training of the Bride of Christ—God's people, and He will reward all those whose character has been shaped into the image of Christ by the Spirit of God. In the following passages of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus focuses on the rewards given on the day when this evil world closes, found in chapter 6, verses 1, 4, 5, 6. We only have one life to live on Earth, and we should maximize our opportunities to glorify God and not ourselves or other people. This reminder about rewards prompts us to live for eternal things rather than rewards in this life. Living for Eternity changes our perspectives and our values, and if we are following Jesus, it can even change our desires.

Giving to the Needy

6 “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no **reward** from your Father in heaven. ²“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their **reward** in full. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will **reward** you (Matthew 6:1-4, Emphasis added).

Our hearts are “deceitful above all things and desperately sick,” the prophet Jeremiah told us (17:9 ESV), and our inner desire for the approval of those around us can deceive us out of the reward that God gives. The Fall of Man has tainted our soul with a bent toward the praise of men rather than the praise of God. Jesus tells us to "Be careful" (v. 1) about our inner motivation to tell people

about our acts of righteousness. Why are we like that? The Lord gives an example of things He has seen going on in Israel. He calls those individuals hypocrites, a word that means a stage actor on the stage of life—those who would wear a mask and act out a character that was not true in their life. At a particular time in the temple courts, the trumpets would be blown to issue the call to give. People within earshot of the trumpets would drop what they were doing, put on a holy face, and parade themselves to the offering boxes. Yes, they receive a reward, but it is not for an eternal laying up of treasure; it is wasted because of the motivation of their hearts. They were not giving but buying. The hypocrites were looking for some payback in worldly influence coming back to them. When the thought arises to give, Jesus said not to let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. What on Earth does that mean? How can that be possible? Most people give with their right hand, so Jesus uses the laughable image of attempting to be so secret about our giving to God that the left hand is ignorant of it. He says that because our inner motivations can be so deceitful and influence us more than we realize. The Lord really wants us to fully receive a heavenly reward and receive what is eternal and not what is fleeting.

How does one lead their lives to make a maximum impact on those around them? We should not live focused on the rewards; the focus of our hearts should always be on the glory of our God, but having said that, it is our Savior who wants to let us know that there will be a reward for a life lived with Christ at the center. What's in it for me will always be with us, as it was with Peter the Apostle:

“See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?”²⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:27-29).

It is so refreshing to see that the apostle Peter asks this question; "what then will we have?" He made massive life changes and left behind the life he had. He was questioning what he would get for his decision, and he was not afraid to ask this question. Peter was always the one to speak his mind! Jesus reassures Peter by telling him that he will receive a hundredfold for what he has given up and inherit eternal life. Although we can only see it in our imagination now, just as the sun will rise tomorrow, the Day of Christ will come, and He will sit on His glorious throne, and it will be then that God will reward all those who are faithful to Him.

Some of us have experienced loss due to following Christ, and some have even been rejected or lost friends or close relationships due to their Christian faith. Do you think Jesus is referring to rewards in Eternity only, or does He promise rewards in this life also? (Matthew 19:29).

Prayer

The Lord goes on to speak about how to live free from hypocrisy and maximize their rewards in the eternal kingdom:

⁵“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will **reward** you. ⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Matthew 6:5-8, Emphasis added).

In this passage above, Jesus is not decrying public prayer, but again, it is the motivation to be seen by man—the Lord uses a strong word—they love to pray to be seen by others. They will receive their reward, but their full reward is not the reward of God but the seeking to influence men. The man rewarded by God hides his prayer life from men. Prayer can be done by rote, and the heart can be removed from the sincerity and transparency in prayer that influences God. There are those today in every culture who believe that God answers prayer according to how many times it is repeated, but how often is your spouse influenced by requests mindlessly repeated? Can you imagine trying to influence people with multitudes of requests—why do we think the Holy God, who knows all things, hears and sees all things, can be influenced by rote, heartless prayer? The Lord reminds us that He knows what you need before you even take the time to ask Him (v. 8). Brothers and sisters in the Lord, we are almost certainly praying to ourselves when we pray without having our hearts in it.

In my ministry of teaching small group leaders, I have often taught people to pray publicly by modeling one-sentence prayers because prayers can degrade into focusing on words to sound fancy to the hearers in the room. This desire to look good to others and to impress people with our vocabulary doesn't impress God. I well remember the time when we invited a young, newly converted couple to dinner at our house. They were so thankful that we asked them to dinner that they wanted to return the favor. When we got to their home, they had taken lots of time to clean and prepare a beautiful meal. Just as we had modeled to them, they waited until the food was in front of us before asking me to pray and bless the food. I replied that it is the custom in England for the host of the home to be the one to thank God and bless the food. The young man gulped and went for it, saying, "Thank you, God, for our friends and this food," and with another gulp, he said, "And...See you Sunday." I really believe that God was blessed with that prayer. Heartfelt, sincere prayer touches God's heart more than eloquent prayer.

The Lord qualifies His words on prayer by giving us an example of prayer:

⁹“This, then, is how you should pray: ““Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰your kingdom come, your will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us today our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ ¹⁴For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (Matthew 6:9-15).

What is commonly called the “Lord’s Prayer” is not a prayer that Jesus would pray. After all, He never had to pray for God to forgive His sins (v. 4). It should be called the “Disciples Prayer,” and even then, I believe it was not a rote prayer to pray over and again but a model prayer. It certainly

is not wrong to pray with the exact words, but we should understand that any prayer we speak to God should be based on the principles of this model prayer.

Jesus started the model prayer by directing our hearts heavenward by calling God with the very intimate term "Father." This approach to God was not common at the time. God was referred to as the Father of the nation of Israel, but He was never referred to with this name by a singular person. Many Christians have become so used to it that we do not understand how shocking this was to people of a different culture who had always viewed God as far-off. The following story illustrates how different this intimate way of approaching God is to other cultures:

Former Egyptian Muslim Daniel Massieh tried to persecute a church in Egypt and planned to mimic what Christians did so that he could infiltrate the church to destroy their testimony. He asked a Christian friend if he would share with him a prayer that he could pray out loud to gain the trust of those in the Egyptian church he was trying to subvert. The Christian friend wrote out for him the prayer Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew, the one that we are now studying. Daniel went into the bedroom to start trying to memorize it, but he had a hard time getting past the first two words— "Our Father." Here, in his own words, was what happened:

"I sat on the bed to read and memorize the prayer. The first two words, "Our Father," grabbed me! "Our Father? Our *Daddy*?" I asked myself incredulously, wondering whether I could have read correctly. Muslims would never dare to address God in this way! As a Muslim, I was taught that Allah was my master, a frightful and distant overseer who would never allow me to approach him in such a familiar way. How disrespectful and foolish for Christians to address God like this. Surely this was blasphemy! Shaking my head, I casually opened the window, gazed out, and addressed the night sky in a mocking whisper: "God, did you marry my mother? Are you my father?" Suddenly, an inexplicable and overwhelming Presence filled the room. It was a powerful yet comforting Presence that penetrated me to the very core of my soul. The response to my question was almost audible: "*Yes, I AM your Father.*" I was completely suffused [to spread over and be overwhelmed] by God's Presence, enveloped by an indescribable Love. This was God's love *for me, a fatherly love, the love of a daddy!* God was introducing Himself at that moment, saying that He was my heavenly Father!

I felt like a little child who, having been estranged from his Daddy for twenty-three years, had at long last been found. The love I felt was so overpowering that I wanted to proclaim it to the rooftops: God is my *Father!* God, the Creator of all, the All-Powerful, the Lord of Lords—is my *Father!*" All through the night, I experienced the sensation of God's love hugging me, and I was desperately hugging Him back. I began to be mindful of all the wrong things I had done and of how they grieved the Father. I confessed to Him every wrong I could recall ever having committed. I also expressed my remorse at having entered the church under false pretenses so that I could make fun of the Christians.

Becoming aware of my sins and how they grieved the Father convulsed me in gut-wrenching sobs. I cried so hard that Mamdouh [His friend] heard me from the adjoining room. When he later asked why I had been crying so loudly, he couldn't believe that the Lord's Prayer had so profoundly affected me. That night, I slept very deeply. When I awoke

the following day, I felt as though I had shed the weight of a heavy camel that had been riding on my shoulders. Peace and comfort filled my heart. I learned later that this is what the Bible means when it says, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).¹

Mohammad Kamel, who had been an enemy of the Christian faith, changed his name to Daniel Abdul Massieh (Daniel, the servant of Messiah), and he now preaches the Gospel of Christ in many different countries, including all over the Middle East Arabic nations as well as in the USA.

It is possible the disciple’s prayer was meant as a model or an outline for our prayer life. There are five parts to the prayer. They are as follows:

- 1) Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
- 2) Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.
- 3) Give us today our daily bread.
- 4) Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
- 5) And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

One can approach God by elaborating on each aspect of this prayer, such as the following:

1) Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

All prayer to our God should, first of all, look upward. To come into His presence begins with a focus on the Lord Himself.

- a) Picture yourself coming before a loving Father who has loved us with an everlasting love.
- b) Think about the fact that He has drawn us into a close, intimate relationship with Himself, calling us His sons and daughters; there should be a sense of wonder that He is our Abba, our Daddy.
- c) Our Father is in heaven, and He has called us into this relationship with Him for Eternity, and the glories of heaven are ours!
- d) His name is to be hallowed or set apart as consecrated and sanctified. To hallow means to set apart as holy or to reverence Him as the creator of all things. Just as there is a sense of awe when one walks in the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem or when one goes to the site of the Twin Towers destroyed on September 11, 2001, in the same way, His name on our lips should be hallowed. We are cut to the heart when we hear His name spoken in vain.
- e) There should be a sense of thankfulness and praise for Who God is and what He means to you. You may want to sing to Him at this time when you are entering His presence.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name (Psalm 100:4).

2) Your kingdom come, Your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.

¹ Daniel Massieh, *Traitor*. Published by Open the Gates Publishing, San Diego, CA 92198. Page 31-33.
Website: www.openthegates.org

The second part of the prayer again looks upward with a prayer for the Kingdom of God to come to Earth, focusing on God's will to be done and not ours. In this part of our time of prayer, we focus on the following:

- a) Pray for the furtherance of the Gospel in your nation as well as the missionary enterprise to other countries. Pray for Satan's kingdom and his influence over people and nations to be broken.
- b) Pray that God's kingdom will come to all those around you. Take time to pray specifically for individuals that God has placed on your heart, i.e., those you sense He wants to do something in their lives with needs, such as healing.
- c) Pray for your spouse, your children, and other family members.
- d) Pray for your pastor and for those who lead you in whatever church or house group to which you belong.
- e) Pray for the kingdom of God to come to you in a personal way, i.e., for you to be filled, controlled, and led by the Spirit of God. This approach to God involves putting ourselves on the altar, i.e., offering our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship (Romans 12:1). God can only use us to the level that we abandon ourselves to Him.
- f) Pray for the leaders of whatever country in which you live that they would allow the Gospel to be freely communicated without hindrance.

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone—²for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

3) Give us today our daily bread.

- a) At this point in your time of prayer, thank Him for His provision to you and your family. Then, pray concerning your work, i.e., that which God uses to supply you and your family with food on your plates. Ask for direction and wisdom on what you do for Him.
- b) Use the time here to remind God of His promises of blessing. Ask for God to expand your area of influence and to open doors of blessing.
- c) Ask Him for specific guidance in the stewardship of your time, energy, and money for His kingdom purposes. Be open for the Lord to speak to you about helping others with material support.

4) Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Our time of prayer now focuses on our being in right relationship to God and others. The Lord makes our forgiveness conditional to our also forgiving others. Grace has not reached the level of our hearts if we have not forgiven others. The overflow of God's forgiveness in our lives is to such a degree that we, in turn, want to forgive others and set them free from any obligation to us. If we have not truly forgiven others from our heart, we have not fully seen what it cost God to forgive us.

- a) In asking God to forgive us our debts, we are to open our lives to inspection by God and be rigidly honest before God about sin. David prayed for God to **"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts"** (Psalm 139:23).
- b) Confess your faults to God. Ask Him for specific strategies to overcome your sinful nature. Job wrote this about his plan to overcome his sensual lower nature: **"I made a covenant with my eyes**

not to look lustfully at a girl” (Job 31:1). He thought through specific strategies to overcome, so go and do likewise!

c) In this time of introspection, ask God to show you anyone whom you have not forgiven, e.g., someone who may have hurt you. Ask Him to operate on you so that you can genuinely forgive from the heart. Pray for God’s blessing on those that come to mind.

5) **And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.**

a) Ask God to deliver you from every occult influence or any curse directed at you because of your desire to live a life pleasing to God.

b) Pray that the armor of God will be on you. At this time, you may want to ask God for the belt of truth to be buckled around your waist and for His righteousness to be like a breastplate over your heart. We need our feet fitted with readiness to walk out the Gospel of peace, that you have a shield of faith with which you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one, the helmet of salvation to protect the mind, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, to be used powerfully in you and through you (Ephesians 6:13-17).

c) Pray that when temptation and trials of your faith come, you may stand and not fall into compromise.

The closing of your time of prayer should be with an acknowledgment of the One you live for and to whom you are committed. Finish with a song or a psalm of praise.

Jesus tells us to ask the Father to deliver us from evil. We have a part to play in resisting temptation, but do we pray this? Have we neglected to pray for this protection deliberately and consistently? Why do you think this could be increasingly important for the days in which we live?

Fasting

¹⁶“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will **reward** you (Matthew 6:16-18, Emphasis added).

Jesus has assumptions about how we live as believers in this world system. The first was: “**So when you give to the needy...**” He did not say if you give, but when you give. He carried on with His assumptions by saying, “**And when you pray...**” Those who trust in God and walk with Him will pray. The third assumption wasn't **if you fast**, but when you fast. He assumes that if we live in step with the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:25), our walk will progress into fasting.

Prayer and giving are both spiritual acts that we are very familiar with, but for many of us, fasting is not. There is still a need to fast today. If you are physically able, and it is safe medically for you to do so, consider adding this to your spiritual devotional life if you are not already doing this. Ask God to teach you to develop the discipline of fasting. When combined with prayer, it is the most potent weapon to practically demonstrate our Spirit's mastery over our physical needs and cravings. It is a mystery hard to understand, but in some way, fasting tips the scales toward the spiritual side of our nature and releases power over the enemy in a way that prayer alone does not.

If we make fasting a part of our spiritual lives, we will be ready when faced with situations that call for great faith. Many difficult situations involving spiritual darkness are best addressed with prayer and fasting. If Jesus needed to do it, how much more do we need this critical spiritual tool?

There are spiritual benefits of fasting. The Book of Isaiah, chapter 58, discusses the "fast that God has chosen." This Scripture shows us how to fast to see strongholds broken. I'll focus on just a few verses in that chapter:

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? ⁷Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? ⁸Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. ⁹Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I (Isaiah 58:6-9).

The Lord said that fasting would "untie the cords of the yoke" and “set the oppressed free” (v. 6). He also said that “light will break forth like the dawn” and “your healing will quickly appear” (v. 8). Another spiritual benefit is that people would experience hearing God's voice when they cry to Him for help (v. 9). There are also promises of God’s guidance, provision, and strength. He said we would be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail (v. 11). If you are experiencing depression, joy will flow over you instead (v. 14). All this through fasting!

Have you ever been led by God to fast about a situation, and was there any noticeable breakthrough? What kind of situations are you facing now that may prompt you to fast?

There are different kinds of fasts. Daniel and his three friends went on a vegetable and water fast (Daniel 1:12). Later, he fasted for three weeks without tasty food, meat, or wine touching his lips (Daniel 10:2-3). Decide for yourself how you are going to fast. Ask God to show you what kind of fast you are to undertake. If you are under a doctor's care for a medical condition, make sure with your doctor that fasting is safe for you. You may be able to do a partial fast or a Daniel fast.

The words in Isaiah 58 show us that in our fasting, we are not to withdraw as in an act of piety but minister to the needs of others and show kindness. This is the fast that God has chosen. These thoughts show us, again, that our spirituality is linked to the way we treat others, not just the devotion that we offer to God. We show our devotion to Him also in the way that we treat others.

Through prayer and fasting, we can see strongholds broken down and situations that seem like huge mountains move! Consider incorporating praying the Lord’s prayer in a personal way and combining your prayer with fasting. Call to Him, and He promises to answer. If you want to know more about fasting, I recommend [God’s Chosen Fast by Arthur Wallis](#), a very practical book that will build you up spiritually and encourage you in your fasting.

May all that we do for Christ have the inner motivation to elevate our God and not ourselves, and may you be greatly rewarded by God and not men.

Prayer: Father, would you help us as we grow in faith by fasting and prayer? Our world needs people full of the Spirit and empowered by You through prayer and fasting. We see that your ways are higher than our ways, and your thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Lord, reveal to us your ways. Please show us your strength and deliverance as we look to you.

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