Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

## *Matthew Chapter Four – Week 54: The Great Sermon, Part 3*

*Old Things and New Things …*

## Day 371. Don't make a fuss, just do it

"Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites because they love to pray while standing in synagogues and on street corners so that people can see them. Truly I say to you, they have their reward! But whenever you pray, go into your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you. When you pray, do not babble repetitiously like the Gentiles because they think that by their many words they will be heard. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." (Matthew 6:5-8).

A hypocrite is an actor – one who wants people to think something about them. Jesus is saying, "In my Father's house, just talk to Him. Don't make any show of it to impress others. Don't go on a long time or use fancy words to impress others. Just talk to Him. And if you just talk to Him, you will find: He talks to you as well. Don't make an act of it, just be real."

But why talk to Him? If our Father knows what we need before we ask Him, why bother? We know our children need food, shelter, clothing. We know many of their immediate needs before they ask us. But do we not delight just in the act of communication? Sometimes so much delight that we spend a lot of time talking with our children (or with others we love) about, objectively, nothing? Our Father delights when we talk with Him. That's the biggest reason. Another reason is that the Father is genuinely interested in our exploration of our thoughts, feelings, desires, and worries, with Him. A third reason may be that the Father, in His love, allows us to "change His mind." It may be obvious to us that something is happening. We may even believe that it is the Father's will. But the bible tells us, and some of us have experienced, when we approach our Father and say, "Oh Please God, no." or "Please God, help here." Or "My Father – I don't know what to do. Please turn this around." – unexpected things sometimes happen. Imminent tragedy turns into joy. Unexplainable or far-fetched events occur (some call them 'miracles'). For examples of this, see Jonah 3:9-4:11, Amos 7:1-6, or Exodus 32:9-14. God loves us to talk to Him. He is insulted if we use that to make a show in front of others. But He is greatly pleased if we genuinely approach Him, and earnestly listen to hear if He speaks back to us, through Word or deed.

What do you need to talk to God about? Talk to Him. Don't make a show of it to impress others, just talk with Him. Your Father knows what you need, what you desire to say, but He wants to hear it from you. Write your thoughts down here.

Share your thoughts with your Father who created you as an Image of Him.

## Day 372: The Lord's Prayer

"So pray this way: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored, may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.'" (Matthew 6:9-13)

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name…"

There is a lot in this prayer. It is a prayer for us to say, and a prayer to use to structure our lives with. Are we honouring our Father who created us as an image, an aspect, of Him? Are we doing His will? Are we grateful for what He gives us? Do we trust Him for what we will need in the future? Are we forgiving, especially those who do not deserve it? Are we walking away from temptation, and not embracing evil in any form?

It is also a prayer to play with. Here is another prayer, created by playing with the Lord's prayer:

'Father of all, You are everywhere: be held in reverent love. Help us to live in shalom as You designed us. Help us to follow Your path, today and for eternity. Fill us with Your presence and all we need. Forgive us as we forgive. Guide us safely through our dark valleys; may we not stray from Your way. You are the ultimate reality, and we love You. May all be reconciled to You in Christ. Truly.'

Two exercises to try:

1.) Make your life a living example of the Lord's Prayer. Try it for ten minutes, then the next, then the next.
2.) Play with the Lord's prayer. Perhaps use the second prayer given as an example. If you were Jesus, creating it today, what words would you use to say the same (or similar) thing? Write your version here:

Share your experience and your prayer with those you trust.

## Day 373: Forgiveness

"For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you your sins." (Matthew 6:14-15)

We've talked about forgiveness extensively (see days NNN…). It is a big thing.

This statement would have shocked Jesus' listeners – how can forgiveness be more important than honour, and respect, and family? Surely not! And so Jesus underlines it with the statement above.

Who do you need to forgive? Please proceed. We want our Father to forgive you *your* sins.

Make some notes regarding forgiveness, those you need to forgive, and the problems this may cause you.

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

## Day 374: Doing without

"When you fast, do not look sullen like the hypocrites, for they make their faces unattractive so that people will see them fasting. I tell you the truth, they have their reward! When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others when you are fasting, but only to your Father who is in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:16-18)

We've also talked about fasting a fair bit (days NNN, NNN). Jesus' points ask the question, 'why do you fast? Why do you sacrifice? Do you sacrifice to impress others? That's no sacrifice!"

Fasting is part of making your life a prayer to God. It is saying, "Father, I depend totally and only on You. More than I depend on food (or whatever you are fasting from). I shall live for the next little while, depending upon You along, and the reserves in this body You have given me. Thank You so much for Your gracious, loving gift."

When you fast, don't make a show of it. Use it as a method of communicating with the Father who loves you dearly.

What has your experience of fasting been? Make some notes here:

Share your experience with your fellow explorers.

## Day 375: Finding hidden treasure

"Do not accumulate for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and devouring insect destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But accumulate for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and devouring insect do not destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21).

"That's a lot of money saved up – I'll be good for life now."

"What a lovely house! You're set for life!"

"Everyone respects me. I am held in esteem and listened to."

Jesus' listeners may have thought, "but isn't our wealth, our possessions, our reputation signs of God's steadfast love? And of our faithful obedience to God?" They were probably confused by His comment.

Everything on earth is temporary – your wealth, your possessions, even your reputation. Any power you feel you have – it is like a breath in the wind.

Instead, "accumulate treasures in heaven." What does that mean?

What does God highly esteem? What does God ask us to do, time and time again? What makes God delighted with us?

Those are your heavenly treasures.

In your own words, describe some of the treasures of heaven.

Explain with your fellow explorers.

## Day 376: Line of Sight

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If then your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is diseased, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matthew 6:22-23)

Many corporations focus on trying to achieve "line of sight" – where everyone can see how their specific job helps the company achieve its overall objective, and tailers their job to focus on what is most helpful to that overall objective. It's as if everyone, from the CEO to the bottom-level employee, has the same 'line of sight' – looking in the same direction, walking forwards as one, towards the same objective.

What we take in affects us in every way – what we eat and drink determines if our body can be healthy. What we hear and see helps us to understand our world, influences what we think, and how we respond. We can fill ourselves with 'dark' things like pornography, addictive temptations, poisons and destructive substances, anger and hate; and we can teach that to others. Likewise, we can fill ourselves with 'light', like love, caring, kindness, giving; and we can teach that to others. If we fill ourselves with light, we become full of light. If we consume only darkness – then the darkness is very dark, indeed. What we see, what we take in, determines what we pursue.

Is there anything "dark" in your life which you need to turn from? Make a note of it here, along with how you will turn from that by replacing it with something of "light." Talk to your heavenly Father about this and seek His guidance and support.

Share with others you trust.

## Day 377: Rest

Rest, receive nourishment, feed both body and soul. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). Pray. Dedicate this day to God. Worship! Fill yourself with Light. In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you. Celebrate, Rejoice, Give thanks, talk and walk with God.