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“Holy Habits”

Matthew 6:1-18

Pastor Gary Hamrick

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught about three particular disciplines of the faith: giving, praying, and fasting. Spiritual disciplines are not religious rituals; they are habits, practices, and experiences that are designed to develop, grow, and strengthen one’s spirit, to build the muscles of one’s character as a follower of Christ. So, why are we to practice these? And how? In this message Pastor Gary teaches on the topic of holy habits.

Historical Background

1. Spiritual disciplines are habits, practices, and experiences that are designed to develop, grow, and strengthen one’s spirit, to build the muscles of one’s character as a follower of Christ.
2. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about three spiritual disciples: giving, praying, and fasting.
3. **Matthew 6:1-18** – *“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But **when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.** And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, **pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees***

*in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father 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 forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Moreover, **when you fast**, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you **do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.**" (Emphasis added)*

Jesus Assumes We Are Already Doing These Things

4. Regarding giving, praying, and fasting, Jesus said,
 - a. *"... when you do a charitable deed..."*
 - b. *"... when you pray..."*
 - c. *"... when you fast..."*
5. Pastor Gary said, "It's not about 'if'; it's about 'how' and 'why' you should be doing these things, [and what is our motive]? ... [This is not] about religious rituals. This is not in order to be a really good person, [you have] to do [these things]. [Practicing these things] strengthens our souls and brings us closer to the Lord."
 - a. **Jude 20** - *"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith..."*

These Things Should Be Done Discreetly

6. Regarding giving, praying, and fasting, Jesus said,
 - a. *"... that your charitable deed may be in secret..."*
 - b. *"... pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret..."*
 - c. *"... do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret..."*
7. Pastor Gary said, "[These are things that we do] to connect us to our Father in heaven, not as a way to draw attention to ourselves or to somehow try to impress

people that we are [an extremely spiritual person]. ... Jesus was not opposed to public, corporate prayer. What he is opposed to is when people do it [to] draw attention to themselves. ... Jesus is confronting the motivation of our hearts in regard to these disciplines. Are we doing these things unto the Lord, or are we doing these things to impress other people?"

These Things Will Be Rewarded By The Lord

8. Regarding giving, praying, and fasting, Jesus said,
 - a. *"... that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."*
 - b. *"... pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."*
 - c. *"... do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."*
9. Pastor Gary said, "The Bible doesn't say how and in what form [the] reward comes. [We don't know if the reward will come in our lifetime or if it will come when we are with the Lord in heaven.] Jesus [made] the promise that we will be rewarded."

Giving

10. Instead of *"when you do a charitable deed,"* the 1984 NIV and the ESV use the phrase *"when you give to the needy."*
 - a. The Greek word is eleemosyne, ¹ which means charitable giving or compassionate acts toward those who are needy.

Prayer

11. Pastor Gary said, "I believe that the Lord's prayer [is] to serve as a model or a pattern, but not necessarily to be recited as a rote prayer. [That's] the reason we don't say it [at Cornerstone Chapel]. ... I don't think that there is anything wrong with [reciting it] ... but as a regular thing ... [I think] the constant repetition of it will [cause it] to lose its meaning. ... [I think] we can go through the motions without the emotions."
12. Adoration
 - a. **Matthew 6:9** - *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name."*
 - b. Our prayers should not begin with a list of things we need the Lord to do or things we need from the Lord.
 - c. We should begin prayer with praise and adoration of the Lord.

¹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G1654&t=NKJV>

13. Submission

- a. **Matthew 6:10** - *"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*
- b. The reason this is about submission is that the Lord's kingdom, will, and purposes are the highest thing, not our will and our plans.
- c. Jesus modeled the submission of his will to the will of the Father.
 - i. **Matthew 26:39** - *"[Jesus] went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.' "*
- d. Pastor Gary said, "Even though Jesus was fully God and fully man, he was constantly deferring to the will of the Father. ... [It's remembering that] God is sovereign, and we are not, [and we need to practice] humility and submission to [God]."

14. Provision

- a. **Matthew 6:11** - *"Give us this day our daily bread."*
- b. God wants us to pray about our needs.

15. Confession

- a. **Matthew 6:12** - *"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."*
- b. We need to practice confession so we will focus on getting our hearts right with God and others.

16. Protection

- a. **Matthew 6:13** - *"And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."*
- b. The enemy of our souls is the one who leads us into temptation.

17. 'The Bookends'

- a. **Matthew 6:8** - *"Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him."*
 - i. Pastor Gary said, "It is comforting to know that our Father in heaven [knows] what our needs are... And he is always aware of our deepest concerns, and cares, and needs. And that he always has our best interest at heart. That's the nature of our Father in heaven. ... It's challenging in that [why do we need to pray if God already knows]? ... Here's the reason why we should pray even though God already knows what we need. [We need to pray] because our Father in heaven is waiting for us to ask so that it would [show our humility and also that he would have the opportunity to show his strength in our lives]. ... There is nothing quite as awesome as when God answers your prayers, [which] bolsters your faith for the next situation. [We] deny ourselves

the opportunity to have our faith bolstered if we [don't pray and ask so that we can see] God's hand move in miraculous and amazing ways."

1. **James 4:2** - "... you do not have because you do not ask."
- b. **Matthew 6:14-15** - *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*
 - i. Pastor Gary said, "[Jesus emphasized forgiving people who have wronged or offended you.] This issue of unforgiveness is one of the greatest hindrances in a Christian's life... I have seen bitterness and unforgiveness... figuratively speaking, eat people alive. ... We have something that the rest of the world [who] don't know Christ does not have, and that is the ability, not within ourselves, but the God-given ability beyond ourselves to forgive people who have wronged us and sinned against us. [We] do it through what Christ has done for us. ... [When] you refuse to show mercy toward someone who has sinned against you, despite the fact that God has shown you mercy for having sinned against him, [and] you have refused to do what God has done for you, you are, in effect, positioning yourself above God. ... When you [do this, then] God is not willing to forgive you because you are in effect saying that you are superior to God. ... I [speak with people all the time] who say, 'If I forgive this person, then I'm basically condoning what they did.' No, you're not. You are actually freeing yourself from being in bondage to the bitterness and the animosity that rises up in one's heart because you've been wronged, or you've been offended. ... [Let] God deal with the person."
 1. **Colossians 3:13** - *"... forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."*

Fasting

18. Fasting is denying ourselves food or anything else that would help us to direct our focus and attention to God.
19. Typical reasons for fasting include:
 - a. To repent
 - i. **Nehemiah 9:1-2** - *"Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers."*

- b. To mourn or grieve
 - i. **Esther 4:3** – *“And in every province where the king’s command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.”*
- c. To intercede for others
 - i. **Psalms 35:13** – *“... I humbled myself with fasting...”*
- d. To break the chains of bondage
 - i. **Isaiah 58:6** – *“Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?”*
- e. To petition God or seek answers
 - i. **Ezra 8:21-23** – *“Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king; saying, ‘The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him.’ So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.”*
- f. To appoint leaders
 - i. **Acts 14:23** – *“So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Matthew 6:1-18** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Allow the people in your group to share examples of the ways they are growing in their faith and relationship with the Lord because they are practicing spiritual disciplines. (See #1 above)
3. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s comments about the fact that the Lord assumes Christians are giving, praying, and fasting. (See #5 above)
4. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s remarks about the need to practice these spiritual disciplines discreetly. (See #7 above)
5. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s remarks about the blessing of being rewarded for practicing these spiritual disciplines. (See #9 above)

6. Allow the people in the group to share their experiences about times when they recited the Lord's Prayer in a church service, or at a funeral, etc.
7. Did you have a sense that reciting the Lord's Prayer was mechanical?
8. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about prayer. (See #11 above)
9. Spend time talking about each of the five points in Pastor Gary's outline concerning the elements of the Lord's Prayer. (See #12 through #16 above)
10. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about what he called 'the bookends' of the Lord's Prayer. (See #17a and #17b above)
11. How have you seen the Lord work in your life regarding your asking and his answering prayer?
12. Have there been times in your life when you didn't ask of the Lord in prayer because of the misunderstanding that the Lord knows, so there's no need to pray about matters big or small?
13. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about receiving forgiveness from the Lord.
14. How has a proper understanding of the Lord's forgiveness helped you forgive others?
15. Are there situations you are dealing with concerning being unwilling to forgive someone that you would like to share with the group?
16. Read and discuss each of the items in Pastor Gary's outline about fasting. (See #18 and #19 above)
17. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)