

Praying for the Reward

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 June 2016

Preacher: Chris Trousdale

[0:00] If you have a copy of the Scriptures with you, then I invite you to open up your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew.

We're going to spend this morning and next week in Matthew chapter 6 looking at Jesus' instructions to us concerning prayer. If you're using one of the Bibles that's out there in the chairs with you, you just need to turn to page 811 in those pew Bibles and that'll get you to where we want to be, which is Matthew chapter 6.

We were grateful to be able to get away. I'm grateful for Ryan for filling in and preaching to you guys last week and continuing the series that we're in.

We were able to get away and go to the beach for several days and spend some time there. And that was a lot of fun. We spent most of our time just on the beach. We spent most of our time.

I spent a lot of time with the kids, enough time to get sunburned pretty badly. It's mostly faded by now, thankfully. But we spent a lot of time out there on the beach. And on the first day out there, the boys and I were wading out into the water.

[1:14] We're trying to get to where the waves break over you. Of course, they're not big enough waves along the Texas coast to really do too much. So you've got to really wade out there until the waves feel as if they're larger than they are.

And so I said, boys, here's what we're going to do. We're going to wade on out there to about our waist. But when we're out here, I always want us to kind of look up every once in a while on the shore to take a look at where our stuff is. We had a few things with a chair and some other stuff that we brought out there and put.

Always take a look and see where your stuff is because whether you realize it or not, while we're out there in the water, we're slowly sort of being pulled along the shore away from our beach house and away from where we sort of set up camp there on the beach.

And I told them a story about when I was a kid that we had taken a little, I mean, it was just a little raft thing. And we had gotten in at a friend of mine and I had gotten in the raft and we were just sitting out there.

We're not even deep in the water and the waves just kind of hanging out there and talking and, I don't know, doing nothing really. And before we knew it, we looked up and we had drifted so far down we couldn't even really see our beach house.

[2:16] And they all looked the same at some point. And we didn't. So we jumped out and we drug it up there and we had to walk along the shore until we saw things that started to look at least a little bit more familiar to us. And I said, that's what happens, guys.

You'll slowly drift off to the side and you won't even know it when you're playing in the water. So you just got to sort of keep an eye on your home base. And as we're going through this series on spiritual disciplines this summer, that's a reality that we're facing in our spiritual lives.

That there is a tendency for us to just begin to slowly drift away if we don't pay careful attention to where we are in our walk with Christ. It's not that we have to always do something overtly and intentionally in order for us to drift away.

We simply need to neglect the things that will keep us in place, that will keep our feet firmly rooted to the ground to where we need to be right there in the center of God's will. We will just slowly drift away because of our own sinful natures, because of the fallen world that we live in.

We will find ourselves, if we don't pay attention, we will find ourselves down the line much further away from where we once were. And it doesn't happen suddenly, it happens slowly for most people.

[3 : 30] When someone suddenly walks away from the faith, we call that falling away. And we will say they were probably never a real believer, a genuine follower of Christ in the first place. But many of us have seen that genuine followers of Christ can have periods in their life where they begin to sort of just drift a little bit.

And they get off, they get away. And the reason that they do that is they're not making use of the means that God has given us to help us to stay anchored, to help us to stay where we need to be.

So this summer we're considering these anchors that God has given us, these things that we call spiritual disciplines. And we have defined them as the means of grace that God himself uses to help us, to keep us persevering in trusting and treasuring Christ and all that he is for us.

So that the real problem that we have oftentimes is that our satisfaction becomes placed in the things of the world. Not necessarily bad things, not necessarily evil things, not necessarily terrible things.

Sometimes in the good gifts that God has given us, we can begin to place our sense of self-worth, our sense of satisfaction, our sense of home in those things, whether they be our family or other good things that surround us, rather than in Christ himself.

[4 : 53] And so that causes a bit of a drift away. So that our goal is always to ask, how can we make sure that Christ is the source of our satisfaction?

Or to put it another way, how can we make sure that we are treasuring Christ above everything else in our lives? And God has given us this great gift of spiritual disciplines to help us, to set our hearts aright when we have drifted away, and to keep us anchored in place when our eyes are fixed upon Jesus so that we don't drift away.

He has given us these means of grace that He is using to keep us and to help us to treasure Christ more fully. So far we have considered the Bible as a means that God uses.

The Bible both proclaimed here the way that I'm doing this morning from the leaders of the church, and the Bible as you encounter it personally in your own lives on a daily basis. The Bible is one of the means, God's Word is one of the means that He uses to help us to incline our hearts more toward treasuring Christ.

And now this morning we're going to turn away from that, but not fully away, but we're going to turn and look at another aspect, another one of these spiritual disciplines that God uses to help us to treasure Christ, and that is the spiritual discipline of prayer.

[6 : 14] But I want us to start by looking at what Jesus Himself has to say about prayer. We're going to spend this week and next week looking at Jesus' instructions about prayer in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6.

So I want to ask you guys to stand as we look at the first six verses of Matthew 6. Jesus says to His disciples, Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogue and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others.

Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

[7:37] Father, we thank you that Jesus himself spoke these words, and that your Spirit inspired Matthew to record them for us and for our benefit. I pray this morning that you would, through these words, teach us.

Teach us how to pray and teach us why we ought to pray. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat.

There's a reason why we began this series on spiritual disciplines, by considering first the role of God's Word in helping us to treasure Christ more fully.

Because the Bible is and ought to be for us a kind of oasis in the midst of a dry desert of a world that we live in. The Bible functions for me on a regular basis as refreshing, as salvation in the midst of a world in which I can't find anything to drink.

I can't find anything that gives any real lasting satisfaction. We do live in a world that is devoid of any real, real satisfaction to be had.

[8:48] It's as if we live in a desert. It's as if we live in a wilderness. And we wander about, we climb over the dunes, always looking for something, some way to satisfy us, some way to quench the thirst that we have.

And God has given us His Word as an oasis in the midst of that desert. And I can't tell you how many times I have returned to the Bible to find nourishment, to have my soul, the thirst of my soul, quenched by God's Word.

And the Bible should function that way for us. It shouldn't just be like a textbook that we read to glean information. It shouldn't just be sort of like something that we open almost like a magic incantation book and put our finger on and try to find something that will inspire us for the day.

No, the Bible should function for us as a place where we meet God. Because in the Bible, we find God's words. Not merely man's words.

Not merely a record of things that God said in the past to other men. But the Bible itself is the very Word of God. And as the Word of God, it comes to us to quench that thirst.

[9:57] It comes to us to actually give us life. We'll oftentimes try to find the kind of satisfaction that we'll only find in God's Word in other ways.

We'll look for it in other places. We'll try to dull the sense of thirst that we have. It's like a person who's been out exercising or working out in the heat.

I mean, they are just parched. They need something. They need water to quench their thirst. But rather than go and grab a glass of cold water, they pop open a soda and they drink a Coke.

Or they grab a hot cup of coffee. Which may help slightly because there's some water in it. But at the end of the day, it's not the thing that they need. And we do that oftentimes. We try to find some rest.

We try to find some relief in other places. And all the while, God is saying, I have provided it for you. I have given it to you. Open my Word.

[10:55] Read my Word. And find in it not just a record of what I've done for other people and with other people, but find in it my own voice speaking even now.

Now, we know that that's true. We confess that to be the truth. But then we are still confronted with the reality that there are a lot of people well-versed in the Bible who still walk around parched, just desperately thirsty to be satisfied, desperately thirsty to actually hear from God.

And so we have to ask the question, how can it be that we can go to the oasis, we can go to the place where we find God's words and yet walk away not having received God's words, not having really heard God's words?

If that weren't possible, then we wouldn't have the phenomenon of liberal Christianity. You wouldn't have liberal theologians dedicating their lives and their careers to teaching and explaining the Bible to other people, and yet they themselves be as lost as can be without any hope in this world or the next.

That phenomenon wouldn't exist if the Bible, in coming to it, if it automatically quenched the thirst that you have. The reality is that God gives the word in the context of a relationship with his people.

[12:19] That this book is directed toward the people of God. And so the reception of the word and the being able to develop a taste for the word and be satisfied by the word assumes a kind of relationship.

It assumes that there's a back and forth between us. In fact, a lot of times, I prefer to think of the Bible as one side of a conversation that we're having with our Heavenly Father.

We hear God speak in the word, but then God demands that we speak back to Him in prayer. Because relationships primarily consist of communication.

That's what they consist of. You don't have a good relationship with your spouse if you don't actually have real conversations with them. If all you do is say things in passing to one another, then you don't have a vibrant, strong relationship if all you do is hear someone else, then you don't really know them.

You don't really have any kind of relationship. Some of you may have heard me preach a dozen times or more and yet never had a real conversation with me. And so you couldn't claim to have a relationship with me if you haven't actually heard me and spoken back to me at some other time than when I'm standing here speaking to you.

[13:42] Relationship presupposes that language goes both ways. Words pass both directions so that in the Bible, yes, we hear from God, but those who are in a genuine, authentic relationship with Him will also respond back to Him by speaking to Him in prayer so that we need more than just the Bible.

We don't need another word. We don't need another message. But we need to respond. We need to show that we are receiving the word in the context of a relationship.

And the relationship that we're experiencing, the relationship in which we receive the word is a family relationship. It is the relationship of father to son, father to child.

In fact, Jesus assumes that kind of relationship throughout His instructions to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. Take a look. I just want you to see a few places just in the verses that we read this morning where Jesus assumes a kind of father-son relationship between God and His people and His disciples.

Look in verse 1. He speaks of not receiving a reward from your Father who is in heaven. Your Father, He says. Underline those words.

[15:00] And then if you move down a bit more, you can see in verse 4. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you. The same words. Your Father.

And then further down, He assumes the same thing. He says in verse 6 that you ought to pray to your Father. And then He says, Your Father who sees in secret will reward you. So there is the assumption of a father-son relationship between God and the disciples of Jesus Christ.

And it's in the context of that kind of relationship that the communication occurs. First of the Word of God, the written Word of God now to us. And then of our prayers back toward Him.

So that everything that we're saying throughout this series on the spiritual disciplines, whether we're talking about the Word of God or prayer, or we're talking about fasting, or we're talking about giving and what we do with our material wealth that we'll do later on, whatever spiritual discipline we're talking about, we need to first pause and recognize that none of these things are going to be of any value if they're not taking place within the context of this specific relationship as God as Father and you as His child.

And that only happens through faith in Christ Himself. You can dedicate yourself to reading the Bible. You can dedicate yourself to praying frequently throughout the day.

[16:21] You can fast all the time. You can give all of your possessions away. And yet at the end of all of those things, you will not have a real, authentic, saving relationship with God if you've not come to Him through Jesus Christ so that He is now your Father.

There's a barrier between Him and us. And none of these external activities that we do will bring that barrier down. Only faith in Christ, who has paid the penalty for our sins and who has Himself broken down that wall, can make a way for us to have the relationship with God that we need to have in order for these spiritual disciplines to be of any benefit to us.

So the first thing that we need to say before we proceed any further, and we need to say this every week as we talk about these spiritual disciplines, is that you must do these in the context of a real relationship.

But relationships consist primarily of communication back and forth. And we have considered God's communication to us through His Word.

And so now this morning, we need to consider what Jesus has to say about our communication back to Him in prayer. And it's going to take us two weeks to do that because I didn't want to preach for an hour and a half to you this morning.

[17:38] So we're going to spend this morning looking at just a small portion of Jesus' instructions on prayer in this passage, just verses 5 and 6. And then next week we'll return to this chapter and pick up in verse 7 and go to the end of the Lord's Prayer in verse 13.

So that what we're doing is this morning, we're considering the why of prayer. Why are we praying? What are we aiming towards? And then next week we'll consider how we ought to pray.

So that this week we're looking at the motive and next week we're looking at the manner in which we pray. So let's look at verses 5 and 6, consider what Jesus has to say about why pray.

What's the motive behind our prayers? The first thing that you'll see is that Jesus is concerned with motive throughout the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is concerned with our hearts throughout this entire sermon.

So that in chapter 5 He gives instructions concerning some of the law, some of the commandments in the Old Testament. He says things like, you have heard it said, you shall not murder. That's the external commandment.

[18:45] Simple enough to understand. It's not difficult really to avoid murdering people. But Jesus wants to move beyond the external activities that we participate in. And He wants to get to the heart.

And so He says, but I say to you, whoever is guilty of being angry with their brother without cause is guilty of murder. Or He moves on to the issue of adultery. And He says, you've heard it said, you shall not commit adultery.

That's a good command. We should all obey that commandment, right? But Jesus goes beyond it. He goes to the heart. He goes to motive. And He says, but I say to you, that whoever has lusted after a woman in his heart has committed adultery in his heart.

So Jesus, throughout the Sermon on the Mount, is concerned with our internal life. He's concerned with motives. And especially as we approach chapter 6, Jesus is going to contrast the external behavior of those whom He labels as the hypocrites, who outwardly perform all of the things that we would call spiritual disciplines.

They know their Bible. They pray a lot. They fast a lot. They outwardly do all of those things. But Jesus says that their motives are not right. Their hearts are not directed. They're not directed toward the right cause.

[19:57] And so Jesus is going to begin to instruct us this morning on why we ought to pray. What are we trying to accomplish? What are we doing when we pray? Now there are a lot of surface motives that are not necessarily bad motives, but they're not the ultimate motive.

So anybody would say, well, we pray because we need stuff. And there's nothing wrong with that. We pray because we need healing. We pray because we need a new job. There's nothing wrong with saying, well, the reason that I pray is because I need things from God.

That's not wrong. Jesus is going to go on to say in the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 7, He's going to say that we should ask God. One of the reasons that we don't have things that we need is because we don't ask Him, but that we should trust Him as a good Father to give us the things that we need and the things indeed that we ask for.

So that's not a bad motive. There are a lot of motives for why we pray, but Jesus is going to dig a little bit deeper than that and get to the ultimate motive, the core motive of all prayers, whether they be prayers on behalf of someone else, prayers for ourselves, prayers for financial provision, prayers for healing.

whatever prayers we might have underlying the initial motive of things that we need and others need, there's a deeper motive. There's a deeper reason for praying and Jesus is going to drill right down to that in our passage this morning.

[21:17] But first, I want you to look and see how He contrasts those who perform the external duties without having their hearts right, without having the right motives. Look, He gives a general statement in verse 1 of chapter 6.

Beware of practicing your righteousness. So for the purposes of this sermon, we might say, Beware of participating in spiritual disciplines.

Any sort of external act of righteousness. Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them. So now we're going to purpose. That's a purpose cause.

In order to be seen by them. That's the motive. Beware of doing any external activities that we would say, those are good, those are righteous, in order that we might be noticed by other people.

Beware of that. For then, He says, you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. And then He begins to give specific illustrations. He begins with giving to the needy.

[22:13] In verse 2, He says, Don't give to the needy in such a way that everybody sees you doing it. Then you'll have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. And we're finally going to arrive at His instructions on prayer, though, in verse 5.

And He gives the exact same kind of warning. When you pray, He says, so He's assuming that we're going to pray. That's just an assumption that Jesus makes. You're going to pray. And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners so that they may be seen by others.

It's the same kind of motive. So they may be seen, literally, by men. Their concern is what other people think about them. That's the hypocrite's attitude.

The hypocrite thinks, I need to live this kind of lifestyle because other people are watching me, because other people are aware of what I do. The hypocrite comes into a worship service and makes sure that everybody sees that they're there.

They make sure that everybody is aware, that everyone knows that they give when the time comes to give, that they sing loudly when the time comes to sing, that they're taking scrupulous notes when the sermon is preached.

[23 : 23] They do all that so that others may see them. And none of the things that I've mentioned are bad. Giving, taking notes, singing loudly, they're all good things, right? But the hypocrite comes in and does those things so that others might see that they are doing them.

And Jesus says, if you approach righteousness in that way, then you've already received your reward. The only reward that you get is that others have seen you do it.

You receive the praise of others, you receive the adulation of others, and that's it. It's a failure to perform righteous deeds with right motives.

But of course, Jesus contrasts all of these things with the right motives. He says, for instance, with prayer, He tells us, rather than simply, rather than going and praying so that everybody will see you, I want you to pray so that nobody sees what you're doing, so that nobody else is aware, so that you will know that you're not praying for the praise of others.

Notice what He says. He says in verse 6, but when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.

[24 : 41] So there's a contrast here. The hypocrites pray in the synagogues, which roughly corresponds to our worship gatherings. They're different, but really the gatherings of the early church were to some degree modeled upon the synagogue gatherings of the Jewish people.

And so they would gather together to read the Bible and to pray and those sorts of things. Things that we model our services after. And so it's roughly equivalent to a church service, to a worship service.

And He says, they go into the synagogues, they pray so everybody can hear them. They're on the street corners praying out loud so that everybody can hear them. We think, that's a weird thing. That's a strange thing.

And it was strange even when Jesus said it. It was not a common practice even for the Pharisees to just stand out in the middle of the street corner and voice their prayers. Jesus is sort of going to the extremes here to illustrate His point.

He said, but you in contrast to that, in contrast to those who do it openly and in public for everyone to see, I want you to go into, the word ought to be translated, your inner room or your storeroom.

[25 : 46] Now the vast majority of homes in Palestine in Jesus' day would not have had an inner room. They would not have had any kind of storeroom. They were really, most of them were just single room dwellings.

That's all that they were. They just had one big room and the whole family was in that one room. But some houses did also have, in addition to that, sort of like what we would call a closet.

It was just a place where you would store things. You'd store some food up and things that you might need later on. So some of them would have had those extra spaces there among the poor people of Palestine. And Jesus is saying, I want you to go into that room.

It would have really been the only kind of room that would have ever had a door inside any of their homes. Even if they did have a home with a couple of different rooms, which happened occasionally, there were no doors between them. But the storeroom always had a door so that you could lock it up.

So that if thieves tried to break in, they couldn't get to your goods that you had stored up. In fact, the storeroom never was attached to an external wall of the building because the buildings were constructed of clay and mud and straw.

[26 : 45] And a person could simply dig a hole in the wall into your storeroom and steal everything that you had. So if you had a storeroom, it was usually in the middle of your home in some way, not attached to an external wall.

And it had, shockingly, in that day and time, it actually had a door on it that you could close and you could lock. And so Jesus says, in contrast to the hypocrites, I want you to go into that room, the only place where you really can go, where you can shut a door behind you and lock it and you can be in private, away, secluded from everybody else.

I want you to go in there and I want you to pray to your heavenly Father who sees in secret and He will reward you. So what's the motive now?

Now, now in place of the reward of everyone else's adulation for having prayed publicly, now the reward is a reward that comes from God Himself who sees your actions that are done in secret.

So that the right motive is not, well, I ought to pray so I'm going to pray and that's the motive that I ought to have. That's my duty.

[27 : 55] Every Christian should pray so I'm going to pray. No, that's not the motive that Jesus offers. No, Jesus still holds out reward. It's not a matter of whether you're going to do these spiritual disciplines in order to gain a reward.

You're going to. The issue is what reward do you want? Do you want a reward from other people? Do you want a reward from the world? Or do you want to receive from God Himself?

Do you want to be rewarded by God Himself? And Jesus says, I want you to pray in such a way that you receive a reward from God. He says, I want you to give in such a way that you receive a reward from God.

I want you to do all the things that I've called you to do, all of these external activities, I want you to do them in such a way that your aim is to receive a reward from God Himself.

So we have to ask ourselves, what is the reward? What precisely is the reward that we are to aim for? You might think, well, probably maybe answered prayers.

[28 : 57] I mean, if we're going to pray and then God's going to reward us, I suppose that my goal in prayer is to have God answer my prayers. So I just want to pray in such a way that I can ensure that God's going to answer the prayer.

But I don't think that's the reward that Jesus has in mind. In fact, I think the reward is something else entirely because this is not, chapter 6 is not the first place in the Sermon on the Mount where the language of reward enters into Jesus' sermon.

Turn back to the beginning of the sermon. It's probably just one page for you. It may be on the same page. I want you to turn back to what we call the Beatitudes. This is how Jesus begins the sermon by listing all of these blessings, ways to receive a blessing by God.

So if you look down in verse 3, He begins by saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Then He moves on. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. There's a pattern here. A person has a certain attitude, a certain inclination of the heart, whether it be poor in spirit or one who mourns or those who are meek.

[30:09] There's an inclination of the heart. And because of that, they will receive a blessing from God and then we are told that they're going to receive a reward of some kind. The kingdom of heaven.

Comfort. They'll inherit the earth. And then He goes on. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. And in verse 10, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The pattern continues. You have a certain attitude of the heart. You are blessed because of that. And you will receive in the future at some time a reward.

So it's a future reward. But notice how He goes on because now He's going to begin to change from listing all of these separate types of reward to using the language of reward itself.

[31:08] Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven.

So the reward is in some sense a future reward that is held out for those who have the right heart attitude in their lives.

So that as we pray, we want to pray aiming at a reward but it's not a reward that's necessarily received in the here and now. It is a future reward held out for us described in a number of ways in the Beatitudes.

We see God. We are sons of God. We receive the kingdom of heaven. We become those who inherit the entire earth. We receive mercy.

We will be ultimately, Jesus says, satisfied. So Jesus says, I want you to pray in such a way that God will someday in the future reward you with all of these things which are all various ways of describing having an everlasting eternal relationship with God himself.

[32:27] So the ultimate reward of praying rightly, of giving rightly, of fasting rightly, of all the things that Jesus is going to talk about in chapter 6, the ultimate reward for all of these things is a kind of relationship with God that endures forever and provides an everlasting source of joy and satisfaction.

That's the reward that we are looking ahead toward and we ought to pray in such a way that we will receive that reward. If we pray for only rewards in the here and now, we will only receive rewards in the here and now.

But if we pray in such a way that we might receive that kind of reward, then we will indeed receive that kind of reward. Say, but what about now?

Is there, I mean, is there anything that comes now? Is there, is there anything that we experience now? And I would say, yes, there is, but it's not distinct and separate from our future reward.

We experience now in this life, in the context of our relationship with God as our Father and in the hope of receiving the ultimate reward of everlasting pleasure and happiness in His presence, we receive right now a small taste of what lies ahead in the future.

[33:53] You notice in every beatitude the blessedness or you might even translate that as happy are those who. It is a concept that it encapsulates satisfaction and encapsulates joy and happiness and all of those things.

This word blessed is very difficult to render simply into English because it's relying upon Hebrew words in the Old Testament that communicate a kind of fullness of life.

And Jesus repeatedly says the blessedness, blessed are those, they are blessed even now, but the ultimate reward is future. Do you see the pattern there?

So there's blessing now, but the ultimate reward in the future. So I take that to mean that in the here and now, we get a taste. We get to experience some of the satisfaction.

We get a glimpse of the kingdom of God now in our own lives and in the church. We get a glimpse of it. We get to taste what mercy is like.

[34:58] We get to know and experience what it's like to be those who will someday inherit the earth. We get a taste of our future reward even in the here and now.

And that's what it means to be blessed by God. So why do we pray? What is, what's the ultimate motive? The ultimate motive is so that we might receive everlasting satisfaction in and through God in the future and so that now we might receive a taste of what is ultimately to come someday.

So Jesus motivates us to pray, yes, with reward, absolutely, with reward. He's going to motivate us to do everything that He calls us to do with reward.

But it's not the kind of rewards that the world would have to offer. It's not the kinds of things that we in our own sinful natures would crave after if God had not transformed our hearts.

And the amazing thing about all of these spiritual disciplines is that they serve two functions. they serve to prepare us for the ultimate reward in the future, but they also serve in the here and now to transform our hearts so that we have a better taste for what lies ahead.

[36:27] So that we have a greater capacity even now to experience joy and pleasure and happiness in the presence of God. ultimately someday but real and effective in the present.

Remember, we've defined the spiritual disciplines as the means of grace that God uses to cause us to persevere in trusting and treasuring Christ. And that is for eternity and that is for now.

So when you struggle to pray, when you struggle to complete your side of the conversation, you need to be reminded this is a pathway to pleasure in the presence of God.

That's what prayer is. And we begin to complete the conversation as it takes place. Let me offer you something practical before we close this morning because we're going to get to a lot of practical stuff next week with the manner in which we pray, the how.

But I want to offer you something practical before I close this morning in terms of the motive. And it has to do with this issue of prayer taking place in the context of a relationship and a conversation with God Himself.

[37:39] How does that actually play itself out in your daily life? What should you do to make this happen? What should you do so that this conversation can become more regular and more normal and more fruitful in your life?

It's a two-part conversation. God speaks through the Word and you speak back to Him in prayer and in both of those things you're aiming to experience more satisfaction and pleasure in God and a greater treasuring of what lies ahead for you.

So that we need first of all to hear from God Himself. We need to know what's promised to us. We need to know what God is like. We need to know the one in whom we are to find this satisfaction and so we begin with the Bible.

Of course, there will be others who will say, well, don't ever read your Bible until you've spent some time praying first. But I would encourage the exact opposite. I would say, start with the Bible.

Start there because the truth of the matter is just on a practical level, most of the time when we start to pray, we're not quite ready to pray yet. We're usually not ready. And if you find yourself being one of those people you start to pray and you intend to pray for an extended period of time and yet three minutes in your mind has wandered onto something completely different and you realize I'm not even really praying right now.

[38:57] I'm just thinking about what I've got to do today or I'm just thinking about something that happened. Yes, if you struggle with that and most people do, then you need to know that it's helpful. It's helpful not to start with just talking.

It's helpful to start by listening and we listen to God by reading God's Word. There's a popular series of devotionals out there that are directed towards women primarily and they encourage women to just sit and pray and wait and listen for God to speak.

And I want to say to you that that's not the way that you hear from God. God doesn't speak to us through some mystical otherworldly communion as we sit there silently. That's not Christianity.

That's Eastern religions. That's not Christianity. God speaks to us in His Word. That's how He makes Himself known. So you start there and God's already speaking to you.

The minute you begin to read your Bible, God's already speaking to you. And as you read, your heart will be prepared. God will begin to show you things that you ought to be praying about.

[40:07] and then you begin to pray. God has spoken to you and now you begin to speak back to God Himself. And then after you've prayed and you've pleaded with God and you've praised God and you've asked for Him all the things you want to ask for Him, then you come back to the Word of God and you hear from Him again.

And He begins to instruct you and begins to tell you things that you need to know for the day that lies ahead. So that in reality, all of our prayers, our prayer times, not the prayers that we say on the go, not the prayers that we say when we're in desperate need all of a sudden, but all of our regular prayer times ought to be bookended by the Bible so that we hear God speak, we speak to God, and He speaks to us again.

And then sometimes, in fact, many times, even in the midst of our speaking to God, we're going to need to hear God's voice so we know how to pray and what to say.

That's why we're going to turn to the Lord's Prayer next week so that we're instructed by God's Word on exactly how to pray and the kinds of things we ought to be praying and the kinds of things that we ought to be saying. But we also, there are going to be times, though, too, when we don't have all the words that we need and so in the midst of our talking to God, we talk to God with God's own words.

So we turn to the prayers of Paul and we use those as a guide for how we pray. We turn to the Psalms and we use those as a guide for how we pray. In all of these things, the goal is to have your prayer life and your heart shaped by the Word of God so that before, after, and in the midst of your prayer, you are filtering everything through God's Word and you're hearing God Himself speak so that you now as His child are offering up your prayers to your Father with whom you share an intimate relationship, an eager expectation of ultimate reward in His presence and a taste of that reward now.

[42:14] Let's pray. Amen.