

The Heart of the Matter

Our hearts are muscles that never stop pumping blood throughout our bodies every moment of every day. There is not a single part of you that can survive without the heart. Each time it beats, it contracts with all its force to send nutrients to every cell in your body. Its influence is felt everywhere.

No wonder we use the heart as a metaphor when talking about those things that are most precious to us: something can weigh heavily on your heart, you may have a heart for a particular ministry, or you can treasure a memory in your heart. Jesus knew his Father's heart and reveals it to us in the Sermon on the Mount.

In this week's passage, we reach the halfway point (the heart, if you will) of Jesus' sermon. What we find is Jesus giving us instructions on prayer (along with fasting and giving). Here, Jesus reveals what is most important to our Father, and how we can be a part of what is on our Father's heart. Remember, just as we can't survive physically without our own hearts sending precious blood through our bodies, there is not a single one of us who can survive spiritually if we remain outside our Father's will rejecting the precious desires of his heart. It is a heart that operates with all its force. Allow its influence to be felt everywhere in your life.

Monday – Giving

Jesus doesn't say that these outward things don't matter... What matters is learning to do them simply to and for God himself. All the Sermon on the Mount, in fact, is centered on God himself, who easily gets squeezed out of religion if we're not careful. Tom Wright, "Matthew for Everyone"

1. Please read Matthew 6:1-4. Jesus criticizes those who do good deeds and call attention to themselves. In what ways have you slipped into the trap of giving for the wrong reasons? How did it feel?

Text insight: The word "hypocrites" is a translation of a word describing actors who put on a performance. It is used here to describe those who do good deeds purely for show.

2. Paul gives insight into correct giving in 2 Corinthians 9:6-11. What can you rely on God to supply when you give generously?
3. In Acts 4:32 through 5:11, we read of an extreme case where a married couple gave to the church just for show. According to 5:3-4, against whom did this couple sin? Now look at 2 Corinthians 9:7 again. How can you please God with your giving?

Tuesday – Prayer, part 1

True whole prayer is nothing but love. Saint Augustine

1. In Matthew 6:5-8, Jesus discusses both the way the hypocrites prayed and the babbling prayer of the pagans. Why is it human nature to fall into these two traps? Look again at verse 8; how does Jesus assure us that we do not need to imitate them?
2. Jesus says that our Father knows our needs before we ask, but can he really know what's on our hearts? (Read Romans 8:26-27) What does the Holy Spirit do for us? Look closely at the end of verse 27; how do we know that the Spirit will intercede for us effectively?

Wednesday – Prayer, part 2

The truth of the matter is, we all come to prayer with a tangled mass of motives - altruistic and selfish, merciful and hateful, loving and bitter. Frankly, this side of eternity we will never unravel the good from the bad, the pure from the impure. But what I have come to see is that God is big enough to receive us with all our mixture. We do not have to be bright, or pure, or filled with faith, or anything. That is what grace means, and not only are we saved by grace, we live by it as well. And we pray by it. Richard Foster, Prayer

1. Matthew 6:9-15 is Jesus' instruction manual on prayer. What topics do you see covered?
2. Verses 9-10 focus on who God is, while verses 11-13 address our need for God. Take some time now to pray following this model of focusing on God and your need for him.

Making it personal: Why do you think Jesus emphasizes forgiveness in Matthew 6:14-15, but not the other parts of the instructions on prayer? Why is forgiveness such an important matter to our Heavenly Father? Is there anyone you need to forgive? Anyone you need to start treating the way God has treated you?

Thursday – Fasting

1. In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus discusses fasting in a way similar to his instructions on giving and prayer. Apparently the people of His day had forgotten God's teachings in Isaiah 58.
2. According to Isaiah 58:3-5, what characterizes false fasting?
3. According to Isaiah 58:6-10, what type of fasting pleases God? Now look at Isaiah 58:11.

Putting it into practice – Does all this give you any desire to fast for God? If so, pray for his guidance in deciding when and how to fast. For thoughts on fasting during FBC's emphasis on prayer leading up to Easter, visit our website at www.fbcdavis.org/events/calltoprayer.html.

Friday – A Father's Reward

Jesus doesn't say what kind of reward we should expect. That, too, is part of the point. Simply knowing God better is reward enough; but there may be other things as well. Tom Wright

1. Matthew 6, verses 1, 3, 6 and 18 repeat a theme. What is it? In verses 2, 5 and 16, we see the alternative. What rewards have you seen God bless you with in your own life? What activities, priorities, or affections are blocking you from receiving the reward Jesus is talking about?
2. The notion of rewards for following God's teaching is not restricted to the New Testament. Take a look at Psalm 19:7-11. It lists the law, statutes, precepts, commands and ordinances of the Lord, all of which refer to God's Word, the Bible. Where would you start, then, if you want to claim the reward promised in Psalm 19:11?

For the Weekend: Spend time this weekend asking God to guide you into a better understanding of his heart's desire. Ask Him to show you if there is anything you should be doing about the way you give, pray, or if you should engage in a fast.