

Topic	True Spirituality
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Speaker	Peter Ng

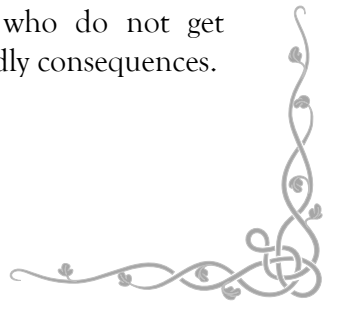
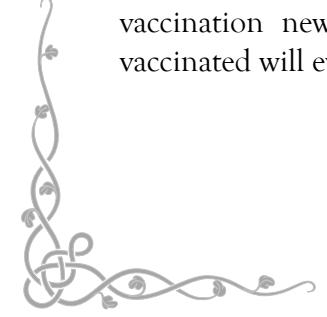
Good morning FBC. Welcome to this Sunday where we are going to be continuing our journey through the Sermon on the Mount. Today we are going to look at Matthew chapter six, verses one to eight, looking through the topic of true spirituality.

Let's start with a word of prayer. Lord, we thank you for being with us this morning. We ask O Lord that your spirit be with us, open up our eyes, open up scripture that it may resonate with our heart and show us what it really means to be a person of faith, what it really means to be truly spiritual walking with you. For, we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Last week our brother Arnold went through with us the challenge that we should be unafraid to bring out our doubts so that our faith will be based on a rational faith, based on how we really understand the Bible to be. But doubt is a significant problem in the world. If you look, there was a study by the Pew Center some time ago, religious switching from 2010 projected up to 2050, next 40 years. And it is projected that in the next 40 years, the number of people who are going to be switching to unaffiliated religions is the largest. We're talking about 61 million. And most of them will be actually switching out from Christianity. The Christianity in the next 40 years will be losing out 66 billion people, most of them becoming unaffiliated. The Muslims and the non-folk religions basically will also be growing as well. What's going down is basically the Jews and the Buddhists and mainly the Christians. All right. And all this is due to doubt. And when key spiritual figures fall, there is a loss of confidence in the faith. And these has consequences, for example, things in the society. For example, the LGBTQ area, society views Christians as very backward, fundamentalists, they are not moving along with society. So Christianity loses its credibility when it stands for the Bible as it were, and it fails to explain itself.

Politicization of religion. If you can look at the attack on the Capitol, lots of Christians were there, attaching their own capital with Jesus Saves signs. All these cause confusion and not only that, as Arnold mentioned last week, pastors who refuse to recognize medical truths, who go against lockdown, go against vaccines, again this cast doubt upon the faith.

If you look at this fake news all over the world, two thirds of tweets were linked to popular websites were from robots. Facebook itself deleted 2.2 billion fake accounts in three month period of time. So fake news is everywhere because of democratization of social media. Everybody can be a publisher, everybody can be an author as it were. This is Star News in March 25th this year, Angela Yeo writes that anti-vaccine content has been posted over 689,000 times on Facebook, in the past two months showed that 73% of it actually originated from disinformation. That means 12 people, only 12 people are the ones spreading anti-vaccination news. And this actually has deadly consequences because the people who do not get vaccinated will eventually succumb to COVID, especially if they are older. There are deadly consequences.



Same situation happened at the time of Jesus when we got authentic spirituality versus fake righteousness. And Jesus was one coming to society and confronting the icons of faith. The icons of religiosity and righteousness were the Pharisees and Jesus was coming and he is confronting them. And they are being shown up as being fake. In fact, he says to them,

Matthew 23:27 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appears beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bone and all uncleanness.

Which means they were fake. And this has deadly consequences because he says to them,

Matthew 5:20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

That is what is at stake. So therefore in chapter six, he comes down to the difference between authentic spirituality, true spirituality and fake spirituality. We should so easily be faked. And if you look at the Pharisees, well the fake righteousness was they obeyed the 10 commandments: do not murder, do not commit, but right deep under the spirit of law, hatred and lust, these proliferate and Jesus points this out and he says righteousness is all encompassing, not only outside conformity to the law but inside in their hearts as well. These are the negative aspects of righteousness and Jesus goes in the last passage before this talking about true righteousness, which we must have to enter the kingdom of God, and he applies that to integrity, whether we retaliate in revenge, divorce and remarriage, lust and adultery, anger management, it goes on all that.

Now today, we are going to look at prayer, alms giving or charity or fasting. What are these related to? These are all related to love for God and love for others. And this is a basically the positive aspects of righteousness. Now this morning, I'm going to be pointing out only three features of true spirituality based on this passage.

1. True spirituality, not fake, is actually responding not performing.
2. True spirituality is relational not transactional.
3. True spirituality is desiring not coveting.

True Spirituality is Responding Not Performing

Matthew 6: Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them for you will have no reward from your father who is in heaven.

The key issue is the expression or the practice of our righteousness and here are the other external manifestations of our righteousness of godliness, is when we are able to give in alms giving, when we able to pray, when we are able to fast and deprive ourselves in order to commit ourselves. These are the external manifestations of righteousness. And in that context, you have Jerusalem, the temple, trumpets will be ringing out. They will blow the horn and say, that's a particular need, COVID pandemic fund as it were, and everybody would urgently close their shops and everybody would start running to the temple. I mean, running to temple, big piggy bank there and they'll take out their coins and dump it there and contribute to the cause.

And everybody can actually see you close your shop and see you run to the temple and if you are running to the temple very fast, wow! This one is very keen to give to God's work. And this was ostentatious, it is over the top, it is public and people love to do that. This was the outward show of righteousness. Call to prayer, similarly the shofar would ring and straight away wherever you are, whether in the Bazaar, whether your army barracks, everybody would turn to the direction of Jerusalem temple and they would pray and everybody would be impressed. No matter what you would you be eating your chicken rice half way and you're just turning and this was an outward display of righteousness.

Then you've got fasting as well. And you'll know you can come with a very sad face to show people that you are actually fasting. Now, all these are done. If you look at what Jesus is saying,

Before others, in order to be seen by them, the verse is repeated three times. 1b, 5b and 16b, all three manifestations of righteousness are done in public and the reason why people do this is in order to be seen by the public. Why? So that they may be praised by others,

And truly I say to you, they have received their reward.

So, which means what is their reward? Three times in each of these three manifestations of righteousness Jesus says they are actually doing it to get that reward and their reward is glory from their fellow man. Everybody say, wow! He is such a generous man. He is giving so much money towards the temple, or he is such a Holy guy who is actually praying and fasting and doing. And why are they doing it? They're doing it to receive the reward from their fellow men not from God. So therefore here you have prayer, alms giving and fasting, is actually what Jesus is saying is a love for self instead of love for God. This is fake spirituality. This is hypocrisy. And that's the warning to us today.

Hypocrisy is an acted lie where a person uses the appearance of good deeds to cloak unworthy designs of self-glorification or some fraudulent credit.

George Cadbury was one of the first pioneers in his big company in England in the 1700s to 1800s, he created the chocolate, Cadbury chocolate and he was the one who was so socially responsible, he actually used the money gained from his Cadbury chocolates to actually benefit his staff and start social responsibility and started giving away his money, but, you know, After that the trend took off. But if you look in websites today, why do people have corporate philanthropy? Why do corporates give money away? For five reasons:

1. It increases brand reputation. The more money you give away and you tell everybody about it and you have a big check and you stick this check and you give it to people and TV3 comes and take a picture of you, that is brand recognition.
2. It results in more sales.
3. It results in employees coming to join you, being very happy because they belong to a corporately responsible company.
4. You attract more talent.
5. Tax benefit. You are able to write it off in tax.

Robert Reich in 2005 wrote an article looking at philanthropy in American setup because Americans actually are probably the group that gives them most to philanthropy. 248 billion was given in 2004 and he said that the largest proportion was given to religious groups, their facilities, operating costs and the clergy salaries. How much was it actually given to the poor? Social services less than 5%, social welfare groups less than 2%, human services 9%. So there is a failure philanthropy because it only gives to a certain sector and the people who are really poor don't really get it. And not only that tax deductions are beneficial to mega donors and it deprives the government of revenue.

What about China?

China has followed suit in this philanthropy and you are going to find a number of foundations, charitable sound foundations set up in China have quadruple over the last 10 years. But if you look, why they are giving. More than half of the philanthropists of foundations gave to charities affiliated with the government to curry favor with the government. They gave most often the education and least often to environmental causes the study found.

If you look here at donations given by donor countries to US colleges, Hong Kong 181 million, UK 147 Canada 136, but the recipients, the biggest recipients for example, if would take Hong Kong giving was to Princeton, Berkeley Harvard or Stanford. These aren't exactly poor people, you know. So therefore donations are given for a vested interest.

Steven Weinberg says good people will do good things, bad people will do bad things, but for good people to do bad things that takes religion.

That's the problem. Jesus criticizes the Pharisees,

Matt 23:28 So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Top five reasons why youth church dropouts say they stop attending church and the second top five reason is 32% of church members are hypocritical or judgmental.

Why is religion particularly the sector that actually breeds most hypocrisy? It is simply because we claim that this is God's standard and this is where we are, and there is a gap between where God is and where we are, and we are tempted to fill this gap with a lie or performance. That is the problem, we are filling the gap. So Jesus said, beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them. All right. So prayer, alms giving and fasting is something that people in those days did regularly anyway. He never said, if you were to give to the needy. He says, when you give to the needy, when you pray and when you fast. It basically assumes that these are the things that you actually do anyway.

Now, when we do this as a function of our nature, 1-John 3:10

By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

So the opposite is true. So therefore the children of God are the ones who practice righteousness and the one who loves their brother. So basically what is righteousness? Righteousness is justice, that means you do right and love is to care for your brother, and this is basically reflecting the image of God, because God is righteous and so therefore we as his sons are by nature righteous, living according to his Holy will and are by nature loving as we care for each other. This is what he expects of us. All right. And it is actually your father in heaven who will see in secret and will reward you.

So we are not doing it so that others will be seeing us, we are actually doing it so that God will be pleased. The authenticity is actually often only verified by God, sometimes you can't see a person's authenticity, just like iPhone.

So filling up the gap between God standard and where we are, we are attempted to do it in two ways, we either perform or we respond. When we are performing, it is by willpower, trying your best in order to earn your way to God or when you're responding is being hit by the grace of God, responding because he so loved us that we actually respond. Why do we actually fill the gap with performance or a lie? Well, because of few reasons; 1, we fear that if we don't meet up to God's standard, we don't fill that gap between where God is and where we are and then we will go to hell. And that is actually the simple most of what some people have. The other is because we want the praise of man, we forget that actually is God who ascertains our authenticity. And thirdly, is this idea of self-esteem, self-righteousness because if you actually moving towards God's standard, that means you are somebody of stature. You are truly the son of God.

This actually bleeds on to how we teach our children. Samuel Williamson actually wrote a book and actually suggesting that is Sunday school destroying our kids, because in Sunday school what we are teaching them is all moral values about David, about Goliath and all sorts of things. This is where they should be, but we actually don't teach them about grace, that many of us fall short of these standards and the Old Testament if it shows us anything, it shows us that we are sinners and that we need the cross and we're not doing that. So he is challenging our ideas. You see Kevin Croft of the Hope Church Vauxhall says, being a Christian is not about pretending to be good, it is actually admitting your are bad, being real.

Now, imagine if you actually permitted murder or theft or rape or assault. You actually straight away, you actually have insight. When you've got insight, you admit you are wrong. There is confession, there is repentance and there is resolution, but the problem is when you are involved in deception, hatred, jealousy, unforgiveness, laziness, those things that are below the surface, we actually have no insight that they're actually wrong and we actually mount a psychological defense to protect our self-esteem and this psychological defense is actually call hypocrisy. It's a method of dealing with sin that actually in the end prevents a solution. We cannot admit it because we're defending ourselves as it were.

In fact, the brain, Arnold Goldberg is a professor of psychiatry at Rush Medical Center, wrote

“Lying is as much part of normal growth and development as telling the truth. The ability to lie is a human achievement, one of those abilities that tend to set us apart from all other species.”

So all other species don't lie, it is only we who lie. It's like a human achievement in order to gain an advantage, which tells us so much about the sinful nature of man doesn't it. It is a survival skill. Imagine your wife comes up to you and ask, hey that girl across the road pretty or not. And you know, you're tempted to, if you say not pretty when she is actually pretty or actually she is pretty and either way you say, you die. So is it a survival skin.

In 1993, there was actually a diplomat who worked in the European commission at that time. And working as a diplomat he negotiated deals. He represented his country and the problem is whenever he told a lie, he would shake, go into a fit, convulse and go into a coma. Now if you are a diplomat. That's not a very good thing because every time he told half truth or a lie he actually had the convulsions and fell down to the ground. They actually found out that he had a tumor in his brain and it took a tumor in the brain to break down our natural psychological defense to actually lie, to be a hypocrite and actually took the tumor out. And he continued his job as a hypocrite. And this syndrome is called a Pinocchio syndrome because Pinocchio grew along nose when he actually lied.

What is the secret to true spirituality to really be authentic?

Well, 1-Timothy chapter three, verse 16 says,

Great indeed, we confess is the mystery of godliness...

Which means being like God, being consistent, being authentically spiritual is actually a mystery, which is we don't know about it, it is only been revealed recently and Paul writes, what is this mystery? What is that that we need to know? Well, this is the mystery;

- He was manifested in the flesh, which is the incarnation of Jesus.
- He was vindicated by the spirit, which means he was resurrected and vindicated. All the things that he taught was correct. Why? Because when they killed him unjustly, he rose.
- He was seen by the angels.
- He was exalted to heaven.
- He was proclaimed among the nations.
- He was believed on in the world.
- And finally he was taken up in glory.

So what is the mystery of godliness? The mystery of godliness is actually Christ, the gospel where the space between where God's standard is and where you are, is to be filled by not your performance but how you respond to grace, because Jesus has already become your righteousness. So our job is to be real, admitting. I hope you've said the right thing in the poll where we ran before the sermon that I am a recovering hypocrite. All of us are because all of us don't go to that standard, and we actually replace that gap with our performance. You can too.

Authentic spirituality is not performing. It's actually responding to God.

If you look at Matthew 25, we talk about the judgement of the sheep and the goats, and Jesus asked them, you know, when I was in prison and when I was sick, did you come to visit me when I was in COVID

ward? Did you come, did you bring me the soup? The sheep will say, yes we did. And the goats will say, you know, when did we actually do that? We didn't see you, and Jesus said,

And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the king will answer them, Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

See what he's saying is that your actions to your brother, whether in love or in charity is actually responding to God. When you look at your brother and you see God in terms of the image of God and when you give alms and led the helping him, you're actually responding to what God has done for you and you're responding to God because you don't see God, but you see his image in your fellow brothers and sisters in church and you're extending that. You are actually responding to God. So true spirituality is not performing, it is actually responding. The grim tale of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter five, you know that they both were sold a piece of land and at that time, people sell the pieces of land and will bring the entire amount and lay at the feet of the apostles Peter. And say, this is what I'm going to contribute for the poor people. So although all the people of the early church of Acts had not no need at all. So what they did was, whatever they brought it was automatically assumed because everybody did it, that this was all there was, and what they did was they sold their piece of land and they brought only a portion. Maybe they brought 10% or 50%. They brought portion and laid at the feet of apostle as if that was the whole amount. Right. And they were actually struck dead, husband and wife because you know what, they lied to the Holy Spirit.

The best thing for them would have been to come before Peter at that time were perhaps if they were real, if they sold it for a hundred thousand dollars and you brought \$50,000, look we could only give 50, we are going to keep 50 for ourselves, that would have been okay and they would not have died. They should have been real. That's why in the New Testament, Paul says,

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

So, there is no compulsion, you are not doing it for show, so that other people will see you. You're doing it, your BT76 as you have decided to be honest and not hypocritical.

Barna Research in 2007 looked at white people reject Christianity and number two reason was judgmentalism. Hypocrisy and judgementalism actually are two faces of the same coin, because when you are judgmental about other people, you are actually avoiding some truth about yourself when you compare yourself to other people and it makes you feel good because you are choosing something in which you are better than others, and using that when you judge them it makes you feel better about yourself. But the problem is Romans 2 verse 1, therefore Paul says,

Therefore you have no excuse O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another, you condemn yourself because you the judge practice the very same thing.

You see, when we actually say the other person gossip, it implies that you have no gossiping. Maybe you gossip less, but it doesn't mean that you're not a gossiper. When you condemn other people, you are passing judgment on yourself.

Imagine it's like going to the COVID ward. You got COVID-19, you are not breathing as bad as the others and you are pointing and judging them, when you are in the same ward. That is actually ridiculous. Some people would be bringing up this issue of Carl Lenz, one who brought Justin Bieber to Christ and Ravi Zacharias, and why do Christians bring them up to criticize? We're not actually criticizing them. The reason why we bring up moral failure among Christian leaders is the purpose is warning. It is not judgementalism, because we have probably done the same sins as they were but we do it in private. We do it privately under the surface. Tell me which person doesn't have lust in his eyes, committed lust in his heart. We all have. The purpose why we bring these things up is for warning, not for judgment.

1-Timothy chapter 1

Fight the good warfare, holding faith in good conscience by rejecting this some have made shipwreck of their faith among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander,

These are leaders. Paul brings them up so that the people are worn because the failing of others, actually the purpose of which brings up to encourage us so that we will not fall as well. That is a purpose for which we bring that up. Judgment belongs to God, only God judges. Right? So in the end, we've got true spirituality. It is either performance, performance is like a well. You throw your bucket in and you're bringing it up and after a while you're going to run out of water, because the well is yourself. You either perform or you respond. The deeper you look into the beauty of Christ death for us and his resurrection, you respond to who he is, and when we were responding, it's going to be like a river of flowing water, which Jesus told to the Samaritan woman that has got no end, you continue to respond out of that endless supply of love.

So the features of true spirituality is responding to grace and not performing. The second point of true spirituality is relational not transactional.

When you pray do not heap up empty phrases as the gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Don't be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you even ask him.

Here you have got two kinds of prayer. One is relational, father and son. The other one is transactional. There are two kinds. True spirituality is relational. If you're transactional, public prayer is more important than private prayer, you tend to be in public and you got prayer meeting. You're praying most, but at home you hardly pray. That is a transactional relationship because you want public adulation and glory to be known as a Holy person. Petition praying for something is more important and more elaborate because you're performing for others as well as for God. Relational, private prayer is more important because you don't stand in front of the whole world and talk to your father. You go to the room yourself and private prayer is because it is intimate. Prayer is in a relationship is a response to grace because of what God has done for you. The purpose is what, why do we pray? We pray, the purpose is relationship, to strengthen

that relationship, to dip into that relationship so that we grow closer in love with him and to fellowship. That is why we pray, not because we have to pray to perform for others.

In a transactional relationship, self-esteem or how we feel, how good we feel ourselves is actually based on our own merit and our goodness. And the fact that if we're given a lot of money to church or we have prayed a lot and went to every single prayer meeting, you feel good? Is that why I've been really spiritual. I've been really righteous. Well self-esteem is based on that, but if it is a relational issue, intimacy with God is based on God's unconditional love of you, not because of your performance. We need to understand that.

So true spirituality is responding not performing. True spirituality is relational not transactional and lastly

True spirituality is desiring not coveting.

If you look at the spiritual disciplines, all right, you have money and you give that away. You've got food, but you deprive yourself and you've got time and you use it to pray. Actually spiritual disciplines present a conflict. How many of you feel praying is easy? I don't think praying is easy. I mean, you are sitting aside quietly and I'm a type A person. I don't like to be quiet and while I can be doing something else, I have to quiet myself and to just pray to a God whom I cannot see, it goes against, it is counterintuitive and all people fall asleep. How many of you like to fast, which means you love to eat? A guy like me loves to eat and then you're depriving yourself. And what about your hard-earned money? You work so hard and you got a ticket and give it away. So basically on one hand we have our desires to keep our money, to keep our food, to keep our time and on the other hand we are asked to give it away. So there is a conflict of desires and this is interpreted by the Greek philosophers at that time, who would actually split the person into soul and spirit. These are the Holy aspects like God. And then what of the body, so the body is bad and sinful, all the desires for sex, desire for food, desire for comfort, all that is really bad. And so therefore true spirituality is to focus on spiritual aspects of life. And when they fast, when they deprive themselves of food. And when they pray, what they're doing is actually they suppressing this part of their lives. So this is basically going to be the good part. And if will look in the Buddhist faith and a lot of the faith that focus on meditation, they are actually essentially doing that. They're denying that that part of your life is actually good.

You need to understand our desires are given by God. Look at Genesis chapter two, God created man Adam and Eve, and gave them the entire garden of Eden with every imaginable beautiful food there. Why did he do that? Desires are actually give from God for our blessing, but desire more than that has an indicative function. It's just like going down to the mall and the sales girl will come and give you a little piece or a turkey or a croissant or a macaroon and you're supposed to taste it and it actually stimulates your saliva, your appetite, your imagination, and then you okay, I will go to your shop and I will have the whole turkey. Desire given by God has an indicative function. It points us to what something, but it is not an end to itself because if you think desire is an end to itself, you're going to be like the rat squad in the rat race, looking for happiness but this happiness is always sold out.

There was a famous New York columnist called David Brooks who actually describe his feelings after he had the first bestselling book called Bobo's Paradise. He was driving around, he felt elated first and after

that he felt kind of empty. He was talking to his editor and he realized that career success has saved me from the shame that I might have felt if I had failed.

And that's a very interesting way to describe career success because everybody wants career success. But what you actually get there, it is not a big deal. You feel kind of empty and all it does is that it saves you from the shame that I may felt if I actually didn't get that bestselling author ship book.

CS Lewis writes,

creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exist. A baby feels hunger; well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim; well, there's such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire; well, there is such a thing as sex.

So there's a correlation between desire and the satisfaction for that desire.

If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

There is something else beyond and that is the indicative function of desire. It cannot be an end to itself. Whatever food you have in fine dining or a beautiful peacock, a time of family, it is not designed to give you full satisfaction. There's always something missing because all desires have an indicative function. It is designed to drive us towards God himself. It is not designed for you to just indulge that desire as an end to itself. So instead of eating to live, you actually live to eat as it were.

Even evil has an indicative function. How do you respond? When you hear news today of so much COVID going on, variant young people in Malaysia are actually getting into ICU. There are variants and all by sure if variants are coming and Malaysia is estimated to reach 8,000 cases at the end of this month if things continue to move towards this direction. This is suffering. There was a theologian in 1950 is called Paul Tillich who describes what suffering is. He says,

What suffering does is that it carves through what you thought was the basement of your soul and it reveals a cavity underneath that. And when you carve below that you discover another cavity below that, you get to the depths of yourself and you discover that only spiritual and emotional food will feed those dark places.

You know, this week, we had quite a number of our FBC people who had been struck by COVID and this is a picture of Vincent Yee whom I know, he was in a desperate situation with his illness and couldn't even get a bed. We tried to get him bed at Subang and all the affiliated hospitals, they were all full and last minute he called 999 and he actually got to Sungai Buloh and he actually is doing better. This is what he writes in the midst of his suffering,

Life is so fragile, so uncertain, hold tight to God's hand and do not let go. Remember, even if you walk down the darkest moment of your life passing through the gates of hell, God is always standing beside you. He won't forsake you.

Wonderful words from a person who is actually suffering. It reminds me of Ecclesiastes chapter 3. There's a time and season for every matter under heaven, time to be born, time to die, time to plant, time to pick up, time to kill, time to heal, time to break down, time to build up, time to weep, time to laugh, time to mourn and time to dance. And I like verse 14. I perceive that whatever God does, whether in COVID variants or not, nothing can be added to it or anything taken very God has done it so that people will fear before him.

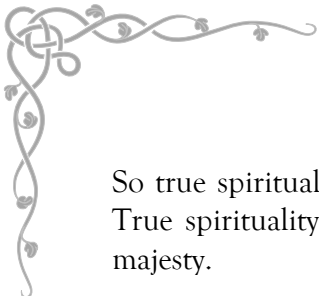
There is a purpose to what is happening and each message which Vincent wrote on WhatsApp is ended by three prayer hands, which means the suffering that Vincent actually has undergone is exactly as Paul Tillich describes, you go down to the bottom of your soul, the basement of your soul, you dig you find a cavity and you find a cavity and that darkness can only be filled by God. The practice of righteousness is therefore an expression of our deepest desire, whether in beauty that we see and anticipate something more beautiful or in darkness of our soul that has to be filled. We're actually forced to desire something greater. We've seen to desire something greater. So we give, we pray, we fast.

On your opposite hand, our temptation is to manipulate God. Empty phrases, so that it will be heard for their many words as if to manipulate God. Genesis chapter 3, the woman, instead of desire she actually covets. And the reason why she took the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil was because God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be open and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. Here is a woman who has been given desire and given the entire garden of Eden, every imaginable food and taste and beauty for her to take in, and that desire points her to God and instead she wants more and that more is want to be like God, which means you actually want to usurp the place of God and decide for herself like God, what is good and what is evil? So instead of desiring God, she covets the position of God.

And this is the same for us. Is God your God or Santa Claus? We strive to be on the nice list and not the naughty list, so that God will give us what we want. There is an interesting book by Christine Smith and Melinda Linquist Denton, looking at the young people in America. And I don't think they're very far off from us in this country, looking at their religious and spiritual lives. They say there is a fake religion in American Christianity called moralistic therapeutic deism, where they believe in a creator God and people are created to be good and nice and fair, and the goal of life is to be happy, to feel good about yourself and what is God needed, God is needed to resolve your problem. Good people go to heaven when they die. That's the kind of religion on general that plagues the church all over the world. Here's how Vincent ends this WhatsApp.

Now I really know the actual meaning of "I am not my own anymore. I have no control over myself. I belong to him totally. I got to do what he instructs me to do in complete obedience.

You see in the depths of suffering, it creates a pole of darkness which only God can fill and Vincent has found that even through the depths of COVID suffering and so therefore in chapter 6 verse 9 Jesus tells us then pray, our father in heaven hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done. That is an expression of desire. When you come to God, he's not your Santa Claus so that you could covet and you manipulate God to give you what you want. You actually come and the prayer that you have is an earnest desire for God and all that he is about. You have surrendered your desire to him.

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So true spirituality is not coveting, deciding that you are God and deciding what you want for yourself. True spirituality is a desire for God and all he is, in all his wonder and beauty and his authority and majesty.

So the challenge for us this morning is your faith real. Well, if you're responding to grace and not performing, if you are relating to him and not transacting, if prayer, charity giving and fasting is an expression desire, and not an expression of coveting then our spirituality is real.