

INTRODUCTION

The Sermon on the Mount began with the Beatitudes, focusing on the inner attitudes of those who follow Jesus. In chapter 6, Jesus shares how our inner attitudes should manifest themselves outwardly, particularly in the areas of giving, praying, and fasting. WHY do we give, pray, and fast? Is our motivation for doing so to make Christ known, or is it to somehow bring attention to ourselves?

SCRIPTURE

¹Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. ²So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁵And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. ⁹This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, ¹⁰Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us today our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' ¹⁴For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. ¹⁶When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew 6:1-18

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Do you think you ever have a completely pure motive for doing anything?
2. Read Matthew 6:1-18. What does it mean to “practice your righteousness”?
3. Read Matthew 5:16 and Matthew 6:1. Is Jesus giving us contradictory commands? If not, what do you think is at the heart of what He is saying?
4. What word is repeated at the beginning of verses 2-3 (giving), 5-7 (praying), and 16-17 (fasting)? What is implied by the use of this word?
5. There is a lot of talk about “rewards” in this passage. What do you think the rewards are? Are they given now or in heaven? Is the promise of a reward what should motivate you to do righteous acts?

APPLICATION

Choose to do one, two, or all three of the following:

1. Either as a group or on your own, purchase a gift card for a local coffee shop. Give it to the barista to pay for the next few customers. Ask the barista not to let anyone know who the giver is. Sit and watch how people respond to receiving this gift. What were some of the reactions you witnessed? How did this make you feel?
2. It's ironic that Jesus tells us not to "*keep on babbling like pagans*" in our prayers just before teaching the Lord's Prayer; for many, this prayer is said repeatedly and without thought to the words. Pray the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) every day this week. Concentrate on what it means as you're praying it. If you find you are just reciting and not thinking about the prayer, write it out, meditating on it as you write.
3. Set up a time to fast this month. For more information on fasting, especially for those who have never done it before, visit <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/fasting-for-beginners>.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Read the following verses, and list what you learn about giving, praying, and fasting:

Proverbs 14:31

James 2:15-17

2 Corinthians 9:7

Psalms 145:18

1 Thessalonians 5:17

1 John 5:14

Isaiah 58:3-7

Joel 2:12

Luke 18:9-14

2. In Matthew 6:2, 5, and 16, Jesus cited examples of hypocritical actions. Where do you struggle with hypocrisy in your own life?
3. Many times the Bible refers to God's heart for the poor and the needy (Psalm 140:12, Proverbs 19:17; 21:13, Amos 5:24, 1 John 3:17-18). Do you think that the modern-day church has overlooked the poor? Why or why not?
4. What are the key focal points of the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)? How might you use these focal points to guide you as you pray?
5. As Jesus began His ministry, He fasted for forty days in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-2). Why do you think He did this? What you can learn from His example?