



DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

SERIES: THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES •

PRAYER AND FASTING • MATTHEW 6:5-18 • 7/9/2023

MAIN POINT

Jesus taught His followers to pray and fast with the right motivation.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What rote prayers did you learn when you were a child? Did you ever find yourself saying things in those prayers that you didn't really understand?

What is the most severe diet you have ever been on? How did you feel? How well did it work?

The Lord's Prayer is one of the most memorized sections of Scripture, and probably the Bible's best-known prayer. It is found in the context of Jesus' teaching His disciples how to pray. Essentially, He taught them that they should not pray for show, but rather out of the sincerity of their hearts. They need not make their

prayers long and wordy, and when they prayed for forgiveness from God, they should also be willing to show forgiveness to others. Similarly, fasting should not be done for show, but as an offering to God.

UNDERSTANDING

READ MATTHEW 6:5-15.

What did you learn about prayer from the way it was done in your family when you were a child?

What was Jesus saying about long, drawn-out prayers in verse 7? What is the relationship between the number of words and the quality of the prayer?

What do verses 12, 14, and 15 say to you about the relationship between forgiving and being forgiven?

What are the basic elements of the Lord's Prayer in this passage? Do you see this as a prayer to be memorized and repeated as is, or as a pattern for extemporaneous prayer? Why?

If it is indeed true that God knows what we need before we ask Him (v. 8), why do we even pray? Is there a benefit to communicating what God already knows?

One of the biggest problems with any kind of religion is that it can degenerate into a show meant to impress people. In the following passage, Jesus spoke very strongly against that kind of religiosity. He spoke to people in an era when praise from the people didn't come from hitting home runs or from singing songs that reached number one on the popular charts. Praise from the people came when they saw evidence of religious devotion. While people today would seldom think of praying in a public place as a way to get the praise of people, in Jesus' day this was a real temptation. Jesus called His followers to avoid such a temptation. In so doing, He was telling them that the sole motivation for doing acts of devotion of any kind should be to please God.

READ MATTHEW 6:16-18.

What consistent message is given in this passage about the audience of our spiritual disciplines (vv. 1-5, 6, 16, 18)? How does knowing who our true audience is affect how we practice these disciplines?

What is the purpose of fasting? What benefit might it bring to a person spiritually? What might we be saying to God through our fasting?

Of the things we are called to do in this passage, which do you find the hardest to do?

This passage assumes that the disciples of Jesus will fast. It says, "Whenever you fast..." not, "If you fast..." Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights in the wilderness (Matthew 4:2); when Jesus was criticized because His disciples did not fast, He responded that it was because He was still with them. After He was finished with His earthly ministry, they would fast (Matthew 9:14-15).

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Where have you been guilty of performing religious acts for the wrong reasons? What do you need to confess before the Lord? What needs to change?

What kind of help from God, as included in the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, do you most need today?

One of the benefits of fasting is that it helps us identify with our brothers and sisters who are hungry. What person or people are you aware of who may be in need? Include them in your prayer time.

PRAYER

Close your time in prayer, reciting the Lord's Prayer together. Recite it slowly, focusing on the meaning of the words.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 6:5-18

6:5 Standing in the synagogues (gathering places for Jewish worship) or on the street corners when praying ensures that many people saw the hypocrites praying, but Jesus taught that God has no regard for such actions.

6:6 A private room (Gk tameion) was a room that did not have doors or windows to the building's exterior. Closing the door granted total privacy. Since the true disciple prays for a heavenly rather than a human audience, privacy is ideal for genuine prayer. Jesus described the Father as the One who is in secret. God is ever-present. The disciple can encounter Him in the most obscure locations.

6:7 The babbling of idolaters may refer to the meaningless gibberish that appears in Greek magical papyri. Like the familiar "abracadabra," these formulas were nonsensical combinations of sounds that were believed to have special power. Ancient texts show that Jews sometimes embraced these practices.

6:9 By commanding His disciples to pray like this rather than simply "pray this," Jesus demonstrated that this prayer was offered as a model rather than a mantra to be recited. The first person plural pronoun Our implies that Jesus intended this prayer to be a model for corporate prayer, i.e., a prayer for when disciples gather as a group. This confirms that Mt 6:5 was not intended to prohibit disciples from praying together publicly in the synagogue or other gatherings but instead prohibited prayers that were motivated by religious showmanship. Your name be honored as holy suggests that Jesus expected His disciples to live righteous lives that honor rather than profane God's name (5:16; Lv 22:31-32). This is an important precondition for successful prayer.

6:10 In light of parallels with contemporary Jewish prayers and Jesus' teaching that the kingdom of God is a present reality but also awaits a fuller future consummation, the petition Your kingdom come has a present and a future focus. The petition asks that disciples submit more fully to God's will as subjects of His reign through Jesus. We should daily pray for the future consummation of God's rule in which He will reign fully and completely over the world.

6:11 Daily bread was the amount of bread necessary to survive for a day. The request is reminiscent of Pr 30:8-9. Jesus wanted His disciples to live in a state of constant dependence on God and His provision.

6:12 The Greek grammar indicates that the disciple prays for forgiveness from God only after having first expressed forgiveness to others.

6:14-15 God forgives those who are truly repentant. True repentance results in a willingness to forgive others.

6:16 They make their faces unattractive refers to the Jewish practice of smearing ashes on the face and wearing grim expressions during times of fasting. Although these acts originally expressed true repentance, hypocrites adopted them as a mask of false piety.