

The Promise of Prayer and Fasting Matthew 6:5–18

There are some things we mess up because we oversimplify them. Prayer is not one of those. Sometimes we can make prayer more difficult than it needs to be.

FBC Halls—“I need to learn how to pray!” Problems with prayer. . .

- Say same things about the same things
- Say right things for wrong reasons or vice versa
- Don't know what to ask

This passage takes us to the heart of prayer of fasting and encourages us to participate.

Introduce Matthew/Sermon on the Mount; READ PASSAGE

6:1—seems to contradict Matthew 5:16, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” BIG difference between giving to be seen, and being seen giving.

This passage is about more than actions (giving, praying, fasting). It's about affections. Motivations. Impulses in our innermost being that God sees as obviously as the actions. Those reflect who we are more than what we do from time to time.

6:9—The prayer is an example rather than formula. If Jesus told us to pray these things, then we have to believe that he will ultimately accomplish them. We never make a mistake when we pray in line with these words.

6:10—First triad—is this a key that unlocks God's willingness to hear? Does he need this? Deserves, but doesn't need. It's about aligning our hearts with his—we need to be reminded of this, and he deserves to hear the confession.

- o Focus on God's character, kingdom, and providence.

6:13—1 Corinthians 10:13, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

6:16–18—Fasting. . .

- o Giving up some good to rely more upon God
- o Temporary test of the heart: do I love God more than his good gifts?
- o Turn our hunger and expectations to the only one who can ultimately satisfy.
- o It is not normal – in our culture – to push back against unfulfilled desires. We hunger, and we eat; we long for, and we take. And we never questions ourselves regarding the legitimacy of our appetites, and whether the experiences we feast on will truly satisfy.
- o “The absence of fasting is indicative of our comfort with the way things are.”¹

Christians are to give, pray, and fast, but to do it differently.

Application. . .

1. Reasons for Prayer and Fasting

- o We need God
 - o Tell us who we are
 - o Tell us what we're here for
 - o Tell us that he'll show up
- o We want God's way

Motives—“Actions speak louder than words, but, with God, motives speak louder than either.”

Think about the biggest prayer on your heart right now. . . what is your motive in asking for that? How would answering that prayer

¹ John Piper, *A Hunger for God*, 93.

reflect upon the Lord? How would his kingdom be advanced? How would his will be accomplished?

2. Reminders for Prayer and Fasting

- God knows
- God sees
- God acts
- God loves

Prayer is not about twisting the arm of a detached, reluctant God to do what we want. It is not coercive; doesn't require exaggerated posturing.

We don't pray because we think too little of God and too much of ourselves. When you become more convinced about who God is, how he works, what he is doing—then you'll pray.

Psalm 9:10, "Those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you."

- Character/attributes

Matthew 7:7–9

3. Rewards of Prayer and Fasting

- Intimacy
- Renewal
- Transformation
- Progress
 - He doesn't always give us what we ask for. He always gives us what we would have asked for if we could see from his perspective.

TAKEAWAY TRUTH: God gives good to those who genuinely seek him.

Closing illustration: Sick child, "thank you for taking care of me." I'm his father!

Is the Father of Jesus your Father? If so, then this promise belongs to you. All of these promises become yours in him!

Invitation. . .

- Have you surrendered your life to the Lord?
 - "YES!"
- Have you followed the Lord in baptism?
- Will you join me in praying for the church during this season of transition?