

Matthew 6:5-8; 16-18—Prayer & Fasting from the Heart

I. Context

- a. Stems from 6:1—not to perform acts of worship to look good before others
- b. Pious Jews typically prayed publicly at set times of the day

II. When you pray... (v. 5)

- a. Prayer must be a part of the life of the follower of Christ: *James 5:13-18; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; Colossians 4:2-3; Philippians 4:4-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17*

III. To whom are you praying?

- a. Jesus is not condemning all forms of public prayer (note v.9 begins with ‘Our Father’ meaning it is prayer within a group; see also *Matt. 14:19 & 15:36*)
- b. Jesus gets to the heart of the matter: are you praying to be heard by God or to be heard by the people around you?
- c. Don’t pray like the hypocrites—some in Jesus’ day who would use public prayer as a display of their piety, trying to look good before other people
- d. *Go into your room...* Jesus emphasizes that our prayers need to be about our hearts connecting with God in an intimate way
 - i. God doesn’t care so much about what your words are (it’s okay if you fumble through a prayer), He cares about your heart

IV. Pagan Prayer

- a. Babbling—term indicating one using same words over and over without thinking
- b. Common thinking among pagans of Jesus’ day—one had to get the attention of the deities to take notice of them; they valued quantity over quality in prayer
 - i. They thought long ritual prayers could manipulate the gods to do what they wanted (c.f. *1 Kings 18:26 & Acts 19:34*)
- c. Jesus contrasts this thinking by reminding them of God as their Father
 - i. We can have an intimate relationship with our heavenly Father
- d. We cannot manipulate God through ritual prayer

V. Purpose of Prayer (v.8)

- a. Why does God call on us to pray when He already knows what we need?
- b. Prayer is not just a technique for getting things we want, but it is an expression of a relationship of trust which follows as knowing God as Father.

VI. The Lost Art of Fasting (vv.16-18)

- a. Jesus assumes his disciples will fast; ‘When you fast...’
- b. Purpose: intentional abstinence (usually of food) to take one’s eyes off the world and focus on God
- c. Like other disciples, Jesus reminds his followers to check their motives

VII. So what? How are you with your intimacy with God?

- a. Share with a friend/spouse/family member how your intimacy is on 1-10 scale; what could you do to grow in intimacy?
- b. How might you incorporate the discipline of fasting into your spiritual life?