

March 22, 2026 (Lesson 3)

THE CHRISTIAN'S DEVOTION

1. **Christian Giving** (Matthew 6:1-4)
2. **Christian Prayer** (Matthew 6:5-15)
3. **Christian Fasting** (Matthew 6:16-18)

Central Truth: God the Father is honored when Christian disciplines are practiced.

Focus: Realize that Christians are to give, pray, and fast for God's glory, and regularly practice these disciplines.

Evangelism Emphasis: Devotion to Christ demands a life that points others to Him.

Golden Text: "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17).

In Matthew 6, Jesus continued His teaching on inside-out righteousness, focusing on three public displays of righteousness: *charity*, *prayer*, and *fasting*. Jesus' teaching on these three practices concludes with a standard formula, instructing His disciples that when we give, pray, or fast, we should do so in "secret" because our "Father who sees in secret will Himself reward [us] openly" (vv. 4, 6, 18 NKJV).

Jesus' instructions here may seem to contradict His previous command, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (5:16). How can people see our good works if we perform them in secret? In 5:16, Jesus was referring to our essential traits as Christians. In other words, if we embody the characteristics of the "blessed" person in the Beatitudes, we naturally become a light on the hill that draws people to God (vv. 14-16). In chapter 6, Jesus refers to specific religious acts. The issue is not that the Pharisees and scribes gave to the poor, prayed, and fasted; rather, the problem was in the manner in which they did these things. God regards acts of righteousness done deliberately to gain recognition by people as hypocrisy. He will only reward righteous acts that are done in sincerity.

1. CHRISTIAN GIVING

A. Hypocritical Giving (Matthew 6:1-2)

¹ Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. ² Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

Jesus urged His disciples to avoid public displays of righteous acts deliberately designed to impress or seek attention because God will not reward such acts (v. 1). The word *reward* can indicate payment for work or a prize for good deeds. Those who act in a way that seeks to impress others will not receive a reward.

The first act of righteousness Jesus discussed is *almsgiving*. In ancient Israel, where poverty was common, helping the poor was a key part of religious life. By Jesus' time, there was a structured support system for the poor managed by the synagogues, much like welfare programs today. This system was sustained by donations from community members. As a result, people took seriously their duty to give to those in need. However, Jesus advised us not to announce our charitable deeds with a trumpet. Although the blowing of the trumpet is likely used as a metaphor, similar to our modern phrase "blowing your own horn," the trumpet was one of the loudest instruments in the ancient world. Therefore, using it to announce a person's giving would draw attention to their generosity. In fact, only someone making a significant donation would use a trumpet, as no one would announce a small gift.

Jesus said the purpose of making a show of generous donations would be to gain the "glory of men" (v. 2). Interestingly, the word for *glory* here is the same as the one used in 5:16. Matthew emphasized the contrast between the objects of glory: Whereas the "good works" of Christ's disciples will cause people to "glorify [the] Father" (5:16), the public display of generosity serves only to exalt the donors, not the Father. Therefore, Jesus called such givers *hypocrites*, a Greek word describing actors who wore masks to play different characters. These religious actors receive no reward beyond human praise.

§ *Why do some individuals settle for being praised by people?*

B. God-Honoring Giving (Matthew 6:3-4)

³ But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: ⁴ That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

Charitable giving should be a private matter between us and God, driven solely by genuine concern for the poor. Whether anyone else knows of our gifts or the amount is irrelevant, because our heavenly Father sees what we do in secret and will reward us.

In that day when we as believers stand before Christ and our deeds are judged, if we have acted with the right motive, we will sustain our reward. If we have been improperly motivated in our actions, we will sustain a loss of reward. This has nothing to do with our salvation, but rather with the measure in which we will be able to enter into the joy of our Lord. It has everything to do with whether or not we are glorifying God (5:16).

Money Talks

Money talks. It says, “Goodbye.” If you doubt this, answer the question, “How much money did I make in the last ten years?” Then answer, “How much do I have left?” Also ask, “And how much do I have stored in Heaven?”—Brian Kluth

2. CHRISTIAN PRAYER

A. How Not to Pray (Matthew 6:5-8)

⁵ And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. ⁶ But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. ⁷ But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. ⁸ Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

Jesus addressed the distinction between performative piety and authentic righteousness through a detailed discussion on prayer. The second group of pious performers consists of those who pray merely to be “seen by men” (v. 5 NKJV). In ancient Jewish culture, there were designated times for prayer, typically in the early morning, afternoon, and evening. At these set times, devout Jews would pause their activities to pray. They could choose to pray privately or to go to the synagogues or public streets to ensure that others saw and heard their prayers. While prayer is a vital spiritual discipline, Jesus criticized making a public show of prayer for attention, saying such prayers are not genuine expressions of faith. Instead, He encouraged private, heartfelt prayers.

We need to understand Jesus was not opposed to public prayers or even praying aloud, as He sometimes prayed aloud in a synagogue and in other places (Matt. 11:25; 14:19; 15:6; John 17:1-26). What He emphasized, though, is God sees private prayers and encounters us “in the secret place” (Matt. 6:6 NKJV), where heartfelt prayers are offered. God is present in the secret place, away from the eyes of others, where it is purely about the relationship between us and God.

In addition to private prayers, Jesus instructed His disciples, “Use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do” (v. 7). The word *heathen* is the common expression for “Gentiles” in Matthew. The focus here is less on their non-Jewish identity and more on their status as being outside the kingdom of God. Jesus used two phrases to characterize the prayers of non-disciples: “babbling” and “many words” (v. 7 NIV). Jesus was not prohibiting the repetition of phrases or long prayers. There have been times when I have been so burdened with life’s struggles that all I could say was, “Help me, God” over and over again. What Jesus opposes is the mindless repetition of words and praying lengthy prayers without sincerity. The focus should be on meaningful communication with God. Prayer transforms us and aligns our motivations, desires, and principles with God’s will.

§ *What does God already know (v. 8), and how should this affect how we pray (v. 7)?*

B. Model Prayer (Matthew 6:9-15)

⁹ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. ¹⁰ Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. ¹⁴ For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: ¹⁵ But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

To guide His disciples in prayer, Jesus provided the “Our Father,” or “the Lord’s Prayer,” as a model for us to follow (vv. 9-13). Some have suggested a better title for the prayer is “The Disciples’ Prayer,” since it teaches His followers how to pray. In light of Jesus’ discussion on “vain repetitions,” it is ironic that this prayer is often repeated mechanically, without much thought or meaning behind it. This prayer is a model for proper communal prayer rather than a rigid formula. Jesus does not expect this prayer to be a word-for-word script. Instead, it is a guide that teaches us key principles of prayer. These themes guide us in structuring our prayers according to God’s priorities but allow flexibility in how we express our needs, gratitude, or concerns. Instead of rigidly repeating the words, we use them as a foundation to pray authentically from the heart, incorporating the core elements of reverence, submission, and trust in God.

The prayer can easily be divided into four parts: (1) address to God (v. 9); (2) requests focused on God’s name, kingdom, and will (vv. 9-10); (3) requests focused on human needs (vv. 11-13); (4) conclusion or doxology (v. 13).

The prayer opens by calling on God: “Our Father which art in heaven” (v. 9). The word for *Father* here is translated from *Abba*, which expresses affection and closeness within the safe embrace of a loving father’s care. While children might have used “Abba” as a loving term like we say “Daddy,” it also carried a much deeper meaning in the spiritual lives of adults. When Jesus instructs His disciples to address God as “Our Father,” He invites us to enter into the close relationship He

has with God the Father. Furthermore, His directive highlights the familial bond we have with fellow Christian believers and with Jesus as our Brother. Although the word *Father* suggests closeness and accessibility to God, the addition of “in heaven” indicates the need for a reverent approach. This reverence is reflected in the following three requests.

The first three requests prioritize God’s name, kingdom, and will over our personal needs. Our prayer requests should come after we center our attention on God. The first request, “Hallowed be thy name” (v. 9), can also be translated as “May Your name be holy.” The word *name* represents God’s identity, character, and reputation. Since God is holy, He is set apart from all the earth and deserves to be approached with the highest reverence and respect.

The next two requests, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,” reflect the believer’s longing for the complete realization of God’s kingdom. Both John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed the arrival of God’s kingdom in the world (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). However, while God’s kingdom is already present, it has not yet fully arrived. Consequently, we continue to look forward to its ultimate fulfillment. Praying for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in Heaven is equivalent to asking for the arrival of God’s kingdom. For God’s will to be accomplished here on earth, we must align our words and actions with His will, just as Jesus submitted to the Father’s will (26:24). The full realization of God’s will on earth will happen only when His kingdom arrives in its final form, overthrowing all evil authority (Rev. 20:1–10) and completing the restoration of the earth (cf. Rom. 8:18–25). However, Jesus’ disciples serve as a living testimony that God’s will can be experienced in the present.

After focusing our attention on God, we then make our prayer requests. “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11) highlights our need for daily provisions. The mention of “bread” represents all our physical and material needs. This request acknowledges that even the simplest food is

provided by God. Many of us in the Western world have enough food to last us a week or more, which makes the idea of depending on God for today's meal seem strange to us. This request brings to mind the Israelites' daily provision of manna in the wilderness, where they were instructed not to gather extra for the next day. Just as manna was provided one day at a time, we must trust God for our daily needs. This request emphasizes a continual dependence on God.

The next request asks God to "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (v. 12). The word *debts* acknowledges the depth of our forgiveness by God and our obligations to Him. This phrase serves as a reminder of the mercy and grace we receive, and the importance of extending the same forgiveness to others. Just as we receive forgiveness for our debts, we are called to forgive those who have wronged us. This act not only preserves the joy of our salvation but also serves as a powerful testament to the world that we are Jesus' disciples. Forgiving others reflects our willingness to "bless . . . and pray for" those who have hurt us (5:44). Moreover, we find our forgiveness rooted in the forgiveness we extend to others.

The final request, "And lead us not into temptation" (6:13), does not mean God is the One who tempts us to do evil. The Greek word for *temptation* can mean either "test" or "temptation," so this request likely asks the Father to spare us from difficult trials or give us strength to resist temptation. Testing itself is not negative. In fact, James 1:2-3 emphasizes that tests produce perseverance, which leads to maturity. However, it is natural to try to avoid trials and hardships. So, the petition "lead us not into temptation" reflects our desire to be spared such tests, even though we acknowledge they strengthen our faith. Moreover, later, Jesus urged His disciples, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41). This is a powerful reminder that Jesus does not lead us into temptation, but instead encourages us to be vigilant and prayerful in order to overcome challenges. The second part of the petition can be translated as either

“deliver us from evil” or “deliver us from the evil one” (NKJV). It is not God but the devil who tempts us. This prayer acknowledges our need for God’s help and protection from being drawn into evil by the devil.

The prayer ends with a doxology: “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (6:13). In the context of asking for God’s kingdom to come (v. 10), this is a fitting way to end the prayer. The phrase “thine is the kingdom” acknowledges all authority rests with God, not with earthly rulers. “And the power” affirms God is all-powerful, with nothing beyond His ability to achieve. “The glory” emphasizes only God is worthy of our worship. Together, these expressions declare God’s kingdom, power, and glory are eternal.

Jesus concluded His teaching on prayer by emphasizing the importance of the fifth request, which focuses on forgiving others (vv. 12, 14-15). It is a powerful reminder that salvation is not achieved through our own efforts, but solely through God’s grace and mercy. After receiving forgiveness and salvation, we are called to extend the same forgiveness to others. This act of forgiveness is the proof that we have been forgiven.

Available and Endless

God is the great reality. His resources are available and endless. His promises are real and glorious, beyond our wildest dreams.—J. B. Phillips

3. CHRISTIAN FASTING

A. False Fasting (Matthew 6:16)

¹⁶ Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

After His lengthy discussion on prayer, Jesus shifted back to contrasting performative and genuine righteousness by addressing the third pillar of Jewish faith: *fasting*. Just as with almsgiving

and prayer, we should not draw attention to ourselves through obvious signs of abstaining from food. We should avoid disfiguring our faces by neglecting grooming or by intentionally looking sad to signal the difficulties we are experiencing during the fast. The “reward” of those who do so will be the temporary praise of others.

Authenticity Required

In the film *The Mask*, Ipkiss transforms from an insecure man to a confident figure when he wears a magical mask, gaining attention and admiration. This mirrors Matthew 6:1-18, where Jesus warns against seeking recognition for our acts of righteousness. Just as Ipkiss performs for an audience, we can sometimes act for approval. True devotion to Christ requires authenticity; our prayers, giving, and fasting should come from a genuine heart, reflecting God’s love rather than seeking praise.

B. Genuine Fasting (Matthew 6:17-18)

¹⁷ But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; ¹⁸ That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Instead of showing off our fast, we are encouraged to put oil on our heads and wash our faces, appearing joyful and content (v. 17). In doing so, we will manifest a spirit of celebration while fasting. The real reward for fasting in secret is the recognition from the Father, who will reward us “openly” (v. 18). Fasting in secret does not mean we cannot fast together as a community. Throughout the Bible, there are examples of entire communities fasting (Judg. 20:26; Ezra 8:21-23; Jonah 3:4). It simply means when we fast, we should do so without drawing attention to ourselves or seeking recognition from others.

§ *Why should Jesus’ disciples sometimes both pray and fast?*

GLORIFYING GOD

This lesson highlights our righteous actions should honor God, not ourselves. In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, we are encouraged to look closely at our hearts, motives, and intentions. Whether we are giving, praying, fasting, preaching, teaching, singing, or volunteering, we should ask ourselves if we are doing it for others to notice or out of love for God. Our primary aim should be to wholeheartedly serve God because of our love for Him. Prioritizing our own rewards as the main motivation for our actions puts us at the center, which is the hypocrisy Jesus warns us about.

Daily Devotions

- M. Example of Generous Giving (Exodus 35:20-29)
- T. Example of Heartfelt Prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10)
- W. Fasting, a Sign of Genuine Repentance (Jonah 3:1-10)
- T. Fasting to Battle the Enemy (Matthew 4:1-11)
- F. Give Thoughtfully and Cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
- S. Prayer for Spiritual Strength (Ephesians 3:14-21)