

STUDY GUIDE



TRANSFORMED
TRANSFORMED IN MY WORSHIP
MATTHEW 6:1-8, 16-18
09/11/2016

MAIN POINT

Giving, praying, and fasting are disciplines of personal worship.

INTRODUCE

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

When has an activity or hobby been effortless for you?

What comes to mind when you hear the word “worship”? List some ways that we worship.

What disciplines or experiences in your life have acted like sails, propelling you forward in your spiritual growth?

It's remarkable how a sailboat can cut effortlessly across the water. No roaring engines drown out the simplicity and beauty of the boat. A gifted sailor knows how to catch the wind. It takes work to position his sails correctly, but once he's done it, his boat moves at a pace he could never produce by his own effort. Jesus preached a masterful sermon found in Matthew 5-7; we call it the Sermon on the Mount. In it, He spoke of three disciplines—three sails, if you will—that, when we correctly apply them, allow us to catch God's power and experience a life we could never produce on our own. These disciplines are the sails of worship.

WATCH THE SESSION 1 VIDEO.

READ AND REFLECT

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 6:1-4.

When you worship someone or something, what are you stating about them?

What are the practical implications of Jesus' warning in verse 1?

Why do you think Jesus issued a warning about rewards?

Jesus introduced a critical principle to His disciples to practice as they worshiped and served Him—their devotion was a matter of the heart. And, what motivated their service to Him as citizens of the kingdom of God was important. Believers were to be motivated by sincere, wholehearted eagerness to please Him alone.

In what ways does your attitude toward giving reflect your attitude of worship?

How would you describe worship that is pleasing to God?

Worship is our genuine response to the greatness of God. Sincere worship transforms our hearts and motivations. Our giving, praying, and fasting should be done out of heartfelt adoration for God. Jesus teaches in these verses that seeking out attention or personal glory for ourselves when we give to help others doesn't honor God.

When has giving felt like an act of worship to you?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 6:5-8.

Who taught you to pray? Who are you teaching to pray?

Since God already knows our needs before we ask, what's the point of practicing consistent, private prayer?

What are some ways we sometimes show arrogance or pride in our prayers?

Jesus rebuked the hypocrites for the way they prayed in the same way He rebuked them for the way they gave. The hypocrites headed to the street corners and made a great show of their prayers. Since God knew their hearts, their actions didn't impress Him.

What prevents prayer from being an act of worship?

What words would you use to describe your prayer life?

Jesus said we should pray in the same way He said we should give: humbly and privately. As with giving, Jesus wasn't speaking against praying publicly; He spoke against praying for the attention and approval of others. When we pray, we're to focus our attention solely on God.

When has praying felt like an act of worship to you?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 6:16-18.

How would you describe your experience with fasting?

In what part of your life are you most tempted to do things for the praise of people rather than the praise of God?

When Jesus addressed the practice of fasting, He confronted the same problem as before—it was more of an outward show. It was fake. The Pharisees smeared ashes on their faces, so that they walked the streets they would look gaunt

and physically unwell. They wanted everyone to notice the agony they were in as they fasted. The people's sympathetic response to the hypocrites' pitiful state was their only reward, Jesus declared.

Besides food, what are some things you can give up as part of a fast?

APPLY

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

Are you areas of worship—giving, praying, and fasting—being displayed for others to see, or are they between you and God? If the former, how will you alter your worship?

What results can we expect when we worship God through giving, praying, and fasting?

PRAY

Thank God for giving us tools like giving, prayer, and fasting, with which we can grow in our relationship with Him. Ask God to help you carefully consider your motives for engaging in spiritual disciplines.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 6:1-18

6:1. This verses serves as an introduction to all of 6:1-18. It establishes the theme of doing acts of righteousness before men, and thus losing reward from your Father in heaven. Jesus' exhortation emphasizes the need to be on the alert to the temptation to seek our reward from men. Jesus was not condemning the righteous acts themselves. His concern was the motivation behind the actions. The same act of obedience can be right or wrong, depending on why a person does the act.

The opening when (v. 2) implies that this was a teaching that applied to any instance of giving. Jesus began by telling His hearers not to give alms, ascribing such ostentatious behavior to the hypocrites (referring to the scribes and Pharisees of 5:20). Key to the passage is the explanation of their motive: to be honored by men. In this first example, Matthew uses a verb meaning praise (5:16), whereas in the second and third examples, he uses another verb meaning "to make visible" (active), "to be seen" (passive). The meanings of the words overlap, but the concern is the tendency toward competition with God for glory.

"Giving" or "almsgiving" is the translation of terms meaning "perform an act of mercy." By the first century, the phrase came to mean specifically the act of giving to the needy. This kind of giving was not mandatory in Scripture, for it was above and beyond the three required tithes. God's people are not to give to draw attention to themselves. In classical Greek, the term hypocrite referred to an actor on stage, wearing a mask. In the New Testament, it came to have a negative connotation, referring to someone putting on an act (i.e., masking the truth). Jewish rabbis taught that almsgiving received especially high reward.

6:3-5. Verse 3 begins with the strong adversative, But when you. The emphasis on "you" was intended to draw a stark contrast between the hypocrites just described and Jesus' kingdom servants, the disciples of 5:1-2. Jesus' instruction in 6:3 is exaggerated wording intended to make the point: "Do all you can to avoid drawing attention to yourself." Since nothing escapes the eye of God, even the most private act is noticed and will be rewarded. Jesus' use of the title Father added warmth to His guarantee of reward. This is not to be seen as a mechanical kind of relationship. Rather, the gift from the heart is given out of love for the Father, and the reward is returned as to a dearly beloved Son.

The reward (6:4,6,18) is not unrelated to the concept of reward in 6:1. The first word leans more toward the idea of repayment; thus, the idea of reimbursement for our "expense" incurred in each act of righteousness. But the point is the Father rewarding His servants. We were "created to do good works" (Eph. 2:10). In keeping with the instruction of 5:16 to "let your light shine," our Father in heaven will reward us for good works. The issue for the Pharisees was works apart from God's righteousness. The Pharisees were trying to establish their own righteousness by works.

6:6-8. Jesus' instructions on prayer began with a warning. Jesus was cautioning against praying in public with the motive of receiving admiring glances and pats on the back for being so devout. Jesus instructed us to find a private place for prayer where thoughts of people's responses won't distract us (v. 6). Thus in secret we can focus on the Father. A second mistake when praying is to babble (v. 7). Jesus was not forbidding prayer for the same thing over and over (see 26:39-44). He even told parables about persistence in prayer (Matt. 7:7-11). Jesus stressed that the Father listens to earnest hearts, not endless words. Jesus reminded us the Father knows the things we need before we ask Him (v. 8). This is not to discourage us from making specific requests in prayer, for He invites us to do that (7:7-11). It does assure us that He will answer in ways that best meet our needs, further His kingdom, and enhance our usefulness.

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 to be recited (v. 9). 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; Lev. 22:31-32). This is an important precondition for successful prayer. God is the ideal Father—all-loving, all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful, and always present with us. At the same time, He is in heaven, which tells us He is greater than we can comprehend; so we approach Him as our Father with due reverence. Our implies that Jesus intended this prayer to be a model for prayer for when disciples gather as a group.

6:10. Your kingdom come (v. 10) could be translated "Your reign come." The kingdom has come in the hearts of all who have submitted to Jesus as Lord. It also is coming as more people yield their hearts to His reign. The kingdom will not have come fully, though, until Jesus returns and establishes it absolutely and forever. To pray for the Father to see that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven frightens some people. Heaven is the only place free of sin and its painful effects. We should daily pray for the future coming of God's rule in which He will reign fully and completely over the world.

6:11-13. In verse 11, the prayer's focus shifts from God's eternal purposes to our temporal needs. We are to request what we need to sustain life, such as daily bread. Daily may be understood as "for today" or "for tomorrow," in either case pointing to immediate need. This prayer reminds us that our Father is our Provider. As a wise father, God provides what we need, not necessarily what we want. We also are to ask for forgiveness. Debts are sins viewed as obligations to the Father. The Greek grammar indicates that the disciple prays for forgiveness from God only after having first expressed forgiveness to others. The final petition has puzzled many believers—Do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. We know God is good and does not tempt us to sin (James 1:13), so how are we to understand this? The overall meaning is obvious: the prayer is for the Father to keep us doing His will rather than being led astray by Satan.

6:14-15. These verses further exhort the kingdom servant concerning the necessity of forgiveness in human relationships if we expect God's forgiveness. These verses, and 18:21-35, explain 6:12. Receiving God's forgiveness motivates forgiveness toward others. Jesus expects us to replace this specific petition with more personalized requests for forgiveness for the specific sins in our own lives.

6:16-18. Fasting is the spiritual discipline of refraining from normal routines of eating and drinking in order to focus on repentance or prayer. Just as Jesus assumed His followers would give to the poor (Matt. 6:2) and pray (v. 5), He also assumed they would fast. The approach of the hypocrites in fasting was again to draw attention to themselves. By looking sad-faced and unattractive they insured others noticed they were fasting. Jesus ridiculed such theatrics as achieving the attention the hypocrites craved but missing the purpose of fasting. The spiritual discipline of fasting is essentially a private experience between the worshiper and God. The obvious way to safeguard fasting from hypocrisy is to keep it a secret. Then God will reward you. Self-denial of any sort is counter-cultural in our day. Choosing to give up pleasure of any kind certainly gains notice. Our motives to live a life of purity and sobriety and simplicity may be genuine at the start, but we all are vulnerable to enjoying the praise of others for these motives.