

## Matthew 6

Verses 1-4 begin the emphasis on a singular point: Check your motives for doing things. God is really interested in what's happening inside of you, not just on the surface.

*Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. (6:1)*

First-century Jews surely practiced hypocrisy differently, but social media has only multiplied the ways we are able to represent ourselves as better than we really are. Today, we might call this “[virtue signaling](#).”

Jesus is urging his followers to be congruent—for their insides to match their outsides.

The problem most of us face is that we *really* don't want other people to see what's inside of the neatly manicured persona we've cultivated. But here's the thing: God already sees. So we might as well stop pretending and allow Him to meet us right where we are.

### Questions:

1. What parts of your life are incongruent? (Where do your insides not match what you project to the world?)

Spend a few moments in prayer, asking God to show you where you're doing the right things for the wrong reasons. Invite him to help you become congruent.

In verses 5-15, Jesus illustrates his message with three examples: giving, praying, and fasting. These were three of the major spiritual practices of his Jewish followers, but they're by no means comprehensive.

What he's asking throughout this section is this: Whose approval are you seeking? If you're making a donation to curry favor with the senior minister, you might get it, but God isn't moved or impressed. If you're praying so that others will think you're spiritually “together,” they might revere you, but God would prefer you shoot straight with Him.

Today's reading strikes a nerve in me. Some days, our prayers are the overflow of personal time spent with the Lord in prayer and Scripture. But there are other days when we speak from a shallow spiritual reserve, with words that lack the intimacy and power borne of time spent with God in quiet stillness.

What Jesus offers here is a framework. He doesn't literally mean, "Don't pray out loud," or "Only pray these words." He's guiding us in conversation with God. Here's what each of these prayer starters may mean:

*Our Father who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.*

Grounding our prayer in *who* God is, is a good place to start.

Jesus invites us to experience God as our Father, and he reminds us that God is holy.

He's encouraging us to "make eye contact" with the one to whom we are speaking.

Who do you see when you look at God in prayer?

*Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.*

We are invited to recognize God's agenda—to unite heaven and earth. To restore the world.

It's helpful to consider God will and desire before asking Him to get to work on our stuff.

When yielded to Him, we're more likely to make better requests anyway.

*Give us this day our daily bread,*

Give me enough for today. And let that be enough to satisfy me.

*And forgive us our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors.*

Make me right with you.

As I am making things right with others.

*And lead us not into **temptation**,  
But deliver us from evil.*

Keep us from being tested,

But when we are, rescue us from the bad around us, and the bad within us.

Amen.

Three more thoughts on this:

1. Do you notice that the pronouns in Jesus's prayer are plural? He says, "Our" and "us" not "My" and "me." Why do you think he does this?

2. The word he uses for temptation is “peirazo.” We talked a lot about this in Matthew 4, when Jesus was tested in the wilderness.
3. This framework for prayer starts by aligning us to God and His work on earth, and moves toward action. When we pray like Jesus, we are more concerned with how we’re growing in him than what we’re getting from him.

For more on the Lord’s Prayer, check out [Tim Mackie’s sermon here](#).

**Questions:**

- What are your prayer habits? Is prayer a foreign, forced, or familiar practice?
- Take a moment to walk through each line of the Lord’s Prayer and put it in your own words. By doing this, some of the crust and dust will be shaken off, so the words might mean more to you than before.
- After you’ve paraphrased each chunk, take a moment to flesh out the specifics of how this works in your own life. (For example, when you are in the section on temptation, pray through specific ways you are being tempted.)
- Why do you think Jesus used plural pronouns in his framework for prayer? How does this compare to how you normally pray?

Read verses 16-18. “The man who fasts is no more in the way to heaven than the man who never prays.” –John Wesley

Ouch. To fast is typically thought of as abstaining from food as a spiritual discipline for an established period of time. Most of us have had to fast for a blood test or surgery at some point. Very few of us have willingly entered a fast for spiritual reasons. So why *would* you fast?

Throughout history, people in pursuit of God have experienced fasting as a way to intensify prayer and heighten our sensitivity to the Spirit of God. By denying our body comfort (and in many cases, distraction), we are forced to sit with our thoughts and feelings in different ways.

In today's reading, Jesus simply *assumes* his followers fast. He says, "And when you fast, do not look gloomy..."

If you're interested in learning more about fasting, [here's a teaching series with a set of practical tools](#) to get started from John Mark Comer at Bridgetown Church in Portland.

Also, [here's the manuscript from a sermon preached by John Wesley](#) in the early 1800s. Wesley fasted from sundown Thursday to sundown Friday and believed it was a necessary spiritual discipline.

**Questions:**

- Do you fast? Or do you abstain from anything physical in order to focus on the spiritual?
- When you do deny yourself something physical for spiritual reasons, do you make a show of it so people will think well of you?

Read verses 19-24. There are passages in Scripture that we often qualify or soften, thinking, "Surely he didn't mean that." This might be one of them. At least for today, let's try to take Jesus at face value.