

SIMPLE FAITH

Prayer and Fasting Minus All the Pizzazz

Matthew 6:9–18



LET'S BEGIN HERE

It is not necessary to have lived in Jesus' day in order to understand His concerns. Our times include vivid illustrations of the very things that troubled our Lord. Religious performance. Theatrical displays. Showmanship. Competition. Hypocrisy. Piety on stage for the purpose of making a good impression . . . the whole nine yards.

How timely are the Master's words! What an indictment of the twenty-first century!

As we go deeper into His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' words turn our attention from all the circus-like pizzazz of performance to the simplicity of prayer and fasting, two disciplines all-too-rarely done His way for His glory. Let's seek out His counsel so we can carry out His instructions.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. A Brief Review: Some Thoughts on Giving and Praying

Jesus began this section on devotional practices with a general warning against performing religious deeds just to get noticed by others. When we feign righteousness, we remove opportunities for God to be praised in the public square and take for ourselves the credit He deserves. Furthermore, we miss the rewards that He has reserved for us.



Quotable

*Our hope rests
on the foundation
of the death and
resurrection of
Christ. It all builds
up from there.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. Further Instruction: More Thoughts on Praying and Fasting (Matthew 6:9–18)

As Jesus continued His thoughts on devotional practices, He offered a sample prayer that His followers could use as a pattern in their own prayers: begin by focusing on God, and only then focus on personal needs and confessions. Let's examine this prayer—known as the Lord's Prayer—and then turn our attention, as Jesus did in His sermon, to the religious practice of fasting.



A CLOSER LOOK

Don't Miss It!

When we study the Lord's Prayer, one of the most familiar passages in all of Scripture, we tend to miss certain details, to pass over bits of information because we've spoken or read or heard it so many times. This is often the case with the very beginning of the Lord's Prayer, which opens with the regularly ignored word *our*.

Our prompts us to see ourselves not as isolated individuals but as part of a people brought together to worship God. Speaking *our* at the beginning of a prayer drives us out of ourselves and reminds us that, as Christians, we are connected with others. Of course, prayer is, if nothing else, reaching out to connect with someone else—the Lord Himself. Therefore, when we say *Our Father*, we reach outside of ourselves, both to God and to the community of His followers.

This act, so simple, reminds us that we need others and that we can no longer rely on ourselves. Nor can we continue to hold on to that which divides us from our fellow believers. *Our* opens us to the ministry of the church—both to receive gifts and service from God and His people and to see our responsibility to give to and serve God and His people.



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LET'S LIVE IT

Devotional practices are a significant part of the Christian life—they matter. But how do we start making them habits? How can we ensure we aren't engaging in them for the attention they might bring?

- First, *make the heavenly Father your main focus*. This means we need to actively avoid making people our main focus.
- Second, *make the secret place your primary platform*. Too many people only actively devote themselves to God in public. However, each of the devotional practices that Jesus addressed in the first half of Matthew 6—giving, prayer, and fasting—can best be practiced alone, in the quiet of our own knowledge that we are living in proper relationship to God.

Have you memorized the Lord's Prayer? If not, commit to memorizing it this week, beginning now.



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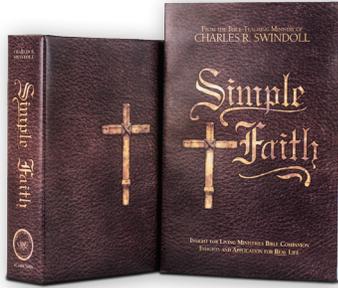
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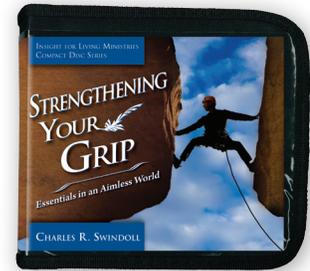
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