

Worship without Hypocrisy

Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18

King of Kings! (Gospel of Matthew Series)

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It is not the being seen of men that is wrong, but doing these things for the purpose of being seen of men. The problem with the hypocrite is his motivation. He does not want to be holy; he only wants to seem to be holy. He is more concerned with his reputation for righteousness than about actually becoming righteous. The approbation of men matters more to him than the approval of God.

AURELIUS AUGUSTINE

Open your Bible to **Matthew 6:1-8**. We are continuing in a series entitled: “King of kings.” This morning we are talking about “Worship without Hypocrisy.” We continue in our study of the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus has just described the inner character and attitudes of a person in His Kingdom family. Now he is moving from inner attitudes to outward actions. Remember Jesus said that we need to be salt and light in the world so that people would see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.

The Beatitudes and Brokenness

poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
mourn, for they shall be comforted.
meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
pure in heart, for they shall see God.
peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
persecuted for righteousness’

Attitude of Humility

So the Beatitudes speak of our “attitudes”. Now Jesus begins to warn us of how these attitudes bring fruit in our lives. Essentially what Jesus is going to say is that our worship must be humble. It must not be put on for men, but broken before God.

Temptation to Pride / Inner Corruption

The problem with outward righteousness is the temptation to inner pride and corruption. Jesus knew that and that’s why He warned against it. **Matthew 6:1**, “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.”

Quotes

Stephen Charnock famously said, “It is a sad thing to be Christians at a supper, heathens in our shops, and devils in our closets.”¹

Robert Murray M’Cheyne said, “It is the mark of a hypocrite to be a Christian everywhere but home.”²

Audience of One

In order to exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, our outward actions have to be for an audience of ONE. If so we will be consistent in all areas of life.

Our Lord has just introduced what Kingdom life is like. Jesus gives **six examples** that demonstrate a righteousness, a heart transformation that “exceeds the superficial righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees.”

1. Kingdom citizens take **anger** seriously. We see even sinful anger and insults as murder.
2. We take **lust** seriously. They don’t even want to look with lust, as they, like our Lord, consider it adultery.
3. We take **marriage** and divorce seriously. We believe there is no reason for divorce.
4. We take our **word** seriously. Everything we say is like an oath.
5. We take **mercy** seriously. We don’t retaliate.
6. We take **love** seriously, even to the point of loving our enemies.

A. Plummer aptly summarizes vv. 1–18 as follows: “The light of a Christian character will shine before men and win glory for God without the artificial aid of public advertisement. Ostentatious religion may have its reward here, but it receives none from God.”³

Christians who judge successful ministries by external statistics such as attendance figures, membership, baptisms, and offerings should seriously rethink their criteria in light of Jesus’ words here. God judges the greatness of his servants by searching their hearts, examining their inner attitudes, and seeing deeds done in secret. Doubtless, his evaluations of who most honors him will invert a substantial majority of his people’s evaluations.⁴

Practicing the Presence of God: Coram Deo

How shall we live out this righteousness? Before men or before God? The true member of God’s kingdom family rejects the fear of man and lives in the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. The motto of the church of the Reformation was: Coram Deo, live in the face of God. We reject the temptation to do anything to be seen of men. This at its core is hypocrisy. We must never do anything to please men. All that we do, we do that God might enjoy it. We are made for His pleasure. We are made to please him, not human beings.

¹ Stephen Charnock. *A Puritan Golden Treasury* (Banner of Truth: Carlisle, PA, 2000), 152.

² Andrew A. Bonar. *Memoir and Remains of the Reverend Robert Murry M’Cheyne* (Edinburgh: William Oliphant and Co., 1764), 379.

³ A. Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (London: E. Stock, 1909), 90.

⁴ Blomberg, C. (1992). *Vol. 22: Matthew*. The New American Commentary (122). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Reading of Holy Scripture

Matthew 6:1–8, “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. 2 “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

5 “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Matthew 6:16–18, “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Worship Not Just Sunday Morning

As we see here, humble worship ought to characterize all our life. Worship is not just on Sunday morning, but a 24/7 walking with God. But when we gather, there is a temptation for hypocrisy.

Three Examples of Hypocrisy in Worship

Jesus speaks of three great examples of hypocrisy in worship: giving, praying, and fasting. It is interesting that when we think of “worship” we think of the Sunday morning service.

Let’s understand that worship is much more than that. Worship is our daily lives lived out for God. We ought to be those who are generous and quiet with our **giving**, dependant on God with our **praying**, and serious about God with our **fasting**.

Doing any of our worship to be seen of men is not worship of God, but worship of self. Our worship ought to be for God. Jesus is not discouraging us from giving, praying or fasting, but telling us to have the right motive. Jesus is discouraging a deceitful, proud, or self-centered heart. God wants us to **give**. He wants us to **pray**! He wants us to **fast**. In all these things we should not *“wear our religion on our coat sleeves.”*

This morning three things in this text that grab our attention. We’re going to see:

- A **Warning** about Hypocrisy (1)
- **Giving** that Pleases God (2-4)
- **Praying** that Pleases God (5-8)
- **Fasting** that Pleases God (16-18)

I. **A Warning** about Hypocrisy (6:1).

Matthew 6:1, “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.”

What Not to Do in Worship

Jesus then begins to tell us what NOT to do if you are to be righteous in your heart before God. He tells us how not to give, how not to pray, how not to fast, not to lay up treasure on earth, and not to worry. This is all necessary teaching because we all by nature struggle greatly with self-righteousness.

A Contradiction?

It seems there might be a contradiction in Jesus’ teaching. In Matthew 5, Jesus says we should “let our light shine” so that they may see our good works and glorify God. Now in chapter 6, it seems Jesus is saying the opposite. How is that?

Actually, Jesus is not talking about whether or not we should do good works, but what is our motivation for obedience and good works. Our obedience is actually not full obedience if our heart is not close to God. Unless we are living for God’s smile and pleasure, then we are missing the point of the Christian life. God does not want our religious activity. He wants our heart.

As Aurelius Augustine said:

It is not the being seen of men that is wrong, but doing these things for the purpose of being seen of men. The problem with the hypocrite is his motivation. He does not want to be holy; he only wants to seem to be holy. He is more concerned with his reputation for righteousness than about actually becoming righteous. The approbation of men matters more to him than the approval of God.⁵

Example of King Saul

King Saul of the Old Testament was one who would use his spirituality as a smoke screen to hide his selfish, self-centered heart. Saul had the idea that as long as he sacrificed and did the religious rituals that God required, that God was pleased. But do you remember what God said? “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” In other words God is tired of all our religious rituals, church attendance and Bible knowledge if it there is no real life change.

God is not impressed with all our outward righteousness. What God wants is inward righteousness (described in the beatitudes).

No Reward

Jesus says if we do our righteous and religious acts to for the admiration of men, then we lose our heavenly reward for that deed.

It is possible to pray for your enemies and have no reward. It is possible to preach like an angel and have no reward. Why? Because it is possible to do all these things for the recognition of men and not of God.

I find this terrifying, for it means that my life, which is ostensibly given to God, can in the end count for nothing. The outwardly most self-effacing saint in our congregation may have all

⁵ Philip Schaff. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers First Series*, St. Augustine, p. 37

his “good deeds” rejected. Jesus does not want that to happen. He is aware that those who have begun to fulfill his Word can be in great danger.⁶

Transition: Now the Lord gives us three examples of how NOT to worship Him. Let’s first look at **Giving that pleases God.**

II. **Giving that Pleases God (6:2-4).**

Matthew 6:2-4, “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Giving to the Needy

Jesus’ first example of religious practice is almsgiving, or giving to the poor (vv. 1–4). The Old Testament taught this duty.

- The **Law** declared in **Deut. 15:11**, “There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land” (cf. vv. 7–11; also Exod. 23:10–11; Lev. 19:10; and Ps. 112:9).
- **Proverbs 19:17** says, “He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done.”
- **Proverbs 29:7** says, “The righteous care about justice for the poor.”
- **Psalms 41:1** says, “Blessed is he who has regard for the weak.”⁷

Even the Jewish rabbis said, “Greater is he who gives alms than he who offers sacrifices” and “He who gives in secret is greater than Moses.”⁸ Jesus taught that this is a religious duty for the believer, for he is not *telling* us to give alms in these verses; he is *assuming* we will do it.⁹

HOW NOT TO GIVE

The Temple Trumpets

Jesus says in **Matthew 6:2-4**, “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others.

The wrong way to give is to *blow your own horn*. If Jesus was speaking of a literal practice, he was probably describing the sound of the temple trumpets that called citizens to come and give. What a great opportunity to show off! The trumpets would blare, and people would be seen scurrying along the streets toward the temple with pious looks on their faces. “Hey, folks, look at my zeal! Big giver on the way to the temple here!”¹⁰

⁶ Hughes, R. K. (2001). *The sermon on the mount: The message of the kingdom*. Preaching the Word (146). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

⁷ Boice, J. M. (2002). *The Sermon on the Mount: An expositional commentary* (153). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

⁸ Cited by William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), vol. 1, 186.

⁹ Boice, 96.

¹⁰ Hughes, 147.

The Hypocrite, an Actor

Jesus says in **Matthew 6:2**: Don't be a hypocrite when you give. "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others."

The hypocrite (Greek- *hupokrites*) was originally an **actor**. On an actor there would be a mask. The actor would PRETEND to be something that he wasn't. He might be feeling sad that day, but play a happy character. He might be a poor peasant, but play a rich king.

No Mask Zone

We want Living Hope to be a "no mask zone". We want this to be a place where you can be broken - a hospital for sinners, not a show case for saints.

J C Ryle says that there is a kind of exercise of worship that:

"is public, and not private; plenty abroad, but none at home; plenty without, but none within; plenty in the tongue, but none in the heart. They are altogether unprofitable, good for nothing, they bear no fruit."¹¹

Caveat, Not that it is Never Seen by Men

The kind of righteousness that bears fruit is for God alone. It doesn't mean that it is never seen by men, but that the MOTIVE is for God, not for the admiration of others.

Giving with Wrong Motives

The truth is, the hypocrites described in Matthew 6 were not giving for the glory of God, or even for benefit of the needy. Giving so others will think we are good and generous is hypocrisy!¹² If ever we have a choice we ought to give anonymously. This is what Jesus goes on to say.

Human Admiration Your Only Reward

Don't give to be seen by others, Jesus says! If you give for the admiration and praise of men, then human admiration is the only reward you have!

Our Lord's language here is decisive, for the word translated "reward" (*apecho*) is a technical term for commercial transactions and means to "receive a sum in full and give a receipt for it."¹³

HOW THEN SHOULD WE GIVE?

Giving in Secret

Jesus says in **Matthew 6:3-4**, "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Our Lord uses an extreme, absurd illustration to emphasize the intense privacy that should be present when we give to help others. The right hand is the one we normally use in giving because

¹¹ J C Ryle. *The True Christian* (Evangelical Press, 1978), 281.

¹² Hughes, *ibid*.

¹³ Walter Bauer, William Arndt, and Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 84.

most of us are right-handed. Thus when we give, our giving must be so hidden that the left hand does not even see what is happening. The idea is, not only are we not to tell others of our giving—we are not to make a big deal of it to ourselves.¹⁴

Whenever we can, we ought to give anonymously. This is one reason why we have offering envelopes at church, so that no one can see what you are giving. We also have a box outside the sanctuary where you can give in a more private, anonymous way.

The Pantry Ministry

This is a good time to announce a new ministry that you will be seeing in our church in the months to come. We are calling it the Pantry. It will be a room downstairs where any member or regular attender can go and obtain non-perishable food, clothing, and other resources like technology, computers, or books. We will also have a “needs” suggestion box where anyone can let the church know about a specific need, and those needs can be made known to the congregation.

An Open Reward

Jesus says in **Matthew 6:4**, “And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Our motive must never be for temporal praise, but to hear the “Well Done Good and faithful servant” when we see our Lord face to face! If we give in secret, then he will shout His pleasure from the housetops.

Jesus says in **Luke 12:3**, “Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.” Things done in secret shall be made known! Your labor of love is never forgotten by God.

All A Gift

All that we have is a gift. There is nothing we didn’t already receive from God. He owns it all. We are just stewards. **1 Corinthians 4:7**, “For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”

Not only that, but we are going to give an account for our generosity. **Luke 12:48**, “To whom much is given much will be required”.

Transition: the second example of hypocrisy is in **prayer**. We ought to pray to please God not men.

III. Praying that Pleases God (6:5-8).

Matthew 6:5-8, “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.”

¹⁴ Hughes, *ibid.*

When You Pray

There is an assumption in all of these verses. He does not say if you pray, give or fast. He says “when”. These are things that believers are going to do. But there is a proper and improper way to approach God. We ought not do it for someone to see how spiritual we are.

Street Corner Performance Prayer

These hypocrites liked to engage in ostentatious public prayer in two places—at street corners and in the synagogues. Opportunities for their street corner performances came at the time of the daily afternoon temple sacrifice and during public fasts when the trumpets were blown as a sign that it was time to pray. Wherever a devout man was on the street, he stopped, faced the temple, and prayed. It was a perfect opportunity to let everybody see your stuff. You could time your afternoon stroll so that when the trumpet sounded, you were on a very prominent corner where you could lift your hands and pray for all to hear.¹⁵

You can imagine what their prayer would have been like, probably just as the Pharisee in **Luke 18:11–12**, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.” We find that he was not heard by God, nor was he justified by God.

Synagogue prayer was led by a member of the congregation who stood before the Ark of the Law (a cabinet that held the Scrolls for the books of the OT), raised his hands, and held forth. It was easy to become preachy, using all the right clichés, dramatic pauses, and voice variations to impress the crowd. The ecclesiastic exhibitionists loved it!

The Prayer Closet

But Jesus had other ideas. **Matthew 6:6**, “But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

The basic definition of prayer is “communion with God,” and if He is not involved there is only the pretense of prayer. Not only must He be involved, but centrally involved. Prayer is God’s provision; it is God’s idea, not man’s. There could be no prayer if God did not condescend to speak with us, and we could not know how to pray had He not chosen to instruct us.

Jesus’ teaching here is simple, in contrast to the complicated and difficult traditions. The phrase **when you pray** implies great latitude. No prescribed time or occasion is given by the Lord. The *tameion* (**inner room**) could be any sort of small room or chamber, even a storage closet. Such rooms were often secret and used to store valued possessions for protection. The idea is that of going to the most private place available.¹⁶

The Most Eloquent Prayers to God

Sometimes the most eloquent prayers to God have very few words. Sometimes they are just grunts and groans. **Romans 8:25–27**, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

Children’s Prayers

¹⁵ Hughes, 148-149.

¹⁶ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (366). Chicago: Moody Press.

When I think about the proper way to pray, I think of my own children. They are not so aware of themselves and have no need to impress others. I learn so much by praying with my own children, even our little Evan. Jesus said we should be the same way. We have “access” to the throne of Grace! We ought to approach boldly like a child to their father!

Jesus Not Condemning Public Prayer

Jesus was not condemning public prayer. He was condemning the desire to be *seen* praying publicly. The early church **thrived on public prayer**, as the opening chapters of Acts so beautifully attest (Acts 1:24; cf. 3:1; 4:24ff.).

Jesus does not forbid or condemn public prayer since Paul later commands that the church pray publically (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1–4). Jesus’ problem is with religious formalism. The primary point Jesus makes does not have to do with **location** but with **attitude**. If necessary, Jesus says, go to the most secluded, private place you can find so you will not be tempted to show off.¹⁷

Jesus was emphasizing that prayer is essentially a conversation between the believer and God. It is intrinsically **private**, not **exhibitionist**. Man is to shut out every distraction and focus on God.¹⁸ And if it is public, it needs to be earnest, simple, and not showy.

How we ought to realize that true prayer, even in public, is always intimate. Our eyes ought not to be on each other, but on God.

How Not to Pray

Matthew 6:7, “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.”

The particular fault Jesus singles out here is that of **meaningless repetition**. This practice was common in many pagan religions of that day, as it is in many religions today, including some branches of Christianity.

Use meaningless repetition is one word (from *battalogeō*) in the Greek and refers to idle, thoughtless chatter. It has the idea of mimicking the sounds of meaningless jabber.¹⁹

James Montgomery Boice set aside his characteristic optimism on one occasion when he told his congregation:

I believe that not one prayer in a hundred of those that fill our churches on a Sunday morning is actually made to Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are made to men or to the praying one himself, and that includes the prayers of preachers as well as those of the members of the congregation.²⁰

Even if this statement is only partially correct, we all need to do what we can to keep our own prayers free from vain repetition and self-promotion. Our responsibility is not to monitor our brother’s and sister’s prayer life but **our own**.²¹

God Knows What You Need

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Hughes, 149.

¹⁹ MacArthur, 368.

²⁰ Boice, 185.

²¹ Hughes, R. K. (2001). *The sermon on the mount: The message of the kingdom*. Preaching the Word (150). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

Matthew 6:8, Jesus says “Don’t be like the actors, the hypocrites.” Take off the mask! He says, “Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Martin Luther: Instructing Ourselves

Martin Luther said, “By our praying ... we are instructing ourselves [of our needs] more than we are him.” The purpose of prayer is not to inform or persuade God, but to come before Him sincerely, purposely, consciously, and devotedly.²²

Hebrews 4:16, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” God wants to help us. He knows your needs!

Prayer is sharing the needs, burdens, and hunger of our hearts before our heavenly **Father**, who **already knows what we need but who wants us to ask Him**. Prayer is our giving God the opportunity to manifest His power, majesty, love, and providence (cf. John 14:13).

1 John 5:15, “we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.”

A Single Attention to God Who Will Answer

To pray rightly is to pray with a devout heart and with pure motives. It is to pray with single attention to God rather than to other men. And it is to pray with sincere confidence that our heavenly Father both hears and answers every request made to Him in faith. He always repays our sincere devotion with gracious response. If our request is sincere but not according to His will, He will answer in a way better than we want or expect. But He will always answer.

DL Moody: God, Stop!

It is reported that D. L. Moody once felt so filled with God’s blessings that he prayed, “God, stop.” That is what God will do with every faithful believer who comes to Him as an expectant child to his father. God will smother him in more blessings than can be counted or named.²³

IV. Fasting that Pleases God (6:16-18).

The final “act of righteousness” Jesus discusses is fasting (vv. 16–18).

Matthew 6:16–18, “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Fasting in the Old Testament

In the **Old Testament**, fasting had been commanded only on the Day of Atonement, but during the Babylonian exile, regular fast days for remembrance of past disasters had been instituted and had become a major part of Jewish religion. A question about whether these fasts should continue after the return to the land of Israel was raised and answered in **Zechariah 7:5**, “for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted?” Significantly, Jesus answers it the same way here! The issue is not how often we should fast, he implies. It is how we fast and why.

²² John Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture: The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1978], 145.

²³ MacArthur, 369-370.

As far as the “how” is concerned, we are to do it privately before God and not to seek attention from men, exactly what Jesus said about giving to the poor and prayer. If we fast before other people, we will have a reward, but it will be from them only. There will be no reward in heaven.

Fasting in the New Testament

The examples we have for fasting in the New Testament are few. Jesus and his disciples were questioned because they did not fast like others.

Matthew 9:14–15, “the disciples of John came to Jesus, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” 15 And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.”

There is a time for the followers of Jesus to fast. When is it? Should we fast? Here we are assisted by examples found in the New Testament. Two are quite clear.

TWO PRIMARY EXAMPLES OF FASTING IN NT

Peter Fasting During a Time of New Direction

First, Peter was fasting in Joppa prior to receiving the vision of the great sheet let down from heaven, which led to the opening of the gospel to the Gentiles (see Acts 10:11).

Christians Fasting Before Great Missionary Journeys

Second, the Christians at Antioch were fasting when the Holy Spirit directed them to send Paul and Barnabas on the first great missionary journey (see Acts 13:2–3). Those were probably the two most significant moments in the history of the early Christian church, and in each case, the believers involved were seeking God and his will and were answered by strong, unmistakable, and historically significant directions.²⁴

Seeking God Earnestly

I think most of us are compelled to fast when we don’t have answers, when we are desperate for God. You might also fast, when you want to go deeper with God. Leonard Ravenhill tells of a man who would seclude himself for three weeks out of the year for more power and direction from God.

A Warning

But when we do fast, we must not do it to be seen of men. Matthew 6:17-18, “But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” We must not broadcast what we are doing. We must quietly trust and wait on God.

God will reward us! He always answers the sincere earnest and effectual prayer of a righteous person.

Conclusion

²⁴ Boice, 101.

In our worship we have an audience of ONE – God! Let us live to please Him. Let us not do our good works to be seen of men.