

## Practices & Formation (Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18)

# THE WAY

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Threefold pattern:

TRADITIONAL TEACHING

VICIOUS CYCLE

TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE

Our passage today: Matthew 6

Giving to the Needy: vv.2-4

\*next week - Prayer: vv.5-15

Fasting: vv. 16-18

Spiritual practices/Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)

TRADITIONAL TEACHING:

v.2: "when you give to the needy..."; v. 5 "when you pray..."; v. 16 "when you fast..."

Assumption of participation in these practices

## Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)

### TRADITIONAL TEACHING: Giving

Expected act of piety due to great poverty

OT precedent: care for poor and vulnerable (widows, orphans, foreigners)

Faithful followers of God/Jesus gave



## Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)

### TRADITIONAL TEACHING: Fasting

Abstaining from food (24 hrs)

Scot McKnight, *Fasting* (The Ancient Practices)

"fasting is a person's whole-body, natural response to life's sacred moments" and that "people fasted in the Bible in response to some grievous event in life – like death or the realization of sin or when the nation was threatened."



## Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)

### TRADITIONAL TEACHING: Fasting

John Mark Comer: "In fasting, you are literally praying with your body, offering all that you are to God in worship. As you yield your body to God, you are breaking the power of the flesh to control you and opening up to the power of the Spirit in its place. You are learning to be joyful, even when you don't get what you want. You are practicing suffering and, through it, increasing your capacity for joy in all circumstances."



## Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)

### TRADITIONAL TEACHING: Fasting

Dallas Willard: fast - "fixed, immovable, unyielding," "the person who is fasting is the person who is settled in their resolve. They are unmoved."



## Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)

### TRADITIONAL TEACHING: Fasting

#### Old Testament and Fasting:

Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) as a way to prepare for confession and forgiveness;

response to a grievous or horrible life event (ex: David fasts and prays for the healing of his enemies in Psalm 35)



## Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)

### TRADITIONAL TEACHING: Fasting

#### Old Testament and Fasting:

Doing justice, caring for poor (ex: Isaiah 58)

Seek God's help or intervention



## Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)

### TRADITIONAL TEACHING: Fasting

New Testament time period: many fasted twice a week; Pharisees

Still was happening and will happen



## Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)

### VICIOUS CYCLE

v.1: "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."

#### Righteousness:

act justly and in alignment with God's vision



## Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)

### VICIOUS CYCLE

Practices are often done in front of people

Issue hinges on "to be seen by them"

Issue: motivation



## Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)

VICIOUS CYCLE: giving and fasting to receive attention

v.2: "when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets"

v.2: "Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full" - they will get attention



## Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)

VICIOUS CYCLE: giving and fasting to receive attention

v.16: "disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting"

v.16: "Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full." - they will get attention



## Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)

VICIOUS CYCLE: giving and fasting to receive attention

People gain power and influence from publicly giving

Creates greater disparity and disunity

John Mark Comer: "If you do the practices for the wrong reasons... they work against your formation, not for it; they become a kind of parasitic infestation on your soul."



## Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)

TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE: do these practices in secret

v.3: "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing..."

v.17: look normal - "put oil on your head and wash your face"



## Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)

Flourishing are you when you give and fast in secret, without seeking recognition, but instead align yourselves with God's heart for equity and justice.



## Spiritual Practices (6:1-18)



## Takeaways

Engage in spiritual practices in order to be formed more like Jesus

Two from today: giving and fasting

Engage in spiritual practices without expecting recognition or attention from others

Be with Jesus, become like him, do what he did

