

TESTING YOUR MOTIVES

1. The Scripture: Giving, Prayer and Fasting

Giving to the Needy

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men: 1tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 3But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4so that your giving may be done in secret Then your Father, who sees what is .done in secret, will reward you.

Prayer

5"But when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. 6When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7And when you pray, do not keep on babbling Like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

9"Thus, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

*10your kingdom come, your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.*

11Give us today our daily bread.

*12Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

*13And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'*

14For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Fasting

16"When you fast do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. 17But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Matthew 6:1-18

II. Looking at the Scripture

To the Jews in the days of Jesus, there were three great pillars of spiritual life-giving to the needy, prayer and fasting.

Jesus did not dispute the importance of these disciplines. What troubled Him was that so often the right things were done for the wrong reasons. In this section of Scripture, Jesus gave a very radical teaching about these three important disciplines. He emphasized the importance of right-motives.

What three things did Jesus say to do in secret?

Why?

1. Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is - Matthew 6:1-4

What label does Jesus give to those who draw attention to their giving?

GETTING YOUR
PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

According to Colossians 3:23, what is to be the motivation for all our work?

2. Praying Jesus' Way - Matthew 6:5-15

In verses 5 through 8 Jesus taught His disciples how not to pray. List the "how not to's" given in these verses.

What did Jesus do after He taught the disciples how not to pray?

Take some time to look at the Lord's Prayer (v. 9-13). Use the following spaces to list the important attitudes, priorities and requests you discover in the prayer.

Attitudes:

Priorities:

Requests:

Why do you think Jesus followed the prayer with the statement found in verses 14 and 15?

3. The Fast Break - Matthew 6:16-18

Notice that Jesus did not say if you fast, He said when you fast He assumed that His followers fasted. What advice about fasting does Jesus give in verses 16 through 18?

What is fasting?

"Fasting is the act of temporarily giving up something that is very important to us in order that we may use the time normally given to that thing for prayer and reflect upon the pain of the temporary 'sacrifice' to better understand the mystery and meaning of Christ's passion and sacrifice for us."¹

¹. Reuben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck, A Guide to Prayer (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1983), p. 9.

Circle the response that describes your feeling at this time:

When it comes to giving up food as a Christian discipline, I . . .

- a. would be interested in trying it.
- b. would be sacrificing a lot.
- c. have never tried it.
- d. consider it a regular part of my spiritual growth.
- e. don't know...

III. The Scripture and You

1. Testing Your Motives.

So much of our lives is guided by secret motives. Many a person has made what appeared to be a good decision for the wrong reason and eventually

became extremely unhappy. This great section of Scripture (Matthew 6:1-18) reminds us to test our motives.

In what areas of your life are you tempted to seek the approval of people rather than of God?

What did Jesus mean when He said, "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Matthew 6:3)?

How can this passage help purify our motives?

2. Proper Motives in Prayer

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) is the model Jesus gave us for prayer. We can better understand the heart and soul of Jesus through His example of how to pray with proper motives. For anyone desiring an intimate relationship with God; a closer look at this prayer will be of great benefit.

What does this prayer tell us about God?

What does this prayer tell us about what we should say to God?

GETTING YOUR
PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

How does this prayer compare to your prayers?

Write in your own words each line of the Lord's Prayer:

"Our Father in heaven-
hallowed be your name-
your kingdom come- your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts-
as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation-
but deliver us from the evil one."

3. Getting Your Priorities Straight

It's so easy to let the truly important issues of life get out of focus. If you are like most of us, you tend to put off dealing with the most significant priorities and spend most of your time on the less important, minor issues of life.

GETTING YOUR
PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

Take a few moments to write down your priorities in the order you believe would most glorify God.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

What decisions and action steps will you need to take to begin the process of putting these priorities in proper order in your life?

GETTING YOUR
PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

Fasting may help you achieve your desire to get your priorities straight. Remember, fasting can be more than not eating food. Fasting is an exercise to deprive one's self of the normal and pleasant performances of life for the sake of personal enrichment and dedication to God.

Christian author and speaker Myron Augsburger has listed five valuable benefits of fasting other than the meditative reverence for God often expressed by acts of fasting in the Bible. They are:

1. Self-discipline
2. Release from the slavery of a habit
3. Developing the ability to do without things
4. The positive health value
5. Developing a greater appreciation of simple things

2. Myron Augsburger, paraphrasing Barclay, *The Communicator's Commentary-Matthew* (Waco: Word Books, 1982), p. 90.

You may need to fast from anything that gets your focus off putting God first in your life. This could be a boyfriend, girlfriend, a car, a sport, partying, or any other thing that has displaced God's rightful position.

You can fast for as short as one hour or for as long as forever. (I chose to never drink alcohol.)

List below the areas of your life in which fasting would be beneficial in order to get your priorities straight. Remember: These areas are not necessarily evil; they just keep us from being all that God wants us to be.

GETTING YOUR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT