

## Rewarding Disciplines

**Matthew 5:43-6:18**

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In our passage today, we will see that Jesus clearly teaches there are certain spiritual activities that will be rewarded, but they must be done the right way and for the right reasons. Now, I would argue that all spiritual disciplines and exercises are “rewarding” in one way or another, but Jesus made particular mention of the four we will look at today. He doesn’t say what the reward will be, but he makes it clear that God the Father sees and will reward the following disciplines. And if we are able to give good gifts, how much more able is our heavenly Father?! With this in mind, let us humbly and prayerfully look to these four spiritual exercises, and see what the Lord may be asking of us.

### **Loving Enemies (Matthew 5:43-48)**

The command to love our enemies, in my opinion, is the most difficult thing that Jesus instructed his followers to do. It goes against every aspect of our flesh and against everything we see in our world and culture. The natural response is to harm those who harm us. If someone treats you poorly, why shouldn’t you respond in kind? They certainly don’t deserve to be “loved”. Yet, that is precisely what Jesus is calling his followers to do, and it is precisely that behavior that he says will be rewarded. All people love those who love them, that is easy. But Jesus calls us to a different way of living, a life that will clearly reveal the love that He has for the world. You see, Jesus isn’t pointing forward and telling us “you go first”, he is waving for us to follow him and the Father into that radical, world-changing type of love. This is the agape love that God has towards those who reject Him, and it should be our desire to reflect that same love towards those who we would consider “our enemies”.

As we turn to look at these last three disciplines, there is a common thread that runs through each one. If we practice our spiritual exercises **so that others can see and take notice**, then there will be no reward from our heavenly Father. (Matt 6:1) In other words, when it comes to giving, praying, and fasting... “What you seek, is what you find”.

### **Giving (Matthew 6:1-4)**

Giving of one’s finances has been a practice in the lives of God’s people from the earliest years, and the principle is still at work today. Because of the generosity of God’s people the Gospel is proclaimed around the world, widows and orphans are taken care of, places are built where people can gather for worship, and countless lives are changed all over the world! The NT makes it abundantly clear that investing our money into kingdom things is the only sure investment there is, for not only will it pay huge “dividends” in this kingdom, but the practice will be rewarded by God the Father. There are so many ways to invest our resources in kingdom work, but I like the way Dr. Strauss categorizes it. “Give to God’s Work, Give to God’s Workers, Give to the Poor and Needy, Give Generously, Give without Fanfare.” There is rich discussion to be had in our families, home groups and bible studies over these categories and their associated scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:19-21; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; Matthew 10:40-42; Mark 9:41; Galatians 6:6-7; Matthew 19:21; Luke 12:33; Luke 14:12-14; Hebrews 6:10; Galatians 6:9-10; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7; Matthew 19:27-29; Matthew 6:1-4

The discipline of giving must be cultivated and developed in our lives, especially considering that the practice goes against our very materialistic and consumeristic culture. We may not hesitate to pay \$1200 for a new phone, but to give an equally sized check toward kingdom work may give us more pause. I pray that the Spirit would convict those of us who need to be convicted, to grow in this rewarding discipline.

### **Praying (Matthew 6:5-15)**

The importance of prayer probably cannot be overstated. Prayer saturated the life and ministry of Jesus as well as the birth and development of the early church. God's people are a praying people. Yet, I well know that this is an underdeveloped area in my own life, and in many others as well. In this section of scripture, Jesus gives clear guidelines for how to pray as well as how not to pray. One line, in particular, catches our attention for our study today, "And your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matt 6:6). Aside from the overwhelming importance prayer has had in the life of God's people, did you realize that God will reward those who follow Christ's example in praying? For those of us who struggle in the discipline of prayer, may we find renewed vigor and conviction through understanding that God sees us, hears us, and will reward us when we pray.

### **Fasting (Matthew 6:16-18)**

The last area we will look at this morning is fasting. This discipline is one of the least understood, and in my experience, one of the least practiced. There are no NT commands to fast, and there is only one OT command. (Lev 16:29-31) However, we see Jesus fasting at the start of his ministry, and we see the practice of fasting in the early church. Particularly to give oneself over to total prayer and concentration when guidance is needed or a ministry is to be entered into.<sup>2</sup> This is the practice of taking the time one would spend on that particular meal, and devoting it to prayer and discernment. What a powerful practice this would be, particularly when faced with trying times or difficult decisions. And though Jesus doesn't command that his followers fast, he assumes that they will, and assures them that when they fast seeking the Father's commendation rather than man, He will reward them.

I hope our study today has helped you realize how prominent this doctrine of "mishology" is throughout the scriptures, and has helped you recognize how valuable the above practices are. These are some of the things that have brought immense spiritual growth in so many churches, and they will do the same in our lives and church family if we set to the work of incorporating them into our lives as well.

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## **Women's Tea: June 25th @ 11:00 am**

Sign up at the Women's Kiosk on the patio.

## **Children's Ministry Volunteers Needed!**

See Billie Phipps out on the patio.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 4:2; Acts 13:2-3, 14:23