

Prayer and fasting

Prayer and fasting shouldn't be reserved for times of trouble and distress, as they often are. If that is the case we aren't praying and fasting to get closer to God, to know His perfect will and to submit ourselves to it completely. The focus is on us and how we can get out of trouble. Have we ever thought of it that the trouble may be from God because we have drifted from him, and will remain, regardless of our prayers and fasting, until we turn the focus from "Lord, get me out of this" to "not my will, but yours be done"?

Matthew 6:5-18 And 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 others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when 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. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

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

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

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

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

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

¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

¹⁶ “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others 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.

1) God expects us to pray and fast

- Jesus didn't say "if you pray" and "if you fast". He said "when you pray" and "when you fast"
 - This could be read in two ways:
 - Jesus knew that his disciples were in the habit of praying so didn't use the hypothetical if but the definite when implying that he knew that they would pray and fast.
 - Even if the disciples weren't in the habit of praying and fasting Jesus expected them to pray and fast.
 - Either way He expected them to pray and fast.
- Jesus went to great lengths to break the bondage of sin over our lives and reconcile us to the Father. It was through His pain, suffering and condemnation on the cross on our behalf that the way into the Holy of holies – the very presence of God – was made open that we may enter freely into His presence to communicate as Father and child.
 - Hebrews 10:19-22 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.
 - Not to enter into His presence in prayer contravenes all that He has done for us and insults His salvation and act of reconciliation.
- Jesus Himself spent nights in prayer and prayed throughout the night in deep travail pouring out His heart to the Father submitting to His will.
 - All He asked His disciples to do was to watch and pray that they wouldn't fall into temptation, and then He rebuked them when He found them sleeping.
- Prayer isn't so much to twist God's arm to get something from Him as to submit our wills to His.
- It's an act of humility saying that we can't do anything on our own and are completely dependent on Him for all things.

- In Shansi I found Chinese Christians who were accustomed to spend time in fasting and prayer. They recognized that this fasting, which so many dislike, which requires faith in God, since it makes one feel weak and poorly, is really a Divinely appointed means of grace. Perhaps the greatest hindrance to our work is our own imagined strength; and in fasting we learn what poor, weak creatures we are-dependent on a meal of meat for the little strength which we are so apt to lean upon.

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2) Prayer, fasting and other people

- Prayer and fasting is for and to God and God alone.
- We don't pray and fast to gain the approval of people.
 - Matthew 6:5 And 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 others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.
 - People can't meet all your needs – only God can do that.
 - If we've received the approval of God who is over everyone and everything in the universe then why would we want to seek the approval of people?
 - Matthew 6:6 But when 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.
- We don't imitate the prayers of others
 - Matthew 6:7-8 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.
 - Whether it be imitating the babbling prayers – such as chanting – of the pagans, or merely imitating the way other Christians pray the prayers aren't pleasing to God as they are fake and not genuine petitions
 - God wants us to be genuine and honest in our praying and fasting.
- Our prayers are affected by our relationships with others
 - Matthew 6:14-15 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.
 - Harboring bitterness and anger against someone else hinders our prayers.
 - God expects us to release it by forgiving those who have hurt us.
 - Having broken and unresolved relationships without having even attempted to reconcile with the other person and then coming to worship and prayer doesn't please God at all.
 - He gave his life to forgive us. He expects us to give all to reconcile our broken relationships, at least from our side.
- For those who are married our marital relationships will also affect our prayers
 - 1 Peter 3:7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers
 - We can't treat our wives with disrespect and expect God to honour our prayers.