

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

11. As with giving to the poor and praying, Jesus simply assumes that his followers will practice the discipline of fasting as part of their journey of faith. What do you think may be the benefits of fasting?
  
12. What instructions does Jesus give for fasting?

It seems that each of these three areas of Christian life; almsgiving, prayer and fasting, are not easy and not automatic for us as modern followers of Jesus (perhaps we should not assume that people in the first century found these any easier!). However, Jesus' instructions to his followers assume their regular participation in each. How will you seek to implement these spiritual disciplines in your life?

# **5 The Blessed Life**

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7

## **The Invisibility of God's Kingdom People Matthew 6:1-18**

### **Introduction**

The three great marks of Jewish religion were almsgiving, prayer and fasting. These were activities which every good Jew engaged in order to demonstrate their piety. In this passage we see Jesus reinforce the value of these activities for the spiritual well-being of his followers, but he also radically reshapes the way in which Christians should engage in them.

### **Read Matthew 6:1-18**

### **The "Invisible" Principle**

1. Verse 1 acts as a kind of introduction and summary statement for the next 17 verses. The "acts of righteousness" that Jesus referred to were (i) giving to the poor, (ii) prayer, and (iii) fasting. Can you think of other "acts of righteousness" which are practised by people today, both Christian and otherwise, who are recognised as being "good religious people."

2. What possible motives could people have for doing these “acts of righteousness”?
  
3. **[optional]** The second part of verse 1 is intriguing. Jesus talks of a “reward from your Father in heaven.” Jesus seems to indicate that there will be some kind of “reward” for his followers in heaven (see also verses 4, 6, & 18). Is there anything in the passage to indicate that this reward is conditional upon the doing of these “acts of righteousness”? (That is, we *earn* this reward in proportion to how well we do these good works)

### **Giving to the Needy (6:2-4)**

4. Verse 2 implies that some people really did announce their giving to the poor with trumpet fanfares in the Synagogue. It seems that we rarely have this kind of problem at St Marks and St Davids today, but perhaps we have another problem. What does Jesus assume about the behaviour of his true followers in relation to the poor?
  
5. Specifically, how can we rightly take up Jesus’ instructions in verses 2-4 in relation to the poor?

### **Prayer (6:5-15)**

6. Once again, Jesus does not instruct his disciples *to* pray. Rather, he simply assumes that they *will* pray, and teaches them the manner in which they should pray. What are Jesus’ instructions regarding prayer in verses 5- 8?
  
7. In verse 8 Jesus affirms that there is no need to pray in the manner of the hypocrites (v5) because our Father already knows our needs. If God already knows our needs, why do you think we then need to pray?
  
8. What do you notice about the structure of the prayer Jesus gives his disciples in verses 9 - 13?
  
9. What ‘prayer principles’ does the order of the requests in Jesus’ prayer teach us?
  
10. Perhaps the most difficult part of Jesus’ prayer is the plea that God would forgive us our debts (sins) as we have forgiven our debtors (those who sin against us). Again, the prayer assumes that we will have already forgiven our debtors at the time that we pray. What do you find most difficult about forgiving another person who sins against you? How do you work through these difficulties to the point that you actually do forgive them?