

Spiritual Disciplines of Life with God

Thomas Robinson, *Shaped by Jesus for Life 3*, March 3, 2019

Matthew 6:5-18

⁵ “And **when you pray**, you mustn’t be like the play-actors. For they love in the synagogues and at the corners of broad streets to stand and pray so that they may be very visible to the people. Truly, I’m telling you, they’re getting their wages right now.

⁶ But **when you pray**, go into **your inner room**, and when you’ve shut your door, pray to your **Father who is in that secret place**. And your Father who sees in secret will give in response to you. ⁷ And **as you pray**, don’t pile up empty phrases as so many peoples do, for they think they’ll be heard for their long strings of words. ⁸ Don’t imitate them, for **your Father knows** what you need before you ask him. ⁹ Pray then in this way:

Our Father in the heavens, may your name be holy!

¹⁰ Let **your kingdom** come, let **your will** become reality,
as in **heaven**, so also on **earth**!

¹¹ **Give** us today our daily **bread**,

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

¹³ And don’t lead us into **testing**, but deliver us from **evil**.”

¹⁴ For if you **forgive** others their **offenses**, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you don’t forgive others, your Father won’t forgive your offenses.

¹⁶ **When you fast**, don’t become like the play-actors, all gloomy, for they disfigure their faces so that it’s clear to people that they’re fasting. Truly I tell you, they’re getting their wages right now.

¹⁷ But **when you fast**, groom your hair and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it won’t be visible to people that you’re fasting, but **only to your Father** who’s in the innermost secret; and your Father who sees what’s done in secret will give in response to you.

Matthew 9:9-17

⁹ As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called **Matthew** sitting at the **tax station**, and he said to him, “**Follow me**.” And he rose and followed him.

¹⁰ And as **Jesus reclined at table** in the house, behold, many **tax collectors and sinners** came and were banqueting with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher **eat with tax collectors and sinners?**”

¹² But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are strong have no need of a physician, but those who are bad off. ¹³ Go and learn what this means, ‘*I desire mercy, and not sacrifice*’ [Hosea 6:6; Mt 12:7]. For I didn’t come to call righteous people, but sinners.”

¹⁴ Then the **disciples of John** approached him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees **fast**, but **your disciples don’t fast?**”

¹⁵ And Jesus said to them, “Can the **wedding guests** mourn as long as the **bridegroom** is with them? Days will come when the bridegroom is taken from them, and then they’ll fast.

¹⁶ No one puts a piece of **new, unshrunk cloth** on an **old garment**, for the **fullness** of the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. ¹⁷ Neither is **new wine** put into **old wineskins**. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are ruined. But **new wine** is put into **fresh wineskins**, and so both are preserved.”

Hosea 6:4-6

⁴What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. ⁵Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. ⁶For I desire mercy (*hesed*) and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

What are Spiritual Practices for anyway?

Jesus: “Change your way of thinking, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!” In the Sermon on the Mount he focuses that repentance/change of thinking. He talks about very basic challenges: anger, desire, truthfulness, enemies, anxiety, judging others, etc.

He focuses regular religious practices: alms, prayer, fasting. We often think of spiritual disciplines as a way of self-control, finding centering, peace, authentic self, etc.

Jesus always focuses on a living, vibrant dialogue with God. God who is intimate, hidden, knowing. The Abba who is life-giving creator, who is reality itself. The perennial dangers are self-centered distortion and the temptation to use piety as performance.

Jesus’ concern is not my sense of authenticity, often distorted, but reality in relation to a God who knows me, who is and gives life. I save my life only by losing/giving it.

Real Prayer and Fasting and Dialogue with God

We begin this afternoon a period of Shared Prayer. Our community prayers flow from experience of personal dialogue with God. Very practical. Not new rules but focus on real relationship. Fathers in ancient world were often controlling, public-oriented.

Jesus remakes “Father” as shared image for creative, intimate, challenging God.

Prayer is seeking to know that astonishing, loving, life-remaking God in intimate terms.

Jesus focuses on seeking God’s unity of earth and Heaven, seeing all that I work for and gain as God’s gift, realizing the challenge of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Prayer is not to make us calm, but to reorient us, change us toward God’s reality.

Fasting is good, but also vulnerable to dangers. It is a language not of self-control or display, but of dialogue with God who understands the language of all practices.

Embodying the Good News in Spiritual Discipline

Jesus shows spiritual practices in new places. He calls a tax-collector who’s not expecting God’s kingdom. He eats with “tax-collectors and sinners.” He challenged disciples to see people through the eyes of God’s love and desire for relationship. Often piety led to exclusivity. Jesus says that God has always desired Mercy (*Hesed*).

The Good News of God’s Kingdom also meant the discipline of celebration. Fasting had its place, but discipleship was a wedding feast. New cloth, New wine – both changed things. They didn’t fit old containers. Jesus is preparing them for the reality that is breaking in that they can’t imagine. Their Father/Creator in secret and in public is remaking the world. “*Let your kingdom come ... as in heaven, so also on earth!*”