

# Lessons from Matthew 6

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Matthew 6, in the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, contains some of Jesus' most practical teachings. It begins by focusing on true worship, which is deeply personal, and it includes instruction on giving to the needy, prayer, and fasting (Matt 6:1–18). This leads directly into a consideration of one's attitude toward God and His kingdom (Matt 6:19–34). As we think about Jesus' teachings here, it would be helpful to ask some probing questions of our own religious experience: Where is our treasure? Who has our heart? Do we really trust God as a loving Father to provide our needs because He already knows them? What has first place in our life in terms of our mind, body, energy, and time?

## Interpretation of the Chapter

### 1. Verses 1–18

- Jesus warns His followers against a self-focused righteousness, which is not real righteousness at all. Genuine worship directs our attention toward God and seeks to glorify Him.
- Human praise and admiration are cheap wages compared to the promised heavenly reward (cf. Matt 5:12). What matters is a personal relationship with the Father (Matt 6:1, 4, 6, 8, 14, 18) and practicing His will (Matt 6:33; 7:21).
- As children of the heavenly Father, being like Him includes relieving the needs of the poor (Deut 15:7) as Jesus and His disciples did (cf. John 12:6).
- Personal prayer is to be regular, private, and genuine—not formulaic. We can share our innermost thoughts with the Father, who already knows our needs, knowing that our prayers will be heard because God gives “good things to those who ask Him” (Matt 7:11).
- Since God knows what we need and is willing and eager to give that to us, long prayers are unnecessary. This is especially important to remember when praying publicly, as the brevity of the Lord's Prayer illustrates.
- The Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9–13) is structured as a chiasm:
  - A<sub>1</sub> Address/Affirmation of God as Father
  - B<sub>1</sub> Three Petitions Related to God and His Kingdom
  - C “As in heaven [may it be] also on earth”
  - B<sub>2</sub> Three Petitions Related to Our Needs
  - A<sub>2</sub> Affirmation of God's Kingdom, Power, and Glory.
- The central petition of the Lord's Prayer asks that the kingdom become a reality among God's people on earth. Fulfillment of personal needs rests on God as *our* Father and belonging to His kingdom.
- Our indebtedness to God is so deep it can never be repaid, only forgiven. Having been forgiven such a debt creates a willingness to forgive others, even if we have been profoundly or repeatedly wronged (cf. Matt 18:22).

### 2. Verses 19–24

- Earthly values fall into one of three categories: possessions, popularity, or power. Possessions are in focus because wealth attracts the other two values. But earthly treasure ultimately vanishes or must be left behind (1 Tim 6:7).
- How to store treasure in heaven becomes progressively clearer—seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness (Matt 6:33), caring for the needy (Matt 25:37–40), and trusting in the present and future blessings of the kingdom (Matt 5:3–12; 25:34). The focus of heart and life reveals what we truly treasure (Matt 6:21).

- The eye is the avenue of light for the body, which is guided by and processed by the mind and heart. If the eye is “single,” focused on God and His kingdom, then one’s life will be a source of light for others rather than a source of darkness.
- Just as it is impossible to look in opposite directions simultaneously, it is impossible to serve two masters and be fair to both. One’s loyalties will be revealed eventually. A divided heart cannot last long. Loving wealth, serving “mammon,” not only shuts us off from the poor but turns our heart from God.

### 3. Verses 25–34

- The reason given for not worrying is trust in God, not only with money matters but also with supplying physical needs. Worry, not work, is at issue. The birds busy themselves gathering the food God has provided but He doesn’t spoon feed them.
- Flowers and grass are temporary; so is human life (Ps 103:15–16; Isa 40:6–8), and yet it is far more valuable. Therefore, we need not worry or wonder how our needs will be supplied as unbelieving Gentiles do, because our heavenly Father knows what we need.
- Above everything, even one’s physical life, we are urged to seek God’s transcendent kingdom and His righteousness, not to be saved but because we are already children of the heavenly Father and long to be like Him (cf. Matt 5:48).

### Application of the Chapter

Important lessons contained in this chapter include:

1. Worshipping God is a deeply personal and private activity, even when ministering to the needs of others.
2. What matters in prayer, whether personal and private or in public, is not how much or how long we pray but remembering to whom we are praying and why.
3. What most consumes our discretionary time, money, and thoughts reveals what has captured our heart.
4. Since God knows our needs, rather than worrying about them, we should ask our heavenly Father to supply them and trust that He will.

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