

- a. In verses 1-18, what three practices are discussed?

- b. What is the gist of Jesus' message in these verses?

- c. What is revealed about the nature of true piety?

2. Matthew uses the title "Father" or "heavenly Father" for God twelve times in chapter 6.
 - a. What fatherly traits of God are illustrated in this chapter?

 - b. What difference does it make to your personal piety or acts of righteousness when you relate to God as a Father instead of as a master or judge?

Prayer: Matthew 6:5-14

3. In verses 5-14, Jesus introduces prayer as an intimate means of communion with the Father. "The Lord's Prayer" gives us a framework so we will understand how to pray.
 - a. What is the primary focus of the Lord's Prayer, the prayer (verses 9-10)?

 - b. St. Thomas Aquinas once said that "The Lord's Prayer is the most perfect of prayers. . . . In it we ask, not only for all the things we can rightly desire, but also in the sequence that they should be desired" (Summa Theologica II-II, 83, 9, quoted in *Catechism* 2763). Why do you suppose these initial requests precede the more personal ones of verses 11-13? See also *Catechism* 2764.

4. In verses 11-13:
 - a. What earthly concerns does Jesus direct us to pray about?

 - b. Which one of these petitions speaks most to you? The *Catechism* discusses them in detail in Article 3 of “Christian Prayer,” nos. 2803-2854. Read the section that is pertinent to the one petition you chose. What did you learn?

Forgiveness: Matthew 6:15-18

5. What, according to Jesus, is the requirement for having God forgive one’s trespasses?

6. **Think about it:** Why do you think Jesus makes such a point of the need for forgiveness in his instructions on prayer?

God and Mammon: Matthew 6:19-24

7. What is Jesus saying in verses 19-24? (Note: in verses 22-23, having “a sound eye” is an ancient Hebrew idiom for generosity.)

Anxiety versus the Father’s Care: Matthew 6:25-34

8. a. In verses 25-34, what reasons does Jesus give us not to worry about how we’ll be taken care of?

Forgiveness: Matthew 6:15-18

5. *What, according to Jesus, is the requirement for having God forgive one's trespasses?*

We must forgive other people for wrongs they have done to us.

6. **Think about it:** *Why do you think Jesus makes such a point of the need for forgiveness in his instructions on prayer?*

If we harbor resentment in our hearts and fail to forgive others, our hearts become hardened to God's mercy toward us. In refusing to forgive others, we are acting in a manner entirely opposite to the way God acts. We are defying his life within us and refusing to shine as lights pointing the way to his grace. If we are truly striving for communion with our heavenly Father, we will rid ourselves of this roadblock.

God and Mammon: Matthew 6:19-24

7. *What is Jesus saying in verses 19-24? (Note: In verses 22-23, having "a sound eye" is an ancient Hebrew idiom for generosity.)*

Jesus is speaking of our attitude toward money and earthly treasure. Accumulating it at the expense of heavenly treasure will begin to dictate our behavior. If our focus and energies are on providing for ourselves, we will necessarily turn our eyes from our loving Father and stop trusting in his provision.

We will serve the treasure we store: Whether that treasure is money or land or possessions and earthly security, or whether it is God and the everlasting treasure he offers. It is impossible to serve both. We must give generously, rather than hoarding for ourselves, which leads to spiritual darkness.

Anxiety versus the Father's Care: Matthew 6:25-34

8. a. *In verses 25-34, what reasons does Jesus give us not to worry about how we'll be taken care of?*

Jesus wants us to realize that there's more to life than food and clothing, and excessive worry about it misplaces our focus, which should be directed toward God. Next, he gives us a proof of his care from nature: If God cares for even the birds and the grass; how much more will he care for his own children? He also reminds us that worrying won't add a second to our lives, neither will it help matters. Furthermore, God already knows what we need and is in control. If we make seeking his kingdom and righteousness our top priority, rather than focusing on temporal concerns, he will take care of those needs as well.

- b. *By telling us not to worry about what we will eat or wear, is Jesus telling us not to work to provide for ourselves? Read **Catechism 2830**.*

No, Jesus is not saying to stop working for these things; he is saying not to be over-anxious. Jesus invites us to seek the Father's kingdom and righteousness as our first priority and to trust in the loving providence of the One who owns all and who cares for even the birds and the grasses.

b. By telling us not to worry about what we will eat or wear, is Jesus telling us not to work to provide for ourselves? Read *Catechism 2830*.

c. What related point does the apostle Paul make in **Philippians 4:6-7**?

D. Application

This question will help you apply one of the key themes of the lesson to your life. After meditating on it, respond to God with a brief written prayer if you choose.

When Jesus speaks of the traditional works of mercy, almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, he is combating a tendency to do these things so as to appear holy before others rather than doing them from the heart. Today we're more likely to hear a homily on why we should do these at all, rather than why not to flaunt them. Are these acts of piety a part of your life, or do you just do them now and then? Do you do them out of duty or love? What can you consciously do to do them regularly and from the heart?

Dear Lord,

Session 7 – Responses

MATTHEW *The King and His Kingdom*

Matthew 6 • Personal Piety

A. Review the Context

Discussion Leaders: Take a brief moment to review the context and what was learned last week. If you like, ask what ideas people had in response to the question that was asked:

- *What did you learn about God's desire for us, as reflected in Matthew 5?*

B. Read the Story

Discussion Leaders: If there is time, have someone read each passage before it is discussed.

C. Take a Deeper Look

Personal Piety: Matthew 6:1-4

1. *In this section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, he turns to matters of personal piety or "acts of righteousness."*

- a. *In verses 1-18, what three practices are discussed?*

Jesus discusses three acts of piety, the traditional works of mercy: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.

- b. *What is the gist of Jesus' message in these verses?*

When you do things like giving alms, praying, and fasting, don't do them to be seen and praised by men. Rather, do them in secret. Then you will be rewarded by your heavenly Father who sees in secret.

- c. *What is revealed about the nature of true piety?*

Piety literally means "righteousness"—it is the same word Jesus used in chapter 5 when he said "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (verse 20). As Jesus makes it clear here, piety is more than the act that expresses it. True piety comes from inside and has to do with motivation as much as with action. Acts performed to be noticed get their own reward, while truly pious actions are done not to be noticed but for God.

2. *Matthew uses the title "Father" or "heavenly Father" for God twelve times in chapter 6.*

- a. *What fatherly traits of God are illustrated in this chapter?*

Answers will vary; among God's fatherly traits illustrated in chapter 6 are that he rewards his children; he wants us to do things out of love for him; he knows our needs; he provides for our needs; he forgives; he teaches us to follow him; and he wants us to trust him so we can be free from anxiety.

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- b. *What difference does it make to your personal piety or acts of righteousness when you relate to God as your Father instead of as your master or judge?*

Answers will vary; encourage discussion. Some possible responses are that in relating to God as a Father instead of as a master or judge, one's actions should flow out of love and a longing to please him instead of from the need to fulfill a duty or keep the law or from fear of punishment. One can approach him in confidence and intimacy rather than fear. The focus should be outward instead of inward, and one might be more motivated to be like the Father.

Prayer: Matthew 6:5-14

3. *In verses 5-14, Jesus introduces prayer as an intimate means of communion with our heavenly Father. "The Lord's Prayer" gives us a framework so we will understand how to pray.*

- a. *What is the primary focus of the Lord's Prayer (verse 9-10)?*

Lest we be tempted to think that prayer is "all about me," Jesus tells us in the Lord's Prayer to focus first on God and his glory: On his name, his kingdom, and his will.

- b. *St. Thomas Aquinas once said that "The Lord's Prayer is the most perfect of prayers. . . . In it we ask, not only for all the things we can rightly desire, but also in the sequence that they should be desired" (Summa Theologica II-II, 83, 9, quoted in Catechism 2763). Why do you suppose these initial requests precede the more personal ones of verses 11-13? See also Catechism 2764.*

Jesus is teaching us both to desire and to pray for the new life he brings. With his words, he orders our thoughts. As we pray to the Father, our thoughts should turn first in love toward God. We recognize him as Father and worship his name as holy, desiring his kingdom and his will above all. This puts us in the proper frame of mind and stance before God when we petition him for his care and forgiveness. When we adore before we ask, our petitions are put into perspective and we are in a better position to have our own thoughts and desires molded to his will.

4. In verses 11-13:

- a. *What earthly concerns does Jesus direct us to pray about?*

Jesus directs us to pray for our daily needs, both physical and spiritual. We need food to live—and we pray for it because all we have comes from God's hand. We also must deal with any sin that is clouding our spiritual sight and separating us from the Father, by asking forgiveness, just as we must forgive others rather than allow bitterness to corrode our spirits and run the risk that God will not forgive us as a result. Finally, Jesus tells us to pray that we might escape temptation to more sin, and be delivered from evil.

- b. *Which one of the petitions speaks most to you? The Catechism discusses them in detail in Article 3 of "Christian Prayer," 2803-2854. Read the section that is pertinent to the one petition you chose. What did you learn?*

Responses are personal and will vary. Use this to draw out what people have learned.

- c. *What related point does the apostle Paul make in Philippians 4:6-7?*

Paul says in Philippians that if we take our cares to God in prayer, with thanksgiving, then his peace will hold us steady in Christ.

D. Application

Discussion Leaders: If time allows, have group members share their responses to the following application question:

When Jesus speaks of the traditional works of mercy, almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, he is combating a tendency to do these things so as to appear holy before others rather than doing them from the heart. Today we're more likely to hear a homily on why we should do these at all, rather than why not to flaunt them. Are these acts of piety a part of your life, or do you just do them now and then? Do you do them out of duty or love? What can you consciously do to do them regularly and from the heart?

As a follow-up to this discussion, listen to or watch Jeff Cavins' talk on Session 7: Matthew 6, "Personal Piety."

Sample