

Act Honestly

Matthew 6:1-18



The NIV Study Bible calls this section of the Sermon on the Mount, “Acts of Righteousness.” What are the components necessary for an act to be considered “righteous”? A dictionary defines righteous as characterized by uprightness or morality, morally right or justifiable, virtuous.

If you are righteous, are you also selfless? Are selfless acts an example of sacrifice? What is the connection of these important concepts? Perhaps Jesus can help us understand.

Selfless Giving

Read Matthew 6:1-4.

When the Jews would give to the poor, they would often make a big show of it. It would be loudly announced. The collection vessel was noisy and the more coins you put in it the louder and longer the noise. They were looking for accolades, praise, and respect.

- How can “acts of righteousness” be self-serving? What is the motive of a person who puts on a show when they do a good deed?
- Why does it matter whether a person gives quietly or ostentatiously as long as they are helping others?
- What are you sacrificing when you give in secret?

Righteous Praying

Read Matthew 6:5-8.

It was very common in Jesus’ time for prayer to be a public show of devotion. Pagans would pray by listing all their gods to make sure they didn’t insult one by leaving out its name. The word translated in some versions as “babble” comes from the Greek word *battologeō* whose root is *battos*, to stutter. For a Greek it meant to talk foolishly at tedious length with vain repetition. Also note that the word translated “hypocrite” is also Greek and refers to an actor who is play-acting a role in a production.

- Share with your group an experience you have had with a speech or a prayer that seemed like babbling to you.

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of public prayer? For the speaker? For the listener?
- How would you make a public prayer effective but not showy?
- Why does Jesus recommend praying in secret?
- What are you sacrificing when you pray in secret?

The Lord's Prayer

Read Matthew 6:9-15.

Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer as a model of how we should pray. He focuses on several important elements of prayer.

- Look at the prayer carefully and write the phrase from the prayer that includes each theme:
 - Praise/adoration _____
 - Surrender _____
 - Provision _____
 - Forgiveness _____
 - Protection _____
- Why is forgiveness so important to our relationship with each other and our relationship with God?

Sacrificial Fasting

Read Matthew 6:16-18.

It was traditional for the Hebrews to cover their head with ashes when they fasted. Perhaps this was a way to show their sorrow over their sins by making themselves look miserable. But Jesus does not approve of this attention-drawing behavior.

- What is Jesus' issue with the typical approach to fasting?
- What are you sacrificing when you do not advertise the fact that you are doing without?
- As Doug mentioned in one of his Pathways sermons, fasting does not always involve giving up food. What other things can you fast from and how would you avoid advertising that sacrifice to others?

Living It

Share with your group how you felt last week after praying for the person who hurt you.

This week:

Examine your life for ways you "show off" your piety. Challenge yourself to find a way to be more secretive with giving, praying, or fasting. Be prepared to share the changes you made next week.