

DIGGING DEEPER



The Heart Behind the Habit: Giving, Praying, and Fasting with Integrity

30 Aug 2026

What happens when doing the right thing becomes about the wrong thing? In Matthew 6, Jesus turns our attention away from outward religious performance and toward the condition of the heart behind it. As we walk through three core spiritual practices -- giving, praying, and fasting -- we are confronted with a challenging truth: even genuinely good actions can miss the mark entirely when our hearts are pointed in the wrong direction. The hypocrites Jesus describes were not doing fake things. They were giving, praying, and fasting. But they were doing it for an audience of people rather than an audience of One. This sermon invites us to examine not just what we do, but why we do it, and challenges us to cultivate these disciplines in secret, where no applause can reach us and only God sees.

1. Jesus warns in Matthew 6 that doing righteous acts to be seen by others means you have already received your reward in full -- in what areas of your spiritual life might you be seeking human approval more than God's recognition?

2. The sermon draws a parallel between a well-developed private relationship between spouses and a well-developed private prayer life -- how does your private communication with God shape the authenticity of how you express your faith publicly?

3. Jesus assumes that His followers will give to those in need, without framing it as optional -- what does it reveal about your heart if generosity feels like an obligation rather than a natural overflow of your faith?

4. Pastor Daniel reflects that fasting pushes him to depend on God in ways that feeling full and comfortable does not -- what comforts or habits in your life might be preventing you from experiencing a deeper dependence on God?

5. Jesus raises the standard for His followers beyond outward behavior to the condition of the heart -- where in your life might you be settling for external compliance while neglecting internal transformation?

6. The Lord's Prayer begins with honoring God before making any requests -- how does the order and posture of your prayers reflect what you actually believe about who God is and who you are before him?

7. The sermon describes the early church in Acts 2:44-45 as a community defined by radical generosity -- what would it look like for your personal habits and your church community to be known in the same way today?

8. Pastor Daniel uses the analogy of learning the mandolin to illustrate that growth requires practicing uncomfortable disciplines before experiencing their reward -- which spiritual discipline do you most resist, and what might that resistance be costing you?

9. Jesus condemns the hypocrisy of those who pray publicly without a genuine private prayer life, yet public prayer itself is not condemned elsewhere in Scripture --

10. The sermon closes with a challenge to pursue genuine connection with people you do not yet know in your church community -- what fears or habits keep you from forming

- how do you discern whether your public expressions of faith are authentic rather than performative?

deeper relationships, and how might overcoming them reflect the values Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount?

Remember...

"Jesus is deeply concerned with the heart. As we look at this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, we can see that Jesus' concern is like, what is your heart doing when your hands are doing the right thing? When you're specifically in the middle of doing something correctly, where is your heart?"