



## WEEK 5

### READ

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-13

There are two ways we can make prayer all about us, and Jesus addresses both in this passage. First, we can pray long prayers in front of other people, attempting to impress them with how super-spiritual we are. The Pharisees offered many prayers like this. Second, we can pray only for things that will benefit ourselves and make our lives more successful or comfortable. Jesus warns us not to pray selfishly and models the types of things to pray for: God's concerns (his exaltation, kingdom, and will), then our concerns (daily needs, forgiveness, and spiritual warfare). Both halves of the prayer cause us to draw near to and worship God.

### REFLECT

What is your prayer life like? Write out a description of your experience of prayer, including a list of all your motivations (good or bad) to pray.

What do you normally pray for?

### RESPOND

Commit to pray every day this week in a way that reflects the themes of the prayer Jesus models for us in this passage.

## **READ**

Scripture: Matthew 6:16-18

Fasting is viewed very differently by different people and groups. Some ignore the practice as if it didn't exist. Others develop cookbooks and products to make money off trendy types of fasts. In today's passage, Jesus doesn't spell out the nature, details, or motivations of this practice. But he makes it clear that fasting is something between us and God, even going so far as to suggest a person hide the fact that they're fasting if they're tempted to "show off" to others. Maybe it's time for us to unlearn whatever we thought we knew about fasting and to consider how we can approach this discipline with a fresh perspective.

## **REFLECT**

Have you ever fasted? If so, describe your fasting experiences, particularly in terms of your encounters with God. If not, what has prevented you from taking part in a fast?

What is your understanding of the spiritual purpose and benefit of practicing a fast?

## **RESPOND**

In this weekend's sermon, we were challenged to engage in a faith-stretching fast this week. Decide what that will look like for you and share your plan with someone who will pray for you this week.

## **READ**

Scripture: Matthew 7:7-11

Have you ever forgotten to whom you're praying? This may sound crazy, but think back to the prayers you have offered before meals. Is it possible that some prayers like this become so automatic or mechanical that we forget what we're really doing? Every time you pray, you are communicating with the God who created the universe, formed your personality, and gave up his only Son for your sins. In today's passage, Jesus helps us remember who we're talking to in prayer: a good Father who knows what we need even more than we do. He may not always give us what we want or answer when we want him to, but we can rest in his goodness.

## **REFLECT**

Describe your understanding of who God is. Include a list of adjectives you would use to describe God.

In what ways does your picture of God fluctuate as the circumstances of your life vary between good and bad?

## **RESPOND**

Set aside time today or tomorrow to simply praise God for the qualities you listed above.