

## Facing the Future on Firm Footing (Part 5) “Keeping First Things First” (Matthew 5:3)

**Introduction:** We tend to think that the more faithful we are to God, the more spiritual we will feel; but really, quite the reverse should take place.

You see, it is not what I have that makes me feel more spiritual, it is in realizing what I don't have, that drives me to the Lord. In Jesus famous sermon on the mount, He begins by telling us “*Blessed (or happy) are the poor in spirit... theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” However, becoming poor in spirit requires discipline and today, in our last message of “Facing the Future on Firm Footing,” I want to share five spiritual disciplines that will help us stay poor in spirit. Exercising the disciplines of prayer, fasting, giving, Bible study, and Christian service, will lead to a new love for the Lord, and they are actually designed to help us maintain our sense of our desperate need for Him. These are what we would call “The first things” Leadership expert John Maxwell says, “There are two things that are the most difficult to get people to do: *To think and to do things in order of importance.*” Maxwell goes on to say, “prioritizing is the key to personal effectiveness. I would say to us today, making these five disciplines a priority in our lives will be the key to our spiritual growth, maturity, and effectiveness as well. As we look at each one, we just want to grasp a deeper understanding of what they are, how they work and how they help us.

### I. The discipline of prayer:

**A. When believers pray** - Believers pray because they know that God is the source of all good, the controller of all events, and the possessor of supreme power. (Neh. 14-5; 9:6; Mt. 6:9)

The apostle Paul said, “We ought to pray without ceasing and make everything a matter of prayer” (1 Tes. 5:17; Phil. 4:6). When believers pray, each aspect of prayer is designed to maintain our love for the Lord by reminding us of our desperate need of Him.

1. **Petitions**- which are our request for our needs and the needs of others. (1 Jn 5:14-15) Notice God puts a condition “*that we ask according to His will.*” (Lk. 22:42)
2. **Confession** – Reminds me of my weakness and exposes my desperate need for the moment-to-moment power from God to have victory in my life. And in times of failure, when we confess our sin to the Lord, He is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse us of our sins (1 Jn. 1:9)
3. **Thanksgiving** – is another form of prayer, Giving God thanks is a constant reminder to us that it is God who is meeting my every need daily. (1 Thes. 5:18; Eph 5:20; Col 3:17; Phil 4:6; Rom 8:28-29).
4. **Intercession** – This is the means by which we share the needs of others with God (Js. 5:17).

**B. Why believers pray** – Believers pray to communicate with God, worshiping Him, praising Him, thanking Him, confessing to Him and making request to Him.

Believers pray, admitting their own helplessness and their complete dependance and trust is upon God revealing to us we are poor in spirit. (Mk. 9:17-24; Rom. 9:20; 11:33-34)

### II. The discipline of Bible study:

**A. Reading the Bible** will cause us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord (2 Pe. 3:18)

1. All of us can have a reading plan or goal. (Read through the gospel's beginning with John, then Matthew, Mark, and Luke)
2. As you read, ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to understanding and give you the specific knowledge you need for that day. (The key is: Expect to discover God's truth.)

**B. Studying the Bible** – using methods such as...

1. Meditation (Ps. 119:15)
2. Read and respond – (Js. 1:22)
3. Memorization – (Example: Phil 4:13)

These are three simple methods you can use to begin studying the Bible for spiritual growth and a deeper sense of our need for God, which will result in keeping us poor in spirit.

### III. The discipline of giving:

**A. There is a command to give** - (Mt. 10:8; Acts 20:35)

**B. There is a concern about giving** – The more we build up assets for our future the more prone we are to feel that we don't need God like other people do. (1 Tim 6:17-18; Rev. 3:17) Exercising the discipline of giving keeps us dependent upon the Lord and poor in spirit which is right where we want to be.

**IV. The discipline of fasting:** Fasting is one of the most effective ways to remind ourselves of our desperate need for God to meet our daily needs.

**A. A biblical definition of fasting** is a Christians voluntary abstinence from food for a spiritual purpose.

**B. The broader view of fasting** – Fasting does not always deal strictly with the abstinence of food, it can involve abstinence from other things: Fasting is good reminder of the warning God gave ( *Deut 8:11-15*)

**C. Fasting illustrates the reality** that man's life does not consist of things he possesses.

**If you are on medications or under a doctor's care** – your doctor should be consulted first especially if your fast is from food. Fasting is used to open a deeper awareness of the spiritual, mental, and emotional needs we have that only God can meet, which keeps us aware we are poor in spirit.

**V. The discipline of service:** The requirements of ministering to the spiritual needs of others forces us to see what we are lacking in ourselves; as a result, it keeps us poor in spirit and completely dependent upon God.

**A. You “can” serve** – (1 Cor 2:3-5)

**B. Our service is to be unto the Lord (Mt. 10:37-39)**

**C. It is sin that keeps us from serving the Lord** – (Prov. 24: 30-34; Prov. 11:2).

**D. We are all called and equipped to serve the Lord** (1 Cor. 12-14; He. 9:14)

**E. Our service to the Lord is to be motivated by our:** (Deut. 13:4; 1 Sam.12:24; Ps. 100:2; Isa. 6:6-8; Jn. 13:12-16; Phil.2:3; Gal. 5:13; 2 Cor. 5:14-15)

**F. All service to the Lord** is to be done out of the recognition that I am poor in spirit, and I have kingdom responsibilities.