

CORE Seminar
Spring 2024
Sermon on the Mount
Course 5: Matthew 6:1-18

ICE BREAKER

Choose an ice breaker from the *Spring Community Group Guide* or go to www.fbcportland.org/icebreakers to select an ice breaker to ask your group.

- Spend about 5 minutes discussing the question – this is a great way to “warm up” your group.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome back to the Sermon on the Mount – **week 5**. The last time we met we were finishing up **Matthew 5**. We discussed how Jesus provided us some practical examples of how a Kingdom Citizen with a changed heart should live in the world around us – and how this makes us to look different than the culture around us.

This week, we will be in **Matthew 6:1-18**. In these verses, Jesus refers to the condition of the heart and three behaviors that come from the heart: **giving** [verses 2-4], **prayer** [verses 5-15], and **fasting** [verses 16-18]. In His instruction, Jesus instructs His disciples [*and us*] how to do them in the right way – a way that **glorifies** God.

His main concern in teaching His disciples on these subjects is found in **verse 1**:

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”

Understanding the cultural backdrop of Jesus' time sheds light on why He stressed righteousness and helping the poor. Back then, righteousness was closely linked to giving alms. This is why Jewish leaders put such emphasis on acts of charity and kindness as a way to be righteous and earn favor with God.

Even today, many Jewish individuals believe they'll be able to be a part of the Kingdom of God by doing good deeds. However, in our Scripture today, Jesus challenges this notion directly. Jesus came to save those who were spiritually lost, but first, He had to make people realize their spiritual condition due to **sin**.

So, let's pray and then we'll dig into Scripture.

PRAYER

Ok – let's open our Bibles and dig into **Matthew 6:2-4**

Have someone in your group read Matthew 6:2-4

²“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Ok – some more context.

For as long as I can remember, I was taught that the reason trumpets were blown was to announce when alms were to be collected in the Temple. The only problem with this is there are no Jewish sources to confirm this.

But, we know that some practice existed to “sound” a trumpet in connection with giving because Jesus references here – and it isn't good! In fact, He states that the only ones who do this are the “**hypocrites**.” A hypocrite is defined as “a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion; a person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs or feelings.” ¹ It's all about the **attention** and **praise** for these “hypocrites.” Jesus states that the attention and praise they receive for their acts of “generosity,” is the reward they will receive.

This still applies to us. Giving to the poor shouldn't be about seeking attention or recognition. If we're out doing things for others just so that people will notice [tooting our own horn is what my parents would have said], then we're not helping others with the heart of God, but for the attention and the praise of others. It's like putting on a serious, holy facade while on the inside being quite the opposite.

So, help others in **secret**. Other's may not know what you do – even the person you are helping may not know. But, God does know – and you reveal a heart that has been changed by God.

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hypocrite>

QUESTIONS: Why is it so important to give in secret?

- What are some ways that this can be accomplished for the glory of God?
- We are all probably hypocrites in some way (even small ways) in our lives. How can we address this?
 - How can we still be confident before God even though we are not perfect?
- Have you known someone who pretended to be something they weren't?
 - In what ways have you pretended to be something you're not?
- Describe what goes on in your heart when and if you do receive praise from people. How do you react?
 - How rewarding is that ultimately compared to pleasing God?
- What does it mean to not "let your left hand know what your right hand is doing?"
 - Is it possible to always hide all of the good things we do? Is it necessary?
 - What is the principle we need to learn from this?

Any questions?

Let's move on to Matthew 6:5-15

Have someone in your group read Matthew 6:5-15

⁵ "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁷ "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ Pray then like this:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,
¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

In our second set of Scriptures, Jesus shifts the focus from giving to **prayer**. And man does the church need to talk about prayer. It's interesting the number of times church members balk at the idea of praying out loud because of the way their prayers "sound." Prayer should not be complicated – it is simply having a conversation with God. Prayer is the way we [the adopted children of God] speak with Him and seek out His will. And, one of the best ways we can learn to pray is to pray to God through **Scripture**. The best book that I have ever read that teaches how to pray through Scripture is Donald Whitney's book, **Praying the Bible**. It is a short read and I encourage you to purchase a copy.

But quick question – How many of you desire to pray more deeply and more consistently than you currently do?

We all do! And I dare say that all of us want to pray – we want to learn how to pray more deeply and consistently than we currently are.

So, to help us out, we're going to look at a quote by Brother Lawrence and then we're going to condense his quote into a couple of words. And when we leave here tonight, those couple of words are what I want us to remember – these will help us in our prayer life.

Brother Lawrence wrote a book called **Practicing the Presence**. In this book, he talks about how he was given menial tasks around the monastery. With every task he was given, he was determined to experience the presence of God – no matter what. And here is what he said:

We ought to act with God in the greatest simplicity, speaking to Him frankly and plainly, and imploring His assistance in our affairs, just as they happen.

Now, this is a good quote because if you read the prayers of biblical characters and if you take that prayer – straight from the text – and you put those prayers in your life.

- For example – take Moses' accusatory prayer with God in Exodus. Take that accusatory prayer and put it in your Community Group, and a brother/ sister starts rebuking the Lord...
- Your Community Group will be filled with anxiety and no one will come back to your Community Group!

But, this is the basis of the Lawrence quote – if "x" is on your heart, then speak plainly. Don't complicate it. There is no such thing as a remedial prayer, advanced prayer OR doctoral prayer. It's simply prayer.

So, we want to take Brother Lawrence quote and we want to condense it down to these words – **Pray what you got!** When we do this, the Lord loves that and He delights in that.

This is one reason Jesus has provided us the model prayer [Lord's Prayer]. This model prayer guides us and allows our prayers to be focused on the will of God. This model prayer also teaches where all provision comes from; all forgiveness comes from; and where all conviction comes from. If you haven't guess it – the answer is God.

This should not surprise us. We know that God is an omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. God **“knows the things you need before you ask him.”** He is **aware** of your needs and He is **focused** on them.

In **Isaiah 65:24** God comforts His people and encourages them to pray to Him by stating:

*Before they call I [the LORD] will answer;
while they are yet speaking I will hear.*

God is encouraging His people to talk to Him with the understanding that He is a perfect heavenly Father who loves you with a perfect, heavenly love and concern. He is always available. He is always ready. He is always willing. And, He is ALWAYS able!

QUESTION: What is prayer? What do you find helpful in enabling your prayer life to show fruit?

- **How can we ensure that we keep our prayer real, personal and not showy? Why is that important?**
- **In Matthew 6:5-6, Jesus gives a negative command [“do not...”] and a positive command [“But when you pray...”]. What are those two commands?**
- **In Matthew 6:7-8, Jesus again issues a positive and a negative command. What are they?**
- **If, as Matthew 6:8 states, God knows what you need before you ask Him, why should you ask Him at all?**
- **What does Jesus say in verse 10 should be our attitude whenever we pray?**

Any questions?

Have someone in your group read Matthew 6:16-18

¹⁶ “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Last, Jesus teaches/ warns that we should watch our **intentions** when fasting. Most people would never know when we are fasting. They are not available to know our eating or praying habits. For the most part, these are done within the privacy of our own homes.

If people know that we are fasting it is because we have told them. If we have told them we are fasting, they will be watching us. Jesus warns against the temptation to look “gloomy,” or “disfigure your face” when fasting. These actions are only done to bring MORE attention to the fact that you are removing something from your life – even for a brief period of time.

Those individuals that do these things with their face are only after the approval of men, not the approval of God. And, once again, Jesus tells us that they will **succeed** in what they are after the attention and praise of man. This will be their only reward.

So, what does Jesus teach us to do? He teaches us to clean ourselves up – wash our face and use a little olive oil. Simply, straighten yourself up, and continue to live in the life that He has put you.

It's that simple.

QUESTIONS: In Matthew 6:16-18, what kind of fasting is Jesus warning against?

- **What is Jesus' point in talking about olive oil and face-washing in verse 17?**
- **Have you ever fasted? Why do you think fasting is often ignored/neglected among Christians today?**
- **What are some of the reasons/uses for fasting? Would you consider it? Who should know when we fast**
- **To do anything as a gift to God - but in order to be seen by someone else - is going to lessen the gift. In the light of this statement, think about your religious activities. Does anything need to be changed?**

CONCLUSION

Today we have spent some time learning both the importance of three spiritual disciplines as well as the importance of choosing our audience carefully. If we complete spiritual actions - meant to give glory to God - before men, then we will get what we are looking for [attention & praise] but lose our Christian integrity. The same will happen if we become our own audience. Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it this way:

It is even more pernicious if I turn myself into a spectator of my own prayer performance... I can lay on a very nice show for myself even in the privacy of my own room.²

So we must be aware of our hearts intent and focus on God as our audience. In Mark 12:41, Mark gives us an account of Jesus watching the people putting their gifts into the temple treasury, we must know that God watches us as we give – and the heart in which they give. As we pray and fast in private, we are assured that He is there with us. God hates the hypocrite but He loves the humble. That is why it is only when our heart matches His – when we are truly humble and seeking to give God all glory – will our giving, praying and fasting be real.

PRAYER

Next Week: Read Matthew 6:19-34

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The Cost of Discipleship. Page 146.