

# What matters is what we do in secret



CITY BIBLE FORUM

What matters in life – Sermon on the Mount - Session 5<sup>i</sup> <sup>1</sup>

*To explore how being a follower of Jesus is a matter of having God's approval, not the praise of other human beings (from Matthew 6:1-18)*

**Mathew 6:1-18** <sup>1</sup>“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

<sup>2</sup>“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

<sup>5</sup>“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

<sup>7</sup> And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

<sup>9</sup>“This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,

<sup>10</sup> your kingdom come,

your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread.

<sup>12</sup> Forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.’

<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

<sup>16</sup>“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

<sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Are you an approval junkie?

*Hardly ever = 0 points*

*Sometimes = 1 point*

*Often = 2 points*

<sup>1</sup> Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, NIV, Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

1. *I worry about what people think of me. SCORE: \_\_*
2. *I avoid conflicts rather than trying to resolve them. SCORE: \_\_*
3. *I become angry when I am contradicted, especially in public. SCORE: \_\_*
4. *I overreact to criticism by dwelling on it too long or unnecessarily, allowing it to depress me. SCORE: \_\_*
5. *I give into peer pressure rather than standing up for what I know is right. SCORE: \_\_*
6. *I gossip about others to people whom I believe will be pleased with me for giving them such luscious tidbits of information. SCORE: \_\_*
7. *I go fishing for compliments. SCORE: \_\_*
8. *I feel being rejected is one of the worst things a person could possibly experience. SCORE: \_\_*

*How did you go?*

*0-4: You are generally not driven by the approval of others*

*6-11: You are a people-pleaser*

*12-16: You are an approval addict*

It's natural (within reason) to want the approval of others. What Jesus has to say about approval – and whose approval really matters – is very challenging.

Before we look at what Jesus has to say, let's look at where we are up to in Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount".

### **From previous weeks**

The Pharisees, part of the religious leadership of Jesus' day, were extremely zealous in their devotion to God, keeping 613 laws.

**Matthew 5:20 "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."**

Jesus isn't saying that you have to keep 614 laws, rather than 613, if you want to have a righteousness that's greater than the Pharisees. What he is saying is that following God, being his disciple, is a matter of the heart.

Jesus then goes on to give examples of how God looks at the heart. For example, it's not about whether you murder someone, but about whether you are angry with someone. And it's not just about whether you love your neighbour – it's about whether you love your enemy (a real challenge for the heart).

## The principle

**Mathew 6:1** “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Q1. Why won't God reward this kind of behaviour, do you think?

*Because anything done before other human beings just wants the praise of human beings – not God.*

Jesus goes on to give 3 examples of how it's possible to do the right thing for the wrong motives.

### Giving to the poor

**Matthew 6:2-4** <sup>2</sup>“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Q2. According to Jesus, what's the wrong way to give?

*For the praise of others.*

Q3 What's the right way to give?

*In secret.*

Q4. “Secrecy safeguards sincerity”. Do you agree with this statement?

*There is truth in it. If we give in a way where no one else sees, then that is a good test for our motives for giving.*

Q5. Is it wrong to want a reward?

*No – it's just a question of whose reward you are after.*

### Prayer #1

**Matthew 6:5-6** <sup>5</sup>“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Q6. What “reward” could Jesus be talking about here?

*The reward could be that your prayers are answered (if what you have prayed for God thinks is good).*

## Prayer #2

**Matthew 6: 7-15** <sup>7</sup> And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

<sup>9</sup> "This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,

<sup>10</sup> your kingdom come,  
your will be done

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<sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread.

<sup>12</sup> Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.’

<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Q7. Is Jesus against long-winded prayers? (hint: what does verse 8 tell us about these prayers?)

*He is if the basis of a long-winded prayer is to get God's attention! God already knows what we need before we ask him.*

Q8. What does Jesus encourage when it comes to praying about God?

*For God's concerns – that his name would be honoured and his authority recognized by all (Matthew 6: 9-10).*

Q9. What does Jesus encourage when it comes to praying about ourselves?

*What's really important – our daily needs, forgiveness, protection from the temptation to give up trusting God (Matthew 6: 11-13).*

Q10. If we don't forgive someone, does that mean God won't forgive us?

*Yes. We can't ask from God what we are not prepared to do for others.*

## Fasting

In the Old Testament, “fasting” meant going without food and drink for a period of time. The Israelites were told to do this once a year – at the Day of Atonement. At other times people

fasted as a way of humbling themselves before God, confessing their sin and praying earnest prayers.

By Jesus' time, the Pharisees had made fasting really important – they fasted twice a week.

**Matthew 6:16-18** <sup>16</sup>“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

In terms of whether followers of Jesus should fast today, there's no direct command in any of the New Testament letters addressing the normal Christian life. So if a follower of Jesus wants to do it because it will help with their prayers and confession, then they are free to do it. They are just not to make it look obvious to others that they are doing it, or tell others about it.

### **Are you an approval junkie?**

Q11. Can we completely “detox” from needing the approval of others?

*No – but if we are a follower of Jesus, then God's approval should matter that much more, and that's where our focus should be.*

Q12. So in light of Jesus' words...is it just about “performing for an audience of one” (God)?

*Yes – because it is ultimately only his approval that counts.*

Q13. Why is God's approval that much better?

*Because God's rewards are that much better! The God of the universe can do so much more for you than other human beings can.*

### **Words about Jesus**

**John 3:36** “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's anger remains on him”.

Q14. With earning God's approval, where is the place to begin?

*It needs to begin with asking God to forgive our sin/debts (Matthew 6:12). “Believing in the Son” is trusting that Jesus died for you to provide that forgiveness (John 3:36). That forgiveness starts a relationship with God. Without that, God still regards you as an enemy, deserving of his anger. Only a friend of God can have God's approval.*

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