Unit III: Jesus Teaches about True Worship

The Pitfalls of Showing Off

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Ecclesiastes 5:1-6; Matthew 6:1-8
PRINT PASSAGE: Matthew 6:1-8

Key Verse—Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 6:1, KJV)

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"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." (Matthew 6:1, NIV)

Lesson Aims
As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:
- Understand Jesus’ teachings about one’s not practicing his/her piety in order to be noticed by others.
- Repent of making a show of religiosity in order to receive praise from others.
- Practice simplicity and humility in your devotional lives.

*Key Terms
Hypocrites (verse 2)—Greek: *hupokrités* (hoop-ok-ree-tace’): persons who answer; actors; hypocrites; pretenders.
Pagans (verse 7)—Greek: *ethnikos* (eth-nee-kos’): national; foreigners; Gentiles; non-Jews; “heathen” (KJV).
Reward (verse 2)—Greek: *misthos* (mis-thos’): wages; hire; reward; recompense.
Righteousness (verse 1 [NIV only])—Greek: *dikaiosuné* (dik-ah-yos-oo’-nay): righteousness; justice; justness.
Secret (verse 4)—Greek: *kruptos* (kroop-tos’): hidden; secret.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)*
Introduction

I can recall days of playing in my childhood neighborhood. Oh, the great times we had with our stress-free living! The only real worry was to make sure we made it in the house as soon as the porchlight came on; for my city cousins that was as soon as the streetlights came on, if not before. I can truly recall the many acts of so-called heroism we pursued to honor ourselves and show off our skills for our friends—sometimes for a girl we liked, other times just to prove we were the best in the neighborhood in a particular area. Oftentimes showing off led to bumps, bruises, scratches, and even broken bones as we would ride bicycles with no hands, see who could jump the farthest like Evel Knievel, and/or who could ride the fastest, including have races in the streets that had an added risk from cars zooming by. I am sure as you read this you can recall some of the silly things you did that led to pitfalls as you chose to show off your skills for self-glorification. Pitfalls happen when we are not paying attention to our surroundings. When we take our eyes off the original vision and plan, we can easily be distracted, leading to careless and costly mistakes as we seek to show off.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

The Way to Give (Matthew 6:1-4)

KJV

TAKE HEED that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

2 Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

3 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

4 That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.
“BE CAREFUL not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 “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 others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

3 “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

4 “so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

In this sermon, Jesus just concluded challenging His followers to be perfect (see Matthew 5:48). As a part of being perfect, Jesus challenges them in their giving. The ancient Jews were instructed to give alms, charitable gifts for the poor and needy—including widows and orphans (see Deuteronomy 15:11). Jesus warned His followers to be careful as to not give their alms in the presence of others for the sake of being seen, particularly in the sense of being recognized and even acknowledged by others (verse 1a). Jesus added to the challenge to give without seeking attention by explaining to the followers that those who do so “have no reward of [our] Father which is in heaven” (verse 1b). Jesus told them not to seek attention, emphasizing the idea describing hypocrites as sounding a trumpet to draw attention to themselves as they give. Their purpose is to seek attention and honor from others for what they do (verse 2). The hypocrites did their giving as a duty, not from the principle of obedience to God nor love or compassion for others, but out of pride. Jesus additionally warned that those who chose this method will have their reward. The implication here is that the reward is far from what they are expecting, especially since Jesus contrasts verse 2 with verse 3. He said rather than do as the hypocrites do, we must not let our left hand know what our right is doing (verse 3). This analogy is more than hiding from yourself or family but speaks to the humility and privacy in giving—as it is a personal gift from you to the work of the Lord through people for people. Jesus further shared that our Father in heaven sees everything, including your gift from the heart, and will reward you openly, in the presence of those who would ridicule you for selfless giving (verse 4). The way to give is out of humility and a heart that loves people. God blesses and rewards this selfless giving, not the giving that is for show.

What Do You Think? Assess your own giving practices. Additionally, what are your opinions on the tradition of roll calling or having people stand and/or walk with certain amounts of giving?
The Way to Pray (*Matthew 6:5-8*)

**KJV**

5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the *heathen* do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

**NIV**

5 “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 others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

6 “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.

7 “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like *pagans*, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

8 “Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Jesus further expands on the premise of living perfect, holy lives by shifting from our giving practices to our praying practices. Again, He pointed out the need for His followers not to pray as the hypocrites do—as He goes into a description of their prayer habits. Jesus stated that the hypocrites love to pray standing in the synagogues and on street corners to be noticed and admired by people, not so that their prayers may be heard and received by God (**verse 5**). Jesus stated to His followers that those who practice such arrogant ways shall truly “have their reward” (**verse 5**). Again, in contrast to what the hypocrite does, Jesus told His followers (who were present for the sermon) that when they pray they should not seek places whereby they are most likely to be seen; instead, they should seek private prayer by going to their closet to pray (**verse 6a**). Jesus further explained that when they pray to the Father in secret, similar to the practicing of giving, God would reward them openly (**verse 6b**). The premise to be grasped here, similar to earlier, is that you do not need to nor should we desire to seek human attention or approval. People’s approval and applause are temporary. God’s blessings are lasting. Jesus further challenged His followers not only to not seek an audience when praying, but also not to use “vain” and “repetitive” words for the purpose of being heard (**verse 7a**).
Jesus pointed out that the “heathen” use this practice—as they believe that by speaking for long periods of time, saying things over and over again, they are more likely to be heard by their gods (verse 7b). Jesus concluded the lesson by telling His followers not to be like the heathen and to truly grasp the fact that the Father knows what we need (verse 8). In both instances He was challenging the intent, not casting public prayer nor the repetitive emphasis of words in a negative light. Is it about you or about connecting with God? The way to pray is with a sincere heart, a position of piety and humility, and not a position of haughtiness and attention seeking. These instances of showing off have their reward.

**What Do You Think?** **Share ways that we can be more effective in corporate prayer.**

**A Closing Thought**

Some may ask what the purpose of prayer is if God knows what we need. Why is there a need to bother Him? It is possible that the purpose of prayer is to remind us of our need for reliance and dependence on God, the supplier of all our needs. Shifting our minds from selfish desires and attention-seeking motives will allow us to have greater alignment and greater rewards, thus keeping us from encountering pitfalls because of our selfish acts of showing off.

**Your Life**

This week, assess your giving and praying practices. Consider any possibility that an action, including making charitable donations, could be taken out of selfish motives and seek to realign your will to God’s will.

**Your World!**

This week, seek to challenge a fellow saint, family member, or friend to participate in the same reflective self-assessment you are doing this week. Encourage him or her to share his or her success and failures, especially in the process of daily prayer.

**Closing Prayer** Dear Lord, we all have done things in the name of religion for the wrong reason. Search our minds and hearts and remove any self-serving desires that would hinder our giving and our prayer life. We want to remain connected to You, Lord, trusting You in all our ways. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**Conclusion**

(Preparing for Next Week’s Lesson)

While reading the Background Scripture, consider this thought: “When you pray, do you ask for what really matters?”
### Home Daily Bible Readings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading Title</th>
<th>Bible Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MONDAY</td>
<td>February 10</td>
<td>&quot;God's Name Is 'Our Father'&quot;</td>
<td>Isaiah 63:15-16; 64:8-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUESDAY</td>
<td>February 11</td>
<td>&quot;The Adopted Children of God&quot;</td>
<td>Romans 8:12-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEDNESDAY</td>
<td>February 12</td>
<td>&quot;Enticed by Temptation&quot;</td>
<td>James 1:12-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THURSDAY</td>
<td>February 13</td>
<td>&quot;Forgive the Sins of Fellow Believers&quot;</td>
<td>Luke 17:1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRIDAY</td>
<td>February 14</td>
<td>&quot;Forgive the Offender&quot;</td>
<td>2 Corinthians 2:5-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SATURDAY</td>
<td>February 15</td>
<td>&quot;Forgive like God in Christ Forgives&quot;</td>
<td>Ephesians 4:25–5:2</td>
</tr>
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<td>SUNDAY</td>
<td>February 16</td>
<td>&quot;Praying and Living the Lord's Prayer&quot;</td>
<td>Matthew 6:9-15</td>
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### Notes

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