

Jesus asks us to examine whose approval carries the most weight in our lives. How would your daily decisions change if you truly believed God's approval was the only one that mattered?

The sermon suggests that hypocrisy is often a symptom of our deeper longing to be seen and accepted. In what areas of your spiritual life might you be performing rather than genuinely connecting with God?

Jesus says our Father knows what we need before we ask Him, yet He still invites us to pray. If prayer isn't about informing God, what do you think its true purpose is in your relationship with Him?

The pastor describes how human applause has a terrible shelf life, like French fries that quickly lose their appeal. What are some ways you've experienced the emptiness of seeking human recognition over God's approval?

When Jesus teaches us to pray 'Our Father,' He invites ordinary people into an intimate relationship with the Creator. How does viewing God as a delighted Father rather than a distant judge change the way you approach Him?

The sermon states that giving, praying, and fasting should flow from belonging rather than from trying to earn our place. What spiritual practices in your life feel more like performance than expressions of relationship?

Jesus warns against letting our left hand know what our right hand is doing when we give. Why is it so difficult to stop keeping score of our own acts of service and generosity?

The pastor suggests that fasting reveals what we're truly hungry for by removing one appetite to rediscover a deeper one. What temporary satisfactions might you be reaching for instead of seeking satisfaction in God?

In the story of the prodigal son, the father never lets the son finish his rehearsed speech of earning his way back. What speeches or conditions are you still rehearsing before you feel worthy to approach God?

Jesus invites the weary and burdened to find rest in Him rather than in performance. What specific burdens of spiritual performance do you need to lay down in order to experience this rest?

Small Group Guide: "Who Are You Trying to Impress?"

Matthew 6:1-18 | Summer on the Mount Series

OPENING PRAYER

Begin your time together by inviting God's presence and asking Him to help you see yourselves as His beloved children, not performers seeking approval.

ICEBREAKER

Share a time when you felt the need to impress someone. What did you do, and how did it make you feel afterward?

(This helps the group ease into the topic and recognize how universal this struggle is.)

KEY SCRIPTURE

Matthew 6:1, 8

- "Be careful not to practice your righteousness before others to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward with your Father in heaven."
 - "Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."
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SERMON SUMMARY

Jesus addresses our deep longing to be seen and valued, showing how we often turn spiritual practices (giving, praying, fasting) into performances for human approval. The real issue isn't hypocrisy—it's living for the wrong audience. Jesus invites us to stop performing and start enjoying relationship with our Father, who already sees us, knows us, and delights in us through Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Audience Question

"Who are you trying to impress? Whose approval in your life carries the most weight?"

- How did you answer this question when it was first asked in the sermon?
- Has your answer changed after hearing the message? Why or why not?
- In what areas of your life do you find yourself most tempted to perform for others' approval?

2. Giving Without Performance (Matthew 6:2-4)

"Do not announce it with trumpets...but when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."

- Have you ever served or given hoping someone would notice? How did that feel?
- What's the difference between healthy accountability in generosity and performing for recognition?
- How can we cultivate "natural generosity" where we're not keeping score—even with ourselves?

3. Prayer as Relationship (Matthew 6:5-8)

"Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."

- If God already knows what we need, why do you think He invites us to pray?
- The sermon said, "Prayer isn't where we earn our Father's attention. It is where we sit and enjoy it." How does this change your view of prayer?
- What barriers keep you from believing that God delights in hearing from you?

4. Our Father (Matthew 6:9-13)

"He invites ordinary people to address the creator of the universe in such a personal way...as His children."

- How does your relationship with your earthly father (positive or negative) affect how you view God as Father?
- What would change in your prayer life if you truly believed God was delighted every time you came to Him?
- Which phrase from the Lord's Prayer resonates most with you right now? Why?

5. Fasting and Our Appetites (Matthew 6:16-18)

"Fasting teaches me what my desires are really hungry for."

- The sermon suggested we often feed surface appetites (food, entertainment, busyness) to avoid deeper soul hunger. Where do you see this in your own life?
- What are you really hungry for right now?
- Have you ever practiced fasting? If so, what did you learn about yourself and God?

6. Coming Home

"Through Jesus, that door is already open. The cross didn't simply make forgiveness possible. It makes family possible."

- Where in your life are you still "rehearsing speeches" or trying to earn your way back to God?
- What would it look like for you to stop performing and simply "come home" to the Father?
- How does knowing you already belong change the way you approach spiritual practices?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **The real issue isn't hypocrisy—it's living for the wrong audience.** We all long to be seen, loved, and accepted. The question is: whose approval are we seeking?
2. **God already sees you, knows you, and delights in you through Christ.** You don't have to perform to get His attention—you already have it.
3. **Spiritual practices aren't performances; they're invitations to enjoy the Father.** Giving, praying, and fasting reveal who our audience is and deepen our relationship with God.
4. **You don't call God "Father" because you've prayed enough, given enough, or gotten your life together.** You call Him Father because Jesus made you family.
5. **Human applause has a terrible shelf life, but God's love is eternal.** Performance-based living is exhausting. Relationship-based living brings rest.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

This Week, Choose One:

GIVING: Practice "secret generosity" this week. Do something generous that no one else will know about—not even those closest to you. Notice how it feels to give without recognition.

PRAYING: Set aside time for private prayer each day. Start with "Our Father" and let that relationship shape your conversation. Don't worry about eloquence—just talk to Him like the Father who delights in you.

FASTING: Consider a simple fast (from food, social media, entertainment, or something else) for one day or one meal. Use that time to ask God, "What am I really hungry for?" and "What am I trying to feed with this?"

REFLECTING: Journal about this question: "Do I really believe I belong to God's family through Jesus?" Write down the lies you've believed about having to earn God's love, then write the truth from Scripture beside each one.

MEMORIZING: Commit Matthew 6:8 or Matthew 11:28-30 to memory this week.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Read together as a group:

"Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me because I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." — Matthew 11:28-30

Reflection Question: What burden of performance do you need to lay down today?

PRAYER PROMPTS

Close your time by praying for one another:

- For those who are exhausted from performing
 - For deeper understanding of God as a delighting Father
 - For freedom from living for human approval
 - For grace to practice righteousness from a place of belonging, not earning
 - For rest in the finished work of Jesus
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NEXT STEPS

- Share with the group one way you plan to apply this week's message
 - Consider finding an accountability partner to check in with about your chosen practice
 - Prepare for next week's sermon in the "Summer on the Mount" series
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Remember: You are loved. You are seen. And through Jesus, you are enough.

5-Day Devotional: Living for Your True Audience

Day 1: The Father Who Already Sees You

Reading: Matthew 6:1-4

Devotional: Before you ever whispered a prayer, before you ever gave generously, before you ever took a single step toward God—He already saw you. The Father doesn't need to be informed, impressed, or convinced to care about you. Today's reading challenges us to examine our motives: Are we performing for human applause or living in the reality that our Heavenly Father already delights in us? The tragedy of living for human recognition is that it has a terrible shelf life. Compliments fade, recognition is forgotten, and applause eventually stops. But the Father's gaze never wavers. His attention never diminishes. You don't have to announce your righteousness to be noticed by Him—you already are seen, known, and loved.

Reflection: What areas of your spiritual life have become performances rather than genuine expressions of relationship with God?

Day 2: Prayer as Coming Home

Reading: Matthew 6:5-8; Romans 8:14-17

Devotional: Prayer isn't about convincing God to care—it's about enjoying the attention you already have. When Jesus taught us to pray "Our Father," He wasn't giving us a religious formula; He was inviting us into family. Through Christ, you don't approach God as a stranger at the door or a servant awaiting orders. You come as a beloved child. The Spirit of adoption allows you to cry "Abba, Father"—an intimate term of endearment and trust. Your Father knows what you need before you ask, which means prayer has never been about information; it's always been about intimacy. You don't have to pile up eloquent words or perform spiritually to earn an audience with God. You already belong.

Reflection: When you pray, do you come as a performer trying to impress, or as a child welcomed home?

Day 3: Hungering for What Truly Satisfies

Reading: Matthew 6:16-18; Psalm 63:1-8

Devotional: We are all hungry—the question is, what are we feeding? Fasting isn't primarily about food; it's about discovering what our souls are truly craving. We often reach for temporary satisfaction—success, comfort, entertainment, approval—only to discover we're still empty afterward. These things were never meant to carry the weight of our souls. Fasting removes one appetite so we can rediscover a deeper one. It's a way of praying without words: "Father, more than I want this comfort, I want You." When you've tasted the goodness of the Father, everything else begins to lose its grip. The psalmist declared, "My soul thirsts for you...because your love is better than life." What if we truly believed that?

Reflection: What temporary satisfactions are you reaching for that only God can truly fulfill?

Day 4: Belonging, Not Performing

Reading: Luke 15:11-24; Ephesians 2:4-9

Devotional: The prodigal son rehearsed his speech all the way home: "Make me like one of your hired servants." He was still performing, still negotiating, still trying to earn his way back. But the father never let him finish. He ran, embraced, celebrated—not a servant, but a son. This is the heart of the gospel: you don't earn your place in God's family through spiritual performance. Through Jesus, the door is already open. The cross didn't simply make forgiveness possible; it made family possible. You are saved by grace through faith—not by works, so that no one can boast. Stop rehearsing speeches. Stop trying to prove you're worthy. You can't earn what has already been freely given through Christ.

Reflection: In what ways are you still trying to earn the love and acceptance you already have in Christ?

Day 5: Rest for the Weary Performer

Reading: Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 4:9-11

Devotional: Jesus offers an invitation to all who are exhausted from performing: "Come to me...and I will give you rest." If you've spent years wondering if you're good enough, trying harder, serving more, praying longer—hoping that maybe then God will be pleased—hear this truth: if your hope is in performance, you will never find rest. But if your hope is in Jesus, you can finally stop performing. He lived the perfect life you couldn't live. He died the death you deserved. He rose in victory and invites you into the Father's family. Kingdom devotion isn't an audition for acceptance; it's the joyful response of sons and daughters who already belong. Lay down the weight of performance. Take up the easy yoke of grace.

Reflection: What burden of performance is Jesus inviting you to lay down today so you can experience true rest in Him?