



# First Baptist Church Selmer

SERMON ON THE MOUNT • GENUINE BELIEVER OR HYPOCRITE? •

MATTHEW 6:1-8, 16-18 • 10/19/2025

## MAIN POINT

By God's grace, we are to train ourselves to be more like Jesus through the practice of spiritual disciplines.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Describe a time in your life when you showed unusual discipline as you worked toward a goal, such as running a marathon or studying for a professional licensure exam. What were some of the disciplines you used to meet your goal?**

**What was the biggest sacrifice you made, or the biggest hurdle you overcame?**

To be excellent in something requires a disciplined approach to constant improvement. In many ways, this same mentality applies to spiritual growth. Training in godliness (1 Tim. 4:7-8) is an important aspect of the Christian life, and it's how we ensure we're pursuing God and strengthening our faith. When we're devoted to our relationship with God and invested in spiritual training, He uses us to make a difference in the world, just as He used Timothy and Paul.

As we look at the passage today, we will look at three components (or pillars) of Judaism that Jesus addressed in regards to the hypocritical religious devotion of the Pharisees. The three pillars were giving (v. 1-4), prayer (v. 5-15), and fasting (v. 16-18). We will look at each of them today.

# UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 6:1-8.

*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.*

*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. 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. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*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." (ESV)*

**How does Jesus describe the hypocritical behaviors and attitudes of the Pharisees?**

**Why does he warn His followers to beware of them?**

According to New Testament scholar Charles Quarles, "The word *hypocrite* originally referred to a play-actor who performed on the stage of the Greek or Roman theater... for the thrill of standing ovations and the prizes and awards... The hypocrites to whom Jesus referred were spiritual play-actors who pretended to have a piety that they did not actually possess in order to inspire the applause of a human audience."

The Pharisees wanted to be seen. They wanted to be praised and applauded for their deep religious devotion that appeared genuine based on their outward actions. But Jesus was never fooled. Now He warns His followers about people who live one way outwardly but in reality, are just pretending.

## **Why does God expect His children to be givers?**

### **If God showers His children with blessings, what does our willingness to give to others reveal about our hearts?**

Jesus' statement in Matthew 6:2, "*when you give,*" assumes that giving and caring for others are natural parts of being disciples. The same phrase is repeated in verses 5 and 16 in regards to prayer and fasting. The specific type of giving Jesus referenced in these verses was "alms-giving," or giving gifts of money to the poor, but His teaching also applies to giving of time, talents, and so forth.

### **What are some selfish reasons we're motivated to serve the poor? How do these motives compare with the ones Jesus desires us to have?**

### **How can we know if our motives are pure when it comes to prayer? What are some obvious clues our motives might not be pure?**

### **What three kinds of prayer did Jesus say to avoid?**

Jesus cited three kinds of prayer to avoid. First, don't pray as those who loved to be seen praying in synagogues and on street corners (v. 5). A second mistake when praying is to babble like the idolaters (v. 7). The word translated "babble" appears only here in the Bible. Because of the word's sound, the basic meaning has been suggested as "to stammer," that is, to repeat words. A derived meaning came to imply going on and on without thinking. Third, we need not feel compelled to inform God of endless details about our needs (v. 8).

## **| HAVE A VOLUNTEER 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."*  
(ESV)

### **Why is fasting an opportunity for confession of sin?**

### **Why is feeling our weakness in fasting so important? How have you experienced this?**

Daniel Akin states, "Fasting consists of abstaining from eating, drinking, or even sexual activity for the purposes of prayer, spiritual devotion, mourning, grief, and repentance. Fasting can be corporate or individual." - *The Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary*.

When we fast, we might find ourselves to be irritable or easily angered; that's not because of our hunger—it's because we are weak and frail. The fast reveals the weakness that's been inside us all along. As we empty ourselves, though, we must also take Jesus' invitation to fill us with something that truly satisfies.

"Fasting emphasized the denial of the flesh, but the Pharisees were glorifying their flesh by drawing attention to themselves. The Lord's words emphasized once again that such actions should be done in secret before God. As a result, God alone would know and would reward accordingly." - Louis A. Barbieri in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What are one or two spiritual disciplines that need to become a part of your daily life?**

**Why is it important to consider our motivation in practicing spiritual disciplines? How might considering our motives drive us back to the gospel?**

**What good things in your life are most likely to distract you from focusing on your relationship with God? How might the discipline of fasting help you reorder your priorities?**

## PRAYER

Thank God for giving us tools like giving, prayer, and fasting, with which we can grow in our relationship with Him. Ask God to help you carefully consider your motives for engaging in spiritual disciplines.

## COMMENTARY

| MATTHEW 6:1-8; 16-18

6:1. This verse serves as an introduction to all of 6:1-18. It establishes the theme of doing acts of righteousness before men, and thus losing reward from your Father in heaven.

Jesus' exhortation emphasizes the need to be on the alert to the temptation to seek our reward from men. Jesus was not condemning the righteous acts themselves. His concern was the motivation behind the actions. The same act of obedience can be right or wrong, depending on why a person does the act.

"Giving" or "almsgiving" is the translation of terms meaning "perform an act of mercy." By the first century, the phrase came to mean specifically the act of giving to the needy. This kind of giving was not mandatory in Scripture, for it was above and beyond the three required tithes. God's people are not to give to draw attention to themselves. In classical Greek, the term hypocrite referred to an actor on stage, wearing a mask. In the New Testament, it came to have a negative connotation, referring to someone putting on an act (i.e., masking the truth). Jewish rabbis taught that almsgiving received especially high reward.

6:3-5. The emphasis on "you" was intended to draw a stark contrast between the hypocrites just described and Jesus' kingdom servants, the disciples of 5:1-2. Jesus' instruction in 6:3 is exaggerated wording intended to make the point: "Do all you can to avoid drawing attention to yourself." Since nothing escapes the eye of God, even the most private act is noticed and will be rewarded. Jesus' use of the title Father added warmth to His guarantee of reward. This is not to be seen as a mechanical kind of relationship. Rather, the gift from the heart is given out of love for the Father, and the reward is returned as to a dearly beloved Son.

The reward (6:4,6,18) is not unrelated to the concept of reward in 6:1. The first word leans more toward the idea of repayment; thus, the idea of reimbursement for our "expense" incurred in each act of righteousness. But the point is the Father rewarding His servants. We were "created ... to do good works" (Eph. 2:10). In keeping with the instruction of 5:16 to "let your light shine," our Father in heaven will reward us for good works. The issue for the Pharisees was works apart from God's righteousness. The Pharisees were trying to establish their own righteousness by works.

6:6-8. Jesus' instructions on prayer began with a warning. Jesus was cautioning against praying in public with the motive of receiving admiring glances and pats on the back for being so devout. Jesus instructed us to find a private place for prayer where thoughts of people's responses won't distract us (v. 6). Thus, in secret, we can focus on the Father. A second mistake when praying is to babble (v. 7). Jesus was not forbidding prayer for the same thing over and over (see 26:39-44). He even told parables about persistence in prayer (Matt. 7:7-11). Jesus stressed that the Father listens to earnest hearts, not endless

words. Jesus reminded us that the Father knows the things we need before we ask Him (v. 8). This is not to discourage us from making specific requests in prayer, for He invites us to do that (7:7-11). It does assure us that He will answer in ways that best meet our needs, further His kingdom, and enhance our usefulness.

6:16-18. Fasting is the spiritual discipline of refraining from normal routines of eating and drinking in order to focus on repentance or prayer. Just as Jesus assumed His followers would give to the poor (Matt. 6:2) and pray (v. 5), He also assumed they would fast. The approach of the hypocrites in fasting was again to draw attention to themselves. By looking sad-faced and unattractive, they ensured others noticed they were fasting. Jesus ridiculed such theatrics as achieving the attention the hypocrites craved but missing the purpose of fasting. The spiritual discipline of fasting is essentially a private experience between the worshiper and God. The obvious way to safeguard fasting from hypocrisy is to keep it a secret. Then God will reward you. Self-denial of any sort is counter-cultural in our day. Choosing to give up pleasure of any kind certainly gains notice. Our motives to live a life of purity and sobriety, and simplicity may be genuine at the start, but we all are vulnerable to enjoying the praise of others for these motives.