

FLIPPED

"THE FLIPSIDE OF RITUAL" MATTHEW 6:1-18

This Week's Core Competency

Humility – I choose to esteem others above myself. Philippians 2:3, 4 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

When it comes to spiritual formation, I have good news and bad news for you. Here's the bad news. No one can be like Jesus by *trying hard* to be like him. This is obviously true with respect to the virtue of humility. No one can, in Peter's words, "clothe himself with humility" (1Pe 5:5) by trying hard to be humble. Put differently, no one can be humble no matter how hard he or she tries. Clothing oneself with humility isn't at all a matter of mustering the raw willpower to make it so. Now, here's the good news. What can't be done by trying hard, can be done by *training wisely*. Paul didn't tell Timothy, "Try hard to be godly;" he told him, "Train yourself to be godly" (1Ti 4:7).

Having said that, how does a person train himself or herself to be humble? One way is by fasting—the neglected spiritual discipline. Fasting, isn't in the words of one author, "a magical way to manipulate God into doing our will; it's not a way to get God to be an accomplice to our plans." Matter of fact, if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.

Practices are the nuclear reactors of the Christian faith, arenas where the gospel and human life come together in energizing, even explosive ways.

- Craig Dykstra

"Neither is fasting a spiritual way to lose weight or control others . . . Fasting is an opportunity to lay down an appetite—an appetite for food, for media, for shopping. This act of self-denial may not seem huge—it's just a meal or a trip to the mall—but it brings us face to face with the hunger at the core of our being. Fasting exposes how we try to keep empty hunger at bay and gain a sense of well-being by devouring creature comforts. Through self-denial we begin to recognize what controls us. Our small denials of the self show us just how little taste we actually have for sacrifice or time with God" (Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 219, 20).

Fasting involves voluntarily abstaining from anything legitimate, usually food, for spiritual purposes. It entails deeming something or someone more important than self. Think of it this way; fasting is an exercise in humility. The link between fasting and humility is recognized by Calvin in the following quote. "Many who are accustomed to expressing humility in prayer by kneeling might ask why we would want to express humility all day by fasting. Conversely, John Calvin asked a better question: Why not? 'For since this [fasting] is a holy exercise both for the humbling of men and for their confession of humility, why should we use it less than the ancients did in similar need? . . . What reason is there why we should not do the same?'" (Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 172).

If you've never tried fasting, start with a *normal* (i.e., abstaining from food but not water), *private* (as described by Jesus in Mt 6:18), *occasional* (e.g., lunch on Wednesday) fast. And here's what you might do in the short time you set aside for fasting.

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Sit down at your computer with a bottle of water and visit World Vision's website (www.worldvision.org). Check out what that organization is doing to fight hunger in third world countries. Thank God that your fast is *voluntary*, learn about the magnitude of the problem, and consider how you might help. Or you might devote your fasting time to reading through a book of the Bible. Start by reading Paul's letter to the Philippians. On day one, read chapter 1 and then go for a short walk. The next time you fast, read chapter 2 and go for a short walk. Follow this pattern until you finish the letter.

For Discussion

A friend in your home group refuses to lead the group in prayer anytime it prays together. He says the whole experience flies in the face of what Jesus had to say about prayer in Matthew 6:5-8. In the first place, it's public and seen, not private and unseen. In the second place, it deteriorates into "babbling." One person after another rambles on, trying to sound more spiritual than the previous one while looking for a place to "land" his or her long-winded petition. That's the very thing Jesus told his disciples not to do. At first you took offense at his criticism of the group's prayer time, and then you wondered: What if he's right? Your thoughts . . .

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Matthew 6:1-18

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.

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 men. I tell you the truth, 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.

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 men. I tell you the truth, 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.

9 "This, then, is how you should pray:

"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 today our daily bread.

12 Forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

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

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

16 "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. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 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. (NIV(c)1984)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

* Highlight v. 1.

* Circle "acts of righteousness" in v. 1.

* Draw a line across separating between vv. 9, 10 and another between vv. 15 and 16.

* Underline "I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full" in vv. 2, 5, 16.

* Circle "trumpets" in v. 2.

* Double underline "Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" in vv. 4, 6, 18.

* Number the occurrences of "reward" in vv. 1-18.

* Number the occurrences of "hypocrites" in vv. 1-18.

* Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 3, 6, 17, 18.

* Box "so that" indicating *purpose* in vv. 4, 18.

* Box "for" indicating *reason* in vv. 5, 7, 8, 16.

* Circle "babbling" in v. 7.

* Box "like" indicating *comparison* in v. 7.

* Circle "fast" in vv. 16-18.

* Circle "disfigure" in v. 16.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Explain the relationship of verse 1 to verses 2-18 of chapter 6.
2. Jesus finds fault with the "acts of righteousness" of people he calls "the hypocrites." How so?
3. Explain the *contrast* in verse 3.
4. In 5:16 Jesus tells his disciples to do their good deeds in public, but in 6:3 he says to do them in secret. How can this discrepancy be resolved?
5. Explain the *contrast* in verse 6.
6. Do people nowadays "babble" when they pray? Explain.
7. If the Father knows what we need before we pray (v. 8), why bother praying?
8. What do you infer about fasting from what Jesus has to say about it?
9. **Discussion:** Talk about the relationship of Mt 6:1-18 to the virtue of humility.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Matthew 6:1 opens a new section in Jesus' sermon. One author explains, "In Matthew 5 he teaches that our righteousness must be greater than that of the Pharisees (because they obeyed the letter of the law, while our obedience must include our heart) and greater also (in the form of love) than that of the pagans (because they love each other, while our love must include our enemies as well). Now in Matthew 6, with regard to 'religious' righteousness, he draws the same two contrasts. He takes the ostentatious religion of the Pharisees first and says: *You must not be like the hypocrites* (5). He then moves on to the mechanical formalism of the heathen and says: *Do not be like them* (v. 8). Thus again Christians are to be different from both Pharisees and pagans . . . The essential difference in religion as in morality is that authentic Christian righteousness is not an external manifestation only, but one of the secret things of the heart" (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, TBST, 126).

Jesus states the general principle in verse 1. "All acts of righteousness must be preserved from the ostentation of showmanship and from the degradation of the chase for human approval" (D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 68). Then, after making his point he goes on to illustrate that point with respect to three basic, fundamental religious practices—almsgiving, prayer, and fasting—taking for granted that *his disciples will engage in all of them*. The three are tied together by a common pattern. First, he offers a description and a denunciation of an expression of play-acting piety so typical of the Pharisaism of that day: "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" (v. 2). Second, he gives an ironic affirmation of the limited reward of that kind of pseudo-spirituality: "I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full" (v. 2). Their reward, of course, is the acclaim of the crowd, and nothing more. That's all such actors get! Third, he offers a contrasting description and affirmation of an expression of true piety and its lasting reward: "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (vv. 4, 5).

On almsgiving in that day one author writes,

"Poverty was widespread in ancient agrarian societies, and the people of Israel took seriously the obligation to provide for the poor (cf. Deut. 15:11) . . . The truly spiritual person recognized the plight of the needy and attended responsibly to their care. But Jesus says, 'Do not announce it with trumpets' (6:2). Some suggest a literal trumpet is in mind, either to call the people to fasts with accompanying almsgiving or to signal an especially large gift being given. Or perhaps this denotes the sound of coins being tossed into the trumpet-shaped money chests in the temple used for collecting alms (*m. Se-qal.* 2:1). But more likely Jesus is drawing on a vivid piece of typical irony—those who seem to be the most humanitarian often want the most human glory and will make it known that they have been magnanimous in their concern for the poor. In our day the metaphor is well known as a person who wants to 'toot his own horn'" (Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew*, 272). Instead of drawing attention to one's generosity, Christ tells his disciples to give in secret (v. 4). Others will not know they acted righteously but their Father will, and he will reward them.

To those who are troubled by the thought of doing good for a reward, C. S. Lewis writes, "We must not be troubled by unbelievers when they say that this promise of reward makes the Christian life a mercenary affair. There are different kinds of reward. There is the reward which has no natural connection with the things you do to earn it, and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things. Money is not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man mercenary if he marries a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover, and he is not mercenary for desiring it . . . The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation" ("The Weight of Glory," cited by Stott, 131,32). What then is the Father's reward for the secret giver? Perhaps, it's no more than seeing his gift accomplish that for which it was given, namely to see a need relieved. Seeing his donation feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and heal the sick may be reward enough. Anything more is solely up to the Father.

On prayer in that day another author writes, "Of course the discipline of regular prayer is good; all devout Jews prayed three times a day like Daniel.

And there was nothing wrong in standing to pray, for this was the usual posture of prayer among Jews. Nor were they necessarily mistaken to pray at the street corners as well as in the synagogues if their motive was to break down segregated religion and bring their recognition of God out of the holy places into the secular life of every day. But Jesus uncovered their true motive as they stood in synagogue or street with hands uplifted to heaven in order that they might *be seen by men*. Behind their piety lurked their pride. What they really wanted was applause. They got it. 'They have received their reward in full' (NIV)" (133). Instead of drawing attention to one's devotion, Christ tells his disciples to pray in secret. He tells them to go inside where no one can see them except the Father and pray there (v. 6). Behind closed doors they'll have no need to drone on endlessly in order to impress those standing near them; their prayers can be short and to the point knowing that verbosity is no key to being heard.

Finally, on fasting a third author writes, "In the Jewish calendar there were certain special fasts in which everybody participated. These took place in connection with the high feast days, such as the Day of Atonement or the Jewish New Year. Fasts might also be called when, for example, the

autumn rains failed to appear, these fasts, too, would be national in scope. In addition, many individuals would fast at other times, allegedly for reason of moral and religious self-discipline, and especially as a sign of deep repentance and brokenness before the Lord, and perhaps as part of some important request offered up to the Lord. But what began as a spiritual self-discipline was prostituted into an occasion for pompous self-righteousness. Some would wear glum and pained expressions on their faces, go about their business unwashed and unkempt, and sprinkle ashes on their head, all to inform peers that they were fasting. What was once a sign of humiliation became a sign self-righteous self-display" (Carson, 93, 94). Instead of drawing attention to one's abstinence, Christ tells his disciples to fast in secret. Don't alter your appearance during a fast; brush your hair and wash your face as usual. Act normally so no one but God will know that you're fasting. The point of his three illustrations is the same. Our acts of righteousness must be practiced before God not paraded before men. Herein lies a tension. "Our good works must be public so that our light shines; our religious devotions must be secret lest we boast about them" (Stott, 127).

The Message of the Passage

Christ's disciples do their acts of righteousness secretly to receive a reward from their Father and not openly to receive the acclaim of others.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about what God wants you to know . . .

–Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

–Write about what God wants you to do . . .

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **acts of righteousness** Cf., "practicing your piety" (NRSV); "do your charitable deeds" (NKJV); "display your righteousness" (the NET Bible); "make a show of your religion" (NEB); "parade your righteousness" (NJB). The same word [dikaiousune] is simply translated "righteousness" in 5:6, 20. "Previously 'righteousness' related to kindness, purity, honesty and love; now it concerns such practices as almsgiving, praying and fasting. Thus Jesus moves from a Christian's moral righteousness to his 'religious' righteousness" (Stott, 125). "Whereas the 'greater righteousness' of 5:20 introduced the demands for conduct corresponding to a new relationship between individuals (5:21-48), the righteousness of 6:1 introduces three admonitions for conduct corresponding to a new relationship between the individual and God" (Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 275).

v. 1 **reward** "This anticipates the considerable stress on reward in the three following sections, in each of which Jesus says concerning those who display their piety 'they have their reward' (vv. 2, 5, and 16), and of those who practice their piety in secret that 'your Father will reward you' (vv. 4, 6, and 18)" (Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33a, *Matthew 1-13*. 139). The repetition of words (e.g., "hypocrites," "secret," etc.) and phrases tie vv. 1-18 together.

v. 2 **give to needy** Lit., "do an act of mercy," "give alms" (NRSV, NJB). "The Jews took giving to the poor very seriously, and in each community there were officials who made weekly collections of goods or money for the poor (Moore, II, pp. 174-79). Gifts were obligatory; a man residing in a town for thirty days became 'liable for contributing to the soup kitchen, three months for the charity box . . .' (B. Bat. 8a). But more than this compulsory levy was needed, and almsgiving over and above the charity box was commended" (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 135; cf., Tobit 12:8-10 NRSV). "Performing deeds of mercy, or doing kindness, was one of the pillars of Judaism (m. 'Abot 1:2)" (Hagner, 139; Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew*, 272). "In addition, special festival days and synagogue services gave further occasion for making contributions" (Guelich, 278).

v. 2 **trumpets** It's unclear whether the trumpets were literal or metaphorical (cf., "toot your own horn")—perhaps more likely figurative (see discussion in Morris, 137 and Hagner, 139). "Whether Pharisees sometimes did this literally or whether Jesus was painting an amusing caricature does not really matter. In either case he was rebuking our childish anxiety to be highly esteemed by men. As Spurgeon put it, 'To stand with a penny in one hand and a trumpet in the other is the posture of hypocrisy'" (Stott, 129).

v. 2 **hypocrites** "In classical Greek the *hypokrites* was first an orator and then an actor. So figuratively the word came to be applied to anybody who treats the world as a stage on which he plays a part. He lays aside his true identity and assumes a false one" (129).

v. 4 **will reward you** To the question "Should we not rather give purely for the sake of giving?" Stott offers an extended quote from C. S. Lewis, which ends "The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation." And then he explains, "What, then, is the 'reward' which the heavenly Father gives the secret giver? It is neither public nor necessarily future. It is probably the only reward which genuine love wants when making a gift to the needy, namely to see the need relieved" (Stott, 132).

v. 5 **on street corners** "There were prayers that were offered at prescribed times (cf. Ps. 55:10; Dan. 6:10; Acts 3:1), and it was not beyond the ingenuity of some to order their affairs so that they were in a public place at the time of prayer and thus 'compelled' to pray where they would be seen" (Morris, 14). "Certain prayers like the *Shema* and the Eighteen Benedictions were statutory and fixed as to time of the day and content (Str-B 1:397; Jeremias, 'Daily,' 67-72). Whereas the *Shema* was to be recited morning and evening, the Eighteen Benedictions was to be prayed morning, afternoon, and evening" (Guelich, 281).

v. 7 **babbling** The derivation of this rare Gk term [*battalogo*, lit., "to say *batta*"] is debated. Some think it is derived from Aramaic words meaning "talk idly" and so give it the meaning "babble" or "speak without thinking." Others think it is onomatopoeic meaning "stammer" or "stutter" and approximates the Latin *blatero* [cf., English "blether," "blather," "blither" as in "blithering idiot"]. "The verb here, however, refers not to a speech impediment but to the repetition of meaningless syllables. 'Many words' [*polulogia*] seems to have in mind vain repetition and lengthiness" (Hagner, 146).

v. 16 **disfigure** Cf., "go about looking unsightly" (NJB). "The word translated 'disfigure' (*aphanizo*) means literally to 'make to disappear' and so to 'render invisible or unrecognizable'. They may have neglected personal hygiene, or covered their heads with sackcloth, or perhaps smeared their faces with ashes in order to look pale, wan, melancholy and so outstandingly holy" (Stott, 139). Ironically, they hid their faces to be seen!

Family Time

Family time will help you take a break from your busy schedule and spend time connecting with your family.

Tips for your Family Time: Keep it simple! Be flexible! Do it often! HAVE FUN!!

In this week's lesson, we are learning that our acts of worship - giving, praying and fasting should flow out of our private relationship with Jesus. The Pharisees were intent on performing their spiritual acts in public to draw attention to themselves. Jesus teaches that what we do in private will manifest itself in public ways. You can help your child understand this principle by talking about eating healthy and exercising. Plan a healthy meal together this week and take the kids with you to the grocery store to buy the ingredients. Talk about the options that are good for your body and those that aren't. Over dinner, remind your kids that taking care of the inside of your body will make the outside healthy. Eating right helps us be healthy, build strong bones and muscles, and maintain healthy weight. Plan to take a walk as a family after dinner. Exercise is also a great way for us to get our blood pumping and muscles working which will also benefit our bodies. Our spiritual health improves in a similar way. If we are feeding our minds and heart with God's truth and spending time in prayer, we are building spiritual muscle that will manifest itself in obvious ways. When we spend time privately with Jesus, our text tells us we will be rewarded and we can be sure our reward will bring glory to God!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Matthew 6: 1-18

1. According to verse 3 and 4, how are we to give to the needy?
2. How does verse 6 tell us we should pray?
3. Finish this sentence that appears three times in the text.
"Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, _____."
_____."

What Do You Think

1. According to verse 3 and 4, how are we to give to the needy?
2. How does verse 6 tell us we should pray?
3. Finish this sentence that appears three times in the text.
"Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, _____."
_____."

What R U Going To Do

Make a new commitment as a family to be physically and spiritually healthier. Make a fruit and vegetable chart to track how many you are eating. Go on a walk a few times a week. Have a quiet time checkup to see if family members are spending time alone with Jesus.

MEMORY TIME

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the Memory Verse throughout the house.

Core Comp

Humility - Choosing to make others more important than me

Memory Verse

Proverbs 4:23 "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.