

**Welcome to the
Common Ground Café!**



Sunday, April 7, 2019

**Impressing God
A Study of Matthew 6:1-8; 16-18**

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Did you grow up in a home that was “too showy” about their religion, “too secret” about their religion, or somewhere in between?

In the first half of Matthew 6, Jesus warns against doing the right thing for the wrong reason. Read Matthew 6:1-8 and 16-18.

Jesus states the general principle in verse 1, and then he gives three examples. Answer the following questions:

- ❖ What is the general principle in verse 1?
- ❖ What religious practice is discussed in verses 2-5?
- ❖ What religious practice is discussed in verses 5-6?
- ❖ What religious practice is discussed in verses 16-18?

Before we look at how Jesus instructed us to conduct these three spiritual practices, let’s discuss these three spiritual practices. Answer the following questions:

- ❖ **Charity:** In verses 2-4, Jesus seemed to think of giving to the needy as a religious act. In what way does our relationship to the poor impact our relationship to God? Does God’s call to care for the poor have any political implications, or is it simply a private decision?
- ❖ **Prayer:** In our study today, we’re skipping verses 9-15. This is where we find the Lord’s Prayer. We will begin a six-week study on the Lord’s Prayer on Easter Sunday. Who do you hope to bring to the first week of that study on Easter Sunday?
- ❖ **Fasting:** In verse 16, did Jesus use the phrase “if you fast” or “when you fast”? Based on your answer, do you think Jesus expects us to see fasting as still relevant today as it was in the Bible days? If you answered no, why not? If you answered yes, what is the spiritual value of fasting?

In all our spiritual practices, we have a choice between two audiences, two arenas, and two accolades.

Two Audiences

According to Jesus, when we perform our spiritual practices we will hope to please only one of two audiences. Who are those two audiences?

Describe some of the subtle ways by which we seek the praise of people for what we do.

John Wooten said, "The true test of a man's character is what he does when no one is watching." In light of today's text, would Jesus agree?

In Jesus's day, his culture admired others for their religious practices. In our day, our culture increasingly considers religion irrelevant or odd. (Think of the criticism people raise when Christians offer "thoughts and prayers" after a tragedy.) If we neglect religious practices because it's **not** admired by others, is that similar to doing religious practices only if it **is** admired by others? Explain.

Two Arenas

According to Jesus, when we perform our spiritual practices we have a choice between two arenas. What are those two?

What did Jesus mean in verse 3 by the phrase "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing"?

Read Matthew 5:15-16, Acts 4:34, Daniel 6:7-11, and Acts 13:2 and answer the following questions:

- ❖ In light of these verses, is it **always** wrong when the public knows someone is giving, praying, or fasting?
- ❖ If you answered yes, what do we do with these other verses you've just read? If you answered no, how do we reconcile these verses with Jesus's teaching in Matthew 6?

If people somehow find out about what you have done in service to God and recognize you, does that negate your reward from God? Why or why not?

Two Accolades

Jesus said that we'll get rewarded by the audience we're performing for. So...

- ❖ What kind of rewards do we get from performing for people? (There are several.)
- ❖ What kind of rewards do we get from performing for God? (There are several.)

Conclusion

We're taking the first half of 2019 to study through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Why do you think Jesus takes such a big portion of his Sermon on the Mount to address this topic of showy spirituality?

Do you think this is still an issue in our life and in our church or is it more relevant to the religious community of Jesus day?

We should avoid the ditch on either side of the road. On one side we can be too "flashy" with our spiritual disciplines. On the other side, we can fail to engage in these spiritual disciplines entirely. What are the consequences of both of these extremes?



Close with praise reports and prayer requests