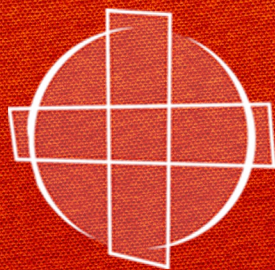


Donald J. Wills
Senior Pastor

SEPTEMBER
2018

TRANS *f* **ORMED** 2018
MATTHEW 5:33-6:24
IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS



ADULT CONNECT
CLASS CURRICULUM

The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

As we continue our study of Matthew, this month's lessons show how our relationships with others are transformed through our relationship with Christ. Christ's teaching is clear about how we should relate to our fellow man as well as our heavenly Father. As we study His teaching about our interaction with people with whom we connect on a daily basis, let us apply what we are taught through His Word.

As I shared last month, "Many of our relationships could probably use a little work. However, I am reminded that in any relationship I have control over one party—and that is myself. It is the same for you." If there is going to be change in our lives and how we relate to others, we must honestly evaluate ourselves and how we interact with others: family, friends, co-workers, and most importantly our Father in heaven. When our actions differ from His teaching, then we must take steps to correct our mistakes and apply what He has given us in His Word to our lives.

Through this study, stop and ponder: "How are my relationships?" I encourage you to begin by examining your own relationship with Christ and then your relationships with others. Do you shine in each as a true follower of Christ? Our prayer—and goal as a disciple—is to do just that.

-Blessings

Pastor Don



Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively

Introduce

Day 1: Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Instruct

Day 2: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

Day 3: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

Inspire

Day 4: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Incorporate

Day 5: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

Day 6: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

Day 7: Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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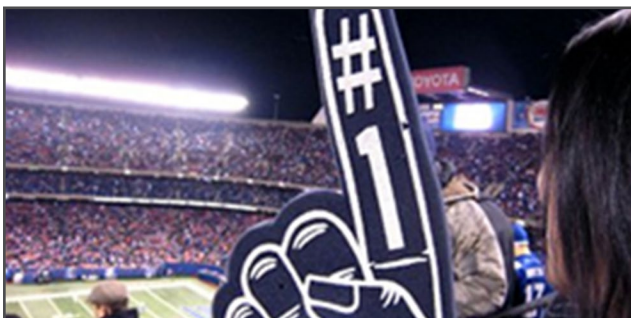


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Transformed in our Relationships in Public

Matthew 5:33-42

Focal Verse:

“But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”

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Matthew 5:37

Introduce

Almost every new product that we buy comes with some type of initial warranty that guarantees it will function according to the original specifications under proper use. For some, the warranty gives peace of mind because it seemingly covers *anything* that could go wrong with the product without incurring additional repair expenses should something actually happen. For this reason, the store which has sold the item will also inevitably offer an extended-warranty for a period totaling three to five years for an additional fee. Whether on a car, a computer, a tool, or a



household appliance, the extended-warranty overlaps with the original unless stated in the contract; therefore, a three-year period in actuality becomes only two—already somewhat deceptive advertising practices! However, many people still readily shell out the money without investigating the terms for this extended-warranty fully.

Usually, we find the warranty in a package along with the instruction manual which we never read because it contains way too many words and too much small print. So, we'll toss the massive amount of paperwork in a desk drawer or filing cabinet and won't look at it or think about it again until a problem arises. Hopefully, our new product works well and serves its purpose for years without causing problems. Unfortunately, many of us have probably had an experience where what we bought malfunctioned before the warranty fully expired. After spending an hour looking for the paperwork in a messy file, we finally find it and begin reading the fine print which discusses everything the warranty does and does not include. Although we may have initially thought it covered everything without exception, we have learned the hard way that it does not.

One time, I had purchased a new set of tires from a large commercial chain that offered "road hazard" and "full replacement value" as part of their warranty. The words "full replacement value" were scrawled across the warranty in large, bold letters, but at the bottom in the fine print it claims that "full value" was based upon the tread depth which they could then manipulate to increase the price. On a tire less than one-year-old which had damage from a nail, I had to pay more than two-thirds of the cost to replace it. In reality, the warranty didn't guarantee "full replacement value!" It was a dishonest and

Introduce

deceptive tactic to sell their tires. In [Matthew 5:33-42](#), Jesus emphasizes the need for us to keep our promises and remain principled in our disagreements. The world uses deceptive tactics, such as this warranty, but we as Christians should be transformed in our relationships in public so that other can see Christ in us!

Key
Question

Why is it important to consistently keep our promises?

Matthew 5:33-37

KEEP YOUR PROMISES:

Once **again**, Jesus appeals to the Old Testament to show the importance of keeping our promises and being consistent with our word by acting with integrity. Unlike He has twice previously, Jesus doesn't appeal directly to one Old Testament passage, but actually combines several into one statement. He reminds His audience that they should **not swear falsely, but perform** their **oaths to the Lord** (v. 33). Here, Jesus points to the third commandment which states that we should "not take the name of the Lord in vain" ([Exod 20:7](#)). To it, He links [Leviticus 19:12](#) which adds that we should "not swear by [His] name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord" along with [Deuteronomy 6:13](#)* which declares that they "shall take oaths in His name." The Bible, however, doesn't establish parameters whereby we *must* swear or make **oaths** to other people in certain situations, but it does clearly state that if we vow or promise to do something then we must absolutely commit to fulfilling it (see [Deut 2:23](#); [Eccl 5:4-5](#)).

In-Depth Information



Without understanding the full context of [Deut 6:13](#), it may appear that the Lord permits us to swear oaths in His name; thus, it would seem to contradict Jesus' teaching. The entire verse reads: "You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name." According to the context, however, taking an oath in His name means that they have committed to serving Him alone—they would not serve any other gods. In other words, they aren't making human contracts and covenants, but declaring their allegiance to the Lord!

On the other hand, Jesus clarifies that we should **not swear at all** (v. 34). He doesn't contradict the Old Testament at this point, but declares that swearing or making any kind of oath is not the preferred way. He can make such a statement with authority because Scripture is ambivalent about making **oaths**; it doesn't specify or comment whether it's right or wrong. The Bible doesn't tell us that we *must* make **oaths in the name of the Lord** nor does it clearly say that we shouldn't until Jesus Himself cautions us against using them. Jesus cautions against using the name of the Lord to make **oaths** because when we fail to keep that which we promised we misrepresent Him and undeservedly bring



dishonor upon Him. In fact, this meaning lies behind the third commandment prohibiting the misuse of God's holy name! Even though God always remains faithful and fulfills His promises to us, we harm His good reputation in the eyes of men when we don't keep our word. Therefore, we ought to act with integrity and keep our word without making an oath;

even when we act without an oath, God will still be glorified when we are consistent and faithful in our words and actions.

When we don't keep our promises, how does it reflect negatively upon the Lord?

Question
1

Next, Jesus lists four things which we ought not use when swearing an oath: 1) **heaven**, 2) **earth**, 3) **Jerusalem**, and 4) our **head** (vv. 34b-36). Because God alone has the power to make an oath and fulfill it, when we **swear by** anything else we put ourselves in His sovereign place. For instance, one should not swear **by heaven** because **it's God's throne** and figuratively represents His sovereignty over the universe; therefore, making an oath or covenant solely belongs to the Lord who is the almighty Creator and Sustainer of life. **Nor** should we **swear by the earth** which functions as **His footstool** or **by Jerusalem** which is the earthly dwelling place of the **Great King**. As Creator, the realm of **the earth** belongs solely to the Lord who has the right to oversee it in His authority. Similarly, like **heaven, Jerusalem** represents His earthly throne and seat of power; therefore, God alone dictates and orchestrates His will and plan on earth. Finally, we shouldn't **swear by** our **head** because we have no authority to **make one hair white or black**. When we swear by ourselves, that is our own life, we put ourselves in God's place of having ultimate authority.

Instead of swearing an oath, we ought to pledge allegiance and remain committed to the Lord and His will. James captures this sentiment in his letter when he talks about our inability to plan accurately and effectively apart from God's will. As an illustration,

he points to someone who has made definite travel plans saying, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such city"; however, he reminds them that they don't actually know what will happen in the future. Only God can know that! Consequently, we ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that" ([Jas 4:13-15](#)).

We ought to focus on doing God's will and faithfully following His guidance rather than swearing human **oaths**. In fact, we shouldn't make **oaths at all** because they are God's prerogative and only He holds the future securely in His hands. We certainly should plan and work proactively toward a goal,



but we shouldn't make definitive and careless statements without consulting the Lord and following His directions explicitly.

Why are Jesus' remarks in this passage not a license to remain complacent and do nothing?

Question
2

Jesus isn't saying that we can't make human commitments, such as marriage, business agreements, or basic social promises, but rather He stresses the importance of maintaining our focus on Him and seeking guidance to fulfill our promises so they bring honor and glory to the Lord. As we will learn during the last week of September, the Lord should receive the priority in everything we do. When we put Him first, we will always have integrity in our business practices regardless of what others may do. We will display morals in all our social relationships, whether with family, friends, neighbors, or even acquaintances. In addition, we will have ethics in all our financial dealings and not allow greed or coveting to dictate our choices. Above all, we won't make flippant statements or careless promises, but rather we will continually think how we reflect upon the Lord by what we say and do. Certainly, we may be tempted to deceive or mislead others at times, but when we focus on Christ He will help us overcome those fleshly desires and act with integrity and consistency.

When someone lacks integrity and repeatedly breaks the promises he has made, we lose trust and confidence in him; moreover, we tend to become cynical and skeptical

because we doubt he will ever keep his word. As believers, however, we ought to stand in stark contrast to the world which freely makes promises and takes pledges only to break them when a better opportunity presents itself. On the contrary, we ought to strive to represent our heavenly Father by executing and fulfilling that which we have



promised in order to show that He always fulfills His promises and never goes against His word. In so doing, we will become like these two little girls who were counting their pennies as they played. With exactness one declared, "I have five pennies." The other boldly stated, "I have ten." "No," said the first girl, "You have just five cents; the same as I do." To which the second girl

quickly replied, "But my father said that when he came home tonight, he would give me five cents, and so I have ten cents." Through faith, she had confidence that what she had not yet seen would come to fruition and she counted it as being already hers because it had been promised by her father who had never failed!

At times, however, every one of us will fail to deliver what we have promised because we become distracted from the plan God has for our lives and we remain imperfect in our flesh. We may not intentionally try to deceive people, but we still break our promises. For example, as a child I often heard, "Wait 'til we get home! You're really going to get it for behaving this way!" Sometimes, fortunately for me, my parents forgot and broke their promise—much to my delight. If this happened often, it would teach the wrong thing; I would learn that I could act however I wanted in public without consequence. Sometimes we promise to do something, whether a chore, a project, a favor, or even a life-style change for health reasons, just to get a person off our back. Yet, we never even have the intention of doing those things in the first place. Wouldn't it be better simply to tell the other person the truth rather than creating a lack of trust and deception? In other instances, we may promise to help someone, whether financially or by mentoring him, and we become so "busy" that we never follow through on our pledge. Unfortunately, this also teaches the person that he or she is not a priority nor what we have promised

them was of any consequence or value.

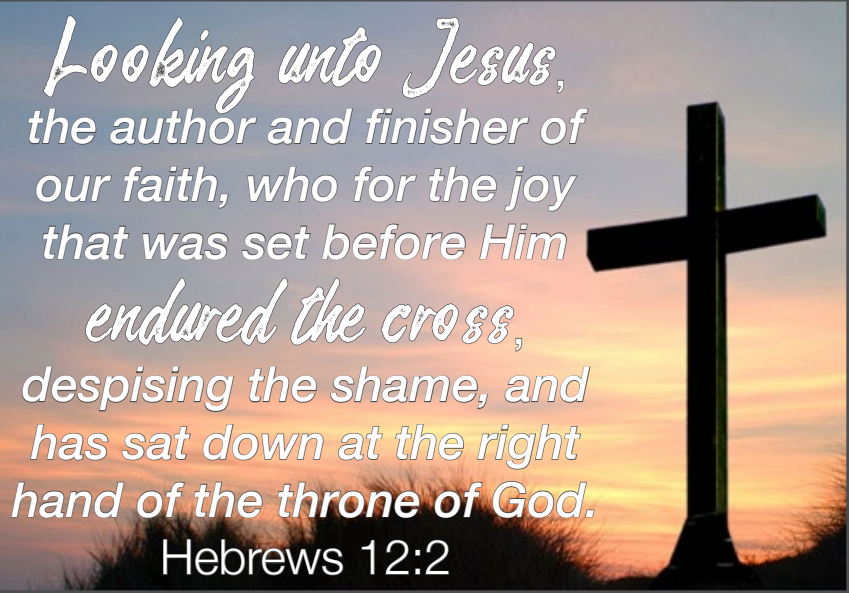
In what ways have you experienced broken promises in your life or seen it in the lives of others? How did it affect you or them?

Question
3

Imagine if Christ had behaved this way and broken His promises when He came to earth. From the beginning, He promised salvation to all through His sacrificial death on the cross; He told us that He would be the perfect sacrifice for us so we could have eternal life, but when it came time to endure the cross He said, "I don't think this is the best way. I'm not going to do this. I'm a busy man. I have a successful ministry despite my bumbling followers who at times fail to understand what I'm saying. I don't need to die, but I need

to be here to continue training them. We can do this another way."

Praise the He didn't say these things and break His promise because we would all be without hope and hopelessly dead in our sins and condemned to hell. Instead, Jesus obediently fulfilled His promise and because of His love for us endured the cross and died for us! Therefore, we ought to follow His example. We



*Looking unto Jesus,
the author and finisher of
our faith, who for the joy
that was set before Him
endured the cross,
despising the shame, and
has sat down at the right
hand of the throne of God.
Hebrews 12:2*

don't need to make oaths and pledges to other human beings in the name of God, but we need to commit solely to the Lord. When we have surrendered fully to Him, we will live with integrity and keep our promises, strengthening our relationships and pointing others to Him.

Finally, Jesus tells us that we must be consistent in our speech and fulfillment of our promises; therefore, He says that we ought to **let our yes be yes** and our **no be no** (v. 37). The best example of consistency / inconsistency comes in the from the parents' relationship to their child(ren). Often, children will go to one parent to ask permission for something; if he doesn't get the answer for which he seeks then he will go to the other parent in hope that he might have better luck. Without discussing it first, sometimes one parent may say no while the other parent says yes. As a couple, they have presented an inconsistent answer which the child will exploit and continue to exploit in future instances. It would have been best that the couple discussed their response together

Instruct

first and presented a unified front.

Unfortunately, many people behave in life in a similar way to these parents. In one set of circumstances, they speak one way; in another set, they speak a totally different way. Their answers then depend not on truth, but on their circumstances! In other cases in order to get out of a jam from a comment they have made, whether in person or online, a person will attempt to clarify or re-define what they meant! Jesus, however, in verse 37 warns us to speak plainly and openly. The answers we give should be the same in every circumstance and we ought to think carefully about the things that we say so that others will clearly understand what we actually mean. In any case, we are to act consistently with integrity when we speak and abide by and fulfill that which we have spoken.

In what ways do people speak with a double tongue today? How does that hurt their testimony?

Question
4

Matthew 5:38-42

IN DISPUTES REMAIN PRINCIPLED:

Next, Jesus warns against retaliation and revenge when He quotes the first part of [Exodus 21:24](#) which permits the human government to issue punishment equal to the crime; in more modern terms, the punishment should fit the crime—here **an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth** (v. 38). Although the human government still retains the God-given right to enact punishment for wrongdoing and sentence the guilty, Jesus tells His followers to refrain from retaliating and to go the extra mile. The world expects someone to seek revenge for the wrong done unto him, but we have a higher standard as believers to represent Christ. At this point, Jesus discusses four areas in which we ought not seek revenge, but to react with grace and kindness. First, we shouldn't respond in kind to those who insult us or mock us (v. 39). We should ignore an **evil person** who hurls insults. Jesus tells them **not to resist**—that is fight back—but rather to **turn the other cheek**.

To give someone a backhanded **slap** on the **right cheek** doesn't place them in physical danger, but it signifies more of an insult or embarrassing put down. When our lives aren't in mortal danger, we should respond to such insults with kindness and love, so that the person may see Christ in us and we can lead them unto repentance. However, most of us have a mental image in which we take this teaching literally like Michael

Landen's character in *Highway to Heaven* where he played an angel sent to earth to help people. In one scene, the angel was violently attacked by a thug in an alley in which an altercation occurred and he was punched in the face with a closed fist and knocked into a pile of garbage. Standing up and brushing himself off, the angel then turned the other cheek



and was once again brutally struck and knocked down by the thug. After turning **the other cheek**, he sprang to his feet and punched the thug with such force knocking him unconscious. Jesus isn't talking about responding to a brutal assault in such a manner nor does He only want us to ignore insults merely twice and then retaliate with unrestrained force. On the contrary, Jesus wants us to exercise self-control and resist the urge to respond in like manner. He doesn't want us to compromise our morality and values, but to remain on the firm foundation of His Word and treat people with respect even though they may not treat us in that same manner.

What other verses in the Bible tell us not to retaliate or treat others in an unethical manner, but to respond with love and kindness?

Question
5

Second, Jesus cautions against retaliating with petty lawsuits against someone who has sued us and won a legal victory in court. Although we certainly have the legal and ethical right to present evidence and seek to have the suit dismissed, we are not to countersue if we lose the trial and are required to make restitution. Instead, if we have been found negligent or guilty, we should go the extra mile in making the situation right and give them our **cloak** rather than merely our **shirt** (v. 40). In other words, we ought to do everything within our power to make amends and correct the situation in order to maintain our integrity and restore fellowship with them. Third, we should serve faithfully and diligently when requested. Here, Jesus uses the example of a Roman soldier compelling a citizen to carry his equipment a **mile**; instead of doing the bare minimum, we should go the extra **mile** and carry it **two** (v. 41). In whatever capacity in which we are required to serve, whether at work, in the community, at home, or in the church, we

Instruct

should always go above and beyond, seeking to glorify the Lord in all that we do.

Why should we seek to do more than the bare minimum when serving others?

Question
6

Finally, the last example deals with the concepts of generosity. Jesus instructs His disciples to be generous in helping the less fortunate; He tells them **to give to him who asks** and **do not turn away**. Based upon [Deut 15:7-11](#), this presumes that they have an actual need and aren't manipulating people to find favor in handouts. We are to be good stewards of the money that God has given us and we shouldn't enable people to take advantage of the situation, but we should generously help those who are truly in need. In all we do, we should be radically transformed in our relationships in public, so that others may

**GREATER
LOVE
HAS NO ONE
THAN THIS,
TO LAY
DOWN
ONE'S LIFE
FOR HIS
FRIENDS.
JOHN 15:13**

see Christ in us. Christ was often insulted and mocked—once even being literally slapped for the perception of offending the high priest; however, never once did Jesus retaliate, but He always responded with the truth in love. When carrying that old, rugged cross beam to the place of crucifixion after having been badly beaten, Jesus went the extra mile on our behalf to take our sin upon Himself! Jesus often gave generously to those in need and less fortunate, but the greatest gift that He gave was eternal life through the perfect sacrifice He offered for us! Therefore, let us imitate Christ and be

transformed in our relationships so that they reflect His plan and purpose to the world.

In what ways can we imitate Christ to the world around us?

Question
7

Regardless of how the world may act, we as believers should act with integrity and seek to set examples that others might follow. First, we should always keep our promises. The world often makes empty promises to appease others, but has no intention of fulfilling them because they simply forget, become sidetracked, or allow circumstances to dictate and control their responses. In any cases, we see these empty promises all the time in every arena in life. In the 1988 presidential election campaign, President George H. W. Bush famously exclaimed, “Read my lips: no new taxes”—only to raise them during his first and only term. Broken promises lead to suspicion, distrust, and often disappointment which can derail our relationships with others. It becomes difficult to regain trust and confidence if we ever break our promises.

However, as Christ’s representatives, we must seek to have a testimony in which we can point others to the truth in Scripture. If we continually break our promises, how can people trust what we say about the Lord and Scripture? The truth of the gospel cannot be compromised by our lack of integrity or our inability to keep our promises, but it does hinder our testimony as an ambassador for Christ. As an ambassador of Christ, we shouldn’t retaliate, but we should treat people with kindness and respect even if they fail to treat us likewise. In every circumstance, we must go above and beyond that which we have been called to do; we should go the extra mile so that Christ may be honored and glorified in all that we do. When we are transformed in our relationships in public, people won’t see us as hypocritical, but they will see Christ as an all-powerful Savior who can change us thoroughly.

Incorporate

How would you evaluate your consistency in keeping promises? Why is it so important to consistently to keep all your promises?

Why should we not retaliate in like manner according to the way that people act against us?

Why is it important to respond to people in truth with love? How will this make a difference when someone insults us, when someone asks us to serve, or when someone asks us to give them assistance?

Journal: Document God's Work



*Transformed in our
Relationships in Public*
Matthew 5:33-48

Focal Verse:

“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

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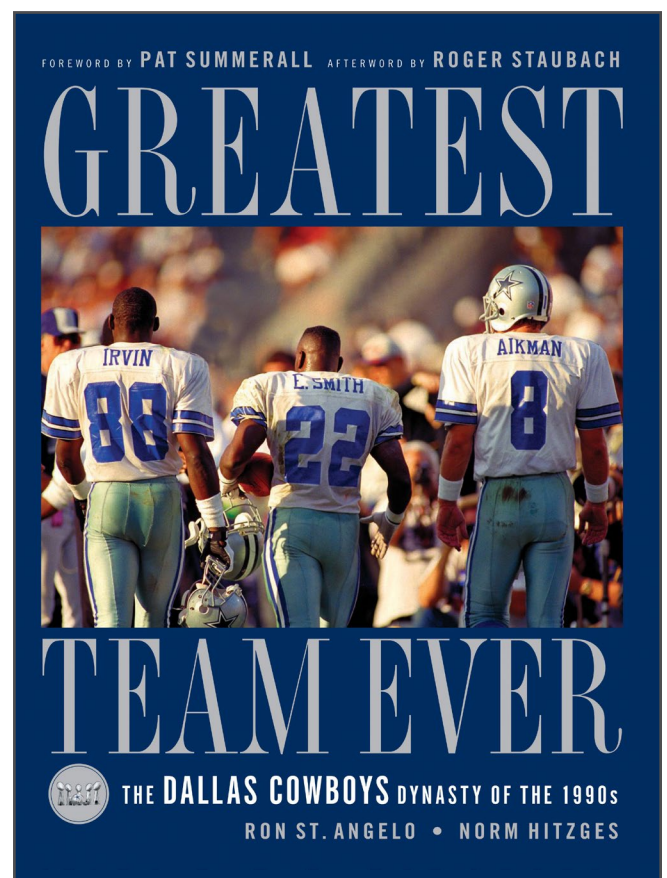
Matthew 5:48

Introduce

At the beginning of the season, teams in any sport and on any level have high aspirations of winning a championship which causes them to strive for perfection. Every year, Jerry Jones sounds like a broken record when he declares that *this year* the team has enough talent to make it to the championship game and win! Some twenty-two years later fans still await that day of celebration to come once again. In their striving for perfection, teams practice the fundamentals of their sport to ensure they have a grasp of proper and successful techniques in both defense and offense. They develop routines for conditioning and weightlifting, so their players can hopefully remain healthy all season. They meticulously study film on their opponents so they can identify their strengths and weaknesses and develop an appropriate game plan. As we can clearly see, this pursuit of perfection requires much time and effort in hope of achieving such a lofty goal.

Out of all the teams having won championships over the course of sports history, only a handful of teams have achieved perfection, but this doesn't stop future teams from trying to replicate this lofty goal. For example, only one professional football team has achieved perfection during the regular season and the playoffs. The 1972 Miami Dolphins won the championship under legendary coach Don Shula, finishing the season at 17-0. A few more college football teams have finished the season undefeated, but only a handful of college basketball teams have achieved this goal. The last team to come close, but ultimately fell short was the star-studded 2014-2015 University of Kentucky Wildcats who lost in the national semi-final to the University of Wisconsin. Their season ended with only one loss at 38-1. Even though teams rarely have unblemished success, each team begins the season with the same goal and expectation.

Because we have been transformed in Christ, we ought to strive for perfection in our lives by surrendering to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Only one Man has ever



Introduce

walked upon this earth in perfection and He died for our sin: Jesus Christ. Although we won't achieve perfection in this life until Christ returns or calls us home, it doesn't mean that we should stop trying. On the contrary, we ought to try even harder so that we represent Christ well to the world around us. As we learned in August, our good works ought to be visible to others so that Christ may be glorified and exalted. We should not do these works arrogantly to get recognition, but so that the public can see Christ in and through us. Therefore, in our pursuit of perfection, let us be transformed in our public relationships so that others may know of the goodness and greatness of Christ through us.

Key
Question

Why should we strive for perfection in our lives?

Matthew 5:43-47

SHOW YOUR LOVE TO PEOPLE

In a fitting conclusion to this part of His sermon about how to live transformed lives, Jesus cites the second most-important principle in the Law when He reminds His disciples of [Leviticus 19:18](#): **you shall love your neighbor** (v. 43). We know the importance of this command because Jesus uses it in part to summarize the entire Old Testament when asked about the most-important commandment by a lawyer; Jesus responds by saying that we should love the Lord with all our hearts first and foremost and then **love** our **neighbors** as ourselves ([Matt 22:36-40](#)). In addition to this biblical command, Jesus refers to a secular proverb which relates how people **hate** their **enemy**. Nowhere in Scripture does it tell us to **hate** our **enemy**, but this way seems logical and right to the world; in fact, it comes naturally to **hate** those who **hate** us. In a stunning contrast to the world's philosophy, however, Jesus tells us to **love** our **enemy** (v. 44). Just like He implored us in our study last week not to retaliate against others using the same motives and methods as the world, here He speaks of a radical transformation which enables us to **love** those who persecute us!

Why does Christ command us to show love even to our enemies?

Question
1

Instead of responding in a way that the world both promotes and approves, Jesus identifies four ways in which we ought to act so that we represent the Father and His character to both our **neighbor** and **enemy**. First, He simply commands us to **love**—not just those who reciprocate our **love**, but *everyone*. Through Jesus' teaching both here in Matthew and His story about The Good Samaritan ([Luke 10:29-37](#)), we realize that the definition of **neighbor** had become too narrow at that time. Typically,



even today, we regard our **neighbor** as someone in close proximity to us with whom we often share a common background or interests. Jesus, however, redefines our view of **neighbor** by showing how it refers to the world at large—even those who differ substantially from us or with whom we may have a dispute. Moreover, He also acknowledges our tendency to struggle with this principle and the radical nature of His request by asking a series of rhetorical questions. For this reason, Jesus inquires, “**If we greet our brethren only, what do you do more than others**” (v. 47). To this, He adds a question which anticipates the affirmative answer, yes: “**Don’t even the tax collectors do so?**” Jesus asks these two questions to demonstrate that loving our relatives and friends doesn’t differ from what the world would do, but He has called us to a higher standard in which we should **love** those who **hate** us and those whom we would classify as our **enemy**.

Most of us wouldn’t have a problem loving those who act kindly, graciously, and respectfully toward us by showing **love**; however, we usually find it more of a challenge to show **love** to those whom we consider our adversaries and **hate** us. In fact, it’s easy and natural for us to show **love** to our family and friends who return our **love**. To help us understand, Jesus poses two questions again, “**If we love those who love us, then what reward do we have**” (v. 46). He then follows it with another question which expects an affirmative answer: “**Don’t the tax collectors do the same?**” Jesus isn’t saying that we should **love** others to receive praise and acknowledgment or to seek some type of tangible **reward**. On the contrary, He uses these two questions to illustrate how radically different we should be from the world around us! Our **reward**, therefore, is the glory and praise directed toward our heavenly Father through the example that we have set amongst the secular world. God has called us to imitate His character and His **love** to the world ([Eph 5:1-2](#))! To say that we have a relationship with Him and act no differently than the world around us is an affront to Him!

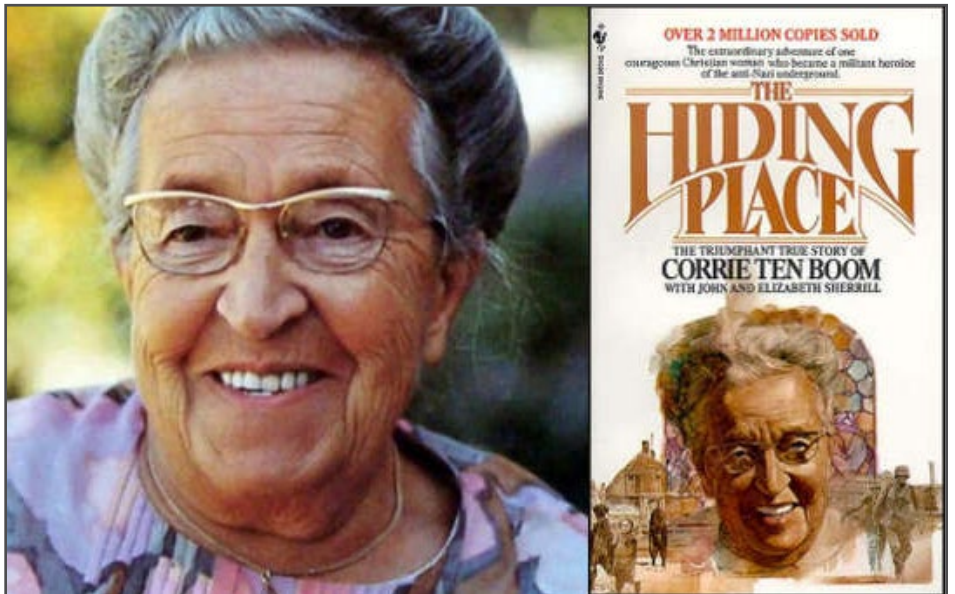
Other than His holiness, the character trait which best describes God is His **love**. When we call ourselves “Christians,” we must imitate this same type of radical **love** which He has so freely and generously given to us. Consequently, John reminds us that “he who does not **love** does not know God, for God is **love**” (1 John 4:8). God directed His **love** toward all creation—the world—even though because of our sin we became His enemies by our own choice ([Rom 5:8-10](#)). Yet, He still loved us so much that He sent His one and only Son to die in our place so that we might have a relationship with

Him and inherit eternal life ([John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10](#)). What radical **love** is this that we ought to imitate! In Christ, God set the ultimate example for us to follow. Certainly, He sets boundaries and issues punishment according to His justness, but this is because He loves us so dearly ([Heb 12:5-8](#)). Just as God has first loved us, so we also must **love** others in the same way. We cannot condone or accept sin, but **love**, pray, and be a consistent example who encourages them to repent and surrender to the Lord.

In what ways can we and should we show love to our enemies? Question # 2

During the Holocaust, Adolph Hitler incited members of the Nazi party in Germany to systematically murder approximately six million Jews along with countless others who conscientiously objected to this unprovoked slaughter and attempted to hide

them from the *Schutzstaffel* (S.S.) squads. In *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom recounts how the Gestapo burst into their home in Amsterdam, Netherlands based on a tip from an informant and arrested her family after discovering they had concealed Jewish people. Corrie, along with her



sister Betsie, was eventually transferred to Ravensbrück—a concentration work camp designated specifically for women. While there, she witnessed first-hand the atrocities in which scores of Jewish women were killed in gas chambers and other women were subjected to severe and inhumane treatment. Despite seeing her own sister die from a lack of medical treatment when she became ill, Corrie never forsook her relationship with the Lord, but continued to trust Him for strength and the ability to forgive until she was eventually released at the end of the war.

At the cessation of the war once freed from the confines of this internment camp, Corrie began traveling and speaking in many churches throughout the world—sharing a message of hope in Christ Jesus. At one particular church in Munich, Germany, she noticed at the back of the sanctuary one of the S.S. Guards who served as her captor

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in Ravensbrück as she spoke about the glorious gift that Christ has given by washing all our sins away. At the end of the service, the visibly moved S.S. guard came to thank Corrie for her message and seek forgiveness for that in which he had participated. At first, Corrie remained motionless and tried to forgive, but found herself unable, so she started to pray. Finally, she extended her hand and she recalled something amazing happening within her: “And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on His (i.e. God). When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command to love, the love itself.” In the same way, God gives us the ability to love others who have wronged us and may even seem unlovable—that love comes not from our own initiative and desires, but it comes from the Lord Himself. Therefore, we must allow His love to transform us and flow through us as we share the goodness of the sacrifice that He has indeed made for each and every one of us.

In Reference



Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 238.

Why is it important to see love for others as a supernatural love flowing and extending from Christ Himself rather than our own ability?

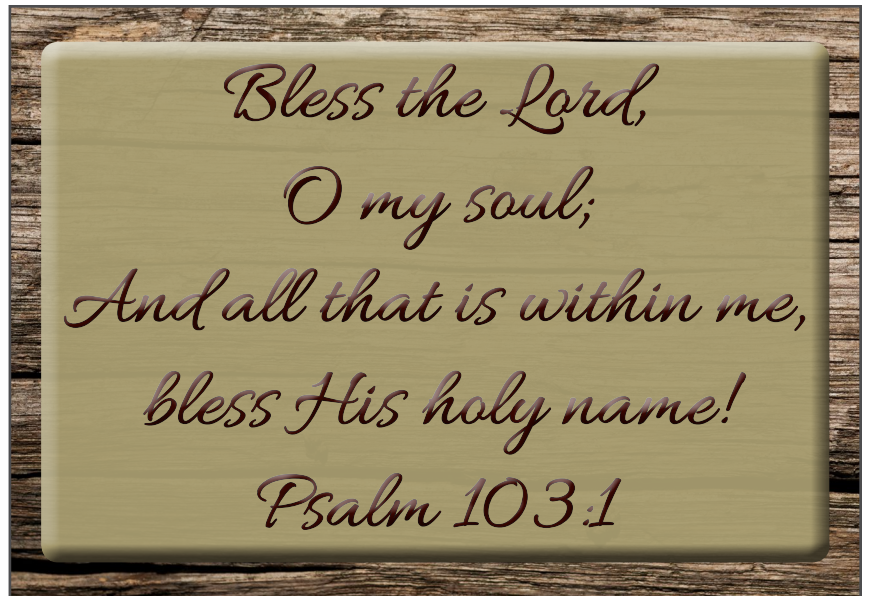
Question
3

Second, Jesus instructs us to **bleed those who curse** us rather than retaliating against them in like manner. When we have a heated argument, this is probably difficult for most of us to do because we tend to respond in the same way others treat us. Through Jesus’ command, we can learn four principles which we can apply that will help us to **bleed** rather than **curse**. First, we shouldn’t speak negatively of others through verbal attacks, put-downs, or vulgar and sarcastic remarks. Instead, we should let our praise be directed toward the Lord! We don’t have to praise them for their evil deeds or acknowledge their hatred directed toward us, but we should take the higher road and address them as Christ would. Second, we should avoid the urge to retaliate through malicious gossip and rumors which seek to destroy their character—this is particularly difficult in an online age in which we can so easily post derogatory and hateful remarks. We don’t have to retaliate and resort to character assassination because they will

destroy their character on their own. Everyone will see what kind of people they are when their actions come to light, so we don't have to declare it to others.

Third, we shouldn't condemn them or speak condescendingly because the Lord will judge them for their actions. Conversely, we should seek to lead them to repentance through acts of kindness which

we will discuss next. Finally, we should simply disengage rather than getting into an argument that causes us to retaliate angrily; we've probably often heard it said that we shouldn't say anything at all if we can't say anything nice. The same applies in this case so that we represent the Lord without compromising our testimony. If you can't engage others in a pleasant, respectful, and meaningful way on social media, then disconnect. It would be as if you would simply walk away from an argument in person before saying something offensive or that you would later regret. Therefore, let us point them to the Lord by modeling His patience and forgiveness in the way that we respond to them.



In what practical ways can we avoid arguments in which we curse others rather than bless them?

Question
4

Third, Jesus encourages us to **do good to those who hate us**. We ought to respond to others with kindness through **good** deeds so that we can lead them to repentance in Christ. Like much of Jesus' teaching in this section, this principle comes from an Old Testament proverb: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head" ([Prov 25:21-22](#)). To heap "coals of fire on [one's] head" doesn't correlate with the modern secular principle "kill them with kindness." It doesn't mean that we take joy in irritating someone by performing kind acts, but rather it means that through these good deeds they will see Christ in us and repent; thus, the coals, just as they did on Isaiah's lips, serve to cleanse and restore to holiness (see [Isa 6:7](#)). For this reason, Paul urges us to "repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men" ([Rom 12:17](#)).

Finally, Jesus teaches us to **pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us**. The

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only way that we can overcome persecution is through prayer—not prayer particularly for us, but for them! Certainly, we should pray for strength to overcome, patience to



endure, and the ability to forgive. Here, however, Jesus tells us to **pray for those who persecute us**; but what should we pray? Some of us may pray that these individuals get what they deserve and that God would deal with them swiftly and justly; however, Jesus taught that we are to extend mercy to others just as He has extended mercy and grace to us (see [Matt](#)

[5:7](#)). Therefore, first let us pray for their salvation. Pray that through you and others that God would reveal Himself to these individuals and they would realize the path on which they are headed leads only to destruction. Pray that they would listen to the Holy Spirit and hear His call for conviction and His invitation for salvation before it's eternally too late. Second, pray for wisdom and peace that they might not hinder the spread of the gospel, but that the truth would still ring forth loudly (see [1 Tim 2:2](#)). Even when praying these things, persecution will still arise because the world is completely opposed to the gospel and the message it delivers about sin; however, we must realize that we have a higher calling and greater reward awaiting us in heaven when we faithfully **pray for those who persecute us**.

In what ways should we pray for those who persecute us?

Question
5

Matthew 5:48

STRIVE FOR PERFECTION:

Jesus ends this part of His message with a command that seems idealistic and even impossible to fulfill: **be perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect** (v. 48). Truly, this teaching comes from the Law when the Lord commanded Moses to tell the people, “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” ([Lev 19:2](#)). In other words, we should

imitate the Lord and ensure our character matches His! Paul makes this declaration explicit in [Ephesians 5:1](#) when he charges us to “be imitators of God as dear children.” We cannot achieve this perfection on our own, but God has sent His Spirit to live within our hearts and He will guide our steps. In Romans 8:3-4, Paul affirms, “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” Therefore, perfection only becomes possible when we submit and surrender to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. When left to our own devices, we will ultimately fail, but when we surrender to the Spirit He who is perfect and works within us will ensure victory!

As we learned in the introduction, no team begins the season talking about the

number of games that they would lose—except perhaps our local baseball team; on the contrary, this shows a demoralizing and self-defeating attitude in which they would, all but certainly, fail in their endeavors. Yet, even if no secular sports team has this type of attitude, why do we as believers do this very same thing? We enter life in Christ by dwelling on our faults



and failures, thinking that it’s impossible for us to be perfect. As we begin life in Christ, we already resign ourselves to defeat—not defeat in terms of abandoning eternal life, but defeat in terms of succumbing to sin. We say things like: “I just can’t help myself”; “It’s impossible to break old habits”; “I’ve tried these things before without luck”; “It’s impossible to live up to the standards of Christ”; and so on. Admitting defeat actually becomes an easy road for us to take because it gives us an excuse; we can blame our sin on others, we can blame it on our world or society, and we can even blame it on our environment and circumstances. Instead of taking responsibility and turning to Christ for help, we admit failure when we should be striving for perfection!

Why should we view perfection as possible in Christ through the Holy Spirit?

Question
6

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On the contrary, we have a Savior who has not only given us victory over death, but also over the power of sin which has gripped our lives. No longer does sin have dominion over us, but we have received the power of God to live a transformed and holy life in Him ([Rom 6:14](#)). Undoubtedly, we may still make mistakes from time to time, but we can't focus on them as if we have no choice. Instead, we ought to learn from them and keep our eyes fixed on our Savior and the goal for which He has called us heavenward. Imagine a fielder in baseball positioning himself in front of a ground ball. If he loses concentration and takes his eye off the ball or even considers the play routine and doesn't go through the proper fundamentals, almost assuredly it will result in mistakes and errors. The Christian life can be much the same way. When we take our eyes off Christ, then we are almost assured of failure and will relapse into sin. In addition, sometimes we can become distracted in our daily routine and we forget to apply the Word of God when temptation arises. Nonetheless, we need to remain focused on our quest to imitate the Father by making manageable goals and remaining consistent in our daily relationship with Him so that He can enable us to fulfill His righteous requirements by empowering us through His Holy Spirit.

Why is it important to remain focused on Christ?

Question
7

Whenever asked how he was doing, Otis Bakke who has gone home to be with the Lord would always respond, “Perfect.” No matter what he had to endure in life his answer was always the same: “Perfect.” He wasn’t referring to his moral standing, although he was indeed a good man, and it didn’t often fit with his physical condition, but it did reflect his spiritual priority. He was blessed and content—indeed “perfect”—in the Lord because he had a relationship with Christ. With everything going on in his life, his relationship with Christ was primary—above all else. His contentment in life didn’t depend upon others, but Christ alone. Each day he strove to imitate Christ to others and be “perfect” in Him, representing Him flawlessly and sharing the gospel faithfully in all he did.

Like Bro. Otis, the perfection of Christ in us should be foremost on our lips and borne out through our actions. Circumstances in life shouldn’t dictate how we respond, but we should consistently represent Christ in all we do! Every time we are asked, how we are doing, let us respond with the phrase: we’re striving for perfection. It’s not an impossible task if we remain focused on Christ, fixed in His Word, and seeking His will through prayer. When we fully surrender to Him, Christ will transform our relationships with others in such a way that He will be honored and glorified.

Incorporate

In what ways do you show your love for people? How do these things involve sharing the gospel?

In the midst of an antagonistic world, how do you respond to criticism and persecution? How does this reflect Christ?

In what ways do you strive to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect? On what areas do you need to work?

Journal: Document God's Work



*Transformed in our
Relationship through Prayer*
Matthew 6:1-8

Focal Verse:

“But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”

Matthew 6:6

Introduce

As humans, most of us by our nature like to receive accolades for what we do—whether in the form of verbal praise, a pat on the back, applause, a promotion based on merit, or even an award for distinguished service or charitable deeds. Something seems to exist innately within us which motivates us to work harder or be more charitable when others recognize our efforts. Most of us, however, don't initially seek to do good things in our church or community because we want others to notice and appreciate what we have done, but often many become sidetracked in this endeavor by ultimately becoming the center of attention. Most of us wouldn't blatantly point to the good we have done or the sacrifices we have made because we understand how conceited or arrogant that would look to others. Yet, at times, this may cause us to think, "What's the use? No one ever notices or appreciates what I do. I wouldn't even be missed if I stopped." Still, at other times, we may become jealous because the work of someone else has been recognized over our own. We may even find ourselves thinking that he or she has done far less than we have to receive such notoriety and praise. The late actor turned president,



Ronald Reagan, always took pride in both his ability to speak persuasively and his down-to-earth humor which captivated and connected with audiences worldwide. So, he felt aghast when the speech he gave in Mexico City as the governor of California was met with a less than stellar response. Several years after giving that speech, President Reagan jokingly recalled this embarrassing moment: "I found myself addressing an audience there, and then there's the thing that any speaker hates more than anything else—I sat down to very unenthusiastic and scattered applause. The next speaker had only heightened my pain when he, speaking in Spanish, was being interrupted frequently with the warmest kind of applause. And trying to hide my embarrassment, I clapped louder and longer than anyone else and started before anyone else each time, 'till our then-ambassador leaned over and said to me, 'I wouldn't do that if I were you; he's interpreting your speech.'"

Introduce

Most of us would probably react and behave like President Reagan in Mexico City. He didn't want to seem uneducated and unappreciative of his host, so he pretended to understand and clap along with the audience. Unbeknownst to Mr. Reagan, it appeared that he was arrogantly and pridefully clapping for the content of his own speech—all because he got caught up in the moment! Most of us don't set out to act pridefully, but we often seem to get caught up in the moment and crave attention and recognition. In Matthew 6:1-8, Jesus warns His audience to avoid seeking attention when doing good deeds or praying. He explains that they shouldn't be hypocritical in their service and prayers seeking to be recognized and applauded by man, but rather all that they do and the way that they pray should honor and glorify the Lord! Therefore, let us be transformed in both our service and in our prayer so that we not only reflect the Lord in our lives, but also that we glorify Him by helping others to focus their attention on Him rather than us.

Key
Question

Why is it important to examine our motivation for serving and praying?

In Reference



Ronald Reagan, "Remarks in Santa Barbara, California, at the Annual Meeting of the Legislators of the Mexico-United States Interparliamentary Conference" (May 28, 1982). Available at www.presidency.ucsb.edu.

Matthew 6:1-4

SERVE WITH THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE:

In chapter six, Jesus shifts the discussion from how we should glorify God by living transformed lives displayed through our righteous actions to how we should serve and pray with the right motives and attitudes. He begins this section by stating that one should be motivated by glorifying the Lord rather than seeking recognition for one's self; in this way, we must have the proper perspective when helping others or serving! For this reason, Jesus commands us to **take heed that we don't do good deeds** simply to receive recognition from other **men** (v. 1). In [Matthew 5:16](#), He has already revealed that we ought to do "good works" with the purpose of glorifying our "Father in heaven." When we do good **deeds** or serve with impure motives with the intention of receiving human acknowledgment, Jesus warns that we **will have no reward from our Father in heaven**.

Why should we be more concerned with our motivation for doing good deeds rather than the reward we will receive?

Question
1

To illustrate His point, Jesus implores us not to become like **the hypocrites** who blast **a trumpet** to call attention to themselves when they **do a charitable deed** in public—whether **the synagogue** or **in the streets** (v. 2). Jesus isn't speaking literally here, but symbolically. It's like our common idiom in which we would say that a prideful and boastful person has "tooted their own horn." Again, Jesus emphasizes that when someone does something to receive praise and **glory from men** they **have** already received their **reward**. The problem, however, with those who seek attention for themselves is that the recognition or reward they receive is almost universally negative. How many of us enjoy being around people who constantly brag or try to do things that show up others? Typically, we avoid this type of person. By bringing attention to themselves, these people actually bring dishonor and shame! A truly **charitable** person doesn't seek attention, but desires to serve even in anonymity in order to get the job done. These people often go unnoticed because they work faithfully in the background to make things happen. They go beyond the call of duty because they understand their higher purpose to share the love of Christ by pointing others to Him through the

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gospel. As a result, these people make tremendous sacrifices because they understand how much Christ has sacrificed for them! Above all, people who give of themselves focus on Christ who in turn calls them to “look out . . . for the interests of others” just as He meets our needs through the salvation He offers and how He continues to meet our needs through daily provision ([Phil 2:3-4](#)).

What are the characteristics of a true servant or a charitable person?

Question
2

In order to understand the meaning behind Jesus’ remarks here, we need to understand the concept of a **reward** in this context. The **reward** of which Jesus speaks does not refer to salvation or eternal life; the Bible makes it abundantly clear that good works cannot save us nor can we lose our salvation or inheritance in Christ when we have a relationship with Him. On the other hand, foolishly seeking praise and recognition among **men** can cause us to forfeit our heavenly **reward** in three primary ways. First, it can rob us of everlasting joy and contentment in Christ because we haven’t invested in the eternal. Later in this section, Jesus will declare, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth . . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” ([Matt 6:19-20](#)). If we do things because we desire to receive earthly praise and recognition, that type of joy will not last; eventually, the notoriety will fade and we must do increasingly greater things to attract attention. When we do things with eternal value, however, we will have joy regardless of what the circumstances may be and that contentment in doing the will of Christ will never fade!

How does seeking human praise and recognition rob us of our eternal joy and satisfaction?

Question
3

Second, it will rob us from receiving blessings in seeing others saved in Christ Jesus and maturing in their faith. Consequently, Jesus informs us to **do** our **charitable deeds in secret** rather than inauthentically doing them in public for notoriety (vv. 3-4). He goes on to say that we should **not let** our **left hand know what** our **right is doing**. This doesn’t mean that others won’t see what we have done or we should disengage from “thinking,” but it means that they will see the love of Christ in us rather than our own ability and talents. We can’t save people from death and eternal condemnation; in our limited resources, we can’t even provide for or help a large portion of the world, but we know

the Savior who can! When we represent Christ faithfully and see others transformed in their relationships, it gives us much joy. In fact, Paul states, “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy” (1 Thess 2:19-20). If we serve others only to be recognized, all we will receive are callouses and a tired spirit from our work. Despite the challenges and hardships of ministry, seeing people saved and growing in their faith strengthens our resolve and blesses our spirit in the Lord.

Third, even as Christians we will be evaluated based on our works after we have begun a relationship with Christ—not to receive salvation, but to receive praise from our heavenly Father. When we faithfully do that to which God has called us, He will recognize our efforts and even give us greater responsibility in His kingdom. For example, Jesus affirms, “His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will



Therefore, my beloved
and longed-for
brethren, my joy and
crown, so stand fast in
the Lord, beloved.
Philippians 4:1

make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matt 25:23). Perhaps with only a few exceptions, the praise that mattered most to us as children came from our earthly parents. Many times, we wanted to emulate them and do things exactly the way they did, but even more importantly we wanted them to acknowledge our efforts and appreciate our accomplishments. In the same way, the praise that comes from our heavenly Father should matter more to us than the praise of mere mortals. As believers, we all would want to stand in heaven with our Savior and hear words of praise flow from His mouth about how we faithfully served Him in all that we did.

In what other ways does seeking praise from men rob us of the reward that our heavenly Father wishes to give us?

Question
4

As humans, we all probably like to be acknowledged for our service and good **deeds**; however, we must take precaution that we don’t do these things only because we will receive a **reward**. Rather than expecting a **reward** for doing the right thing, we ought to glorify the Lord with our actions simply because we love and honor Him—not because

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others recognize it and we ultimately receive something in return. A few years ago, several children were standing in the hallway of their apartment building with a multitude of trash littering the area; crumpled candy wrappers, empty soda cans, and remnants of potato chips lay strewn about the passageway. Looking at the children, some of who



attended church, I instructed them to clean up the mess. To which one of them responded, "I didn't make it. What do I get for cleaning it up?" I replied, "Nothing but the satisfaction of knowing you did the right thing and made your community a better place in which to live." He reluctantly began to pick up the trash, but nonetheless he still helped.

We often teach our children the wrong thing by motivating them with some type of **reward**, whether in school or at home, which frequently becomes a form of bribery! This doesn't mean that we shouldn't recognize them, praise them, or even given them some tangible **reward**, but it does demonstrate that we need to teach them the greater purpose and higher calling we have in Christ to honor Him and see the bigger picture of serving Him intrinsically because we love Him. We shouldn't serve or participate in ministry in order to seek a **reward** or attain notoriety for ourselves. That's the wrong motive! God will certainly bless us as He has promised and recognize our service, so we don't have to "toot our own horn." Instead, we should ensure we glorify Him in all we do!

Matthew 6:5-6

PRAY IN PRIVATE:

Not only should we glorify the Lord through our service, but we should also pray with the proper perspective without turning it into a spectacle that draws attention to ourselves. For this reason, Jesus discusses the benefits of praying in private where we can have personal, uninterrupted communication with our Savior. He challenges us **not to become like hypocrites who love to pray in the synagogues and on the street corners** to seek attention (v. 5). Again, He reiterates that **they have received their**

reward in full. Consequently, Jesus tells us to **go into** our **room** and **shut the door to pray** in private because God **who sees in secret will reward openly** (v. 6). In this passage, Jesus likely refers to Isaiah 26:20 in which he addresses the remnant whom God will restore in the midst of a wicked generation who has turned from serving the Lord faithfully; the remnant consists of the ones who have a personal relationship with the Lord in which they pray and serve Him with authenticity rather than mindless ritual. Therefore, Isaiah writes, "Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past."

Jesus isn't saying that we can't or shouldn't pray in public, but rather He stresses the need for privacy where we can bare our hearts to the Lord and in stillness seek Him. When we pray, we must remember that we are privileged to communicate to the One who created us. Although He already knows everything about us including our future needs, prayer demonstrates



God's desire to have regular fellowship with us. In fact, Jesus often practiced this very aspect of prayer by withdrawing from public attention to be alone with His heavenly Father. Throughout the Gospels, therefore, we see Jesus praying alone in the wilderness ([Luke 5:16](#)), on a mountain ([Matt 14:23](#)), in another city or location more solitary ([Mark 1:35](#)), and even in the Garden of Gethsemane a few paces in front of His disciples on the night of His crucifixion ([Luke 22:41-44](#)). Jesus advises us to pray in private because it has three primary advantages for us. First, it frees us from distraction and focuses us on our Savior alone. Second, it frees us from false pretense where we put on a show for the benefit of others. Finally, it frees us to worship and communicate openly with our Lord.

What are the benefits of praying in private?

Question
5

When we pray in public in order to receive attention, it can become problematic for three primary reasons. First, we tend to pray more generally rather than for specific things. Although there is nothing wrong with a general prayer, it becomes problematic if we never seek a deeper, more intimate relationship with our Lord. In His prayer in [John 17](#), Jesus prayed for specific things related to the circumstances for which He was about to

Instruct

endure. Second, we tend to spend less time in personal confession, self-evaluation, and earnestly seeking the will of the Lord for our lives. By the very nature of public prayer, we don't have the time to develop these aspects fully nor should we air our dirty laundry so-to-speak for all to hear. Indeed, we should hold one another accountable in how we live, but we must first make confession and petition the Lord for forgiveness. For this reason, it leads to the third danger of praying in public to seek attention. Some use it as a means to spread gossip or to present themselves as victims of unfortunate circumstance. When we pray in private, however, we should focus on worshiping the Lord, confessing our sin, asking for deliverance from temptation, communicating our needs, and seeking His will. (We will study this next week.)

What other dangers are there about praying in public to seek attention?

Question
6

Matthew 6:7-8

PRAY WITH PURPOSE:

Finally, Jesus concludes this section by directing us to pray with purpose. He warns us **not to pray like the heathen** who simply **repeat** the same thing many times because **they think** that their gods **will** hear **their many words** (v. 7). Therefore, He reminds us that our **Father** already **knows** what we **need** even before we **ask Him** (v. 8). When Jesus warns us against using **vain repetitions**, the word in Greek actually means to stutter or stammer with the idea of repeating the same syllable again and again. Thus, it could refer to long-winded prayers in which a pagan tries repeatedly to get the attention of their god who cannot hear or respond, so they pray the same thing over and over again in hopes that one time their prayer may be heard. It could also refer to using magical incantations or spells to elicit a certain response. Today, it would be akin to using memorized or prefabricated prayers mindlessly instead of having a true conversation with our Savior, such as a praying the same prayer at a wedding, funeral, or even before we eat. We shouldn't disengage our minds when we pray, but we should have a conversation with the Lord in which we both honor Him and seek Him!

Why should we think about what we're praying rather than using model prayers repeatedly that say the same thing over and over?

Question
7

As He wraps up this section, Jesus emphasizes the fact that the **Father** already **knows** what we **need**. If He **knows** what we **need**, then the question becomes why should we even pray at all? We should pray because it helps us to remember the source of our salvation and provision; it causes us to focus on Him. Over the course of our conversation with the Lord, He reminds us that we must depend upon Him for everything. It teaches us to seek His will and wait upon His timing. In addition, it teaches us to trust Him and rely upon Him for everything in our lives. In order for us to be transformed in our relationships, we must have a time in which we pray daily with all sincerity to the Lord, seeking His will and asking Him to guide our steps. When we have a daily conversation which glorifies Him and places priority on following Him, we will have contentment and joy in our lives. We may not have peace from conflict, be free from health problems, or even financial prosperity, but we will be transformed with a new perspective in which we seek God in all we do and say!



Why should we view prayer as a conversation and not a list asking God for things?

Question
8

For two years in college, I played in the marching band at Campbellsville University—a small Baptist college in southcentral Kentucky. During the marching season before every performance at a football game or high school exhibition, we removed our hats, bowed our heads, and recited the “[Lord’s prayer](#).” We did this so faithfully that it became a routine and ritual about which we thought very little. We knew the words and could recite them flawlessly, but we never thought much about their actual meaning and how they applied to our lives. Like church, some people who attended this university, including those in the marching band, did not have a relationship with Christ. Although people heard the gospel and learned how to pray by saying these words, there was nothing magical about this prayer. People weren’t saved simply by praying it, we weren’t guaranteed success because we uttered the words, and we weren’t magically transformed through the power of the words themselves. On the contrary, apart from a relationship with Christ where we actually understand and apply the principles that Jesus taught here to His disciples the words themselves have no ability to transform; repeating them without a relationship with Christ is useless. Jesus never intended us to use His model prayer as a magical incantation, but to use it as a guide whereby we cultivate our relationship with the Father in private. As we serve and pray, therefore, let us examine our motives; let us seek to glorify the Lord through our serviced directed toward Him and let us mature in our relationship by praying daily with all sincerity to our Creator. When we do, He will transform our relationships by conforming us to His will and teaching us to rely upon Him in everything that we do!

Incorporate

What motivates you to serve in the church and community? In what ways can you glorify the Lord through your service?

When do you pray and where do you go to get alone with the Lord? What distracts you most when you pray? How can you avoid these distractions?

How often do you pray? For what reasons do you pray? In what ways do you worship the Lord through your prayer?



*Transformed in our
Relationship through Prayer*
Matthew 6:9-15

Focal Verse:

"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name."

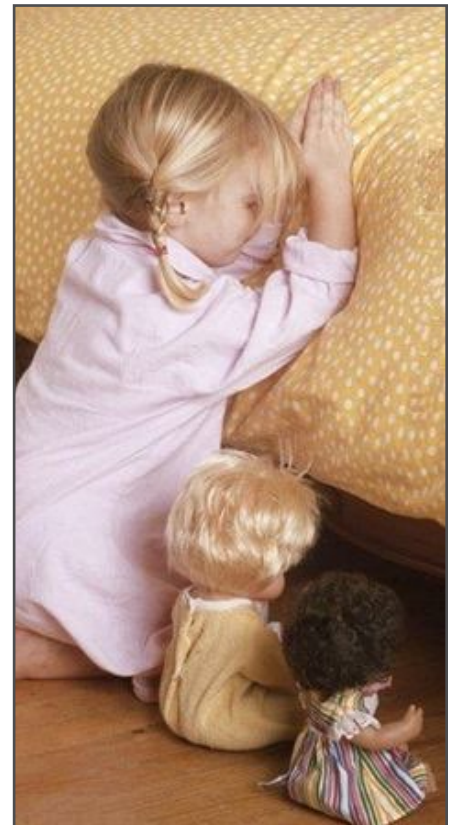
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Matthew 6:9

Introduce

Matt and Mary Kneeling had been raised in church and understood the importance and benefit of prayer, so when they began their family together they vowed to teach their children how to pray. However, neither Matt or Mary grew up in a household that taught them how to pray, except short, to-the-point prayers before eating a meal and just before bed. Certainly, we ought to give thanks to God for our meals and ask for protection as we sleep, but the couple knew that prayer involved so much more than this. In Bible study and worship on Sundays, they had heard longer prayers, but these mainly consisted of a list of personal needs. Although most of the prayers weren't self-centered, they still focused primarily upon intercession for others ([1 Tim 2:1](#)). They knew that God had commanded us to pray for others, but as they listened to these prayers they couldn't help feeling that something was still missing. Unfortunately, the church that they attended assumed that everyone knew how to pray by default, so they spent very little time teaching on it—including new believers whom they thought would learn simply by hearing others.

Consequently, Matt and Mary had no idea where to start teaching their children about prayer. So, they thought they would begin by teaching them some of the cute prayers that they had memorized as children. Before every meal, they would repeat, "God is great! God is good! Let us thank Him for our food. Amen." Then, at bed time they taught, "Now, I lay me down to sleep; I pray the Lord my soul to keep. May God guard me through the night and wake me with the morning light. Amen." Year after year, they prayed these simple prayers without ever teaching their children the value of communicating with the Creator who wants to have a relationship with us. Instead, it became a ritualistic routine which they did as a family without ever giving much thought to their words they were saying. Although it's important to teach children in a way that they understand and help them to maintain good habits like prayer, we must not make it a ritual that we do just to check off our daily list. Matt and Mary had become both troubled and frustrated, feeling like their prayers hit the ceiling and stopped; yet, they still had no idea where to turn to find instruction on how to pray. In their daily devotion, they came across



Introduce

[Matthew 6:9-13](#) where Jesus taught His followers to pray. At that moment, a light went off in their heads as they read; they finally got it! In this model prayer, Jesus gave His disciples a pattern to follow. There was no magic in simply repeating these words! Instead, Jesus gave us a prescription to apply: we should direct our praise to the Father; discover His will; declare our needs; desire forgiveness; and depend upon Him. They now understood how they could teach their children—not merely to say memorized prayers, but to have a conversation.

They would ask their children simple questions which would obviously differ every day: what are you thankful for today; what does God want you to do to please Him today; how do you need help from God today; what have you done today that you need to say sorry; and how has God helped you today? Then, they would instruct their children to “talk” to God and say those things to Him in a conversation. By following Jesus’ teaching and applying it to their current situation, the Kneeling family’s prayer life was radically transformed into a daily relationship with their Savior! They looked forward to spending time with God in prayer each day because it became a way to praise their Lord and have fellowship with their Savior who sustains them and helps them when they need it most.

Key
Question

Why is it important to view prayer as a conversation with the Lord?

DIRECT PRAISE TO THE FATHER:

To help His disciples learn to **pray**, Jesus gives them a model to follow. He literally tells them to **pray** in the following way by providing them with a pattern—not something to be repeated verbatim without any thought—but to be used as an example to express our heart-felt gratitude and desires to the Lord. He begins by focusing their attention on the **Father** who not only hears and answers our prayers, but is the only One worthy to receive our praise (v. 9). Therefore, we ought to commence our prayer by directing our worship and praise exclusively to Him: **hallowed be Your name**. Unfortunately, we may often skip over this declaration without thinking much about the word **hallowed**, but it holds the key to the significance of this prayer. In Greek, it comes from the word to make holy or to sanctify and set apart with a purpose. Thus, it means that we should make God’s name great by praising Him for His holy character. The primary purpose of prayer, therefore, is not to seek something *from* God, but to make a declaration *about* God and praise Him for His holy and righteous character!

In what ways can you praise God for His holiness manifested in your life?

Question # 1

To hallow or exult God’s holy name above all creation means that we must worship and praise His character. Although not technically prayers and more in line with modern hymns, the book of Psalms contains great examples about how we should praise the Lord for who He is! Psalm 8:1 declares, “O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens.” Throughout the book of Psalms, the authors praise Him as Creator ([Ps 8:3](#)), a sovereign Ruler over the universe and all human nations ([Ps 29:10](#)), a mighty



Instruct

Warrior who defends and delivers His people ([Ps 3:3](#)), a Savior ([Ps 68:19-20](#)), a Sustainer ([Ps 54:4](#)), and a Shepherd who provides for His flock ([Ps 23:1-2](#)). Consequently, we can praise God because He is holy ([Lev 19:2](#)), righteous ([Ps 89:14](#)), just ([Ps 96:13](#)), merciful ([Ps 136](#)), and unique or one-of-a-kin ([Ps 86:8](#)). When we pray, therefore, we must remember that we are communicating with the sovereign Creator of this universe who alone deserves our honor, praise, and glory.

Yet, as the sovereign Creator of this universe God desires an intimate relationship with each one of us; indeed, He has given us the opportunity to become His children by accepting the sacrifice that Jesus performed on the cross and repenting of our sins. As a result, we have the privilege of calling Him **our Father**! In His holiness—despite our own unholiness and unrighteousness—God offered us salvation according to His grace and mercy by sending His Son to die on our behalf. Thus, we must take every opportunity to thank Him for that gracious and merciful gift which gives us eternal life in Christ Jesus! As **our Father**, therefore, we can thank Him for the love that He so richly shows us every day ([1 John 3:1](#)); this even includes loving us enough to discipline us when we stray, but offering us the chance to ask for forgiveness and be restored ([Heb 12:5-8](#))! Because of His love for us, **our** heavenly **Father** has promised to provide for us even beyond what we can fathom and expect. Therefore, when we pray, we can thank Him for the intimate relationship which we have with Him through Christ demonstrated afresh each and every day as we walk with Him!

Although we may praise God briefly at the beginning of our prayers, it usually consists of a general sentence or two before we unleash our long lists of requests. Even when God has mercifully and bountifully answered our requests, we often become like the nine lepers who never return to thank their Deliverer; yet, we have many things for which we can thank and praise Him! When we pray, don't forget to worship Him and thank Him not only for what He has done, but who He is. Don't fail to thank Him for the ways that He has answered your prayers—even if it's a way that you didn't expect or may not have even wanted. Let God know how grateful you are for the opportunity to communicate with the King of kings and Lord of lords, but also **our** heavenly **Father** who loves us beyond compare!

How has God answered your prayers in the past?
How did you praise and thank Him for that?

Question
2

DISCERN THE WILL OF THE FATHER:

After expressing adoration to the Lord through our worship, we should seek His **will** through our prayers. Because God's **kingdom** has already **come** and we have the opportunity to participate in it now through Jesus' sacrificial death, we should align our own desires and actions fully with His as we pray. For this reason, Jesus teaches

us not only to acknowledge God's **will be done**, but also to follow it **on earth** just as **it is in heaven** (v. 10). Even though the **kingdom** has already begun, it will not be complete until Jesus



returns a second time to rid the world of sin once-and-for-all, reverse its curse, and restore perfection **in heaven** and **on earth**. As we await its final consummation upon Jesus' return, we should be about our Father's business and seek to do His **will** in our lives. Nothing can thwart or stop God's will from happening; it will be accomplished regardless of what we do. As a Christian, however, we should make sure that we align ourselves with His **will** and get on board with the Lord's plan!

In-Depth Information



The phrase **Your kingdom come** is difficult to render in English because it is a request and is in the past tense. The closest English translation would be "let Your kingdom come." Although the request is future in orientation, the past tense in the Greek indicates that it will certainly occur or happen. From Jesus' perspective, it refers to His death and prayer in the garden whereby He submits that the Father's **will** be done in His death. For us, it reflects the certainty of Christ's return—until then we should seek daily to accomplish His **will**.

When we have a relationship with Christ, He will transform our desires to match His.

Instruct

When we pray, therefore, we should always do so in accordance with His **will** and make sure that we don't confuse our own personal desires for His! For example, in Matthew 21:22 Jesus does assert, "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive"; however, Jesus' statement assumes that we have already sought God's will and are praying for those things which the Spirit has led us—not our own desires whether selfish or unselfish! God's will always supersedes our own desires whatever they may be! Jesus models the importance of praying according to God's **will** in the Garden of Gethsemane when He interjects: "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). In His humanity, Jesus knew the agony of crucifixion and didn't want to die that horrendous death upon the cross if there was any other way. However, as God, He also knew that our salvation depended upon Him alone, so He "endured the cross" to fulfill God's **will** joyously despite all the suffering it entailed ([Heb 12:2](#)). We have such a great and wonderful example in Christ to follow in prayer as we seek to do God's will in our lives!

How can we discern God's will in prayer and differentiate them from our own human desires?

Question
3

In our prayers, we ought to ask the Lord to give us a Christ-like perspective in all things. By praying with a Christ-like perspective, we can rejoice regardless of our circumstances, receive strength to persevere in all situations, and relinquish control to our heavenly Father who wants the best for us. Because God is all-knowing, He plots a course which is best for our lives—even if at the time we ourselves don't understand and can't fathom the circumstances. God has certainly promised to meet all our needs and deliver us through times of difficulty, but His provision may not always look like what we expect or what the world proclaims. Above all, He will never lead us to ask for things or participate in things which contradict or violate His Word. Therefore, we must rely on Scripture and the Spirit to help us know what to pray and how to pray, so that we seek God's will in all situations.

Why is it important to pray for a Christ-like perspective?

Question
4

Matthew 6:11

DECLARE YOUR NEEDS TO THE FATHER:

After directing our praise to the Lord and discerning His will, Jesus invites us to declare our needs to Him and make our requests for daily provision. Later in [chapter 6](#), Jesus describes how God promises to meet our daily needs, but here He instructs us to pray that He **would give us this**

day our daily bread (v. 11). The word translated **daily** in Greek is rare; it has more of the meaning “necessary.”* Therefore, Jesus teaches His disciples to pray for those things which are necessary for life—food, shelter, clothes, etc. As our Father, God loves us so much that He wants us to communicate our needs to Him



even though He already knows what we need and when we need it. Therefore, this serves more to remind us that we depend upon the Lord for everything; it also helps us to remember that He alone is the source of our provision. We don't have to worry about anything because we can turn our burdens and needs over to Him and trust Him to meet them according to His gracious and benevolent will.

In Reference



David L. Turner, Matthew, Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 188.

For what basic needs should we pray? How has God shown His faithfulness to meet those needs in your life?

Question
5

Matthew 6:12, 14-15

DESIRE FORGIVENESS FROM THE FATHER:

Jesus now turns to the theme of forgiveness—both asking for it and extending it to others. First, He bids us to ask Him to **forgive our debts** (v. 12). Although the term

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debt can have financial implications, here Jesus uses it metaphorically to describe the moral implications of sin and the penalty that we must face for our disobedience. When we enter into God's holy presence through prayer, we need to prepare properly and remove anything which hinders or distracts us. We need to prepare both our hearts and minds to seek Him and this requires confession and repentance for our sins. Consequently, we must remember that this is a model prayer and is not in any particular order which we must recite verbatim every time we pray. If we have unconfessed sin in our lives which God brings to our minds, then we must deal with it first before we can worship Him, seek His will, and declare our needs. To have fellowship with our Lord, therefore, we must be in right standing with Him.

Why should we start our prayers with a confession of sin if God brings particular matters to mind? Compare this with Isaiah 1:15.

Question
6

Not only must we seek forgiveness for our own sins, but we must also be willing to forgive others; thus, Jesus teaches us to pray that God would help us to **forgive our debtors** just as He has forgiven us. As a result, God's willingness to **forgive** us should motivate us to **forgive** others! When someone has wronged or offended us, our first response should be to stop and pray that God would give us a Christ-like love to **forgive** them rather than condemn or retaliate against them (see [Eph 4:32](#)). Without the Spirit's guidance, forgiveness becomes an almost impossible task when we rely on conventional human wisdom which teaches that we should seek justice and retaliate against our enemies (see [Matt 5:44](#)); love and forgiving those who have wronged us simply doesn't come naturally. Apart from the grace of Christ shown to us, we would be walking that same path because every one of us has sinned against the Lord. By demonstrating the love of Christ and the power of His forgiveness, it will point others to Him and hopefully lead their own salvation and restoration (see [Rom](#)

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted,
forgiving one another, even as **God in Christ forgave you.**
Ephesians 4:32

[12:17-21](#)).

To highlight why we should extend forgiveness to others, Jesus reminds us how our **heavenly Father** has graciously forgiven us! He states that **if** we willingly **forgive** others **their trespasses** then God **will also forgive** us (v. 14). Conversely, **if** we fail **to forgive** others then God will **not forgive** our **trespasses** (v. 15). In Greek, the second conditional sentence in verse 15 beginning with **if** is contrary to fact and Jesus is using it to make a point about God's character. Since God has forgiven us in all things, we also ought to **forgive** others in **their trespasses**. Thus, with this sentence, Jesus is saying that God's willingness to forgive us in all circumstances should motivate us to forgive others! Therefore, Jesus is not saying that God's forgiveness of us depends upon our willingness to forgive others—this does not reflect His unconditional forgiveness through Christ accurately and this is Jesus' whole point in making these two statements. Forgive others just as we have been forgiven by our **heavenly Father**!

In what ways does God help us to forgive others when we ask Him in prayer?

Question
7

Matthew 6:13

DEPEND UPON THE FATHER FOR DELIVERANCE:

Finally, Jesus implores His disciples to depend upon the Lord for deliverance from **temptation**. Without the Lord's help, resisting **temptation** posed by **the evil one** becomes an overwhelming task. From [James 1:13](#), we know that God does not tempt us; so, when Jesus says to pray **do not lead us into temptation**, He means **deliver** us from the setting or circumstances in which we face temptation. In reality, the prayer to **deliver us from the evil one** states the same thing as the first line. In order to overcome **temptation**, we must be equipped in numerous ways, including the ability to avoid tempting situations altogether. The power to resist these situations comes only from the Lord because in our human weakness more often than not we will succumb to these fleshly desires and sin; therefore,



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we must ask for forgiveness which we discussed in the previous section. As members of God's eternal **kingdom**, we have a higher standard to follow and need to remain pure in our character so that we represent Him well to the rest of the world.

How often do you pray for God to deliver you from temptation? If we prayed this more often, how would it radically change our lives?

Question
8

As we examine our habit of praying, does it reflect a daily conversation whereby we have an intimate relationship with our Creator or has it become a routine which repeats the same generic message like the Kneeling family whom we met in the introduction? Jesus has given us this model prayer in [Matthew 6:9-13](#) as a guide to follow which will help us to remember all the things for which we should pray. As we look at these five areas for which we should pray, do we have a balance among the areas or does one area dominate the rest: worship God, discern His will, declare our needs, desire forgiveness, and depend upon Him for deliverance? If we get into a routine in which we don't think about what we pray, most likely we will say a quick prayer when we need something or our prayers become long, drawn-out lists of needs. God certainly wants us to declare our needs to Him, but He also wants us to spend time adoring Him in worship!

We need balance in our prayers. As you spend time with God in prayer this week, evaluate your praying habits by asking the following questions: How long do you spend worshiping the Lord for His holy character?; How long do you spend seeking His will for your life?; Do you stop and listen to what the Lord is saying or do you fill your prayers with a long list?; Do you spend time confessing specific sins and asking God to deliver you from the things which are most tempting? Prayer is an intimate conversation with our Creator. Although He knows us better than anyone else on this earth, He wants us to spend time in prayer getting to know Him better and better each day! There's nothing wrong with saying a short prayer to bless a meal; we can mention specific requests and needs to God at any time and in any place; we can seek God at all times when we need deliverance. However, we will be transformed in our prayers when we intentionally spend time with the Lord communicating with Him daily to praise His holy name, to know His will, and to remind ourselves that we depend upon Him for our daily needs, His forgiveness, and His deliverance.

Incorporate

In what areas do you need God's forgiveness and His deliverance from temptation? Spend time cultivating your relationship with Him and asking for help in overcoming temptation.

For what can you praise God *this week*? Record those things and spend time worshiping Him.

In what ways has God met your needs *this week*? Use this as a time to thank Him for His provision!

In what areas do you need God's wisdom and guidance *this week*? Spend time seeking the Lord and record how He answers your requests?

Journal: Document God's Work

September 30, 2018



*Transformed in our
Relationship through Priority*
Matthew 6:16-24

Focal Verse:

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

Matthew 6:24

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Introduce

Considered one of the most-significant artists in nineteenth-century Germany, Adolph Menzel (1815-1905) idolized Frederick the Great of Prussia and used him as the subject of many of his artistic pieces. In one such piece, a painting, Menzel depicts Frederick addressing his generals at the Battle of Leuthen Poland on December 5, 1757—the most-important battle of his reign. With an impassioned speech, tradition reveals that Frederick inspired and willed his troops to victory over superior forces. Using innovative tactics as well



as exploiting the terrain of the battlefield to his advantage, he won a decisive victory over the much larger Austrian army, driving them from the region and cementing their ultimate defeat. However, Menzel never finished his painting after working on it for years (1859-1861). Strikingly, much of the painting is highly detailed in a finished state, except for the most-significant person—Frederick the Great! He appears only as a white shadow on the right side of the painting facing his generals with only his hat visible.

When looking at the painting, one immediately notices both the size and prominence of the generals as they encircle their diminutive king, towering impressively over him. One's eye is distracted by the stature of the generals rather than drawn toward the key figure who seems oddly out of place. Hubertus Kohle describes the oddity of the painting by asserting, "Apart from the fact that he [Frederick] is present only as a tricorne [eighteenth-century hat], little emphasis is put upon him; he is positioned away from the beholder towards the left, and moreover almost entirely turned towards the back, hardly impressive in comparison with the generals some of whom, by contrast, are characterised [*sic*] overly incisively."* Not only has Menzel left the key figure of the painting undone, but he also did not give him the priority that he deserved. Frederick the Great should have been the central focus of the entire painting rather than just some afterthought. For someone of such great importance to both Menzel and the painting itself, he plays such a little role in the overarching scope of things.

Unfortunately, many people, including some believers, treat Jesus like Frederick the

Introduce

Great in this painting! To them in theory Jesus is important, but in reality they have omitted Him from their lives and diminished His significance altogether. Jesus shouldn't take second place to our goals, ambitions, and desires, but He should be given a place of prominence in our lives so that everything we do emanates from Him. Sometimes our earthly perspective becomes like this painting and we don't give Jesus the priority and prominence He deserves; instead, we focus our attention on a whole host of other things from family, finances, and fun (i.e. hobbies and recreation). For our lives to function the way they should, we ought to place Jesus above everything and make Him first in our lives. Therefore, we ought to be transformed in our relationships to make Jesus the priority!

Key
Question

In an honest evaluation of your life, have you truly made Jesus the priority?

In Reference



Hubertus Kohle, "The Modernity of History Painting: The Case of Adolph Menzel," trans. by Thomas Frangenberg and Cordula Grewe, in *Intellectual History Review* 17, no. 2 (2007), p. 150-151.

Matthew 6:16-18

LET US ACT AUTHENTICALLY:

Having already addressed the problem of praying hypocritically for show among men in [Matthew 6:5-8](#), Jesus returns to that same theme when He focuses on the reason for fasting. He warns against hypocritical fasting done to impress man rather than glorify the Lord. According to ancient Jewish customs at the time, fasting was not required in Scripture, but often voluntarily occurred in conjunction with certain festivals and along with times of national prayer and repentance. In this current context, Jesus describes two types of **hypocrites**: 1) those who actually **fast** and advertise their “devotion” to the world by going around with **a sad countenance** as if looking starved and emaciated and 2) those who only pretend by **disfiguring their faces** so that they **appear** outwardly **to be fasting**, but in reality are not **fasting** at all (v. 16). Just as those who pray for show, Jesus says that those who **fast** in this way have already received **their reward**.

In-Depth Information



The word translated **disfigure** in verse 16 literally means to destroy or corrupt. In this context, therefore, it means that they neglected their appearance by letting themselves go, so that they looked haggardly, disheveled, and dirty. To neglect or **disfigure their faces** then suggests that they didn't wash or groom themselves so that they outwardly appeared poor and destitute to other people.

God doesn't look on the outward appearance of man alone, but rather He sees the motives of the heart. Often, men try to use religious ritual to disguise their true motives and conceal their true character. Although religious activities and charitable deeds may look impressive to other human beings, God sees and knows the truth. God isn't impressed with mere religion; He wants an authentic relationship with us. For this reason, Jesus insists that we clean up! If we **fast**, we shouldn't appear disheveled, but we should **anoint** our **head** (i.e. wash and comb our hair) and **wash** our **face** (v. 17). When we **fast**, we use the time to cultivate our relationship with the Lord by spending time focused on Him. If we do it to seem pious or religious to other men, then we have the wrong motive (v. 18). Our Father **sees in secret** and will honor our faithfulness **openly** when we seek to glorify Him rather than putting on a show for others.

In-Depth Information



Scripture almost always pairs fasting with a time of prayer. It's no coincidence that this instruction on fasting immediately follows the model prayer ([Matt 6:9-13](#)). Why should we fast? The time that we would normally spend on preparing and consuming food should be spent in introspection of ourselves and worship of the Lord. We should evaluate our relationship with Christ and confess any sin, remove any obstacles which we place in priority above Him, and seek to know Him more intimately!

What other activities do people use to “appear” religious? Why can being “religious” actually hinder our relationship with Christ?

Question
1

Recently, I have begun trying my hand at painting like Bob Ross, so I pulled up some of his old PBS programs on YouTube and began to paint along. In one episode, he paints a beautiful landscape scene at sunset, using hues of blue, red, and yellow to make the sky explode with color. As I followed intently, Ross urged caution with his docile, soothing voice that we make sure the blue and yellow don't mix because “the only thing worse than a green sky is yellow snow.” As soon as he uttered that phrase, I noticed that my sky had turned a dull shade of green like a developing hailstorm here in North Texas in the Spring. Recalling his oft-repeated reassurance, I knew that “we don't make mistakes; we only have happy little accidents.” So, as he instructed, I painted a mountain over the green sky to hide it. To the casual observer who knows nothing about the original painting and what's underneath the snow-capped mountain, it may look normal; however, to me, as the creator, I know what's hidden underneath. In the same way, God as our Creator knows what's underneath all the religious activities and rituals that we do. We can't hide anything from Him! Even though I put a mountain over the hideous green sky, it's still



there in the painting. Likewise, religious ritual only hides our hideous flaws to other humans, but they're still there! Apart from Christ and authentic repentance, the sin and degradation in our lives remain and the Creator can still see it underneath the façade of religion.

How can prayer and fasting help us to evaluate our relationship with the Lord when done properly?

Question
2

Matthew 6:19-21

LET US INVEST APPROPRIATELY:

Next, Jesus transitions to explain what we should have as our true purpose and motivation by describing how we should invest appropriately. He cautions us against laying **up treasures on earth which moth and rust can destroy and thieves can steal** (v. 19). Instead, He urges us to make eternal investments by storing our **treasures in heaven** (v. 20). Jesus continues to explain that those things we value most will be that in which we make the most significant investment of our resources, time, and energies; therefore, He declares that **where our treasure is so there our hearts will be also** (v. 21). As we all know, nothing on earth lasts, yet many people still seek things which instantly gratify rather than looking at the long-term goals and effects. Several years ago when financing the purchase of my home, toward the end of the process the mortgage company offered me the choice between receiving a \$400 cash payment upfront or 0.25% less for the annual percentage rate for the entire life of the thirty-year loan. Unbelievably, many people don't think about the consequences and opt for the \$400 as instant gratification, but in the long-run they pay many times more in interest over the life of the loan. When we make choices in life, we need to focus on their eternal impact rather than the momentary gratification they may have at the time. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves what significance do the decisions I make have in terms of kingdom value?

What are some things that we can do that will make an eternal impact and have eternal value?

Question
3

It's certainly not wrong to enjoy life and have possessions here on earth if we view them in terms of the impact they can have on the kingdom of God. Living in Texas without much good public transportation, we all need a vehicle to accomplish routine tasks in

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our daily lives. As much as we want to buy a car that lasts our entire lives, we know that it will eventually break down and cease to run no matter how well we maintain it. It can take just one accident, one hailstorm, or one mechanical problem to sideline the car permanently. The major investment for which we worked so hard will eventually fail us! Even though things may fail at times, they are a gracious gift from the Lord which we should use to glorify Him by making eternal investments. Although nothing on earth is eternal, we can still use it like the car in this example to impact others: 1) we can use it to bring people to church and 2) we can use it to minister to others who may need rides to work, school, doctor's appointments, pharmacies, and grocery stores and share the gospel with them while we have them as a captive audience. Ultimately, it's not



about having the most luxurious car that has all the features, but it's about using it to honor God and expand His kingdom while we have the chance. One day the car will be in a heap in a junkyard, rusting away and being used for salvage. It's what we do with it now to make an eternal investment that matters!

This perspective of eternal investment should dominate everything we do! Most of the time when we hear the word **treasure** we immediately think about money. In our world, we should certainly invest the money God has given us wisely; we should tithe and give offerings as prescribed by Scripture, but we also ought to make wise decisions about how we invest the rest of our money. Many times, for example, we buy the newest electronics when the old ones work just fine. Therefore, we must ask ourselves: how does the newest version help in proclaiming the gospel and do I really need the latest, greatest gadget to make the most significant impact or add value to my life? **Treasure**, however, is not *just* about money or resources. It can be the talents and abilities which God has given us. Are we serving Him daily? It can also reflect the decisions we make about our education, our career, and the place in which we live. We must ask what opportunities we have in each of these areas to glorify God and further His kingdom. Which of the

opportunities has the most advantage to make a difference and leave a legacy that honors the Lord? It's not always about what's right or wrong, but how much of an impact that we can have! We don't all have to be penny-pinchers or full-time vocational ministers, but we all must make decisions based on how well we can serve the Lord.

What is your treasure and what do you value most? How can you use these things to honor the Lord?

Question
4

Matthew 6:22-23

LET US WALK ALERTLY:

In the next two verses, Jesus introduces us to a hard proverbial saying from that time period when He states that **the eye is the lamp of the body** (v. 22). At that time, the ancients thought **the eye** to be the source of **light**. Because they thought **light** emanated from the person via **the eye**, it revealed what was on the inside—in particularly their motives and morals. For this reason, Jesus says that **if the eye is good** then the rest of **the body will be full of light**; in other words, the person will have good character and morals. In contrast, **if the eye is bad**, it revealed the sinful condition and motives of the soul (v. 23). If a person was evil, then their eye would be **full of darkness**. In this context, we know Jesus is speaking metaphorically because we can't tell by looking into someone's eyes whether they are **good** or evil just like we can't see their **heart** and discern their motives in [verse 21](#). By examining the outcome of their actions, however, we can sometimes discern their motives and see their true character. Taken together, therefore, the metaphor of the **heart** and **eye** signifies that we need to have a proper perspective and walk alertly in the will of God by doing that which is right! Jesus has already pointed out, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" ([Matt 5:16](#)). Here, He is reminding us that we are to be an example in the way that we walk by having a Christ-like



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perspective in all things. In Ephesians 5:8, Paul emphasizes this same point, “For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light.” When we fail to see things from a Christ-like perspective, it can cause us to stumble and fall because of impure our motives and our failure to make investments which glorify the Lord. Impure motives and a bad character will always impact our decisions negatively because we will base them upon selfish reasons and look at what benefits us the most right now rather than what glorifies the Lord and has the greatest impact. Even if we don’t have a selfish motivation, chances become great that we will be blind to the true purposes of the Lord because we will not see the big picture clearly. Many years ago when transition lens first came out, I got a pair at the recommendation of the optometrist who sang their praises about never needing a pair of sunglasses again. Although they did work to filter the sun when outside, the initial stage of entering a building and waiting for them to change—which was rather slowly at the time—created all types of problems because it made the room tremendously dark and objects hard to see. While waiting for them to transition to allow more light to infiltrate, it caused me to stumble around, bump into objects, and not be able to see things clearly without exerting maximum effort. Everything looked dark and dim and nothing could be seen clearly—even the things right in front of me. However, when I took off my glasses, I could once again see—not through something dark which obscured everything. It’s the same way when we allow our motives and morality to dictate our actions apart from Christ. When we look at the world from our own perspective, it’s a mess because we don’t have the wisdom and fortitude to see things unselfishly without sin. Yet, when we see things through Christ and filter our actions and motives through His perspective then we will see things clearly and our decisions will always honor Him.

At what times in your life have you made the wrong decisions because you have looked at things from a wrong perspective? At what times has Christ enabled you to see clearly and make the right decision when you trusted Him?

Question
5

LET US WORSHIP GOD ALONE:

Finally, Jesus ends this section by emphasizing that we must worship God alone which harkens back to the first two of the Ten Commandments which bid us not to place anything before the Lord as our god or to make graven images and worship them ([Exod 20:3-6](#)). In Matthew, Jesus begins by demonstrating the impossibility of **serving two masters** because we will end up **hating one** and **loving the other** or **being loyal to one** and **despising the other** (v. 24). Then, He provides us with a specific case study in which He notes the impossibility of **serving both God and mammon**. In the current context dealing with **treasure** begun in verse 19, **mammon** has the connotation of wealth or riches; in other words, we **can't serve both God and** wealth—whether in terms of money or possessions. Money and possessions themselves aren't the problem, but they become problematic when we love them and place them above the Lord. For this reason, Paul writes, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim 6:10). However, we shouldn't *just* give God priority over our finances, but over everything and every relationship in our life!



We shouldn't deceive ourselves by thinking that we can be devoted to multiple activities at once and God too. Two weeks ago, I mentioned that I played in marching, pep, and concert band during my first two years of college. Although I enjoyed playing in band, my grades and graduating in four years with a double major in English and Religious Education became my priority. In order to graduate on time, I had to take at least 21 hours per semester which totaled at least seven classes. I wanted to achieve the highest grade point average that I could so it would look respectable when I applied for the Masters and PhD programs at seminary and later when I sought a job. Therefore, I devoted myself to my studies every day from the time I rose at 7 am until I went to bed around midnight.

Despite enjoying band and even receiving a stipend to help pay college expenses,

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I never practiced and I despised the time that it required too. I didn't get any course credits and it didn't affect my GPA. At one point, I came to try out for a position in the concert band, but hadn't even looked at the music, so it ended in disaster with me getting cut—which was of no consequence for me because it didn't affect anything which I wanted to achieve. Eventually, I quit band altogether so that I could focus on my primary goal: graduating with honors. When we value anything in life, we will always devote more time, energy, and resources to it because it will be our priority. We ought to make Christ the priority in our lives. Nothing else will satisfy; nothing else can transform; nothing else can save—except Christ alone. When we make Christ the priority in our lives, He will guide our steps, heal our hurts, forgive our sins, provide for our needs, comfort our sorrows, and deliver us through times of tribulation. For this reason, Jesus can affirm, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you,” which we will study next week (Matt 6:33).

What is the priority in your life? How would making God the priority help you in other areas of your life?

Question
6

In order for us to act authentically when we serve and pray, to invest appropriately in eternal treasure, and to walk alertly, we must make Jesus the priority in our lives. If Jesus isn't the priority or has a diminished role in your life like that of Fredrick the Great in Menzel's painting, then our actions will become selfish and we will walk blindly through life just guessing what God would have us do. To make the painting accomplish its purpose, Menzel should have painted Fredrick the Great first and made him the center of the painting rather than relegated to one side where he becomes obscure and out of focus. As Christians, we ought to place Christ in the most prominent place in our lives whereby He can shine through us so that others may see Him in everything that we say and do.

To make Christ the priority, we need to make the cultivation of our relationship with Him intentional. We all know that we should pray and read Scripture daily, but we must make sure it hasn't become a ritual or something we simply do to check off on our lists. We need to spend quality time with our Savior alone! We need to seek Him diligently through prayer, laying aside all our daily distractions. We need to trust Him to meet our needs and allow Him to guide us to serve Him daily by becoming an effective witness and ambassador for Him. When we place Him first in our lives, everything else will fall into place. We may still have trials and tribulations, but we know on Whom we can count and depend! Therefore, let us worship God alone and be devoted to no one or nothing else, but give Him the priority He deserves by making our relationship with Him first in our lives.

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In what ways do you make appropriate eternal investments through this church and in your Connect Class? In what ways could you do better at making those investments?

What does it look like to walk alertly in Christ based on [Matthew 6:22-23](#)? How do we as believers help each other walk worthy of our Lord?

How does the priority of this church align with Scripture? Does it match your priorities? How can we all work together to make the name of Jesus known and share the gospel worldwide?

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