

A mother of a 3 year old disciplined her son. So he threw a temper tantrum. She thought it was so funny the she disciplined him again just so she could video it. After uploading it on Instagram she thought, “What did I just do? I re-disciplined my child just to get a video.” We know some of us are obsessive about posting photos and checking our phones. But such obsession can lead to consequences. A study entitled “Society’s New Addiction: Getting a “Like” over Having a Life” reveals that people who become more obsessed with posting photos or checking their phone are finding less and less enjoyment in life.

The authors, Joseph Grenny and David Maxfield of Vital Smarts write “more and more of us are losing connection with our lives in order to earn “likes” and social media praise. We have, in a sense, turned into social media “trophy hunters.” According to an online study of over 1600 people, 58 percent say posting that perfect picture has prevented them from enjoying life experiences. Ultimately, the study reveals this obsession with social media trophy hunting isn’t just distracting – it’s dictating lives.

Nearly 3 out of 4 admitted to being rude or disconnected from others because they’re more focused on their phone than the other person. 91 percent have seen a tourist miss enjoyment of the moment trying to get it on social media – and many acknowledge doing the same thing themselves. 79% have seen a parent undermine their own experience in a child’s life in an effort to capture the perfect post. 14% risked their personal safety to try and get a good posting.

Many cited decreased enjoyment and increased guilt due to not spending time listening to or being present with people they care about. One mother admitted “while trying to capture and post my daughter’s dance event, I completely missed it. She asked me, ‘Did you see me?’ I really didn’t and it was awful.” Some have engaged in reckless behavior while driving. One answered “I was severely disappointed with myself every time I couldn’t ignore the urge to pick up the phone in the car. Thank goodness nothing bad happened.” People also experienced less enjoyment because of embarrassing moments taking selfies and posting something online they later regretted.

Joseph Grenny writes “Our key finding is that we enjoy important life moments less when we’re focused on capturing them rather than experiencing them. “‘Likes’ are a low-effort way to produce a counterfeit feeling of social well-being that takes more effort to achieve in the real world. This study warns us that we are beginning to value virtual pleasure hits more than authentic happiness.” David Maxfield adds “If our attention is on an invisible audience rather

than the present moment, we are disconnected from the real world. Our devices are beginning to control our attention and motivations in ways we may not even realize.”

Now some of us might be tempted to nod our heads smugly and say “I told you so” to some person looking at their phone right now. But an obsession with gaining the approval or praise of other people is nothing new. It’s been going on since time began. It happens so frequently and sometimes subtly that we might not even notice we’re doing it. So we speak a bit louder to ensure our voice is heard. We dress a certain way in the hopes that certain someone might notice. We put on a little more perfume or cologne to gain attention. We step forward to be noticed. We do something in a very public place or way to ensure that we’re seen. Think for a moment of how much of your life is taken up preparing for how other people to see you or hear about you.

Now there is value in having a balanced consideration for others. It’s not like we stop using mouth wash because Pastor Tom said we should not seek the praise of others or do things just with others in mind. If you don’t use a lot of mouth wash, you might not suffer from an over abundance of praise. But you might get an abundance of other kinds of input. We must engage with others and there are some basic social practices that help us relate well to people. There is healthy and appropriate human praise. But I’m talking about an over the top concern for what other people think. I’m talking about allowing the praise of others to be the primary motivation in our lives.

Such a craving for human praise and affirmation can warp our Christian walk. We can engage in some very good activities or honorable pursuits. But our primary motivation may not be to help with that good activity or pursue something honorably. We do it to be seen, noticed and praised by others.

Now is there anything wrong with this? After all, if the good activity happens or the honorable pursuit gets completed, what harm does it do? Well, it might not do much harm to the other people there. But it might cause some deep harm in our relationship with Jesus. In fact, Jesus saved some of his strongest words for people who acted with wrong motives. He called them hypocrites and warned that living a life to be seen by others can threaten your soul.

Today, as we return to Gospel of Matthew, we will see **Jesus teaches us that protection from hypocrisy is possible when we practice much of our faith in secret.** If you’ve been with us for a few months, you know we started Matthew before Christmas. We looked at the birth narratives and saw Matthew connect those events with prophecies made hundreds of years earlier. Matthew demonstrated that Jesus was in fact the Promised One of the Old Testament.

Jesus continued to fulfill prophecy through His words and actions. He did miracles and many large crowds followed Him wondering if He was the Anointed One; the Deliverer; the Messiah they'd sought for centuries.

But then in Matthew 5, Jesus sits down and begins to teach. In this Sermon on the Mount, we have seen Jesus describe the daily lives of kingdom disciples. Jesus brought in the kingdom of heaven with His coming. In Matthew 5, 6 and 7, He paints a picture of kingdom disciple's lives. In chapter 5, Jesus went constantly to the right motivation or the heart condition as key to kingdom living. Now we get to chapter 6 where he will talk about a right motivation for the very common practices of God's people; giving to the needy, prayer and fasting. Through Jesus' teaching, He raises the issue of hypocrisy especially in relationship to gaining the praise of others. I pray God will use our time together to expose any hypocrisy in our lives and show us the way to freedom from it.

Matthew 6:1-8; 16-18 ESV

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

² "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵ "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁷ "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

¹⁶ "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Jesus mentions hypocrites three times in this passage. In ancient Greece, the term "hypocrite" originally referred to an actor in a play. They pretend to be someone they weren't in real life. But in a play, everyone knows that's the actor is acting. But the term moved from describing a person in a play to a person who acts in real life. So a hypocrite is someone who acts like someone they're not or says something that's not true about themselves or their intentions.

Today, hypocrisy is considered something very negative. What's one of the greatest charges people make against the church or against Christians? It's filled with a bunch of hypocrites! What do people mean when they make that charge? I think they know someone who claims to be a Christian or goes to church. So they expect that person to

act or talk or live a certain way. But they know or see that they don't. So they conclude this person claims to be a Christian but doesn't live like one. Therefore they are a hypocrite. If that's what Christianity is, I want nothing to do with it. Never mind that there's a lot of hypocrisy in other organizations as well. But they rightly should expect a different lifestyle or speech pattern from Christians.

Hypocrisy is insincerity; two-facedness; falseness and deceit. Don Carson points out that there are several types of hypocrisy or ways to be hypocritical. One way is to pretend you're good or kind while you're actually evil and mean. And you know you're doing something bad or mean. But you just want to do it. This could also include people who don't intend to do what they say. They promise to be there but don't show up. They claim to be this expert in some field but end up not having a degree. They promise to pay the money back but never do. So they know they're being a hypocrite but other people may not.

Another type of hypocrisy occurs when a person gets carried away by their own actions and deceives themselves. They believe they are doing right before God. But other people can see through this. We will get to an example in Matthew 7. There Jesus addresses the person who points out the speck or minor fault in another person's life while ignoring the log or major fault in their own life. So in that situation the person thinks they are behaving like a holy person. But they're hypocritical in that they don't see their own obvious lack of holiness. Jesus says in Matthew 7:5 – You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of the other's eye. They are deceived while others are not.

Then there is the hypocrisy where both parties are deceived. The hypocrite and others don't know the hypocrite is being a hypocrite. I think this is what Jesus addresses here. A person can give a great amount of money to the needy with the primary motivation of getting praise from others. A good deed happens. Needy people get help. People praise the giver for the help given. The giver gets some satisfaction from the needy person getting help. But they also enjoy the praise which reinforces giving to the needy for praise of others. In this case, both the hypocrite and others may not see the hypocrisy.

Now we might ask "What's wrong with getting a little praise as long as other people are helped?" Such hypocrisy threatens our relationship with God. When we give to the needy, when we pray and when we fast, we're supposed to do it for God's praise. If we get addicted to human praise more than God's praise, we can go way off track. Humans praise some pretty stupid and destructive actions. But worse than that, we can deceive ourselves into thinking

we are in good relationship with God. In fact we are far from Him. Some will discover one day that they never even knew Christ. We did all this good stuff God. Why won't you judge us favorably? The Lord answers "depart from me. I never knew you."

So Jesus warns us of this possibility in Matthew 6:1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven." Beware; Be wary; Watch out. Something dangerous is here. If you give to be seen by others you will have no reward from the Father. Jesus seems to think it's a pretty big deal to not have a reward from our Father in heaven. In Jesus' eyes, getting noticed by other people is nothing compared to the notice of our Father in heaven. But we turn it upside down – our biggest desire is to get noticed by others – whether or not God notices. Now the ironic thing is that we are a Christian community. Lots of our Christian walk is by its very nature public. We gather for worship. We gain instruction from the Scriptures together. We encourage one another in the faith one on one or as families or in small groups. But such gatherings carry the hazard that we do this primarily to be seen by others. So Jesus shows us how we can avoid such hypocrisy with three examples.

(6:2-4) - What does Jesus say will protect us from hypocrisy in giving to the needy? The first one involves giving to the needy. Every Jew was expected to give a portion of their income to help needy people. Jesus says "don't sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets." Now it would be pretty showy if someone had a gift for the needy and hired a trumpeter to announce the giving of this gift. But we don't have any evidence of this happening. Maybe some ensured that they gave their gifts when trumpets were sounded at the beginning of feasts or festivals. And at the temple in Jerusalem, the collection pots looked a little like trumpets. So people would throw their money down a wider opening and the coins would rattle around to narrower part of the tube until it reached bottom. It could be that some ensured their coins rattled very loudly so that people would take notice that someone gave a huge gift. But Jesus could simply use an extreme example to make his point.

"Don't call attention to your giving to the needy so you will get praised."

Instead we're to give in such a way that "your left hand doesn't know what your right hand is doing." **Give in secret so that your Father who sees in secret will reward you.** Give in such a way that you barely know the amount. That's so we keep this between us and God. When we keep our giving just between Him and us, we are less tempted to hypocrisy.

Jesus talks about prayer as the second area where we need to avoid hypocrisy. **(6:5-8) - What does Jesus say will protect us from hypocrisy in prayer?** Now at first, this seems kind of out of place. Prayer, by definition, is talking to and listening to God. Yet we can pray in such a way that we do it for the praise of others. This is especially the case in public prayer settings. When someone was asked to pray in the synagogue, it was a great honor. You got to go to the front and everyone could see you. There were likely some who talked to God reverently and honestly before the congregation. And others used it for a show. One commentator notes “a person who prays more in public than in private needs to examine their prayer life.”

Jesus is not forbidding public prayer. He did it himself. However, to protect ourselves from hypocrisy in prayer, **He commands us to pray in a room where no one will see you and shut the door.** And the Father who sees in secret will reward. Now this is interesting because most Jewish first century common homes only had one room. You cooked, ate and slept there. The only room with closed door might be a storage place – somewhere others couldn’t see you. But it’s also possible that it simply means to be alone with God. Jesus travelled with 12 disciples and those who supported them. He often got up early to pray and went to the hills where people wouldn’t see Him.

We’re called to find secret places to pray. The essence of prayer is communion with the Father. We’re praying to our Father – not to other people – not to be seen or primarily to be heard by others. We must battle our culture’s invasion of our personal space and solitude. It is harder and harder to be truly alone with God if we keep our phones on or have some screen glowing in the background. We need to set aside that urge to check what’s going on in the virtual world and engage with the living God in the real world.

We’re praying to our Father who knows what we need before we ask. There’s no need to keep on repeating and badgering God. That’s how the pagans prayed. They repeated the same thing over and over and over to wear the gods down or to get the god’s attention. They believed such repetition increased the likelihood of a favorable response. But we serve a heavenly Father who knows what we need before we ask.

Think about that. Your Heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask. So why does He want us to pray? He wants us to enjoy His presence and experience relationship with Him. He wants us to grow in trusting Him so that we can be less stressed about life. He knows what we need before we ask. So if we’re not getting what we ask for maybe that’s not exactly what we need. God consistently pursues us with what’s best for us. Instead of all the fretting,

worrying and twisting arms, He wants us to come and sense His presence and peace. The Father who sees in secret will reward.

Then Jesus teaches a prayer that we will focus on next week called the Lord's Prayer. But one commentator pointed out something that I'd like you to think about. We call this "the Lord's prayer." It certainly came from Him. But who did Jesus give this prayer to His disciples. So this is really the disciple's prayer as taught by the Lord. We'll unpack it next week.

Jesus concludes this section with one more example of where we need to battle hypocrisy. That's found in the area of fasting – abstaining from food for the purpose of drawing near to the Lord or confessing sin. **How do we avoid hypocrisy in fasting? Fast in secret and the Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

So do your fasting in secret. Don't draw attention to it by letting your appearance go., Most personal fasts involved missing a couple meals in a day. You didn't eat and when you felt the hunger pains you prayed and turned to God. You had that automatic reminder to pray. If you have fasted, you know it can give you great focus for a time period because you're not so concerned about making or getting a meal and your body doesn't have to deal with all that food. It gets a bit of a break and cleansing. If you're a diabetic, you need to engage in a different type of fast but we can all fast from something to focus more intently on the Lord. But when we do that, we must not draw attention to it or the focus is lost.

So basically, Jesus says **to protect yourself from hypocrisy, do a lot of your faith in secret.** If you give and no one sees it, then you wouldn't give so that others would see. But if you give when no one sees, it might indicate a sincere faith. If you pray and no one sees or you tell no one, then it focuses prayer on God and not being seen by others. If you fast and don't let anyone know it removes the motivation to be seen by and sympathized with by others. Giving, praying and fasting in secret forces our focus on God. It directs our energies to what pleases Him not what will get likes.

God wants His people to trust Him to reward them appropriately when the time is right. He wants to release us from the never ending quest to squeeze praise rewards out of the people around us. It goes back to that lesson we learned from Job. Would we do something if there wasn't anything in it for us? Would we do the right thing just because it is the right thing to do? Would we worship God just because He's worthy of worship even if we don't get anything out of it? Will we give, pray and fast even if we don't get a like on our Facebook or a praise from another?

One of the greatest and purest motivations in the Christian life is thankfulness to all God has done for us. God promises to reward us in the next life. But that's a pretty distant reward. That's something I can't really get my hands on in the next 5 minutes. But it also tests me and sifts me to ensure that I'm doing what I'm doing for the right reasons.

It protects my soul – because if I think that I can gain or even earn a reward from God by engaging in the right religious activities, I might have an insincere faith. I might be just like the Pharisees – full of religious activity – far from God. A strong belief that I am right with God when I am in fact on my way to Hell. Beware that you do not practice your righteousness before other people to be seen by them – for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. **A hypocritical walk before God damages our relationship with Him.** It could also indicate a serious deficiency in our faith and motivation.

But some of you have already grasped this. You've recognized this – You're okay with the secret parts of the faith. Today, I invite you to receive God's affirmation for your faith done in secret. Very few people in the church may know your name. Very few people in the entire Christian community may know your name or the name of this church family. Very few outside of St. Albert may know our church's name. But that doesn't matter. God your Father sees that gift you offered behind the scenes; He sees the prayers prayed when you were on a sickbed; He sees the times you fasted when no one knew about it and so appreciated your desire to draw near to Him.

Others of us need to Repent from hypocrisy in our lives. We need to Receive the Spirit's power to begin overcoming it. We cannot accomplish this in our own strength. We don't have the capacity to change our hearts and motives. We need Jesus and the Holy Spirit to change us from the inside out. We need the Holy Spirit to work in us and uncover some of the selfish reasons we actually engage in giving to needy or prayer or fasting. We need the Holy Spirit to change our hearts from seeking people's praise to seeking God's praise.

This could only be accomplished by Christ first dying. Then after His death, resurrection and ascension, He sent the Holy Spirit. This Comforter guides us into all the truth. He convicts us of our sin. He grows His fruit in us – love; joy; peace; patience; kindness; goodness; gentleness; faithfulness; self-control – all these fruits contribute to a character where we are comfortable waiting for God's approval; self-controlled about whether or not we get noticed; at peace with praying in secret and no one knowing how much we've labored in prayer for them. So if you need to repent today, do that in a moment and begin that journey of overcoming hypocrisy by the power of the Spirit.

Some of you need to Receive Christ for the first time ever. You need to stop trying to earn favor with God by doing religious activities. If you've been trying to earn His favor or believed that you could be made right with God just by doing something religious, maybe God has opened your eyes today. It's not about doing the right religious things though they can be very helpful tools in our faith. It's about being in relationship with God through Christ. Will you put your trust in Him now?