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Matt. 6:1-18 Spiritual life as God's Secret Agent

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1**“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them.** Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2**Therefore,** when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 3**But** when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4**that** your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

5**“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For** they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 6**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. 7And when you pray, **do not use vain repetitions** as the **heathen** do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

8**“Therefore do not be like them. For** your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. 9In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. 11Give us this day our daily bread. 12And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. 13And do not lead us into temptation, **But deliver us** from the evil one. **For** Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

14**“For if** you forgive men their trespasses, **(then)** your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15**But** if you do not forgive men their trespasses, **neither** will your Father forgive your trespasses.

16**“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites,** with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17**But** you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18**so that** you do not appear to men to be fasting, **but** to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Matt. 6:1-18 NKJV with my boldfaces and underlining.

Introduction

When we look at Jesus' sermon on the Mount, it's helpful to think of the three chapters as a whole, as we might with the books of Philippians, Galatians,

or Ephesians. By looking at how the ideas flow and what Jesus was trying to say, we can really understand the sermon's structure.

Jesus's sermon is very well-organized, and it's a good idea to go over the whole thing when you're focusing on the middle part. This way, you can see how the middle part connects to chapters five and seven. The discussion starts in chapter five, verse 17, and wraps up in chapter 7, verse 12, where Jesus says, "So, do to others what you want them to do to you, because that's what the law and the prophets"

Later on, Jesus uses examples and contrasts to explain his teachings throughout the book. His teachings are really deep and powerful. These truths come from God and have the same amazing qualities as His miracles.

The people were so amazed by Jesus' deep teachings, even though he wasn't very educated, which really shows how important his message is. Unlike other speakers who just quoted what others said, Jesus said, "But I say to you." You can see this in how the sermon is put together.¹

Now, Jesus is talking about our spiritual lives, and he's comparing the pretenders, (fake people), who he calls hypocrites, to the real ones who do secret things for the Lord. We'll see this contrast in the next few verses of this chapter.

Matt. 6:1-4

In verse 1, Jesus gently reminds us that doing good deeds is important, not just to get noticed. Some translations say it's "righteous acts," while others call it "alms" or "good deeds." The main idea is clear: we should do good things because we want to, not because we want others to see us. If you're doing it to get attention, you might not get the reward you're hoping for from your Father in heaven. He doesn't reward doing good things just to be seen. So, when you do something kind, don't brag about it as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, trying to get glory from others. Just watch what I've done. The whole point of their actions is to be seen by others. Sometimes politicians do something similar. They do a good deed, but have a camera crew filming them so they can use it in their ads to show themselves as good people. But they might not actually do these things all the time. It could be a staged event, with a camera operator there. For example, a politician might visit a place with people with disabilities or the elderly and do a photo shoot there. But the next day, they're gone, and when it's time to change the sheets, they're not doing those things. They're just gone. They've done their act for the camera so people can see them as wonderful people. These are pretenders.

¹ Lk. 2:47; Matt. 7:28, 29; 13:54; Mk. 1:22; 6:2; Jn. 6:58; 7:15; 7:46 His teaching had authority and was the Word.

Now, let's look at verse 3. Here, Christ tells us the truth. But when you do something kind, try not to let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Here's a fun experiment: your left hand is doing something while your right hand is not. We're so good at doing actions quickly and over and over with our hands that we might not even realize we're doing them. It's just something we do naturally. The important thing is that we're not trying to impress anyone as those hypocrites did. We're just being ourselves. We know we're using our hands and feet to help, but it's just something we naturally do to lend a hand and support others. Maybe your act of kindness is done quietly. On the other hand, your Father, who sees what you do in secret, will publicly praise you. This gives you a reason to do it and makes you want to keep going. It's a good deed, a commendable act, a righteous thing done with God's help. But it's all about serving God, not just getting noticed.

It's easy to see people who pretend to be religious. When you pray, try not to imitate those who are just seeking attention. They used to stand in synagogues and on street corners, dressed up to show off how holy they were, hoping to be noticed. They often made a big deal out of everything they did.

Let me illustrate this when I was coaching. We all want to be liked, but sometimes I notice players trying to get my approval. It wasn't about looking at me and showing off what they were doing. Instead, I watched them practice, recalling the drills we had done. When they played those drills were used in a game, it was really impressive. You could see how hard they had worked and

Your righteousness, your righteous acts, your good deeds, your alms, practicing your righteousness, displaying your righteousness, charitable deeds are the different ways translations have conveyed good deeds. Think of times when people did something good for you. Some act of kindness. It meant something to be thankful for.

Because we are created in the image of God, God has created us with the ability to do good.

Good works can't save us. We all have sinned and we need a Savior. We were born in a fallen world and we share one thing in common. We have been born with a sinful nature. A common trait from Adam. Jesus died on the cross so that we can be forgiven, and be spiritually born.

Now created in us are good works to be discovered and lived out.

By faith we live and obey God in many and various good works. We are enabled to do this now by the Holy Spirit who now dwells in us.

We still have a sinful nature until we go to be with the Lord. There the works of the flesh do battle with the fruits of the Spirit.

Faith is our victory

Luke 10:25-37; Gen. 1:27; 2:15-17; 3:16-19; Ro. 8:18-25; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Eph. 2:1-10; John 3:1-16; Gal. 5:16-25; 2 Cor. 5:1-8; 1 John 3:1-3; 5:4.

how dedicated they were. Sometimes they won, and other times they played close games. Those moments made me happy. I get it because it's what we talked about. We all want approval, but to get it, we should focus on prayer, doing good things, and using what we know. But those who are hypocrites like to stand in synagogues and on street corners to be seen, putting on a show. Sometimes, you see people like TV preachers or radio hosts who make a big deal to get attention and get paid for it. But when it comes to prayer, it's important to go to a quiet place, like your room, and just talk to God in the quiet. That's where you can really connect with God.

Matt. 6:5-14

I think of a mother praying for her son serving in the Middle East. She is in the secret place alone with God praying for her son's protection. "I must tell Jesus, Alone" A father praying for his children, regardless of age to return safely. Recall when your teen first drove for the first time alone. Scary stuff. The dangers are real. We come along side regardless of outcome. This is where the rubber hits the road.

Finding a quiet spot for prayer can be tough. In those moments, you can pray privately, often without even realizing your prayers are being heard. Public prayer, though, has its own set of hurdles. The pressure to be heard can make it hard to connect deeply with God. It's important to approach public prayer with sincerity and trust the Holy Spirit to guide you.

When you're praying publicly, try to keep it short and avoid repeating yourself. It's easy to want to say everything you feel, but too much repetition can make your words sound hollow. Instead, focus on sharing your real thoughts and feelings with God.

In the passage, the author points out the danger of repeating words, (vs. 7) which are often used by people who don't believe in God to get attention. These words might seem magical, but they're really just empty and don't mean anything.

I have found that short, sincere prayers are often more powerful than long, complicated ones. By focusing on the heart of your prayer and showing genuine devotion, you can build a stronger connection with God. A great example of this is in **1 Kings 18:26-39**. As I get ready to preach, I'll share the scripture with you. This passage really shows how empty some people's prayers can be when they're directed at something that doesn't exist.

25 Now Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one bull for yourselves and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it."

26 So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till

noon, saying, "O Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made.

27And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened." 28So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. 29And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.

30Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down. 31And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name." 32Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord; and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs (measures, about 3-4 gallons) of seed. 33And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and said, "Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood." 34Then he said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time; and he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time. 35So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water.

36And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. 37Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again."

38Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. 39Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!"

Elijah, in particular, doesn't hold back when he talks to these people. His constant questioning and tough criticism really highlight how pointless their actions are. It's like he's pushing them to face the truth about their situation and the emptiness of their prayers.

Elijah's actions during the firelighting contest are especially striking. He pours so much water on his wood that it's clear he's determined and committed to his cause. When God finally intervenes and lights the sacrifice, it highlights God's divine nature and how empty the prayers to Baal were.

This reminds us of what's happening now. Many people say repetitive and empty prayers, hoping for validation and attention.

But there are times when people pray receptively because of extreme pain or overwhelming circumstances. (I have heard this many times in a hospital or nursing home.) It's important to remember that these prayers often come from extreme pain and suffering.

Instead, we focus on offering support and prayer with compassion and without judgment. We recognize the pain and suffering of others and give them the comfort and encouragement they need.

It's important to tell the difference between prayers that come from pain and those that are just seeking attention. It's natural to feel difficult times and want to pray, but we need to approach our prayers with sincerity and a real desire to connect with God.

God really listens to those who genuinely want to be with Him. But remember, tough times are part of life, and we need to handle them with resilience and faith. In contrast, there's a real difference. Approach them with compassion, love, and prayer. Just remember that God is listening. Saying, "You might need to pray with them often because they might need comfort often." Instead, express gratitude for pain relief and other necessary medications. While there's a time for these, prayer is still important. When you pray, remember that God hears. Sometimes, a clear and sincere prayer can really get your heart out. This is especially true when we praying with those suffering. Clear brief prayers that can be understood that show both love and truth of God's care in a moment.

Your father already knows what you need before you even ask! This makes you wonder why we need to pray if God already knows everything. The

Aren't you glad for pain relief? There are times when we really need it. Sometimes it takes a while to heal, and pain relief is very much appreciated.

At the end of our lives, we may experience severe pain. I am grateful for the advances in care for the dying. Hospice, home health, nursing homes, and hospitals all give aid. Our visits with brief prayers and words of encouragement reach out for those in need. Simple gospel messages, ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation, are ministered like balm. Clear, brief, cannot be said enough. **Faith, hope, love** come to mind. Be sensitive in reacting to responses.

Be aware of family who may be hurting. All kinds of emotions are felt. Regret, forgiveness, expression of love long repressed. Why? Resist sermonizing. A hand on the shoulder, a hug, accept the emotions. Weep with those who weep.

answer is that we exist in time and space, while God is eternal. Even though we have limitations, God wants us to pray, including for our everyday needs.

Actually, our daily needs are part of our prayers. But remember, God already knows what we need, even if we can't say it out loud. So, how can we pray? Here's a suggestion: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. We worship God in our prayers. When we are alone with God, part of our prayer is worship. Sometimes, when you go to pray, bring your hymnal. Sing a chorus or a line of a song. Worship the Lord.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Have you noticed that many people in this world don't live according to God's principles or His kingdom? They're actually living in rebellion. Everything happening on earth isn't God's will; much of it goes against it. Yet, we still pray for it, hoping that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven, even though there are many things on earth that don't align with it.

Finally, let's talk about our daily care and needs: "Give us this day our daily bread." God wants us to pray for this. In chapter 6, Jesus will go into more detail about this part of daily care. Regarding seeking Him first, all these things will be added to you.² We have specific prayers for those who are struggling, But God has provided us with our daily sustenance, and we pray for it. Still, some individuals genuinely face challenges in this area.

When is the last time you ate only bread? I've experienced that God often provides meat and potatoes. If you are a vegetarian, aren't you glad that God provides meat and potatoes? I hope you're laughing. Imagine living by the sea of Galilee and you get to eat the wonderful fish that are caught there.

Now, let's address relationships. We should forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors. Also, let's address our personal sins and pray for those in our lives who need forgiveness and reconciliation. We continue to do this diligently.

In our spiritual journey, we often seek guidance to avoid temptation. As Paul reminds us in First Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation is overtaking you except such as is common to man, but God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you're able. But with the temptation will be a way of escape that you may be able to bear it." God is there to help us with our temptations, but sometimes we still fall. James talks about this in the first chapter. When that happens, it's important to get back on track with God in our daily relationship with Him.

God has forgiven us for all our sins, past, present, and future when we came to Christ for salvation. But He has also provided for our continued walk

² Matt. 6:33

especially focused on our present and keeping a strong connection with us. He keeps helping us overcome the things that keep us apart from Him in this life, so we can be reconciled with Him and live a righteous life. This is something we can all do.

When we admit our mistakes, God is always true and just, forgiving us and making us clean from anything that's not right. This is like a daily cleaning process. You can look at the image from the tabernacle to see how it works. In the tabernacle, people would go to the cross at the brazen altar, where Christ gave his life for their sins. But as they worked for the Lord, they had to wash and take care of things that got dirty because of their work in the tabernacle. They were always washing after making sacrifices at the temple inside the tabernacle. Because of their work, they were exposed to things in the world, such as sin and temptation. So, they had to do the work, as 1 John 1:9 says, to deal with their daily sins and walk with the Lord. That's exactly what we're doing here. But we need to be careful of the evil one, Satan, who is much stronger and more powerful than we are. The Bible tells us that Jesus, who lives inside us, is stronger than the one who lives in the world. So, we need to ask for help from the evil one and trust in the Lord's strength and power. Because the kingdom of God is forever and will always be in power and glory.

Prayer touches on many things, like dealing with the evil one, but it also helps us connect with God. In Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7, Jesus talks about the rules of his kingdom while he is on earth. These rules are still important for the church, but we're not Israel, and we're not in the kingdom age right now. But we will be someday. This is clear in verse 14: "If you forgive people their sins, your heavenly Father will forgive you too. But if you don't forgive people their sins, your Father won't forgive yours." This passage really shows how important forgiveness is, not just getting saved. It shows us how we're supposed to be friends with God and help our enemies get to know Christ. So, we're supposed to love our enemies and help them find Jesus. When we're trying to make peace with our kids and grandkids, we know that we need to forgive them too, so they can forgive us. Our work is all about this idea, and we can see how it changes our lives.

During Jesus' time on Earth, forgiveness was super important. He showed everyone how powerful it is, and it would keep happening under his rule. But, it's important to remember that forgiveness doesn't mean we forgive people who have done really bad things, like serial killers or Adolf Hitler. While some actions deserve divine justice, as the Bible says, we have to let God handle the eternal justice for evil. Sometimes, we might have to stand up and fight against evil.

Forgiveness is a gift from God, but it's also important to know that not everyone wants to be forgiven. People who have done really bad things might have already met God in judgment. But we can still forgive each other in our

families and relationships with our neighbors. In loving our enemies we are helping them being reconciled to God and to us. This is hard to do and indicates how much we need God to help us.

Matt. 6:16-18

Regarding the fast, Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness, drinking water and having food. He didn't feel thirsty, but he did feel hungry. While a 40-day fast isn't necessary for everyone, it's worth remembering that Jesus' fast followed the principles He teaches here.

The main difference is how he fasted. Unlike the hypocrites who fasted with sad faces to get attention, Jesus fasted genuinely and sincerely. It's important to remember that fasting isn't about seeking others' approval.

In the end, forgiveness is a gift from God that should be given to those who truly want it. Even though we might not be called to fast for 40 days, we can try to show forgiveness and compassion in our everyday lives. Even today, people fast in the Middle East, but they make it clear they're fasting by showing signs of sadness and doing rituals. While this might be okay in some cultures, Jesus says fasting should be done to please God, not to get noticed. Instead, people should anoint their heads and wash their faces before fasting, so they're focused on their Father in secret, who is the one who judges and rewards.

In our lives, we sometimes need to spend time alone with God. We can meet with the Lord in a private place, even if we're just walking. But it's important to remember that we're not trying to get attention for our fasting.

Jesus himself showed us how to do this by spending time in the wilderness, focusing on worship and being with God. People have been fasting for all sorts of reasons over the years, like when they're fighting spiritual battles, seeking advice, or preparing for something important. In the Gospel of Matthew, the disciples had a demon that they couldn't cast out.³ When they asked the Lord for help, he told them that sometimes fasting and prayer are needed because they need God's help to work.

Fasting can be a really good way to grow spiritually and strengthen yourself, but it's important to remember that it's not just about getting healthier. If you're fasting for health reasons, think of it as a way to feel better, not the main goal. Some of you may be thinking, "Brother Reeves, I think you should do a little more fasting." Fasting for health is different for fasting for spiritual reasons.

So, when you fast, make sure you know why you're doing it, not just to get better physically. It's a special thing that should be done with respect and

³ Mark 9:28 "Why could we not cast it out?" Note His answer in vs 29 "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."

love, asking our Father for help and blessings in private. When you fast for spiritual reasons, the main idea is to spend some time thinking and being close to God. It's important to distinguish between fasting and other spiritual practices. While fasting may need to be considered in terms of age and health, you can still include moments of prayer and meditation in your everyday life.

Fasting doesn't have to mean you're not eating for a long time. If you're fasting for a while, it's a good idea to take short breaks to eat and take care of any health issues.

It's really important to take care of your health and feel good when you're fasting. As we get older, it's even more important to pay attention to what our bodies need and take steps to keep ourselves safe.

When thinking about fasting, let's keep things in perspective. It can be helpful to try short fasting spells and weave in moments of prayer and connection with God throughout your day. Just remember not to push fasting too far, or it might become too much or make you doubt yourself.

If you're praying for something specific, be clear about what you're asking for, and then move on once it's answered. This way, you'll keep your focus on your spiritual path, not just on what happens next.

As we get older, we have a special chance to do spiritual things that might have been hard before. So, let's make sure we take advantage of this and spend time in prayer, meditation, and connecting with God.

In closing, let's approach fasting with purpose and mindfulness. Anointing the head and washing the face can help us feel grounded while we focus on our spiritual path. Remember, God sees in secret and rewards those who engage in spiritual practices with open hearts. We're earnestly praying for reconciliation and restoration within our family, and we're also seeking renewal for our church and the restoration of our relationships. Essentially, we're striving for a higher degree of seeing answered prayer and a focused life. These are the core objectives of our endeavors, and they're truly remarkable.

Conclusion

I hope today you gain a deeper understanding of our ability to serve God. However, it all begins with a sincere motivation, a secret commitment. We're doing these things for God. While others may witness our actions, we're not seeking attention or recognition. Some of you may have experienced the challenges of caring for an elderly parent, and the time may come to assist them with personal hygiene and physical care. Some of these tasks may be unpleasant and require some discretion. When we perform these acts as God's secret agents, we are not doing so for show. We rely on God's guidance and support. However, there is a profound sense of satisfaction that comes from

pleasing God and genuinely helping someone during their most difficult times. This perspective can be quite fulfilling.

When we pray, we specifically request what we need and acknowledge the circumstances we are facing. We don't have to repeat ourselves endlessly. We find ourselves alongside individuals who are enduring repeated needs moment by moment.

We have learned to pray through Jesus' teachings, practicing this in the privacy of our own hearts. We develop our own personal retreats to connect deeply with God. Even a short period, such as an afternoon, is beneficial. It doesn't have to be an extended commitment. Sometimes, we might want to set aside a weekend for prayer, which is a wonderful idea. But if we need food to stay healthy, we should take care of that first. We're all about being with the Lord and finding our own quiet spots. I think this is a great way to grow. I hope this helps us be real and do what God wants us to do. Until we see each other again, I send you my blessings,

“Lord, for your hard work studying your word. I really hope this helps, and I'm so grateful for everything you do. In Jesus' name, amen.”