

# Message Reflections

a little something extra to keep you connected to Jesus this week

Message Reflections accompany the [weekly message](#).

“Over here! Look at me!” That seems to sum up our current society. Wherever we look there seems to be someone clawing their way through the television or social media app to get our attention by outdoing the last beautiful, funny, outrageous, or controversial thing that may have held the world’s gaze for a few minutes. Even private accounts on social media will display perfect reels of perfect marriages with perfect family moments, on perfect vacations, after timely promotions, with quiet moments of candlelit devotions, tender reflections, hilarious kid quotes, and all their amazing friends. Nowhere do we see the arguments, disappointments, debt, betrayals, insecurities, bitterness that may or may not be lying just beneath the surface—the heart of it all. There are software programs that will fix your images by erasing people, adding people in the picture who weren’t there, blending several pictures of the same image to make a fictitious image where everyone is smiling or looking in the right direction, erasing photo bombers, or removing unsightly things in the backgrounds. Is anything real anymore? Do we really know anyone? Is it even possible to truly know someone? The answer is no, and not because I am being cynical, but because it says so in God’s word.

***1 Samuel 16:7b (ESV) “For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”***

***1 Chronicles 28:9 (ESV) “And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him he will be found by you, but if you forsake him he will cast you off forever.”***

While we may be able to manipulate other humans’ perceptions of our character, we can never fool God. Even the attempt is insulting to Him. It is important that when we pray, we examine our hearts. This weekend’s message warned us that performing for our fellow humans to appear religious by publicly practicing or announcing our religious disciplines while our hearts remain unaffected is hypocrisy. God is not impressed with pretense. In Matthew 6 Jesus warns us about the consequences of this, ***“Watch out!”(NLT) and “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.” (Matt 6:1 ESV)*** It is better to be caught doing good deeds than to flaunt our good deeds. Another passage about pretense is found in ***1 Samuel 15:22 (NLT) “What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice and submission is better than the fat of rams.”***

Jesus told a story in Luke 18 about a pharisee who was standing and praying loudly in the temple, inflating his character in comparison to the sinful tax collector. The tax collector was prostrating and begging God for forgiveness. In verse 14 Jesus says. ***“I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”***

In addition, it really hurts our ministry when we inflate ourselves as pious and religious while our hearts are still holding on to what the world values. People are craving something true, something real, something authentic. And though they can't see directly into our hearts, our hearts are often showing. Let's be caught doing good and reflecting God well rather than be caught in our sin. Let's remember we are His ambassadors in every area of our lives. I will confess, I don't always represent God well when I drive (the reason I can't have a fish or WRCC bumper sticker, just sayin') or when I am frustrated at my workplace. It would be better to claim allegiance to NOTHING than to misrepresent Christ. There is a quote that has stuck with me and challenged me through the years. It is loosely attributed to Mahatma Ghandi, "I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." The more public we make our Christianity, the higher our behavioral standard will be among unbelievers—as it should be! Our hearts are showing more than ever. Do we make Christ attractive to unbelievers? Or are we two different people, one on Sunday and another the rest of the week?

It is impossible to present a shiny version of ourselves to God. There is no app or program that can clean us up before God. Only God can do that. So when we pray, we must examine our hearts, not make a spectacle of it, keep it simple and concise without droning on and on, and humble ourselves before the God of the universe who has turned His ear toward us. Not so that others can think better of us but so that we can enrich our relationship with Christ, remembering that He already knows our thoughts, needs, and motivations. Because only through our relationship with God will we be able to represent Him well. Praise God, that this is exactly why Christ came, died, and rose again. He came to give us a direct line to the throne, to unite us with God once again, so we can have a rich and personal

relationship with Him. What a privilege! And so I will close with the perfect prayer, taught to us by Jesus himself:

Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day, our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

**Questions for further discussion:**

1. Is your prayer life about appearance or about your heart? Are you following God to be seen or are you seen following Christ?
2. Where do you pray? Do you have a quiet, secluded place for just you and God to abide? Do you have a certain prayer routine?
3. What parts of your heart are you trying to keep hidden? From God? From others?
4. Has a Christian in your life caused you to doubt Jesus? In what ways?
5. How can you improve your prayer life?
6. A shameless plug: Please consider joining our team of message reflection writers. We need you!