



grow. pray. study.

July 12, 2020 A Question of Motive

Building Your Life on a Firm Foundation: The Sermon on the Mount

Scripture: Matthew 6:1-2, 5, 16, 19, 21 (CEB except for vs.1 NRSV)

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

“Don’t blow your trumpet”

MONDAY 7.13.20 Matthew 6:1-4

Want an absurd image to make you smile? Imagine a pompous person hiring a trumpeter to sound a fanfare just before he put his big gift (“for the poor”) into one of the offering boxes at the Temple. Jesus was likely using hyperbole (exaggeration for effect) in that image, as he certainly was when he said not to let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. His warning was clear: you can do a good thing for wrong reasons. God can always tell the difference, whether other people can or not.

- Generous giving to help others is good. (In fact, it’s one of the five essential practices of the Christian life. *) What Jesus said, though, is that if you give to impress others, then whatever good impression you make on others is all the reward you’re going to get. As you extend Jesus’ call for inner honesty from the start of the Sermon on the Mount into this week’s topics, what are the main reasons you give?
- Okay, so you’ve never seen anyone hire a bugler to play a fanfare as they gave. But you’ve probably been in places (maybe even churches) where large plaques announce who gave a large gift to pay for most or all of this or that furnishing (or even this or that building). Often there’s no way of knowing if the donor asked for that recognition, but clearly they (or their heirs) didn’t refuse it. How, if at all, do you believe Jesus’ teaching in today’s passage applies to those situations?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to learn from your model of self-giving generosity. Teach me how to do my giving, not for my ego’s sake, but for the sake of those who need what I am able to give. Amen.

* See Hamilton, Adam. *The Walk*. Abingdon Press, 2019, Kindle Edition, chapter 4.

“Don’t pray...like hypocrites”

TUESDAY 7.14.20 Matthew 6:5-8

All through Matthew 6, as Jesus taught about various spiritual practices, he never used the word “if.” In today’s passage, he said “When you pray. . .” just as in yesterday’s passage he said, “when you give to the poor.” As scholar N. T. Wright put it, Jesus “assumes that people will continue to do all of these. What matters is learning to do them simply to and for God himself.” *

- Jesus did not condemn all public prayers. He did say that shouldn’t be the only place we pray. Scholar William Barclay wrote, “A certain preacher once described an ornate and elaborate prayer offered in a Boston Church as ‘the most eloquent prayer ever offered to a Boston audience.’ The preacher was much more concerned with impressing the congregation than with making contact with God.” ** When you worship, do you ever slip into “critic” mode (“That wasn’t a very good prayer”), or do you join the person praying in focusing on God, not other people?

- Jesus' description of people who think their prayers will be heard because they "pour out a flood of empty words" might recall the bizarre, tragic scene of the Baal prophets "praying" on Mount Carmel (cf. [1 Kings 18:26-29](#)). They didn't see their god(s) as caring and loving, but as careless, aloof and needing to be "won over." What helps you trust that God wants to hear you, that you don't need to impress God by eloquence or lengthy rhetoric?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when we make it a definition, it sounds so obvious: "Prayer is talking to God." Help me keep growing so that I value talking to you more highly than any other friend to whom I talk often. Amen.

* Wright, N.T., *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 55). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

** William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 1, Chapters 1–10* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, pp. 197.

Jesus' model prayer

WEDNESDAY 7.15.20 Matthew 6:9-15

Matthew set Jesus' model prayer in the Sermon on the Mount. Luke also wrote about Jesus teaching the prayer, but in a different setting (cf. [Luke 11:1-4](#)). This strongly suggests that Jesus taught this prayer to his followers often, not just one time. Jesus didn't mean the Lord's Prayer to be a museum piece, framed in a display case. Nor did he want it emptily recited by rote. Jesus was teaching his disciples, and through them all God's people, how to meaningfully communicate with God.

- Jesus prayed (and taught us to pray), "Bring in your kingdom so that your will is done on earth as it's done in heaven." In what ways does that prayer cast life's meaning differently than saying, "God's kingdom will come someday"? In what ways are you open to making God's kingship a current reality in your life, not just a distant future hope?
- With the simple phrase "Give us the bread we need for today," Jesus' prayer taught daily trust in God. That meant we don't wait to pray until a big crisis pops up, nor do we ever think we are so "spiritually stocked up" that we can skip praying. In what ways do you (or could you) make it a part of your routine each day to commit yourself and your concerns to God? What specific needs or concerns do you have this very day that you can pray into God's wise, caring provision?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me never to be too busy, or too shy, to talk to you about both the big and little things that are on my mind. Thank you for the ongoing conversation we call "prayer." Amen.

"Don't put on a sad face"

THURSDAY 7.16.20 Matthew 6:16-18

"Body language is an outward reflection of a person's emotional condition." * Again Jesus did not say if you fast, but rather when you fast. Fasting, the practice of self-denial, most often from food, for a spiritual purpose, can be physically uncomfortable. So Jesus urged his followers not to use non-verbal communication to draw attention, and presumably praise, to their physical discomfort when they fasted. He knew that sometimes our body language can be as "loud" as a trumpet blast.

- A typical fast might be giving up food for 24 hours and committing to prayer and Scripture study at mealtimes. (Note: people with certain medical conditions or pregnant women should not fast. Christians sometimes fast from their smart phone or other cherished activities rather than food.) Does Jesus' phrase "when you fast" trigger any sense of conviction in you? If you do not yet practice fasting, would you consider trying a short fast? What keeps you from fasting?
- Most people are not aware of their non-verbal communication. This week pay attention to the non-verbal way(s) you present yourself to other people. Even when using technology to communicate, we send out non-verbal cues. Consider asking someone you trust who knows you well what your non-verbal

communication portrays. Are there ways you use non-verbal cues to try to make yourself look better to others when you'd never use words to seek their praise?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I enjoy food. I am uneasy with the idea of a grumbling stomach. However I fast, help me to present myself at my best, drawing attention away from myself and toward you. Amen.

* From Barbara Pease and Allan Pease, *The Definitive Book of Body Language*. New York: Bantam Books, 2004.

The right place for your treasures

FRIDAY 7.17.20 Matthew 6:19-21

Jesus' teaching echoed the ancient Hebrew sages' wisdom: eagerly amassing this world's "treasures" does not produce a fulfilling life (cf. [Proverbs 14:22, 21:20](#)). Sadly, many religious leaders in Jesus' day ignored that part of their tradition. And remember, his prayer asked that God bring in his kingdom here, now.

"Heaven" was not just far away and far in the future. Making God's kingdom now your treasure was better than collecting the kind that might corrode or thieves could steal.

- Too often people think Jesus said, "Accept a miserable life now, and someday you'll get a lush life in heaven." Scholar N. T. Wright said Jesus was teaching us how to enjoy heavenly treasure right now. "How can one do this? Well, the whole chapter so far gives us the clue. Learn to live in the presence of the loving father. Learn to do everything for him and him alone. Get your priorities right." * Are you brave enough to reorient your priorities and give Jesus' way a serious try?
- Have you ever put money into something you were assured was "secure," only to see it prove to be insecure? There are so many things that can take up part of our "treasure"—vacations, various collectibles, prized belongings, tickets to special events, houses, retirement savings. Where is your heart—do you put as much time and energy into "investing" in God's heavenly kingdom as into earthly investments and spending choices?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are Lord of my life, and I want to "collect" your kinds of treasures. Increase my capacity to live out your values in my everyday choices of how to spend my time, energy and money. Amen.

* Wright, N.T., *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 63). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

Choose the right master

SATURDAY 7.18.20 Matthew 6:22-24

Jesus' words about "the eye" may sound confusing. But for Hebrews, they'd likely have been clear.

"According to a common view in the ancient world, the eye allowed the body's light (or darkness) to be seen by others. Whether one's eye is *healthy* or *bad* signals whether one's life is full of light or of darkness." * And what does it take to live a life that fills us with light that can shine to bless others? It takes choosing the right master. Not choosing an interesting church to attend when it's convenient; not choosing a suitable, admired denomination to put on my resume. Scholar William Barclay brought home the seriousness of Jesus' words: "The word [translated] *master* is *kurios*, and *kurios* is the Greek word which denotes *absolute ownership*. We get the meaning far better, if we translate it: No man can be a slave to two owners." **

- On a human level, the idea of slavery offends most Americans. But it was a fact of life in the Roman Empire Jesus lived in. So Barclay spelled out Jesus' implication: "God must be undisputed master of our lives. We can never ask, 'What do I wish to do?' We must always ask, 'What does God wish me to do?' We have no time which is our own. We cannot sometimes say, 'I will do what God wishes me to do,' and, at other times, say, 'I will do what I like.' The Christian has no time off from being a Christian; there is no time when he can relax his Christian standards, as if he was off duty....Nowhere in the Bible is the

exclusive service God demands more clearly set forth.” ** But before you say, “Hmm—maybe I’ll serve wealth,” note N. T. Wright’s wry comment: “What Jesus is saying is that money gives orders. It bosses you around.” *** Jesus said you’re choosing a master either way. Which do you choose?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, calling you “Lord” means that you rule over my life and my priorities. Give me the courage and devotion to really mean it when I call you “Lord.” Amen.

* Eugene Eung-Chun Park and Joel B. Green, study note on Matthew 6:22-23 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 17 NT.

** William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 1, Chapters 1–10* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, pp. 248-249.

*** Wright, N.T., *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 64). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

Bill Tooley and family following the death of Marvis " Marti" J Tooley (wife), 6/16/2020

Barbara and Jim Hesler and family following the death of Jason Hesler (son), 6/25/2020

Michelle Sloop and family following the death of Janice Dowdy (mother), 6/26/2020

Rosemarie Magee and family following the death of Karl Dittman (family friend), 6/29/2020

Lee Duckett and family following the death of Mike Duckett (husband), 7/2/2020

Jennifer Alley and family following the death of Tom Campbell (father), 7/3/2020