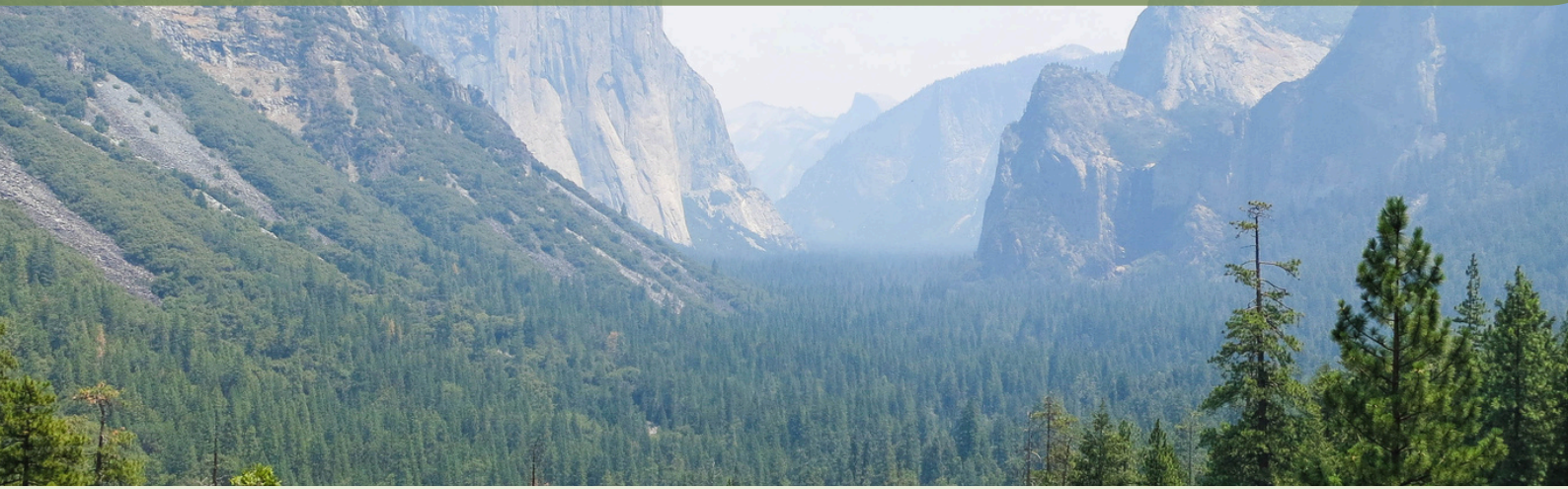




Week 4: Matthew 6:1-18

In Week 2, we saw how Jesus pointed out people’s misconceptions about the laws (Matt 5:21-48). This week, we will see how Jesus pointed out **people’s misconceptions about religious conducts and rituals**. Jesus’ teaching flows from negative behaviors to positive behaviors, but the emphasis is the same – the **real issue lies in our heart, not in our behaviors**. All spiritual disciplines, including giving, prayer and fasting, should be done **for glorifying God instead of glorifying oneself**.

It is important to read through the “Introduction” and previous weeks’ guides beforehand, as Matt 5 provides an essential foundation for understanding the entire Sermon on the Mount.

Warm-up question

What is the funniest / silliest thing you did *in secret* during your childhood? (E.g. Spending money on Pokemon cards instead of stationery?) **How did that make you feel?**

Read Matt 6:1-4 – Overall principle & giving

1. What is the difference between the manner of giving by the “hypocrites”, and the manner of giving taught by Jesus? In Matt 5:14-16, Jesus taught believers to be “the light of the world” and show others their good deeds in public; but why did Jesus say our giving should be done “in secret” in Matt 6:2-4?

- Note: “Do not let your left hand know” is a metaphor for keeping things secret (or “lowkey” as Gen Z would say) and not for pleasing others or oneself.
- Reminder: We should not think of “secrecy” as transactional like “if we do it in secret then God will reward us”. Instead, we should treat “secrecy” as a means to guard our heart and check our intention: Do we care if anyone knows it or not? Are we truly doing it for the glory of God?

Further notes:

- Both Matt 6:1 and Matt 5:6 refer to “righteousness”. True righteousness is the status when we are justified before God, and due to our sinful nature, this is only attainable through our faith in Jesus, not through our good behaviors.
- The word “reward” is repeated throughout the passage. When religious conduct is done for one’s own glory, Jesus said they have already “received their reward in full” (6:2, 6:5, 6:16) – if we do it to get people’s praise, we will get people’s praise, but nothing more. The true, eternal reward lies in our citizenship in His Kingdom, which is in line with the true “blessedness” mentioned in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10) – “blessed are . . . for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”.
- The concepts of true righteousness and eternal reward are inseparable: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt 6:33)

Read Matt 6:5-15 – Prayer

2. Jesus was not against praying publicly with other people (e.g. Matt 18:19-20). **Jesus was also not against praying time after time** (e.g. persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8; “pray without ceasing” in 1 Thess 5:17). **So what was the real issue that Jesus was addressing? How does praying without being known or admired by others (Matt 6:6) affect our heart and focus when praying?**

3. (Optional) God already knows what we need before we ask Him (Matt 6:8), so why do we still pray? Knowing that God is all-knowing, how does that influence the way you pray?

- Hint: Think about the relationship and dynamics between parents and their young children.
- Note: What is the heart and purpose of prayer? Re-visit the content of Week 3 if needed.

4. Jesus introduced the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9-13) as a model or example, not as a compulsory form or a “magical formula”. How would you describe (a) the structure and (b) the theme of this model prayer? How can you apply this structure and theme in your own prayer life?

- Hint: The first half (Matt 6:9-10) is our adoration of God, and the second half (Matt 6:11-13) is our petitions to God. What is the significance of this sequence?
- Note: The Lord’s Prayer starts with an intimate address of “Our Father”, which was uncommon for believers at that time to do so until Jesus taught it. We should recognise God as both our sovereign Ruler and our loving Father. The Lord’s Prayer is also given in the context of the coming Kingdom of God – declaring the coming of the Kingdom and preparing ourselves in light of it.

The Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9-13)	Reflection questions
Our Father in heaven	Do you recognise God as your Father?
Hallowed be your name	Do you want the world to know God?
Your kingdom come	Do you recognise God’s reign over your life and the world?
Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven	Do you desire to do God’s will?
Give us today our daily bread	Do you depend on God as your Provider on an everyday basis?
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors	Are you willing to show mercy to others just as how God shows mercy to you? (See also Matt 5:7, 5:23-26, 18:21-35)
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one	Are you aware of your sinful nature and the sin of this world, and are you actively depending on God in trials / challenges?
For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.	How can you glorify God in your everyday life?

Read Matt 6:16-18 – Fasting

5. What is the difference between the manner of fasting by the “hypocrites”, and the manner of fasting taught by Jesus? How does that echo Jesus’ teachings on giving and prayer in the previous verses?

- Note: The spiritual discipline of “fasting” means the abstinence from food for a specific period of time while seeking God, in order to foster humility and a stronger focus on God. As some put it: “starve the flesh, feed the spirit.” It has been a common practice among believers (e.g. Lev 23:27-32; Acts 13:2, 14:23).
- “Put oil on your head and wash your face” (Matt 6:17) refers to regular acts of life as an orderly person, as opposed to pretentiously acting miserable or despairing.

6. (Optional) What is one spiritual discipline that you can commit to practice “in secret” this week, for the purpose of glorifying God and growing closer to Him?