

Secret Virtues: Prayer*Matthew 6:5-8*

Introduction: Last week we returned to the study of the Sermon on the Mount. In this portion of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is urging us to excel in secret virtues. He encourages us to practice our righteousness secretly for the eyes of God alone instead of trying to impress other people. Jesus' disciples are supposed to have a secret life that is rich in virtues such as giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting. We are to avoid hypocrisy – merely impersonating righteousness. Today we focus in on the secret virtue of prayer.

Opening Discussion: What one word would you use to describe your current life of prayer?

Read Matthew 6:5-8

1. What is significant about the fact that Jesus says, "when you pray" (v. 5) instead of "if you pray"?
2. What is it that the hypocrite is going for in his praying?
3. Do you think Jesus is prohibiting all public praying? Why or why not?

Steve said:

Personally I don't see a lot of Christians clamoring to show off their prowess in prayer in order to impress others. If anything I see a reluctance to pray in front of others. Nevertheless, it's worth considering whether the **main** time you pray is when you're praying with other people - whether with your family before meals or with your Life Group. In other words I see a challenge to make sure that when we do pray in public (or in the hearing of others) that it's the tip of the ice berg, not the entirety of our prayer life.

4. Is there any way in which you feel that the "**main** time you pray is when you're praying with other people"?
5. In what ways, if any, do you sometimes try to impress other people with your praying?

Steve said:

My encouragement is simply to begin making it your habit to find a quiet place to come to God as a little child. Talk with God about whatever is on your heart. This is secret prayer that nobody will find out about, so you can talk about whatever is on your heart. And you might even try listening to try to hear what is on God's heart. If secret prayer is new to you, you probably don't want to shoot for an hour a day. Maybe start with 2 minutes a day; if you keep that up, you will have prayed for an hour this month. Not bad.

6. How does the image of a little child talking to a parent, affect your thoughts about what your experience of prayer can be like?
7. How might it look for you to make it your habit to spend some time in secret prayer with your heavenly Father?
8. What have you found to be helpful in quieting your heart so that you can come into the presence of God in prayer?
9. What is the main thing that Jesus is stressing in verses 7-8?

Steve said:

This is something that small children do really well – ask for things. They realize that they are helpless, and they believe that their parents can do anything. A kid is likely to ask, “Mommy, can I have an elephant?” But as children grow older this mindset often flips; older children often think that they can do everything and that their parents have very little to offer them (besides food, clothing, a place to live, transportation, etc.). My point is that we often grow up with a mindset of self-sufficiency, reluctant to ask anybody else (including God) to do things for us. We'd often rather go without than ask somebody else to come through for us.

10. What ways, if any, does an attitude of self-sufficiency hinder your prayer life?
11. What do you sense is the main point of application for you from this study?