

Focus on the Father

Matthew 6:1-8

Intro

Let's begin our time of study in God's Word with a simple thought...

Our focus determines our future...

Let me say that again...

Our focus determines our future...

For example — let's say you start ***focusing*** on how much you would like to eat at Chick-Fil-A — but don't focus on it *today* because they are *closed*...

- So, as you focus on Chick-Fil-A *tomorrow* this ***focus*** is likely to lead you there...

Your focus determined your future...

And this is how we live life everyday — what we focus on determines our future...

- If we ***focus*** on going on a family vacation then we will start taking steps to make that vacation happen and that will determine our ***future*** — on us actually going on the trip...

The reason you are sitting in this room right now is because in the recent past — a couple of hours (or a few minutes) ago — you **focused** on coming to church — and here you are...

- You see, everyone of us is a *time-traveler*...

Every moment of our lives we are moving from the *past* to the *future* by way of the *present*...

- This never stops as long as we are alive on this planet...

We are each moving into the future at a speed of 60sec/min...

But as we are traveling, we do have some say over our future — and the Lord has given us that freedom by allowing us to *determine what we focus on*...

Dallas Willard — Renovation of the Heart

“What we think is, in the adult person, very much a matter of what we allow ourselves to think, and what we feel is very much a matter of what we allow ourselves to feel. Moreover, what we think is very much a matter of what we wish and seek to think, and what we feel is very much a matter of what we wish and seek to feel. In short, the condition of our minds is very much a matter of the direction in which our will is set.”

In other words, our focus determines our future — what we choose to focus on determines what we think and what we feel — and this in turn determines our future...

Unfortunately, because of our own sinfulness and the training we have received in this fallen world, our minds are often set on the wrong things...

- Our focus is faulty and that this leads us in the wrong direction...

And I believe that it is this **faulty focus** that the Lord Jesus is addressing as we continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount...

- Here in Matthew 6:1-8 the Lord Jesus will expose a **faulty focus** commonly associated with **giving** and **praying** and He will instruct us on the only **proper focus** for **giving** and **praying**...

And this instruction is indispensable because it applies not only to giving and praying but to each and every area of our lives...

- In fact, this **proper focus** was the very core of the Lord Jesus' life and ministry — it was the firm foundation on which the greatest life ever lived was built...

And this was that firm foundation — in everything that the Lord Jesus ever *thought, said or did* — **His focus was always on the Father...**

- And if we are to be disciples of the Lord Jesus, then in everything we do we must seek to **focus on the Father...**

As we focus on the Father we will increasingly experience the fulness of the good future that the Father has planned for us...

With this in mind, please follow along as I read the passage that we will be studying this morning...

Matthew 6:1-8 (NKJV)

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.

7 And 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.

Let's move into our first section...

1) The Focus of Giving (vs 1-4)

1 "Take heed

To be in a state of alert, be concerned about, care for, take care...

Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them.

So, here the Lord Jesus is warning us against having the *wrong focus* in our giving...

- We are ***not*** to *focus* on men when we are giving...

The Lord Jesus continues...

Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

This is a radical statement from the Lord Jesus...

Without reservation or qualification, the Lord Jesus states that a *focus on men* in the act of giving will result in ***no reward*** from your Father in heaven...

- You see, since the giving was done to be seen by men and not to honor God, the Father will not reward it...

[ex. I see \$100 drop out of your pocket — but instead of simply and quietly returning it to you, I arrange for a news crew to capture me giving you your money back — you should not reward me — because I didn't do it for you — I did it for me...]

And please understand that the Lord is not speaking hyperbolically here in vs 1...

The reality is that whatever good works we do *simply to be seen by men* **will not be rewarded** by the Father because He wasn't the *focus*...

Moving on to vs 2 we read...

2 Therefore, when you do a charitable deed,

Please notice the word **when** in this verse...

- I would argue that this means *we should give* — that giving is a normal part of the Christian life...

Everything that we have has been given to us by God and we should sacrificially give back to Him...

For more on this subject, please turn to...

2 Corinthians 9:1-8 (NKJV)

1 Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you;

2 for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority.

3 Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready;

4 lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting.

5 Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.

6 But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

- [expand — give of time, talent & treasure — always with a focus on the Father...]

Now please turn back to Matthew 6 as we continue on in vs 2 where Jesus says...

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.

In other words, do not draw attention to yourself as you give...

- [ex. photo shoot of politicians reading to children / video of celebrities serving food to the poor / people donating so that their names are on buildings, etc...]

The reality is that drawing attention to oneself while giving is done with a focus on receiving **glory** from men...

- This **attention-getting giving** is done with a focus on receiving praise from men — of getting the applause of men — of being considered a somebody in the eyes of men...

And it works — notice what the Lord Jesus says at the end of vs 2...

Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

This is the reality of the situation — if we give of our time, talent & treasure with a focus on receiving glory from men *we will get it...*

- And we will have received our reward — the temporary applause of men — and that will be *all* the reward that we receive from that investment...

As one Bible commentator put it, this sort of giving is not giving at all — it is really *buying* — it is *buying* the praise of men...

- On the other hand, true giving is to be **others-centered** — it is the sacrificial offering of something to improve the life of another...

Continuing on to vs 3-4 we read...

**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;**

When we give, we should do it in a way that is secret — we should not be publishing it before men so that we may be praised by men...

- With that said, this does not mean that we cannot declare our charitable giving on our taxes — because we are not trying to receive glory from the IRS...

The big idea is that our giving is not to be done for false motives — we are not to focus on men and what they think of us...

- Because if we do, our giving is simply a means of manipulation — it is a desire to control the narrative — it is a desire to determine what others think of us...

Now please notice what the Lord Jesus says at the end of vs 4...

and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

Please pay special attention to the words **your Father**...

- If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ then God the Father is **your Father**...

And you can give in secret because you know that **your Father** sees in secret...

You can know that whatever you give with a *focus* on **your Father** is pleasing to Him — it is meaningful to Him...

- This wonderful truth frees us from the tyranny of needing to be seen by people, of needing applause and praise from people...

You can give of your time, talent and treasure *freely* and *secretly* because it is not in vain if it is done with a focus on **your Father**...

But wait — there's more...

Your Father will not only **sees in secret** — He will also **reward you openly**...

- [expand — openly reward us in this life (partial reward) / openly reward us in the life to come (full reward)...]

Luke 6:38 (NKJV)

“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”

As it has been well said, *“You can't out-give God”*...

REMEMBER — A focus on the Father leads to future reward...

Now, before we move on to our next section, we must not miss the irony of hypocritical giving to receive a reward from men...

The reward is gained — and it is immediate — but it is also temporary and unsatisfying...

- However, if we give with a focus on our Father we will receive a reward that we must wait for — but it is a reward that is eternal and fully satisfying...

[ex. fireworks vs stars — story from Pastor Chuck Smith...]

Let's move now to our second section...

2) The Focus of Praying (vs 5-8)

5 And when you pray,

Again we see the word **when** — just like giving, prayer is to be a normal part of the life of a believer...

And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites.

hypocrites — *actors, pretenders, not really what they appear to be...*

For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets,

standing in the synagogues — *place of prominence, easy for men to see...*

- They could pray silently in their seats but they love to pray standing for everyone to see...

These hypocrites also love to pray in the...

corners of the streets — *get the most traffic, easier to see a person on the corner of a street...*

And the Lord Jesus tells us what their focus is...

that they may be seen by men.

Once again we see that the ***focus is on men*** and ***not on the Father...***

The Lord Jesus continues...

Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Once again, we see that a focus on getting the praise of men *works...*

- A temporary reward is received from men and that is it...

The Father will not reward that which is not focused on Him...

- *Now, as we move into verse 6 we find something very interesting — the word **you** is in the singular in this verse...*

[expand — the Lord Jesus emphasizing the personal prayer life that each believer is to have with the Father...]

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;

- [expand on imagery — you go into a secluded place to meet with your Father who is in the secret place...]

This is true prayer — an intimate conversation between two persons who love one another — no one else needs to be in on this conversation...

- [expand — prayer is a conversation / both persons speak / ***Hearing God by Dallas Willard...***]

Now, we must understand that the Lord Jesus' instruction in vs 6 is not a prohibition against all public prayer — because there is a great deal of public prayer in the Bible...[c.f. Book of Acts]

Instead of prohibiting public prayer, I believe that the Lord Jesus is bringing out at least two concepts that are vital to a focus on the Father...

1) My prayer life should primarily consist of secret prayer between myself and my Father...

2) When I do pray publicly, the focus should be on the Father and not on those people who are around me...

Now to the last part of vs 6...

and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

The Lord Jesus reminds us that the Father **sees in secret** — no one else needs to know — and that He will openly reward the one who focuses on Him...

Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV)

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Moving on in Matthew 6 to vs...

7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do.

Vainly repeating the Lord's Prayer or other prayers through the use of prayer beads or other methods is prohibited...

- [expand on why this is unacceptable / it is not how relationship between thinking persons works...]

[ex. A person who understands how to play a video game and a person who is just mindlessly pushing buttons / the first person is actually relating to the game / the second person is not...]

For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

[ex. Child saying, "mom I want it, mom I want it, mom I want it... / this is not relationship, it is a form of manipulation...]

8 Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him."

Our Father knows what is best for us before we ever ask Him for anything...

- And no amount of badgering Him will make a difference — He will not give us what is bad for us because He loves us and love always wants the best for the one who is loved...

Elisabeth Elliot — Suffering is Never for Nothing

“The love of God is not a sentiment. It is a willed and inexorable love that will command nothing less than the very best for us. The love of God wills our joy.”

So, we are not to use vain repetitions because God knows what we need and He will only give us what is best for us...

- With that said, we are instructed to be persistent in prayer...

But persistent prayer is not mindlessly repetitious, it is thoughtful, consistent and sensitive to the responses of the Father...

With this in mind, would you please turn to...

Luke 18:1-8 (NKJV)

1 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,

2 saying: “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man.

3 Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’

4 And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man,

5 yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’ ”

6 Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said.

7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?

8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily.

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

Conclusion

We will stop here for today and Lord-willing continue in Matthew 6 next week...

- *And as we close, I want to remind you of two familiar passages that remind us that the Lord Jesus is our ultimate example in that He always focused on the Father and that He looked forward to a great reward...*

The first passage is...

John 8:28-29 (NKJV)

28 Then Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.

29 And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.”

- [expand — Jesus was always focused on the Father...]

The second passage is...

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NKJV)

1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- [expand — the joy set before Him & the seat at the right hand of the Father...]