

Deep Discipleship: Avoiding the Loss ▪ Matthew 6:1-4, 13-18

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Author and speaker Paul Tripp wrote a book a few years back called *Dangerous Calling*. The target audience was primarily ministry leaders. The book was a warning against sin and cynicism that can come over time doing the Lord's work.

The sad irony was that the 5 pastors who had written endorsements published on the cover of the book—*only two* have remained faithful in ministry. The others were morally disqualified in big scandals, and one is no longer a professing Christian. These were all pastors who had large churches, spoke at conferences, and wrote books.

What a sad loss. Not only for those men, but the families and ministries, and followers that they left behind.

- When Jesus spoke these words, he was not targeting ministry leaders, but ordinary disciples who lived in the culture of corrupt and compromised leadership.

Jesus knew the spiritual world of his disciples had the potential of the counterfeit, phony, and artificial. But his purpose was to issue the warning. (6:1)

When I was growing up, I had a paper route. Occasionally a house would have a sign in the front yard—solid black background with orange block letters: BEWARE OF THE DOG.

It was not usually a Chihuahua in that case; it was a Pit Bull or German Shepherd. A beast that might be a good pet, *but can also do massive harm.*

- › This warning is against a specific, subtle enemy - a beast that can devour.
- › Traditionally called *vainglory*. *Anything done for the sake of drawing attention to ourselves, not God.*

6:1-18 is all connected to the warning in 6:1.

—This warning is followed by three examples: charity, prayer, and fasting.

- These are considered “acts of piety” — good things we do that can deepen spiritual life ... yet they are always tempting avenues of vainglory.

› Main Idea: Jesus wants us to avoid the loss of falling into vainglory.

AVOID THE WRONG MAN-CENTERED REWARD

On hypocrisy:

- As we get into this, first it’s important to get a handle on the word Jesus uses: hypocrite.

It’s found 17x in NT and 13x in Matthew.

- One thing that is interesting—Jesus is the only one in the Gospels who calls out hypocrisy. Maybe we should leave that Judgment to him?

The word illustrates two things:

1. Hypocrites are good actors. That’s the meaning of the Greek word. A person plays a role that is not their true self.

Now if you hear the name Tom Hanks, or Denzel Washington, you get a clear picture in mind. Maybe even a movie comes to mind.

Actors and actresses are also known for being on display; in front of an audience, in the spotlight, on the screen.

Actors are not known for seeking obscurity.

2. Hypocrites love attention, love to be seen, and crave affirmation.

Hypocrisy is very targeted at the Religious Leaders (Mt. 23)

- In the examples Jesus cites, he warns about being “like the hypocrites”.

The heart of religious hypocrisy is caught in:

John 12:43 ESV

for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

- › We are always a product of what we love
- v1: Practicing your righteousness *in order to be seen by others.*

“In order” is an important word in grammar. It translates a purpose clause/purpose statement.

- Now we are told to aim at one thing in doing good: that the Father may be glorified. (5:16)

Yet there are some people who aim at “practicing righteousness for the purpose of being seen, being noticed...getting a nod, a like, a following.

Maybe that was the aim all along, or maybe over time things become more of a show because of more affirmation or more success.

Jesus provided two examples:

- The first example is generosity/charity (v2)

We may think—this does not happen in our day. But there are ways....

I’ve visited churches before where brass plates are tacked on pews that have people’s names on them. Talk about “sitting in someone’s pew, literally”. How anti-missional and uninviting.

How about the *Go Fund Me* causes that we donate to—that provide the opportunity for us to go public with what amount we gave. “But maybe it will encourage someone else to give.”

Or, maybe it causes me to be bitten by that nasty beast vainglory.

It gets pretty ugly as Jesus cuts (v2) “that they may be *praised by others*”.

One of the things I miss about living in a small town is riding my bike everywhere.

When we lived in small town, Iowa, I would sometimes go days without driving a vehicle because my bike got me everywhere. Save money and exercise.

Every day I would ride my bike to church in the Spring, Summer and early Fall...until the day it was stolen.

Someone snatched it right from in front of the church!

- › When we seek to do things “to be praised by others”, it is *theft*. We prove that we are glory thieves.

Are you aiming for the wrong reward?

How can we know?

--We care more about reputation than actual relief?

--Are we ever tempted to give not for the sake of the cause, but for what it may gain us?

--Do we feel crushed if we are not affirmed, or recognized by what we do?

I find that even in Reformed circles, we know that God’s glory is the right answer. Westminster confession says it’s our chief end, but functionally we can just be as man-centered in the functional outworking of our lives.

How do we act if we know that only God is watching; that *only he sees*?

AIM AT THE RIGHT GOD-GLORIFYING REWARD

- V3-4 - When you give (again, assumed that you *will give*) do it indiscreetly, so that your giving may be in secret. (v3)
- Again, v17-18

There are two lessons here:

The best way to hit the target is by what we *avoid*.

1. *Disciples intentionally avoid the spotlight.*

Now for some reason the children's summer musical songs get stuck in my head.

"Don't be secret disciples, secret disciples..."

That was the takeaway from the Nicodemus story. Don't hide the fact that you are interested and want to follow Jesus!

But there is a time to do discipleship "secretly" —when we are tempted to flaunt our spirituality around in a way that is seen by others.

- › *There is a prize in purposely concealing or being hidden in our spirituality.*

Apply: Boy, this is a massive challenge in our day when many of us can live through the filter of Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, etc..

- › The reward of that may be instant and immediate...*but not lasting*

2. The second way is to *avoid turning your spiritual life into a system.*

- Now, the fact that Jesus’ says “when you fast”, means that he expects it. In the OT Law, fasting was only commanded on one day (Day of Atonement).

Other fasts were occasional—repentance and renewal.

But the Pharisees turned it into a twice weekly thing. ([Lk. 18:12](#))

—What was lacking? A focus on the Father.

The focus on our heavenly Father is the thread that runs through this section.

—no reward *from your Father who is in heaven* (v1)

—And your Father who sees (v4, 6, 18)

—Your Father knows (v8)

—Prayer begins, “Our Father in heaven” (v9)

—Forgiveness is the Father’s work ... (v14-15)

- › The health or decay of our spiritual life will always be in direct correlation with how focused and secure we are in God our Father.

When a loving relationship with the Father is not at the core, we can turn our spiritual life into a system that externally looks good, but it’s a shell.

Sometimes if there is a younger man who seems very insecure and tries to over compensate, we will say “Maybe that dude’s got daddy issues. He must not have had a good relationship with his dad.”

All vainglory can trace itself back to having “daddy issues”. On the other hand--*All positive spirituality will have God the Father as our chief focus.*

This is the way to gain the right reward and avoid the loss. Keep your heavenly Father at the Core.

Here we are getting at the heart of Deep discipleship:

An abiding relationship with God the Father.

If you want to find out what a Christian is about...

Romans 8:15 ESV

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

There is no room for "daddy issues" there.

Friends—A secure, spiritual life of substance and love is available to any who sincerely come by faith and want it.

Conclusion

As we close, you still may be asking what the reward is? What reward is Jesus talking about?

I think it has to do with what happens at the final judgment.

Romans 2:16 ESV

on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

At the close of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus speaks very literally about his return, and the final judgment.

Jesus returns; all the nations are gathered to him; people are separated—sheep on the right, goats on the left.

Matthew 25:33–35 ESV

And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for

you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,

How can you spot sheep?

Sheep don't put themselves in the spotlight. They don't know what to do with it.

May the Lord keep us from the beast of vainglory, and keep us a sheep who are set on his glory.