

# SERMON PASSAGE GUIDE

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## *This Week's Passage*

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. <sup>2</sup> "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. <sup>5</sup> "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. <sup>6</sup> But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. <sup>7</sup> "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. <sup>8</sup> So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. "Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. <sup>17</sup> But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face <sup>18</sup> so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.



## *Prepare Your Heart & Mind*

Begin this time in prayer, confessing any sins you can recall, thanking the Lord for the gift of His Word, and asking for His Spirit to guide you in your time.

## *Reflect/Connect*

*Use these questions to reflect privately in prayer, or journal, or to start a meaningful conversation in your Life Group.*

- When you practice spiritual habits like giving, praying, or fasting, what is your instinctive hope for the outcome? Is it God's pleasure, personal growth, or the affirmation of others?
- Where do you feel the tension most strongly between Jesus' call to practice righteousness "in secret" and a culture that encourages us to broadcast our good deeds, document our spirituality, and build a personal brand?

## Grow in the Word

These questions are designed to guide your personal study, or spark spiritual conversation in your Life Group.

Jesus begins with a warning not to practice righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, because doing so results in no reward from the Father in heaven. He then gives the example of giving to the needy. He tells His listeners not to announce their giving like the hypocrites do in synagogues and on the streets to be honored by others. Instead, they are to give quietly, without drawing attention to themselves. The Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward them (v. 1-4).

- How would you describe the underlying motivation for someone who "sounds a trumpet" before giving? What does this kind of public display reveal about whose approval the "hypocrites" value most?
- In what ways does the desire to be rewarded by God differ from the desire to be praised by people? Why is seeking the Father's reward described as an essential part of faith? See also Hebrews 11:6.
- What does Jesus mean when He says not to let your left hand know what your right hand is doing? How might this level of secrecy actually protect our own hearts when we give?

Jesus also addresses prayer and fasting. When His followers pray, they are not to be like the hypocrites who pray publicly to be seen by others, nor are they to heap up empty phrases. Instead, they are to pray to their Father in secret, remembering that He knows what they need. Likewise, when they fast, they are not to make it obvious, but to go about it in a normal way so that only the Father sees. In each case, the Father who sees in secret will reward them (v. 5-8, 16-18).

- What does the habit of "thoughtless repetition" suggest about how the Gentiles viewed their gods? In contrast, how does knowing that the Father already "knows what you need" fundamentally change your motive and posture when you pray?
- Jesus points out that the hypocrites "distort their faces" to ensure everyone knows they are suffering for God (v. 16). What does this reveal about how exhausting it is to constantly manage our spiritual image for an audience?
- Three times, Jesus promises that the Father who "sees in secret will reward you" (v. 4, 6, 18). How would you describe the nature of the reward found in the "secret" place with the Father, and why is it more valuable than the reward the hypocrites receive? See Psalm 16:11; 1 John 2:17.

## Practice Together

This section provides an easy way to live out the truths of the passage in daily life, whether you're with your Life Group, family & friends, or on your own. These practices help turn reflection into relationship & action.

- This week, choose one act of generosity or service and do it intentionally in secret. When you feel the natural urge to mention it to someone, pause and remind yourself that the Father's secret pleasure is infinitely more valuable than the fleeting applause of others. Use that secret as a private moment of connection to thank the Father who sees.
- Set aside a short, intentional time of prayer where your goal is not eloquence or length, but simple, honest conversation with your Father. Begin by acknowledging, "You already know what I need."

