

# YOUR FATHER WILL REWARD YOU

Matthew 6:1-18

Key Verse: 6:4b

**“Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”**

This passage mainly talks about practicing righteousness. Some of us immediately associate righteousness with justification. We love to hear about justification. Justification is more than forgiveness. It is God’s final declaration that we are not guilty, and have a right relationship with God. What a blessing this is! We did not earn this righteousness by our own effort. It was given to us as a gift, freely by God’s grace, through faith in Jesus, who fulfilled the law perfectly. This righteousness is passive; it was imputed to us by Jesus (2Co 5:21). However, in today’s passage righteousness does not refer to justification. It refers to religious observances that are the fruit of faith. Jesus’ examples are giving to the needy, prayer and fasting.

We should understand this passage in its context. Israel was a religious nation in which the Mosaic Law was publicly enforced. The synagogue was the center of society and religious leaders had great authority. Religious observances were highly regarded as the evidence of righteousness. People were under great pressure to practice them, whether they really wanted to or not. In that kind of atmosphere, people who desire honor and recognition easily became hypocrites. This can happen in our churches. Practices that are meant to build up our spiritual life can be misused to gain people’s praise. Decisions that should be made prayerfully and honestly before God can be made reactively, to please people. Jesus wants his followers to practice righteousness as the genuine expression of faith. How can we? When we know who God is and live before him. This is what Jesus teaches us today.

Verse 1 warns us, **“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”** Jesus implies that we should practice righteousness. This is the proactive effort to do what is right in practical life. It is not easy in a fallen, sin-sick world. One man met a brother in urgent need on the way to a prayer meeting. He said, “God bless you,” and continued on his way. Later, he repented and came back to help his brother. He had to struggle to do what was right. Some people do not practice righteousness

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because they are paralyzed by selfishness. Some people do not practice righteousness because they are afraid they will become hypocrites. This kind of cowardly, do-nothing attitude is not an option for Christians. Jesus assumes that we will practice righteousness. It is the way to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world. However, we must do so to please God. If we do it to please people, we have no reward from our Father God. Jesus wants us to be rewarded by God. So he tells us how to practice righteousness in three ways.

**First, giving (2-4).** Jesus said, **“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full”** (2). Jesus assumes that we will give to the needy. Giving to the needy is an important virtue in all religions. But Christian giving is distinctive. While other religions emphasize giving to obtain salvation, Christians give as the fruit of salvation. We have received God’s salvation free of charge, so we give to others free of charge. Jesus said, **“Freely you have received; freely give”** (Mt 10:8b). We should not give to earn merit and boast, but to express gratitude to God and to give him the glory. Giving to the needy means more than contributing money. It includes visiting the sick or lonely, encouraging the broken-hearted, and sharing the word of God with others. How wonderful it is to practice such giving in this selfish world. Yet, there is the danger of self-promotion. In Jesus’ time, some people blew trumpets when they gave. They wanted to hear others say, “Wow! Look at that generous person! Let’s elect him as mayor!” Self-promotion seems necessary to get a good job or win an award. But in giving to the needy, we should not promote ourselves. If we do, we become hypocrites (2). A brief moment of human recognition will be our full reward.

How, then, should we give to the needy? Jesus said, **“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret”** (3-4a). Our giving should be done in such a way that, in some sense, even we ourselves are not aware of it. How can we do this? It is possible when our giving comes so naturally that it is done subconsciously. This requires us to develop a giving spirit as our habit. This happens as we practice giving in secret. Our Father sees what is done in secret and rewards us (4b). In Acts 10, we find a man named Cornelius. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave

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generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. God chose him as the first Gentile to receive the gospel through Peter. What a blessing! Let's try giving in secret so that we can experience God's reward.

**Second, prayer (5-15).** Prayer is personal fellowship with God. Through prayer, we can connect to God who is our source of life. We can gain wisdom and strength, forgiveness and peace in our time of need. But there are dangers that our prayer life can become hypocritical (5). In truth, hypocrites do not really talk with God; they display their holiness before others. The prophet Daniel was a great man of prayer. He went into his room, closed the door and prayed to God sincerely (Da 6:10). But the hypocrites went outside and stood on the street corner to pray. They prayed loudly with dramatic arm motions. Like them, some in our time promote themselves through prayer. Though they pray very little in private, they pray for a long time in public. Some people deliver a message to others in their prayer, sometimes even rebuking them.

Jesus teaches a right attitude in prayer: **“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you”** (6). When we pray, we should go into our room—closing the door to the world and opening the door to God. We should turn off our cell phones to have personal time with God. What a blessing this is! Most of us probably cannot have a personal meeting with the president. Yet the Creator God invites us to meet with him personally in a sweet hour of prayer. It is the way to find new strength when we are weary. It is the way to find courage and wisdom to overcome temptation and hardship. It is the way to a victorious and fruitful life. When we know what a great privilege we have in prayer, we will not misuse it.

Jesus warned against one more danger in prayer: **“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words”** (7). Here “babbling” means to keep repeating the names of gods until one is found who listens, or to keep repeating the same phrase in the hope that the god will become so worn out that he answers the prayer. For a Christian, this could be praying without any real point. It is like making “small talk” with God, ignoring the real need we have. In truth, some do not bring their real problem to God because they don't really trust him. Yet Jesus tells us that God knows everything we need, and is

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just waiting for us to ask him (8). He wants us to bring our real problems to him in prayer, with sincere hearts, so that he can help us.

In verses 9-13, Jesus teaches us how we should pray. Prayer begins with the words, **“Our Father in heaven.”** Though God is so awesome and holy, he is also our Father. How can we sinners call God “Father”? It is possible because of what Jesus has done for us through his suffering, death and resurrection. It is possible by the help of the Holy Spirit whom he has poured out into our hearts. In Jesus, we can call God “Father” with great conviction. Who is God? He is the unique God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 1:3,17). God is not just one of many gods. He is the God of the Bible. He is the Creator God, Redeemer God, and Judge of all. He is holy, righteous and just. He is loving, compassionate, forgiving, and everlasting. He is perfect, unlike our earthly fathers. We can call this God “our Father” and have an intimate relationship with him. It is so wonderful to call God “Father.” Let’s say, **“Our Father in heaven”** in one voice.

This prayer contains six petitions—three related to God and three to our needs. The first petition is **“hallowed be your name.”** It is for God’s name to be highly honored and set apart as holy. God made man to honor and glorify him in all that we do. However, one effect of sin is that we no longer thank God or glorify him (Ro 1:21). Those blinded by sin will even blaspheme God’s name. But Jesus cleanses our sins and opens our eyes to see how beautiful, glorious and majestic God is. Now we can begin our prayer by coming into God’s presence and admiring his holiness, goodness and glory. Sometimes we get stuck and it is hard to pray. Our sins and mistakes, or the problems we face look like giant mountains and God seems like a wisp of cloud. But as we honor and glorify him, he becomes bigger and bigger and our issues are put into perspective. Then we can really pray.

The second petition is **“your kingdom come.”** This means that God’s reign may be restored in our hearts and lives, and in this world. It also anticipates Jesus’ coming again in great glory as King and Judge. While living in this world we experience pains and sorrows. Behind these things lays the power of sin, death and the devil. Sometimes our hearts are broken by the power of evil that is still working in the world. But Jesus wants us to release all these things. He wants us to invite God into our hearts as King and Lord. When he comes in, he forgives all our sins, heals our wounds and fills us with

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the power of his Holy Spirit. He enables us to see his final victory and live with our heads held high as we await his return. More than that, he wants to use us to expand his kingdom by sharing it with others. He wants to come into our families, community and nation to reign with peace and love. Let's invite Jesus into our hearts as our Savior King to reign over us.

The third petition is **“your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** In heaven, everything is done according to God's will because God is the Lord of all things. God's will is good, pleasing and perfect (Ro 12:2b). However, there can be a conflict between God's will and our will. Even Jesus prayed, **“Yet not as I will, but as you will”** (Mt 26:39b). This is especially evident when we need to make practical decisions of obedience to God. We could see this in the testimony of Philmar Mendoza on Friday. It is God's will to send her to the Marshall Islands as a missionary. To accept God's will, she had to give up her will. She did so with tears. This is an important part of prayer.

Next Jesus guides us to pray for our practical needs. First of all, we should pray, **“Give us this day our daily bread”** (11). The point is to depend on God daily for material needs. We should not be proud and self-sufficient, but come to God for help daily. Jesus asks to pray for “our” daily bread, not “my” daily bread. Through Missionaries Helen and Liebens we heard of the dire need of the people of Venezuela. We should pray for them to have daily bread both materially and spiritually. The Lord wants us to be generous and mindful of all those in need. Even my youngest son Joshua knows this. He often prays for all those who are sick and hungry to be healed and well fed.

Jesus also teaches us to pray, **“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”** (12). Here “debts” refer to “sins.” Though we have received Jesus' grace of salvation, we still sin every day. Sin makes us miserable and breaks our relationships. Jesus wants to give us victory over sin. He wants us to come to him each day for forgiveness and to live in the power of his Spirit. All we have to do is ask him for help daily. But there is an assumption here. It is that we have forgiven our debtors. When we practice forgiveness freely, we can ask forgiveness freely.

Finally, Jesus teaches us to pray, **“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”** (13). Apostle Peter told us that the evil one

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is like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1Pe 5:8). His power is fierce and he is oh, so clever. No human being can resist him in their own strength and wisdom. But Jesus completely defeated him through the word of God. When we depend on Jesus, we can have victory over the evil one daily. So, we need to pray for ourselves and for each other.

In his version of the Lord's Prayer, Matthew emphasizes restoration through forgiveness. Jesus said, **“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”** (14-15). The only condition that Matthew mentions here to be forgiven by God is to forgive others. By the same token, those who don't forgive others who sin against them will not be forgiven by God. Unforgiveness is a very serious problem in a Christian community. Those who don't forgive others are extremely miserable—they experience hell in their hearts. They become like venomous snakes who spread a judgmental spirit, grudges and complaints. Forgiving others is not an option, but mandatory. How can we do so? We should always remember that God forgave all our sins by shedding the blood of his only Son Jesus Christ on the cross. Then we can forgive others and experience God's forgiving love and restore relationships with them.

**Third, fasting (16-18).** Fasting is to abstain from eating food for spiritual purposes. In Jesus' time, pious Jews fasted twice a week. This became a kind of standard of righteousness. Some people, when they fasted, disfigured their faces to show others they were fasting (16). They let their facial hair grow, spread ashes on their faces, and went around with a grimace. Jesus said that the recognition they received from people was their full reward. Then he gave instructions about how to fast, saying, **“But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father...”** (17-18a). Jesus wants us to fast, not before men, but before God. Then the Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward us (18b).

We can apply this teaching more broadly than to just fasting. It can apply to anything we do for the sake of self-control to devote ourselves to God. It can be fasting from social media or entertainment. It can be denying our sinful desires, such as lust, anger, pride or hatred. We Christians must know how to control ourselves. But there is a danger that when we win a

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victory, we take credit and boast about it. We should struggle before God, not people. When we do, we can please God and God blesses us. We can be healthy, happy and fruitful in body and spirit.

Throughout this passage, one phrase is repeated three times: “...**your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you**” (4,6,18). Here we learn who God is and what he wants us to do. Though God is invisible, he sees what is done in secret. He knows everything; he is present everywhere at once; nothing is hidden from him. God wants us to live before him and to seek our reward from him, not people. The reward from people is recognition, praise and honor. This is very short lived and generally makes one proud and useless. The problem is that our desire for human recognition is very strong. But when we know that God’s reward is far greater than people’s recognition, we can practice righteousness secretly, seeking only God’s reward. Apostle Peter said, “**For, ‘all people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever**” (1Pe 1:24-25a). As a young man, I was praised in my family and small hometown. I loved this praise; it motivated me to do many things. But I found that it left me empty and miserable. Then God had mercy on me. Through his living words God opened my eyes to see him as my great reward. Little by little he has helped me to live before him, not people. As I have experienced God himself and his reward, I find it truly satisfies. Still, I need to daily deny honor-seeking desire and seek only God’s reward. God rewards us with eternal life, love, joy and peace. God enables us to grow in Christ and be a blessing. Let’s live before God and seek his reward.