

Pleasing God

Read Matthew 6:1-18

"Look what I did, Daddy!" the child squeals, delighted that her father notices and approves. Children love praise—especially from their parents. Our heavenly Father understands this. In fact, He encourages us to seek His praise and gives it to us freely. However, God also knows how desperately we seek to impress others. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus presents personal godliness as life in God's family—a life in which there can be no true substitute for our Father's praise.

1. Why do you think children are especially responsive to praise?

Most people respond well to praise, especially if it is perceived as actually deserved. Children are less independent and thus have a built-in need for praise from their care-takers. Some common sense principles to follow in doling out praise would be:

1. Reward performance, not merely participation.
2. Ensure the praise is deserved. If you ever lie they will no longer believe you.
3. Praise small advances. If you wait for perfection, you'll be waiting forever.
4. Be specific with praise. Don't just say "good job". Tell them what made it a "good job."
5. Balance criticism with praise. Most counselors agree that the ratio should be 6:1, that is six praises for every criticism.
6. Praise progress in relation to their past progress, rather than in relation to others'.

2. Read Matthew 6:1-18. God is called our Father ten times in this passage. How does our relationship with the Father provide the context for understanding Matthew 6:1-18?

If the words "which is in heaven" are meant to strike a keynote of reverence, the words "our Father" give us the dominant notes of trustfulness and love. Knowing that we have a loving Father in heaven watching us should lead us to:

1. Honor, love, and obey Him. Malachi 1:6
2. Try to imitate Him. Ephesians 5:1; Matthew 5:48
3. Rid ourselves of all Lowlander concerns. Philippians 4:6; Matthew 6:31-32
4. Be patient in our afflictions. Deuteronomy 8:5; Hebrews 12:9
5. Live up to the dignity of such a noble relation. Philippians 2:15
6. Love our spiritual family. 1 John 3:14
7. Be heavenly minded, remembering that there is no concealing our faults from Him, as we can our earthly parents. Psalm 69:5; Hebrews 4:12-13

Thus, the emphasis Matthew 6 gives us on the issue is "tzedekah" or righteousness, rather than "tzedakah" or charity.

3. How does Matthew 6:1 relate to what Jesus says in Matthew 6:2-18?

The desire to be righteous and holy supersedes all other desires. It is the overarching principle. In fact, it may be THE overarching principle. The greatest command "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself" is implicitly preceded by the desire to be righteous.

4. In Matthew 6:2 Jesus describes how hypocrites in his day gave to the needy. In what ways can our giving be hypocritical today?

- a. Pretending to be close to God, when not desiring or enjoying a relationship with Him.
- b. Practicing religious activity to be seen and praised by men. Matthew 6:2, 5, 16

- c. Pretending to be excited about fellowship with other believers, when in reality only wanting to impress them with our spirituality.
- d. Giving money to gain the praise of men. Matthew 6:2; Acts 5:1-2
- e. Praying to impress others with our spirituality. Matthew 6:5
- f. Fasting to impress others with our spirituality. Matthew 6:16
- g. Pretending to be excited about service for the Lord, when merely doing it out of obligation.
- h. Pretending to live a holy life, but inwardly wishing we didn't have to.
- i. Pretending to be a spiritual person when we're really not.
- j. Saying we love God, but not obeying His mitzvot. Luke 6:46
- k. Saying we have d'vekut with God but seldom actually speaking to Him in prayer.
- l. Obeying God because of a fear of what others will think of us.
- m. Making spiritual decisions based on other's expectations.

What kind of giving pleases God and why (Matthew 6:3-4)?

It should be done:

- a. without ostentation
- b. as unobtrusively as possible
- c. humbly
- d. cheerfully 2 Corinthians 9:7
- e. promptly Proverbs 3:28
- f. efficiently Ecclesiastes 9:10
- g. generously Ecclesiastes 11:6
- h. in a balanced manner 2 Corinthians 8:12-15

Why?

- a. Because the wrong aim in *tzedekah* alters its nature and may invalidate it.
- b. Because the harvest we hope to get is in *olam habah*, the other world.

5. In what ways do hypocrites love to pray today (Matthew 6:5)?

The problem with the praying habits of the pagans (other than the fact that they pray to demons¹) is that they feel their prayers will be more effective if they are lengthy utterances. The notion is that if you drone on in prayer long enough, you will eventually get whatever it is you request.

Unfortunately, this false idea of merit through duration has crept into the prayer habits of various disciples of Christ. Jesus soundly rejects the opinion that in order to be effective our petitions must be long or loud. The longest recorded prayer in the New Testament comes from Jesus and lasts approximately two minutes.² Many others were only one sentence long.³

6. In contrast to hypocrites and pagans, what does the Father desire from us and why (Matthew 6:6-8)?

God is more concerned with the content of the prayer and the attitude of the petitioner than with the duration of the petition. God knows our need before we utter a single syllable. Praying does not bring God up to date with our condition. Rather, it gives us an opportunity to participate in those works of God that will satisfy our needs. Prayer is a way of expressing our confidence in the love and provisions God has for us personally.

¹ 1 Corinthians 10:20

² John 17

³ Matthew 14:30; Luke 18:13; 23:42; Acts 7:60; Ephesians 3:14-19

There were three times each day that the Jews set aside for formal prayer – 9:00 AM, noon, and 3:00 PM.⁴ Regardless of the place or the circumstances, the devout Jew was to drop everything and pray.

It was commonly believed (though scripturally unsupportable) that the prayers offered in the Temple were the most effective; next in line came the prayers made in the synagogue. If neither of these places were convenient, the individual could pray wherever he found himself. It seems that numerous Jews, especially the Pharisees, often found themselves wherever the largest audience was – too often for it to be considered coincidence. A hypocrite's prayer is worthless. Being spoken to men and not to God, their reward will come from those to whom they pray.

Granted, there is a proper place for public prayer in the will of God⁵, but here Jesus emphasized our need also to pray privately. This is secret prayer – unannounced and unattended by others.

7. In Matthew 6:9-13 Jesus teaches us how to pray. What do we learn about prayer and about our Father in heaven?

After specifying the wrong ways to pray, Jesus proceeded to give a sample of the right way to pray. Every necessary element for a richly spiritual life is contained in these few words. First, as ought to be expected, God and His Kingdom are given the initial place in the prayer. Second, our own needs – both physical and spiritual – are mentioned in the spirit of expectancy. Note that Christ's disciples do not hoard things – "i.e. daily bread". Third, our relationship to people is covered with the grace of forgiveness. Finally, in the fourth position, the desire for protection from Satanic forces is confidently expected.

8. In what ways do your prayers need to become more balanced?

9. In what sense does our forgiveness from God depend on our forgiving others (Matthew 6:14-15)?

- **1 Peter 4:7-8 HCSB** Now the end of all things is near; therefore, be clear-headed and disciplined for prayer. **(8)** Above all, keep your love for one another at full strength, since **love covers a multitude of sins.**

We often hear "love covers a multitude of sins" quoted as a suggestion to overlook sin. However, when taken in context, the true meaning of the verse is that if we pray for others in a disciplined and clear-headed manner and work at loving each other, many of OUR OWN sins will be covered in Hashem's eyes. This fits very neatly with the principle of "forgiven as we forgive."

- **Matthew 6:12 HCSB** **And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.**
- **Luke 6:37 HCSB** **"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.**

So, the Adonaic Christian needs to work steadily at finding ways to gently restore those who have fallen into sin. Why is this principle so important? It is because an unforgiving spirit is a proud spirit. It says "I would NEVER do such a thing." As it harbors its root of bitterness, it stores sin in its core and God cannot, will not set that aside.

10. In Matthew 6:16-18 Jesus assumes we will fast. Why and how should a Christian fast today?

See Fasting handout.

⁴ cp Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10; and Acts 3:1

⁵ Acts 3:1; 4:24-31

11. Jesus mentions earthly and heavenly rewards seven times in this passage. Why this emphasis?

There is no other but present temporal reward to be expected for such who do their good works in order to be seen by men. On the other hand, there is a certain and glorious reward for them who do their good works with one eye on God.

When our duty to God is done He will take care that it be duly recognized; but when done purely for ostentation's sake, God cannot own it. God accepts only what is done to Himself.

12. How has this passage helped you to better understand life in God's family?