

**A21 Days of Dwelling
Week 2**

A Journey with Jesus Through the Sermon on the Mount

Day 8

Matthew 5:38-42 You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’^[a] ³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. ⁴¹ If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

The original law here makes sense to us. If someone takes your eye, you get to retaliate and take their eye. If someone knocks your tooth out, you get to punch them in the jaw and knock one of their teeth out. It’s only fair. Someone harms you, you should be able to harm them back in the same measure. That’s justice.

But Jesus says we must stop ourselves from trying to even the scales and, instead, tip the scales in the favor of the one who wants to harm us. In order to do that, it is absolutely necessary that we view ourselves the way God sees us.

1 Peter 2:9 ⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Galatians 4:6-7 ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba*,^[b] Father.” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

1 John 3:1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

John 14:12 “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me (Jesus) will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”

Mark 16:17-18 “And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name (Jesus) they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”

It's important that we start here because we need to be fully aware and convinced of who we are in Christ. We are not victims, we are victors!

According to the above scriptures we are chosen, holy priests of God. We are called His special possession. We are children and heirs of God who are lavished with His love. We are powerful and when we walk according to the Spirit of God, He enables us to do great and miraculous things.

Now, from the correct perspective of who we are in Christ, let's read today's scripture from The Sermon on the Mount again. Jesus is not making you a victim of abuse. This scripture is not condoning someone staying in a situation where they are being harmed. As Christians, Jesus is asking us to walk this scripture out, not from the position of being a doormat, but from a position of power, authority, security and provision.

When I know that vengeance belongs to God and He is good for it, I can stop myself from retaliating against someone. When I am confident that I am provided for by my Father who owns all the wealth in the world, I can give without worry to someone who asks of me or is taking me to court. As a matter of fact, I can even give more than what their asking because I know my Father watches over me.

1 Corinthians 6:7-10 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? ⁸ Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters. ⁹Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men^[a] ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

The Apostle Paul rebuked the church in Corinth because they were suing each other. He makes the case that it is better for them to be wronged or cheated than to insist on their own way or getting even. Why? In verse 9 he tells us that those who are doing wrong, will not inherit the kingdom of God. Again, it's a perspective shift. We

have all these amazing benefits in the here and now plus we will spend eternity with Christ in His kingdom. Those who are not followers of Jesus will not receive any of that. You may have heard the saying, “this present life is the only taste of hell for a Christian and the only taste of heaven for the non-Christian.” With that being the case, what does it matter if we get cheated or lose something right now. We have the brightest future imaginable.

Most of us aren’t being sued or slapped in the face on a regular basis. We also no longer have to carry the armor of Roman soldiers one mile if they tell us to. So what does this verse look like for us? How do we walk this out?

You give to those who ask for something without worrying about getting anything in return. You even give them a little more than what they are asking for because you’re not worried about the here and now. You know you have treasures in heaven.

You think of ways you can do good to those who treat you poorly, even if the only safe thing you can do is pray for them to come to Christ.

You don’t insist on your own way.

You resist the urge to get even, tell your side of the story or lash out because you trust in your Father who sees all.

Matthew 26:62-63 ⁶²Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” ⁶³But Jesus remained silent.

The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.”

Romans 12:19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.

I want to, once again, point out that this portion of scripture is not saying that someone who is being abused cannot get out of that situation. But rather, when people abuse us, we have to release the need to get even with them.

Questions for Reflection

1. We talked about anger last week. Jesus continues to touch on this subject because he knows that anger and resentment lead to the desire for revenge. Christians are forbidden from taking revenge on another. Spend some time searching your heart and ask the Holy Spirit to show you any area where you have a desire to get even. It may only be in your thoughts. Ask the Lord to give you a perspective change so that you trust Him more than your desire for revenge.
2. Think of a way that you can do something good for someone who has wronged you. Can't think of anything? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you an opportunity to be a blessing to someone who doesn't deserve it.

Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

How can you practically **APPLY** this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a **PRAYER** asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.

Day 9

Matthew 5:43-48 ⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor^[a] and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Well, if you thought that Jesus was going to let up on that subject, this scripture dashes that hope. Jesus goes even further now. Not only are we to keep ourselves from anger at others and the desire to get even, now Jesus is telling us to love our enemies. He means it. The Gospel of Luke records His words in some more detail.

Luke 6:32-36 ³² “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Jesus’ point is that even evil people love those who love them, are good to them, treat them well and never make them angry. He wants His followers to live by a higher standard. Why? Because He wants us to look like Him. Jesus tells us, in the above scripture, that God is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. We should do no less, especially since we are recipients of that undeserved kindness.

Romans 5:6-8 ⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The great love and mercy of God compels us to act differently than the rest of the world and act like our Savior instead.

Many of you have probably heard the story of Jim and Elizabeth Elliot. There have been books and movies made about them. In the 1950's, as newlyweds, they traveled to Ecuador as missionaries. Along with their fellow ministers, they made contact with the Auca/Waodani tribe. Things were going well until one of the tribal members told a lie about these men who had been giving them gifts and establishing communication. The tribe responded by spearing each of the men to death. The missionaries were found with holstered guns on their bodies. They refused to harm those who were taking their lives because they knew their future was secure with Christ and their attackers didn't have that security.

After receiving the news of her husband's death, Elizabeth took their young daughter and returned to the United States. But she wouldn't stay there. Her heart was so broken and filled with compassion for the Auca/Waodani people that she and her daughter (along with some of the other wives) returned to Ecuador, ended up living with the tribe and leading most of them to salvation through Christ, including the man who had killed Jim.

The reason so much has been written and filmed about them is because their actions are extraordinary. Can't you just imagine God smiling as their story has been showcased to the world saying, "Look! THIS is how my children act. They're different. They're special. They look like me. I am loving, merciful and kind to those who don't deserve it and so are my followers!"

Most of us won't have books or movies dedicated to telling our story but God expects no different from us. He wants to showcase your works of loving kindness, even if it's only to the one receiving it. He wants us to be extraordinary instead of just ordinary. When we do that we are being salt and light.

Philippians 2:14-15 ¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation."^[a] Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky

After the story of the Ecuadorian missionaries got out to the rest of the world, some sociologists went to study the tribe. They found that they had a language problem. They literally had no words that enabled them to talk about feelings of anger. Since they had no way to process such strong emotions, they would feel anger and then kill whoever made them angry. The sociologists taught them how to use words to talk about their feelings which made a huge difference in how they lived.

Now let's try to give ourselves God's perspective. There was a time when He looked down at a group of people who were killing each other over the smallest of spats. What terrible bloodshed and pain God must have seen. Who would help the Auca/Waadani tribe? Who would be selfless enough to love those who harmed them without cause so that they could be set free? His kids, that's who! By being salt and light, Jim and Elizabeth Elliot preserved that group of people, exposed the darkness they were living in and drove it back.

What about us? We can't totally see things from God's perspective but we can trust Him enough to know that He sees much more than we do. He knows that person who hurt you. He knows the desperate needs, fears and hurts of that person. He will see that justice is served. As those who sin against others, all of us have two choices. Our first choice is to accept that Jesus took upon Himself the punishment for our sins and become His disciple. That means we follow Him when He says things like:

Luke 23:34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The other choice is to live according to our own ideas of right and wrong, refuse to let Jesus take our punishment because we refuse to obey Him and die to ourselves, and spend eternity receiving the just punishment for our own sins.

Do both choices have their own set of hardships? Sure. But choice number one comes with all of the power of the Holy Spirit deposited within you to enable you to do these hard things for the tiny amount of time that you're on this earth. Then we will spend eternity in peace and joy.

Revelation 21:3-4 ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death'^[a] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Choice number one is the clear winner!! That's why we can be people who love our enemies.

Questions for Reflection

1. These last two days have been hard teachings from Jesus because they go against everything that our feelings tell us. Think of someone who has hurt you. Ask the Lord to give you His heart of compassion and love for that person. You don't have to muster it up. Let the Holy Spirit do a supernatural work in you to accomplish it.
2. Sometimes there are people who just rub us the wrong way. Maybe they haven't done anything to harm us but we get easily annoyed by them. Come up with one way that you can show that person love.

Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

How can you practically **APPLY** this scripture to your daily living?

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Day 10

Matthew 6:1-4 “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.

²“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. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Yesterday we read Philippians 2:14-15. It told us that God wants our good deeds to shine like stars in the sky. Now today, Jesus seems to be telling us to do our good deeds in secret so that no one sees. Is God contradicting Himself? Let's dig a little deeper into this scripture.

One of the things Jesus has been focusing on in The Sermon on the Mount is our heart problem. On days 4-9 we saw that Jesus was more interested in what was in our hearts than our outward appearance of obedience. Jesus is now finished with the “you have heard it said” section of His sermon where He raises the bar of the Law, but He is still focused on the hearts of men and women.

In the upcoming verses, Jesus will uncover our motives. If the motivation behind our good deeds is to be seen by others and honored by them, we will not be rewarded by Him. On Day 2, we talked about the real rewards that God will give His children at the Judgement Seat of Christ. We learned that our actions motivated by things like pride, selfish ambition, greed or jealousy will be burned up and we will not receive rewards for them, even when those actions look like they're good.

Can we actually do good deeds that are rooted in sin? Yes, we can. When we give because we want people to see it and think we're great, we are operating in pride and that admiration from others is the only reward we will receive. When we want to teach a Bible study so people will think that we are ultra-righteous and admire us, our hearts are in sin.

We see an example of this in the early church

Acts 4:34-5:11 from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

5 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ² With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

³ Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

⁵ When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶ Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

⁹ Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

¹⁰ At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Ananias and Sapphira wanted to give some money to those in need and that's a good deed. But pride was the motivation of their hearts. They could have easily brought the money and said that it was a portion of the sale. But, had they done that, others might have admired Joseph the Levite more than them and their pride would not allow that. So they lied and sinned to receive the praise of men.

Jesus wants our motivation to be our love and obedience to Him and the compassion the Holy Spirit is developing in us. Our desire to do good should come from a heart of desiring God alone to see and be pleased.

Does that mean that, if someone finds out that we have done a good deed or admires us, we lose our reward. Nope. God does want people to find out about our good deeds sometimes and be impressed so that we shine like stars and give glory to Him. God also wants others to see how we are serving Him so that they are encouraged to do the same.

In chapter 11, the writer of Hebrews tells of the heroic and faith-filled deeds of many Old Testament servants of God. We call that chapter the “Hall of Faith.” We only know about these heroes of the faith because what they did was seen, talked about and passed down to others. Now we have these great examples to follow. God wants you to be an example too. Paul tell us:

1 Corinthians 11:1

¹ Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

How do we walk the line of doing good and being an example to others while, at the same time, keeping our hearts free from pride and selfish ambition?

1. We allow the Holy Spirit to search our hearts and reveal sinful areas every day.
2. We are honest with ourselves about our motives and repent when we recognize sinful ones.
3. We place the highest value on pleasing God and the lowest value on impressing man.
4. We do good whether someone is watching or not.
5. We let God and others promote us instead of promoting ourselves.
6. If we tell others about a righteous deed we have done, we are careful to make sure it is for the encouragement of another and gives glory to God.

2 Corinthians 10:17-18 ¹⁷ But, “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”^[a] ¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

Questions for Reflection

1. Pride and selfish ambition are difficult to discern in ourselves because they often come wrapped up in a pretty package of self-righteousness. Examine the motives behind some of the good deeds you have done. Most of us will see places where our hearts have been tainted by sin. Praise God that we have a merciful Savior!! Ask the Lord to increase your desire to please Him and decrease your desire to impress others.
2. Do something good for someone this week. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what to do. Don't tell anyone about it.

Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

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Day 11

Matthew 6:5-15 ⁵“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ 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. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹“This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, ^[a]
but deliver us from the evil one. ^[b]

¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

How would you feel if someone you loved, such as your spouse, child or parent, only gave you attention and showed you affection in public so that other people would see and be impressed? That wouldn't feel very good, would it?

Just like we learned yesterday, Jesus is not saying that you can never pray around other people. He wants us to gather and pray with one another. But, the bulk of your prayers should be done in secret, alone with Him. Praying publicly with others should only be the tip of the iceberg. There should be a deep, unseen reservoir of prayer in your daily life that no one except God ever sees.

When we love someone, we want to be with them, talk to them & hear from them most of all when we have them all to ourselves. We love alone time with our true loves! Our relationship with God should be no different. When we spend alone time with Him, Jesus tells us that we will be rewarded.

Psalm 91:14-16 ¹⁴ “Because he^[a] loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

¹⁵ He will call on me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor him.

¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation.”

So how do we pray? First, just do it. It’s a conversation. You don’t need to have a mantra memorized or sound like anyone else. Be you. Talk to God like you would talk to someone who loves you very much. We also need to remember that we are talking to a Holy God. And always remember that you are coming before God clothed in Christ’s righteousness and given much grace and mercy.

To help us out, Jesus gives us this amazing template for prayer. We don’t just say these words. Rather, we follow the flow and order of the example of prayer that Jesus gave us. Let’s break down each part of The Lord’s Prayer.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,**

God is holy. Hallowed means holy, greatly revered and honored. We start by praising God for His holiness and greatness. We do this mostly because He is worthy of it. In addition, fixing our thoughts on the holiness and majesty of God has the wonderful effect of changing our own hearts. We can experience peace, compassion, conviction and joy when we simply let the greatness of God come out of our mouths.

**your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.**

What is God’s will for different areas of your life? Ask Him. When you hear from Him, you need to pray those things into fruition. There is an incorrect attitude that has seeped into our theology. It’s the idea that God will do what He wants, and we can just sit back and wait because God will work it all out anyway.

Yes, God will do what He wants. However, scripture has made it clear that what He wants is for us to partner with Him for His will to be done on earth. This means that we both pray His will and take action to do His will until we see it done.

Matthew 18:18 ¹⁸ “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be^[d] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be^[e] loosed in heaven.

Jesus has given us so much spiritual power and He wants us to wield it. When we daily spend time with Him and He reveals His will to us then it's our job to continue in prayer until we see His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Luke 18:1-8 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

⁴ “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

⁶ And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

This is not the same as babbling on and on like the pagans do. This is doing what Jacob did in Genesis 32, wrestling with God until we see the blessing of His will being done on earth.

Give us today our daily bread.

What do you need today? A job? Wisdom? Healing? Help? Ask Him for it. Be specific.

**And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

Do you need to repent of anything? Do you need to forgive anyone? Now is the time to do it. Having a hard time forgiving? Ask Him for help.

Did you notice that asking God to forgive you is not first? Many of us feel as if we can't approach God if we have sinned. You are clothed in the righteousness of Christ! Because of Christ and His great love for you, He beckons you to come close to Him. And, because of His great love for you He prompts you by the working of His

Holy Spirit to repent of your sins so that He can make you more into the image of Christ.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

**And lead us not into temptation,^[a]
but deliver us from the evil one**

What did you just repent of? Ask the Lord to keep you from the temptation of that thing. Ask the Holy Spirit if there is anything you need to cut off to keep you from being tempted again.

Do you feel like the enemy is attacking you in any area? Ask the Lord for specific protection around that area.

The Lord's Prayer is the best structure for daily prayer time. I do want to point out, again, that you are spending time with your Father who loves you very much. Don't get caught up in stressing about following a formula. There have been times when I've been so distraught by something that I simply cry out to God about it. He is not furrowing His eyebrows at me saying, "wait a minute, you're getting the order wrong."

Just do it. Enjoy your time with God! He is amazing, glorious, loving, wise, merciful, powerful, majestic and so much more. He wants to spend time with us! Isn't that wonderful?!?!

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you get excited to spend time in prayer or do you view it as a drudgery and obligation? Ask the Holy Spirit to increase your desire and anticipation to spend time with Him.
2. Are there areas in your life where you are confused about God's will? Are there areas in your life where you know God's will but haven't been praying for it?

Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

How can you practically **APPLY** this scripture to your daily living?

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Day 12

Matthew 6:16-18 When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

How appropriate that this scripture came about halfway through our fast. How is everybody doing? I think you'll be energized and encouraged to keep going strong today. If you haven't been fasting with us already, why not start now?

Looking back at these last few scriptures, notice that Jesus doesn't say "if" you pray, give and fast. He says "when" you pray, give and fast. These are not optional. We all know that, as Christians, we are expected to pray. Most of us know that we are expected to give. It seems as if the idea of fasting has often been relegated to only the few "super-spiritual" people, but Jesus expects all of His followers to make it a practice.

Just like praying and giving, Jesus doesn't want us to make it about impressing people. As we've already discussed, it's alright if someone finds out you're fasting but we don't make a show of it or draw attention to ourselves about it. There is also a sense in this scripture that Jesus would like us to be joyful about it. Don't have a mournful, disfigured face. Go out ready and exuberant for the day.

In verse 18, we see that word again that Jesus keeps using, reward. He tells us that our Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward us when we fast. We've already seen from other scriptures that we will be receiving rewards in eternity. But, giving, praying and fasting reaps rewards here too. What are some rewards that we can immediately experience from fasting right now?

1. Obedience to God

This is not a reward that we can see but knowing that we have walked in obedience to God is its own reward. Pleasing Him is a delight. Whatever happens in the natural, if we are walking in obedience to God, we can have peace.

2. Victory over sin

In Galatians 5, Paul outlines what the works of the flesh (our sinful nature) and the fruits of the Spirit look like. As you would expect, they are drastically different.

Galatians 5:19-23 ¹⁹The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

All of us want to keep ourselves from the acts of the flesh and grow in the fruits of the Spirit. Many people find themselves stuck in one area that they just can't seem to conquer. They pray and read their Bible and beg God to help them overcome this sin to no avail.

We cannot muster up righteousness through our own will power. It is a spiritual work. Paul continues in Galatians to give us the solution.

Galatians 5:24-25 ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Luke 9:23 ²³Then he (Jesus) said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

Our flesh cries out for a lot of things. Some are sinful. Some are not. There is something powerful that takes place when we tell our flesh "no" to something its craving. We are essentially establishing who is boss. There is a continual war that rages within you for control. When you allow your spirit to deny your natural nature something that it wants, you are declaring that it is the spirit man (or woman) who has the authority and calls the shots. When your sinful nature is put in its place, it becomes weaker. Let's be honest, the ultimate goal is to kill it completely.

One side note: throughout history people have taken the words of Paul in Galatians and used it to promote physically beating their own bodies. That is NOT what the Bible is telling us to do. In the Greek language, "flesh" here is talking about the natural sinful nature of man.

3. Victory over demonic forces

Fasting is spiritual warfare. The enemy is all about self-gratification and getting me to focus on my wants, my feelings, my goals, my stuff. Fasting doesn't only tell our sinful nature "no", it also tells our enemy "no" and that we will not be ruled by our selfish desires. What happens when we tell him "no"?

James 4:7 ⁷Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

One of the ways we resist the enemy is to resist the temptation to make everything about us. By denying ourselves something during fasting, we are showing him that we will not be drawn into his way of operating.

In Matthew chapter 10, shortly after Jesus preaches this Sermon on the Mount, He gives His disciples the authority to heal the sick and cast out demons which they did. Later in chapter 17, a father brings his demon possessed son to the disciples, but the disciples cannot cast the demon out. Jesus arrives and brings deliverance to the boy. Later, the disciples want to know why they had limited power in this instance. Jesus' response enlightens us to some of the realities of spiritual warfare.

Mark 9:29 ²⁹He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."^[a]

By saying "this kind," Jesus is revealing that there are different levels of demonic power and opposition. This one was more powerful than the other demons the disciples had encountered.

The Greek word for "prayer" in this passage denotes a deep, earnest communication with God and in many early manuscripts of this scripture the word "fasting" is added to prayer.

4. Wisdom

A few months ago, I had to get a cortisone shot in my shoulder to relieve pain. The interesting thing was, once the pain in my right shoulder was gone, I realized that I had some pain in my left shoulder as well. The pain on the right was strong enough that it had completely drowned out the pain on the left.

What does my shoulder have to do with fasting? Sometimes we need to quiet something yelling for our attention, like my right shoulder, so we can hear something quieter, like my left shoulder. Sometimes we need to tell our flesh to quit its clamoring so we can hear the voice of the Spirit.

In 1 Kings, the prophet Elijah is upset. He wants some answers from God. God tells Elijah to go out to the mountain and He will pass by. So, Elijah obeyed.

1 Kings 19:11-13 Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹²After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

When Elijah went out of the cave, God spoke to him and gave him direction. God's voice is not always thundering. Sometimes it's a whisper. When we quiet other things by fasting them, we position ourselves to hear His whisper.

Questions for Reflection

1. Have you ever thought about the importance of fasting in victory over sin, Spiritual warfare or hearing God's voice? Which of these are you in need of today?
2. How has your attitude been during the first half of our fast? Have you viewed it with joy or with dread? Ask the Lord to help you remember all the rewards of fasting so that it is a joy. Let's finish strong!

Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

How can you practically **APPLY** this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a **PRAYER** asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.

Day 13

Matthew 6:19-24 ¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²²“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy,^[a] your whole body will be full of light. ²³But if your eyes are unhealthy,^[b] your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

It's helpful that Jesus has already established that there will be rewards given to us in heaven. Now Jesus is asking us to focus more on those rewards than on the things we want to reward ourselves with now.

I recently bought a vintage Airstream Argosy for \$650. In 1973, my trailer sold for \$6000. That's the equivalent \$42,600 for us today. It didn't keep its value because, let me assure you, vermin have gotten in there and destroyed quite a bit.

We know that our stuff will break, wear out, go out of style, rust, be eaten by critters or even get stolen but we want that stuff so badly anyway. I recently read an article about a woman who kept buying and buying all the gadgets that social media influencers were trying to sell her. She was consistently disappointed by the quality and longevity of the items she received but she kept buying anyway. She racked up \$120,000 worth of debt.

Jesus tells us that, if we're not careful, our eyes can get unhealthy. He's not talking about our physical eyesight; he's talking about what our thoughts and desires are fixating on. When our fixation is on all the things we want and we funnel our resources to those things, the result is darkness. Or, to put it another way, the result is debt, disappointment, selfishness and a lack of true treasure. We think these things will be both a light and delight to us which makes the darkness even more disappointing.

Jesus has another way. He tells us to funnel our resources toward the Kingdom of Heaven. Those treasures are completely safe and will keep their value for all eternity.

Matthew 13:44-46 ⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

In this parable, Jesus gives us a hint at how valuable our treasures in heaven will be. He says that when someone really sees the truth, there is no comparison between the treasures of heaven and the things we value on earth. When the man found the treasure and the merchant found the treasure it was worth everything they had. The man even had great joy in selling all his stuff so that he could secure the treasure of the kingdom of heaven.

Notice in verse 21, Jesus tells us that the place of our treasure tells us the place of our heart. Just like so many of our other verses in The Sermon on the Mount, this is a heart issue. It's also a litmus test for us. Where do you spend your resources? To answer that question let's take a closer look at what resources we have.

1. Time

How do you spend the majority of your time? We all must work, sleep and eat so we'll call those things neutral. Let's talk about our free time. Imagine a pair of scales where one side collects the free time you spend on earthy pursuits and the other side collects the free time you spend on godly pursuits. What do your scales look like?

I love to play a silly game on my iPad where I shoot colored marbles. There is nothing wrong with my little marble game. It's fun and helps me unwind. We each have our equivalent of my marble game. There is nothing wrong with the vintage trailer that I am spending time restoring. The problem is when my marble game, “me” time, favorite sport, TV show, hobby, or anything else keeps me from giving my time to seek the Lord, serve the Church and benefit the body of Christ.

2. Skills and Talents

Whether you believe it or not, God has gifted you with specific skills & talents. He wants you to employ them for His kingdom. They don't have to seem great to you. They won't be the same gifts that you see other people using. That doesn't matter. What matters to God is that you are using what He has given you for Him.

3. Money

Our finances are a large part of our resources and, like our time and skills, God expects that we use what He has given us for His kingdom. We can tell a lot about our heart based on where we direct our money. I'm kind of a broken record because, again, it's a heart issue. Do I love the things that my money can buy me (including security) more than I want to see the works of His kingdom advance?

We're going to close today with another parable from Jesus.

Matthew 25:14-28 ¹⁴“Again, it (the kingdom of heaven) will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag,^[a] each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

²¹“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’

²²“The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

²³“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’

²⁴“Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

²⁸““So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance.

Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

What's this? Do the treasures we store up in heaven earn interest? It seems that they do. As we use what God has graciously given us for His kingdom and to pursue His desires, He gives us more. But when we don't use our gifts for Him, what He has given us is removed. The wicked, lazy servant had a wrong view of God. He believed God was hard and ungenerous, so he hoarded what his master gave him. God is faithful to His promises! Believe Him. Give of yourself. You won't regret it!!

In the words of Jim Elliot, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you have a problem giving generously of your time, giftings or money? Remember, we can't muster up righteousness in our own will power. Begin to daily ask the Holy Spirit to change your focus from your earthly kingdom to His heavenly kingdom and to give you a generous heart.
2. Financial experts tell us that we must tell our money where to go or we will just spend blindly. We all know that we should budget our money but what about our time? Let's create a time budget! Figure out how much free time you have after work, chores, eating and sleeping each week. Now make a time budget with that free time that reflects storing up your treasures in heaven.

Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

How can you practically **APPLY** this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a **PRAYER** asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.

Day 14

See you at church!!

Hebrews 10:24-25 ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

YOU are important to the Body of Christ. Spend some time in prayer this morning asking the Holy Spirit to show you someone you can spur on towards love and good deeds. Who does the Lord want you to encourage at church???