



Loosening Your Grip: The Lies We Believe

Devotional Thoughts for the Week of October 18, 2020
by Lynne Bergman

This is week 7 of our series on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount called "Living Right-side Up in and Upside-down World." Our focus this week is on Matthew 6:1-6, 16-24. Our devotional author this week is Lynne Bergman.

Week 7 Day 1: The Best Rewards!

From whom do we desire recognition? As Jesus digs deeper and deeper into the hearts of his followers, he essentially instructs them to consider, 'Why do you do the things you do?' When we can honestly answer that question, we really do get to the heart of our motives. If all of our audiences and 'rewards' are stripped away, what do we have left? Purposelessness? Depression? Self-pity? Anger? One simple test is this: what is provoked in you when you have done everything you thought you should do, or needed to do, and no one cares? Or maybe worse, you are taken advantaged for it?

Often, we get stuck in a rut of doing good things for the wrong reasons, and find ourselves angry, overwhelmed and depressed by the weight of it all. Anger flaring up is a key indicator that what we wanted to happen because of our 'self-sacrifice,' hasn't. Anything motivated in the absence of true love for God and others will amount to nothing, and ultimately hinder our relationship with the Lord and others. The apostle Paul puts it this way, "*If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing*" (1 Corinthians 13:3).

The good news in these passages is that God desires to reward his children! Jesus mentions reward eight times in these verses. God is not opposed to rewarding us. He isn't demanding a life of homage to him, cursing us if we even consider what's in it for us. Like a good father, He desires to give good gifts to his children (Matthew 7:11).

Be assured, His gifts are the best! Reward from the Father, however, is only promised to those who are motivated to practice spiritual disciplines, and acts of service out of love rather than selfish gain. In fact, Jesus says, when anyone acts out of selfish motives, they "have received their reward in full." How about you? Where do your motives lie?

Week 7 Day 2: Pure Motives?

We all know that motives matter, but getting to the heart of our motives is a little tricky. A telling verse in Scripture Jeremiah 17:9, "*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*" Yet, we know God sees and searches the heart, revealing it to us if we ask (Psalm 44:21; 139:23; Jeremiah 17:10).

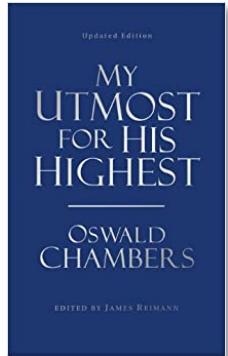
I don't know about you, but that can be a very unsettling thing to do, asking God to search my heart. Psalm 139 is a beautiful psalm that reminds us that God is here and everywhere. There is nowhere that we can go to hide from His presence. He already knows all about us, even the words we will speak before we speak them. At the end of this psalm, acknowledging that God knows everything about us even from the womb, the psalmist asks the Lord to

"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (139: 23-24).

Albeit, most of the time, we know when our motives aren't reflecting what God wants, if we are listening. The Holy Spirit nudges, whispers, and convicts us. However, the Holy Spirit can be grieved and quenched in our lives (like a fire extinguished by a bucket of water, Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19).

Oswald Chambers, an early-1900s teacher and preacher from Scotland, has a prescription for staying sensitive to the Spirit's voice





by keeping present in your walk with God (<https://utmost.org/do-not-quench-the-spirit/>). Check it out, he always gives a good challenge.

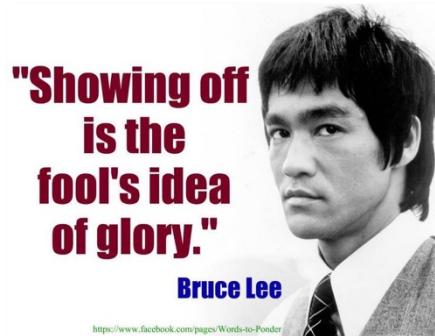
For me, staying connected to God requires a consistent time in the Word, prayer, study/teaching, and Christian fellowship where iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17). Be careful to not think you can stay pure in your motives on your own. Without these disciplines, we will soon find ourselves dull of hearing, dull of spirit, caring little about our motives and

whether or not we are really reflecting Jesus. Tomorrow we will consider what some of those un-Christlike motives look like... and it isn't pretty.

Week 7 Day 3: Sound the Trumpets! NOT!

One commentary I read recently suggested Jesus might have been jesting when he described the actions of hypocrites in these passages in Matthew 6, and not to be like them. Hypocrite translated from the Greek actually was a theatrical term for actors who wore huge masks to portray the character they were playing.

Imagine Jesus being animated when he taught about hypocrites blowing trumpets, standing on street corners to proclaim their prayers, and intentionally disfiguring their faces so others would know they were fasting and especially pious. Good teachers do this; draw you in to the absurdity of a situation only to surprise you with its personal application. The metaphorical gut-punch. “Don’t be like” them, Jesus said (Matthew 6:5). On the one hand we laugh at the ridiculous behavior of so-called religious leaders, but then as we consider these acts of false piety, the picture



disgusts us. We see it today, everywhere, especially in the political arena, but lest we digress: let’s remember, this is about us.

When you give to the needy, when you pray, when you fast, do it in secret, Jesus instructs. Then you will have true (lasting) reward from the Father who sees everything we do and knows why we really do it. Secrecy helps US to know if what we are doing is from pure motives to please God or to please others or ourselves. When we desire to be pure in our hearts towards God and men, our light will shine, but it won’t be our light, it will be the pure light of God (Matthew 5:16). Tomorrow we will have a treasure hunt, revealing where our heart is. Gulp!

Week 7 Day 4: Treasure Hunt

Don’t you just love Jesus?! He doesn’t mince words. Obviously, the verses Matthew 6:19-21 may appear to be more painful to those with more ‘treasures,’ but even the poor can strive to serve money rather than God. It all depends on the focus. Let’s take this in for a moment:

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

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light.²³ But if your eyes are unhealthy, 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” (Matthew 6:19-24).

Where is our focus? Where do we spend our time, our abilities, and our finances? Is it to glorify God and His purposes or is it primarily to secure for us a stable, safe, comfortable (fun) life on earth? Let’s take a personal survey based on things that Scripture says we should care about, and then check to see if we do. This ‘fruit inspection’ is only between you and God, but let’s be honest, rotten fruit can be smelled

everywhere in the house. CRU (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) uses this list to disciple young people in their ministry.

<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/help-others-grow/mentoring/reveal-health-heart.html>



What are several areas you know need further inspection in your heart? Ask God to help you be honest about where you have stored up your treasures, and to guide you into transferring those treasures back to Him, where they belong.

Tomorrow we will talk about how it is not being a hypocrite if our feelings don't align immediately to what God tells us to do, but we do it anyway. Not only do we find where the heart is when we find where the treasure is, but we can also lead our heart to the right place when we obediently lay our treasure at Jesus' feet. Jesus is clear on this: we can't serve two masters.

Week 7 Day 5: Security or Sovereignty?

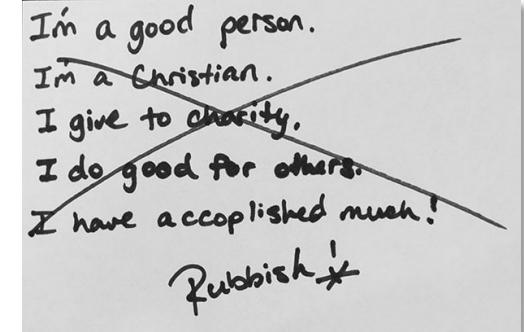
This one is rough, a true test of where our heart is: how much of ourselves can we give away? How much control do we need to be happy? When do we start to feel insecure, grumpy, and downright beside ourselves with angst when things aren't going the way we would like? Usually it is when we have lost something we valued and felt we needed to be secure and happy. It may be the state of the world and the evil that seems to get worse and worse. It may be the pain and heartbreak we see all around us and in us that robs us of our faith in a loving God. Or it may be lost jobs or lost health, lost friendships, or lost hopes. Our heart may cry like the psalmist in Psalm 13:1-2,

"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
² How long must I take counsel in my soul
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?"

This cry is universal and timeless, yet serving and following God isn't about our comfort, it is about His purposes, isn't it?

It amazes and challenges me what some give up in service to the Lord and to share Him with others. Yet, we get it backwards when we think we are giving things up to serve God. What is gained is far greater than anything this earth offers. I think most "greats" of the faith would say like the Apostle Paul,

"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8).



Jesus goes on to encourage us in Matthew 6 that we don't have to worry about our life, because we are greatly loved by God. So, when we feel life is out of control, and we trust the Lord and obey Him anyway, our heart and feelings will fall in line when we put Him first.

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Lynne Bergman, has spent most of her life surrounded by children along with her punny husband Paul, homeschooling six of their own and now enjoying eight grandchildren and counting. Early mornings and a good cup of coffee gets her going into all of her varied endeavors. Lynne has a heart for mentoring women and children, finishing her Masters of Arts degree in Crisis Response and Trauma Counseling 3 years ago from Liberty University. She has founded a new ministry in the Dayton area called Promise House, and hopes to use this house, partnered with others in our church, to mentor young women in crisis with the love and hope of Jesus Christ.