

Matthew 6:1-6 New Revised Standard Version

Concerning Almsgiving

6 “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.^[a]

Concerning Prayer

⁵ “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Matthew 6:1-6 The Message

The World Is Not a Stage

6 “Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don’t make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won’t be applauding.

²⁻⁴ “When you do something for someone else, don’t call attention to yourself. You’ve seen them in action, I’m sure—‘playactors’ I call them—treating prayer meeting and street corner alike as a stage, acting compassionate as long as someone is watching, playing to the crowds. They get applause, true, but that’s all they get. When you help someone out, don’t think about how it looks. Just do it—quietly and unobtrusively. That is the way your God, who conceived you in love, working behind the scenes, helps you out.

Pray with Simplicity

⁵ “And when you come before God, don’t turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat?

⁶ “Here’s what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won’t be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.

BUSY: Reconnecting with an Unhurried God

I had the privilege this week of listening to a TED talk presented by Carl Honore, who has recently published a book entitled, [In Praise of Slowness](#). He spoke a little bit about his experience in writing and promoting this book. He said that the irony of

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publishing a book on slowness is that you need to do it really fast. Everyone wants to learn about slowness, but they want to learn it really fast.

Think about it. We live in a world stuck in fast forward and obsessed with speed. We used to dial the phone, now we speed dial. We used to enjoy reading, now we speed read. We used to date, now we speed date. And, there are even a few fitness centers that offer speed yoga for those who don't feel they have time to pose, breathe deeply, and meditate.

Our Western Culture has promoted the ideal that "busy" is what is required of us and ultimately what makes us good persons. During this Lenten season, we will be reminded that God is not looking for humans to "perform" as if we must earn God's love through succumbing to a faster pace of productivity in order to be "worthy." We are reminded to slow down enough to connect with God, family, self, and neighbors.

Experts contend that we have lost sight of the damage that our rapid pace inflicts on us: on our health, our diet, our environment, our community, and even on our relationships and spirituality. It often takes a crisis to serve as a wake-up call to alert us that we are living the fast life, rather than the good life. That crisis may come in the form of an illness, heart attack, or stroke. One may experience burn-out at work, or the dissolution of relationships. By slowing down at the right moments, people find that they can do everything better. They eat with more satisfaction and gaining increased nutrition. Relationships blossom or may be rekindled, there is time for adequate exercise, creativity is enhanced, spirituality soars, and opportunities for mission and service are seized and offer fulfillment.

And, it is not just adults who are experiencing symptoms of being "speed-aholics!" Children are saddled with more homework, layered extracurricular activities, and expectations for performance. Trying to meet all of these demands sacrifices family time, unstructured play time, time to be creative and write songs, poetry, novels, or just to reflect on the many circumstances of life.

There is no doubt, it is hard to slow down! Just test your comfort level if you have to go a day without your watch or cell phone! Try sitting undistracted at a table while an elder takes 50 minutes to consume a meal. Make the time to help a 4-year old learn to read. Help a person with mental impairment to file their taxes. It is hard to slow down!

And yet, in our hearts we know that intimacy with God requires stillness, attentiveness, and silence. We must get off of life's freeway to grow closer to God. Jesus frequently removed himself from the world. He spent time alone in prayer and solitude. And in these moments, Jesus received the strength to fulfill his mission, the confidence to continue his mission, and the wisdom to discern the ways of god from the ways of the world. Unless we spend extended periods of time alone with God through prayer, solitude and Sabbath, the speed of the world will skew our understanding of God. Anxiety, unrest, and discontentment will hover over our lives like a dark storm cloud.

We just sang God's invitation to us:

*Come and find a quiet center in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed:
Clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes that we can see
all the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be.*

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That will be our theme song during this season of Lent. It will be the song that beckons us to slow down and reconnect with God. So, how will we slow down enough to give God the attention needed to rekindle our spiritual relationship? Find a “time-out chair!”

I don’t know who first developed the concept of disciplining children with a time-out chair, but I think it is ingenious, and should be employed for persons of all ages! We give, or claim, a time-out when a break is needed. Perhaps we need to think about the consequences of an action, or we just need to break the intensity of the moment. Perhaps we are spiraling emotionally and need some perspective by redirecting the thought patterns. Perhaps we just need to get quiet so we can change the course of action. So during this season, I encourage you to identify a time-out prayer chair, and take time there daily for reconnecting with God and with self.

This will be a time for letting go of the things we do not need and that are weighing us down, sometimes known as confession, assurance, and petition. You may start each time-out prayer chair session with some silence, mostly inside our own heads. In the stillness, breathe deeply. Listen, for God may be speaking. Remember the sung invitation:

*Silence is a friend who claims us, cools the heat and slows the pace,
God it is who speaks and names us, knows our being, touches base,
making space within our thinking, lifting shades to show the sun,
raising courage when we’re shrinking, finding scope for faith begun.*

Then, each Sunday during Lent, you will be given a guided prayer meditation, which may be used in your time-out prayer chair as you desire. But for the next few days, just practice being silent in God’s presence. Be aware of yourself, be aware of God.

Let us pray:

For the times when we have been too busy for you, God . . . forgive us.

For the times when we have been too busy to take care of ourselves...
forgive us.

For the times when we have been too busy to let our loves ones know
how much we love them . . . forgive us.

Help us to be open to your nudge in this season, to adjust to your timing for us.

In this moment we hear your promise:

“You can just be you. It’s enough.

You don’t have to ‘perform’ for me,

or try to be anybody else except for who I created you to be.”

You do not ask us to live up to the standards of the world’s version of success.

We are your children, and you love us right now.

Thank you, God! We love you! Amen.