

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY SEVENTEEN

Beware! Religious Performance Now Showing

Matthew 6:1–8

God isn't looking for impressive performances before the public but deep, inner character that comes from pure devotion to Him—doing what is right, showing kindness and compassion to others, and walking in humility.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN a starless night on a raging sea, the most hopeful sight for a captain navigating a ship to safety is a lighthouse. The beacon serves two vital purposes: to point ships to the harbor and to warn of the rocks below.

Jesus accomplishes similar purposes in His Sermon on the Mount. He illumines our way through the world's tumultuous seas into the kingdom's calm, and He warns of the jagged rocks that could shipwreck our faith. Earlier in His Sermon, Jesus flashed a caution:

But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven! (Matthew 5:20)

In the opening of Matthew 6, Jesus flashes another warning:

“Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven.” (6:1)

If we're not careful, currents of pride can pull our sincere devotion onto the rocks of performance, and our righteousness will be no better than the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. In his book, *Simple Faith*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll describes the religious wreckage of those who followed the Pharisees:



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Matthew 6:1–8

A humble, uncomplicated walk with God had been replaced by a prime-time performance of religion. It was righteousness on display . . . strut-your-stuff spirituality led by none other than the scribes and Pharisees who loved nothing more than to impress the public with their grandiose expressions of piety on parade.¹

With a firm grasp on the helm and a keen eye on Jesus, let's heed His warning and follow His light into God's presence as He teaches on the spiritual disciplines of giving and prayer.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you quiet yourself before the Lord, open your heart to His truth as you study His Word.

Father, Your words "are my joy and my heart's delight" (Jeremiah 15:16). Draw me into the joy of Your presence as I learn from Your Son how to walk closer to You with authentic and pure devotion. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 6:1–8* and look for Jesus' warning followed by two applications. Verse 1 states Jesus' main warning not to do good deeds to be admired. In 6:2–4, Jesus applies this principle to giving, and in 6:5–8, He applies it to praying. In the space below, write down the main warning in 6:1 which forms Jesus' overall thesis.



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Matthew 6:1–8

 **Observation: Instructions for Giving and Praying**

Observation is the first step in *Searching the Scriptures*, which lays the foundation on which we build our interpretation and base our principles.² Some students of Scripture like to write their observation notes directly on the pages of their Bibles. Others like to print the passage on a piece of paper, mark it, and clip it in a notebook. Digital Bibles now include highlighting and notetaking tools, and your notes can be saved for later reference.

Whichever method you prefer, take a few minutes to reread the passage and note in the margin the section on giving (Matthew 6:2–4) and the section on praying (6:5–8). Then, underline or highlight the phrases that are parallel, such as *when you give*, *when you pray*, *reward*, *publicly*, and *in private*. Circle the word, *don't*, which Jesus repeats six times like a flashing light. Put a square around the contrasting word, *but*, which indicates Jesus' shift from what to avoid to what to do.

Now, let's organize these parallel and contrasting ideas in a chart for each topic.

Instructions for Giving—Matthew 6:2–4

Jesus contrasted the hypocrites' giving style versus how His followers should give. Summarize Jesus' teaching on giving by noting what Jesus warned against and the results for those who do not heed His warning. Also, write down what Jesus instructed us to do, along with the results of following His teaching.

Verse	Actions	Results
How the hypocrites give (<i>Matthew 6:2</i>)		
How Jesus' followers should give (<i>6:3–4</i>)		



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Matthew 6:1–8

What did Jesus say is the hypocrites' reason for giving? What can you conclude about the proper motive for giving in contrast to the hypocrites' wrong motive?

Instructions for Praying—Matthew 6:5–8

Jesus warned against praying like the hypocrites or like the Gentiles. Fill in the open spaces on the following chart to contrast the dos and don'ts of praying.

Verse	Actions	Results
How the hypocrites pray (<i>Matthew 6:5</i>)		
How Jesus' followers should pray (<i>6:6</i>)		
How the Gentiles pray (<i>6:7</i>)		
How Jesus' followers should pray (<i>6:8</i>)		



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Matthew 6:1–8

What did Jesus say is the hypocrites' reason for praying? What can you conclude about the proper motive for praying in contrast to the hypocrites' wrong motive?

What did Jesus say the Gentiles falsely assume will result from their babbling on and on? How did Jesus correct that assumption for His followers?

For a final observation, note Jesus' insights into the attributes of God the Father. According to Jesus' teachings, what does God *see* and *know* (6:4, 6, 8)? What do Jesus' insights about the Father say about our relationship with Him?

We live our lives naked before God. There is no such thing as hidden sin or an unspoken motive. He sees and hears it all. We can't fake it. We can't act like we're more holy than someone else. The Father who sees in secret would love in secret to reward you. And He does. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Matthew 6:1–8



Interpretation: Meaning and Principles

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we seek to understand what Jesus meant by asking key questions and finding the answers in our Bible study resources. For help, consult pages 109–112 in Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. Another excellent resource is *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*.

Does Jesus' warning in Matthew 6:1 contradict His command in 5:16?

Jesus warned us *not* to “do our good deeds publicly” (Matthew 6:1), but earlier He told us, “let your good deeds shine out for all to see” (5:16). What is the difference between the two instructions? To find the answer, compare the motives and results of doing good deeds in [6:1](#) versus [5:16](#). Who gets the glory in each case?

Write a principle about doing good deeds based on your conclusions from comparing these verses? A biblical principle is a timeless truth that applies to all people, not just those in Jesus' day.



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Matthew 6:1–8

What rewards did Jesus refer to?

Although Jesus didn't specify the nature of the rewards, He did identify the source, either "others" or "your Father" (Matthew 6:1). Our reward comes from whomever we seek to impress. If we give or pray to receive people's applause, then their applause is our only reward. However, if we give or pray in private from hearts full of love for God alone, our reward comes from Him alone. What do you think the Father's reward might be?

Write a principle about the inner blessings of unseen acts of devotion to God.

What does Jesus mean, "Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (6:3)?

What do your resources say is the meaning of Jesus' expression? For an online resource, consult *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.



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Matthew 6:1–8

Write a principle about not drawing attention to ourselves when we help others in need.

What was Jesus teaching us about the attributes of God?

According to Jesus, our heavenly Father “sees everything” (Matthew 6:4, 6) and “knows exactly what you need even before you ask him” (6:8). What truths can you draw regarding the attributes of God?

Conclude this section by writing a final principle about the nature of the Father and our secure relationship to Him.

When you pray, give up all the extra words. Just come to God as a Father and tell Him what you need. Pour it out in all honesty. If you want to sing to Him, He loves your song. He loves to hear your heart. He loves that you will level with Him on things that you maybe would level with no one else about. That's intimacy. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: What Does God Look for from Us?

Like Jesus, the prophet Micah contrasted outward displays of religious piety that we may think God wants from us with quiet expressions of faith. In Micah 6:6–8, Micah echoed the people's questions for God to know how they could win back His favor. What religious extremes did the people think God wanted them to do, according to *Micah 6:6–7*?

In response, what simple acts of faith did Micah say God really wants (*Micah 6:8*)?

Micah summed up true religion in the most basic areas of life: our *actions*, our *heart*, and our *character*. The hypocrites in Jesus' day may have done what they thought God wanted, but their hearts were far from God and their character was riddled with pride. As we apply Jesus' teaching, let's focus on the heart and character that God seeks from those who walk with Him.



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Application: Principles in Action

Jesus described a *simple* faith that blossoms in an intimate relationship with God. What can we learn from Jesus' teaching? Here are three basic principles to take away from our study.

1. *When devotion becomes a performance, we lapse into hypocrisy.* Keep a watch on your motives as you serve God.
2. *When giving lacks secrecy, we lose our reward.* Anonymous generosity directs our focus to others instead of ourselves.
3. *When prayers are public demonstrations, we lack God's power.* Don't pray to impress your audience but to commune with your heavenly Father.

Which of these principles would you like to apply this week, and how?

Turn back in your study to the principles you wrote down. Pick one of these principles that touches your heart most deeply. How can you live out this truth this week?

Had Micah been in Jesus' audience, his heart would have burst with joy as the light of Jesus' teaching and warnings flashed brightly, like a lone lighthouse in a dark night. Jesus was reflecting the simple faith Micah flickered centuries before: "Walk humbly with your God."



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A FINAL PRAYER

Instead of reading a prayer, write your own private prayer of devotion to your heavenly Father who loves to hear the expressions of your heart in the quietness of your private communion with Him.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Simple Faith* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 121.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

