

## Where We Are in the Sermon on the Mount

Our journey through the Sermon on the Mount has taken us through six examples of “greater righteousness” (5:21-48). Jesus’ point has been this: to be part of the kingdom of heaven requires *more* than simply checking the box that one has kept the demands of the Mosaic Law. To really uphold the Law, a person must embrace God’s desire *behind* the giving of that particular commandment. For example, to refrain from murdering someone is not enough: you must also refrain from being angry with them.

Moving on from examples of Law-keeping, Jesus presents three examples of religious practices—giving to the poor, praying, and fasting. Just as truly keeping the law requires *more* than simply conforming to the commandments, so truly doing these religious practices requires more than simply going through the motions. A person must be *properly motivated*.

The striking thing about these examples is that they all highlight the importance of having and knowing God as one’s heavenly Father.

Notice how often this theme of God as Father is repeated:

1. “For then you will have no reward from **your Father** who is in heaven” (6:1)
2. “And **your Father** who sees in secret will reward you” (4).
3. “And **your Father** who sees in secret will reward you” (6).
4. “**Your Father** knows what you need before you ask him” (8).
5. “Your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (14).
6. “Neither will **your Father** forgive your trespasses” (15).
7. “Your Father . . . is in secret” (18).
8. “Your Father . . . sees in secret” (18).

The theme even carries into the next section (6:19-34), which deals with the believers’ relationship to wealth, work, and anxiety.

9. “**Your heavenly Father** feeds them” (26).
10. “**Your heavenly Father** knows that you need them all” (6:32).

As it relates to our present text (6:1-4), Jesus’ point is that *sincere generosity finds its true motivation in a relationship with God as Father*.

He makes this point by contrasting hypocritical generosity with sincere generosity.

1. Hypocritical generosity (6:2)
  - a. Its practice: ostentatious
  - b. Its motive: notice and approval from people
  - c. Its reward: notice and approval from people
2. Sincere generosity (6:3-4)
  - a. Its practice: hidden
  - b. Its motivation: notice and approval from God the Father
  - c. Its reward: notice and approval from God the Father

## Questions for Discussion and Application

1. Can you think of a time when you have been hypocritical in your religious practices? What is true about religion that so easily leaves its practitioners open to the charge of hypocrisy?
2. Why do you think people—whether or not they are followers of Jesus—are so concerned about hypocrisy? Isn't it sufficient that someone gives to the poor, regardless of their reasons?
3. By “hypocrites” Jesus means not only those who deceive others, but also those who deceive themselves. Explain how that process of self-deception might work in someone's thinking.
4. What is true about having and knowing God as one's Father that eliminates both the need and desire for hypocrisy?
5. What does Jesus say is the truest way to make sure you are not giving out of hypocritical desire to be noticed? Why is it so difficult to do something good without telling anyone—especially when the good thing required much sacrifice?
6. Does Jesus rebuke one's desire to be rewarded, or does he commend it? Why do you think this is the case?