

On-Track: Personal-practices

We are in the middle of our Sermon Series – On-Track, and today we’re talking about Personal-practices... a horrible word, something we all would rather ignore.

A personal practices is:

- Something you are supposed to do, but don’t want to do – things you don’t want to do: like getting up or go to bed earlier, eat less and healthier, save more and spend less money. Spend more time with your family or find time for self-care, the list goes on. If I pushed enough, I can make you feel bad, because no matter how disciplined you are, you have “supposed to’s” in life!

Now, they start off difficult, but turn into a pleasant habit and even an addiction.

Runners and cyclers, you know what I mean. It starts as something you force yourself to do; now if you don’t, you almost have a withdrawal.

It’s the same with Personal Practices. They start as a hard discipline, then become something you enjoy. But lead to growth, even with a bad attitude.

- Personal Practices – are something you will not do now so you can do more later – like being disciplined in your finances are a good example, you start and it’s hard, but later – you have more because of the personal practices. You don’t spend now, so you have more later and financial freedom! WHY?
- Because - Personal Practices are also delayed gratification Instead of gratifying your desires right now, I will have something better to show for it later. That is personal disciplines... that’s how some of us got through school.

It all boils down to “doing what I am supposed to do, even though I don’t want to do it!”

The reason we’re talking about these “Personal Practices,” is because this is one of the five things I found people say they experience... as they grow to have more confidence in God and grow in their journey of faith.

These 5 things or catalysts: Life-appliable Biblical Teaching, God-given Friendships, Personal-practices (*which we are talking about today*) - God having a Plan – and Life-changing Experiences. **God uses these 5 things or catalysts over and over again to grow people’s confidence or faith in God.**

Whenever someone talks about growing in their confidence in God:

- They talk about learning how to pray, having a “quiet time,” or a “personal devotional time” where they spend time with God.
- They also talk about handling money - how people learn how to give.

Most people I talked to, giving started as gut wrenching; a supposed to. *“I know I’m supposed to be generous; Jesus gave so much for me and the pastor said Jesus died for my sin, and the least I can do is give Jesus a few dollars!”*

In the beginning, giving wasn’t cheerful! I gave because I’m “supposed to.” But when people talk about growing their confidence in God, the story grows when they start a personal time with God and see faith intersect with finances, then your relationship and confidence in God – grows!

NOW – we are not starting a stewardship drive or big capital campaign, we are not going to hit you up for money. Don’t worry about that...

But today, listen for what Jesus says about these Personal Practices around money and prayer!

Because this has more to do with our confidence or our faith in God, then how it benefits anyone else! When it comes to giving - - even if it is triggered because you see a big need.

This practice isn’t about helping anyone else.

Today we are talking about how

Personal practices are in you, for you, and for your faith

Obviously Personal Practices, especially prayer and giving are bigger than you and me.

But there is an important part of praying and giving that’s over-looked when you listen to Jesus talk about praying and giving.

- These Personal Practices are a big part of growing big confidence in God! And for many people, it starts as a discipline and a struggle, but ends up a joy!

As you listen today, you might start arguing with me in your head. But if you don’t believe me, go home and look up these verses yourself. I’m just sharing what Jesus said. If you do find yourself resisting what I’m saying today... pay attention to that! Ask yourself – what are you actually resisting?

Faith is like a muscle, and the more you exercise a muscle, the more you grow the muscle... and the more you exercise your confidence in God, your faith in God, the more it will grow and the more God proves Himself! God will bring you to a place where you will start stretching your faith like a rubber band, your confidence in God will grow!

So, turn to Matthew 6:1-8. We find Jesus teaching; and there may be a few things Jesus says that will bother you... that’s OK! Remember, I’m only the messenger. But we need to take what Jesus says seriously - he is Jesus! **Read scripture**

In today’s scripture, when Jesus talks about “practicing righteousness” or “acts of righteousness,” Jesus is talking about your Personal Practices, these things you do on your own.

Matthew 6:1-8 is about confidence in God

Verse 1 – “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. (Why? Because these are private practices) If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

- Now these are private, but might be done publicly, but there needs to be a private element to them. This is important – if you do them privately and consistently, your Heavenly Father will see this... and will reward you!
- If you don't like the idea of God rewarding you. And you say, “But I'm not doing it for a reward.” That's ok, God will reward you anyway! No matter what you say, Jesus said “*your Heavenly Father will reward you as you practice these Personal Practices or practice – acts of righteousness.*”

Jesus gives us 3 acts of righteousness or personal practices, but we're only going to talk about 2, the 3rd is for another sermon some day.

1) Here's the first. Verse 2 – “When you give to the needy...”

Jesus gives us an example of what we need to do privately – specifically “Alms giving.” Beggars and handicapped people would sit at the entrance to the Temple or Synagogue, and as you walked to the entrance, they would beg. Remember, there was no Social Services to care for people back then. So people would bring extra money and out of the mercy of their heart, they'd give money to these people.

It wasn't a systematic kind of thing, just giving out of mercy. This was **NOT** the tithe – the first 10% of one's income that went to God, the money the Jewish people gave to the Temple! This was beyond that.

Jesus explained, “When you give, *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.*” Look, the reward they received is what? **Being honored by people.** People saying “WOW, look how generous they are!” There is a reward connected with generosity and they just got theirs!

Verse 3 – “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” We don't know what the reward is, but in context of this verse, part of the reward – is honor!

When your Heavenly Father sees you giving privately, give in secret, and give to the things close to God's heart... He will honor you! Now remember, this is about growing confidence in God – this is about you and God... this is about faith.

What if you had total confidence – you really believed – **“When you give” this is about confidence that Jesus sees how you give, and rewards you?** If you ask me – are we supposed to give in order to be rewarded? My response is – I didn’t say it - Jesus did! My question – what if you really were confident in what Jesus said about being honored by your giving and rewarding you for that secret giving?

I suppose, the reason many people don’t give, is because they really are not confident, they do not believe that! The real issue here is your confidence in God... not the money! **According to God, money is a faith issue, because He doesn’t need your money!**

What if you had perfect confidence... when you give your hard earned money and funded the things close to God’s heart – things like what the Missions Ministry offers in its Monthly Noisy Can collections. That God really sees it and will reward that? **There would be no struggle in giving to God!** You’d look forward to the opportunities to give when the opportunities come up!

Here is why... **giving is a confidence or faith issue, because we live in this world as if money is life**

At the end of life, when we stop living and breath our last – we completely trust in whatever we believe in. We hope we were right in what we placed our confidence in. It’s too late to change our mind, there are no second chances.

Before we die, Jesus teaches that from now until your last breath... what we tend to trust in the most... is our money, our ability to control our environment! That means: If there is a God who holds your eternity – and that God is a personal God (and we believe He is), and He invited us to call Him Father, and He wants you to trust Him now. Than wouldn’t it make sense that:

God gets your attention by messing with your money

Why? Because God wants you to trust Him now! That’s why Jesus says you can’t serve God and money! Your money and possessions competes with God, more than anything else! We live as if money is life and air. Jesus taught, we worry more about money than anything else! That’s the human condition! So God tells us, “I want you to have more confidence in me than anything else!”

Because we have so much confidence and trust in money – money is a faith thing, but God wants you to have confidence in Him, and you have a choice in this!

**That’s why learning to be a percentage giver is important, because God wants us to have confidence in Him. That’s why we teach the 10-10-80 principle!
10% to God, 10% to savings and 80% for everything else!**

Give, save, live on the rest! We give to God first to say, God I have more confidence in you than I do in anything else! Because money is a trust and heart issue. **Money is a heart or emotional issue because you trust in it**

But God wants you to trust in Him, not just for eternity, but for today too!

The real question is, “Do you have big confidence that God will take care of you? If you place your confidence in Him over everything else? And Jesus said, when Your Father in Heaven see’s you place your confidence in him instead of money – He will reward you for it!

Then Jesus moves on – aren’t you glad about that?

2) The 2nd Personal Practice. Verse 5, “...when you pray,” this is about time

We all are busy, we all have things to do! Time is the one thing we can’t go out and make more of! So... **Time is your most valuable asset.**

That’s why Jesus said, “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.” Now Jesus is connecting praying with rewards from Your Heavenly Father!

Verse 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.*” Jesus is not talking about the on-the-go prayers here... Jesus help my kids – as they walk out the door, God help me with this person who is driving me crazy, Jesus – HELP! Everybody prays these prayers in the midst of a problem or a scare or that anxious moment. Jesus is not talking about those prayers here.

Jesus is talking about you taking some of your time, your most valuable asset in life, valuable because you’ll run out of time before you run out of money! So Jesus is saying, “take a piece of your most valuable asset of time and devote it to me!
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Jesus wants us to go into a private place and spend undistracted time... with him – pray! “...go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father... Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” Your Heavenly father sees you pray... and in some mysterious and mystical way, when you take a chunk of time and spend it with Him – **God will reward you!**

If you say, “But I’m not doing it for a reward!” Good – God will reward you anyway! This is **NOT** bartering with God or cutting a deal with Him.

But: It is honoring to God when you give Him your time

It is telling God, I'm taking a slot of time out of my busy day... I am investing my time with You. I want you to know that I am so dependent on you, that I can't imagine starting my day without spending time with You and depending on You for a few minutes!

If you talk to someone with Big Confidence in God and ask them what's the benefit of spending time alone with God, without any distractions. They'd tell you: **The Reward - is Assurance that God is with me! Entering God's presence!**

The reward is not God saying yes to all my prayers, or that new car or that girl friend or boy friend, or even that problem disappearing (that's another sermon).

The reward is an uncanny assurance - in uncertain days - that God is with you!

So here is my challenge to you:

For a couple of weeks or 30 days – you pick the time...

What if you give God the first few minutes of your day?

Pick a few minutes in private with God

What if you give God your first few dollars

Give God a set percentage for a set period of time

What would happen? The tension you feel will be a confidence issue, but God will reward you for it and God will grow big Confidence in Him through it!

Prayer