

# Jesus' Life in the Gospels

November 1.....	Why I Do What I Do .....	page 3
November 8.....	My Prayer Life—Part 1 .....	page 8
November 15.....	My Prayer Life—Part 2.....	page 12
November 22.....	The Blessing of Giving Thanks.....	page 15

Part of the *Life Focus* series  
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## Why I Do What I Do

Scripture: Matthew 6:1-4

Lesson Goal: To better understand Jesus' teaching concerning the purity of our hearts as we do charitable deeds.

Introduction: Please answer the following questions based on the past several weeks' study of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5).

- How would you summarize Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5?
- What is at the heart of Jesus' teaching?
- Please explain these words, as they pertain to Jesus' teaching:
  - 1) Motives of the heart
  - 2) Application of life
  - 3) Character of a true follower.

Jesus began his instructions on the hill by portraying, in the beatitudes, the essential elements of Christian character. He went on to indicate by His metaphors of salt and light the influence for good which Christians will exert in the community, if they exhibit this character. He then described Christian righteousness which must exceed the righteousness of scribes and Pharisees by accepting the full implication of God's law without dodging anything or setting artificial limits. Christian righteousness is righteousness unlimited. It must be allowed to penetrate beyond our actions and words to our heart, mind, and motives, and to master us even in those hidden, secret places (Stott).

(Matthew 6)

In the first half of Matthew six, Jesus specifically speaks to three areas of practical righteousness in an individual's life: charitable deeds "giving" (verses 1-4), prayer (verses 5-15), and fasting (verses 16-18). It is interesting to observe that in these eighteen verses, the name "Father" is recorded ten times.

- Why do you think it should be a point of emphasis for us that "Father" (Heavenly Father) is used so frequently in these verses ?

In these 18 verses, Jesus instructs and warns His followers against the temptation and the parading of their piety in a performance manner before others to draw attention and approval of men. Jesus does not warn against the action of the charitable deed in itself; rather, He again warns His followers about the motives behind the action of the deed. He does not condemn the action of charitable deeds, but He condemns unholy motives of the heart.

(V1) "Take heed" meaning to be careful, watch out for, give heed to (Rienecker).

"that you do not do your charitable deeds before men to be seen by them"

Please read Matthew 5:14-16. How do we understand that there is no contradiction between these two passages of Scripture (Matthew 6:1a and Matthew 5:14-16)?

In both passages, Jesus helps us to understand that our motives and actions should glorify the Father.

Please explain the following statements.

- 1) As a follower of Jesus Christ, the greatest testimony of my life is to bring glory to the Father.

2) As a follower of Jesus Christ, I am to glorify the Father in all areas of my life.

Please list and define 10 areas of your life in which you are to glorify the Father.

The story is told of an eastern religious holy man who covered himself with ashes as a sign of his humility and regularly sat on a prominent busy street corner of his city. Tourist would often ask to take a photograph of him. Before the photograph was taken, the man would carefully arrange and position his ashes to give the best possible picture of his destitution and humility. John MacArthur offers these words:

A great deal of religion amounts to nothing more than rearranging religious ashes to impress the world with one's supposed humility and devotion. The problem, of course, is that the humility is a sham and the devotion is to self, not to God. Such religion is nothing more than a game of pretense, a game at which the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day were masters.

- How is pride related to doing charitable deeds before men?

After praying for godly wisdom, answer the following questions.

1) As a follower of Jesus, why do I do the things I do?

2) What is the difference between the applause of men and the approval of God?

If our actions are done with the motive of gaining the attention and approval of men, by impressing them with our *appearance* of righteousness, then our actions will not have any lasting eternal affects. These kinds of actions do not glorify the Father, nor do they gain His approval or reward.

(V2) "Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men."

Please read Mark 12:41-44.

- In the context of Mark 12:41-44, how were offerings presented in the temple?
- How did offerings given in the temple become a kind of trumpet sounding or blasting?

John B. Phillips rendered Matthew 6:2 in his usual graphic style: "When you do good to other people, don't hire a trumpeter to go in front of you like those play-actors in the synagogues and streets who make sure that men admire them."

Beware if all you seek is the applause of men, because the applause can change very quickly.

Please explain the following statement.

- The "Hosanna!" of Sunday can become the "Crucify Him!" on Friday. What does this say about the nature of people and their applause? (Please examine Jesus' life during crucifixion week to answer this question.)

We also find in Jesus' words, of verses 1-4, that there should be no doubt about the followers of Jesus Christ helping others and doing charitable deeds. Jesus did not use the word "if" in reference to these deeds, but rather used the word "when." "When" we give, pray, and fast, we should be sure of the "why" behind the "when."

God rewards good deeds done for His glory. He does not reward good deeds done for selfish recognition, display, applause or honor. In fact, as Jesus explains in Matthew 6:5, the valued

“reward” from others is the only reward that will be received (Barton).

In verse two, Jesus instructs how *not* to give alms or do a charitable deed. He strongly warns against self-glorifying demonstrations of giving that seek to impress men and gain their applause. We should not call attention to our actions to impress others.

In verses 3 and 4, Jesus explains how we (His followers) *should* give. Our motives must be pure and our ultimate goal to help others and glorify God. When we give in such a fashion, God blesses and rewards.

As we close today’s lesson, *The Life Application Bible Commentary* offers three points of practical advice concerning verses 1-4:

1. Don’t get proud of your generosity. You are only a steward of resources that belong to God already.
2. Don’t give for the honor bestowed on donors. Instead, give in gratitude for what God has given you.
3. Don’t count your gifts as merit points for heaven.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). **Amen.**

## My Prayer Life—Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-6

Lesson Goal: To better understand how to pray with a pure heart.

As a nation, we join together this week to observe Veterans Day, the official federal holiday honoring those who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Would you take time to recognize and say thank you to the veterans in your class and to those of this congregation who have honorably and proudly served our country? Let us all remember that we enjoy the wonderful freedoms of this great nation because of the faithful service of so many heroic men and women. Please take time this Sunday morning to express your love, appreciation and gratitude to them. And as we honor the veterans among us, let us take time to honor our God. I ask each class to stand together to honor Him with the singing of “God Bless America.” Let our honoring of God be heard up and down the hallways on every floor of every building on this campus.

God bless America  
Land that I love,  
Stand beside her and guide her  
Thru the night with a light from above

From the mountains, to the prairies  
To the oceans white with foam,  
God bless America,  
My home, sweet home  
God bless America  
My home, sweet home (Berlin).

Lesson introduction: In today’s Scripture passage, Jesus turns our attention to prayer. Just as Jesus warned His followers of hypocrisy when they give or do charitable deeds, now He warns us, His followers, concerning hypocrisy when we pray.

(V5) “And when you pray”

The followers of Jesus are to be people of prayer. Prayer is a vitally important part of our daily lives, not just reserved for mealtimes and special holidays.

Prayer is not to be an afterthought or merely a presentation of our wish list to God. As breathing is to our bodies, prayer is to be to our spiritual lives.

- How is your prayer life? Please answer honestly and openly before God.
- When do you pray? Again, please answer honestly.
- Please list some times when Jesus prayed.

In verse 5, Jesus is not condemning prayer, for we are to pray (see 1 Thessalonians 5:17; James 5:16; Acts 4:31). But He is strongly warning His followers concerning the purity of their hearts as they pray. He warns that His followers should not purposely position themselves in public areas so others will see them praying and be impressed by their piety.

“You shall not be like the hypocrites.”

The word hypocrite means “actor,” or “one who impersonates another.” It also means “to wear a mask.” The hypocrites were pretenders, and the Pharisees were the greatest pretenders of all. See Matthew 23:5 and verse 14. We must remember that as Jesus spoke these words to His disciples (His followers) many of the Pharisees were listening.

“For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men.”

Once again, Jesus is warning against impure motives in prayer. He is speaking to the purity of the heart. The prayer of a pure heart is not offered for the purpose of being noticed or to impress men. The Pharisees wanted the people to think they were very holy, and public prayer was a way they could draw attention to their appearance of holiness.

- Jesus knows the motives and purity of our hearts. Have you ever given the outward appearance of being holy or living for Jesus, when your heart was not pure? Please ask the Lord’s guidance as you answer.

Jesus is not stating that public prayer is wrong or unacceptable. He is saying that any prayer, public or private, which is prayed with impure motives from impure hearts, is really not praying at all. “There is a place for public prayer, but to pray only where others will notice you indicates that your real intention is to please people, not God. For these hypocrites, people’s praise will be their only reward” (Barton).

(V6) “But when you pray, go into your room (closet), close the door, and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

The prayer life of Jesus’ followers is to be radically different than that of the religious leaders’ of His day. Jesus’ stern words to us, His followers, help us to understand that public prayer should flow from a heart of private prayer. Public prayer and corporate prayer were vitally important to the early church, just as for the church today. As followers of Jesus Christ, we should not pray more publicly than we do privately. The essence of our prayer life should be done in the privacy of our prayer rooms alone with God. Private prayer allows us to literally pour out our hearts to God with honesty and purity. It also allows us a time to be silent and listen for God’s voice and His answer. Jesus called out and prayed to the “Father” which shows us the intimate relationship we are to have with God our Father.

When Jesus speaks of going “into your room, and when you have shut the door,” He is speaking of a private or secret place. May I loving remind you that your secret place does not have to be an inner closet inside your home, although it may be. Your private place may be your back porch or inside your car. It is not so much about a specific place as it is about the purity of the heart of the one praying.

- Do you have a special, private prayer place?
- As we study the life and ministry of Jesus, where do you often go to pray?

Perhaps to help others in your class, you could share some of your special, private prayer places.

- What is the benefit and blessing of having a special, private place to pray?
- Where did Jesus often go to pray when He sought privacy and fellowship with the Father?
- Please complete the following statement:  
My prayer life is...

## My Prayer Life—Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 6:7-8

Lesson Goal: To learn that praying is about gaining the attention of Almighty God not about impressing others.

Introduction: Today we continue our study on the purity of our hearts as we pray. In the book of James, chapter 5, verse 16, James wrote: “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Purity of heart is an essential characteristic of a truly righteous man. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

(V7) “And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathens do.”

“Vain repetitions”—Greek *“battologesete,”* meaning “to babble much; to use many phrases; to say idle things; to say meaningless things.” According to the *Preacher’s Outline and Sermon Bible*, vain repetition means at least two things: saying the same words over and over again without putting one’s heart and thought into what is being said, and using certain religious words or phrases (sometimes over and over again) and thinking God hears because one is using such religious talk.

Warren Wiersbe states: “A request becomes a ‘vain repetition’ if it is only a babbling of words without a sincere heart desire to seek and do God’s will. The mere reciting of memorized prayers can be vain repetition.”

“as the heathen do, For they think that they will be heard for their many words”

This makes reference to the Gentile practice of the day concerning their pagan ceremonies and worship. Often they would name and designate all the various gods in order to avoid leaving out the appropriate one (see 1 Kings 18:26-28).

God is not impressed by the mere multiplication of many words, no matter how eloquent or fluent they may seem.

- Is the heart of the one praying more important than the words being spoken? Please answer thoughtfully.

Prayer should not be thoughtless or filled with the vain (empty) repetition of careless words or phrases without regard for the words and meanings. It is not the honest, properly motivated repetition of needs or praise before God that is wrong, but the mindless, indifferent recital of spiritual-sounding incantations or magical formulas over and over. Not only must our hearts be right before God, but also our minds must be right. Thoughtless prayer is almost as offensive to God as heartless prayer. In most instances, they go together. Prayers are offered to gain the attention and be heard by God, not to impress men who may see or hear the one praying.

(V8) Again I remind you that Jesus was not condemning prayer; He was condemning the thoughtless manner in which some prayed. The underlying message of Jesus’ words is that when His followers prayed they prayed to the one true and living God who knew their needs even before they asked. They did not pray to idols of wood, gold, or stone.

When we (His followers) pray, there is to be a genuine sincerity which flows from a pure heart. Simple

and direct prayers offered from pure hearts accomplish much.

- Please explain this statement from the *Believer's Study Bible*:

God, who is always more ready to hear than we are to pray, already knows our needs, as well as our ignorance in making proper requests. Prayer avails one of God's willingness. Through prayer, one recalls personal needs and adopts an attitude of dependent trust which is ready to receive God's gifts and to yield in open trust and praise to His demands. Prayer is communion, not a battering ram used to break down the door of God's treasure house; it is a receptacle with which the child of the Father receives that which He is already prepared to give.

- Describe prayer and what it means to pray.

- Why do we pray so little?

As we come to the end of this study, "My Prayer Life," I have intentionally shortened today's lesson to allow time for your *Life Focus* class to join together in prayer. May God bless your sweet time of communion with Him, as you pray with pure hearts, not with vain repetitions or multiple meaningless words.

If you are having difficulty knowing what to pray during this time, I remind you that we are only eleven days from Thanksgiving Day. Sincere prayers of thanks-giving, from the genuine and pure hearts of His children, would be a blessing to our Father.

## The Blessing of Giving Thanks

Scripture: Psalm 100

Lesson Goal: To gain a better understanding of the true believer's response to the blessings of God.

As a Town Creek, Alabama grade-school student in the 1960s, I remember having to memorize Psalm 100 as part of a Thanksgiving assignment. I'm sure, as with most grade-school students, my greatest attention was on the fact that Thanksgiving meant holidays, which meant days out of school. But in our public school of yesteryear, Psalm 100 was as much a part of the recognition and celebration of Thanksgiving as Plymouth, pilgrims, and pumpkin pie. Psalm 100 was as much a part of Thanksgiving as Luke 2 was to Christmas. Today, we will look at the timeless truths of this great psalm of praise and thanksgiving.

Have you ever noticed how, as parents, we quickly teach our children to express their gratitude and say thank you? Most parents can remember the first time their child said thank you without any prompting or bribing. It was truly one of those memorable moments. Parents delight in their children expressing their gratitude and appreciation. A simple "thank you" can be a great blessing.

How long has it been since you spent just a few minutes with your heavenly Father expressing your gratitude and appreciation to Him? How long has it been since you spoke with Him, making no request, no petitions, just expressing your heart's genuine gratitude by saying, "Thank you"?

Why not take a couple of minutes from your busy study time, pause, take a deep breath, clear your mind, and voice to Him your thanks? Just let the gratitude flow from the fountain of a grateful heart.

### **Psalm 100:1**

"Make a joyful shout [noise] to the Lord, all you lands."

Psalm 100 is a wonderful testimony of thanksgiving, gratitude and praise. The theme is worship, primarily a call to worship. "The psalm was sung at the entry into the temple" (Weiser). The psalm opens with a call to sing the praise of God with shouts of joy. It is a call for all people from "all lands" to worship Him.

In the Hebrew language, the words "joyful shout" are an energized command with reference to public praise. There is certainly an appropriate time and place to honor God with the joyful shout of public praise. This time and place is defined by all honor to Him, all glory to Him, led by the Holy Spirit moving in the hearts of His people.

- Have you ever been directed to "give or lift to Him a handclap of praise"? Have you ever been encouraged to lift your praise to Him through a joyful shout? How did you respond? Why is it so difficult for us to express our praise with a joyful shout? Why is it difficult for us to show any public expression of praise?

(V2) "Serve the Lord with gladness."

Worshippers of God are instructed to express their worship with a gladness of heart. In verse two, we find the motive, the aim, and the spirit of the service rendered to God in worship, which is to be done with a joyful heart expressing gladness. By the manner in which the people of God worship, others are drawn to worship Him.

- Why is it so very difficult for some to express their worship with a joyful heart? Answer prayerfully.

My experiences in Guatemala have taught me many wonderful truths, but the single most important lesson the believers there have taught me is how to collectively worship the Lord. From the smallest child to the most aged adult, they truly participate in worship, joyfully singing with hearts of gladness and praise. I wish I could transport our congregation there, so they could teach us what they know about worship. A joyful, singing heart has nothing to do with talent or impressing others. It has nothing to do with material possessions or blessings, for most of the dear people in Guatemala live day-to-day very simple lives. Many live in small houses with dirt floors and no running water or other modern conveniences, but, oh, how they worship Jesus! They truly “make a joyful shout to the Lord” and “come before His presence with singing.”

- What are some excuses we, the MHBC family, give for not participating in worship with singing?
- What does a simple smile say about the heart of a worshipper?

(V3) “Know that the Lord, He is God.”

From the Old Testament mindset, this statement is the most important thought of the entire psalm. It literally means: “Yahweh alone is God.” These words are a declaration and confession of a genuine faith. Please read Deuteronomy 6:4-7.

“It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.” As we worship Him, we (true believers) experience the reality of who He is and that we are totally dependent upon Him. He is our creator and maker. Without Him, we are nothing. But He has graced us that we might be called His children.

Oh for a Thousand Tongues to Sing

Oh for a thousand tongues to sing  
My great redeemer’s praise  
The glories of my God and King  
And triumphs of His grace

My gracious Master and my God  
Assist me to proclaim  
To spread through all the earth abroad  
The honors of Thy name

So come and sing out  
Let our anthem grow loud  
There is one great love  
There is one great love, Jesus  
Jesus the name that charms our fears  
That bids our sorrows cease  
Tis’ music in the sinner’s ear  
Tis’ life and health and peace

He breaks the power of canceled sin  
He sets the prisoner free  
His blood can make the foulest clean  
His blood availed for me

To God all glory, praise and love  
Be now and ever given  
By saints below and saints above

## The church in earth and heaven (Wesley).

- How do you privately express your praise to God?
- How do you publically express your praise to Him?

Please read Psalm 147:1, Psalm 48:1 and Psalm 47:1-9.

(V4) “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise.”

These are words of instruction. Artur Weiser explains: “They are also the opening words of the second part of Psalm 100 and sung by the choir of priests before the festival congregation passed through the gates of the Temple and entered its forecourts. As in the first part of the psalm, they begin with a call to enter the sanctuary with songs of praise in order to testify and praise His name.”

- What do we do as we enter our place of worship?

As we entered the sanctuary for mid-week Bible study this past Wednesday evening, Brother Robin was seated at the altar offering a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. As worshippers entered, many just made their way to the front to join in a spontaneous time of praise. It was indeed a special time of worship. We had truly entered into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise.

- Explain the difference in being a participant in worship and being a spectator to worship.
- Prayerfully answer this question. Are you a participant in worship or a spectator to worship?

### Personal testimony

During our 2013 men’s conference, Dr. Kevin Hamm spoke on worship and praise. He emphasized two words “shout” and “sing.” He quoted from the prophet Isaiah: “Return to Me, for I have redeemed you. Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done *it!* Shout, you lower parts of the earth...” (Isaiah 44:22b-23a). Dr. Hamm reminded us of how wonderful it is to be redeemed (saved); and therefore, our worship should never be dead. It should be alive with energy and purpose. He challenged us (real, true followers of Jesus) to sing and shout, because of all peoples of all lands, we have something to sing and shout about.

(V4b) “Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.”

“Be thankful” is meant to be an expression of a genuine heart, but it also an expression of a genuine heart that finds expression in public praise. The result of a thankful heart is to “bless His name.”

“[Bless His name] is the expression of that personal feeling towards God which only His own redeemed people can cherish” (Spence and Exell).

- Do you find blessing in “Bless His name,” as you verbally declare your praise to Him with thanksgiving and “bless His name”? Explain.
- What does it mean to you personally to bless His name?
- How do *you* personally bless His name?

(V5) “For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.”

“The knowledge of God’s grace and faithfulness is the true source from which the joy and the enthusiasm of the psalm spring. The joy expressed in the psalm is joy simultaneously derived *from* God and joy *in* God. It emanates from him and returns to him” (Weiser). We return it to Him through our worship.

(V5b) “And His truth endures to all generations.”

The psalm closes with a focus on His everlasting truth. He, like no other, is completely/totally trustworthy. He, alone, is truth as truth can only be. He is faithful. His faithfulness is measured only by His truth. He is truth and forever shall be.

### **Questions for Life Focus**

- 1) What does Thanksgiving Day *really* mean to you?
- 2) How do you express your “thanks” “giving” to Him?
- 3) If you are a parent or grandparent, what are you teaching those in your care concerning Thanksgiving?
- 4) What is the difference between a believer’s Thanksgiving Day and a nonbeliever’s Thanksgiving Day?
- 5) If unknown to you, Jesus was part of your Thanksgiving Day activities,\* would He know that you are His follower by the way you express your thanks and enjoy the day?

\*In reference to question 5 above—HE IS!!  
HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

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