

Why Help Others? 1

This study is based on Matthew 6:1–4 and
Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, chapter 4
—see also *Blessings*, chapter 4.

Good things for bad reasons

Many who sat there on the mountainside that morning must have been very frustrated with Jesus. They knew He had power to make things happen. They had seen Him miraculously heal the sick and injured. Many had seen Him turn a few loaves and fishes into a meal for thousands. “He has all this power,” they must have whispered to each other. “Why doesn’t He use it? He could have driven out the Romans and set Himself up as king already.”

To be honest, what they were saying was, “If I had that kind of power, I would have already destroyed all my enemies. I would be running this country.” But what Jesus said that day was no different than what His actions had been saying all His life. His power was not there to give Him the advantage over others. It wasn’t there to make Him famous or rich. His power was used for only one reason—to help others.

This part of Jesus’ sermon that day covers an area that still causes much debate today. Do we do good deeds—help others—in order to win them to Christ, or do we do those good deeds simply to help someone in need? Does a good deed, a kind act, have value in itself, or only in terms of how it affects the eternal destiny of the person helped?

Is it possible to do good things for bad reasons? Yes, when a person is focused on the attention they get for helping others, God is not impressed. Those who live for the praise of others are only pretending to be Christians.

But when a person shows genuine kindness to another, the praise goes to God. In fact, Jesus’ words indicate that there is a double blessing in a good deed, one not just for the person who is helped but also for the person who does the helping. And every time we help someone in need, we grow closer to Jesus and more like Him.

Reflect on the story

Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing—The true motive in service

“The words of Christ on the mount were an expression of that which had been the unspoken teaching of His life, but which the people had failed to comprehend. They could not understand how, having such great power, He neglected to use it in securing what they regarded as the chief good. Their spirit and motives and methods were the opposite of His. While they claimed to be very jealous for the honor of the law, self-glory was the real object which they sought; and Christ would make it manifest to them that the lover of self is a transgressor of the law.

“But the principles cherished by the Pharisees are such as are characteristic of humanity in

A Thoughtful Hour 3

all ages. The spirit of Pharisaism is the spirit of human nature; and as the Saviour showed the contrast between His own spirit and methods and those of the rabbis, His teaching is equally applicable to the people of all time.

“In the days of Christ the Pharisees were continually trying to earn the favor of Heaven in order to secure the worldly honor and prosperity which they regarded as the reward of virtue. At the same time they paraded their acts of charity before the people in order to attract their attention and gain a reputation for sanctity.

“Jesus rebuked their ostentation, declaring that God does not recognize such service and that the flattery and admiration of the people, which they so eagerly sought, was the only reward they would ever receive.

“‘When thou doest alms,’ He said, ‘let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly.’

“In these words Jesus did not teach that acts of kindness should always be kept secret. Paul the apostle, writing by the Holy Spirit, did not conceal the generous self-sacrifice of the Macedonian Christians, but told of the grace that Christ had wrought in them, and thus others were imbued with the same spirit. He also wrote to the church at Corinth and said, ‘Your zeal hath stirred up very many.’ 2 Corinthians 9:2, R.V.

“Christ’s own words make His meaning plain, that in acts of charity the aim should not be to secure praise and honor from men. Real godliness never prompts an effort at display. Those who desire words of praise and flattery, and feed upon them as a sweet morsel, are Christians in name only.

“By their good works, Christ’s followers are to bring glory, not to themselves, but to Him through whose grace and power they have wrought. It is through the Holy Spirit that every good work is accomplished, and the Spirit is given to glorify, not the receiver, but the Giver. When the light of Christ is shining in the soul, the lips will be filled with praise and thanksgiving to God. Your prayers, your performance of duty, your benevolence, your self-denial, will not be the theme of your thought or conversation. Jesus will be magnified, self will be hidden, and Christ will appear as all in all.

“We are to give in sincerity, not to make a show of our good deeds, but from pity and love to the suffering ones. Sincerity of purpose, real kindness of heart, is the motive that Heaven values. The soul that is sincere in its love, wholehearted in its devotion, God regards as more precious than the golden wedge of Ophir.

“We are not to think of reward, but of service; yet kindness shown in this spirit will not fail of its recompense. ‘Thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly.’ While it is true that God Himself is the great Reward, that embraces every other, the soul receives and enjoys Him only as it becomes assimilated to Him in character. Only like can appreciate like. It is as we give ourselves to God for the service of humanity that He gives Himself to us.

“No one can give place in his own heart and life for the stream of God’s blessing to flow to others, without receiving in himself a rich reward. The hillsides and plains that furnish a channel for the mountain streams to reach the sea suffer no loss thereby. That which they give is repaid a hundredfold. For the stream that goes singing on its way leaves behind its gift of verdure and fruitfulness. The grass on its banks is a fresher green, the trees have a richer verdure, the flowers are more abundant. When the earth lies bare and brown under the summer’s parching heat, a line of verdure marks the river’s course;

and the plain that opened her bosom to bear the mountain's treasure to the sea is clothed with freshness and beauty, a witness to the recompense that God's grace imparts to all who give themselves as a channel for its outflow to the world.

“This is the blessing of those who show mercy to the poor. The prophet Isaiah says, ‘Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily. . . . And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought: . . . and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.’ Isaiah 58:7–11.

“The work of beneficence is twice blessed. While he that gives to the needy blesses others, he himself is blessed in a still greater degree. The grace of Christ in the soul is developing traits of character that are the opposite of selfishness,—traits that will refine, ennoble, and enrich the life. Acts of kindness performed in secret will bind hearts together, and will draw them closer to the heart of Him from whom every generous impulse springs. The little attentions, the small acts of love and self-sacrifice, that flow out from the life as quietly as the fragrance from a flower—these constitute no small share of the blessings and happiness of life. And it will be found at last that the denial of self for the good and happiness of others, however humble and uncommended here, is recognized in heaven as the token of our union with Him, the King of glory, who was rich, yet for our sake became poor.

“The deeds of kindness may have been done in secret, but the result upon the character of the doer cannot be hidden. If we work with wholehearted interest as a follower of Christ, the heart will be in close sympathy with God, and the Spirit of God, moving upon our spirit, will call forth the sacred harmonies of the soul in answer to the divine touch.

“He who gives increased talents to those who have made a wise improvement of the gifts entrusted to them is pleased to acknowledge the service of His believing people in the Beloved, through whose grace and strength they have wrought. Those who have sought for the development and perfection of Christian character by exercising their faculties in good works, will, in the world to come, reap that which they have sown. The work begun upon earth will reach its consummation in that higher and holier life to endure throughout eternity.”

Reflect on the story

Blessings—The real reason to help others

“Jesus’ words that day on the hillside expressed what His actions had been saying all His life, but no one had understood. They couldn’t grasp how someone with His great power didn’t use it to force the changes they wanted to see in their country. Their spirit and motives and methods were the opposite of His. They claimed to be very protective about honoring the law, but what they really wanted was fame and power for themselves. Jesus now made it clear to them that anyone who loves himself most is breaking the law.

“But these attitudes are not unique to the Jews of Jesus’ day. The spirit of the Pharisees is the spirit of human nature in all ages. As Jesus showed the differences between His own spirit and methods and those of the rabbis, His teaching speaks to all people, even to us today.

“The Pharisees worked to be considered ‘holy’ because in their culture, such a lifestyle was rewarded

A Thoughtful Hour 3

with honor and wealth—their just reward for righteousness. At the same time, they paraded their acts of charity in front of the people in order to get attention and to be thought of as righteous.

“Jesus pointed out their desire to be noticed and declared that God is not impressed with such things. They might receive praise and respect from the people, but that is all they would ever get. ‘When you give to the poor,’ Jesus said, ‘don’t let anyone know what you are doing. Your giving should be done in secret. Your Father can see what is done in secret, and he will reward you’ (Matthew 6:3, 4).

“Jesus wasn’t teaching that acts of kindness should always be kept secret. The apostle Paul shared the story of the generous giving of the Macedonian Christians, but he also told how their belief in Christ had changed them. This story inspired many other Christians to give as well. Paul also wrote to the church at Corinth and said, ‘Your desire to give has made most of them ready to give also’ (2 Corinthians 9:2).

“The meaning of Jesus’ words is clear: acts of kindness should not be done to impress others. Those who live for the praise and attention of others are only pretending to be Christians.

“Jesus’ followers bring glory to Him with their acts of kindness and generosity. Every such act is done by the influence of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit brings glory to God, not to human beings. When the light of Christ is shining in our souls, our lips will praise and thank God. It won’t be our prayers, our efforts, our generosity, or our selflessness that we’ll be thinking about or discussing. Jesus will be at the center of our thoughts.

“We must give, not to show our generosity, but because we see the needs of others and are moved to help them. This kind of genuine response to those in need is what Heaven values. The person who loves others sincerely, who follows Jesus wholeheartedly, is more precious to God than pure gold.

“We should think only of serving others, not of any reward, but it’s true that kindness will always be rewarded. ‘Your Father can see what is done in secret, and he will reward you’ (Matthew 6:4). A relationship with God is the greatest reward, and the more we become like Him, the more we will enjoy it. As we give ourselves in service to humanity, God gives Himself to us.

“The hills and plains that provide a channel for a mountain stream to reach the sea are greatly rewarded for their gift. The singing stream leaves behind greener grass, large strong trees, and more beautiful flowers. Everywhere else the ground may lie bare and brown, but a line of rich green marks the stream’s path. The plains and hills that share their space to allow the water through are blessed with freshness and beauty. In the same way, anyone who opens his or her own heart and life to be a stream of God’s blessings to the world will be richly blessed for it.

“The Bible promises this blessing to those who help the poor: ‘Share your food with the hungry and bring poor, homeless people into your own homes. When you see someone who has no clothes, give him yours, and don’t refuse to help your own relatives. Then your light will shine like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. . . . The LORD will always lead you. . . . You will be like a garden that has much water, like a spring that never runs dry’ (Isaiah 58:7–11).

“Helping others creates a double blessing. Those who give to the needy bless others, and at the same time, are blessed even more themselves. The grace of Christ in the soul will develop unselfish character traits, traits that will purify, strengthen, and enrich the life. Secret acts of kindness will bind hearts together and will draw us closer to the heart of God, the Source of every generous thought and act. The small acts of love and self-sacrifice that flow out from a life as quietly as the fragrance from a flower are the source of much of the blessings and happiness of life. In heaven, we will find that putting the needs

and happiness of others first—even if it is ridiculed here—is the true sign of a close relationship with God.

“Even when kind acts are done in secret, the results in the lives of those who do them cannot be hidden. The more closely we follow Jesus and live as He did, the closer our hearts will be to God. Then by the power of the Spirit, our hearts will change and come into harmony with His. God blesses those who use the gifts He has given them. He takes great joy in blessing those who are leaning on the grace and strength of Jesus to become like Him. Those who work here on earth to develop their character by acts of kindness will ‘reap what they have sown’ in heaven. This work, begun on earth, will continue as we develop a better, more holy life throughout eternity.”

Questions to consider

1. We are comfortable criticizing the Pharisees as “prideful, arrogant church leaders who thought they were better than everyone else.” What does it mean then that “the spirit of the Pharisees is the spirit of human nature”? What aspects of our lives are similar to the Pharisees?

2. What are some things that we do in order to earn the favor of heaven?

3. Why did Jesus say that acts of kindness should be done in secret? Do you ever help someone in need without telling anyone about it?

4. What do hillsides and plains receive in exchange for allowing a stream or river to flow through them?

5. It’s clear how acts of kindness affect the one who receives the kindness. How do such acts affect the one who gives them?
