

Text: Matthew 6
Topic/Theme: Affirmation and our need for it
Big Idea: Affirmation is something granted by others.

Introduction:

*Like any young parent, I have spent several Saturdays on the sidelines of a soccer field cheering on my son, Matthew. He started playing organized sports at six and each Saturday morning has become an anticipated family ritual. **Watching Matthew play soccer for many years, I have learned an important lesson about his life and mine.***

OBSERVATION NUMBER ONE: DON'T COACH YOUR KID FROM THE SIDELINES.

With Matthew being our first child, Janae and I were learning proper parental protocol on the sidelines - ok I was learning it and Janae was moving her chair away from mine. That's the coaches job. During his first game, I was yelling to Matthew, "Run back" while his coach was yelling, "Run forward." Poor kid didn't know what to do. Didn't make any points with the coach on that one.

OBSERVATION NUMBER TWO: I DON'T CARE WHAT ANYONE SAYS, WE ARE OUT HERE NOT JUST FUN, BUT TO WIN.

Ever heard people say, "We just out here to have a good time...The score doesn't matter." Who made up this dumb saying? You mean we are NOT here to win, we are not here to conquer our enemies, to slaughter our foes, to avenge our name - Wolverines (that's the name of his team). Isn't that what sports for 6-year old are all about?

Laugh as you may, but you may be surprised how early that sense of competition is ingrained in us. I remember one conversation at Matthew's game where his team was getting slaughtered. In his frustration, Matthew yelled to his

coach from the field, “We losing bad our here coach, I want to come out.” To which the coach yelled back, “Don’t worry Matthew, it is only a game. We are NOT keeping score.” To which Matthew replied, “Well, I am and it is 10 to 0.”

OBSERVATION NUMBER THREE: WE ALL PLAY FOR AN AUDIENCE.

When Matthew first starting playing, he would kick the ball, stop and then look to Janae and I on the sideline for approval or applause. We would yell, “**GOOD JOB MATTHEW, NOW GO DO IT AGAIN.**” Or after a big loss (and there have been many for his team) he would come to us his parental audience and look for reassurance for his performance, for comfort and for something else to do to get his mind of the game. In mom and dad, Matthew was found an audience which provided him security, approval, acceptance.

We all need audience APPROVAL. We all play for ACCEPTANCE, we play for CELEBRATION, we play for APPLAUSE, we step onto that field or on a stage to get the reward that someone else will share in our moment of glory.

Intrinsic in all of us is the need to be NOTICED, CELEBRATED and AFFIRMED. In one sense this is NORMAL. In another it is QUITE FALLEN. In one sense there is great the genuine need for someone we respect look at us and say, “WELL DONE...”. In another there is EGO that comes in and selfishly takes the spotlight so people will take notice. In one sense, our need for affirmation can draw us away from God (especially if we get affirmation from the wrong people) and in other our need for affirmation can draw us to Him. Once again, in the Sermon, JESUS IS TEACHING US WE SHOULD NOT LOOK FOR AFFIRMATION (FROM OTHERS), BUT LEARN TO RECEIVE IT (FROM GOD).

Shakespeare once said, *“All the world is a stage, and all the men and women are mere players.”* If that is true, then I am ask, **”Then WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?”** *“If all the world is a stage, and all the men and women are mere players, then who is the audience?”* **WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?**

Jesus answers this question by discussing HIS BIG THREE LIST of spiritual disciplines of all Christ followers. Three key areas He expects all Christ followers to adhere to. So this morning I want to:

1. Define those three areas for us, the Big Three (or what I call the Hungry for God list)?
2. And then look at the broader topic of AFFIRMATION.
3. Show you that AFFIRMATION is not something we should seek for (from others), but something we receive (from God).

I find that the principles for these three spiritual disciplines (how we are to do them) apply broadly to other areas of our life whether, work, school, sports, hobbies or play.

For such insight, we need God’s Spirit and too Him I now ask you join me in prayer.

THE BIG THREE or the Hungry for God list:

As we turn the page and enter a new chapter in the Sermon of the Mount, we encounter **THE PRACTICES OF THE FAITH**. For some of you, there may be a sigh, finally, something I can put my hands too. For others, this short list may **NOT** involve activities to your liking.

Certainly, there are numerous activities found in Christianity both today and throughout history. *In fact, I looked at the VCC church calendar for the month of October and discovered the following church activities besides the ongoing Sunday services: Numerous meetings, small groups, choir and worship practices, Bible studies, Dinners for 8, drama production rehearsals, 25 year VCS reunion, games and events, social outreaches and evangelism.* Certainly, all of these events have a social, intellectual, and perhaps evangelistic bent to them.

But let's compare our events to those Jesus lists in Matthew 6: **GIVING** (specifically almsgiving or giving to the needy - verse 2), **PRAYER** (verse 5), and **FASTING** (verse 16),. This trio of religious actions express in some degree our duty **TO OTHERS, TO GOD and TO OURSELVES.**

OUR SACRIFICIAL SERVICE TO OTHERS IN GIVING,

OUR INTIMATE TIME WITH GOD IN PRAYER AND

OUR DENIAL OF SELF IN FASTING.

Three activities Jesus lists that characterize those who travel with Him down this road less traveled. With all three of them, He begins with the word **"WHEN"**, NOT **"IF"**. **WHEN** you GIVE to the needy (verse 2), **WHEN** you PRAY (verse 5) and **WHEN** you FAST (verse 16). I call this **THE "HUNGRY FOR GOD" LIST**. Why?

Because, in my experience of life, ONLY THOSE WHO ARE REALLY HUNGRY FOR GOD TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY.

I know I am personally challenged by such a list and have fallen to my knees several times in preparing this series of messages asking myself, **“Do I measure up?”** Personally, I want Jesus to evaluate me on other religious standards: **(the hours I spend in church, the amount of meetings I go to, my attendance in a service, study, email responses, phone calls, coffee with others), not these three.** But our text brings us here this morning and we must ask ourselves honestly **HOW DO WE STAND?**

In the ensuing weeks I explain each one of these topics in detail. If this is the **BIG THREE** list of Jesus for all those who claim His name, then we should take time to look at each one and make sure we understand what He is telling us to do. But before we do that we must tackle first **HOW JESUS WANTS US TO DO THEM (GIVING, PRAYER AND FASTING) WHICH WILL LAUNCH US INTO THE TOPIC OF AFFIRMATION. THERE ARE DISTINCT PATTERNS, SPECIFIC CONCERNS, JESUS HAS WITH EACH OF THESE AREAS.**

Hypocrisy - we pretend:

This morning, we take A HIGH ALTITUDE LOOK of these topics before we explore them in detail. As I said earlier, Jesus is not only concerned that we do these things (giving, prayer and fasting), but HOW WE DO THEM. He wants to make us REAL, not FAKE. TRUE TO OUR SELVES, not FOR OTHERS. He wants AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY, not HYPOCRITES. In fact, 3x in our text, he mentions HYPOCRITES:

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the HYPOCRITES do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

Matthew 6:2

“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 men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

Matthew 6:5

“When you fast, do not look somber as the HYPOCRITES do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

Matthew 6:16

In classical Greek the ὑποκριτής was first an orator and then an actor. So figuratively the word came to be applied TO ANYBODY WHO TREATS THE WORLD AS A STAGE ON WHICH HE/SHE IS A PART. THIS PERSON WOULD LAY ASIDE HIS TRUE IDENTITY AND ASSUMES A FALSE ONE. He is no longer himself but in disguise, impersonating somebody else. He wears a mask.

Now IN THE THEATRE there is no harm in such practices, BUT IN THE CHURCH HYPOCRISY IS A GREAT OFFENSE BECAUSE ONE DELIBERATELY SETS OUT TO DECEIVE PEOPLE. He is like the actor in that he is pretending (so that what we are seeing is NOT the real person but a part, a mask, a disguise), yet he is

quite unlike the actor in this respect: he takes a religious practice (giving, prayer or fasting) which is a real activity and turns it into what it was never meant to be, **NAMELY A PIECE OF MAKE BELIEVE, A THEATRICAL DISPLAY BEFORE AN AUDIENCE. ALL TO GAIN SOME SENSE OF APPROVAL OR AFFIRMATION.**

*It is sort of like manufacturers who are selling us the same size packages we are accustomed to, but they are putting less of the product in the box. For example, according to **US News and World Report** a box of well-known detergent that once held **61 ounces** now contains only **55**. Same size box, less soap. How something is wrapped doesn't always show us what's on the inside (2x).*

That's true with people as well. We can wrap ourselves up in the same packaging every day—nice clothes, big smile, friendly demeanor—yet still be less than what we appear to be. That is what a hypocrite does. On the outside they play for God, but on the inside they are only performing for an audience.

My recommendation: **SIMPLY BE HONEST WHERE YOU ARE AT IN THE JOURNEY.** People despise it when we purposely deceive them about who we are, what we know and how we live. Don't project strength when there is weakness and answer honestly where you are at in the journey. **Especially, when it comes to matters of faith.** If you act one way in this room and another at work, home, on the football field, then you are merely playing the part. You may deceive some, but you mock God who sees your heart and intent in everything (Matt 6:8).

Audience - we perform:

Which brings us to our second point - **THE AUDIENCE**. *If all the world is but a stage, and all the men and women merely players, THEN WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?*

According to the text, **there are two groups we play before**. Two distinct settings we attempt **TO PLEASE, TO SATISFY, TO CATER**. The first group is **OTHER PEOPLE**.

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

Matthew 6:2

“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 men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

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Matthew 6:16

At first glance these words seem to contradict Jesus' earlier command to **“Let your light shine BEFORE MEN, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Mt 5:16)**. In both verses He speaks of doing good works, **“before men”** and in both the objective is *clear* **“to be seen by them”**. But in the earlier case, Jesus **commands** it and here in our text He **prohibits** it. **HOW DO WE RESOLVE THE DISCREPANCY?**

The answer lies in the fact that **JESUS IS SPEAKING TO DIFFERENT SINS**. It is our **HUMAN COWARDICE** that Jesus addresses when He says, **“Let your light shine before men”** and it is our **HUMAN VANITY** that made Him give warning of performing our religious actions before others. As one theologian put it, **“We are to show when tempted to hide” AND “Hide when tempted to show.”** Our good

works must be public so that our light shines. Our religious devotions private lest we boast about them. If we do this, then the glory may be given to God, rather than to men and women.

Why do we play for the crowds? Why do we pretend and perform?

Why do we play for the crowds? Why do some of us spend our lives in pursuit of another approval? Why can't we just ignore people their comments and their actions toward us? The answer is simple: we all long for ACCEPTANCE, FOR APPROVAL, FOR AFFIRMATION. We want to fit in, to be one of the gang, to have people who will invite us in and call on us. IF FACT, MUCH OF OUR IDENTITY, OUR CHARACTER, OUR LIVES ARE SHAPED BY THOSE WHO EITHER ACCEPT US OR BY THOSE WHO REJECT US. Most counseling arena's are aware of this fact and explore this world to a great degree trying to find what event, what person, what situation of rejection derailed our life. *How many stories have we heard about folks who did not get picked for the team, invited to the party or simply overlooked by the popular crowd and how those events altered their life? Have you noticed that the same story seems to be appearing in the school shooting events? The outcast who was rejected rails back on those who closed him out.* THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT WE ALL NEED ACCEPTANCE SO WE PLAY FOR THE CROWDS and in doing so, WE SOMETIMES CATER SO MUCH TO THEM WE LOSE OUR IDENTITY, OUR INTEGRITY, OUR FAITH. Yet, for so many of us, acceptance is like a shadow we chase after but never catch. We long to find solace, refuge, and security in some setting, whether a gang or in our family, but we are afraid of rejection, of rebuke, of ridicule.

WHY DO WE ACT THIS WAY? Because many of can't accept ourselves. There is something lacking in how we view ourselves, something that we are ashamed of, perhaps even despise. Something that causes us to cave into the

setting around us. So we allow both inside and outside forces to shape us. Inside we don't trust or value enough of who we are to have a resolve or conviction. Outside, we value the need for approval and often we don't even evaluate who is giving this "approval" and at "what cost." Who is to say that you diagnosed what they want or that they know what you want. We place our self-worth into the hands of others never asking if they know really what we need. The world ignores your design and desires and uses us for its selfish ends.

We stop being who God made us and start allowing a context or culture shape us. So, in order to be accepted, celebrated and praised, we pretend we are something we are NOT. Yet, silently we fear we will be exposed for the fraud we really are. This takes a lot of energy.

Young people today, whether you know it or not, you are on a journey for self-understanding and self-acceptance. At some point you got to be you. To come into agreement with God in the beauty, wonder and design of who you are.

Now I am not saying we don't need others. The truth is we do. **FRIENDS WHO LOVE US FOR WHO WE ARE AND WHAT GOD IS DOING IN US.** If they don't love us for that, then I question whether they are true friends. But too often our pursuit for another's approval that runs contrary to what God is trying to do in us.

Affirmation (self worth) is never something we should seek from others, but something we receive from God.

Which brings us to **THE SECOND AUDIENCE**. Not only are we to **NOT** display our religious gymnastics **BEFORE OTHER PEOPLE** to be accepted by them, there is a sense in which we are **NOT** even to do it for **OURSELVES**.

“Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”

Matthew 6:3

In essence Jesus is saying we are **NOT** to congratulate our self in our piety, **NOT** to pad ourselves on the back, **NOT** to base our faith on our good religious deeds. It is amazing how our acts of mercy and devotion can so easily turn into private trophies of self-accomplishment. We say, *“I am not doing this for others; there is no audience applauding at my good deeds, BUT INSIDE OUR HEART, WE KEEP REWINDING THE TAPE AND SHOWING OURSELVES TO BE THE HERO AND WE GIVE OURSELVES A STANDING OVATION.”* Of course, it is impossible to literally obey this command. We should always be conscience of what we do. Nevertheless, **WE ARE TOLD TO PERFORM THESE ACTS PRIVATELY SO MEN WON’T SEE AND WITH LITTLE MEMORY SO WE WON’T CONTINUALLY SEE**. Christian service is marked by **SELF-SACRIFICE** and **SELF-FORGETFULNESS** and **NOT SELF-CONGRATULATION**. We are not to be our own audience. (i.e. Bricks at Disneyland).

One exception:

In the home. Parents, do your children see you pray, serve the poor, fast? Spirituality is caught, never taught.

The Presence of God:

In a recently aired episode of "The X-Files," agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully are discussing a prison chaplain who claims that God speaks directly to him. When Mulder expresses skepticism that such a thing could ever happen, Scully asks, "Don't you think God can talk with people?" Mulder replies, "God is just a spectator. He only reads the box scores." How different is the biblical view of God!

"Give in secret. Then your Father, WHO SEES what is done in secret, will reward you."

Matthew 6:4

"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."

Matthew 6:6

"When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, WHO SEES what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew 6:17-18

As one early church father wrote: "God is over all things, under all things, outside all; within but not enclosed; without but not excluded; above but not raised up; below but not depressed; wholly above, presiding; wholly beneath, sustaining; wholly without, embracing; wholly within filling. Here is the Christian living in the world, but not catering to it. Consciously aware of God's presence and purposely making decision, going places, doing activities that include God.

A little boy wanted to go to the theatre and see a movie his mom did not like. Seeing this as an opportune moment to teach the child about the presence of God, the mother said, "Son, Jesus would not want you to go see that movie." To

which the boy responded, "Then He should stay home." How many of us, whether deliberately or unconsciously, tell Jesus to stay home? Don't come on this date. Don't come into this theatre. Don't go to this party. Stay home Jesus.

In doing so, we rob ourselves of one of the greatest richest of the Christian life - **THE BEAUTY OF WALKING WITH GOD HAVING HIM AS OUR AUDIENCE.** As J. Oswald Sanders says, "Peace is not the absence of trouble, but the presence of God."

Brother Lawrence, a 17th century soldier turned mystic, describes the Christian walk in this way. *"The most holy practice, the nearest to daily life, and the most essential for the spiritual life, is the practice of the presence of God, that is to find joy in his divine company and to make it a habit of life, speaking humbly and conversing lovingly with him at all times, every moment, without rule or restriction, above all at times of temptation, distress, dryness, and revulsion, and even of faithlessness and sin."*

Spiritual experiences in the Christian life is not a matter of finding God, nor are they a matter of waiting till God fairly screams, "Look, here I am!" Spiritual experiences surround us. We fall over them dozens of times a day. We can't avoid them if we try. **A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE IS SIMPLY A MATTER OF RECOGNIZING AND ACKNOWLEDGING OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD IN WHATEVER IS GOING ON IN OUR LIVES AT THE MOMENT.** God is involved in all we do and does not pop in and out of our lives. We live surrounded by God.

Conclusion:

Even Jesus needed affirmation from his father.

Be invited into the seat of honor...

Hug from Jesus story...Not hugs but applause...

CHOOSE

the road less traveled
studies in the sermon on the mount



*“So when you **GIVE** to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”*

- Matthew 6:2

*“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 men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”*

- Matthew 6:5

*“When you **FAST**, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”*

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- Matthew 6:5

“**WHEN YOU FAST**, do not look somber **as the HYPOCRITES do**, for they disfigure their faces **TO SHOW MEN** they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

- Matthew 6:16

DO NOT let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

- Matthew 6:3



*"Give in secret. Then your Father, **WHO SEES** what is done in secret, will reward you."*

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