**Small Group Sermon Study Guide**

Shedding False Stories: (5) I Find My Value in Your Positive Approval

 Matthew 6:1-21 3/25/12 **A.M.**

1) ***“Be careful*** *not to do your acts of righteousness before men to be seen by them” (v1)*

Jesus gives warnings precisely about those sins which are prevalent but very hard to

 Detect in ourselves. Look at *Young Adult Prefer Praise* on the quote sheet.

Is the desire for praise all bad? Is there a proper desire for praise?

What does Jesus teach about seeking praise in John 5:44?

 Look on the quote sheet at *“Signs that You Might be a Spiritual Show Off”.*

Did any of these signs surprise you or convict you? Which ones?

 How often do you examine your motives for “acts of righteousness”?

**2)** *“Pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret*

 *will reward you.” (v6, see also v4a, and v18)*

We often assume that because we need to be flashy to attract other peoples attention

 that we need to do the same with God. Is that true?

Fred Bruner says, “it is as if God the Father is blinded by dazzling, spectacular deeds and

 cannot see them, but when the deed is muted by privacy, God sees it.”

How can the truth “Your Father sees” help us relax about those times no one notices

 our acts of service?

**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 done in secret.” (v3-4a)*

These verses encourage us to keep our good deeds hidden from others, and also from

 ourselves.

 How do we hide our good works from ourselves? Is that even possible? See the

 comment by Dallas Willard *Service Absorbed in the Love of God.*

**4)** *“This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name”*

 *“*Hallowed be your name” means, “Come, impress me with your goodness and greatness so that

I am vividly aware of you as my main audience and seek to please you alone.”

 What does it mean to do your good deeds before an “Audience of One”?

 **Soul Training Exercise: Secret Service.** On the quote sheet take a look at James Bryan Smiths’

 suggestions about secret service. Resolve to do 5 intentional acts of secret service next week.

***Quote Sheet***

***Young Adults Prefer Praise***

According to a 2011 study reported in USA Today, “Sex, booze, or money just can’t compare with the jolt of self-esteem.” Brad Bushman, the lead author of the study said, “We looked at all the things college students love, and they love self-esteem more.”

 The researchers used two separate studies of 282 students in Ohio and New York that measured the students’ desire for a number of goals: receiving praise, engaging in sex, drinking alcohol, getting a paycheck, eating their favorite food, or seeing their best friend. The results pointed to one clear desire: university students wanted experiences that would help boost their self-esteem, such as receiving a compliment or getting a good grade.”

--Illustration from PreachingToday website, Sharon Jayson, USA Today article 1-10-11

***Signs of a Spiritual Show Off (Adapted from James Bryan Smith)***

If you immediately want to let others know about some honor you’ve received,

 *You might be a spiritual show off.*

If you actively keep others from knowing your weaknesses and failings,

 *You might be a spiritual show off.*

If you try to casually insert your accomplishments into conversations yet all the while you seek to

 Appear humble and talk modest, *you might be a spiritual show off.*

If you drop names in conversations to such an extent that all of your close friends are well aware

 of the famous people you have met, *you might be a spiritual show off.*

If you have never resisted sharing your acts of service so that you can’t even think of a moment

 You have done “secret service” *you might be a spiritual show off.*

If you are more concerned with how your kids perform in sports or music than whether

 they enjoy the activity and are giving their best effort *you might be a spiritual show off.*

If you blow up in anger or get very bitter when people forget to thank you or acknowledge your

 Service, *you might be a spiritual show off.*

--Adapted from James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Life, @52%.*

***Service Absorbed in the Love of God***

The kind of people who have been so transformed by their daily walk with God that good deeds naturally flow from their character are precisely the kind of people whose left hand would not notice what their right hand is doing---as, for example, when driving one’s own car or speaking one’s native language. What they do they do naturally, often automatically, simply because of what they *are* pervasively and internally. These are people who do not have to invest a lot of reflection in doing good for others. Their deeds are “in secret” no matter who is watching, for they are absorbed in love of God and in love of those around them. They hardly notice their own deed, and rarely remember it.

--Dallas Willard, ***The Divine Conspiracy,*** p192-193

***The Flesh Screams Against Hidden Service***

Nothing *disciplines* the inordinate desires of the flesh like service, and nothing *transforms* the desires of the flesh like serving in hiddenness. The flesh whines against service but screams against hidden service. It strains and pulls for honor and recognition.

--Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline,* 130

***Five Intentional Acts of Kindness Done in Secret***

In his book *The Good and Beautiful Life,* James Bryan Smith encourages readers to engage in the soul training exercise of “secret service.” Examples: Doing Laundry, filling someone’s car with gas, driving someone a place they need to go. “Listen, really listen, to someone.” “Offer to serve dinner at a homeless shelter.” “Help you kids with homework.” “Ask God to send you a person in need.” Smith says, “Go out and “give me five” this week, five intentional acts of kindness and sensible acts of beauty! However, there is another catch to this one: You must strive to do it in secret!”

--James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Life, @56%*