



Shaping the Heart

Spiritual Formation & the Christian Life

To Consider: A little girl cries out, "Daddy, Daddy! Watch this!" as she makes her first attempt at riding her bike without training wheels. She wants to know that her efforts are worthy of her father's attention. No one else's attention will do; it is her father's attention she longs for.

Secrecy

Secrecy intentionally dims the light on our own good qualities or good deeds in order to shine a bright light on God's. "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" **Mt 5:16.**

1. Secrecy frees us from the "approval game," which can quickly turn into the "fame game." The very moment we do things for the approval of others, no matter how seemingly selfless our acts may be, we lose the approval of God. Why? Because our motive is to bring glory and attention to ourselves, thus robbing God of what is rightfully his (see **Is 42:8**). Jesus warns "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven" (**Mt 6:1**).

*Note: Jesus did not say "beware of practicing your **un**righteousness before other people..." Why is it that the things we do in secret are not the things for which we seek approval from others?*

2. Read **Mt 6:1-6; 16-18**. Note the NIV renders **Mt 6:4** as "your Father, who sees **what is done** in secret" [Note: The ESV/NRSV ignore the definite article in the dative τῷ which modifies κρυπτῷ. Thus the NIV/NASB is likely a better rendering]. It's not that God secretly sees, but that God sees "what is done" in secret. The implication? What goes on in public may not be recognized and certainly not rewarded by God when motivated by self-adulation. Hence, the discipline of secrecy "enables us to place our public relations department entirely in the hands of God" (Dallas Willard).
3. Read **Pr 16:3; Mt 5:16; 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17; 3:23**. What do these passages say about our motivations and how could these texts help us avoid the "approval game?"
4. Read **Jn 7:1-9**. Jesus refused to be put on public display. Is it possible John is telling us that those who seek to elevate prominent leaders before the public do so because of unbelief (cf. **Jn. 7:5**)? Put differently, a sign of unbelief is when the limelight conceals or obscures what God may be doing secretly. Jesus's time had "not yet come." Of course, Jesus did go to Judea and eventually became prominent, but not in the way his brothers demanded or expected (**Jn 7:6-10**). The discipline of secrecy affords us the opportunity to see surprising and unexpected results.
5. Secrecy is the main ingredient for humility (**Jm 4:10; 1 Pt 5:6**). Without secrecy, it's impossible to be humble. Likewise, all those who are genuinely humble practice the discipline of secrecy.
6. Most importantly, *secrecy is a tacit yet wonderfully tangible expression of our deep and abiding trust in God.* Secrecy redirects all our attention to God as we trust him to be the sole provider for our needs and our longings.

Consider: Secrecy is not the same as privacy. Given the existence of an ever-present, all-knowing God, there are no acts done, no thoughts thought, no attitudes expressed, and no feelings felt that are exclusively in private! The attention of One and only One must be our focus in secrecy. And rest assured, an all-seeing, all-knowing God **never** takes his eyes off of you!



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Sacrifice

1. Sacrifice teaches us to forsake self-reliance and our own resources and to trust in God's ability to make us secure. Sacrifice is not merely "giving when it costs us something." Instead, it operates on a much deeper level. Sacrifice involves "spending" ourselves for the sake of God's kingdom. It's the intentional abandoning of whatever it is that makes us comfortable, including our very lives if necessary, for the purpose of advancing God's purposes in this world (**2 Cor 11:21b-29; Heb 12:2**).
2. Sacrifice may mean forfeiting everything we have, including our financial security (**Lk 19:8-10; 21:1-4; Philip 3:7-8**; see also **Deut 8:11-18**). At the very least it means giving from our resources, even though at times it may hurt to do so (**2 Sam 24:24; 2 Cor 8:3; Heb 13:16**).
3. Sacrifice may involve giving your time, your emotional well-being, your sleep, your career progression, or even temporarily compromising your family's well-being (**Lk 14:26**). It may mean giving up the security of a relationship (**Gen 22:9-10**).
4. Just as in the Old Testament, sacrifice and worship are closely related (**Ps 54:6; Heb 13:15**). Indeed, sacrifice is an expression of worship (**Rom 12:1**) and God expects us to offer our whole selves to him ("bodies" = our physical existence as a concrete expression of our entire being). Whenever we sacrifice, we are worshipping God and vice versa. Note **Rom 12:1** says it is "to God" that our sacrifice is directed. Thus, whenever our sacrifices are aiming at anyone/anything else but God, our "acts of righteousness" fail as authentic worship, and become mere religious posturing (see **Mk 7:11-13** for an example of "righteous" pretension).

*Often, sacrifice involves others (our children, our neighbors, friends, co-workers, church members). And yet the recipients of our sacrificial offering are secondary to the One who sees what is done in secret. God must be front and center in all sacrifice. It is God himself who is the primary recipient and it is he who accepts our sacrifice when offered in accordance with the discipline of secrecy and faith (see **Gen 4:3-8; Heb 11:4**).*