

The Practice of Secrecy



Word: Matthew 6:1-4

¹ “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. ² “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 others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you

“Humility, if we could ever grow into it, would not be a burden. It would be an immense gift. Humility is the freedom to stop trying to be what we’re not, or pretending to be what we’re not, and accepting our “appropriate smallness.” In Luther’s words, humility is the decision to “let God be God.”

—John Ortberg

A Life of Freedom: The Practice of Secrecy

True spiritual maturity sets us free from the bondage of “approval addiction.” It sets us free from the need to congratulate ourselves when we’ve gotten something right.

Approval addiction means we are motivated to impress others, to seek their applause and approval. It is the opposite of living as Jesus would live in our place. Acts done to impress

others are a form of pride and have no value as spiritual training. But by practicing the discipline of secrecy—doing good things for people but not saying anything about it—we can be released from bondage to approval addiction.

In his book *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster writes, “The grace of humility is worked into our lives through the Discipline of service... Nothing disciplines the inordinate desires of the flesh like

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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.” Foster clearly recognizes how greatly we struggle with pride and bondage to “approval

addiction.” He also recognizes how important it is for our hearts to be purified and changed by the practices of servanthood and secrecy. As much as we may be inclined to fight against these disciplines, they truly set us free.

Discussion:

1. Do you struggle with “approval addiction?” Think about the people by whose judgment you measure your success or failure: parent(s), teachers, neighbors, coworkers, boss, members of your peer group, etc. How much influence do they really wield over you?
2. Think about the people in your circle of influence. What opportunities do you have to practice doing “secret” things for them? (Give them a gift anonymously? Pray for them? Do a chore for them?)

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“Symptoms of Approval”

You can do this activity as a group or on your own: Carefully read through “Symptoms of Approval Addiction” and check any symptoms that describe you. Then write down what you intend to do about each problem area.

✓	SYMPTOMS OF APPROVAL ADDICTION	WHAT I INTEND TO DO
	I am often hurt when other people express less than glowing opinions about me.	
	I habitually compare myself to other people.	
	I am competitive in most ordinary situations.	
	I have a nagging sense I’m not important enough or special enough.	
	I envy someone else’s success.	
	I’m afraid someone will find out how much I worry about receiving approval.	
	My sense of self-esteem depends on whether someone notices how smart, attractive, successful, or _____ I am.	
	I find it difficult to love someone who expresses disapproval of me.	
	The opinions of others really affect me.	
	I measure my accomplishments against those of other people.	
	My concern for what others thinks inevitably leads me to shade the truth.	
	I resent the person whose approval I seek because too much of my wellbeing rests in his or her hands.	
	I am consumed by impression management. Much of what I say is to control how other people think of me.	