

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Ash Wednesday – February 18, 2026

"¹{Jesus said,} "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.⁵And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

- Matthew 6:1, 5-6 -

"Look at me! I did good, right?" When my kids were younger, they wanted to make sure their dad and I were watching them when they did something they were proud of. Maybe they had drawn a picture or learned to ride their bike without training wheels. Whatever it was, they always looked to my husband and me for praise and approval. Children need encouragement from their parents, so it's understandable. They're looking for an "atta boy" or "atta girl" to boost their esteem and encourage them to keep on doing a job well done.

As God's children, we find ourselves doing the same thing. At times, we are guilty of showing up at church, so that others will notice that we've come. We might want others to notice how faithful we are; we are good, little Christian boys and girls coming to worship our Father. And at times, we are guilty of praying in presence of others for the sole purpose that, once again, they'll notice our prayers and our faithfulness. Yes, we want a pat on the back, not only from our Christian brothers and sisters, but from our Heavenly Father. We want to make our Father proud.

But do you notice what Jesus says about this in Matthew, chapter 6? These verses come from Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*. Jesus says that if this is the motivation behind our praying and worshiping, then shame on us! We are doing it for the wrong reasons. We don't need to be praised, encouraged, or rewarded for our worship and prayer. In fact, Jesus says, we ought to go do so in secret. Why's that? Because what really matters is the relationship that is strengthened through our worship and prayer. No one else needs to see or hear how well we do (or how well we *don't* do.) The reward isn't in some sort of praise from others. Our reward is great—even greater than praise and encouragement. Our reward is in Heaven.

Our conversations with God, our worship of God, and our praise of God will strengthen the relationship with have with our Heavenly Father. And as we spend time in prayer and worship, we are reminded of God's promises and his greatest gifts to us: forgiveness of sin, life, salvation.