

Jesus On (7):

Spiritual Authenticity (Mt. 6:1-6, 16-18)

### Introduction

I've got a quiz for you.

How much do you think the average American woman spends on her appearance on an annual basis?

Groupon actually did a survey on this.

Things like makeup for their faces, gym membership for their weight or for toning, haircuts, moisturizers, anti-aging cream... just stuff related solely to appearance.

I'll give you three figures, and we'll see if you can guess the right one with a show of hands:<sup>i</sup>

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What the Average American Woman  
Spends on Appearance Annually

- A. \$1,756
- B. \$3,756
- C. \$5,756

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How many think the average American woman spends \$1,756?

How many think it's \$3,756?

How many think it's \$5,756?

Wow. You went high. Here's the answer:

It was \$3,756.

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#### What American Women Spend on Appearance

Monthly:           \$313  
 Annually:          \$3,756  
 Lifetime:          \$225,360

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Which is just over \$300 a month and nearly a quarter of a million over a lifetime.

That's a lot of money just for how you look.

Now, before you think I'm being sexist for singling out women, here's the rundown for men:

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#### What the Average American Man Spends on Appearance

Monthly:           \$244  
 Annually:          \$2,928  
 Lifetime:          \$175,680

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On average, we'll spend around \$250 a month, almost \$3,000 a year, and more than \$175,000 throughout our lifetime.

And in case you're curious, women tend to spend the most on their face - makeup, moisturizer - and men on their bodies through gym memberships and supplements.

Now, when you spend money so that you can look younger, better, prettier, handsomer, getting rid of some gray, covering up some wrinkles, it's usually pretty innocent.

I mean, obviously there's some vanity there, but mostly we're just trying to look our best.

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And it can even be good for us - like working on losing weight.

But when does concern about our appearance, covering up how we really look beneath the makeup, trying to put ourselves forward as something we're not, when does that cross a line and get toxic?

That's what we're getting into today as we continue working through the most famous message Jesus ever gave - the Sermon on the Mount.

By the way, in case you ever wondered why it's called that it's because the Bible says that when Jesus saw how a crowd had come out to hear Him, He went up on a mountainside, sat down and began to teach.

This week Jesus is going to talk about how we can do to our spiritual lives what we are sometimes very prone to doing with our personal lives.

So let's jump in.

### I. Acts of Righteousness

Here's how He starts:

*"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."* (Matthew 6:1, NIV)

Okay, let's stop there. This is His big, overarching principle. The big idea.

Don't do something that's good, that's spiritual, in a way that is meant to be seen.

That's trying to draw attention to yourself and what you did.

That tries to get people to applaud you or praise you.

If you do, you won't get any credit for it from God. Because you did it for show, you got all the credit you're going to get.

Here's how Eugene Peterson paraphrases this:

*"Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding."* (Matthew 6:1, Msg)

And that idea of theater is a really good one and important to explore.

Have you ever seen masks like these?

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These masks were known as comedy and tragedy in ancient Greece.

But there were actually all kinds of masks.

In ancient Greek theater, actors wore masks that represented their character. Since all actors back then were male, it also allowed a male to play a female. They would simply don a female mask.

Do you know what the word was, in Greek, for one of those actors?

The word was "hypocrite."

The mask would wrap entirely around the head, with narrow slits to see through and speak through.

The art of the actor was that, from the moment he put on his mask, his entire conduct on stage should reflect the role. He was immersed in it.

So a hypocrite was an actor.

Specifically, a person who speaks from behind a mask. Someone who pretends to be someone they are not.

Obviously, for acting, this is good. And the more you can immerse yourself in that mask, the better.

One of my favorite actors has taken this craft of being a "hypocrite" better than almost anybody.

Daniel Day Lewis is the only male actor who has won three Best Actor Academy Awards.

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And he does it by being a professional hypocrite - putting on the mask better than almost anyone.

For example, he learned to speak Czech for his role in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. He studied it until he was fluent.

When filming *My Left Foot*, where he played Irish writer and painter Christy Brown, he insisted on visiting restaurants in a wheelchair.

He prepared for his role in *The Last of the Mohicans* by learning to track and skin animals. He learned that art on his own.

He actually spent two nights in jail for *In the Name of the Father*.<sup>ii</sup>

He doesn't like to talk about what he does or how he does it, but other actors are fascinated by how and why he does it. But I dug around and found a short clip of one time he actually touched a bit on doing this:

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Daniel Day Lewis on Method Acting

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Db03GF8VP7c>

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That's a theatrical hypocrite.

What Jesus did - and in all of my research and studies I couldn't find anyone who had done this before - is that He took hold of this word and applied it to people who were spiritual actors.

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So a spiritual hypocrite is someone who goes through life as if they're on a stage wearing a mask.

They are playing a part. But it's not their true identity.

What they do spiritually is theater - it's make believe; as if they are on stage in front of an audience.

And they do it for the same reason an actor does - for the applause.

And Jesus hated it. He didn't hate the people, He hated *it*.

Let me give you a taste how exercised He got over this idea of spiritual hypocrisy. Just a couple of examples. He said:

*"Everything they do is for show... Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy - full of greed and self-indulgence."*  
(Matthew 23:5, 25, NLT)

Wait - He was just warming up. Here's another taste:

*"Hypocrites! ... You pretend to be holy, with all your long, public prayers in the streets, while you are evicting widows from their homes. Hypocrites! You are like beautiful mausoleums - full of dead men's bones, and of foulness and corruption. You try to look like saintly men, but underneath those pious robes of yours are hearts besmirched with every sort of hypocrisy and sin."* (Matthew 23:14; 27-28, LB)

## II. Giving

Well, after setting that big idea up, Jesus gives three very specific examples of the difference between authenticity and hypocrisy, beginning with giving.

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He says:

*"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. 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 in secret. Then your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."* (Matthew 6:2-4, NIV)

Here Jesus says there's a right way to give and a wrong way to give.

One is authentic, one is for show.

One gets the applause of heaven, one only gets the applause of men.

So what's the wrong way to give?

It's giving in a way that draws attention to yourself. That tries to let everyone know how generous you are.

I've known people - both in church settings and academic settings - who will not give unless a building is named after them, a plaque is hung on the wall about them, or bricks with their name on them on a path are prominently displayed.

That's what matters to them. Not the cause, but the credit.

But when all you care about is getting the credit, Jesus says that's all the credit you'll get.

That named building. That plaque on the wall. But there won't be anything hanging on the wall of heaven.

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Because you didn't do it for heaven.

But that's not all. It robs God of His honor; it robs God of His due.

Because here's the truth:

There's nothing that I have that has not been given to me.

Nothing.

My very next breath is a gift from God.

Whenever I hear someone say, "Oh I made all this money" I want to say to them, "You made nothing. I've made nothing."

There is nothing I have that didn't come to me through the ridiculous generosity of God.

So whatever I give isn't really even me giving - it's God giving. It's His resources that I have been given to manage that is doing the giving.

So to try and steer the whole thing toward me getting the recognition is crazy.

It's a God-thing, not a me-thing.

So what's the right way to give?

And Jesus makes it clear we are to give and to be generous.

Jesus says do it in a way that doesn't draw attention to yourself. Giving that is secret, private.

Which simply means giving that gives for the sake of giving, for the sake of generosity, not for the sake of notoriety or commendation.

Let's say you give to support your church here at Meck. You give through the weekly offering or you give online.

You do it out of gratitude and obedience. You whisper a prayer of thanksgiving to God when you do, thanking Him for everything He's given to you, everything He's trusted to you.

For you, giving is a privilege and a joy, even an act of worship.

But if you talk about how much you give, brag about how much you give, try to get preferential treatment because of how much you give, you've crossed the Jesus line.

You've gone from doing something for the applause of heaven to doing it for the applause of men.

But that's not the only way you can screw your giving up.

Let's say you know of someone in need. They are short on their rent, have a car repair bill they can't afford but they need their car to work, or had a medical emergency that left them with mounting bills.

You want to help. That's a good thing.

But do you want to do it because of the "thank you" you'll receive? The indebtedness they'll feel? The gratitude they'll have? Again, you're getting into the toxic side of this.

Jesus would say to just put some cash in an envelope with an anonymous note that says, "I love you" or "I'm praying for you" or "I thought this might help" or "God loves you."

And Jesus wants us to be generous. Now I get that sometimes there may be a situation when you have to write a check so they'll know who it's coming from.

You don't have to get paranoid if somehow they know it's you who helped.

Just don't go tell five other people what a wonderful thing you did. Just keep it between the two of you.

Here's a beautiful picture of giving. It comes from the ancient early church.

There was a group of Christians in Jerusalem who were facing enormous financial hardship.

So a group of Christians in another city, Macedonia, sent them some money even though they themselves were the poorest among the poor.

And Jerusalem was known as the more affluent church but they had fallen on hard times.

Here's how it was described:

*"Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity."*

*"For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do."* (II Corinthians 8:1-5, NLT)

Did you notice the spirit of that? Not a single name of an individual giver was mentioned. It was done purely for the joy and privilege of giving.

And to this day we read about it in the Bible. Because to this day God smiles on that kind of giving and marks it in heaven.

### III. Praying

Now on to the second example Jesus gave, which had the same point:

*"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. 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 6:5-6, NIV)

Again, just like with giving He says to it's good to pray - but again, just do it authentically. Don't do it for show.

There's nothing wrong with praying in public. What's wrong is doing it only because it's public.

Because you want people to hear you. Because you want people to see you praying.

And that's the only time you pray - when you're on stage for an audience.

Jesus says that's about all you're going to get out of that prayer - the attention you got when you prayed it.

So how should you pray?

In a way that doesn't draw attention to yourself, but instead focuses entirely on you paying attention to God. On your relationship with God. Your conversation with God.

Find a time, maybe early in the morning before everyone gets up. Find a chair, maybe looking out a window. Turn off the lights. Be totally alone with God. And pray in a way He will love to hear and respond to.

#### IV. Fasting

And then Jesus gave one more example - and again, with the same point:

*"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. But 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 6:16-18, NIV)

Do you see what He's doing here? He's saying, "Do you want the world reward or the BIG reward that God can give? If you want the big reward that God can give then give the way He wants you to, pray the way He wants you to, fast the way He wants you to."

It's fine to be motivated for God's blessing on your life and His smile and favor and His approval and affirmation.

But don't be so superficial in thinking that you need the world's reward or that you're getting some big payoff.

A quick word for you about fasting if you're not familiar with that.

Fasting is a very important and helpful spiritual discipline.

A spiritual fast is when you go without something - usually food - for a period of time in order to hone your senses for prayer and spiritual sensitivity.

Usually you fast with a reason - something you're praying over, like a decision. Or something you're praying for, like a friend who does not know Christ.

And when you fast, every time you consciously have to bypass what you're fasting from - and you can fast from food, going online, watching Netflix - you are reminded not only that you are fasting, but what it is you are fasting about.

And that prompts you to pray about it. It cultivates an ongoing prayer throughout the day.

It's a powerful, personal, private spiritual discipline.

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But here, Jesus is talking about people who, when they fast, want everybody to know they are fasting. That they are suffering for God.

They would even put ashes on their head.

But Jesus says don't even let people know you're fasting!

When He said to wash up and put oil on your head, back then that's what you did when you were gearing up for a party or a celebration like a wedding.

So His point was to go the opposite route. Don't give people a hint that you're going through deprivation.

So don't fast for attention.

#### V. To Be or to Be Seen

So do you see what Jesus is after here?

When you do anything at all related to your spiritual life, things that are designed to feed your relationship with God - things like giving, praying, fasting - BE AUTHENTIC.

Just ask yourself the gut-check question:

Am I doing this in order to *be* a certain kind of person, or to be *seen* as being a certain kind of person?

Really, that's the accountability you want to put on yourself.

Am I wanting to be this person, or to be seen as being this person?

And if you aren't seen, are you still wanting to do it?

If I'm wanting to be that person, then I'm not doing it for show.

It's not about wearing a mask.

It's not something on a stage.

It's actually about who I am when no one is looking.

It reminds me of something I read many years ago that has never left me.

I hate poetry with a passion, and this is a poem. But it doesn't read like a poem.

It was written by Ruth Harms Calkin.

It was simply called, "I Wonder."

Here's what she wrote:

"You know, Lord, how I serve You  
With great emotional fervor  
In the limelight.

"You know how eagerly I speak for You  
At a women's club.

"You know how I effervesce when I promote  
A [small] group.

"You know my genuine enthusiasm  
At a Bible study.

"But how would I react, I wonder

"If You pointed to a basin of water  
And asked me to wash the calloused feet  
Of a bent and wrinkled old woman

"Day after day  
Month after month

"In a room where nobody saw  
And nobody knew."<sup>iii</sup>

## VI. Self-Deception

None of us, I believe, want to be hypocrites.

Which raises a very subtle but important way this can play itself out in our lives.

It's not being a hypocrite to the world, but a hypocrite to ourselves - and we don't even know it.

What I mean is that we have a spiritual mask or two or three on, but instead of wearing it for the world, we're wearing it for the mirror.

The mask is what we think authentic spirituality is and when we look at the mask we think we're doing life with God.

We've reduced our spiritual live to things we do publicly, and think we're gaining traction in our inner world. And too often, we're not.

This is when coming to church and hearing someone pray, or joining with them while they pray, is what you've reduced your prayer life to.

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Participation in public prayer. Not being the one doing the praying but praying along with someone, so you think your prayer life is strong.

Worshiping through song or dance or film or any vehicle of the arts during a service is what you've reduced your worshiping life to.

That public act.

You pick the activity - serving on a team, participating in a small group - very good things. Very public things. But they are acts.

And if you're not careful, you can put on that activity as if it were a mask and pretty soon you think doing them as a Christ follower is what it means to be a Christ follower.

The mask becomes all that you have, all that you are.

You don't mean to be an actor. You're not wanting to be an actor. But so much of your faith has become a mask of activities.

Instead of a life of intimacy.

So ask yourself - if you are a Christ follower are you a public worshiper, or a private one, too?

Do you hear the Scriptures taught here alone, or are you digging into the Word on your own, too?

When was the last time you set aside a time, alone, to pray? Really, pray - just you and God?

So while it infuriated Jesus when people purposefully deceived others and did their religious acts for attention and acclaim,

... it broke His heart when well-intentioned people donned the same mask - not for the crowd, but mistakenly for the mirror - and reduced the vibrant relationship God wants with us to an outward chain of activities.

You believe in God, you are involved in some things related to God, but you don't know God. Not personally. Not relationally. Not from the inside out.

You do a lot of things that might flow FROM a relationship with God, but the relationship ITSELF isn't there.

Or at least being tended.

You've fallen into an inauthentic spirituality, and you don't even know it.

You're not a hypocrite - you're not doing it on purpose - but you're not real, either.

You aren't trying to deceive others, but could you have deceived yourself?

### Conclusion

None of us want to live a life with that verdict.

Jesus doesn't want us to, either.

So what's the real thing?

What is authentic spirituality all about?

It's not whether others see you pray; it's whether you pray yourself - alone - in private because you can't imagine not talking to your Father.

It's not about whether others see you give; it's whether you give, freely, because you are taken with how much has been given to you, and you are taken with what your giving can mean to the extension of the Kingdom of God.

It's not about whether people know you fast; it's whether there is a truly transforming presence in your life that has you more like Jesus now than you were a year ago.

And it's not all that you do - all these wonderful things that are helpful and good - but whether you are doing those things out of what is flowing out of you. In other words, things that come about because of what is going on inside of you.

These are really important things to wrestle with and important things to think about. Simply because there's a lot of ways you can put on a mask.

And Jesus says, "Oh, take it off. And just come be with Me. And let's just make it the two of us."

Let's stand for a closing prayer.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://nypost.com/2017/07/06/vanity-costs-american-women-nearly-a-quarter-of-a-million-dollars/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.thrillist.com/entertainment/nation/daniel-day-lewis-method-acting-stories#>

<sup>iii</sup>. Swindoll, *Improving Your Serve*, pp. 43-44.