

# Bible Class: The Spiritual Discipline of Secret Giving (60-Minute Study)

## Introduction (5 minutes)

This study explores Jesus's teaching on giving in secret from Matthew 6:1-4, examining how spiritual disciplines like secret giving both reveal our spiritual deficiencies and bolster our spiritual strength.

Central Thesis: Spiritual disciplines are intentional tests of our faith that reveal our addiction to approval and draw us closer to God by teaching us to sacrifice the praise of others for the pleasure of God.

Opening Question: How do you evaluate your spiritual well-being?

Nobody ever comes right up and asks: "How's your walk with the Lord? How's your relationship with God? Are you filled with the Holy Spirit?"

But do you ever stop and ask yourself that? How would you even go about evaluating it? On a scale from 1 to 10, how well are you doing spiritually?

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## I. Testing Reveals and Strengthens (10 minutes)

### A. Physical vs. Spiritual Well-Being

Evaluating physical well-being: Similar to evaluating spiritual well-being

The self-deception:

- Sitting on the couch watching Netflix, eating Cheetos
- You feel like your physical well-being is pretty good
- You think you're kind of in shape

But when you start to run:

- You realize your physical well-being isn't so great
- You can't catch your breath
- You realize you're not doing so great

The method: The way you evaluate physical well-being is testing

- When you're tested
- When you have to run, jog, lift something heavy
- When you have to do something hard
- Then you find out how well you're doing

### B. Testing Our Faith

The same is true spiritually: We evaluate our spiritual well-being through testing

Key Principle: Testing reveals our spiritual deficiencies and bolsters our spiritual strength

Sit with that for a second: Testing reveals our spiritual deficiencies AND bolsters our spiritual strength

### C. James on Testing

James 1: James talks about the testing of our faith

- He says to "count it all joy"
- Maturity comes through the testing of our faith
- The testing of our faith is a good thing

When our faith is tested:

- When we go through various trials
- We should consider it all joy
- Because it bolsters our spiritual strength

But it also: Reveals our spiritual deficiencies

- Just like running a mile would reveal physical deficiencies
- When we go through trying times, when our faith is tested
- It reveals our spiritual deficiencies

### D. Current Testing

Right now: As a country, world, community, church, families, individuals—our faith is being tested

No matter where you fall:

- Politically
- On this issue or that
- Chances are you've felt like your faith is being tested over the last few weeks/months

We can give thanks: That our faith is being tested

- Because we know it's bolstering our spiritual strength
- Making us stronger, more mature people

But it also reveals our spiritual deficiencies.

### E. Personal Deficiencies Revealed

Personal confession: "Over the last few weeks, this testing has revealed some of my spiritual deficiencies"

Examples:

- I'm not as patient as I should be

- This pandemic season has revealed my lack of patience
- It's revealed my addiction to the sense of control
- I like to feel like I'm in control
- I don't like the feeling of not being in control
- None of us have felt in control through this crisis
- We've all realized we're not

Collective deficiencies: If we're on social media or around other people, we recognize this crisis is revealing spiritual deficiencies in many of us:

- Anger
- Fear
- Bitterness
- Criticism
- Jealousy
- Saying and doing things that if we're not careful will break and destroy relationships

The dual effect: Crisis, trial, testing can:

- Strengthen and bolster our spiritual strength
- But also reveal our spiritual deficiencies

Discussion Question: What spiritual deficiencies has this current season of testing revealed in you?

## II. Intentional vs. Unintentional Testing (10 minutes)

### A. What We Do With Testing

The question: What are we going to do with this revelation?

The answer: We're going to have to:

- Learn during this period of testing what we need to work on
- Allow it to do its work

### B. Spiritual Disciplines as Intentional Testing

Here's something to realize: There are things we can do to intentionally test our faith

Unintentional testing: This crisis we're going through

- Came unexpectedly
- Came unintentionally
- None of us planned for it

- None of us wanted it
- It wasn't part of our plans
- But it came nonetheless

Your life will be full: Of these kinds of seasons—unintentional, unprovoked times of testing

But spiritual disciplines: Are a way of intentionally testing our faith

- A way of intentionally training our faith
- Like going for a run on purpose

### C. The Running Analogy

Unintentional test: If somebody were to chase me right now, that would be an unintentional testing of my physical well-being

Intentional test: If I were to choose to go on a run right now, it would be intentional training or testing of my physical well-being

That's how spiritual disciplines work: They're the intentional testing of our faith

### D. What Spiritual Disciplines Do

They do the same thing unintentional trials do:

- They reveal our spiritual deficiencies
- They bolster our spiritual strength

But be warned: When you practice these things (solitude, giving in secret, fasting, meditation—things from Matthew 6):

- They will reveal your spiritual deficiencies
- They'll reveal how much we are addicted to control, pleasure, and the approval of others
- But they will also help draw us closer to God

### E. Being Prepared

The principle: If I want to be prepared for somebody chasing me and being able to outrun them without getting winded, I have to intentionally test my physical well-being—go for a run

The application: If you want to go through crisis and hardship and come out stronger, then at times in your life you have to practice these spiritual disciplines

The opportunity: This period of crisis, trial, separation, distance—it's a great opportunity to practice spiritual disciplines that:

- Yes, reveal our spiritual deficiencies
- But also bolster our spiritual strength

The question: Are you ready to take the next step? To take some:

- Spiritual exercises
- Spiritual tests

- Spiritual trials
- Spiritual practices
- Spiritual disciplines

And be intentional about: Disciplining your faith, disciplining yourself for godliness

Discussion Question: What's the difference between unintentional testing (crisis) and intentional testing (spiritual disciplines)?

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### III. Understanding Sedaka: Practicing Righteousness (15 minutes)

#### A. The Text (Matthew 6:1)

Read together: "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."

#### B. An Interesting Phrase

"Practicing your righteousness": When's the last time you talked about this?

Most of us: Go through weeks, months, years, maybe our entire life without talking about "practicing your righteousness"

What does it even mean?

#### C. The Hebrew Context

Matthew wrote in Greek: But Matthew, Jesus, everyone to whom Jesus was talking in the Sermon on the Mount, and Matthew's original audience were all Jewish people

- They thought in Jewish terms
- They thought in Hebrew terms

The Complete Jewish Bible puts it: "Be careful not to parade your acts of sedaka"

Sedaka (סְדָקָה):

- A Hebrew word
- Fun to say: Sedaka
- An interesting word

Jesus says: Be careful not to parade or practice your righteousness or parade your acts of sedaka in front of people in order to be seen by them

#### D. What Sedaka Means

A Jewish rabbi's explanation: If you asked 1,000 Jewish people, 1,000 Hebrew speakers to translate this word into English:

- 500 would say charity

- 500 would say justice

The question: How could the same Hebrew word be translated as justice OR charity? In English, those words are very different!

## E. The \$100 Illustration

Scenario with Travis:

Justice: If I had a \$100 bill and Travis asked me for \$100

- If I owed Travis that money
- If I had borrowed it from him
- Giving it to him would be justice
- I would be doing what was right
- It's rightfully his
- It's fair and just for me to give it because he earned it, it belongs to him

Charity: If Travis asks me for \$100

- And I don't owe it to him
- But I give it to him anyway
- That's charity

In English: Something is either charity OR justice—it can't really be both

- If somebody works for something and gets what belongs to them = justice, fairness
- If somebody gets something that doesn't belong to them = charity

In Hebrew: They're one and the same—sedaka is both charity and justice

## F. How Can It Be Both?

The biblical way of thinking: If you realize what it means to be God's covenant people:

Nothing really belongs to you: Everything belongs to God

So when you give money to someone:

- It's God's money that you're giving anyway
- You are partnering with God
- That's what God's covenant people are supposed to do
- Covenant with God to be God's covenant partners in the world
- To make the world a more fair, more equitable place

When we give away money:

- We are doing justice
- We are doing righteousness

- We are doing charity
- All at the same time

For Jesus, the apostles, anyone with a biblical mindset: If I give Travis \$100:

- I haven't given Travis my money
- I've shared with Travis the money that God gave me to be a steward of
- Therefore, you can do both justice and charity

Sedaka: Practicing righteousness, doing fairness, doing justice, doing charity—all wrapped into one concept

Discussion Question: How does understanding that everything belongs to God change the way we think about giving?

## IV. The Danger in Doing Good (10 minutes)

### A. Jesus's Warning (Matthew 6:1)

"Be careful": Anytime Jesus says "be careful," realize there's an inherent danger

Jesus wouldn't tell you to be careful unless there was an inherent danger.

The danger: In doing sedaka, in practicing righteousness, in being charitable—you might do it for the wrong reasons

The specific danger: "Be careful that you don't do it in order to be seen by others, in order that you may be seen by them"

### B. The Pharisees' Example (Matthew 6:2)

Read together: "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward."

The Pharisees made a big show: Of doing sedaka, doing righteousness, doing justice

- Partnering with God to make the world a more equitable place
- Partnering with God to do what is right and fair
- Giving to the needy
- Distributing what God has given to those in need
- Lifting them up for better standing in the world

But Jesus says: That's not really their intention

- Their intention isn't really sedaka
- Their intention isn't really righteousness
- Their intention isn't really justice or fairness

Their real intention: To be praised by others

Look at what he says: "That they may be praised"—that's their intention

### C. The Critical Distinction

Their intention isn't: To practice righteousness

Their intention is: To be praised for practicing righteousness

Do you see the difference?

Their intention isn't:

- To practice righteousness
- To practice justice
- To practice fairness

Their intention is:

- To be seen practicing righteousness
- To be praised for it
- To be applauded for it
- To be appreciated for it

There's a vast difference between the two.

### D. Our Temptation

We have to stop and recognize: The temptation we have to do the same

Social media has made it even easier:

- To take credit for everything
- To raise our hand and say "Yes, I'm on God's side"
- "I'm a good person"
- "I'm doing good things"
- "I'm all about fairness and justice"

It's very easy: To want to be seen, praised, applauded for doing the right thing

### E. Important Clarifications

There's nothing wrong:

- In doing the right thing
- In being seen doing the right thing
- Nothing wrong in being seen for doing the right thing

But there IS something wrong:

- In doing it in order to be seen

- In order to have the credit

## F. The Turtle Joke

The story: A turtle wanted to get to the ocean (several miles away)

- Tied a string between the feet of two seagulls
- Clamped his jaws in the middle
- The seagulls lifted him and flew toward the ocean
- It was working really well
- Almost to the water when people on the sidewalk looked up
- They were amazed: "Wow, that's really impressive. I wonder whose idea that was."
- The turtle opened his mouth to say "It was my idea!"
- [Falls]

That's how we are: We have to take credit

- So often we take credit to our own demise

## G. The Real Target

The temptation: "Yeah, I know a few people like that"

- That turtle always taking credit
- People always taking Instagram photos of their good deeds
- People always posting and bragging

Wait: We're not talking about them. We're talking about ourselves.

The opportunity: To look in the mirror and realize:

- With every opportunity to do good
- With every opportunity to practice righteousness, fairness, justice, equity
- There is also an opportunity to do it for the wrong reasons

The Pharisees: Were doing some of the right things for the wrong reasons

- Their goal wasn't sedaka (righteousness, justice, fairness)
- Their goal was to be praised by others for doing righteousness

Discussion Question: How does social media make it easier to do good things for the wrong reasons (approval/praise)?

## V. The Spiritual Discipline: Giving in Secret (10 minutes)

### A. The Text (Matthew 6:3-4)

Read together: "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. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

## B. What the Spiritual Discipline Is

The spiritual discipline isn't just:

- Giving
- Serving
- Practicing righteousness

Jesus assumes: If you're God's covenant people, you're going to practice righteousness—that's a given

- You're going to do good
- You're going to seek to make the world more equitable
- You're going to give to the needy
- You're going to do those things

The spiritual discipline is: To do it in secret

- Do it anonymously
- Do it so secretly that your one hand doesn't know what the other hand is doing

That's the spiritual discipline:

- The spiritual discipline of secrecy
- The spiritual discipline of anonymity

## C. Public vs. Secret Good Works

Important clarification: This doesn't mean there's not a place for public good works

In Matthew 5: Jesus talked about:

- A city set on a hill (can't be hidden)
- A light that can't be hidden
- "Other people are going to see your good works and give credit to God who is in heaven, your Father who's in heaven"

So it's not saying: There's no time and place for public good works

But it IS saying: It's a spiritual discipline to:

- Practice secrecy
- Practice righteousness in secrecy
- Do good works, give to the needy secretly

## D. The Reward

"And your Father who sees in secret will... reward you"

There is great reward: In doing the right thing for the right reason

But every opportunity to do the right thing: Also comes with an opportunity to do the right thing for the wrong reason

When you do the right thing for the wrong reason: You've got your reward

- If you do good to be praised by people
- For the applause, appreciation, accolades
- When you do it for that reason, you get your reward
- That's your reward in and of itself

But Jesus says: "If you practice doing good secretly"

- So that you know you're doing this for the right reason
- You're doing what's right because it's right
- You're doing what's fair because it's fair
- You're doing what's just because it's just
- You're not doing it so other people will see you
- You're not doing it so other people will praise you
- You're not doing it so other people will applaud you
- You're doing it because it's the right thing to do

The only way you're ever going to know why you're doing it: Is to test yourself

- Test yourself by doing it in secret
- Doing it so nobody knows what you're doing
- Not even your other hand knows what you're doing

## E. What the Reward Is

Does he mean eternal reward?: Reward in the resurrection, reward in the age to come? Maybe, maybe that's part of it.

But there's a reward right now: A closer, better, stronger relationship with God

Jesus says: "Do this. Give secretly, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you"

The reward: When you do good secretly, you have this secret relationship with God

- God rewards you with a better, stronger, deeper relationship with Him

Discussion Question: What's the difference between doing the right thing and doing the right thing for the right reason?

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## VI. Sacrifice the Praise of Others for the Pleasure of God (5 minutes)

### A. The Core Principle

When we give secretly: We sacrifice the praise of others for the pleasure of God

That's what we're doing: Being intentional about sacrificing the praise of others

Why?: Because we know that the pleasure of God is better

- It's better to make God happy than to make people happy

The only way we're going to know: What reason are we doing this?

- Do it sometimes in secret
- Do it secretly, anonymously
- Intentionally sacrifice the praise of others for the pleasure of God

### B. This Week's Challenge

Do righteousness: Practice sedaka, fairness, justice

Give to the needy this week: And:

- Don't Instagram it
- Don't tweet it
- Don't put it on Facebook
- Don't drop it casually in a conversation with somebody
- Just do it secretly

When you have that urge:

- To put it on Instagram
- To tweet about it
- To Facebook it
- Recognize that urge for what it is: The desire for appreciation, applause, accolades, praise of people

Intentionally give it to God: Say, "Father, Your pleasure is worth far more to me than the praise of others"

### C. Imagine God's Response

Sacrifice the praise of others for the pleasure of God: By doing good secretly

Then imagine in your head: As you sacrifice the praise of others for the pleasure of God

- Imagine the Father saying to you: "Well done. Well done, good and faithful servant."
- Those words can echo in your heart

## D. The Shallow Addiction

It feels good for a minute: When somebody:

- Claps for you
- Appreciates you
- Praises you

But from personal experience: It's addicting and it's shallow

- When it's gone, you'd do anything to get it back

So we do good secretly: And we sacrifice the praise of others for the pleasure of God

We allow God to break our addiction:

- To the approval of people
- To the applause of people
- To the appreciation of people

Have you ever felt that way?: "Why aren't I being appreciated? Why doesn't anybody appreciate me? I've worked so hard and done so much."

We're addicted to it sometimes: When we do good in secret, it's an opportunity:

- To exercise our spirituality
- To exercise our faith
- To allow God to break the addiction we have to approval, applause, and appreciation of others
- To sacrifice those things for the pleasure of God
- To hear and embrace the words of our Father: "Well done, good and faithful servant"
- "You did the right thing for the right reason because you love Me and you're partnered with Me to do good in the world"
- "And that's reward enough"

That reward: That pleasure of our Father—now and eternal—is worth far more and lasts far longer than the applause of man

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## VII. Personal Practices with Collective Benefits (5 minutes)

### A. We're Still Connected

Just because we're distant: Doesn't mean we have to be disconnected

During this month: As we talk about spiritual disciplines:

- Our own personal walk with the Lord
- Our own personal faith

- Disciplining ourselves for godliness
- Exercising ourselves, exercising our faith

We need to realize: We're still connected to the body

## B. The Principle

Spiritual disciplines: Are personal practices with both individual and collective benefits

Think about that: Spiritual disciplines are personal practices with both individual AND collective benefits

## C. How It Works

When I discipline myself for godliness: And do the right thing for the right reason

When you discipline yourself for godliness: And do the right thing for the right reason

- Give secretly not for approval, praise, applause, appreciation of people
- But do good because you love God and want to be drawn closer to Him

When you do those things: It makes the whole body stronger

Just like your hand, arm, or legs: As one member of the body gets stronger, the whole body gets stronger

As you discipline yourself for godliness: The church gets stronger

- As I discipline myself
- As I study scriptures
- As you study scriptures
- As I give in secret
- As you give in secret
- It makes the whole body stronger

These spiritual disciplines: Are personal practices with both individual and collective benefits

So let's work on ourselves: Because as we work on ourselves, the whole body gets stronger

We're in this together: Just because we're distant doesn't mean we have to be disconnected

## Closing (5 minutes)

### A. Walking Through Together

Let's walk through this testing and crisis together: We can't do it alone

This testing, trial, crisis:

- Has revealed spiritual deficiencies in me
- Probably revealed spiritual deficiencies in you

- And guess what? That's okay
- That's part of the growth process

Jesus intends: For His whole family, His whole body, the entire community of His followers to build each other up in love

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## Discussion Questions (Choose 3-4 for your context)

1. How do you currently evaluate your spiritual well-being? What methods do you use?
  2. What spiritual deficiencies has recent testing (pandemic, crisis, etc.) revealed in you?
  3. How does understanding sedaka (righteousness/justice/charity as one concept rooted in stewardship) change the way you think about giving?
  4. Why is it so tempting to want credit for the good things we do? What does that reveal about us?
  5. Can you think of a time when you did something good specifically to be seen or praised? How did you feel afterward?
  6. What would it look like practically for you to give in secret this week?
  7. How does the idea that "spiritual disciplines are personal practices with collective benefits" motivate you?
  8. What's the difference between the temporary praise of people and the lasting pleasure of God?
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## Key Scriptures for Reference

- Matthew 6:1-4 - Giving in secret
  - Matthew 5:14-16 - Let your light shine (public good works that glorify God)
  - James 1:2-4 - Count it joy when you face trials
  - 1 Timothy 4:7-8 - "Discipline yourself for godliness"
  - Hebrews 12:11 - "Discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness"
  - 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 - The body of Christ working together
  - Proverbs 27:2 - "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth"
  - Matthew 25:21 - "Well done, good and faithful servant"
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## Summary: Core Truths to Remember

1. Testing reveals and strengthens - Trials expose deficiencies while building spiritual strength
2. Two types of testing - Unintentional (crisis) and intentional (spiritual disciplines)
3. Sedaka - Hebrew word meaning righteousness/justice/charity as stewardship of God's resources
4. The danger in doing good - We can do right things for wrong reasons (to be praised)
5. The spiritual discipline - Not just giving, but giving in secret
6. Test your motives - The only way to know why you're doing good is to do it secretly
7. Sacrifice praise for pleasure - Give up people's approval for God's pleasure
8. Break the addiction - Secret giving breaks our addiction to approval and applause
9. The better reward - Father's "well done" is worth more and lasts longer than human praise
10. Personal and collective - Individual spiritual disciplines strengthen the whole church body

The Bottom Line: Practice giving in secret this week. When you feel the urge to post, tell, or take credit—recognize that as addiction to approval. Sacrifice the praise of others for the pleasure of God. Do the right thing for the right reason. Let God's "well done" be reward enough. As you discipline yourself, the whole body gets stronger.