

## Jesus' House Rules – Lesson 4

### “Practicing Your Faith in Secret: Kingdom Devotion”

#### Summary

*Jesus teaches that true kingdom devotion is practiced in secret, not performed for applause. In Matthew 6:1–18, He reframes giving, praying, and fasting by exposing the danger of doing spiritual acts to be seen by others. Instead, He calls His followers into a hidden life with the Father—one marked by quiet generosity, private prayer, and purposeful fasting. The Father who “sees in secret” rewards not performance but intimacy, shaping hearts that desire Him more than recognition. Kingdom people cultivate spiritual disciplines not to impress anyone, but to deepen their relationship with the Father.*

#### Scripture

Matthew 6:1–18

### 1. Introduction

#### Opening Thought

In Week 4, Jesus shifts from kingdom relationships to kingdom devotion. He exposes a subtle danger: doing spiritual things to be seen by people rather than known by the Father. Jesus teaches that giving, praying, and fasting are not performances—they are practices of intimacy.

#### An Example of Kingdom Devotion: “The Widow’s Mite”

The parable of the widow’s mite (Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4) depicts Jesus watching people donate to the temple treasury. While rich religious men gave large sums, a poor widow donated two tiny coins, worth almost nothing. Jesus taught that she gave more than all others because she gave everything she had, whereas they gave out of surplus.

#### Key Aspects of the Story

- **True Generosity:** Jesus teaches that sacrifice, not the total amount, determines the value of a gift.
- **God's Perspective:** God sees the heart and sacrifices that humans often overlook, valuing total trust and devotion.
- **Systemic Critique:** Some interpretations suggest this story also critiques religious leaders for exploiting poor people, as the widow gave all her livelihood, leaving herself with nothing.
- **Context:** The story happened just before Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple, emphasizing that her heart was more valuable than the magnificent building.

This story is a classic lesson in sacrificial giving, emphasizing that true generosity is measured by what one keeps rather than what one gives.

## 2. The Father Sees in Secret

### The Danger of Performative Spirituality

- Jesus warns against practicing righteousness “to be seen by others.”
- The issue is not the disciplines themselves—but the motives behind them.
- Key idea: Kingdom devotion is relational, not performative.

### Three Spiritual Practices Jesus Reframes

#### Giving (vv. 1–4)

- Wrong motive: giving to be admired
- Right motive: giving to please the Father
- Result: unseen generosity that reflects God’s heart

*Kingdom truth: Generosity is worship, not self-promotion.*

#### Praying (vv. 5–15)

- Wrong motive: praying to be noticed
- Right motive: praying to be known by God
- Jesus gives the Lord’s Prayer as a pattern of kingdom priorities

*Kingdom truth: Prayer is communion, not performance.*

#### Fasting (vv. 16–18)

- Wrong motive: fasting to appear spiritual
- Right motive: fasting to seek God
- Jesus calls for joy, secrecy, and sincerity

*Kingdom truth: Fasting is hunger for God, not attention from people.*

### The Father’s Reward

Three times Jesus says, “Your Father... will reward you.” The reward is not applause—it is intimacy, formation, and deeper dependence on Him.

## 3. Practical Application

### A. Creating a Private Prayer Rhythm

- Set a daily time and place
- Use the Lord’s Prayer as a framework
- Keep it simple, honest, and consistent

*Example: 10 minutes each morning with Scripture, silence, and prayer.*

## **B. Practicing Generosity Without Recognition**

- Give anonymously when possible
- Look for needs quietly
- Practice spontaneous generosity

*Example: Paying for someone's groceries or sending a gift without signing your name.*

## **C. Fasting With Purpose**

- Choose a specific focus (clarity, repentance, intercession)
- Fast from food, media, or distractions
- Use hunger as a cue to pray

*Example: Fasting one meal a week to pray for a person or situation.*

## **4. Discussion Questions**

- Which spiritual practice—giving, praying, or fasting—do you tend to perform rather than practice?
- What does it mean to you that “the Father sees in secret”?
- How could you create a more consistent private prayer rhythm?
- What makes secret generosity difficult?
- What spiritual practice do you need to reclaim or deepen this week?

## **5. Closing Thoughts**

Kingdom devotion is not about impressing people—it's about intimacy with the Father. Jesus invites us into a hidden life with God where our motives are purified, our hearts are formed, and our faith becomes real. The secret place is where kingdom devotion grows.

### **Challenge for the Week**

Choose one private practice to deepen this week – pursuing intimacy, not visibility:

- Secret giving
- Secret prayer
- Secret fasting

## **Bonus Material**

### **“Maintain Family and Secret Devotion”**

In a standard church covenant, the phrase "maintain family and secret devotion" refers to the commitment of church members to practice regular, intentional spiritual disciplines outside of formal church services.

#### **Family Devotion**

This is a shared time for members of a household to worship together. It typically includes:

- Bible Reading: Reading and discussing scriptures collectively.
- Prayer: Praying as a group for the family's needs and specific requests.
- Worship: Singing hymns or songs of praise together.
- Spiritual Instruction: Taking opportunities to teach children and kindred about Christian principles.

#### **Secret Devotion**

Also known as "personal" or "private" devotion, this refers to an individual's private relationship with God. It is often based on Matthew 6:6, which encourages believers to "pray to your Father who is in the secret place". Key elements include:

- Privacy: Time spent alone, away from public view or external validation.
- Focus: A distraction-free environment to center on God.
- Practices: Personal prayer, meditation on scripture, confession, and self-examination.

#### **Why It Is "Maintained"?**

The use of the word "maintain" emphasizes consistency. The covenant recognizes that spiritual growth is not sustained by weekly church attendance alone; it requires a daily, habitual dependence on God through these private and domestic disciplines.