

Good morning, church. My name is Josh Patterson. I serve as one of the pastors here on staff. I'm eager to be with you this morning. I do want to just briefly tell you a story about a man named Harry Tibbals. Harry Tibbals moved his family from Louisiana to the thriving metropolis of Wylie, Texas, in the early 1960s. What you know of Wylie today as the kind of wide-awake town of Wylie is not what it was back then. It was a smaller, kind of one-horse type of town. He moved his family there, and he opened the Wylie Supermarket. I had the opportunity to get to know Harry Tibbals right around his eightieth birthday. I knew him for eight years before he went on to be with the Lord.

I got to know him through his granddaughter, who happens to be my wife. The one thing that stands out to me about Harry Tibbals is this simple fact: he walked in a quiet, godly generosity. Really what marked his life, the thing that stood out over and against everything else I knew about him in all the different environments I had to interact with him in, was that he lived a quiet, simple, godly, generous life. The interesting thing about Harry Tibbals is, more than any other person to this point in my life, he has impacted me spiritually around the area of generosity beyond anyone else.

The simple little things. There was nothing flashy about his life. He didn't get any crazy signing bonuses from the grocery store. There were no lucrative contracts. The same house he moved his family into in 1960 was the same house he passed in in 2006. It's the same little house he raised his four kids in, the same house that has the El Camino parked there even today. There was nothing flashy. There was nothing ostentatious about his life. There was nothing that, when you saw him, you went, "Man, that guy rolls deep." He was just a quiet, godly, generous saint.

When Natalie and I were engaged to be married, there were little, simple things like this: he kind of came alongside and said, "It would just bring such great joy to our hearts if we could just buy you this wedding dress." He would come alongside. Things like that. When I graduated from seminary, at my seminary party in 2006, which was quite a ball, we had just had our first little girl. She was just a couple of months old at this point, and Granddaddy came up to me at this little deal, and he said, "I'm so proud of you. Now you have a family, so I just wanted to give you this." He handed me a set of keys to a mini-van.

At that point I thought, "This is a little premature. It's just kind of the three of us. It's a minivan, and I'm working through all of these hard issues myself..." He had bought this minivan for Natalie's family when they started to grow and expand when she was in high school. Now he was taking this and going, "Your

family is starting to expand, so I'm going to give you this." He gave us the van, and the irony of it was that for, literally, the next nine months I drove the minivan to work while Natalie took the other car and had Lily in it. I thought, "This is not what Granddaddy had in mind here, and it's certainly not what I had in mind." I'm rolling deep with all my buddies in the minivan going to lunch, but we got that straightened out.

He was the kind of guy who, just about every time you were around him, you could just expect to see that little tear kind of well up in his eyes. He was in his twilight years, and he would just kind of give Natalie a hug and hand her a bill. He was just generous. Just quiet and generous. It brought him delight and joy. He was a man who was transformed by Christ, and that transformation of heart in his life so affected his life that the generosity of God toward him led him to be generous toward others. It was just profound.

I know as we're about to enter into a time where we're going to walk through a sermon based on generosity and giving, there could be a whole different host of emotions going on in this room. For some of you, now that we're about to turn and talk about giving and about to look at a text, this is the time you begin to fold your arms and lean back and think, "I knew it. This is what the church is all about. This is where they start asking for my money. I was just coming to hear some good preaching, and now they're going to start asking for my money."

Maybe you have some skeletons in your closet. I know the Church definitely does. There is no doubt the Church has abuse in terms of financial stewardship. Some of you have been affected by that, so any time this topic gets brought up, you just start to close off and start to get a little frustrated. For some of you, it might not be frustration or anger; it might be a bit of embarrassment. You want to be generous. There is that part of you in your life where you really long to be generous, but for one reason or another, you don't feel like you can, whether it's because life circumstances have taken a really tough turn and you simply don't have the finances.

It's just enough to meet the bills by the end of the month. Generosity is one of those things you long to do, but you just feel ashamed because you just can't get there. Maybe the embarrassment has more to do with some foolishness you have walked in. You have just saddled your life in debt through foolish consumer spending, so anytime giving and generosity and these types of issues get brought up there is this tinge of shame that kind of wells over you.

For others, it might be guilt. You're well-versed in the Scriptures. You understand what Christ has taught us and is teaching us even now. You know the call on your life and on my life is to be a generous people, and you just know you haven't been. You have taken what God has given to you, and you have pretty much spent it and used it for you. Even now, there is that sense of guilt that kind of begins to well up within you.

Let me say, I have no intention of addressing each one of those emotions this morning. I have no desire to walk through and pick apart each one, because the reality is they are so personal to you. I'm just going to go ahead and leave that up to what the Holy Spirit does best. I'm going to let what the Holy Spirit does in your heart and in my heart.

What I'm going to do is open up the text and see what Jesus has to say to us. I want to walk through the passage on the Sermon on the Mount. We're just going to continue the conversation and see where Jesus is taking us as he's talking about these kingdom practices. I'm going to pray and trust the Spirit will do what the Spirit will do. This morning we're going to be in Matthew, chapter 6. Let me pray.

Father, I do thank you for Harry Tibbals. I thank you for a man I got to meet near his eightieth birthday, a man who has impacted my life in a variety of ways. I thank you for what I have learned from him about generosity. God, I thank you for this text. I thank you that this text, in my own heart, took a turn I was not expecting. I thank you for that. I do pray this morning, God. I don't know where everybody is. I don't know what all the emotions are.

I don't know how this topic hits people, so I pray, Holy Spirit, you would do what only you can do. I pray you would move in hearts, that you would do the surgery you so personally and delicately do. If there needs a mending of hearts this morning, I pray you would do that. If there needs to be a cutting of hearts, then I pray you would do that. Holy Spirit, we trust you, so we just ask you would do these things. I pray you would move in a mighty and powerful way. I ask this in Christ's name, amen.

Like I said, we'll be in the book of Matthew, chapter 6. As you're turning there and getting ready for it, let me just refresh us a little bit on the book of Matthew. The interesting thing about this book is it's built around what are called *five key discourses*. There are these five key discourses in the book of Matthew where Jesus is giving a sermon. If you put these five key discourses together you literally have a manual on discipleship. You have a manual of what it looks like for a disciple to live and walk and be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the book of Matthew, you have more instructional ministry teaching from the lips of Jesus than anywhere else in all of Scripture.

The first of the five key discourses is known as the Sermon on the Mount. In the Sermon on the Mount, he launches out with the Beatitudes in chapter 5, verses 1 through 16, where he's going to say, "Blessed are..." Then he's going to take a turn right around verse 17 and all the way through the end of chapter 5. He's going to lay out these kingdom principles. He's going to lay out some kingdom principles and say, "This is what the kingdom is like." Then he's going to shift in chapter 6. In chapter 6, he's going to move from kingdom principles to kingdom practices. The whole overarching theme of the entire Sermon on the Mount is the authority of the message of the Messiah.

That is what the Sermon on the Mount is about. The Messiah has come onto the scene. He has made his way here, and he is pronouncing things about the kingdom and about himself with an authority like no other. Think of the text we see here. **"You have heard that it was said...but I say..."** Laced throughout this sermon, Jesus is demonstrating his authority. Not only is he the messenger, but he *is* the message. As he walks through these kingdom principles, think of where we've been. We've talked about anger. We've talked about lust.

We've talked about divorce. We've talked about remarriage. We've talked about oaths. We've talked about murder. We've talked about loving your enemies. Then it ends in chapter 5, verse 48. **"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."** He's going to move from these kingdom principles right down into kingdom practices, how this is fleshed out in your life and my life in daily living. How do we live out and flesh out the kingdom as we go? That's right where chapter 6 begins.

In verse 1, he's going to begin to talk about kingdom practices. He's going to highlight three kingdom practices known among the religious community of that time. He's going to talk about almsgiving, or giving to the poor. Then he's going to move into prayer. Then he's going to move into fasting. So in chapter 6, verses 1 to 18, he's going to tackle these kingdom practices. Look at what he does. Let's start reading in verse 1 of chapter 6.

"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. 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. 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."

Notice what he does right there in verse 1. He starts off and says, **"Beware..."** The idea of this verb, *beware*, means, "Hold your mind on the matter. Don't lose this. Keep this here. Lock in on this. Beware. Look intently. Take care." It's the idea of being watchful, noticing something. He's saying, "Hey! Look up. Church, beware, because something is coming you might not expect." I think of the verse, Proverbs 4:23, where it says, **"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the wellsprings of life."** The idea of keeping or guarding your heart is what Jesus has in mind here when he says, **"Beware..."**

The idea of a guard is someone who is on a post. They're on that post with this mission, that they are protecting, they are watchful, because there is an assumed opposition. "There is something assumed that is coming against, so you need to be on guard. You need to be mindful of this. Don't slip here. Don't fall

asleep here. Wake up, church! Beware." Think if you have a guard on a post. You think of the "Rent-A-Cop" variety security guard. What you *don't* want, if you're protecting something valuable, is that guy or that gal to spend most of their time updating their Facebook status. You don't want them most of the time checking their Twitter feed or looking up scores or playing Angry Birds.

What you want them doing in that is you want them up and alert and watchful and looking, because there is an assumed enemy. There is assumed opposition. There is assumed that there is something worth guarding. There is something valuable that you can't afford to be lulled asleep here, so he says, "Wake up! Wake up!" The question is... *What is he asking us to beware of?* What is he saying to us when he says, "Be mindful of this"? He goes on and says, **"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them..."**

Let me say it this way. Make sure your faith doesn't become a vehicle for your flesh. The verb here, *to be seen*, is where we get our word translated theatrical. It's theatrics. It's theatre. Make sure you're not practicing your righteousness in order to be seen as if you're on a stage displaying before everybody else who you think you are. It's more of a role you're playing rather than a heart that has truly been transformed and changed. It's this idea of a spectacular show or a display, and you have really played the part well. He says, **"Beware..."** Make sure your faith has not become a vehicle for your flesh.

What he is saying here is your faith can be deceived in such a way that your heart can take it and turn it and what you begin serving in the end are these little counterfeit gods, these little idols that well up in our hearts rather than the one, true, living God. He says, "Make sure you're not practicing your righteousness, that you're not living out this religious activity on this arena and this platform in order to be seen. Make sure your religious fervor isn't simply a different arena for you to flesh out your idols." That is terrifying. To me that is terrifying. Make sure your energies, make sure your focus, make sure what you're doing you are doing for the praise of the Father and not for the praise of others.

He's going to go on and say, **"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."** The idea is if you and I are caught up in our religious activity, but what is fueling that activity is a desire for accolades and attention and we're getting our worth and affirmation from others, if that is what is fueling us and propelling us and moving us forward, he says, "No reward. There is no reward there." The Father simply looks over at that point. He doesn't take note of this.

Listen to what D.A. Carson says. He says, "We human beings are a strange lot. We hear high moral injunctions and glimpse just a little the genuine beauty of holiness, and then prostitute the vision by dreaming about the way others would hold us in high esteem if we were like that. The demand for genuine

perfection loses itself in the lesser goal of external piety; the goal of pleasing the Father is traded for its pygmy cousin, the goal of pleasing men. It almost seems as if the greater the demand for holiness, the greater the opportunity for hypocrisy. That is why I suspect that the danger is potentially most serious among religious leaders."

Matthew 6:1 is a terrifying text. It's a text that, as he is calling us to great and grand things, as he's calling us to live out a vibrant, life-giving faith, he's saying, "Make sure, because when you do that what may happen is what is fueling you is not the glory of God but the glory of men." He's going to call that *hypocrisy*. He's going to say in verse 2 of chapter 6, this is what the hypocrites do when they sound the trumpet, when they let everybody know... "Hey, everybody watch! I'm about to get real spiritual right here."

They sound the trumpets, the beggars line the streets, and they come and fill their coffers with coins. They give and they give, and they seem so spiritual and so righteous. They get the applause of the beggar, but the Father looks past them. The idea of hypocrisy, there are really three different types. One type is the hypocrite who knows he is deceiving and is purposefully deceiving. Think of a scammer. Think of a con artist. Think of the guy who calls the house and says, "I work with Microsoft. There is something wrong with your computer. I need a few bits of information from you. I can help you fix that right away." The next thing you know your identity is gone, right?

Think of the people who even right now are scheming and conjuring up in their depraved minds ways they can take advantage of those affected by Hurricane Sandy. They're doing that right now. They're trying to find ways they can get money or get supplies. They're scamming and scheming. That's a level of hypocrisy that is wicked and debased, but it's not what Jesus has in mind here. There is a second level of hypocrisy. It's a hypocrisy where the man or the woman...*hypocrite* means actor or pretender or role player...is so consumed in playing their own role they actually think they have become the role they're playing.

They can't discern the difference between who they truly are and the role they're playing, so they walk around deluded and deceived, but the onlooker doesn't. The onlooker looks at that person and says, "What a fool!" It's the time you get in the car with your spouse or you leave somebody, and you've just been around somebody who is just really awkward. You just kind of go, "What a joke!" You almost feel sorry for them that they can't see they're so consumed in a role, but it is disingenuous. It comes across that way. That's not the hypocrisy Jesus has in mind here either.

There is a third kind of hypocrisy, and it's the kind of hypocrisy where the man or the woman is consumed in the role, and he is or she is deceived, and the onlooker is deceived. They are both deceived in thinking they are doing this for the glory of God, but actually what is fueling them and what is propelling and compelling them forward is the applause and the praise of men. It's self-deception at its greatest level. It's

when you are disastrously self-deceived and you can't tell and nobody else can tell, so the more you walk out in this self-deception, the more you receive the applause and the accolades of men when you think you're doing it for him, but really what is fueling you is the applause of man because you're gaining some aspect of worth.

You're gaining some aspect of identity. You feel loved and affirmed, and that's what you're longing for. The god you are serving is that ravenous, little, idolatrous god within you who wants more and more and more, so you serve and you go and your energies are this way because I'm trying to get something from you. As I get it, it only fuels the fire. It only feeds the monster. This snowball of self-deception just gains speed and momentum.

There was a doctor in the mid-1850s who was an obstetrician. His name was Ignaz Semmelweis. It's my best Hungarian translation. He worked at Vienna General Hospital in the mid-1850s where the mortality rate...get this...for women who were in labor giving birth in the maternity ward was 1 in 10. That's devastating. There was literally terror in the streets. No woman wanted to go to this hospital to give birth, because chances were you were not coming out alive. The interesting thing was the midwives who worked on a different floor had a mortality rate of 1 in 50.

Semmelweis went to study to figure out the differences between this floor and that floor. Why was there such a drastic difference? It's not that you wanted a 1 in 50 shot, but it was better than a 1 in 10 shot. In Vienna General Hospital he began to standardize everything. The procedures here were the same. The way in which they went about it here was the same. All of this was the same, and they couldn't figure it out. What was happening was the women would go into a fever and get what they called "childbed fever." They would die within a few short days.

Semmelweis went to another hospital to begin researching and was gone for four months. He came back to find that in his absence the mortality rate plummeted. Do you know what he started to see? Do you know who the problem was? Semmelweis. Here is what they didn't know. The reason the doctors had a 1 in 10 mortality rate versus the midwives who had a 1 in 50 is because, this being a research hospital, the doctors were doing research. Doctors were doing research on floor 2, which is where the cadavers were. They would do their research and then step up to another floor to perform surgery or assist in the birth of a child.

This was before the germ theory. There was no understanding at this point about germs, so they would leave the cadavers, not wash their hands or do anything like that, and perform the surgery. The women would get sick because there was a transfer of disease. Semmelweis was the problem; he couldn't see it. He was self-deceived. Think of the havoc he wreaked on lives unknowingly. A trusted doctor who came in

with what seemed to be good intent toward a patient, and the results were disastrous. Do you know what Semmelweis did?

He said, "Let's just start washing our hands." Do you know what they did to him? They kicked him out of the hospital. They were offended at his pride and ludicrous theories. His pride and his ludicrous theories eventually paved the way for Louis Pasteur to come up with the germ theory. His pride and his ludicrous theories eventually paved the way where they would wash their hands in a lime solution, and mortality rates began to fall. Think of how terrifying it is to be walking in a world where you are the issue and you can't see it.

Beware. He's saying there is a level of hypocrisy where you don't know you're the hypocrite. This is where the church comes in. This is where you and I need other eyes to begin to see for us. There is an old proverb that says, "The eye cannot see [the eye]." You need help. You need outside eyes looking in on your world, and I need outside eyes looking in on my world. I just spent this week, and what a great example in my life of other brothers and sisters having outside eyes looking in on me and helping me see where I cannot see. Is it painful? Absolutely, it's painful. Is it difficult? Yes.

Would I rather walk around self-deluded or walking in the light? I'll take the light every time. He says, **"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other[s]..."** You'd better beware. The interesting thing about reward is this. He says, **"...for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. 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."** Here is the interesting thing about the reward here. You get a reward. That's what is crazy.

There is a reward associated with the approval idol that is fueling you. As I move forward, motivated by the approval and the acclaim and the attention and the affection of others rather than the reward that comes from above, do you know what reward I get? I get whatever you give me. Whatever flutter happens in my heart, whatever little tinge of "Yes," whatever satisfaction I feel in my soul at that moment, that's my reward. It's a fleeting reward. It's a temporary reward. It's transient. It doesn't last. That little wolf in me wants more and more and more and more, but that is my reward.

It takes my giving and translates my giving, where the interesting and ironic thing is I'm not truly giving. I'm not giving anything. What I'm actually doing is buying. I'm not generous at all. I'm ravenous. I'm not giving; I'm buying, and what am I buying? I'm buying from you approval. What am I buying? I'm buying from you attention. What am I buying? I'm buying from you worth, because that is what I need. That which is fueling me forward, I'm shelling out whatever I can to get it. There is no generosity in my soul. It's all selfishness.

Sure, I might be giving finances, giving time, giving energy, giving all of these things, but the ironic twist of this is I'm not truly giving. I'm not actually generous; I'm ravenous, and I'm buying.

The text is saying, "Yes, you want it, you pay for it, you get it, and it's done, but buyer beware. That type of spending will eventually bankrupt your soul." Verse 1 was super interesting for me, but in verses 2 and 3 giving is assumed. Look at this. Verse 2: **"Thus, when you give to the needy..."** Verse 3: **"But when you give to the needy..."** Verse 4: **"...so that your giving..."** The idea here is not that Jesus isn't addressing giving; it's that giving is assumed for his people. He's already said in Matthew 5:48, **"Be perfect like your heavenly Father is perfect..."**

Be like your Father. You are in the family. You are taking after the characteristics and the traits and the attributes of the One who has brought you in, so you are to look like your Father. You are to look like Christ. You and I are to grow in our Christ-likeness. The reality is, as we look to our Father, we look to our God, we recognize he is a gracious, generous, giving God, and we will be like him. Our giving is motivated by looking at him and realizing, like Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9, **"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"** that he has not withheld any good thing from us.

In fact, he has given us the best thing, the best thing being his Son, Jesus, who he gave fully to us. He withheld no good thing from us. **"Every good and every perfect gift is from above...from the Father of lights..."** The very nature of our God is a generous, abundant, giving God, and the best gift he has given his people is the gift of his Son. In light of that, his people are now freely able to receive that gift and freely able to give because they've been freed from all these other little worthless gods and worthless idols, recognizing he is a generous and gracious God.

That then motivates us and compels us to move forward in our generosity. How can we, God's people and God's children, be a stingy people when we above all else have been given with great abundance the greatest gift there is? There are other verses that teach giving. In *these* verses, the giving is assumed: *when* you give, not *if* you give. Not if you think it's a good idea to give, but because you are pulled out, adopted in, grafted into this family, his children will be like this. His children will be noted by this. They will begin to look like their Father. They will begin to look like their Creator. They will begin to look like their God.

Their giving is an overflow of their adoption. Their giving is an overflow of their salvation. Their giving...our giving...is an overflow of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In verse 3 he says, **"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."** The idea here is that the heart intent in your giving is not motivated by the applause and the affection of others, but your giving is free of that in such a way that it's like your right hand doesn't quite know what your left hand is doing in your generosity.

Several years ago I asked our finance team to do a quick audit of our staff. I do this from time to time, really looking at the generosity of our staff. Are we giving regularly? Are we giving faithfully? I don't ask for amounts; I just ask for trends. It affords me the opportunity to do a couple of things. It affords me the opportunity to have a conversation if there seems to be some red flag here where some person is not giving regularly or there doesn't seem to be a faithful trend of giving. It gives us the opportunity to step in and have a conversation, because I firmly believe God's people are a giving people.

If we are to help lead and steward this church then we had better be a generous staff, but there might be reasons why one person is not. Maybe they are financially in a bind I'm not aware of that it would be helpful if I was aware of, or maybe their heart has become cold in a way that I also would like to be aware of. I remember sitting down with a staff member and having this conversation: "Help me understand this. I've seen no record of your giving, no trace of what seems to be regular, faithful giving." There was this moment of, "Oh, my gosh! Am I in trouble?"

I said, "I don't know. Help me." They said, "We've just been giving cash. We just read this text about not letting our left hand know what our right hand is doing, so we just have been giving cash. Is that okay?" "Yep. See you later." It was great. It was beautiful. It was encouraging. Think of this in your giving. There is this aspect of a secrecy to it. There is a quietness to it. There is not a, "Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to call my publicist and let my publicist know I'm about to give to Hurricane Sandy so everybody can see how generous I am."

It's the idea that I'm just going to be generous. I don't need the fanfare for it. You think of how tempting it is in you and in me to want the attention, to want the notice for that generosity. What Jesus is saying here is you want to walk in an element of forgetfulness where you're not knowing what is going on. It's the idea where on Twitter when the guy gets a compliment and he re-tweets his own compliment. Then he backlashes and says, "Hey, thanks." It just feels so self-serving in that. The irony is there are booths out there in the foyer right now. As I thought about this text, the idea of giving in secret...

You can walk out there in public, right? You can sign up and get some Compassion kids or help out some kids in communities and schools. The idea is not that you're in your closet doing things on your computer where nobody else will ever know about it. The idea is you are free from the applause and the acclaim of man. Some of you need to walk right by that table, because you know in your flesh you'll be so tempted to walk by and go, "Man, I'm going to adopt some more kids from Guatemala. I have 15, but the Lord has just been so good to me so I'm going to get some more. Man, isn't he good?"

You just need to go home, shut your mouth, and go adopt 15 more...and repent. It's interesting the little games we play, the little longing for that affirmation and attention where you want to receive that. You need to receive that. Think of this. Does this mean we shouldn't be an encouraging church? Does this mean we shouldn't affirm other people? Absolutely not. What this means is how I receive that affirmation can't begin to fuel my worth. My worth is rooted and grounded in the Crucified Son, the One who rose again and has given me the endowment of his Spirit. That is where my worth is tied into.

Can a brother or sister come and lift my arms up to help me fight this race? Absolutely. Do I need that? Yes, but can I live my life where I'm fishing for these things, longing and needing these things? Absolutely not. Does this giving in secret contradict the whole idea of a city being on a hill? You think of Matthew 5, 14 through 16, where it says, "We're going to be a city on a hill where everybody is going to look at us." Think about how the verse ends in verse 16 where he says, "**...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works...**" Are we in contradiction? No.

Because, "**...that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**" Starkly different. Radically different. Here Jesus is saying the reason you and I are doing these things at times is not for the glory of God but for the praise of men. We want to be a city on a hill that people are looking up to in such a way that they're looking even beyond us, and that we become a reflection that is moving beyond us and looking up to a God who is a gracious God, a God who is a giving God, a God who is a generous God. Listen to what Dietrich Bonhoeffer says. This is a quote quoting Bonhoeffer.

"According to Bonhoeffer, the hiddenness that should characterize the disciples' actions applies to the disciple. Disciples should 'keep on following Jesus, and should keep looking forward to him who is going before them, but not at themselves and what they are doing. The righteousness of the disciples is hidden from themselves.' Bonhoeffer suggests, therefore, that those who would follow Jesus can be characterized by a kind of 'forgetfulness.'

Following Jesus requires that we lose our overpowering sense of self. Such a loss often accompanies participation in any grand movement, but the kind of forgetfulness required to follow Jesus is different from those moments that are briefly exhilarating but soon lost. The forgetfulness that Jesus offers is made possible by the compelling reality and beauty of participation in his time, a time that cannot be lost, because it is God's time."

The idea here is that as I am following my Lord...the idea of a disciple is one who is a follower first...my eyes fixed on the author and perfecter of my faith, I'm not taking into account what it is I'm doing. I'm not going, "Man, isn't this great what I'm doing over here? Hey, look at me doing this religious activity over here! Check out what I'm doing right here!" What I'm doing is I'm simply lining my life up with the Lord,

and I'm following him, and that infuses in me this kind of spiritual forgetfulness that is healthy, a forgetfulness where I'm not taking note of every move I'm making, wondering if it's going to get me this or get me that.

All I want to do is be obedient to him. I want to look like him, live like him, love like him, and lay down my life like him. Where Matthew is going to take us in chapter 16 at the end of it (verses 24 through 27) is, "If you want to gain, you lose. If you want to live, you die." This is what Bonhoeffer has in mind when he says, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." This is the call of the disciple. There is a forgetfulness in your death as you're raised unto him and you walk and you follow him so that you're not feeding these little idols, but you're serving your God. As you follow and walk and lay down your life for him, your hands begin to open up. This is how the disciples walk. This is how the church is to be.

Listen to this quote from John Stott. "Generosity is not enough, however. Our Lord is concerned throughout this Sermon with motivation, with the hidden thoughts of the heart. In his exposition of the sixth and the seventh commandments he indicated that both murder and adultery can be committed in our hearts, unwarranted anger being a kind of heart-murder and lustful looks a kind of heart-adultery. In the matter of giving he has the same concern about secret thoughts. The question is not so much what the hand is doing (passing over some cash or a check) but what the heart is thinking while the hand is doing it. There are three possibilities. Either we are seeking the praise of men, or we preserve our anonymity but are quietly congratulating ourselves, or we are desirous of the approval of our divine Father alone."

Church, let me ask you some questions that have haunted my own heart this week in a good way. Are you more interested in righteousness or reputation? Are you more interested in living out your identity in Christ or projecting an image? Would you be content living a quiet, simple, godly, unknown life that brought glory and honor to the Father? Would that be enough? Would that be enough if you lived an obscure, unknown, quiet, faithful life? If you didn't receive a whole lot of accolades? If you didn't receive a whole lot of attention? If your heart was just satisfied with the eyes of the Father on you saying, "Well done"?

Are you more interested in righteousness or reputation? How many of your religious activities are motivated by the attention of others? How much of your religious fervor and religious energies, how much of your faith has become a vehicle for your flesh? Think about the ironic twist here. Think about the crazy twist here that the very thing that saves, the very people who were called into, the very opportunity for our faith to work out, our hearts are so deceitful. Our hearts can take a turn where we take this good thing, and we turn it on its head. We take this thing that is to be upward, and we pervert it and make it outward.

In what areas of your heart, in what areas of your life are you more concerned, more flirting with the approval and the attention of other people? What happens in you when you know you should be mentioned but you're failed to be mentioned? What happens when you get glossed over? What happens when nobody takes note of your great religious fervor or activity or deeds? In my own heart, I'm ashamed at what happens. The crazy thing about this week is I thought I was going in to prepare a message on giving, and the Lord just wrecked shop in my heart about these little approval idols, these little clamoring, ravenous wolves that are so within me.

The sobriety that has filled my heart for this church, for the leadership of this church. You don't think Matt gets approval? You don't think he gets acclaim and attention and "attaboys" all the time? Jesus is saying, "Hey! You'd better beware." You don't think Bleecker gets attention for his gifts? There is this aspect of approval and taking note of where you're celebrating and you're saying, "Praise the Lord for this," but man, are our hearts wicked and deceitful where we will take this and begin to own it and begin to long for it? You're going through your Twitter just kind of hoping for a mention, because that just does something.

All of a sudden, "We're a part of The Village Church. We're at the Village." All of a sudden that becomes something in you, some type of perversion of a good thing, where it becomes a little idol in your heart, where it becomes unhealthy, where it becomes something altogether different. It has become a really weighty text. Are you generous? Are you abundant in your giving? Would your checkbook reveal this? I know what you and I might say, but if you looked at your credit card statement, what would it say about your generosity? If you looked at your checkbook register, what would it say about your generosity?

Not do other people think you're generous, but what does your life actually look like? Is it mirroring the generosity of the Father? In 2006, Granddaddy Tibbals went to be with the Lord, and in true, fitting fashion, he always had a tear in his eye. I remember being in the hospital room as the family kind of gathered around him and sang hymns. He just wept and eventually went home to be with the Lord. At his funeral at First Baptist Church in Wylie, where he served for 40 years, his friend and pastor, who served there for 36 years, performed and officiated the services.

Brother Al Draper stood at the pulpit and began to talk about his friend, Harry Tibbals, and what I knew to be true about Harry Tibbals, I did not know the extent of it. Do you know who did? Al Draper did. He knew stories like this. The church is here, and right across the street is the supermarket. People would come to the church for benevolence. They had a system where they would give them vouchers to go over to the supermarket where they could trade in those vouchers for diapers and food and supplies for those in need. The supermarket was to give back the vouchers to be reimbursed.

For 36 years, Harry Tibbals never turned in a voucher. He just kept them quietly. I didn't know that. It's not like Granddaddy was saying that at the Thanksgiving table. "Do you know what I did over the last 36 years?" I mean, I found that out as I sat in the pew at his funeral. I found out he would quietly purchase little plots of land, thinking, "The Lord is growing our little community of faith here, and there might be a time when this church might need that property, so I'll just hold on to it." Scholarships in the schools. Scholarships in the church. I mean, in the receiving line after that funeral, family after family, person after person...

Over 1,000 people there for this 88-year-old man, and do you know what the overwhelming theme was? "Your granddaddy was generous." "Your granddaddy was gracious." "Your granddaddy was giving." Person after person after person. No Twitter feed expounding this. No publicist making this known. No Facebook page highlighting Harry Tibbals and Retha and their generosity. Just quiet, steadfast, simple, godly generosity. My hope for this church is that God would raise up thousands of us: cheerful, hilarious givers, that it would bring our hearts glad tidings to live like this. Let's pray to that end.

Father, I do thank you for the opportunity to open your Word. I thank you for the opportunity to, hopefully, be changed by it. I thank you for the opportunity this week, God, that you pressed in my own heart in some uncomfortable ways but some really, really good ways, some areas where I've just walked in some blindness, things I just can't see, so I thank you for the community of faith who loves me enough to come in and impress.

I pray, Holy Spirit, that you would move in here and you would begin to slay those little approval idols, those little counterfeit gods that well up within us that are not generous but ravenous. All they want is to consume, which that type of spending will eventually lead to bankruptcy of soul. Spirit, do what only you can do, we pray. We ask all of this in Christ's name, amen.