

**"Go!!!"**

**A Verse-by-Verse Study of the Book of Matthew**

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## **The Secrets of the Kingdom**

### **Matthew Chapter 6**

Some things need to be done in secret. Some things in the Christian life need to be just between you and your Lord. These things are special gifts from God – moments only you and He know about – and they will bring a spring to your step, a smile on your face, a sweet peace deep within you that bubbles up at the most unbelievable times.

I'm sold. What are they?

1. Giving.
2. Praying.
3. Forgiving.
4. Fasting.

You're going to love this chapter of Matthew!

First, I'd like to tell you a little story about the kingdom of heaven. An older gentleman at our church, Walter, had Parkinson's disease, and for quite a few months hadn't been able to sit comfortably in church. In his last couple of weeks, his body had just been shutting down on him. His stomach had stopped working, and it became obvious that he wasn't ever going to be able to eat again. The medical suggestion was that he would have a feeding tube inserted, which hopefully could deliver nutrients to his body, and bypass his stomach.

He decided, after much thought and prayer, that this was not what he wanted. He was ready to die, and his body was ready to die, so he declined the feeding tube. He wanted to be allowed to go home to be with the Lord. With family and friends by his side 24/7, he waited for a few days for the Lord to come and take him home.

Another man, Maury, in his 60's, was a public school educator, and also loved preaching, teaching, and singing on praise teams in his volunteer work in the family of God. He began to show symptoms of Alzheimer's disease,

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and for 10 years saw himself deteriorate, finishing his life on this earth in an Alzheimer's unit of a nursing home, no longer able to take care of himself. Near the end of his life, when he could still carry on a decent conversation, he loved to talk about the Lord, loved to talk about the Word of God, and loved to sing. In fact, in the nursing home, he sang to his fellow patients.

These two men of God knew each other, and were able to get together once, close to the end of Walter's life.

What followed was a picture of the kingdom of heaven. Maury, who has lost his sense of space, and could not get himself in or out of a room, was guided to the bedside of his friend, Walter, who was too weak to rise. And Maury sang to Walter. He sang loud and clear of the awesomeness of Jesus, and with tears running down both faces, two men nearing the end of their lives on earth still had the joy of the living in the kingdom which had only just begun for them both.

I know this might make you cry – it did me – but that isn't my goal in telling it to you. My goal is to show that there are secrets in the kingdom of heaven which catapult believers from tragic situations to a place of pure joy. Maury and Walter were not sad as they worshipped God together in a nursing home. They were full of joy. They knew the secrets.

## **1. Giving.**

*Matthew 6:1-4 "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."*

You'll notice here that the Lord expects us to give. He expects that we will be doing things for other people, and giving things to other people. He doesn't say "if you give"...or even "when you give". He just assumes that of

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course you will be giving – and then goes on to tell us a secret about giving. It's meant to be done in secret.

Sure there are times when someone else may know you are doing a charitable deed. You and your husband may decide together to help someone pay their utilities. Or the people that take care of the finances at your church will know that you give a gift every month to the church. Or the very person you are helping may know that it is you who is buying them that gift card to Walmart so that they can buy food.

So this isn't a "set-in-cement-don't-break-it-or-you're-in-trouble" rule .... It's just a simple, wonderful truth: Giving was meant to be done in secret as much as is possible – because it is so much fun to give and to have it just between you and Jesus.

One of the amazing rewards of giving in secret is that there is so much joy in doing it! I suppose there are other rewards, too, but the joy part is worth it all as far as I'm concerned.

When you were growing up, did you ever just sneak into a sibling's room, or your parents' room, and make their bed for them? When they saw that it had already been done, they were like: "Hey, who made my bed?", and it was so cool to keep quiet and let it be a mystery.

Well that's how fun giving is supposed to be for the rest of your life. You can still have that "excited little-kid" feeling every time you take something God has given you, and give it right back to Him.

The Bible has a lot to say about giving. Here are a few verses and the things they teach us about giving:

1. Romans 12:8 "...he who gives, with liberality".

**Dig deep. Don't be cautious in your giving. Give big.**

2. Luke 14:12-14 "...When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the

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maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

**It's not giving if you're going to be paid back.**

3. Nehemiah 8:10-12 "Then he said to them, 'Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, 'Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.' And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them".

I love the picture we get from this story in Nehemiah. The Jews are back in the land of Israel after 70 years of captivity in Babylon. They have begun to rebuild their temple, and the wall of safety around the city. They gather together for a time of worship, and for the first time in a very, very long time, they hear the Word of God read to them by Ezra. And they begin to weep. They have been away from God for so long. Away from His plan for them, away from group worship. They are feeling guilty, relieved, heartsick, forgiven, and simply overwhelmed. So they weep. Ezra tells them, "No! Do not weep! This is a day of rejoicing!" "Eat, drink, rejoice, and give!"

There were people in their midst who had no food to eat or drink to drink in order to rejoice together with them, so he tells them to give portions of what they have to their neighbors, so all can rejoice together.

**Give so we can all rejoice together.**

4. Matthew 25:35-36 "...for I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me."

**Give to others and you're Giving to Jesus**

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5. II Timothy 1:16 & 17 "The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me"

**Be Intentional. Seek out those Who Need.**

6. James 2:15&16 "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?"

**Kind words mean little if you send them away hungry.**

7. Proverbs 14:31 "He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy"

**Giving honors God.**

8. I John 3:16&17 "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

**Give because you have been given to.**

9. Deuteronomy 15:7-8 "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart not shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs."

**Give Willingly**

10. Job 31:15 "Did not He who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same One fashion us in the womb?" (also Proverbs 22:2)

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**Give because we are all made by the same God.**

11. Hebrews 13:2 "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels."

**Give because you never know....**

12. II Corinthians 9:7 "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver"

**Give hilariously!**

And most of all – don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Let it be something you do as secretly as you can, and then savor the pleasure of it between you and Jesus alone. So much fun!

## **2. Praying**

Matthew 6 is about the secret things we enjoy in this unseen Kingdom in the middle of this decaying earth. The things we enjoy are different than the things the world around us enjoys.

We enjoy giving.

And we enjoy praying.

*Matthew 6:5-6 "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."*

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Again, prayer is not for show. It's secret, private, and personal. If you are asked to pray in front of a group, of course it's all right – Jesus prayed publicly, too. Just make sure it's God you're talking to, and that you are genuinely talking to Him when you talk to Him...and that you care more about what He is thinking than what your public listeners are thinking.

But most of your prayer will not be in front of others. Most will be just you, going into your room, shutting your door, and talking to Jesus. Secretly.

You and I get to talk to God Himself – and He is there when we show up. He listens. He loves it. He answers. If you stop and think about the outrageousness of what you are doing, it might actually leave you a little afraid. I mean, the One Who made that tree outside my window is going to meet with me in a few minutes – I should probably comb my hair or freshen up my makeup...or something!

Sometimes do you just shoot up little prayers to God while you are driving? Or sometimes do you talk to Him about someone right after you have spent a few minutes with them? They are fresh on your mind, so you just talk to God about them. Or sometimes do you talk to him about your loved ones as you read scripture? You read something that reminds you of them, and you just mention their names to Him?

Isn't prayer just the best thing imaginable? There are so many things you can do in prayer: Ask questions. Praise. Cry. Share an experience. Confess. Forgive others. Submit. Hope. Trust. Mention your needs. Bring others. Remember. Repeat scripture. Ask for help. Soar to the heavens. Thank.

*Matthew 6: 7-8 "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him."*

I have to smile when I read the above verses, because the very thing the Lord tells us not to do in verses 7&8 is what we usually do with the Lord's Prayer, which follows in verses 9-13. He tells us not to use vain repetitions. Don't repeat it again and again and again until it finally loses its meaning. ☺

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We don't pray in order to tell God what we want and then ask Him to give it to us. He already knows what we want and need. We pray in order to find out what God wants, and then ask Him to make it happen.

*In this manner, therefore, pray:*

*Our Father in heaven,*

I know you are God. This isn't about me. It's about You.

*Hallowed be Your name,*

I admit you are Holy. Perfect. And I am not.

*Your kingdom come.*

I long for You to return. Your return is more important to me than anything I am about to ask for.

*Your will be done*

I want You to do what You want to do. I want to know Your will, not have You know mine.

*On earth as it is in heaven.*

The very same way You run things in heaven is the way I want You to run things here for me.

*Give us this day our daily bread.*

Please give me what I need today. And when I have what I need today, I know it's You Who is making it happen. Not me.

*And forgive us our debts,*

Thank you for forgiving me for what I have just done. Thank you for making it possible for me to approach You even when I have just failed you.

*As we forgive your debtors.*

How can I not forgive someone else when You have forgiven me?

*And do not lead us into temptation,*

I don't want to be tempted to not trust You.

*But deliver us from the evil one.*

I know suffering may come for me, but please keep me from it if possible.

*For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.*

You have all the power necessary to do everything. I love living in Your kingdom. I look forward to seeing Your glory.

*Amen."*

So be it. I agree with everything You are about to do.

This prayer isn't to be repeated mindlessly. We get to live it. Quietly, secretly, privately, all day, every day.

"Pray without ceasing" I Thessalonians 5:17.



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And as we do, we soar into the presence of Almighty God and see the world the way he sees it. This is so life-changing, that we can smile when there is absolutely no reason to.

### **3. Forgiving**

*Matthew 6:14&15 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

A little later on in Jesus' ministry, Peter will ask Him, "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

And what does Jesus answer him? 'No, Peter, not seven times. But seventy times seven times.' In other words, "To Infinity and Beyond".

Here is the next secret of the kingdom: We get to forgive people instead of being bitter against them. We get to forgive them instead of hating them. We get to forgive them instead of taking revenge. We don't have to suffer with bitterness and hatred and desire for revenge. Jesus enables us to forgive.

An example of the sweet experience you can have with forgiveness: You have been reading your Bible and suddenly you think of someone who in the past has hurt you badly. You have always pretty much hated that person – or at the very least you have always gone out of your way to walk around that person – because they were very wrong in what they did. It wasn't your fault – it was theirs – and you can't stand this person. Normally you would just try to put thoughts of this person out of your mind and get back to your Bible reading. But today you remember that Jesus forgave you for some pretty awful sins...and you also recall what you learned from Matthew 6:14&15 – that Jesus tells us forgiveness is a way of life in the kingdom of heaven. So you take a minute to ask Jesus to help you forgive this person you have disliked for so long...and...wow...it works – He helps you do it. You say quietly, privately, secretly, between you and Jesus – "I don't want to hurt this person back anymore. I want them to be blessed, just like I am blessed. My unforgiveness is over. "

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Writes, Reads, Prays

If you don't do that, then you put up a wall between yourself and Jesus – Who sacrificed His own life in order to forgive you. You are still a child of God, but there is a barrier between you and the One You long to pray to.

But - that barrier comes down the second you give up your unforgiveness and ask Jesus to help you forgive. Keep the forgiveness slate clean – it keeps your walk with the Lord fresh and new every minute. That's what the Lord means, I think, when He says: "...if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses".

## **4. Fasting**

*Matthew 6:16-18 "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."*

Now – fasting is most often associated with food and drink, but it can actually be abstaining from anything which you have every right to do,

but you've decided to deprive yourself of it in order to focus yourself more on the Lord.

The religious rulers of the day made sure that people knew they were fasting. They wore old clothes, went without washing their hair and faces, and generally made themselves look like they were suffering. They wanted people to know they were fasting, so that people would admire them for their religiosity. Or perhaps also so people would follow their example and be more religious themselves.

But Jesus couldn't be more clear. Giving, praying, forgiving, fasting.....all of these "religious" activities were not to be used to gain men's admiration. They were all things to do secretly – honoring God by not seeking the honor of men.

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Is fasting for today? I think so. If you don't know how, just experiment a little. Try skipping a meal and devoting the time to prayer. Or try leaving your favorite food out of your diet for a certain amount of time, and focusing on praying for a specific person every time you think of that food. Or try going without breakfast on Sunday – to keep your mind more on worshipping Him that morning.

"Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?" Isaiah 58:6-7

Or try turning off the TV for a week and volunteering at a Food Pantry. Or going without your car for a day because you loaned it to someone without a car. Or taking someone hungry with you to Starbucks and buying them a sandwich and a cup of coffee. Or giving the money you might spend on shoes to someone who has no shoes.

Just experiment. Use your fasting to enter the presence of God and learn of Him. Keep it simple. There's no hard and fast rules except this: when you fast, just do it. Don't advertise it.

"Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say 'Here I am!'..." Isaiah 58: 8-9a

Great secret!

Four Secrets of the Kingdom: Give, Pray, Forgive, Fast. So....

*Matthew 6:19-21 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroys and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."*

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This speaks for itself, doesn't it? Do the secret things. The things between you and God alone...and you are laying up treasures in heaven. And let the treasures of this earth fall uselessly behind you as you walk forward in the kingdom of heaven.

*Matthew 6:22&23 "The lamp of the body is the eye. If, therefore, your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"*

Your "eye" is the part of you that determines how much truth you are welcoming into your life. If your "eye" is good, your whole life is flooded with truth. If your "eye" is bad, your whole life is flooded with lies and confusion.

How much truth are you welcoming into your life right now?

Your "eye" is good if you are responding to God. And if your "eye" is good, you are going to desire the right kind of treasure – the kind that lasts. If your "eye" is bad, you're probably not going to even understand what this chapter has said. It won't make sense. Your whole ability to "get" these verses is based on your "eye". So....again...how much truth are you welcoming into your life right now?

Give yourself a little test. Read the rest of the verses in this chapter, and while you read and think about them, don't ask "How could I possibly do this?".... just ask yourself: "Do I want this for my life?"

*Matthew 6:25-34 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?"*

*"So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so*

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*clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?*

*"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."*

If you don't want this for your life, your whole life is full of darkness. Ask the Lord to give you a new "eye".

If you do want this for your life, seek it. Concentrate on doing the secret things of the kingdom. Give. Pray. Forgive. Fast.

### **Questions for Your Personal Use:**

*These aren't for the whole world to know,  
So just answer these questions for yourself:*

1. When was the last time you gave to someone in need?
2. Do you give every week or every month to your church?
3. Is there someone you know of right now who needs something you can supply?
4. Is giving a joy to you, or a burden?
5. How big is prayer in your life?

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6. How could you make it bigger?
7. Who do you need to forgive?
8. Will you be experimenting with fasting this next year?