



# Social Media and the Sermon on the Mount

**Theme:** "Wherever you are, be all there."

**Bible Reading:** Matthew 6:6

**Starting Questions:** Do you often distract yourself? Do you usually demand attention that you do not usually offer being in social media?

## **Matthew 6:6**

"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

## **Reflection Reading**

Imagine for a second that you are at the Galilean hillside with 150 others. It's a hot and dry day with a blazing Middle Eastern sun. Up ahead you see a slightly more organized body of people, apparently listening to a preacher. You reach the crowd and realize that this is not just any sermon. The man in the center is Jesus, and he is talking about the poor in spirit and the need for compassion.

Unfortunately, you and a few others in the crowd are doing what often happens when someone at the front of the room is speaking: You're only half-listening. Jesus has one ear while social media has the other.

You send out a tweet that says, "I'm here at the #sermononthemount for epic speech by @Jesus. Peace out!"

The lady next to you is updating her Pinterest page with a photo of Peter the Apostle's satchel while the pre-teens next to her are sharing a photo of the crowd via Instagram. Joe, who is always thinking of career advancement, updates his LinkedIn profile to include the continuing education credits received from being present at the Sermon on the Mount. A GTD (Getting Things Done) productivity enthusiast one row over from you punches in several new to-do items in his iPhone so as to adequately follow up from today's event.

Sound absurd? Not so much when you consider how most people allocate their attention in today's hectic world. Most of us give partial attention to people and events while social media tug at us, hinting that we ought to be constantly updating our Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn accounts.

In light of the recent election of Pope Francis, during which cell phones were forbidden to cardinals throughout the process, more companies are banning cell phones during meetings altogether. I can only imagine how Jesus would feel, giving arguably his most important speech, only to see a man in the back of the crowd glancing down at an incoming text.

Now fast track to 2013, when meeting facilitators are continually given only partial attention from attendees who are constantly updating their smartphones.

Social media, as valuable as they are, become a detriment to our faith when they leak into our spiritual lives. If you find the Bible boring and can't sit in silence (without a glowing screen in front of you) for five minutes at a time, you might be too plugged in. There is another, more subtle indicator that your spiritual life is being negatively impacted by social media: if you are tempted to broadcast every spiritual moment and insight. Take a breath and slow things down.

Let's remember that Jesus taught about moderation, privacy and the spiritual life way back when. In Matthew 6:6 he says, "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Some moments with God are best left unpublished, savored only by the heart.

If you're reading this, it's safe to assume that you weren't present for the original Sermon on the Mount. Still, each of us has a less glamorous event in everyday life to which we must give our full attention. The stay at home mom can give total devotion to a toddler in need. The C-suite executive can give focused attention to a strategy session that will chart the course for the company's next quarter. The maintenance man can clean a space with the intention of an artist.

Work, meaningful work, is like that. It requires us to be fully present and then good things follow. As missionary Jim Elliot (1927-1956) famously said, "Wherever you are, be all there."

### **Dynamic Reflection**

1. How do you understand the passage in Matthew 6: 6 as an emphasis on concentration?
2. How much do you care about your social reputation? Why?
3. How can you improve care in your family, work, and friendships?

### **Application**

1. How your mindset and actions changed after reflecting on this.

2. What can you do to practice this teaching in your work.