

## PRACTICING PIETY WITH AMY-JILL LEVINE

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### Some Definitions and Comments/Scripture to Consider:

“If [a pious] practice is based on justice, that’s fine; if it’s based on self-interest, ‘in order to be seen by others, then it’s not ... When motive and action work in harmony, when the head is aligned with the heart, then we are moving toward that goal of ‘completion’ or ‘perfection.’”

-AJ Levine

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

Matthew 6:1

**Piety** - *“Our expressions of our religious commitments. To be a Disciple means less about believing in a set of propositions and more about acting upon God’s word as interpreted by Jesus”* - AJL

- The quality or state of being pious
  - fidelity to natural obligations
  - dutifulness in religion: DEVOUTNESS
- A conventional belief or standard

#### **Pious:**

- Marked by or showing reverence for deity and devotion to divine worship
- Sacred or devotional as distinct from the profane or secular : RELIGIOUS
- Showing loyal reverence for a person or thing : DUTIFUL

#### **Salt of the Earth:**

- A very good and honest person or group of people

#### **Contrast:**

- Juxtaposition of dissimilar elements (such as color, tone, or emotion) in a work of art
- The difference or degree of difference between things having similar or comparable natures
  - Comparison of similar objects to set off their dissimilar qualities
  - the state of being so compared

- A person or thing that exhibits differences when compared with another

***Almsgiving:***

- The giving of necessities, especially money, to the needy
- **“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you”**

***Praying*** - **“All conversations with God are a form of prayer. Prayer is a matter not only of the heart but also of the body”** - AJL

- An address (such as a petition) to God, or a god, in word or thought
- A set order of words used in praying
- An earnest request or wish
- The act or practice of praying to God or a god
- **“When you are praying, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret”**

***Fasting***

- To abstain from food
- To eat sparingly or abstain from some foods
- **Whenever you fast, do not look dismal.”**

## A Little More Information from *Sermon on the Mount*

### ***“You are the salt of the earth”***

- A fact, not a command.
- The Disciples, whom Jesus labels “The salt of the earth,” have become:
  - What is necessary for life
  - What is good in the world
  - What is valuable
  - What is simple
- Salt does its work by NOT calling attention to itself, but by brightening and making more alive everything it permeates.
- The Disciples natures have changed – they have become salt, they *are* motivation.

### ***“You are the light of the world”***

- Light is necessary for life.
- Light does not call attention to itself – it lights up the world.
- As light, the Disciples are to shine so that others can find their way.
- Light cannot be restricted to the church or any one community.

Any faith that does not manifest itself in works is not faith; it is complacency and self-satisfaction. It is not salt because it contributes nothing. It is not light because it shines only for self-reflection. The action of the disciple should be light and salt to the earth and the world, not just to those inside their own houses.

### ***Perfection***

- **“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”** – Matthew 5:48
- God is not telling us to *be* God, but God sets the standard for us.
- The Greek *teleios* (be perfect) is from *telos* – “complete.” The Hebrew reads *Shalem*, a cognate of *shalom*, Hebrew for “peace.”
- To be perfect or complete is a goal/part of a process. We won’t get there in this life but that’s alright. We just need to continue on the path to the Kingdom toward being complete and at peace.

### ***Practicing to be seen***

- “Piety” is the NRSV translation of the Greek *dikaiosynē* (righteousness or justice).
- Righteousness is never to be displayed for personal aggrandizement.
- The Disciples’ righteousness is to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees – a high bar.

- The Disciples are to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness – they are to have a foot in the Kingdom of Heaven
- Quandary: how do we do acts of justice and righteousness without being seen? If it is for justice, that is fine. If it is for self-interest, it is not.

### **Almsgiving**

- Charitable giving can definitely be the wrong kind of piety – often done to be seen.
- Hebrew word for righteousness and almsgiving come from the same root and the Hebrew for righteousness translates into Greek as *dikaiosynē* (righteousness or justice)!
- We should not need or even desire public recognition for our gifts.
- Maimonides' levels of giving
  - Unwillingly
  - Willingly but inadequately
  - Only after being asked
  - Giving before being asked
  - Anonymously but beneficiary know our identity
  - Benefactor but know recipient but recipient doesn't know benefactor
  - Benefactor and recipient don't know each other
  - Offer a financial base so that the person in poverty will no longer require charity
- Giving requires a concern for dignity.
- The one who gives today may be in need tomorrow.
- Everyone has *something* to give.
- We don't act because we expect a reward from God – we act as God acts.

### **Praying**

- Can be praise, lament, demand or accusation.
- "WHY?" is not disbelief – it is our resistance to chaos.
- Should be focused on God, not the one praying - no showing off.
- God knows our needs: when we can't find words, we can use Psalms or silence.
- Jesus says to pray personal prayers in a way that does not call attention to them.
- Do not heap up empty phrases meant to manipulate God.
- Consider moving lips in prayer in remembrance that prayer is a matter of heart *and* body