



2: God's in the Disciplines | Pastor Matt Clark | January 3, 2010

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

Introduction:

Our mission here at Life Center is about helping each of us grow into whole hearted followers of Christ. And that's a journey, not an event; this faith journey we're each on with Jesus is really about trust. If you look at any relationship you have, whether its marriage, kids, work, friends, school, at the heart of those relationships is trust. As we look at those relationships we have to ask the question "do I trust that person". Faith is about trust and confidence. The more we trust in Jesus, not just believe but have an ongoing day to day trust in Him, our relationship will grow. So the question is how do we grow that trust? How do we have big faith? This series is about answering that question. Each week we're talking about things that will help us grow our faith and move us toward being wholehearted followers of Jesus. Today, we're focusing on discipline. Disciplines are those "things we are supposed to do." Few things that require hard work or sacrifice are totally enjoyable in the beginning. What's interesting about discipline is it always results in progress and practiced disciplines end up being a lifestyle. In Matthew 6, Jesus taught three spiritual disciplines that will help us grow our trust and give us big faith as we journey with Him.

1. **When you give.** [Read **Matthew: 6:1-4** together now.]

Jesus is assuming that we will give. He says "when you give", not "if you give". And then he says when you give don't do it out loud, don't make a big deal about it, don't announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets. Make these disciplines, private acts of righteousness. When the Jews would go to the temple there would be people lined up who were sick, disabled or just in need, and they would ask for alms, and for gifts. Jesus says when you give don't announce it, don't sound the siren, do it privately. This is countercultural; we live in a culture that wants immediate benefits and rewards. For us to give and help in secret, goes against the flow of our culture. There are times when God uses other people to encourage us and this type of reward is good. But too often we only focus on the rewards and recognition from man. Jesus is saying there is a reward connected with generosity. This passage has to do with our trust in God more than anything else. It's really not about our money, and it's really not about the needy either. It's about our heart and attitude. The audience Jesus was talking to here in Matthew 6 was already giving 15-30%. Jesus was challenging a crowd who already gave a lot, and His challenge was about trusting God with everything. Giving isn't about our money; it's about our trust and confidence in God. He doesn't need our money. He's interested in growing our faith. Our spiritual maturity is often measured by our personal and private generosity. God promises to reward us. In **2 Corinthians 9:7**, Paul explains that *"each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."* Just be faithful, God will reward you and that discipline can become a passion.

2. **When you pray.** [Read **Matthew 6:5-15** together now.]

Jesus says, "When you pray". Not if, but when. Jesus is saying there's a time when you go into your room, close the door and be still before me. There's a time and a place to stop and pause before God. It's easy for us to say "God you don't know how busy I am". And we throw our prayers at Him on the run, and wonder why we miss Him so often. When Jesus talks about prayer here in **Matthew 6**, He's asking us to slow down; He wants some of our time and our focused attention. It's really about surrender. Jesus knows that our time and money are

important to us. He knows the things that are a priority in our life, will take our time and money. What Jesus is saying here is that if you really want to grow your relationship with me, you'll have to give me a portion of your time and money. It is honoring to God when we take some time out of our busy day and devote it to Him. He sees when we stop to connect with Him out love and relationship. Committing to a daily devotional time with Jesus communicates our dependency on Him. It's a trust and surrender issue. Joe often talks about PBJ, prayer, bible study and journaling. January is a great time to reestablish this discipline. Remember you might have to gut it out at first but be faithful and God will reward you.

3. When you fast. [Read **Matthew 6:16-18** together now.]

Biblical fasting is voluntarily giving up food, for the purpose of focusing on our spiritual life. This concept is very countercultural. We don't talk a lot about this, but it's important to Jesus because He says, "When you fast..." not IF you fast. Jesus assumes a life of faith involves fasting. Here are 4 reasons why we need to fast:

a) A Deeper connection with God

But there are times when we need to stop and pause before God, and included in this is fasting. We need a deeper connection with God and that can only happen when we stop and give some time to Him. Fasting allows us to do this. It's taking that day every so often and saying today I'm going to skip lunch and spend some concentrated time with God.

b) Power from the Holy Spirit

Jesus operated in the power of the Holy Spirit. It's with this power that Jesus performs miracles. We have access to this same power. Jesus promises us this power in **Acts 1:8** when He said "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." As we surrender, serve and sacrifice God fills us with the Holy Spirit. He empowers us to do His work.

c) A Heart change

A misconception about fasting is that it's something we do to change the heart of God, or change what God will do. God doesn't respond to the fast, it's we who respond to the fast. When we sacrifice it's something we respond to. God responds to our heart change that comes from the sacrifice. Jesus includes the promise "if you fast your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you". Maybe part of that reward is change.

d) It grows our faith

This is what this whole series is about, growing our faith.

Christian maturity isn't a sprint, it doesn't happen all of the sudden. It's a process, it happens over the long haul. As we do the little things, those private acts of righteousness, and those spiritual disciplines that God asks of us is when our faith grows.

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. Do you trust Jesus enough to surrender your finances and allow Him to control the rewards? In what ways are you doing this? Where could you improve? What types of reward do you tend to gravitate towards, men or God's? Why?
2. How have you struggled with balancing the busyness of life with the need to slow down and spend time with Jesus? What types of things are you doing to maintain balance? What do you currently do during your devotional time?
3. How does Pastor Matt's perspective on fasting change your understanding of this important discipline? Have you ever fasted with the hope that God would somehow respond? What is the purpose of fasting? What changes occur in you and how does this draw you closer to God?
4. Is there something in your life that has become an obstacle, to your spiritual maturity? What is one change or discipline that you can implement now that will grow your faith?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes).

- Take time to reflect on your current spiritual practices. Decide which disciplines you could add or spend more time on to draw closer to God.

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God for his guidance and direction towards growing spiritually.
- Ask God to search your heart and help you know the areas where you need to grow.
- Bring praises and requests to God that came up during your discussion.