

Spiritual Disciplines

WARM-UP

- Tell us about a hobby you enjoy. What do you like about it?
- What is something you have always wanted to experience for yourself?
- Recall a time when you had to be there for a family member or friend, even when it was difficult. What happened?

WORD

“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.”

MATTHEW 6:1

(Read also **MATTHEW 6:2-8,16-18.**)

Spiritual disciplines are an important part of a Christian’s life. Like exercise, they build up our spiritual muscles for a deeper and richer relationship with God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned His disciples to be careful of practicing these disciplines with the motive of being seen by others. Here we will look at three spiritual disciplines Jesus encouraged His disciples to practice: generosity, prayer, and fasting.

1 Give to the needy.

³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

MATTHEW 6:3,4

When we give to those in need, our motive should not be to call attention to ourselves. If so, the attention itself will become our reward. Instead, we should give *in secret*, with the intent to bless even if others won't know what we've done. Jesus promises that our Father will definitely see what we do and reward us. According to Acts 20:35, what is better: giving or receiving? Why?

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2 Pray to the Father.

⁶But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁷And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." **MATTHEW 6:6-8**

When we pray, our motive should not be to show others what we are doing or to draw attention to ourselves. Instead, if we pray in secret, Jesus assures us that our Father sees us and will reward us. In fact, He knows what we need even before we ask Him. Why do you think some pray for show? Why do you think Jesus emphasized praying in secret?

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3 Fast in secret.

16"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 17But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

MATTHEW 6:16-18

We fast to become spiritually closer to God. If we fast only to be seen and acknowledged by others, we won't get a reward from our Father. We fast to know and seek God more. This means that we don't draw attention to ourselves while fasting, with gloomy expressions. And God, who sees us, will certainly reward us. According to Isaiah 58:8, what will happen when we fast?

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APPLICATION

- Are you growing in your relationship with God? What's one thing you will start doing differently to know Him more?
- Which of the three spiritual disciplines do you do regularly? Which one do you need to do more often? Tell us what you will do about it today.
- How can you set an example to your family and friends about knowing God, while keeping what you do a secret? How do you think others will be challenged to know God more through your faith?

PRAYER

- Thank God for your relationship with Him, and how you can know Him more every day. Pray that your relationship with God will always be of highest value to you.
- Pray that you would develop spiritual disciplines and habits that will help you know God more. Pray that your motive and heart would be to honor God, and trust that He will reward you accordingly.
- Pray that you will be a blessing to others, and that your faith will cause others to know and follow God as well.

NOTES



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