



SESSION 1

TRANSFORMED IN MY WORSHIP

▶ ***The Point***

Giving, praying, and fasting are disciplines of personal worship.

▶ ***The Passage***

Matthew 6:1-8,16-18

▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

It's remarkable to watch a sailboat cut effortlessly across the water. No roaring engines drown out the simplicity and beauty of the boat. Gifted sailors know just how to catch the wind. It takes work to position the sails correctly, but once that's done, the boat moves at a pace the sailors could never produce by their own effort.

What are the "sails" in your life? What gets you moving in the right direction in spite of the wind and waves that threaten to engulf you?

Jesus preached a masterful sermon we call the Sermon on the Mount. Right in the middle of that sermon, He spoke of three disciplines—three sails, if you will—that, when correctly understood and applied, allow us to catch God's power and experience a life we could never produce on our own.

These disciplines are the sails of worship. And worship always gets us headed in the right direction.

▶ ***The Setting***

Jesus gathered His disciples to a mountainside to instruct them about being citizens of the kingdom of God. Countless others joined Him. His instruction came to be called the Sermon on the Mount. In His instructions, He underscored the value of worshiping the Father through giving, praying, and fasting. He went on to teach His followers how to practice those disciplines from a heart devoted to growing in Him instead of bent toward seeking applause from others.

What does the Bible say?

Trumpet (v. 2)—Offering chests in Jesus’ day had trumpet-shaped openings to prevent thieves from reaching in and stealing money. Thus, people could “sound a trumpet” by throwing coins loudly into the offering horn for the purpose of calling attention to their generosity.

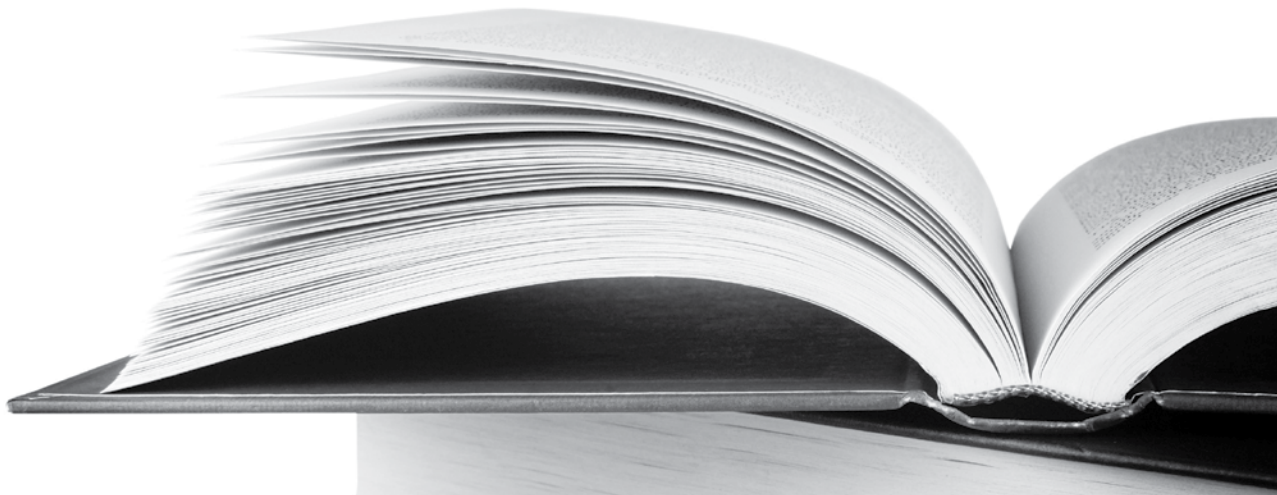
Fast (v. 16)—The practice of abstaining from food for a period of time for the purpose of growing closer to the Lord.

Matthew 6:1-8,16-18

1 “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of people, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. **2** So whenever you give to the poor, don’t sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. I assure you: They’ve got their reward! **3** But when you give to the poor, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

5 “Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by people. I assure you: They’ve got their reward! **6** But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. **7** When you pray, don’t babble like the idolaters, since they imagine they’ll be heard for their many words. **8** Don’t be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask Him.”

16 “Whenever you fast, don’t be sad-faced like the hypocrites. For they make their faces unattractive so their fasting is obvious to people. I assure you: They’ve got their reward! **17** But when you fast, put oil on your head, and wash your face, **18** so that you don’t show your fasting to people but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”



GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes



Notes

LEADER PACK: Use Pack Item 1, “Transformed,” to introduce the major theme of this study, along with the specific focus of each session.

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 13 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “**When has an activity or hobby felt effortless for you?**”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Create a bridge between Question #1, above, and the imagery of sails in “The Bible Meets Life” by encouraging group members to build paper airplanes. Provide each person with a piece of paper and ask them to build an airplane that will sail effortlessly through the air. If time permits, you could even set up a quick competition where volunteers see who can sail their airplanes the farthest.

Note: There are likely several people in your group who have a kinesthetic (hands-on) learning style. These people may not always feel comfortable with sitting still and talking; therefore, giving them a chance to build something with their hands can enhance learning and discussion for them.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 14 of the PSG. Introduce Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” at the top of page 14 of the PSG: “**Giving, praying, and fasting are disciplines of personal worship.**”

PRAY: Transition into the study by expressing your desire to worship God with your actions and attitudes. Ask for wisdom as you and the members of your group engage Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount now and in the weeks to come.

TIP: *When helpful, use this “Notes” column to record additional discussion questions, concepts, and activities that connect the study content with your specific group.*



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

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ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What are the practical implications of Jesus' warning in verse 1?

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Matthew 6:1-4

1 *"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of people, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

2 *So whenever you give to the poor, don't sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. I assure you: They've got their reward!* **3** *But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,* **4** *so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 16 of the PSG: **"When you worship someone or something, what are you stating about them?"**

READ: Matthew 6:1-4 on page 15 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG). Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

GUIDE: Use the third paragraph on page 21 of this Leader Guide to explain what Jesus meant by sounding a "trumpet" (v. 2) and paint a picture of how giving was managed in the temple at that time.

+ **RECAP:** Highlight the third paragraph on page 16 of the PSG:

Notice that Jesus didn't denounce giving in verses 1-4, but He did challenge us to check our motives. Is my giving about receiving recognition or a tax deduction? Or do I give entirely out of a gracious desire to help others—a response to the goodness and grace of God in my own life?

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 16 of the PSG: **"When has giving felt like an act of worship to you?"**

Note: Remind group members that they don't have to answer this question in terms of giving money; there are many other types of giving that can serve as an act of worship.

TRANSITION: Having addressed the discipline of giving, we'll see Jesus move to the discipline of praying as we look at verses 5-8.

Matthew 6:1-4

[Verse 1] Jesus introduced a critical principle for His disciples to practice as they worshiped and served Him—a matter of the heart. This principle had to do with what actually motivated their service as citizens of God’s kingdom. Believers are to be motivated by sincere, wholehearted eagerness to please God alone. That kind of proper motivation goes to the heart of walking with and serving Him.

[Verse 2] Jesus applied the principle of proper motivation by calling attention to the poor and the spiritual discipline of giving. In those days, public assistance programs sponsored by social service agencies did not exist. Victims of poverty had to depend on the kindness of people in their community in order to survive. Jewish people embraced the responsibility for giving to the poor, and it became a distinctive part of their lives. However, giving to the poor could also attract the applause of others. Thus, an opportunity to give could become a temptation to parade a person’s piety so that everyone could see it and marvel at it.

This temptation was made worse by the offering boxes placed in the temple for contributions. People would drop their coins down a brass funnel inserted at the top of the box. The funnel resembled the bell of a **trumpet**. The larger the amount of money they poured down the funnel, the louder the noise of the coins clanging against the brass. Jesus referred to people who give out of such a shallow motivation as **hypocrites**. While they play the role of selfless and benevolent givers, their hearts exhibit something different. Indeed, they seek the applause of those who witness their extravagant generosity. When they receive it, they had better enjoy it—that’s the only **reward** they can expect to receive for their pretentious charade.

[Verse 3] Next, Jesus turned His attention to His followers and the spiritual discipline of giving they had been taught to practice. He challenged them to take extreme caution to avoid the hypocritical desire to get people to look with wonder on what they gave. By talking about giving so the one **hand** doesn’t know what the other **hand is doing**, Jesus wasn’t frowning on a church’s practice of maintaining contribution records. Rather, He urged believers to make sure that their motivation for giving honors Him alone. We give because of the joy that comes with obeying Him through our resources.

[Verse 4] That kind of **reward** enriches us and prompts us to give more. We practice the spiritual discipline of giving, but not to catch somebody’s eye. Instead, we give purely to express our wholehearted devotion to the Lord by sharing the resources He has given to us. We’re pleased simply because we know the Lord notices our giving. That’s the reward we receive every time we make a contribution in His name and for His glory. That’s the only reward that transforms our worship.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

Matthew 6:5-8

⁵ “Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by people. I assure you: They’ve got their reward! ⁶ But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁷ When you pray, don’t babble like the idolaters, since they imagine they’ll be heard for their many words. ⁸ Don’t be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask Him.



DO: Direct group members to complete the activity “Give in Secret” on page 17 of the PSG. If time permits, encourage volunteers to share tips for giving generously without recognition.

Jesus commanded His followers to give in secret, which isn’t always easy in the modern world. Record practical ways you could contribute the following resources to God’s kingdom without gaining recognition for yourself. Choose two.

Money / Time / Gifts and Talents / Possessions / Knowledge

What emotions do you experience when you give to others?

READ: Matthew 6:5-8 on page 15 of the PSG.

SUMMARIZE: Call attention to the main points on page 18 of the PSG:

- ▶ “Not only does true worship transform our giving, but also our prayer.”
- ▶ “Jesus said we should pray in the same way He said we should give: humbly and privately.”
- ▶ “Done correctly, public prayer should lead our listeners before the throne of God, not display our own piety.”

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 18 of the PSG: **“When has praying felt like an act of worship to you?”**

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
Since God already knows ours needs before we ask, what is the point of practicing consistent, private prayer?

Matthew 6:5-8

[Verse 5] Jesus also applied the principle of proper motivation to the spiritual discipline of prayer in worship. Jesus drew a distinction between public prayer and private prayer. As He brought up public prayer, He called attention to people who misused it in worship, and He showed that their misuse started in their hearts. They always made their way to public places such as **synagogues** or **street corners** at one of the daily prayer times. There, they would stand up and pray so others would hear them and admire devotion. According to Jesus, this admiration would be the only **reward** for such prayers.

Even so, Jesus' warning doesn't diminish the value of public prayer as a part of worship. When we pray in a worship service out of a proper motivation, we talk with God in the company of others who are worshipping with us. We worship through community.

[Verse 6] Jesus went on to teach that applying the principle of proper motivation starts with private prayer. That's why He directed His listeners to go to a private place for prayer—a room with no distractions and no audience. Once there, they should close out everything that will prevent focusing attention on conversation with the Lord.

[Verse 7] Another inappropriate motive for praying involved the pagan habit of rambling on and on with meaningless words or phrases. People given over to idol worship fostered the notion that they could get their god's attention by making certain sounds and uttering them repeatedly. People passing by on the streets had no choice but to hear the prayers of the idol worshipers as they babbled on and on with their words. Jesus knew some of His disciples might be tempted to follow the example set by these idolaters, arriving at the notion that they needed to repeat their own prayers over and over in order to get God to listen to them.

[Verse 8] Jesus instructed that we don't need to babble on and on in the hope the Father will eventually hear and pay attention to our requests. Quite the opposite: He pays attention to us because we belong to Him through Christ. He already knows what we need before we begin to think about what to pray. Prayer, therefore, isn't supposed to get God's attention. Prayer is simply a way to be with Him. In His presence, we praise Him, express our love for Him, and surrender to Him. Granted, prayer involves bringing our needs to Him, but not because He doesn't already know about them.

What Jesus taught in this verse only scratches the surface of what we should do in order to pray effectively. More attention will be given to this vital spiritual discipline in the next session.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Matthew 6:16-18

¹⁶ “Whenever you fast, don’t be sad-faced like the hypocrites. For they make their faces unattractive so their fasting is obvious to people. I assure you: They’ve got their reward! ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head, and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you don’t show your fasting to people but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

READ: Matthew 6:16-18 on page 15 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Encourage group members to read through the first two paragraphs on page 19 of the PSG in order to gain a better understanding of the behavior Jesus called out as hypocritical.

Note: The first two paragraphs on page 25 of this Leader Guide provide additional information on the same theme.

RECAP: Read out loud the third paragraph from page 19 of the PSG:

Sadly, fasting is a neglected discipline in the church today. We live at such a fast pace and are surrounded by so much stuff. It’s not that work, hobbies, and kids’ schedules are bad, but we’ve let all these things consume our time, and we haven’t set aside any real space for God to show up. Fasting allows us to be emptied for a stretch of time, which gives God an opportunity to bring about His fullness in our lives.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 19 of the PSG: **“What results can we expect when we worship God through giving, praying, and fasting?”**

Note: Encourage group members to interpret the word “results” in any way they choose—spiritual results, practical results, ministry results, and so on.

GUIDE: Refer back to “The Point” of this session: **“Giving, praying, and fasting are disciplines of personal worship.”** If time permits, encourage volunteers to share any final thoughts and questions.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
How would you describe your experiences with fasting?

Matthew 6:16-18

[Verse 16] Jesus brought up a third spiritual discipline often abused by people who wanted to make a spectacle of their spirituality. **Fasting** was more prominent in the Jewish culture of Jesus' day than in our culture today. Jewish people honored the Old Testament law that instructed them to fast on the Day of Atonement (see Lev. 16:29-31), which took place once a year when Israel gathered to worship the Lord in a spirit of repentance and gratitude. During the time of Jesus' ministry, Jewish leaders regularly included fasting in their lives as a wholesome act of righteousness. They denied themselves food to demonstrate that nothing stood in the way of their desire to nourish a healthy relationship with God.

Like giving and praying, fasting could provide **hypocrites** with an open door for visibly practicing piety in front of others. When onlookers crowded into the public square or at the synagogue, these hypocrites would make it obvious they were suffering from a lack of food—including walking around with ashes heaped on their heads to portray the agony of their deprivation. They would make sure everyone knew they were fasting, which Jesus confirmed was their only **reward**.

[Verse 17] Jesus taught a completely different approach to fasting that requires proper motivation and a pure heart. Notice that Jesus didn't say "if you fast," but "**when you fast.**" Obviously, He anticipated His followers would practice this discipline as they grow in relationship with Him. Like the first-century Christians, we have obstacles that get in the way of our walk with the Lord. Your obstacle may be food, or it may be something else. Removing that obstacle may require you to deny yourself in order to embrace Jesus as your first priority.

Yet as we deny ourselves today, we must remember Jesus' instructions not to display our disciplines in order to impress others. Go about your normal daily routines while you fast. Don't allow attention to this spiritual discipline to catch the attention of others.

[Verse 18] The reason to work diligently not to display this spiritual discipline is simple: fasting is not meant to get somebody's attention and applause. We fast because we want to grow in our walk with our Father. When that's our motivation for denying ourselves, we will be glad we gave ourselves to it.

When we approach fasting in that way, we can expect a rewarding experience that transforms our worship. Our lives will be enriched, our paths will be clearer, and our relationship with Him will be more intimate. The reward of His presence, guidance, wisdom, and strength will be ours to embrace and enjoy. A growing disciple could never ask for a greater reward.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

Notes

Dotted lines for notes

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 20 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following options for allowing Jesus’ teaching to impact their lives this week:



- ▶ **Start fasting.** If you don’t have much experience with the discipline of fasting, give up one meal this week. Instead of eating, use the time to praise and thank God for the blessings in your life.
- ▶ **Move beyond food.** If you have experience fasting from meals, try a media fast over an entire weekend. Abstain from TV, movies, computers, phones, and so on—use your desire to be entertained as a continual reminder to connect with God throughout each day.
- ▶ **Seek God’s presence.** Schedule yourself a time to spend at least an hour in God’s presence this week. Use that hour to pray, worship, meditate on His Word, and so on.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the Conclusion from page 20 of the PSG:

There aren’t a lot of skilled sailors in the modern world. But there’s every reason, and every opportunity, for followers of Jesus to become skilled worshipers. Best of all, sailing with God in worship will always take you in the right direction.

PRAY: Conclude by declaring your desire to practice the disciplines of giving, praying, and fasting as part of your walk with Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to transform your efforts into genuine moments of worship.