

SESSION 1

TRANSFORMED IN MY WORSHIP



*When has an activity or hobby
felt effortless for you?*

QUESTION #1

#BSFLtransformed

THE POINT

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



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.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Matthew 6:1-8,16-18

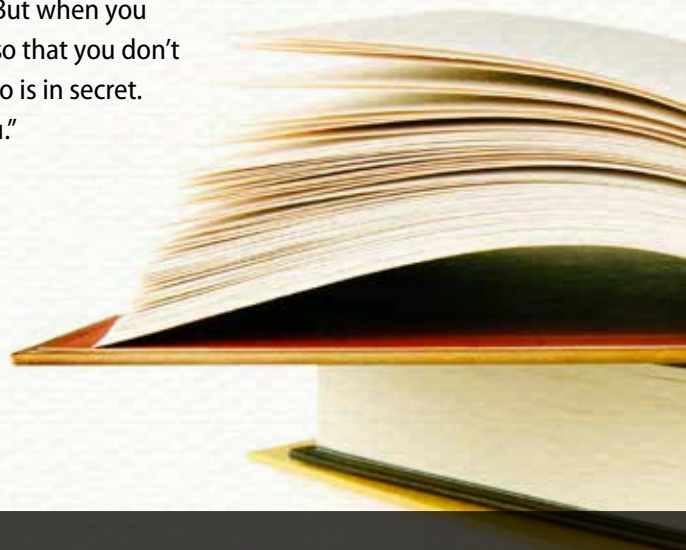
1 “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of people, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. **2** So whenever you give to the poor, don’t sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded 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.”

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 6:1-4

At its core, worship is delighting in God. Worship is our natural response to the greatness of God. And that kind of worship transforms us—including the way we give.

It's a noble thing to give to help others, yet that nobility had become part of the problem in Jesus' time. People often exploited their giving as a way to gain honor. The same is true today: some people love to make a big splash with their giving. Jesus called such people "hypocrites." These are people who wear a mask of spiritual devotion, but their hearts tell a different story.

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?

Worshipful giving says to God, our Father:

- ▶ I recognize You own it all.
- ▶ I recognize You as my Provider; all I have is from You.
- ▶ I am thankful for my salvation in Christ.
- ▶ I want to join You as You work in the lives of others.
- ▶ I recognize that You reward faithful obedience; even as I give, You will continue to take care of me.

Giving is the only discipline in Scripture in which the Lord calls us to test Him: "'Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this way,' says the LORD of Hosts. 'See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure'" (Mal. 3:10).

When you worship someone or something, what are you stating about them?

QUESTION #2

When has giving felt like an act of worship to you?

QUESTION #3

This “blessing” isn’t necessarily financial. God offers something far greater, which Jesus affirmed in His Sermon: “Your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (v. 4). When we give from proper motives, God rewards us. We are blessed with His favor, grace, and growth.

GIVE IN SECRET

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?



Matthew 6:5-8

Not only does true worship transform our giving, but also our prayer. Unfortunately, that's necessary because we can just as easily abuse prayer as we can giving.

In verses 5-8, Jesus rebuked the hypocrites for the way they prayed in the same way He rebuked them for the way they gave. The hypocrites headed to the street corners and made a great show of their prayers. Since God knows our hearts, their actions did not impress Him.

Jesus said we should pray in the same way He said we should give: humbly and privately. Jesus went on to say, "Don't babble like the idolaters" (v. 7). The pagans believed they had to drone on and on to get the attention of whatever god's favor they wanted. Such babbling is totally unnecessary when talking to our Father, the One who knows us so deeply He "knows the things you need before you ask Him" (v. 8).

In fact, we don't have to do anything special to get God's attention. He seeks us and desires for us to come to him: "Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and incomprehensible things you do not know" (Jer. 33:3).

As with giving, Jesus was not speaking against praying publicly. Done correctly, public prayer should lead our listeners before the throne of God, not display our own piety.

"Your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (v. 8). God's answers to our prayers certainly can be seen as a reward, but the even greater reward is the communion we have in private conversation with God. Since we're not trying to impress anybody when we pray privately, our hearts can be more focused on simply communing with God. There is no greater reward than the presence of God Himself.

When has praying felt like an act of worship to you?

QUESTION #4

What results can we expect when we worship God through giving, praying, and fasting?

QUESTION #5

Matthew 6:16-18

When Jesus addressed the discipline of fasting in verses 16-18, He confronted the same problem as He did earlier in Matthew 16. The hypocrites attempted to be crowd-pleasers with their giving and praying—so why not go three-for-three with their fasting?

How do you make a public spectacle of fasting? The Pharisees smeared ashes on their faces so that when they walked the streets, they would look haggard. They wanted everyone to notice the agony they were in as they fasted. According to Jesus, the people's sympathetic response to these hypocrites' pitiful state was their only reward.

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.

I know my life can be controlled by the desire for food. But when I'm fasting, I let those hunger pangs drive me to pray. I'm reminded that I don't live by bread alone, but by the power and provision of the Lord.

Fasting, like giving and prayer, is a discipline intended to position us for true worship. So if you don't fast, consider starting as an act of worship. When you do, you'll experience the great reward that comes with such worship: the joy of the power and presence of God.

PRAY

LIVE IT OUT

How will Jesus' teachings on giving, praying, and fasting impact your worship this week? Consider the following options:

- ▶ **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.



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.