

Starting the Conversation

In grace, God gives us incredible and soul nourishing spiritual practices. Things like prayer, fasting, Bible reading, Bible and theological study grow our faith and understanding. They give us greater spiritual wisdom and greater spiritual strength. Sometimes we are prevented from embracing these gifts by getting hung up on how we should do them. While there are helpful tools for all of these, there is nothing more important than just jumping in and asking for God’s help. The one factor that determines spiritual success is making God the center of it all—we do these things with God, for God, and through God’s grace and power. The only way that we miss the blessing is to make anything other than God the center, whether that be our own pride, our own agenda and selfish desires, or the approval of others. When we seek God with our whole heart and desire Him above all else, He will be found and He will fill us with truth, love, and power for growth.

Let’s Read Matthew 6:5-8

Leader: There is a tension in the Christian faith that is important to understand. The Christian faith is deeply personal, but it cannot be private. As we follow Jesus, we must be ready and excited to share the good news with others in what we say and do. But it is not for show, to impress others, to get a good reputation, or even to impress God. We share the Gospel from a love for God and others. For this to happen with a genuine heart and real impact, we understand that we cannot effectively point others to something that we don’t already have. Public faith comes from personal devotion. Jesus warns us against living faith just for public praise. Real faith begins with an intimate, private, personal, and vulnerable devotion to God.

- What pressures do you feel/experience with praying in groups or in front of others? Why do you feel that pressure?
- What connection is there between the prayers you pray privately and prayers with others?
- Why does Jesus say that it is important to pray privately?
- What does private prayer look like according to Jesus? What should be involved?
- What struggles do you face with your private prayer life?
- How have you experienced the power of God through prayer?

Let’s

Read Matthew 6:16-18

Leader: Not many of us are comfortable or even familiar with consistent fasting. Jesus does not question whether or not fasting should be a part of walking with God. Jesus says that “when” you fast, you should do it to connect with God and to please God. There is a reward coming on the other side of life on earth for those who desire to connect with God and are willing to engage in spiritual disciplines to connect with Him more closely.

- Why is fasting something that very few of us engage as a spiritual discipline?
- What spiritual benefits can fasting provide?
- Why is it important for fasting to be a private and personal spiritual discipline.
- What kinds of rewards do you think Jesus is referring to in this passage?

Closing—Read Matthew 14:23.

- Jesus often went away to be by Himself so that He could talk with God. Why do you think Jesus did this?
- What do you think was a part of Jesus’ alone time with God?
- What are some ways that you can prioritize being alone with God this week and moving forward?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for inviting us to talk with You and listen to You in prayer. Give us a faith to trust that You hear and respond. Give us the ability and desire to hear You and understand You. Give us courage to trust and obey. Grow us in our faith and devotion. Draw us closer to you this week and give us an excitement to be with You. Show us where we need to step out of our comfort zones to pursue You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.