



Life Group Study Notes

"First Things First"

Sr. Ps. James Lowe - January 8, 2017

Warm Up (10-15 minutes)

Choose a question below to answer, or ask another. No right or wrong answers.

- Did you pray as a child? If so, who taught you?
- Did your parents teach you to give to the poor or underprivileged when you were a child?
- Have you ever fasted? If so, when was the first time and how did it go?

Word (10-15 minutes)

Sermons can be heard online at www.bethelworld.org

Matthew 6:33 ESV "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

- Jesus taught us to not be anxious about our basic needs: food, drink, clothing, etc. He also taught us to prioritize God's kingdom and righteousness above all of our basic needs and desires.
- Earlier in his message Jesus highlighted several ways he expects us to express God's righteousness.

Matthew 6:1-4 ESV "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. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

- Jesus assumes that we will give to the needy. To not do so is to not be a faithful follower of him.
- Jesus is especially concerned with our motives in giving. Our highest motive should be to please God. Our next highest motive should be genuine love and concern for people in need.
- Jesus also taught us to believe that God will personally reward us when we give from good motives.

Matthew 6:5-15 ESV "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But 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. And 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. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly

Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

- Jesus assumes we will also pray, and that we will pray daily. To not pray is to not be a faithful follower of Jesus.
- Jesus is also concerned about our motives in praying. Our primary motive in prayer should be to seek God and please him. We also should be motivated out of concern for others, and so pray for them.
- Jesus taught us to pray from a growing knowledge of God's character, purposes, and will. From such knowledge we are to prioritize God's concerns above our own when we pray.
- Jesus also taught us to expect God to reward us for praying according to his guidance with good motives. However, we must keep our hearts free from unforgiveness toward others.

Matthew 6:16-18 ESV "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. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that 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.”

- Jesus also assumes that we will fast. To not do so would be to not be a faithful follower of Jesus (unless of course there are medical reasons that prevent you from fasting).
- Jesus is once again concerned with our motives, this time in fasting. Our primary motive, as in prayer, should be to seek God and please him. To seek the honor and praise of people for the practice of fasting disqualifies us from pleasing God.
- Jesus also taught us to expect God to reward us when we fast from good motives.

All three of these spiritual disciplines (giving, praying, and fasting) were highly valued by the popular religious teachers of Jesus' day, yet their practice of them did not profit them spiritually or please God. When Jesus taught his disciples, he expected them to also value these disciplines, but to be diligent to examine their motives for doing them. His teaching is just as important and authoritative for us today.

Discussion (10-15 minutes)

Choose an item below to discuss, or introduce another related point for discussion.

- How might your life be different or how might you be a different person if you were regularly giving to the poor, praying daily, and fasting with consistency, and were doing all of this with good, godly motives?
- Which spiritual discipline from among giving, praying, and fasting do you believe God wants you to practice and develop more?
- What are some steps you could (and should) take to better develop and practice one of the spiritual disciplines taught in this lesson (giving, praying, and fasting)?

Prayer (10-15 minutes)

Pray for any of the following, as well as any other requests you may have.

- Ask God for the Holy Spirit's help to grow in one of the spiritual disciplines covered in this lesson.
- Ask God for wisdom on how to implement lasting change in one these spiritual disciplines.
- Ask God to give you an opportunity to learn from someone who is strong in the spiritual discipline that you want to grow in.