



Growth Group Discussion Questions

12. The secret life of Christians

Read Matthew 6:1-6 and 16-18

1. In verse 1, Jesus gives us the general principle before He gives us some concrete examples. ***According to Jesus, what is the overriding motivation that should drive everything a Christian does? What's so dangerous about seeking the praise of people? How does John 5:44 and John 12:43 help us understand why Jesus is so keen to warn us against getting into the habit of seeking the praise of people?***
2. Jesus gives us the practical example of alms-giving – giving money to poor people. ***Discuss some of the ways in which we can be generous in our day and age AND how we can ensure that we are secretive in our generosity?***
3. The New Testament tells us a lot about the *content* of our prayers but hardly anything about the practicals of private prayer. ***Why do you think this is so? Spend time discussing practical ways you have found helpful to keep up your private prayer life.***
4. ***What do you think we should learn from the fact that Jesus Himself often withdrew from the crowds and sometimes even from His disciples in order to pray?***
5. Over hundreds of years Christians have always fasted. It has always been a stock standard aspect of Christianity. ***Judging by the fact that so few Christians fast today, why do you think fasting in Christianity today is seen as 'strange' or 'weird' or something for 'Christians on steroids' to do? What are the reasons Christians don't fast? Are they biblical reasons?***
6. Go back over the passage and notice all the things Jesus tells us about the Father. ***What does Jesus tell us about the Father? What do you think the 'reward' is that God has promised to His children who live a secret life of generosity, prayer and self-control?***

Leaders Notes

1. Christians seek the approval of our Father. We want to please Him in everything we do. 'No one can serve two masters' – the fact of the matter is that when we seek the praise of people we show that they are our true treasure and our true master. To value what people think more than what God thinks exposes where our true loyalty and true love is: people and not God. If this carries on, Jesus warns, we will reach a point where we will not even be saved. Why? Because we will only believe Jesus IF other people approve of our belief. This is a very dangerous place to be in.
2. The key issue to be discussed here is that in our materialistic world we tend to think of 'giving' as money only. As Jesus indicates, it certainly begins with money. However, the spirit of generosity doesn't stop there. There are many ways Christians can be generous. Some will let out their jet-ski to other Christians; some will make their holiday cottage available; some will offer their timeshare; some will share their time by offering to babysit; lawyers will give expertise to other Christians; accountants may help others organise their finances better; some will give a restaurant voucher to another couple; some will cook a meal; etc. etc. As long as all of this is done to please Our Father AND done in complete secret!
3. Isn't it surprising that the New Testament doesn't teach us much in regard to the practicals of private prayer! (Yes, we are taught a lot about the *content* of our prayer and we will explore this in upcoming sermons.) For example in Islam, your private prayer is completely set for you. In Christianity this absence of 'practicals' is deliberate. It is because God knows that we are all very different people, we live in different cultures and He knows that over 2000 years different ages will have different rhythms and different pressures of life. This all means that Christians are to learn from each other. Growth Groups are a great forum for Christians to disciple each other. In the discussion ensure that things like time, place, prayer diaries, bible readings, duration, etc. are all discussed.
4. The answer is obvious but it is worth asking so that people take on board the absolute necessity of private prayer. Here is Jesus, the Son of God, who takes time out to seek His Father in private prayer. How much more should we? Private prayer really is more important than food.
5. Christians don't generally fast today NOT because we have discovered something new in the Bible. In other words, Christianity today is not shaped by Biblical thinking but by our cultural thinking. Because we live in an absolutely self-indulgent age, driven by our feelings, Christians have imbibed some of this thinking. Our culture has influenced us. We have become like the world. Fasting will be a great, biblical way to break the hold of the world on us. Of course, we are not legalists. There may be good medical reasons for someone not to fast etc. But the vast majority of Christians ought to fast – as long as they do it in secret.
6. Our Father is described as 'the Father who is in heaven'. Jesus says the Father sees, the Father rewards, and the Father knows (which we haven't yet looked at, but its in Matt 6:7). The point being is that this is not a distant, far away Father. This is a Father who longs to be close to, and intimately involved in, the life of His children. The 'reward' the Father offers us is more of Himself! The more we seek Him in private, the more we get! He is our great reward. Nothing else compares to this. For example, if you want more money, stop having quiet times, go out, and make more money. If you want a better body, stop having private prayer times and go and do gym instead! But if you want Your Father, then a private life of generosity, prayer and self-discipline will get you that. Jesus promises it.