LIFE Group Discussion Guide

November 8, 2026

Matthew 6:16-18

CONVERSATION STARTERS

What are some highs or lows you experienced this past week?

What Scripture has been shaping you recently?

Where have you seen God moving in your life this week?

What did you hear in today's sermon OR read in today's passage that you would like to discuss?

What did you learn about yourself in today's sermon/passage?

What did you learn about God in today's sermon/passage?

What convicted you as you listened to today's sermon OR read in today's passage?

OPENING

Why do people sometimes make a big deal about something difficult or sacrificial they have done?

Jesus has already addressed giving and prayer in Matthew 6. Now He addresses fasting. In each case, Jesus is concerned not simply with what we do**,** but with the motivation behind what we do**.**

Genuine spiritual devotion is focused on God rather than gaining recognition from others.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read **Matthew 6:16–18** together.

As you listen, notice:

- What does Jesus warn His followers not to do when they fast?
- How were the hypocrites trying to be noticed?
- What does Jesus tell His followers to do instead?
- Who sees what is done in secret?

PASSAGE SUMMARY

Fasting was a familiar spiritual practice among God's people. It involved voluntarily going without food for a period of time in order to devote attention to God, seek Him, express dependence, or pursue Him in prayer.

Jesus does not condemn fasting. Instead, He addresses the motivation behind it. Some people made their fasting obvious so that others would recognize their spiritual devotion. They wanted people to see their sacrifice and think highly of them.

Jesus tells His followers to approach fasting differently. Rather than drawing attention to themselves, they should carry on normally and keep their focus on God.

The principle is consistent with what Jesus has already taught about giving and prayer: spiritual practices lose their purpose when they become performances for other people.

Our spiritual practices should be expressions of devotion to God, not opportunities to gain recognition from people.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What was wrong with the way the hypocrites practiced fasting?

The problem wasn't fasting itself. They made their fasting obvious so people would notice them and consider them spiritually devoted. Their focus had shifted from God to human recognition.

Why does Jesus tell His followers to "wash your face" and "anoint your head"?

He is telling them not to advertise their fasting. They should carry on normally rather than drawing attention to their sacrifice.

Does Jesus mean that fasting must always be completely private?
No. Scripture includes examples of people fasting together. Jesus is addressing the heart behind the practice, not creating an absolute rule about secrecy.

What are some other good spiritual practices that can become focused on impressing people?
Prayer, serving, giving, Bible knowledge, church involvement, and even sharing spiritual experiences can become self-focused when looking spiritual becomes more important than knowing God.

What does it mean that the Father "sees in secret"?
God sees what other people don't see. He knows our hearts and values genuine devotion even when nobody else recognizes it.

How does this passage help us understand spiritual maturity?
Spiritual maturity isn't about appearing impressive. It is about genuinely loving God and faithfully pursuing Him whether or not anyone else notices.

APPLICATION

Where are you most tempted to care about appearing spiritual rather than actually growing spiritually?

How do you respond when you do something sacrificial or faithful and nobody notices?

What is one spiritual practice you could pursue this week simply to grow closer to God?

DIG DEEPER

Read Isaiah 58:3–9. What does Isaiah teach about the kind of fasting God desires?

Read Matthew 9:14–15. What does Jesus say about fasting and following Him?

Read Matthew 6:1–4 and 6:5–8. How is Jesus' teaching about fasting connected to His teaching about giving and prayer?

What common principle connects all three passages?

How can our LIFE Group encourage genuine spiritual growth without creating pressure to appear spiritually impressive?

CLOSING THOUGHT

Jesus is not primarily concerned with whether other people think we are spiritual. He is concerned with whether we genuinely know and pursue God**.**

Fasting, prayer, giving, serving, Bible study, and worship are valuable because they help us know God and grow in dependence on Him. But even good spiritual practices can become self-centered when we use them to gain attention or approval.

The Father sees what others don't see. Don't practice devotion to be noticed by people. Practice devotion because you desire God.

LOOKING AHEAD

Next week we will discuss **Matthew 6:19-24** as we continue the series, *The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached: The Sermon on the Mount.*

PRAYER FOCUS

Pray that we would:

- Desire God more than recognition from others.
- Pursue spiritual disciplines with genuine hearts.
- Grow in humility and dependence on Christ.
- Encourage authentic spiritual growth within our LIFE Group.
- Pray for our worship services—that hearts will be open, the Spirit will move powerfully, and people will respond in obedience to Christ.

COMMENTARY

Matthew 6:16-18

The Christian Standard Bible (CSB) commentary on **Matthew 6:16-18** focuses on the true purpose of spiritual fasting and a warning against religious showmanship:

- **Expected Practice:** Jesus says **"Whenever you fast"** rather than "if you fast," treating fasting as a normal, anticipated spiritual discipline for His followers (much like giving to the needy and praying earlier in the chapter).

- **The Hypocrites' Error:** Some religious leaders of the time acted **gloomy** and made their faces unattractive (or disfigured them) on purpose so everyone around them would notice they were fasting.

- **The Empty Reward:** Jesus notes that performing spiritual acts for human applause receives an immediate and complete reward—the praise of people—leaving no reward from God.

- **The Secret Practice:** Disciples are told to put oil on their heads and wash their faces—behaving normally—so the fast is hidden from human eyes and focused entirely on God the Father**.**

- **The Father's Reward:** Because the Father sees what is done in secret**,** He personally and graciously rewards true, heart-level devotion rather than outward display.