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

Have you ever worked hard at something but wished someone would notice or recognize your effort? What made you feel that way?

Jesus has been teaching His followers about giving and prayer. Now He talks about fasting. In each case, Jesus is concerned about more than what we do. He wants us to examine why we do it**.**

Today we will explore how following Jesus means pursuing God rather than trying to impress other people.

SCRIPTURE

Read **Matthew 6:16–18** together.

Ask the group to notice:

- What does Jesus warn His followers not to do when they fast?
- Why did the hypocrites want people to notice them?
- What does Jesus tell His followers to do instead?
- Who sees what happens in secret?

PASSAGE SUMMARY

Fasting is a spiritual practice that involves voluntarily going without food for a period of time in order to focus on God, seek Him in prayer, or express dependence on Him. Jesus doesn't tell His followers that fasting is wrong. Instead, He addresses the motivation behind it**.**

Some people made their fasting obvious so that others would notice them and think they were especially spiritual. Jesus says His followers should approach fasting differently. They shouldn't make their sacrifice into a performance.

The same principle applies to other parts of our Christian lives. Following Jesus isn't about looking spiritual to other people. It's about genuinely pursuing God.

Main Point:
Our relationship with God matters more than how spiritual we appear to other people.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What was wrong with the way the hypocrites practiced fasting?
They wanted people to notice their fasting and think highly of them. Their focus had shifted from God to getting attention from other people.

Why does Jesus tell them to wash their faces and take care of their appearance?
He tells them not to advertise their fasting. They shouldn't make their sacrifice obvious just so other people will notice.

Does Jesus mean that fasting must always be completely private?
No. The Bible gives examples of people fasting together. Jesus is focusing on the motivation behind fasting rather than making secrecy an absolute rule.

What are some other Christian activities that could become ways of impressing people?
Praying, serving at church, knowing a lot about the Bible, giving, volunteering, or sharing spiritual experiences can become focused on getting attention instead of honoring God.

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

How does this passage challenge the way we think about being a "good Christian"?
Being a good Christian isn't about looking impressive. It's about genuinely loving Jesus, trusting Him, and following Him even when nobody is watching.

APPLICATION

Where are you most tempted to care about how you look to other people instead of focusing on your relationship with God?

How do you respond when you do something good or make a sacrifice but nobody notices?

What is one spiritual practice you could pursue this week simply because you want to grow closer to Jesus?

DIG DEEPER

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

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

Read Matthew 6:1–4 and 6:5–8. How are Jesus' teachings about giving, prayer, and fasting connected?

What common warning does Jesus give about our motives?

How can our LIFE Group encourage each other to grow spiritually without creating pressure to** look **spiritually impressive?

CLOSING THOUGHT

Jesus isn't primarily concerned with whether other people think we're spiritual.
He cares about whether we genuinely know and follow Him**.**

It is possible to do something that looks very spiritual while having the wrong motivation. Jesus calls us to something deeper—a relationship with God that continues even when nobody else is watching.

Don't live to look spiritual. Live to know and follow Jesus.

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 Jesus more than the approval of others.
- Grow in genuine faith and obedience.
- Help one another follow Jesus with humility.
- 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.