



PART 3: PRIVATE DISCIPLINES

Introduction

In this session of *Five Things God Uses To Grow Your Faith*, you will be introduced to the role private spiritual disciplines play in the development of our faith. Drawing from Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, Rich explains how God leverages systematic prayer and generosity to grow our confidence in him.

Discussion Questions

1. When it comes to discipline, where do you struggle most?
2. Is there something you currently enjoy doing that began as a discipline? If so, what made the discipline become enjoyable?
3. Growing up, were you encouraged to develop habits that could be described as private spiritual disciplines? Things like prayer, devotions, giving, fasting, confession? Did any of these become habits that you have carried with you into adulthood? If so, which? If not, why?

Since strong human relationships are held together through discipline and self-control, we should not be too surprised to discover that our relationship with God requires the element of discipline as well.

4. Can you think of disciplines you've developed that have strengthened your relationships with those you care about most? For example, calling your mom on a regular basis; coming home at a predetermined time; picking up after yourself; drinking less or not at all.

Have someone read Matthew 6:1-4. In this passage Jesus challenges his audience to engage in the discipline of giving. Jesus assumes generosity. Notice he says when, not if, you give. Our attitude towards generosity, and money in general, is usually a reflection of the way we were raised.

5. Were you raised in a home where generosity was practiced and talked about? Were you raised to give? Was the giving in your home more needs/crisis based or did your family support your church or other organizations on a regular, systematic basis?
6. How easy is it for you to be generous when confronted with a specific need? Why?
7. When Rich presented this content in his message, he challenged us to engage in the spiritual discipline of giving by committing to give a percentage of our income for one month. What is your reaction to that challenge?
8. Jesus promises that those who give according to his instruction will be rewarded. Do you feel you've been rewarded for your generosity in the past? If so, how?

Have someone read Matthew 6:5-6 and Mark 1:35. Following his discussion on giving, Jesus challenges his audience to engage in the discipline of private prayer.

9. Which is easier, praying consistently or giving consistently? Why?
10. Why do you think Jesus instructs us to pray privately on a regular basis?
11. We all pray in times of crisis. Do you think our crisis prayers would be different if we practiced the discipline of private daily prayer? If so, how?
12. Once again Jesus promises a reward, this time to those who pray privately. In your opinion, how are those who pray in private rewarded?
13. When Rich presented this content in the message, he challenged us to engage in the discipline of daily, private prayer. What is your reaction to that challenge? Is that something we could commit to as a group for one week?

Moving Forward

The notion of a discipline being essential to an authentic, heart-felt relationship may seem strange. After all, discipline is about routine. A relationship is fluid. But if you think about it, every healthy relationship is held together partly by disciplined actions and routines. Perhaps the easiest way to understand the importance of discipline in a relationship is to consider a relationship without boundaries. All self-imposed boundaries are a form of discipline. Imagine a marriage in which neither partner practices self-control. The marriage would eventually deteriorate.

Our relationship with God shares a similar dynamic. Abandoning these practices leaves God at the periphery of our lives. Regularly practicing these disciplines, however, draw us into a closer, more intimate, more dependent relationship with our heavenly Father. What will you do this week to establish both giving and prayer as a regular discipline?

CHANGING YOUR MIND

"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 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. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Matthew 6:2-4

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Mark 1:35