

7th Grade New Testament (Gospels)

Lesson Plan: Giving (Matthew 6:1-4; 16-18)

Learning Goals: Students should be able to give examples of Jesus' teaching on spiritual disciplines (prayer and fasting) and distinguish between actions and motivations.

Opening Question: What does it mean to be a hypocrite? (or alternate activity)

Prayer

Discuss question on the board.

Possible Activity: "What's Inside?"

Items needed: different food items, two of every kind - one name brand and one generic brand in containers to hide the identity of each. (chocolate pudding, peanut butter, juice, soda, etc.)

Recruit a student volunteer to taste the food and try to determine which food is the name brand and which is the generic.

Follow Up Questions:

- Which items tasted almost the same?
- Which items could you tell weren't the real thing because they tasted different?
- What made it difficult or easy to tell the difference?
- In real life, how do you know when people are one thing on the outside and something else (mostly bad) on the inside?

In the same way that Jesus desires to move from the fruit to the seed of behavior in the 6 antitheses, here he wants to shift the emphasis from action to motivation.

Jesus has very harsh words here for hypocrites.

Definition: (1) A person who professes certain ideals, but fails to live up to them.

(2) A person who engages in the same behaviors he condemns others for.

At the heart of the sermon on the mount is a section on spiritual disciplines.

Definition: Activities and habits that we practice to orient our lives and align us with God's on-going activity and purpose.

2 Examples:

Giving

- Don't give in such a way that it draws attention to the giver.
- There is a combination here of deceiving oneself and others. (Make ourselves feel or look holier than we really are.)
- We are called to give without any expectation of getting anything in return. (Example: those who only give so they can get a tax break, or only give expecting God to bless them in return.)
- Secrecy in giving - connection to Matthew 25:31-46 (those who are rewarded by Jesus are the ones who don't even remember doing anything worthy of being rewarded; they served without expectation).

Fasting

- The focus of the Bible on fasting is not on what we get from fasting or on motivating people to fast in order to acquire something, but instead lands squarely on responding to sacred moments in life.
- Definition: Fasting means a human being refrains from food or water, or both, for a limited period of time in response to some sacred, grievous moment (death, the threat of war, sin, our neediness, or our fear of God's judgment). In fasting, we enter into the grief of God.
- The focus here is on intent (not turning a sacred act into an act of theater performance).
- We fast because we are whole beings (body, soul, spirit) - everything is connected.

*(*Serious note: Jesus is urging his followers to fast for the right reasons and not to fast for the wrong motives. If you are fasting to try to lose weight, that is NOT the right motive. You are not genuinely fasting, you are starving yourself. That is indicative of an eating disorder - anorexia.)*

Is Jesus saying that we can't do anything in public?

Wouldn't this contradict Matthew 5:16 about letting our light shine before so others?

(We are to let our light shine so that others glorify God, not us)

No. Jesus prayed, spoke, taught, performed miracles, etc. in the synagogue and in public.

So What? How do we live this?

- We need to be aware of our motivations. Why do I do what I do?
- We need to be aware of the temptation to always want to be recognized for what we do. (We want people to say thank you, we want to get appropriate credit, we want to be noticed.)

Four signs that may warn against a motivation problem:

1. Grumbling when your actions are not noticed or congratulated.
2. Experiencing envy or jealousy when others get credit and you don't.
3. Feeling irritated or getting angry when you don't get what you want.
4. You always feel the need to keep score.

Lesson Summary / Review:

Students should review and highlight the following vocabulary terms and concepts from this lesson in their notes:

- Hypocrite
- Spiritual Discipline
- Fasting