

THE BIG IDEA: Don't make optional what God makes standard.

The Take-Off

This morning marks a turning point in the greatest sermon ever preached.

To this point in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has been talking mostly about our identity and our heart
From here to the end, He's going to talk mostly about our activity and motives

In other words, up until now we've focused on WHO we are, but now we're going to focus on WHAT we do and WHY we do it.

We see this is the very first verse - **Matthew 6:1 (NIV)**

The WHATS we're going to talk about were done by the Pharisees, but they were missing the right WHY

You're going to feel a little like you're getting checked into the boards at a hockey game and that's ok. It's hard to have our motives questioned, but it's a little easier knowing that the One asking the questions is for us!

Remember that IDENTITY fuels ACTIVITY!

Well, a whole bunch of activity is coming our way and if our identity isn't secure, it's going to feel even worse because Jesus is going to continue to describe a standard that we often think is too high for us to attain.

(Hint: that's why we need Him!)

If you've ever bought a car, you're going to understand the difference between standard and optional.

Basically, whatever car you fell in love with during the commercial is going to cost you a whole lot more than the low price flashed at the end of the commercial because the car you saw was loaded with optional equipment.

Here's why the difference is so important: what we're getting ready to talk about is standard equipment for followers of Jesus.

The problem is that we've treated it as optional. Like only the followers of Jesus who can afford these things are supposed to do them.

But as we'll see, if we want to experience the kind of victorious life that Jesus calls us to, then **we can't afford to make optional what God makes standard.**

Ouch.

See why I mentioned that you might feel like you got checked into the boards during a hockey game?

We're going to be in a number of verses in Matthew 6 this morning, so go ahead and turn there.

Let's read **Matthew 6:1-8 (NIV)** and **Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV)** and talk about **3 Big Whens in the Kingdom.**

1. 3 Big Whens

- a. We talk a lot about the big buts in the Bible and even the big ifs; this morning I want you to see big whens
- b. If you've got a favorite sports team or if you play sports, you can probably think of some big wins
- c. Maybe a national championship or a game winning shot or catch
- d. In our passage today, Jesus is going to talk about 3 whens that can lead to wins as we follow Him
- e. The 3 Whens? Giving. Praying. Fasting.
- f. These aren't going to be suggestions or hopes.
- g. And I'm not going to say that they will ever come naturally - we like to throw things out there like how praying should be like breathing
- h. But you can breathe without even thinking about it - that really is natural
- i. But these 3 disciplines (and don't let that word scare you) may not happen naturally, but Jesus does talk as if they can become second-nature
- j. He doesn't really leave us the option of not giving, not praying, or not fasting.
- k. These 3 Whens are standard equipment for a follower of Jesus that we've made optional
- l. "The really mature believers give and pray and fast. I'm not there yet."
- m. Wrong response. If you love Jesus, these aren't options at the Christian buffet line.
- n. These are staples of a healthy diet, so let's try to understand them a bit more.

2. Big When #1: Giving

- a. **Generosity** comes up a ton here at The Gathering because Kingdom generosity can change culture
- b. Remember that it was the generosity of the early church that overcame the hatred they experienced
- c. They were persecuted and yet people sided with them - that only happens when you've given generously

- d. But this isn't just about giving, but the motive behind the giving
- e. The Pharisees gave for recognition - parading in front of others how much they were giving
- f. Jesus calls them hypocrites - literal word means "playing a part" like an actor
- g. Jesus calls us to give for God's recognition
- h. Our reward is seeing God use our giving to meet the need that prompted us to give
- i. But we'll never give something if we aren't giving anything
- j. Don't allow giving and generosity to be an "if" in your life
- k. When you give, not if you give
- l. **2 Cor. 9:11 (NIV)** / "And you will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on EVERY occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."

3. Big When #2: Praying

- a. Jesus turns to the **second Big When - praying**
- b. We're going to devote all of next Sunday to the Lord's Prayer, but let's make some quick points here.
- c. **vv. 5-6** / Pray in secret before you pray in public / Wendy telling me she hated hearing me pray at church!
- d. **vv. 7-8** / Pray sincerely / repeating isn't a bad thing, but you want to use your faith more than just words
- e. **[VIDEO / What if we talked to people like we talk to God]**
- f. **1 Thess. 5:17 (NLT)** / never stop praying
- g. **Col. 4:2 (NLT)** / be mindful of what we're praying / stop multitasking prayer!
- h. Set aside a time - even a small amount - to truly be with God
- i. John 15 is all about abiding with Jesus, not associating with Jesus!

4. Big When #3: Fasting

- a. **The final Big When is fasting**, and of the three, this is probably the least understood of the group
- b. It's definitely one that has been relegated to the "really spiritual"
- c. At it's most basic, fasting is about not eating, but many also fast from things like tv, social media, etc
- d. For our purpose, let's say that fasting is doing without the physical in order to make room for the spiritual
- e. But here, Jesus isn't talking about the method of fasting, but the motive
- f. Don't fast so others think you're "all that" - fast so that God sees you
- g. Some fast to get man's attention; we fast to get God's attention
- h. First Tuesday happens every month - it's a great way to incorporate fasting as an intentional rhythm

The Landing

Let me finish the same way we started: our identity fuels our activity

Galatians 5:16 calls us to walk by the Spirit

How do we do that? Could it be as simple as turning the if into a when?

Pick an amount and give it.

Set aside some time and pray during it.

Pick a meal and fast from it.

Don't make optional what God makes standard.