

Welcome

Hey, everyone. My name is Josh Mounce, and I'm part of the preaching team here at Catalyst. I'm glad you're all sitting down because guys - we need to talk. You're gettin' kinda lazy. I see you letting that beach body slip away... slacking on those healthy habits. I get it. Fall is starting to creep into your brain. You think, "Eh, long pants means no one's gonna see all this leg hair." And everyone knows that fall is made for that favorite pair of pants with the stretchy waistband. As a society, we are kind of getting lax on physical disciplines. And well, you see, I was never really a fan of the word, "discipline" in the first place, so I just decided to skip all of that stuff anyway. When I was a kid, "discipline" meant running around the house attempting to evade my dad with a wooden spoon. Discipline was never something that I thought was "good" for me, despite the insistence from my mother that my dad disciplines me because he loves me.

I'm guessing that I'm not the only one who isn't a fan of the word, "discipline." It just evokes so much tension and anxiety. It makes you think of all the things that you aren't doing right, and of what you need to change. Or maybe you think of all the good habits that you gave up on. Or maybe of how it was twisted into a reason to be abusive. And I think that, unfortunately, those of us who stand up here to speak are often the culprits. We unintentionally turn spiritual disciplines into a guilt inducing list of things to do. But that's not how it should be. These aren't supposed to feel oppressive but rather uplifting.

What I want to present you with is the idea that discipline, and especially spiritual discipline, isn't bad. It's not meant to be a guilt trip or to make you feel inadequate. If we reframe or adjust our view and understanding of it, then we can see it as an opportunity for growth. It can be something we want to do, because the rewards on the other end vastly outweigh the effort that we put in now. Since you are all here on a Sunday morning, I am going to assume that you want to grow in your relationship with God, and practicing spiritual disciplines is one way that we can. What's more is that we aren't doing all the work to get to God. We are not earning his favor or presence. We are merely opening ourselves up to God. You see, God is just waiting for you to allow Him to work. These spiritual disciplines are a way to create space in us for God to inhabit, for him to pour out his love and purpose into. Discipline is not meant for shame or guilt it is meant for experiencing God's love, his purpose, and how he helps us grow.

Let's take the next moments to stand together and sing and prepare our minds and heart for what God wants to tell us.

Message

Our Fall Series is called 5 Things God Uses to Grow Your Faith. We began by talking about FAITH. We insisted that faith isn't about following rules or checking boxes. Rather, faith is about relationships, about trust. If we go clear back to the beginning of Scripture, we see that the whole story of the Bible is really a story of faith: us breaking trust with God and God working tirelessly to restore that trust.

We suggested that God uses five faith catalysts to grow our faith. If you talk to people who have Big Faith, ask them to tell you the story of their faith, these five things come up over and over. We first looked at practical teaching. We saw that when Scripture comes alive for us, when we begin to obey God, to actually do the things God calls us to do, our faith grows.

Then, we looked at providential relationships. We saw that God places people in our lives to help us grow. We asked how we can leverage those relationships to be sure we're paying attention when God brings them into our lives.

Today, we're going to explore the fourth thing God uses to grow our faith: Private Disciplines. While there are many spiritual disciplines, and we have a brochure that outlines them in the lobby, we are going to focus on giving today - giving not only of our money, but especially our time.

Now, wait! Before you tune out, stare off into your phone, or head for the door, give me a chance. This is not a chance for me to beg for money or sell you some green prayer cloth that will make you rich. I want to look at this idea of giving a bit differently. Not as a guilt trip, or to tell you some fantastic story of how I gave \$100 and got \$10,000 the next day... because honestly, those do a great disservice to what the practice of giving is all about. This is just as important as praying, fasting, or reading the Bible. But I know it feels like you may always hear pastors or evangelists talking about this. So why is it so important? Why does it hold the same value as praying?

Let me ask you this: what are the top three most important things in your life? (Read answers from texts) It seems like most of you agree on spouses, kids, family, God, your job, your hobbies, and such. So it's easy to tell me that, but how can I see it for myself? I see it in how you love to spend time with your family, how you love to give presents to your kids, or the hours you spend practicing your favorite hobby. I see it in the new upgrades to your car, in the decision to spend crazy amounts of money to take your kids to Disney, and in your giving to charitable organizations like this church. You see, if I can look at your daily schedule and your bank statement, I could know exactly what your priorities are and what you truly value.

That's because our time is fleeting and our money is finite. And I know that my first reaction is, "Well, just 'cause I don't give doesn't mean I don't care!" While that is true, it also means that it's not a priority to me, which is a problem. If we say we want to grow, then we need to practice these disciplines and make them a priority.

But maybe the problem is that we don't understand why we don't want to give. In searching my own heart, I think it really comes down to this: it's either pride, selfishness, or fear. Pride says, "We earned this money with no help from God or anyone else, so why do I have to give back. I did it all on my own!" Selfishness says, "Well, I only have a small amount of time for me during the day. Why do I need to spend it talking to God?"

And fear... that's the one that gets most of us - and especially me. Especially when you have just barely enough money to get by as it is. When you have so much to do during the day that there's no way you can just sit for 15 minutes to have quiet time with God. We fear that God will not be enough. That if we give Him our time or money, it will be lost, or maybe even wasted.

You see, giving to God creates a sort of dependence on Him that we aren't really comfortable with. It creates uncertainty. It forces us to have faith that we will still get done what we needed to in the day, even though we took 30 minutes for a devotional. It means trusting Him that this money we are giving to the church will not be wasted, and that we are investing in something eternal. And that no matter what, He will take care of us because we made Him a priority.

So am I saying that we have to give to get into heaven? That unless we pay our dues God will just pass over us? No - that is absolutely not what I am saying. To say that would be to directly contradict what God has done through Christ. What I AM saying is that if we are serious about growing our faith in God and our relationship with Him, then we will take spiritual disciplines, like these, seriously. Because at the core of this and pretty much everything we have been talking about is trust. Trust that God wants what's best for us and that He will provide. And trust is so

important because it's the foundation of any good relationship and the more trust the deeper the relationship. Just think of the one person that knows all of your deepest secrets, my guess is that that person is your best friend. Why? Well, because you have entrusted them with your secrets, your love, your reputation, sometimes your kids and pets. We often times put more of our trust into other humans who often fail us than the perfect God who made us.

So this whole giving thing is even more about forcing us into a deeper level of trust and therefore relationship. And not a toxic one, but a loving and flourishing one with a God that wants to see nothing more than us succeed and grow. If we can start to view it through this lens, giving can become a joy rather than a burden.

In 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul has asked the Church in Corinth to donate money and have it ready for when his companions arrive. And while this may seem a bit direct or rude, it's actually because he had heard about how excited they were to give and had told everyone about it. He was excited to use this money to help a church in Jerusalem that was suffering through a bad famine. So he follows with encouragement about giving and how it blesses others and God multiplies it.

Let's read what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:6-15:

Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. As the Scriptures say, "They share freely and give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will be remembered forever."

For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God.

As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the overflowing grace God has given to you. Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words! -- 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

But I guess this ultimately begs the question of why: why does the God who is all powerful and can make things out of thin air need our time and money? Can't He just will things to happen or exist? The answer is that He doesn't. Confusing, right? You see, spiritual disciplines aren't about giving God something that He needs, but teaching and training ourselves to trust Him more and become the person, the witness, and the reflection of Him that we were meant to be.

Giving our time and money to God and our church is a way to further the kingdom here on earth. It shows that we aren't thinking just 3 or 30 years ahead, but maybe even 3,000. We aren't in this for the short game. We want to see the bend of history move towards God. We want to invest in what will last far beyond our families and hobbies. And the great thing is that even if you only give to this church, it influences the entire world. Some of the money you give passes through the Nazarene denomination and goes out to train pastors in over 160 countries

around the world. And that is just one way of how you can impact the world through giving, no matter if it's \$5 or \$500.

It's an act of humility. The whole idea of giving God the first of what we earn and not the leftovers is that we immediately recognize that what we have is because of Him. We say that no matter what surprise expenses come up, we are choosing to trust Him with what we have first.

And again, I'm not asking you to pull out your checkbook and write us a big check. What I am asking is that you talk to God about where your time and money would have the most impact. It's not even just limited to this church. Though I do have to say I love catalyst and what God is doing here. It could be volunteering at the Red Cross or a Boys' and Girls' Club. It could mean sponsoring a foreign missionary or a child in another country. It could mean fostering, or hosting an exchange student for a summer. God can work through your time and money in so many more ways than we think. We just need to be ready and willing to trust Him with the sacrifice.

So what if you give a lot of money or invest a lot of time in something that you REALLY feel God directing you to, but you see no result or change? It can feel like maybe you heard God wrong, or didn't give enough, or didn't pray enough. But remember - we are in it for the long haul. Just because you didn't get a random check for \$10,000 doesn't mean that your sacrifice was in vain. And if we reduce this spiritual practice to that then we are treating this whole thing with God like a transaction and not a relationship. Like God is a vending machine and we just have to find the right combination of good deeds or push the right buttons to get what we want. There are always ways in which God is working behind the scenes that we don't see: The changes inside a kid's heart because you spent time with them. The extra time a missionary could spend in a country to change someone's life because you gave to them. These are the changes and blessing that we don't see, but God does. He knows how to take that that \$10 you gave and multiply it into dozens of blankets for the homeless or meals for the starving.

In the 1950's, a couple by the name of Ressa and Al took \$5,000 out of their savings and gave it to a pastor who wanted to start a Christian camp. And while that is definitely a generous donation, here's how much that money translates into today. \$52,312.45. That is about what many of us may make in a year. They took a MASSIVE step out in faith because they believed that God wanted to work through them and in the lives of many others. That pastor ultimately left his church so he could direct the camp ministry full-time. But for the next 40 years, Ressa and Al sent money to the camp every month. The first year, only 19 children attended the camp. But as the years went on more and more children came every year. Now thousands come to the camp every year. While the camp director was on the the front lines, Ressa and Al helped to keep the place running by giving money every month. Their sacrifice and commitment to spiritual discipline has changed the lives of thousands of youth. Now just think about how their relationship with God must have changed. Think about the joy that knowing that their spirit of giving blessed more than they probably ever imagined. I like to think about how excited I get to give my kids presents. To see how it gives them such joy. In heaven, Ressa and Al will get to meet thousands of people they helped lead to Christ through their faithful and generous giving that helped start and sustain that camp for many years. They will have given those kids a gift that will have changed their lives forever. They will see how God used their money to do more than they could have if they had kept it for themselves.

So how would your relationship with God be different if you put these disciplines into practice? If you had to depend on Him more? Discipline isn't bad. These disciplines are an opportunity for growth. A chance to step out in faith and trust God with our most precious and finite resources.

Our growth in faith depends much more on us and our willingness to trust God than it does on Him. He is excited to use what we give Him and multiply it to affect hundreds and thousands of people. We only need to be willing to depend on Him, and not ourselves, to provide everything that we need.

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] Before we give, before we pray, before we do anything, we receive communion together. This table invites us to share in the meal Jesus ate with his followers the night before he was killed. In that meal, he broke bread and gave it to us, saying, “This is my body, broken for you. Eat this and remember me.”

After the meal was finished, he gave us a cup of wine, saying, “This is my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sin. Drink it all.”

At this table, Jesus creates space for us to be in relationship with God. At this table, Jesus demonstrates his trustworthiness by giving his very life for us. Everything that needs to be accomplished for us to have a relationship with God, Jesus accomplished in his death and resurrection. All that is required of us is to respond when Jesus says, “Come.”

You don’t have to be a member of Catalyst to receive communion with us today. This table is open to anyone who is responding to God’s invitation. If you are willing to say Yes to the work God has already done, to trust God more fully, then you’re welcome to come to the table.

Before we receive communion, we’re going to spend some time in prayer together. I’m going to lead you in a Prayer of Examen. I’ll ask you four questions, and give you space after each to reflect prayerfully. After that, I’ll pray for us all, and then as you’re ready, you’re welcome to approach the table.

In the last week, where have I made space in my time or my finances to trust God?

In the last week, how have my time or finances shown that I’m ignoring God?

How might I be tempted to ignore God in the next week?

This week, how can I make space in my time or finances to trust God?

God, our Father,

You have gathered us together today to remind us that you are always at work to draw us into a deeper relationship with you. We confess that too often we are prideful, selfish or afraid to acknowledge your goodness and provision. Thank you for reminding us through your servant Paul that you created us to be givers, that you want to use every aspect of our lives to draw us deeper into relationship with you.

We approach your table this morning at your invitation. We come to participate in your love, to remember yet again that everything we have is because of you and that in you we live and move and exist. We come to receive these wafers and juice, and we ask that they become a spiritual food. Please give us the grace we need to see you in every area of our lives. Give us the grace to create space in our lives that your Holy Spirit might transform us always more closely into the image of your son Jesus.

It’s in his name we offer these prayers and approach your table today.

Assignment/Blessing

Thank you to those of you who are regularly supporting Catalyst through your giving and serving. Thank you for making what we do possible!

And again, if you're a guest with us, welcome! We know it can be hard to connect to a new congregation, and we wanted to make it easy to do that. We created an experience called the Newcomers' Lunch that we do once a month. The next one is next week, on October 21. It's right after this, and in about 45 minutes, we feed you, tell you who Catalyst is, and what God is doing here, and we give you a next step to get connected. If you'd like to sign up, just check the top box on the Next Step Card and drop it in the box by the door on the way out!

Now, as you're going, may you leave knowing that God has gone before you. May you leave knowing God is going beside you. May you leave knowing that God is following behind you. Go in the knowledge that God loves you and is working all around you to invite you to trust. Know that as you create space for God this week, God will be faithful to grow your faith and bring you back next week with a deeper trust and greater love.

Go in the grace and peace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!