

## OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

THRIVING AMID THE THREATS  
THRIVING WHEN DUPLICITY ARISES  
JANUARY 29 – FEBRUARY 4, 2017



### INFORMATION

#### **Valentino's Dessert Café**

Friday, February 10 (6:00-9:00pm)

Plan a date night with your sweetheart, growth group, or the entire family! Invite your friends and neighbours for a relaxed evening out. Decadent desserts and specialty coffees will be available for purchase, served by our Sr. High youth. (Sign up at the Event Registration Kiosk to donate desserts or items needed).

#### **Family Focus Day Sunday, February 19 @ 11am (one service only)**

Join us for a special service designed for the entire family, with a "kid-friendly" focus you won't want to miss! No Sunday School or pre-school classes, but nursery will be provided for children under 3.

The service will revolve around J. Warner Wallace's newest book *Cold-Case Christianity for KIDS*.

Special music, a dramatic performance, prizes and games—this is a Family Day event for the whole gang. Join the adventure when our police academy cadets put their detective skills to the test on the world's oldest cold case—the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Both adult and kid versions of J. Warner Wallace's book *Cold Case Christianity* will be for sale at the event.

### COACHES' CORNER

Leaders, based on feedback, the first part of this article resonated with a number of you past week. I present to you the second half. Enjoy.

#### ***Is Our Small Group Dying? Use these symptoms to help determine the health of your group.***

By Joel Comiskey (PART 2)

You've heard the phrase that 20 percent of church people do 80 percent of the work? Put another way, 80 percent of the people do 20 percent of the work. But sometimes groups are wholly comprised of the 80 percent who don't share the work load. Even worse, a group can be taken captive by non-committal people. For example, when a group fluctuates weekly from 2 attenders to 15, the group is unstable and can easily capsizes as the leaders grow weary with doing everything.

## SERMON BASED GROWTH GROUP

As a remedy for this, some groups make a covenant with group members (OEFC refers to these as a group 'code of conduct' and samples are available in the Resources section of our website), asking each member to actively participate in the life of the group—which includes regular attendance and showing up on time.. Others emphasize the small-group core of faithful and committed members. One large church, for example, expects the core members of each group to meet separately on a different night from the small group in order to plan out the group meeting, visit members, and invite new people. This church discovered that strong core groups generated healthy small groups.

### **Eternal Members**

Small groups are the perfect place to give people the opportunity to use their gifts and grow in leadership. They turn members into leaders—disciples who make other disciples. I get excited about small-group ministry every time I remember that it is the best way to fulfill Christ's mandate to make disciples who are equipped to make other disciples (Matthew 28:18–20).

Some small groups, however, never go beyond themselves. No one is willing to enter the prescribed training and lead a new group (or be part of a new-group leadership team). Eventually, the leader becomes over-burdened and decides to quit.

### **Will the Group Live?**

I led one group for a couple years and eventually had to close it. Three out of the above four problems overtook the group, and I felt it was best to abandon ship and start afresh. The group simply was not healthy. The best thing I could do was integrate the remaining members into other groups and start a new group from scratch.

On other occasions, I've been able to deal with a particular sickness and move on. When the group members and I discovered a remedy, the group moved into new life and health and continued reaching out.

Which will be true of your group? Simply put, you must try your best to resolve the problems you are facing. If your group is suffering from one or two of the illnesses above, you should be able to gather with your members and your [Community Life Pastor] and figure out a solution.

If your group's illness is more pronounced, however, it may be that your only option is to turn off the lights and start over.

— Joel Comiskey is a pastor, church planter, and founder of [www.joelcomiskeygroup.com](http://www.joelcomiskeygroup.com).

### **PONDER:**

1. Is our group suffering from any of the illnesses above?
2. What illnesses has our group recovered from in the past, and how was that accomplished?
3. What steps can we take to identify a prescription that will get us to a better place? Who can help us make the proper diagnosis?

## **SERMON OUTLINE**

### **Thriving When Duplicity Arises** **Acts 4:36–5:16**

Joshua 7:1, 11  
Numbers 12:10-16  
1Corinthians 11:30

**Duplicity slipped into the Thriving Church for two reasons:**

1. The Baggage of Pride
2. The Baggage of Paganism

**Avoiding Duplicity requires a Proper View of God and his Kingdom**

*What do I need to do with what I've heard today?*

## MAIN POINT

When we are part of God's thriving church, we must guard ourselves against the tendency toward pride.

## THINKING THINGS THROUGH

*Connect the sermon to the study.*

**1. Have you ever been tempted to misrepresent yourself in a job or friendship? What gave rise to these feelings?**

**2. Do you ever feel tempted to pretend to be someone else in your relationships with God and/or other Christians? Why are we tempted to do so?**

**Leader:** Throughout this sermon series, we have been learning about the thriving church. At the end of Acts 4 into the beginning of chapter 5, the desire to be seen and acknowledged brought conflict in the church in the form of human pride. Pride remains a danger for us and our church today, and it is something we must actively guard against. While pride can take many different shapes in our lives, let's consider three specific

## DIGGING DEEPER

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 6:1-4.

**3. In Matthew 6, Jesus pointed to three specific aspects of our spiritual lives where pride is a danger. The first of these is generosity. How does pride affect our generosity? What are some selfish reasons we're motivated to give?**

**4. What does Jesus tell us to do in order to be humble givers? What criteria can we use to make sure we are giving for the right reasons?**

## SERMON BASED GROWTH GROUP

**Leader:** In Matthew 6:1-4, Jesus warned against being like “hypocrites,” people who gave to the poor in such a public manner that they would be recognized by others. By giving in this manner, they drew attention to themselves rather than pointing recipients of their gifts toward God. Generosity is a key component of a thriving church (Acts 2:45), so it also becomes an easy place for pride to creep in. When you give, whether it be your time or your resources, remember that you are giving back from what God has given you. All that you own is given to you by God. By giving in private, you eliminate the temptation to take the praise for yourself.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 6:5-15.

---

**5. Another easy area for pride to grow in a thriving church is through prayer. How can we know if our motives are pure when it comes to prayer? What are some obvious clues our motives might not be pure?**

**6. What three kinds of prayer did Jesus say to avoid? If these are the prayers we should avoid, what should the prayers of a thriving church be like? Look to Jesus’ example in verses 9-13 to help you answer.**

**7. How does praying as Jesus demonstrated help us keep our pride in check?**

**Leader:** In order to keep pride out of our prayers, Jesus cited three specific kinds of prayer to avoid. First, don’t pray as those who loved to be seen praying (v. 5). A second mistake when praying is to babble (v. 7). The word translated “babbling” appears only here in the Bible, and it is related to going on and on without thinking, or speaking mindless prayers. Third, we need not feel compelled to inform God of endless details about our needs (v. 8). The problem with each of these types of prayer is that the focus is on ourselves rather than on God. In contrast, Jesus’ prayer is focused completely on God—His character and His work in our lives.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 6:16-18.

---

**8. The third spiritual practice Jesus drew attention to was fasting. What is the purpose or goal of fasting? How does pride twist fasting into something it isn’t supposed to be?**

## SERMON BASED GROWTH GROUP

**9. The Pharisees in Matthew 6 used fasting as a way to be seen, to show off their spirituality. What is different about the way Jesus tells us to fast?**

**Leader:** We have a natural tendency to be drawn in and disappointed by small pleasures that promise great satisfaction. They always fail us. To help us battle this tendency, the Bible directs us to fast. While fasting is not as common a practice as giving and praying, it is supposed to be a part of our Christian lives. When we fast we feel the weakness that leads us to seek false satisfaction, and we remember that true satisfaction is feasting with Jesus. The temptation when you fast is pride. Jesus condemned that kind of fasting; they only wanted others to be impressed with their spirituality, and that's the reward they received. But when Jesus commands us to fast, He is moving us toward something better than the praise of men. When we fast, we can have a greater experience of and focus on God's grace in our lives as we are reminded of where our true strength and true sustenance lies.

### DOING LIFE TOGETHER

*Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.*

**10. In Matthew 6, Jesus mentioned three areas where pride can creep into our individual relationships with God and the life of our church—giving, praying, and fasting. What are some other examples? From these examples, what can we conclude about the danger pride poses to the thriving church?**

**11. The only way to avoid the tendency toward pride in the Christian life is to keep our focus on God and His grace. What are some specific ways we can help each other keep God at the center of all we do this week and in the months to come?**

### PRAYER

As you close in prayer, ask God to help you fight back against the desire to be seen and acknowledged for your relationship with God. Pray that humility would be a defining mark of our church body, and that we would be quick to point out pride in one another's lives.

### MEMORIZE

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have

## SERMON BASED GROWTH GROUP

received their reward in full. – Matthew 6:5

### SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

#### MATTHEW 6:1-18

---

**6:1.** This verse serves as an introduction to all of 6:1-18. It establishes the theme of doing acts of righteousness before men, and thus losing reward from your Father in heaven. Jesus' exhortation emphasizes the need to be on the alert to the temptation to seek our reward from men. Jesus was not condemning the righteous acts themselves. His concern was the motivation behind the actions. The same act of obedience can be right or wrong, depending on why a person does the act.

The opening when (v. 2) implies that this was a teaching that applied to any instance of giving. Jesus began by telling His hearers not to give alms, ascribing such ostentatious behavior to the hypocrites (referring to the scribes and Pharisees of 5:20). Key to the passage is the explanation of their motive: to be honored by men. In this first example, Matthew uses a verb meaning praise (5:16), whereas in the second and third examples, he uses another verb meaning "to make visible" (active), "to be seen" (passive). The meanings of the words overlap, but the concern is the tendency toward competition with God for glory.

"Giving" or "almsgiving" is the translation of terms meaning "perform an act of mercy." By the first century, the phrase came to mean specifically the act of giving to the needy. This kind of giving was not mandatory in Scripture, for it was above and beyond the three required tithes. God's people are not to give to draw attention to themselves. In classical Greek, the term hypocrite referred to an actor on stage, wearing a mask. In the New Testament, it came to have a negative connotation, referring to someone putting on an act (i.e., masking the truth). Jewish rabbis taught that almsgiving received especially high reward.

**6:3-5.** Verse 3 begins with the strong adversative, But when you. The emphasis on "you" was intended to draw a stark contrast between the hypocrites just described and Jesus' kingdom servants, the disciples of 5:1-2. Jesus' instruction in 6:3 is exaggerated wording intended to make the point: "Do all you can to avoid drawing attention to yourself." Since nothing escapes the eye of God, even the most private act is noticed and will be rewarded. Jesus' use of the title Father added warmth to His guarantee of reward. This is not to be seen as a mechanical kind of relationship. Rather, the gift from the heart is given out of love for the Father, and the reward is returned as to a dearly beloved Son.

The reward (6:4,6,18) is not unrelated to the concept of reward in 6:1. The first word leans more toward the idea of repayment; thus, the idea of reimbursement for our "expense" incurred in each act of righteousness. But the point is the Father rewarding His servants. We were "created ... to do good works" (Eph. 2:10). In keeping with the instruction of 5:16 to "let your light shine," our Father in heaven will reward us for good works. The issue for the Pharisees was works apart from God's righteousness. The Pharisees were trying to establish their own righteousness by works.

**6:6-8.** Jesus' instructions on prayer began with a warning. Jesus was cautioning against praying in public with the motive of receiving admiring glances and pats on the back for being so devout. Jesus instructed us to find a private place for prayer where thoughts of people's responses won't distract us (v. 6). Thus in secret we can focus on the Father. A second mistake when praying is to babble (v. 7). Jesus was not forbidding prayer for the same thing over and over (see 26:39-44). He even told parables about persistence in prayer (Matt. 7:7-11). Jesus stressed that the Father listens to earnest hearts, not endless words. Jesus reminded us the Father knows the things we need before we ask Him (v. 8). This is not to discourage us from making specific requests in

## SERMON BASED GROWTH GROUP

prayer, for He invites us to do that (7:7-11). It does assure us that He will answer in ways that best meet our needs, further His kingdom, and enhance our usefulness.

**6:9.** By commanding His disciples to pray like this rather than simply “pray this,” Jesus demonstrated that this prayer was offered as a model rather than to be recited (v. 9). Your name be honored as holy suggests that Jesus expected His disciples to live righteous lives that honor rather than profane God’s name (5:16; Lev. 22:31-32). This is an important precondition for successful prayer. God is the ideal Father—all-loving, all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful, and always present with us. At the same time, He is in heaven, which tells us He is greater than we can comprehend; so we approach Him as our Father with due reverence. Our implies that Jesus intended this prayer to be a model for prayer for when disciples gather as a group.

**6:10.** Your kingdom come (v. 10) could be translated “Your reign come.” The kingdom has come in the hearts of all who have submitted to Jesus as Lord. It also is coming as more people yield their hearts to His reign. The kingdom will not have come fully, though, until Jesus returns and establishes it absolutely and forever. To pray for the Father to see that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven frightens some people. Heaven is the only place free of sin and its painful effects. We should daily pray for the future coming of God’s rule in which He will reign fully and completely over the world.

**6:11-13.** In verse 11, the prayer’s focus shifts from God’s eternal purposes to our temporal needs. We are to request what we need to sustain life, such as daily bread. Daily may be understood as “for today” or “for tomorrow,” in either case pointing to immediate need. This prayer reminds us that our Father is our Provider. As a wise father, God provides what we need, not necessarily what we want. We also are to ask for forgiveness. Debts are sins viewed as obligations to the Father. The Greek grammar indicates that the disciple prays for forgiveness from God only after having first expressed forgiveness to others. The final petition has puzzled many believers—Do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. We know God is good and does not tempt us to sin (James 1:13), so how are we to understand this? The overall meaning is obvious: the prayer is for the Father to keep us doing His will rather than being led astray by Satan.

**6:14-15.** These verses further exhort the kingdom servant concerning the necessity of forgiveness in human relationships if we expect God’s forgiveness. These verses, and 18:21-35, explain 6:12. Receiving God’s forgiveness motivates forgiveness toward others. Jesus expects us to replace this specific petition with more personalized requests for forgiveness for the specific sins in our own lives.

**6:16-18.** Fasting is the spiritual discipline of refraining from normal routines of eating and drinking in order to focus on repentance or prayer. Just as Jesus assumed His followers would give to the poor (Matt. 6:2) and pray (v. 5), He also assumed they would fast. The approach of the hypocrites in fasting was again to draw attention to themselves. By looking sad-faced and unattractive they insured others noticed they were fasting. Jesus ridiculed such theatrics as achieving the attention the hypocrites craved but missing the purpose of fasting. The spiritual discipline of fasting is essentially a private experience between the worshiper and God. The obvious way to safeguard fasting from hypocrisy is to keep it a secret. Then God will reward you. Self-denial of any sort is counter-cultural in our day. Choosing to give up pleasure of any kind certainly gains notice. Our motives to live a life of purity and sobriety and simplicity may be genuine at the start, but we all are vulnerable to enjoying the praise of others for these motives.