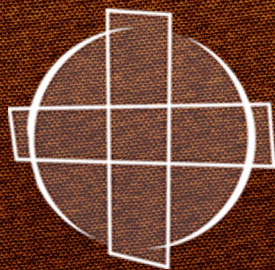


Donald J. Wills
Senior Pastor

OCTOBER &
NOVEMBER
2018

TRANS *f* **ORMED** 2018
MATT. 6:25-7:23
IN OUR OUTLOOK



ADULT CONNECT
CLASS CURRICULUM

The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

There are some exciting and challenging opportunities which lie ahead of us as the FBCFW family. We are launching our campaign—"It's Time, Impact Tomorrow, Today!"—to address some much-needed repairs and renovations in our sanctuary. For this reason, the dates in the curriculum booklet begin with the first two weeks in October and end with the last two weeks of November. On October 21, the entire church will enter into the vision phase of this campaign. Please pray as we embark on this journey.

In this booklet, we acknowledge the teaching of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount is profound as it relates to us living a transformed life. In the next few weeks, we will discover how Jesus challenges us in the priority of our *devotion*, the genuineness of our *discernment*, the motives of our *desires*, and the deliverance from *destruction*. The key in all of this is truly found in the first week's lesson about the priority of our devotion, which is to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." When we do this, everything else will fall in to place. However, this can only be done through a truly transformed life in Christ.

As a reminder, the layout of this curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for both the teacher and the members to get the most from each study. We also acknowledge that teachers may have their own methods for preparing the lessons and we encourage them to prepare in the way that makes them most effective in presenting God's Word and the weekly lesson. We also encourage each teacher and member to use the suggested 7-day approach for their own personal study and encouragement.

Please note that during the month of December we will not have a published curriculum booklet. Each week our Connect Class teachers will bring a lesson about the coming of Messiah and the profound transforming power we have as a result of a His coming.

-Blessings
Pastor Don



Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively

Introduce

Day 1: Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Instruct

Day 2: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

Day 3: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

Inspire

Day 4: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Incorporate

Day 5: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

Day 6: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

Day 7: Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

Contents

October & November Lesson Plans

3



October 7, 2018

Transformed in our
Devotion

[Matthew 6:25-34](#)

15



October 14, 2018

Transformed in our
Discernment

[Matthew 7:1-6](#)

29



November 18, 2018

Transformed in our
Desires

[Matthew 7:7-12](#)

41



November 25, 2018

Transformed from
Destruction

[Matthew 7:13-23](#)

October 7, 2018



Transformed in our Devotion

Matthew 6:25-34

Focal Verse:

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

back to
Table of
Contents

Matthew 6:33

Introduce

At some point in our lives, probably all of us have experienced anxiety over something beyond our control. The stress this worry caused may have given us many restless and sleepless nights, it may have hindered our performance in daily tasks, it may have created health problems if it dominated our thoughts, and even worse it may have caused us to miss opportunities to accomplish something great. Sometimes anxiety can be rational because it alerts us to potential danger or prevents us from doing something irrational and stupid, but most of the time it occurs because we have misplaced our trust. Instead of trusting in what God can do, we trust in what we can do or control on our own. Because we serve a God who never fails and always fulfills His promises, we can be freed from such harmful anxiety when we trust in Him alone! For those of you who have children, especially mothers, worry may seem to come naturally. Eighteen years ago as a twenty-one-year-old seminary student, I moved to this area which has almost twice as many people as the entire state of Kentucky. For me, it was an adventure full of exciting opportunities, but for my mother it was her worst nightmare. Anxiety seized her; there wasn't one thing about which she was not anxious. I had no family within 750 miles and no one to look after me. She worried about my safety, driving in the city, finding a job, searching for a church in which to serve, having help if I became sick, and so on. Although God has promised us in His Word to provide and care for us, it didn't stop my mother from worrying.

Four years later, her anxiety once again became evident when I prepared to go on my first international mission trip to East Africa. She worried about every detail of the trip: What if I got lost in a foreign country?; What if I were abducted by terrorists?; What if I needed help and couldn't communicate to anyone?; What if I needed medical treatment or became ill? Her worry was exacerbated by a gentleman in her church who declared that in Nairobi bandits brandishing machetes would chop off a



*Transportation to Preaching Engagement
Mara Simba, Kenya*

Introduce

person's arm for a wrist watch! To which I responded, "I could be shot in Fort Worth!" (At the time, that didn't make the situation any better.) If God has called us, He will certainly equip us to accomplish His purpose according to His will. For me, moving to Fort Worth and going on an international mission trip presented endless opportunities. If I had been afraid and never trusted the Lord, I wouldn't be where God has me today serving here at FBCFW. As I look back on my life, I am confident that this indeed was God's divine plan because of the fruit which He has borne in this ministry. Nonetheless, anxiety can be especially crippling for any of us in our ministry through the local church if we fail to trust what God can do in and through us. It may prevent us from sharing the gospel because we are unsure what to say or how people will respond. It may cause us to withhold our tithe rather than trust that God will provide for us when we return the portion He requires. It may even prevent us from going on a mission trip or serving here in our local church because we feel that we lack experience and don't know how things may turn out. Here in [Matthew 6:25-34](#), Jesus commands us not to worry, but rather trust in His provision and seek His righteousness first. When we do, our devotion to Him will transform our outlook and allow Him to accomplish great things through us!

Key
Question

How has anxiety or worry affected your service to the Lord in the past?

Matthew 6:25

THE COMMAND NOT TO WORRY:

Jesus begins the next section of His Sermon on the Mount with the command **not to worry about our life**; He ties this command into the previous sections which we studied in September by using the conjunction **therefore**. When we have the right motives, the right perspective, and we earnestly seek Him through prayer, fasting, and authentic service, we **don't** have anything about which to **worry** because our heavenly Father will provide for us. Jesus gives us three areas in which we have no need to **worry**: 1) **what we will eat**, 2) **what we will drink**, and 3) **what we will wear** (i.e. **put on**). Thus, we have no need to **worry** about any of our physical needs. As the Creator, God has the ability to sustain **life** and give more than we need to survive. We aren't entitled to receive physical resources from the Lord, but He graciously provides for our basic needs! God's provision doesn't entitle us simply to sit, do nothing, and wait for something to fall into our laps. In fact, the Bible clearly states, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" ([2 Thess 3:10](#)). In addition, the people of Israel were responsible for gathering and preparing manna although God graciously provided it along with water in the wilderness ([Exod 16:4-5](#)). When we work as God has directed and we trust Him, He will provide abundantly in every situation.

What things typically worry you in life?

Question
1

In-Depth Information



*The way the command **not to worry** is written in the Greek has more of the connotation to "stop worrying." Because Jesus knows the heart of mankind, He knows our propensity to **worry** over the things that we can't control; therefore, He tells us to stop worrying and trust God.*

In the model prayer, Jesus invites us to ask the Father to meet our needs necessary for **life** ([Matt 6:11](#)). In more modern terms, this would focus more on our finances to provide for our physical needs: food, clothing, and shelter. Because we use a monetary system more than we rely on bartering with goods and services, God promises to enable us to make a living wage which can provide for our families. This doesn't mean that we won't ever lose our jobs from downsizing or restructuring; it doesn't mean that we will

Instruct

become millionaires. It does mean that we won't have to worry about our physical needs—even in the face of circumstances beyond our control. When things beyond our control happen, we can trust God and rely on His provision. We must remember, therefore, that this is a command **not to worry** rather than a mere statement or suggestion. Trust God and He will provide!



Jesus follows this command not to worry with a rhetorical question: **Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?** He wants His followers to understand that **life** consists of more than just **food** or physical needs; therefore, by this question, He shifts their focus back to their spiritual needs and their relationship with the heavenly Father. We can observe how Jesus lives by this principle when He resists temptation by telling the devil that “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” ([Matt 4:4](#)). Consequently, we find true contentment not in having our mere physical needs met, but in our relationship with Christ.

As humans, our greatest desire in **life** is to have a purpose and a place to belong in which we feel loved and useful. The pursuit for physical goods can only lead to disappointment because we will never attain enough to satisfy; instead, we will always crave more no matter how abundant our resources may be. In Christ, however, we find a purpose beyond the physical and a Savior who loves us more than anyone in this world! As we learned last week, we have something greater—eternal in fact—in which we can invest ([Matt 6:19-21](#)). When we concentrate on our spiritual relationship with our heavenly Father, we will never lack and always be content no matter how little or how much we may perceive that we have. Above all, we will impact the world and accomplish great things for Christ when we trust Him fully!

Why is it more important to concentrate on our spiritual needs and our relationship with our Father than our physical needs?

Question
2

THE CARE OF THE LORD DISPLAYED:

Having commanded us **not** to **worry**, Jesus gives us two examples from nature showing how much God truly cares for us. First, He instructs us to **look at** the example set by **the birds of the air** (v. 26).

Birds live as scavengers; they must hunt and gather their food daily. They aren't like humans because they **neither** plant crops **nor** harvest them to store in **barns**.

On the contrary, they live from day to day depending upon the generosity of the **heavenly Father** to provide. When we **look at the birds**, we observe that they never lack and never go hungry, but



State Bird of Texas, Northern Mockingbird

the Lord always provides abundantly for them. They simply rely on Him and go about their daily business. Therefore, Jesus ends this verse by asking a rhetorical question to emphasize our value to God: **Are you not of more value than they?** If God cares about **the birds**, how much more does He care about us as the most-important part of His creation?

How have you seen God's provision in the natural world around us?

Question
3

When we understand our **value** in Christ and allow Him to guide us, we won't fear the unknown. Imagine, for example, someone hoarding or stockpiling food because they fear the crash of the stock market or the apocalyptic end to the world. Generally, we save perishable items only to have them expire and spoil because we never use them and continually save them for fear of something that *may* happen one day. Although we ought to trust God and not fear, this doesn't mean that we shouldn't make plans for the future, whether for retirement or in opening a savings account for unexpected expenditures that may arise. On the contrary, we ought to allow God to guide us to make necessary preparations as He leads—based on trust in Him rather than fear. For instance, God directed the Egyptians under the leadership of Joseph to gather food for

Instruct

a seven-year famine. In the same way, we ought to trust the Lord and surrender to His leadership rather than worrying and trying to do things on our own.

Why do Jesus' comments here about birds living day to day not excuse us from making plans for the future?

Question
4

Next, Jesus challenges us **not** to **worry** about the things over which we have no control, but to turn them over to the Lord. He illustrates His point through another question: **which of us by worrying can add an inch to his height** (v. 27). If we **worry** about things over which we have no control, what does it accomplish? It can cause high levels of stress which can lead to all types of serious health problems: anxiety, depression, mental fatigue from lack of sleep, high blood pressure, and even heart problems. It can also cause problems in our relationships because we can become obsessive, withdrawn, and lack trust. Nothing good can come from worrying! We should be conscientious about our **life** and plans, but we shouldn't **worry** and obsess over things out of our control. Thus, we shouldn't **worry** about other people's actions or responses to our service in the Lord; we don't have any control over them, but we do have control over how we respond to the Lord. In addition, we shouldn't **worry** about things in the past; we can't change them. We should learn from them and move forward.

What are some things cause worry over which you may have no control?

Question
5

Second, Jesus uses the **lilies of the field** to comment on the clothing that God provides



for us (v. 28). The lilies simply **grow** in the wild; they don't weave or knit (i.e. **toil or spin**) clothes for themselves as humans do, but God abundantly provides the water and nutrients for them to blossom into beautiful flowers beyond compare over any piece of cloth. In fact, Jesus states that **even Solomon** with all his wealth **was not** dressed

like one of these flowers (v. 29). Just as He did with **the birds of the air**, Jesus ends this section by showing how much more God cares for humans above the rest of His creation. Flowers only live a little while; they are here **today** and gone **tomorrow** because they bake in the heat (i.e. **oven**)—especially here in Texas! Although life is short for us too in the grand scheme of things and we aren't guaranteed tomorrow, God cares infinitely more for us because He sent His Son to redeem and save us. That's how much more God cares for us than mere birds and flowers!

For those who **worry**, Jesus rebukes them for being **of little faith**. When we **worry**, we essentially tell God we don't trust Him to provide for our needs and guide our steps. As we dress for an important event, many of us may **worry** about what we should wear—this may even be the ritual we go through every Sunday before coming to church: do the clothes match, is it the right outfit for the occasion, is it fashionable, or does it make me look fat? We may change clothes a dozen times before we find the right outfit. We certainly shouldn't dress sloppily or intentionally mismatch our clothes, but worrying about what we wear distracts us from our real purpose and from having the right focus. We're more worried about what others may think than what we portray through our personality or convey through our relationship to them. Jesus bids us **not to worry**, but to focus on the thing that's most important: God's righteousness and His kingdom which we will address in the last section of this lesson. When we **worry** about things, we fail to allow God to lead and attempt to do things on our own which usually creates more problems in the long run. Trust God and allow Him to guide!

In what ways does worrying about things distract us from our true purpose in Christ?

Question
6

Matthew 6:30-32

THE CERTAINTY OF GOD'S PROVISION:

Jesus again repeats His command for us to stop worrying about **what** we will **eat**, **what** we will **drink**, and **what** we will **wear** (v. 31). He follows this by explaining two reasons why we shouldn't **worry**. He begins by comparing those who **worry** about **all these things** to **the Gentiles** (v. 32). Their gods couldn't provide the **things** that they needed and **the Gentiles** had nowhere to turn in instances of drought, famine, or disease; their gods were incapable of helping them in any way no matter how much they pleaded, prayed, or paid in offerings! **The Gentiles**, therefore, always lived in great uncertainty—not knowing if they could ever please their gods enough to receive a favorable

Instruct

response from them. Praise the Lord, however, that we have a God who hears us, cares for us, loves us, and provides for us in all circumstances. For this reason, Jesus reminds us that our **heavenly Father knows** what we need, so we shouldn't **worry**. We have no need to **worry** about anything in life because we have a gracious and loving God who created us and will sustain us in every situation.

When we look at the world around us which pursues wealth and material possessions and is consumed by anxiety over these things, we will observe several negative characteristics. First, the world will complain in any situation—whether they lack something or have an abundance. The world is never satisfied with what they have. If they lack something, they will complain they don't have enough or that they have become victims of injustice. They complain rather than work to overcome their circumstances in accordance with God's plan. If they have an abundance, they will usually complain they need even more or that what they have isn't good enough. They need the latest technology; they need the car with the most gadgets; they need to travel first-class; they need a higher-paying job, and so forth.

This leads directly to a second negative characteristic which fuels a spirit of competition with others. Anxiety not only leads to coveting, but it also produces a spirit of jealousy. Instead of being content with our own life and happy about the success of others, it tends to make people bitter; they find themselves asking, "Why don't I have these things?" or "Why can't I have such success?" As a result, people tend to forget the source of their joy, so when their needs are met they simply take it for granted. At times, they may even feel entitled to certain things and never show gratitude to the Lord for their provision He has given them. On the contrary, we must trust the Lord and acknowledge His provision for us by showing Him our gratitude and by telling others what He has done in our lives.

How have you seen God meet the needs in your life? How have you shown Him the gratitude for His provision?

Question
8

Matthew 6:33-34

OUR CENTRAL FOCUS IS GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS :

As we have seen, anxiety can distract us from our true purpose by taking our focus off God and placing it onto our circumstances (see [Phil 4:10-13](#)). For this reason, Jesus

commands us to **seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness** (v. 33). Yet, knowing our propensity to **worry**, Jesus commands us one final time to stop worrying about **tomorrow** (v. 34). Instead of worrying about **tomorrow**, we should concentrate on living according to God's gracious plan today! Since tomorrow rests squarely in God's hands and there's nothing we can do to avoid the **troubles** that may arise, we should concentrate on how we live our lives today. We must spend time pursuing our relationship with Christ daily; when we pursue Him, He will give us wisdom about how we should conduct ourselves according to His holiness and the righteous boundaries that He has set for us. At times, however, we may still have struggles and trials, but when we **seek Him first** we can overcome them without compromising our morals and ruining our testimonies. Therefore, we must learn to trust Him in all situations and surrender to Him regardless of the circumstances. When we do, we will be transformed in our devotion, content in any circumstance, and free from the anxiety which can cripple us with fear and distract us from serving Him!



What does it mean to seek the kingdom of God first and His righteousness?

Question
8

In the introduction, we saw how worry consumed my mother on various occasions. Indeed, worry can cripple us with fear and cause us to miss opportunities for ministry that God has in store if we allow it to dictate our response. Personally, I have a number of well-documented fears, including snakes and heights. Although we shouldn't mindlessly and carelessly put ourselves in danger, we should always be aware of our surroundings and proceed with wisdom and clear direction. For instance, in the grasslands of West Texas, we need to look for signs of venomous rattlesnakes lurking around cacti; we need to know their usual haunts, look for signs of their presence, and listen for the warning shake of their rattles. Even though we should proceed with caution, we shouldn't let fear prevent us from enjoying God's beautiful creation. In the same way, we shouldn't let fear prevent us from participating in the work to which Christ has called us. We should certainly seek wisdom from Him about how we should proceed and we should be sensitive to the environment as we share the gospel and proclaim His Word—we shouldn't change the message of the gospel to make it more acceptable, but we should allow the Holy Spirit to speak through us in such a way that He is heard! When we allow Him to guide us, we will never take missteps and we will always proceed exactly according to His plan. To do so, however, requires us to focus on Him and put everything else out of our minds. We must make Him the priority. When we make Him the priority, He will certainly bless us in ways beyond our imagination, but He will also supply our daily needs abundantly and graciously. All we must do is to stop worrying and to trust Him fully each day. When we are transformed in our devotion and seek Him first, everything else will fall into place and He will give us exactly what we need to endure trials and survive the daily routines of life.

Incorporate

What are some areas in which worry currently prevents you from serving the Lord?

In what ways can you overcome these things so that you become more effective in your ministry?

Pray and seek the Lord and ask Him to guide you in how you can serve Him more effectively. What promises did God remind you that helped alleviate some of your worry?

October 14, 2018



Transformed in our Discernment

Matthew 7:1-6

Focal Verse:

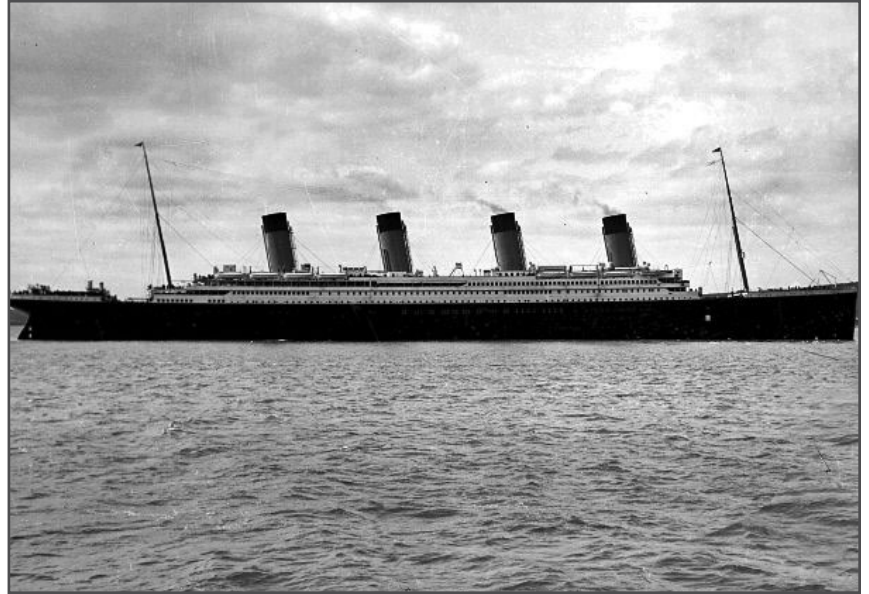
"Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Matthew 7:5

back to
Table of
Contents

Introduce

Often, people make hasty judgments based upon initial outward appearance without using factual evidence to make an informed decision; at times, this type of judgmental attitude can be deceiving. Harry Ironsides* once told the story about a minister from New York who engaged in such type of judgment. A man identified as Bishop Potter departed for Europe on one of the most-luxurious ocean liners at the time. After boarding the ship, Potter proceeded to his room where he met his roommate for the first time. Looking at the outward appearance of the man, he decided that his roommate couldn't be trusted, so he couldn't leave any of his valuables unsecured in the room. Therefore,



he took everything, including his gold pocket watch, to store in the ship's main safe. Handing his valuables to the purser, Bishop Potter declared, "I normally don't use these services, but I judge from the appearance of my roommate that he might not be a trustworthy person." The purser tried to calm his fears and spoke reassuringly to the minister. He said, "It's alright minister. I'll be glad to take care of your things. Your roommate has already been here and left his for the very same reason!"

In Matthew 7:1, Jesus tells His followers, "Judge not, that you be judged not." We shouldn't judge others based solely upon outward appearance or first impression without evaluating the circumstances of their actions. In addition, we shouldn't have a critical or condemning spirit which seeks to alienate and destroy rather than restore and edify. When we judge others with a critical spirit, it causes us to have a sense of superiority and entitlement. We look down on others because it makes us look better and our sin and mistakes seem less prominent. Being critical and judgmental can ruin relationships, create competition, destroy civility, and intensify arguments. None of this should occur within the body of Christ—the church!

On the other hand, Jesus' command in Matthew 7:1 is not a license to justify sin by asserting that we don't have the right to judge each other's actions based on evidence according to the fruit we bear. Unfortunately, many people today have taken

Introduce

Jesus' instruction here out of context, so they can do whatever they want without consequences and without being held accountable. They would exclaim, "You have no right to judge me!" This, however, conflicts with Jesus' teaching later in the chapter where He instructs us to distinguish "false prophets" by inspecting "their fruits" ([Matt 7:16](#)). As Christians, the Spirit and Scripture give us the tools to distinguish right from wrong, but we should never do so with a judgmental attitude. We have the responsibility to point out sin and injustice when we see it, but we must be in right standing in our own lives first! To restore someone who's clearly sinning, we must be in the right mindset and in tune with the Holy Spirit; therefore, we should allow the Spirit to work through us to lead them to repentance and restoration in the Lord. Consequently, let Christ transform us thoroughly in the discernment we have, so that we may evaluate situations correctly according to His perspective.

Key
Question

Why is Matthew 7:1 not a license to ignore sin and fail to distinguish between right and wrong?

In Reference



Harry A. Ironsides, Illustrations of Bible Truth, vol. 4, s.v. "Hasty Conclusions" (Chicago: Moody Press, 1945).

Matthew 7:1-2

BE DISCERNING NOT JUDGMENTAL:

As Jesus nears the conclusion of His sermon, He instructs His followers **not to judge** others, so that God will **not judge** them harshly on the last day. This prohibition against having a judgmental or critical spirit concerning others is perhaps the most-misunderstood passage in all the Bible. Jesus doesn't tell His followers that they can't distinguish right from wrong or condemn the sinful actions of others. On the contrary, He urges them to refrain from exercising a judgmental spirit which condemns people unjustly without seeking to restore them



in love. Like His command to stop worrying which we studied in last week's lesson, He commands His disciples to stop having a critical spirit against each other; thus, they should immediately stop an activity in which they are currently engaged! For this reason, Jesus explains that those who have a critical spirit **will be judged** or measured by the same standards which they use to **judge** other people (v. 2).

In order to understand this verse and apply it correctly, we must first define the term **judge** according to this specific context. Although the Greek word used here is the standard term for adjudicating one's innocence or guilt, in this context it clearly has the meaning of being judgmental, critical, or condemning of another human being. Later in this chapter, which we will study in November, Jesus warns His followers to "beware of false prophets" ([7:15](#)). This requires the ability to **judge** or distinguish right from wrong and truth from falsity based on evidence that we can observe. Therefore, Jesus relates to His disciples that they will know these false teachers "by their fruits" ([Matt 7:16, 20](#)). If Jesus prohibited all types of judgment in verse 1, not only would He contradict Himself in these later verses, but we would also have no recourse whatsoever to deal with sin and false teaching. Consequently, we must have a standard by which to **judge** or discern the truth to make informed decisions; we must not remain silent on matters

Instruct

of sin and falsity, but we should never condemn others without attempting to restore them according to the truth of Scripture.

With this definition of judgment in mind, we can identify three characteristics associated with a person who has a critical spirit. First, they typically seek revenge and retribution disguised as justice rather than trying to restore someone in love. Thus, they will clamor and press for justice while failing to recognize the grace and mercy that they have repeatedly received over the course of their lives. Second, they speak in legalistic terms without exercising grace and mercy with an intent to reconcile and forgive. Certainly, justice should be dispensed and people punished for illegal and immoral actions according to the law, but we should extend hope by pointing them to a relationship with Christ. Therefore, we should seek to correct immoral actions through love and compassion rather than condemnation. Finally, people with a critical spirit often engage in hypocrisy by pointing out the faults of others while ignoring their own—a theme to which Jesus will turn in [verses 3-5](#).

What are some other characteristics of a person who has a critical or judgmental spirit?

Question
1

To illustrate what a critical and judgmental spirit looks like, we can examine an all-too-familiar occurrence in a home with a teenage driver. One day, you come home from work to find that your car sitting in the driveway had been in a minor accident. As you survey the damage, you see that the front bumper had been completely ripped off and notice a large dent on the passenger's side along with a broken headlight and turn signal. Because the damage looked minor and it didn't seem that anyone had been hurt in the accident, you



storm into the house fuming about your insurance premiums. Yelling for your teenager, you demand, "What did *you* do?"—instead of asking what happened. Without giving a chance for a response, you enter a tirade about having to pay for the deductible, the

inevitable rise of your insurance premiums, and the irresponsible driving habits of your teenager whom you *know* drives too fast, follows too closely, and pays more attention to their cell phone than the roadway.

In this scenario, you assumed two things before ascertaining all the evidence: 1) your teenager, and not your spouse, was driving the car at the time of the accident and 2) the driver of your car caused the accident. Obviously, we need to **judge** who was at fault in the accident and determine the course of action that we must take to rectify the situation, but we must do it the *right* way. We can learn three principles from this example that will help us make wise decisions and avoid having a critical spirit. First, don't make assumptions without hearing all of the evidence; take time to gather the evidence and then use it to make a wise decision. Second, don't speak out of anger or frustration, but speak rationally to seek information; ask questions while you assess the external evidence. Finally, use the opportunity as a teachable moment. If your teenager turns out to have caused the accident, for example, help him understand what driving habits he must change, have him deal with the insurance company while you guide him step-by-step, and make him find a way to pay for the deductible. By following these three basic principles, we can see the right way to assess a situation and respond by enacting appropriate consequences without being judgmental and making the situation worse.

In what situations in your life have you been judgmental?

Question
2

Because we live in a society which in many ways has rejected absolute truth, we need to stand firm on the truthfulness of Scripture and not compromise. When it comes to sin, therefore, we have an obligation to discern right from wrong and proclaim the truth in love regardless of the consequences. In fact, Paul urges us "to test all things; hold fast to what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" ([1 Thess 5:21-22](#)). If we have a God-given responsibility to discern the truth and proclaim it, the question naturally arises: How can we proclaim the truth without being judgmental? First, we must rely solely on the Holy Spirit who will reveal the truth in Scripture and give us insight into practical ways to apply it. Second, when we proclaim the truth, we must point to specific Scriptures and let God speak directly to people through His Word. Third, we must remember that we are God's agents and ambassadors who proclaim the truth, but the Holy Spirit is the One who convicts the heart. Finally, we must realize the unrepentant

sinner already stands condemned because of his own actions; therefore, we need to show them the way to have life through repentance and commitment to Christ. Several years ago, I went to downtown Fort Worth to watch a movie with some friends from Seminary. As we exited the parking garage on Calhoun Street, we encountered



a street preacher. Before he even opened his mouth, I noticed the veins protruding from his neck and his beet-red face contorted with anger; he arched his eyebrows inwardly to form a scowl. As he began to speak, he yelled at the top of his lungs, “You sinners will burn in hell!” Because we ignored his initial onslaught and didn’t respond in any fashion, he became

incensed and started following us. Flaring his nostrils and snorting with hatred, he called us “scum” and “refuse.” He then screamed, “One day, you’ll pay for your sins—you reprobates!” Never once did this man stop to carry on a conversation, but he spewed judgment and condemnation from the moment we first saw him.

Finally, I had had enough of his antics, so I turned to confront him in a calm and reasonable manner. I began by explaining that I already had a relationship with Christ, but I appreciated his passion for warning people about the danger of sin and proclaiming the gospel. However, I cautioned against him making a generalization that everyone he met did not have a relationship with Christ; therefore, I urged him to get to know people and hear their story as he shared the gospel with them. I tried to make it clear that this would be a much more effective technique which aligned with Scripture rather than his hate-filled approach. As a result, I continued to explain that Christ helped people to realize that they were sinners in the need of a Savior, but He didn’t do so by condemning them. Through Scripture, He brought them to an understanding that they needed to repent for the wickedness they had done. Despite this rational conversation, the man’s demeanor didn’t change and he began to rail against us for going into the movies and being in league with Satan for watching *The Grinch*! Through this example, we see two different approaches: one which condemns and violates

Jesus' prohibition **not to judge** and one that corrects in love by proclaiming the truth. We shouldn't be confrontational or condescending, but point to Scripture and allow God to transform!

How can we help people see the truth without being judgmental and condemning them?

Question
3

Matthew 7:3-5

BE DELIBERATE IN EVALUATING YOURSELF:

In order to discern the truth and make proper judgments, we must first be deliberate in evaluating ourselves and be in right standing with Christ, thereby having a proper perspective. For this reason, Jesus asks a question about **why** we **look at the speck in our brother's eye** and ignore **the plank in our own eye** (v. 3). He continues to inquire **how** a person with a **plank in his eye** can help **remove a speck** in someone else's (v. 4). Such a person is impaired and cannot make proper judgments! He can't see clearly enough to give appropriate advice because his judgment is clouded by his own sin and problems. Therefore, Jesus warns the **hypocrite to remove the plank from their own eye first** and then **the speck from their brother's** (v. 5). Notice that Jesus doesn't say that we cannot point out the sinful actions of others or even help them to overcome temptation and sin, but He emphasizes that we must have the right attitude in the Spirit and be in right standing with Him to do so.

For those of us who have ever flown, we know that the flight attendants prepare everyone on board for the journey in case an emergency might happen to occur. Most of us probably don't pay much attention when they point out the exits, demonstrate how the cushions turn into flotation devices, and tell us how to buckle the seatbelt! During the course of their monologue, they usually say something like this: "In the unlikely



event that the cabin loses air pressure, an oxygen mask will drop from the ceiling in front of you. Place it over your nose and mouth, tighten the strap, and breathe normally

Instruct

before helping your neighbor if he needs assistance." To help others effectively, we must first have things in order in our lives! We can't help someone if we're gasping for air and the lack of oxygen to our brain clouds our thoughts. In fact, we could make the situation much worse!

Why is it important for us to be in right standing with God before showing another person his own faults?

Question
4

In the same way, we can't help others deal with sin and temptation effectively if we have unconfessed sin and our thoughts have been clouded by a judgmental attitude. To be in right standing, we must first have a relationship with the Lord (see [1 Cor 2:12-16](#)). Without a relationship with the Lord, the world judges arbitrarily based on preference and personal choice, but as a disciple of Christ we should judge according



to the truth based on Scripture. If we have a relationship with Christ, then we must allow the Holy Spirit to guide us when we attempt to lead someone to restoration. Paul writes, "You who are spiritual go to such a one in sin and restore them" ([Gal 6:1](#)). Like Jesus, Paul doesn't mean this in the sense of being "holier" than others, but rather as someone who is in right standing

with the Lord and guided by the Holy Spirit. When we have the right perspective and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, we will not see others through a critical and judgmental spirit, but through the eyes of Christ which offers grace and forgiveness.

If we aren't in right standing and spiritually prepared to help others overcome sin in the right way, three things tend to happen. First, we tend to pick on sins that have become our pet peeves instead of condemning all sin equally. Therefore, we tend to isolate individuals instead of leading them to restoration; we target them and drive them further away. For example, God doesn't tolerate any type of sexual immorality whatsoever, but we often only focus on a couple of areas: adultery and homosexuality.

Yet, God despises divorce as well as any relationship outside of marriage. We can't compromise the truth, but we shouldn't isolate people according to specific sins either. We should show all people how God offers forgiveness and restoration for all sin! Second, we tend to condemn and point out the activities of others which we ourselves may also be doing; in other words, we're hypocrites. Finally, if we aren't spiritually prepared to confront sin, we may find ourselves caught up in the very same situation which we intended to correct. Therefore, to have proper discernment and be able to deal with sinful actions effectively, we must be spiritually prepared by evaluating ourselves and being in right standing with the Lord.

What are the dangers of trying to restore someone if we aren't in right standing with Christ?

Question
5

Matthew 7:6

USE DISCRETION WHEN SHARING THE GOSPEL:

Jesus has called us to take the gospel into all the world, but He also tells us to use discretion when we do. Speaking figuratively, Jesus instructs us **not to give what is holy to the dogs** or **cast our pearls before swine** because they will only **trample them** and then **turn** viciously against us (v. 6).

The Jews despised both **dogs** and **pigs**, regarding them as vile and loathsome creatures. **Dogs** weren't man's best friend; instead, the Jews saw them as hideous creatures because they were scavengers that ate refuse off the streets. In



fact, **pigs** were considered the same for eating "slop" and God had even forbidden the eating of pork in the Law. The moral of this short parable is that we must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit when we are presenting the gospel and follow His direction. Therefore, we must use discretion when presenting the gospel and allow the Holy Spirit to help us discern who is generally receptive. We can't force the gospel upon those who are antagonistic and belligerent; in fact, some people will not only ignore the gospel

Instruct

message, but they will also become violent and bitter if it is forced upon them. In the same way, other people are tricksters wanting a handout; they will say and do anything that they think will benefit them, but they aren't sincere in their response to the gospel. We shouldn't be judgmental when presenting the gospel, but we should be discerning with the help of the Spirit. Often, the Spirit will give us clues from what a person says and from his body language to make us aware of his motives and attitude. A couple of years ago after the Sunday morning worship service, a man wandered into the vestibule wanting assistance. I spent a few minutes talking to him about his need before shifting the conversation to his relationship with Christ and trying to present the gospel. At first when I had asked him about Christ, he declared, "That's personal and none of your business." Quoting Scripture, I said that everyone who has a relationship with Christ is proud to declare it to others; it's not something he keeps secret. However, his response was, "I hate people! I don't like to be around people. I hate 'em." Therefore, I quoted 1 John 4:20: "If someone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" Knowing that this man wouldn't reason logically and would continue to argue unfruitfully, I then asked him to leave and said that we wouldn't help him because he had become belligerent and had lied about having a relationship with Christ. Fortunately, the man left without incident, but this is why Jesus warns us to pay attention, discern, and use discretion when sharing the gospel.

Why should we not spend time arguing about the gospel with someone who refuses to think logically and listen rationally?

Question
6

This week we have learned how to apply Jesus' prohibition against being judgmental correctly in a world that uses it to justify the many immoral actions in which they participate. Jesus' remarks in Matthew 7:1-6 aren't a blanket statement against all judgment, but a call for responsible discernment with guidance from the Holy Spirit. As believers, we have a responsibility to distinguish right from wrong and truth from inaccuracy without having a critical or judgmental attitude. To do so, we must be in the right frame of mind and have all our own affairs in order first. We must hold one another accountable to live lives worthy of our Savior, but we should do so with the right motivation. We should seek to restore a wayward individual in love by pointing them to Christ and His Word.

As we close this lesson, let's evaluate ourselves and see if we have the right perspective in Christ. When you pray, ask God to reveal any unconfessed sin and specifically ask for forgiveness, so that He can make you a more effective witness for Him. Then, ask God to help you evaluate your relationships as well as your perspective in general toward others. If you have a critical spirit which fails to evaluate evidence completely and is unwilling to forgive, ask the Lord to transform your heart and open your eyes to His grace and mercy. Pray that God would help you to understand and focus on the truth without compromise. When we pray for wisdom, God will give generously and help us discern the truth in all situations. As a result, God will transform us from being judgmental and critical to one who can discern the truth clearly and apply it without compromise.

Incorporate

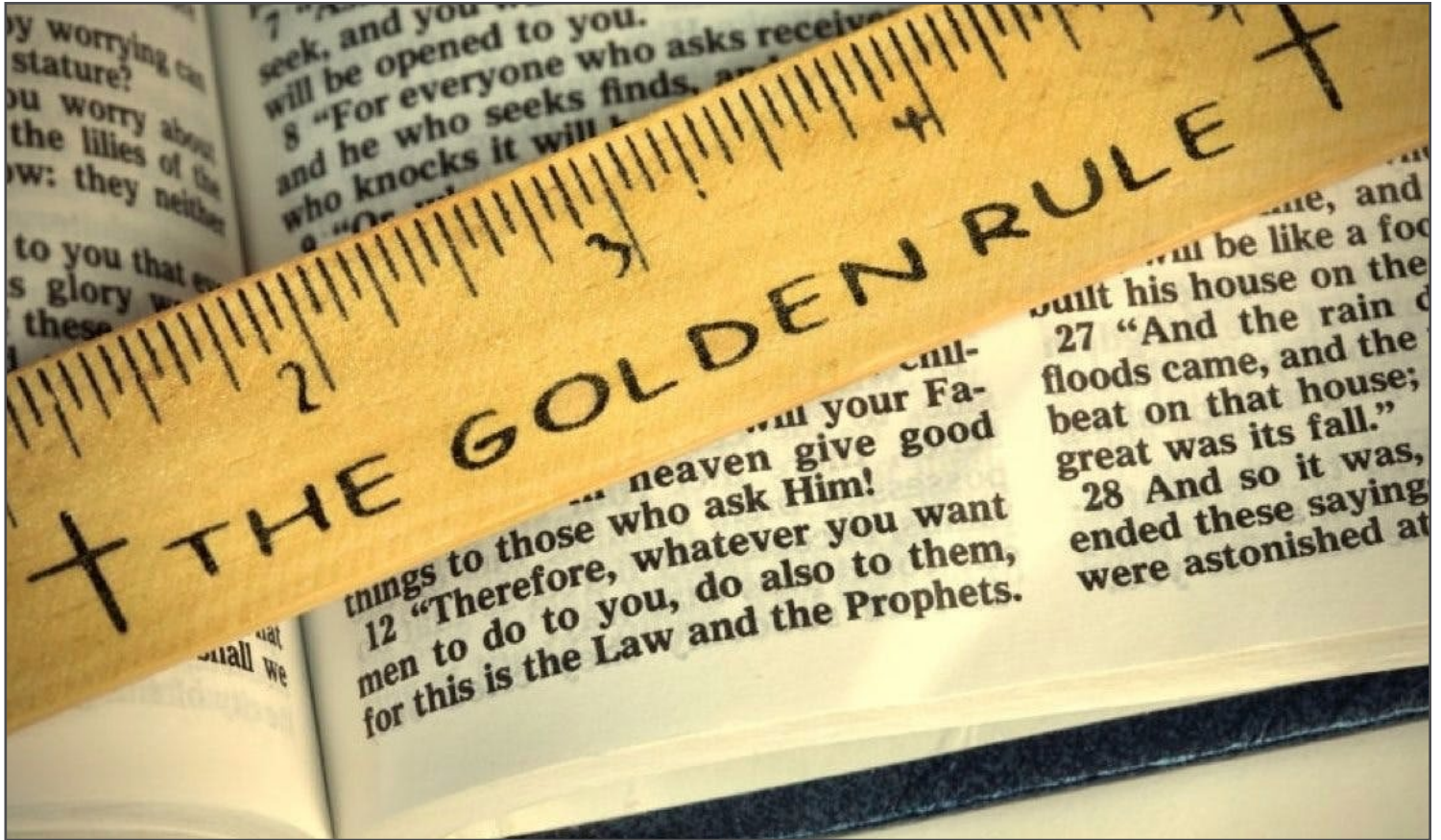
What is the difference between being judgmental and discerning? How would you explain this difference to someone who wrongly asserts that we can't judge anyone even if he sins?

Before confronting someone who's clearly sinned, in what ways should you prepare spiritually?

Why should we use discretion when sharing the gospel? In what instances has the Holy Spirit given you insight and discernment when sharing the gospel?

Journal: Document God's Work

November 18, 2018



Transformed in our Desires

Matthew 7:7-12

Focal Verse:

“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

back to
Table of
Contents

Matthew 7:12

Introduce

In [Matthew 7:7-12](#), Jesus implores His disciples to seek God proactively, trust in His provision, and follow His plan by diligently praying. As a result, He urges us to “ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (v. 7). Although some have taken this passage out of context, we must remember that when we have a relationship with Christ He will transform our desires to His. When we “ask,” “seek,” and “knock,” therefore, we do so in terms of discerning God’s will and following His plan—not our own. Jesus doesn’t grant us a license to seek our own selfish desires, but instead He bids us to follow God’s plan and achieve great things in accordance to His will and through His empowerment. To illustrate this point, it reminds me of a fictional story.

A man once lived along the Gulf Coast in a nice one-story home far enough inland to protect him from the initial storm surge of a hurricane, but not far enough to

protect him from the subsequent flooding. One year, a hurricane was predicted to make landfall in this man’s hometown, but he chose not to evacuate because he knew that God would take care of him. As the wind blew fiercely and the water rose steadily, it began to surround the base of his home and flood the roads throughout the town. Fleeing the storm, men



on four-wheeled ATVs came and urged him to leave while he still could. However, the man refused and said, “I’m waiting on God for a miracle.” So, the men left to escape the imminent flood. As water began to inundate the man’s house, overwhelming the stairs, porch, and inside up to his knees in depth, a rescue boat sailed down the street. The people offered to take him, but again he refused and announced, “I’m waiting on a miracle from God.”

Finally, the flood water reached the ceiling of his home, so he took an axe and smashed through the roof and sat there in the pouring rain on the wet shingles. This time, the US Coast Guard came in a large vessel and pleaded with him to abandon his home and come with them to safety. Stubbornly, the man refused again and interjected, “I’m

Introduce

waiting on a miracle from God." Unfortunately, the flood water swept over the house and the man drown. Because he had a relationship with Christ, he went to heaven. Knowing what was in the man's heart, God asked him, "Why didn't you leave your home when you had the chance?" To which the man made a familiar reply, "I was waiting on a miracle from You!" God, however, retorted, "But I sent you three miracles. Why didn't you take one of them?"

This fictional story demonstrates what can go wrong if we don't proactively seek God's will and allow Him to transform our desires to His. In short, many times our expectations may conflict with His and we may miss the opportunity to participate in the plan the God has for us. This fictional character expected a dramatic rescue in some miraculous way that he mistakenly missed the three opportunities that God had placed before him. Perhaps, the man expected something as miraculous as the parting of the Red Sea, but this time God chose to work in less spectacular ways according to this man's perception. Therefore, it's imperative that we allow God to transform our desires, so that we seek Him proactively, trust in the provision that He sends, and follow the plan He has for us!

Key
Question

Why should we "ask," "seek," and "knock" in prayer in accordance with God's will?

Matthew 7:7-8

SEEK GOD PROACTIVELY:

After reminding His disciples to have the right attitude when practicing discernment—which we studied on October 14—Jesus returns to the theme of prayer to demonstrate God’s faithfulness in responding to meet our necessary needs for life. Jesus begins with three succinct commands:

ask, seek, and knock (v. 7). These commands are synonymous with prayer and Jesus repeats them to emphasize the necessity and importance of communicating with our heavenly Father. They do not represent three different types of prayer, but are simply commands to pray! Following each of these three commands, we see



God’s response! When we **ask, it will be given to us**; when we **seek, we will find**; and when we **knock, it will be opened to us**. For good measure, Jesus repeats this three-fold structure in verse 8 where He notes that **everyone who asks receives**, everyone **who seeks finds**, and everyone **who knocks will have it opened**.

By immediately following the command to pray (**ask, seek, and knock**) with the Lord’s reply (**given, find, and opened**), we can observe His readiness and willingness to respond to our prayers and meet our needs! More importantly, when we pray proactively and communicate with God regularly we will *always* receive an answer. Therefore, we can pray with expectation; we can be *certain* that when we pray God *will* answer. We must be in tune with His will and allow Him to transform our desires to His, so that we don’t miss or misinterpret His response—like the fictional gentleman in the introduction who died during the hurricane. Whether He responds with a yes, no, or wait, God nevertheless responds and we must respect His answer whatever that may be!

At a press conference, Ronald Reagan once told this story. A man found himself precariously dangling on the side of a cliff, barely hanging on by a thread as he

Instruct

clutched the branch of a small tree. Looking down at the valley three hundred feet below, he peered into the heavens and began to pray: “Lord, if there’s anyone up there, give me faith.” Suddenly, a voice boomed from the heavens and said, “If you have faith, let go.” Once again, the man glanced at the rocky valley below where he would land and then looked heavenward. He began to pray again saying, “Is there anyone else up there?” Although in this humorous account God responded immediately to the man’s plight, the man didn’t like the answer he received, so he began to pray again—hoping that God would relent and give him the response that he wanted. How many times do we pray like this gentleman? Even before we utter the prayer, we have a certain answer in mind that we want to receive. Rather than seeking the will of the Lord, we try to manipulate the conversation to get the answer that we want. We ought to pray with expectation, but at the same time we should listen for God’s response and trust what He communicates is the best plan for us. When God says no, we shouldn’t continue to pray as if He hasn’t answered us or as if we can change His mind by repeating the same prayers as the Gentiles (Matt 6:7-8). Instead, we should pray in faith, expecting Him to answer immediately and then apply what He has communicated in our lives.

Why should we pray with expectation? What can happen if we aren’t prepared to receive God’s answer?

Question
1

Not only does God answer immediately whether it’s a yes, no, or wait, but He also answers everyone impartially. In verse 8, we see that whoever (i.e. **everyone**) prays to



the Lord will receive a response. Prayer requires a relationship with the Lord first and He has established that relationship freely through Christ. When we confess our sin, repent, and surrender to Christ, God will answer our sincere prayer and immediately save us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. For this reason, Paul can say, “Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” ([Rom 10:13](#)). When we call upon His name

for salvation, He purifies our hearts and begins the process of conforming our desires to His. To answer us impartially doesn't mean that God gives us whatever we want and ask, but He gives us what we need according to His will. We must remember that salvation produces transformation to conform us to the image of Christ ([Rom 12:2](#)). This means that when we pray, we ought to pray, "Not my will, but Yours, O Lord." When we pray unselfishly according to God's will, He has indeed promised to meet all our needs according to His glorious riches in Christ ([Phil 4:19](#)).

As you have matured in Christ, how have you seen God transform your desires according to His?

Question
2

Through these three commands (**ask**, **seek**, and **knock**), Jesus reveals two fundamental principles about prayer. First, we should treat prayer as a conversation rather than a monologue where we do *all* the speaking. Unfortunately, if you're like me, you spend more time making requests to the Lord and engaging in petitions on behalf of others than you do actually listening for His response. Imagine if God became as frustrated with us as we do those pesky telemarketers who won't let us interrupt their presentation! For the most part, we simply hang up the phone on them. Even though Jesus does bid us to bring our requests and petitions before the Lord in the model prayer, He also teaches us that we should **seek** His will ([Matt 6:10-11](#)). To **seek** His will, requires that we pay attention to what He reveals to us. If we **ask** for something on His behalf, how will we know if God has answered if we don't allow Him the chance to communicate to us? We will become like the man in the introduction who missed the three opportunities that God sent for rescue because He expected something else—something more grandiose which fit his own personal desires. Although God may not speak in an audible voice to most of us, as we diligently pray and study His Word He will give us insight, provide us with a sense of peace, and confirm the direction in which we should go when faced with decisions.

In what ways does God speak to us to confirm that we are making the right decisions?

Question
3

Second, these three commands are in the present tense which signifies that we should make it a habit to correspond with God in prayer. In other words, we should pray daily, diligently, and persistently. When we lose something important to us, do we only look one place and quit? If it's something important that has value and meaning, we will

Instruct

look for it until we find it. Most of us have lost the remote control to our television at some point which in the grand scheme of things isn't that important; however, we



leave no stone unturned. We tear off the cushions to our couch, we feel in all the crevices where it could have fallen, and we even turn the furniture over to look under it when we can't find it. If we seek earthly items so diligently and faithfully, how much more should we **seek** the will of our Master and relate our needs to Him—

recognizing that He is our sole Provider? The terms diligence and persistence don't mean that we pray to God until we get what we want. Instead, it means that we pray daily to **seek** God's will and to maintain a strong relationship with Him. When we pray diligently and persistently, God will be faithful to give, reveal (i.e. find), and open.

Why should we pray daily?

Question
4

Matthew 7:9-11

TRUST GOD'S PROVISION:

Next, by asking a series of rhetorical questions Jesus demonstrates how our heavenly **Father** wants to meet our needs. In the model prayer which we studied in September, Jesus told us to ask the **Father** to "give us this day our daily bread" (Matt 6:11). We learned that we should declare our daily needs to the Father—not because He doesn't already know them, but because He wants us to rely on Him for provision. For the most part, our earthly parents provide for our basic needs to the best of their abilities. If **a son** were to **ask** his father for **bread**, the father wouldn't **give him a stone** (v. 9). Similarly, the father wouldn't **give a serpent** to the son if he **asked for a fish** (v. 10). On the contrary, to the best of his ability he would provide sustenance and nourishment for his child! Thus, Jesus reasons that if earthly parents **know** how to provide for their **children** so does our **Father in heaven**. He surmises that if we as sinful human beings (i.e. **being evil**) **know how to give good gifts**, then our **Father in heaven** according to

His righteousness will **give good things to those who ask** (v. 11). We may not always have success or riches as the world defines them, but God will always provide for those who ask and have a relationship with Him. When we trust in the Lord, therefore, we will always find contentment and joy!

Unfortunately, we often take these remarks about prayer out of context and forget that Jesus gives us three things for which we ought to pray right here in [Matthew chapter 7](#). First, we should pray that we wouldn't have a judgmental attitude against others, but that we should see them through the gracious eyes of Christ (see [Matt 7:1-2](#)). In this way, we should pray that God would use us to help resolve conflict and extend hope to people through the forgiveness of the gospel. Second, we should pray that God would give us a proper perspective and evaluation of ourselves; we need to seek to live in holiness just as God has commanded us. When we evaluate ourselves accurately through God's eyes, then we can help others in their journey (see [Matt 7:3-5](#)). Third, we should pray for discernment when sharing the gospel (see [Matt 7:6](#)). Not only should we pray for discernment when to share the gospel, but we should also pray for opportunities to be able share the gospel without hindrance ([1 Tim 2:1-2](#)). When we pray for these things, God is faithful and will grant us what we need to accomplish the task to which He has called us.

For what other things ought we to pray diligently and persistently based on Matthew chapters 6 and 7?

Question
5

Matthew 7:12

FOLLOW GOD'S PLAN:

Jesus concludes this section of teaching by summarizing the true intent of the Old Testament (i.e. **the Law and Prophets**) into one succinct statement: however we want others to treat us (i.e. **to do to you**) we ought to **also** treat **them** in that very same way (v. 12). Our culture is familiar with this statement and often refers to it as the "Golden Rule." Despite our familiarity with it, people still distort its true meaning. Some would say, "We should treat others how they have treated us." Jesus has already dealt with this misinterpretation in [Matt 5:37-38](#) when He proclaims, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." We aren't to retaliate or respond to someone in the same evil way in which they have responded to

us. Instead, we should treat others with respect and decency regardless of the way that they treat us. We should treat others in the way that we would like them to treat us!

In what ways have you heard or seen the culture distorting or misapplying the "Golden Rule?"

Question
6

We live in a society in which civility, respect, dignity, modesty, and cooperation seem to be waning. As we look at the world, we see many people who resolve their

The core of the
GOLDEN RULE
*is a moral obligation
to treat others ethically
for their sake, not ours,
even if it's better than the way
they treat us.*

WHY?

Not because it's advantageous, but

BECAUSE IT'S RIGHT.

*And because
the way we treat others is about*

**WHO WE ARE,
not who they are.**

- Michael Josephson

perceived problems through violence, destruction, and disruption. People who would decry the theft and destruction of their property are out destroying others. People who complain about not having a voice in society are the same ones not giving others the opportunity to speak and carry on a conversation. People who are offended by cruel comments and the shaming of others are the same ones who insult, disrespect, and repudiate others. Those who clamor for tolerance and civility are the same ones spewing intolerance and hatred.

The same voices who cry the loudest against these behaviors are the same ones who lead the way in participating in them as well! Although they would speak out against these actions, they don't think about how their words and behaviors affect others. They have in actuality become blinded to Jesus' teaching that we ought to treat others with respect and treat them in the way that we would like them to treat us. The only way that we can resolve these attitudes and issues is by having a relationship with Christ and allowing Him to transform our desires. When we have been transformed to Christ's perspective, we will be more conscious of how we treat others!

As an accomplished law professor, author, and founder of an ethics institute, Michael

Josephson writes, "The core of the Golden Rule is a moral obligation to treat others ethically for their sake, not ours, even if it's better than the way they treat us. Why? Not because it's advantageous, but because it's right. And because the way we treat others is about who we are, not about who they are." Despite having read his biographical sketch and not seeing any reference to a relationship with Christ, his comments about Jesus' teaching provide insight and ring true. First, Christ has given us the responsibility of treating others respectfully and ethically so what we can point them to a relationship with Him. Treating others ethically may not spare us from the greed, selfishness, and persecution of our fellow man, but it will enable us to represent Christ as His ambassador and maintain a good testimony before all. Second, we treat others ethically because we have been transformed in Christ; therefore, it's not about who we are per se, as Mr. Josephson writes, but about who we have become in Christ! When we have been transformed in Christ, we will have a new perspective. That new perspective causes us to stop and think: how would I like someone to treat me in this situation. Therefore, our actions will always demonstrate the character of our Savior when we allow Him to transform our hearts guide our steps!

Why should we treat others ethically with respect and dignity?

Question
7

When we have a relationship with Christ, we should pursue Him daily through prayer and Bible study. If we become lazy in our pursuit, we often look for purpose and pleasure in the wrong things; we then tend to lose focus and become more self-centered in our desires. When we are driving a vehicle, for example, we *should* have only one purpose: to pay attention to the road and operate the automobile safely. However, today many people find themselves distracted; driving becomes secondary to a whole host of other activities. People make phone calls, compose texts, read e-mails, surf the internet, watch videos, fiddle with the radio, put on make-up, shave, fixate on billboards or other motorists, deal with fighting children, and even eat all while driving. The one task we have been given in a car we can't do well because we're not focused. If we honestly evaluate our prayer life, can we truly say that we are focused on seeking the Lord and understanding the plan He has for us? Too many things in life can distract us from asking, seeking, and knocking if we're not careful and our prayers can become self-centered, causing us to lack contentment and joy.

When we pray, therefore, we need to focus on seeking God's will, acknowledging His provision, and following the plan He has for us. We have one task when praying: seek the Lord. In fact, Jesus ended chapter 6 with that very call: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" ([Matt 6:33](#)). Certainly, we can pray about a variety of things, but do we pray in accordance with God's will or based on our own fleshly desires. As we pray, give God a chance to respond; allow Him to speak to you through the Holy Spirit's conviction, through Scripture, and through other believers who will lift you up in prayer and hold you accountable to that which the Lord has called you. To have a transformed prayer life, therefore, we need the Lord to transform our desires in such a way that the outlook we have on life matches what He has said in His Word. When we have a transformed prayer life and seek His will and follow His plan, God will do extraordinary things through us and He will transform our families, our church, and our world through our testimony which points others to Him.

Incorporate

In what ways should we proactively seek God through prayer? How does He reveal Himself to us through prayer?

How will God transform our lives if we trust in His provision? How has He specifically transformed your life when you trusted Him?

In what ways have you applied the “Golden Rule” in your life? How did it allow you to witness or share the gospel?

November 25, 2018



*Transformed from
Destruction
Matthew 7:13-23*

Focal Verse:

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.”

back to
Table of
Contents

Matthew 7:13

Introduce

With the advent of radar and other sophisticated weather technology, we can have a pretty good idea of the path that a hurricane will take several days in advance. Although some uncertainty still exists within the forecast, slower-moving storm systems like hurricanes allow authorities to prepare well in advance and issue evacuation orders along the coast in areas expecting the most-intense storm surge. Typically, the media will begin broadcasting mandatory evacuation orders a day or two in advance as police and other first responders go door-to-door to ensure every citizen has heard the news of the impending danger. Many of us may remember scenes of overcrowded freeways during Hurricane Ike as thousands fled the Houston area northward. In some cases, major roads, like Interstate 45, were reversed and made one-way heading into North Texas.

The ordinarily narrow roadways became overwhelmed with people trying to escape the destruction predicted to occur!

Despite all the modern technology and preparation, many people choose to ignore the warning and remain defiantly in the destructive path of these storms. In 1969 when Hurricane Camille struck Pass



Christian, Mississippi, several people remained in their apartment building to throw a party in defiance of the evacuation order; according to accounts which vary, all but one perished. If people somehow do survive this destructive power, they cite various reasons why they chose to stay. Some, like those in Pass Christian, simply wanted to defy the authorities and mock mortality. Some don't want to leave their beloved home and property. Others don't think the storm will really be as bad as the meteorologists and officials say. While others, like billionaire Richard Branson who owns Virgin Atlantic, trust in advanced building techniques which would help them to withstand winds and waves. In a tweet recorded in *Fortune Magazine*, Branson quips, "On Necker Island we have constructed really strong buildings (with hurricane blinds) that should be able to handle extreme weather pretty well . . . I will be on Necker alongside our team, as I have been on the three times we have had hurricanes over the past 30 years."* In the

Introduce

intervening days when the hurricane hit, Branson's home and island were destroyed and he narrowly escaped with his life.

Unlike hurricanes whereby some people may survive by happenstance even though they ignored the warning, one day all humanity will face judgment which no one will escape unless they have a relationship with Jesus the Christ. Therefore, Jesus warns us, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it" ([Matt 7:13](#)). Just as the freeways were reversed in one direction coming out of Houston, there is only one way we can have hope in eternal life—through the death and resurrection of Jesus (see [John 14:6](#)). Yet, some people choose to ignore the warning of impending judgment of which the Bible clearly proclaims—just as some people tempt their fates with hurricanes. Hopefully, however, you have already responded to the warning that sin leads to death and destruction and have rejected the false prophets who claim that it won't be as bad as Scripture may lead us to believe. Therefore, in order to be transformed from destruction to salvation we must recognize that we need a relationship with Jesus whereby we confess our sin, repent, and surrender to Him as the only person who can save us!

Key
Question

On what do you base your hope of eternal life?

In Reference



Kirsten Korosec, "Richard Branson Is Riding Out Hurricane Irma in His Wine Cellar," *Fortune Magazine* (September 6, 2017).

Matthew 7:13-14

RESPOND TO THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL:

We live in a day and age when people don't readily respond to the truth; instead, they surround themselves with views that appeal to their personal perspectives and appease their conscience in an attempt to justify their actions or make them "feel" good ([2 Tim 4:3-4](#)). The truth is, however, that we can have eternal life only one way—and that way is not popular with most people! Jesus commands us to **enter** eternal life **by the narrow gate**—that is to have a relationship with Him based on our response to His death, burial, and resurrection by repenting or turning from our sins. He goes on to describe how unpopular this idea is amongst the rest of the world: **for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction** because **many go** down that path (v. 13). In contrast, He explains that **the gate is narrow** and **the way difficult** that **leads to eternal life**, resulting in **few people who find it** (v. 14). Although God has made salvation simple and free according to His grace and mercy, mankind has made it **difficult** because many people reject the truth.

How would you explain to someone what it means to "enter the narrow gate?"

Question
1

To understand the metaphor that Jesus uses here more clearly, we can appeal to a modern example. Throughout these two verses, Jesus uses the illustration of a **gate**.

Probably most of us have attended a sporting event or concert inside an arena or stadium. In order to make sure that everyone has a ticket and the right to access the venue, we all funnel through a few "entry" points. Because people generally arrive about the same time, it can cause long lines to form and make it **difficult** to get through security. Consequently, some people leave because they decide it's not worth the wait and the hassle. Others



get to the gate and realize that they didn't have the right ticket or they had been deceived—either they purchased a ticket for another event or they got a counterfeit one from a scalper. Still others present their ticket and are welcomed inside to enjoy the privileges and benefits bestowed upon them. As people leave the venue, however, they find it much easier because all the gates are opened and people can choose freely how they wish to proceed. Yet, crowds press all around them because everyone is headed to the same destination—the parking lot to make their way home.

Unlike entering a human venue by purchasing a ticket, our ticket for salvation was purchased for us by Christ and given to us free of charge. To access heaven and spend eternity with our Savior, we must have that one ticket purchased by the blood of Christ! Nothing else will work! Some people will get to the “**gate**” of heaven so-to-speak and realize they don't have the right ticket. They tried to attain salvation through other means: by being a good person, by doing good things, or by following religious ritual. Others will get there and find out that they had been misled and not everyone will have access to heaven—only those who have a personal relationship with Christ will be welcomed to enjoy the privilege of eternal **life**. Still others reject the free offer of salvation here on earth because they enjoyed participating in sin and refused to repent rather than accept the transforming power of Christ's sacrifice. Just as people leave the stadium after the program and walk mindlessly in a massive crowd toward their cars, people who have rejected Christ here on earth walk down a dangerous and crowded path to **destruction**! We certainly have the responsibility to warn people that they are headed for **destruction**, but ultimately the choice they make is their responsibility.

Why do some people make receiving salvation in Christ more difficult than it truly is?

Question
2

We have a choice to make: Do we go along with the crowd which is headed for **destruction** and making false promises of instant gratification or do we follow Christ and endure persecution by taking the path that's right and **leads to life**, but is unpopular with the world ([John 15:18-20](#)). In this choice, there is no middle ground and we have no room for error because **the way** to salvation has been clearly revealed to us. Jesus even says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” ([John 14:6](#)). The choice is black and white: either we have the Son and have eternal **life** or we don't ([1 John 5:11-13](#)). Therefore, we can know with certainty whether we have eternal

life based on our relationship with Christ. We don't have to guess; we don't have to hope or wish, but we can *know* confidently that we have life. Even so, the world tries to deceive us and distort the message of the gospel—a theme which Jesus now seeks to explain.

Matthew 7:15-20

REJECT THE MESSAGE OF FALSE PROPHETS:

Because the world is filled with lies and empty promises, Jesus urges us to **beware of false prophets** and reject them (v. 15). **False prophets** practice deception by presenting themselves as **sheep**, but inwardly being **ravenous wolves** who lead the flock to complete **destruction**. In this context, Jesus emphasizes how they intentionally mislead others, so they can gain some type of personal benefit—whether for financial gain, for the attainment of power, or to satisfy their own ego. By developing rapport and establishing trust with people, they pretend to care for others, but in reality they prey upon their gullibility and attempt to fleece or exploit them. A wolf among **sheep** only has an ulterior motive; nothing good can come out of that scenario! In the end, therefore, **false prophets** destroy people emotionally, socially, mentally, and even physically—especially in the case of Jim Jones and David Koresh.

However, many times these **false** teachers are much subtler and what they peddle sounds like the truth. In retail, we

would call this “bait and switch.” Retailers who use this deceptive practice lure people to their stores through false advertisements and bogus promises. In some cases, for example, they advertise a name-brand product at an extraordinarily low price, but they never had that exact product in stock. When the customer arrives, they substitute



an inferior or low-quality brand as a replacement to fulfill their obligation. Thankfully, the US offers consumer protection and has outlawed these deceptive practices.

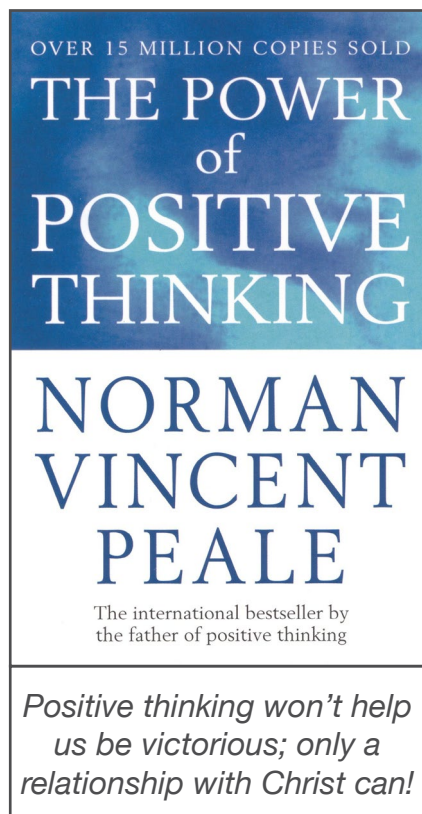
Unfortunately, however, many religions and **false** teachers still practice a type of bait and switch which has eternal consequences. They may have attractive programs, they may entertain people with glitz and glamor, and they may make people feel good with positive messages that uplift one's self-esteem, but underneath they are all empty

practices. When we begin to study the content of their message, we quickly see that it has no substance; it has no power; it cannot transform from the inside out. Their message may seem attractive, but it only leads to destruction because Christ is not the center.

In what ways does the world try to deceive us with empty promises?

Question
3

Sometimes these **false prophets** have even deceived themselves because they have never taken time to seek the truth. They may sincerely believe what they say is true, but they are sincerely wrong in their beliefs when evaluated by Scripture. As a result, the world espouses many false views that conflict with the Bible. Although we can't list all these false beliefs here, we can identify a few held by most people. Today, many people assert that every belief is valid and we must follow the one that works best for



us; this has led many to follow their heart rather than logic and reason based on evidence found in Scripture. If all beliefs are valid, then these **false** teachers claim that we have many paths to heaven and eternal life. Even more unsettling, some people argue that everyone will go to heaven because God is love and wouldn't send anyone to hell. Others, however, reject the idea of a literal heaven and hell altogether and claim that life simply ends after death because the world was formed not by a Creator, but through a series of random and repetitive events that allowed life to develop.

In the end, all these views discussed in the previous paragraph that conflict with God's Word lead only to

destruction. False prophets may not come out and say these things directly, but they present them positively by packaging them in a way that makes it seem acceptable

to the world. Often, they appeal to our own self-worth by having an emotion-driven message which emphasizes our ability to change ourselves. Because we are fiercely independent and self-reliant, they tell us we can make a difference in the world by overcoming obstacles and personal struggles with the power of positive thinking. In addition, they claim that we need to motivate ourselves by personal sacrifice and

service which will make us feel good. These messages may even be couched in terms of religion, but it's only about what we think, how we feel, and what we can do. It's not about what Christ has done for us and how we ought to respond to His call that will transform us permanently and conform us to His image!

In what ways do these false prophets present their messages to make it seem less offensive and more attractive to a wider audience today?

Question
4

Consequently, we need to take time to evaluate every idea and message according to the truth found in the Bible. Therefore, Jesus instructs us to discern the truth by inspecting the **fruits** of these **false prophets** according to Scripture (vv. 16, 20). He assures us that **a good tree cannot bear bad fruit** nor can **a bad tree cannot bear good fruit** (v. 17). For this reason, we can **know** for certain what their motives and intentions are as well as evaluate the truthfulness of their message by how they act, what they say, and what their actions produce in their ministry. Thus, Jesus reinforces this idea by asking a rhetorical question: **Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?** In other words, we can **know** what's in a person's heart by how they act outwardly. Although at times people may fool us about their relationship with Christ because only God can see the heart, Jesus promises that we can identify the truthfulness of their message by **their fruits**. So, this leads to ask two questions: How should we evaluate their fruits and on what should we base our evaluation?

What are some characteristics of false prophets and teachers in our world today?

Question
5

Consequently, we should seek to validate the claims and messages of anyone with whom we come into contact—lest we be fooled ourselves and swept away into their folly. 1 John 4:1 shares the same outlook espoused here in Matthew: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” First, we must be able to distinguish between **good** and **bad fruit**. As a result, we must be in right standing with the Lord ourselves in order to discern correctly—we studied this idea during the week of October 14. If we ourselves are not bearing **good fruit**, how will we be able to judge others? To be in right standing, we must have a daily, personal relationship with the Lord whereby we allow Him to guide us through prayer and Bible study as we submit to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Instruct

Second, we must rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us because we cannot ultimately see the heart of man, but only the outward results of his actions. We must have a standard by which we judge whether something is **good** or **bad**; therefore, we should allow the Spirit to show us the truth in Scripture and then guide us to test their message by granting us knowledge and wisdom. To be valid and truthful, their message *must* align with the Bible; therefore, we should ask, “Do they reflect the values of Christ or do they mimic the standards of the world?” A few years ago, several crates of fresh green beans were delivered to the church for people to take home and use; however, when they arrived, some of them had a pungent odor—indicating that they were **bad**. Having picked fresh green beans from the garden, I knew what they were supposed to look like, feel like, and smell like. If they were discolored, soft, or had a strong aroma, then they were bad and needed to be discarded. In the same way, to differentiate truthfulness from falsehood, we must first **know** what truth is. Since God’s Word is true, we should use it as a guide and a standard by which we judge everything; however, we can’t **know** the appropriate standard by which to judge things if we don’t read and study the Bible. By not spending time in God’s Word, we can find ourselves deceived and headed perilously toward **destruction**.

In what ways does the Bible help us to evaluate situations in which we find ourselves in life?

Question
6

When we fail to heed the truthfulness of God’s Word, we put ourselves in danger of



destruction. Jesus warns that **every tree which does not bear fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire** (v. 19). Although we can’t lose our salvation, problems will inevitably arise when we listen to people who do not know the truth and follow their path. We’ve all probably heard the phrase “the blind leading the blind.” This timeless saying fits this context

well. We wouldn’t hire someone who has no wisdom, no knowledge, and no experience

to work in our business; we would first evaluate their credentials, assess their resume, and contact their references. We would do our due diligence before we hired them to make sure that we have a top-notch employee who can do the job. However, when it comes to spiritual matters, why do we many times follow people who are on a path to **destruction**? For this reason, Jesus warns us to **beware** of following those who are spiritually dead and headed for judgment. When we have life in Christ, we have a higher standard which to follow and we have an obligation to differentiate the truth from falsity through the Holy Spirit and Scripture, so that we make sure that we don't become sidetracked by these **false prophets**.

Matthew 7:21-23

RECOGNIZE THE NEED FOR A RELATIONSHIP:

To have eternal life, we must have a relationship with the Father through Jesus. Our relationship isn't achieved through religious ritual, acts of service, or good behavior. It is based on the gracious gift of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross! We **do the will of the Father in heaven** when we respond through faith by repenting of our sin and surrendering to Him. By responding, God will cleanse us from all unrighteousness and then transform us to perform acts of service which demonstrate our love and devotion to Him. Still, many people errantly think that they can earn salvation through acts of service and good deeds. For this reason, Jesus explains that **not everyone who ritualistically cries out "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven** (v. 22). These people further believe since they **prophesied in Jesus' name, cast out demons, and have done many wonders** that they will have eternal life (v. 23). Yet, Jesus makes it clear that He had no relationship with them, for on that day of judgment He will **declare, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness"** (v. 23). To illustrate Jesus' point, it reminds me of a story that Jack Stowe told a few years ago. A beautiful, vibrant tree was once struck by lightning in the midst of a thunderstorm. The lightning did not fell the tree or completely kill it; as time advanced, the tree still produced leaves and looked outwardly healthy. Yet, when one bore into the center of the tree where the lightning had struck, he found it completely hollow and decaying. While it looked healthy on the outside, it was dead and rotting on the inside. In the same way, many people will do and say things in the name of Christ, but they do not have a relationship with Him; they believe that their good works will merit them salvation. On that day of judgment, they will ask, "Didn't we tithe and give our finances **in your name**? Didn't we come to church every time the doors were open? Didn't we

Instruct

volunteer for service projects **in your name**? Didn't we teach Sunday School **in your name**?" We could list hundreds of other areas, but the fact remains that we must have



a relationship with Him or these things which we do are worthless to us. Like the tree struck by lightning, the works may look good on the outside, but on the inside those who don't have a relationship with Christ are dead and headed for **destruction**! Despite all the work that we might have done, Jesus will tell those who base their salvation on their good works rather than on

a relationship with Him to **depart** because He **never knew** them.

How can we know that we have a relationship with Jesus? Why can we be confident that we will enter heaven when we die if we have that relationship?

Question
7

Just as we saw in the introduction how meteorologists and authorities seek to warn people in the path of a hurricane about its impending danger, the Bible warns us about an even greater danger that awaits every sinner at the end of this age. Fortunately, Scripture doesn't merely warn us about the danger, but it gives us a full-proof plan of action whereby we can escape that destruction and have eternal life. However, only Christ makes that escape possible through His death and resurrection when we admit that we're sinners, confess our sins, and turn to Him for salvation by making Him the priority in our lives. Despite the Bible's full-proof plan to circumvent that danger, many people have become disillusioned and deceived by worldly wisdom and philosophy which espouses that we can save ourselves. In a world which has rejected absolute truth and in which almost anything goes, we are in danger of being deceived by something that sounds good and logical, but in the end will lead to everlasting destruction because it's not the truth!

The path to eternal life is not hard to find or difficult to attain because Christ has paid our penalty in full through His death. We've all been offered the hope of eternal life through the grace and mercy of our Lord! However, we as humans make it harder and more difficult than it should be because we don't trust in the *only* solution that works. Thus, we exclaim to the Lord, "I don't need help. I've got this!" We trust in popular human solutions and follow the crowd like lemmings over the edge of a cliff into the great abyss of destruction. To be transformed from destruction into life, we need the ability to recognize the truth and distinguish it from falsehood. Through Scripture, we have that ability. We need to be careful that we don't find ourselves swayed by false teaching which looks good, appeals to the ears, and energizes the emotions, but in the end leads to destruction. Instead, we must know the truth of God's Word and stand firm on its unchanging principles, so that we have a relationship with Him which leads to life.

Incorporate

What are some destructive habits and ideas that the world around us has?

In what ways have you seen today the world present ideas which sound good and logical, but are totally devoid of truth? How can we help others recognize these views are false?

How would you explain the gospel to someone who says, "All roads lead to heaven or everyone will go to heaven because we have a loving God?" Use [Matthew 7:21-23](#) in your answer.

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