



This week, we are continuing our series, “High Definition Living, an inside look at the Sermon on the Mount.” Our message this week is “True Religion.” Our primary goal is to study some common religious activities and to understand the proper motives and ways to do them.

- **What do you think of when you hear the words "Religion" and "Religious"?**
  - **How would you define those words?**
  - **Would you generally consider them positive or negative in our culture?**
  - **Would you consider yourself "Religious"? Why/Why not?**
- **Discuss the differences in the following two words:**
  - *Religious* - relating to or manifesting faithful devotion to an acknowledged ultimate reality or deity.
  - *Religiose* - excessively, obtrusively, or sentimentally religious.
- **READ: Matthew 6:1 and James 1:26-27. What do we learn from these passages about being "religious"?**
- **READ: Matthew 6:2-4 and 6:21.**
  - **How do these passages relate to the James passage above?**
  - **What motivates you to give more: your desire to please God, or a specific cause/need?**
  - **If your devotion to give reflects your religious devotion, how would you rate your devotion to God? How does this realization motivate you to make adjustments to your lifestyle?**
- **READ: Matthew 6:5-15.**
  - **What do verses 5&6 teach us about our motivation to pray?**
  - **What does this passage teach us about the importance of prayer?**
  - **What do verses 7-15 teach us about how to pray?**
  - **What do these verses teach us about praying with other people?**
  - **How will studying this passage help you pray more effectively?**
- **READ: Matthew 6:16-18.**
  - **What is the point of fasting?**
  - **Does your devotion to God motivate you to fast?**
- **All three of the topics in this discussion mention "rewards" for both right and wrong motivations. Discuss the positives and negatives of rewards mentioned in the passage.**
- **What other “religious activities” do you think Jesus would talk about if he preached this sermon today?**
- **How will this discussion change the way you approach your "religious" activities?**



Welcome to February Growth Group Leaders!

Since I am teaching this week, it means I am doing double-duty on the message topic. As a result, I apologize that this Travel Guide isn't quite as in-depth as some others. However, if you heard the message on Sunday, you should be able to lead your folks through the material fairly easily.

Additionally, I suggest reading my blog over the next couple of days. I will be doing a couple of follow-up entries on the "topics for today" that I mentioned in my message. This may also help you lead your discussion.

One the question on "topics for today," please give me some feedback on what your group comes up with. I'd like to do a whole series of blog entries on this.

Thanks!  
Andrew

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This week, we are continuing our series, "High Definition Living, an inside look at the Sermon on the Mount." Our message this week is "True Religion." Our primary goal is to study some common religious activities and to understand the proper motives and ways to do them.

As usual, the first two groups of questions are simply topic-starters. Enjoy the discussion, but move through them fairly quickly so you will have time to finish the rest of the material.

- **What do you think of when you hear the words "Religion" and "Religious"?**
  - How would you define those words?
  - Would you generally consider them positive or negative in our culture?
  - Would you consider yourself "Religious"? Why/Why not?
- **Discuss the differences in the following two words:**
  - *Religious* - relating to or manifesting faithful devotion to an acknowledged ultimate reality or deity.
  - *Religiose* - excessively, obtrusively, or sentimentally religious.
- **READ: Matthew 6:1 and James 1:26-27. What do we learn from these passages about being "religious"?**

The primary point I would like you to discuss here is that TRUE RELIGION involves acts that minister TO people, but not to be SEEN BY people. Touching peoples' lives is an essential part of TRUE RELIGION. Doing it for the right reason is equally essential.

- **READ: Matthew 6:2-4 and 6:21.**
  - How do these passages relate to the James passage above?

James tells us that ministering to people is essential,  
6:21 tells us that our giving determines the desires of our hearts, and  
6:2-4 tells us that when we give with the right motives, we will quietly, and God will reward us accordingly.

- **What motivates you to give more: your desire to please God, or a specific cause/need?**

Discuss the fact that giving to causes and needs is good, but we should do so because God directs us. You may want to take some time to introduce and discuss the idea of “revelational giving.” Revelational giving is when we are faced with a giving situation, rather than rationalize through it, we pray through it and ask God to reveal an amount to us, regardless of whether it really makes sense or not. Revelational Giving is giving out of obedience to God even more than personal desire.

- **If your devotion to give reflects your religious devotion, how would you rate your devotion to God? How does this realization motivate you to make adjustments to your lifestyle?**

In my message, I talked about the reasons people might be giving. I suggest you review them with your folks:

Tax Write-Off

Habit (just always have, don't think about it)

Ability to brag about the projects you are helping to finance.

“Tipping” for services received – not giving to invest in others, but for what you're getting out of it personally.

Simply because it pleases God and you want to please God.

- READ: Matthew 6:5-15.
- **What do verses 5&6 teach us about our motivation to pray?**

Again, the main point is to seek God, not to look religious. However, you may want to expand on this thought a little bit. Talk about the nature of prayer as a conversation with God. If you pray to look religious, that all you'll be is outwardly religious. However, if you pray simply to seek God's face, He'll reward you . . . He'll answer your prayers . . . You will have a life-giving personal relationship with a Righteous and Holy God.

- **What does this passage teach us about the importance of prayer?**

The very fact that Jesus mentions prayer in this passage indicates that it is an important activity. We have several accounts in the Bible that Jesus prayed. If Jesus found it important to get alone with His Father, isn't it that much more important for us, since we are so easily tempted away by our sinful nature?

Additionally, he gives a good bit of time to the discussion.

Be sure to mention to your folks that Journey Church believes that Prayer is so important that we are devoting an entire series to it beginning later this month.

- **What do verses 7-15 teach us about how to pray?**

Bottom line: **KEEP IT SIMPLE**, and **BE YOURSELF**.

You may want to expound on this just a little bit to encourage your folks not to be intimidated to pray out loud. Particularly if they are around people that seem to pray eloquently or with big words. They can be reminded that the eloquence and big words doesn't help God hear the prayers any more than if they just keep it simple and be themselves. For some people, being eloquent and using big words is the most natural thing they can do, but for most people, its going to be simple, raw, and real.

- **What do these verses teach us about praying with other people?**

This may be considered a bit of a trick question. The passage really doesn't address praying with other people. However, some might try to construe to passage to mean that they should only pray alone or that it is OK to only pray alone. I would argue that verses 5-6 focus more on private prayer, and verses 7-15 tend to lend themselves more to an application of praying with others.

- **How will studying this passage help you pray more effectively?**

This is simply an opportunity for your folks to respond to the discussion. I once heard a quote that said, “*The only time you can pray too much is when it is keeping you from being the answer to your prayers.*” The quote is a double-edged sword. First, it encourages us to pray more and deeper for God to do a mighty work in and through

our lives. But, second, it tells us that sometimes the best answer to our prayers is to get off our knees and do something. This second point keeps us from using prayer as an excuse to not step out in faith. This thought may help you motivate your folks to look at their prayer lives just a little different.

- READ: Matthew 6:16-18.
  - **What is the point of fasting?**

Fasting is simply depriving yourself of something you need (usually food) to demonstrate and increase your dependence upon God. Often, we overlook the importance of FASTING today, because we're not really conscious of our dependence upon God. Randy Sprinkle (prayer coordinator of the International Mission Board) once said, "Prayer is an unspoken confession of our utter dependence upon God. Prayerlessness is an unbroken testimony of our dependence upon the flesh." If this is true for prayer, how much more for FASTING!

- **Does your devotion to God motivate you to fast?**

Take this opportunity to really push your folks to question their dependence upon God. A lot of folks will say, "I just can't skip a meal." Or, "It's not healthy to not eat." Or any one of a million excuses as to why they won't fast. There is piles of research that indicates a wise approach to fasting actually has a lot of health benefits, so the excuses can be set aside. But we shouldn't fast for the health benefits. We should fast because we are desperate for a move of God in our lives.

- All three of the topics in this discussion mention "rewards" for both right and wrong motivations. **Discuss the positives and negatives of rewards mentioned in the passage.**

The reward for the world's way is nothing more than the praise and adoration of the people around us. In contrast, the reward for TRUE RELIGION is from God: a transformed and abundant life now and an allusion to various rewards in heaven.

- **What other "religious activities" do you think Jesus would talk about if he preached this sermon today?**

I would suggest talking some about the topics I suggested, and then see if anyone has any others. I will probably blog more about each of these this week . . . and any other suggestions you come up with would help me expand the blog series. In my message, I speculated that Jesus might say something about the following topics:

#### Worship

When you worship, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they look forward to their worship experience from week to week and talk about their conferences and events to be known as religious. They have received their reward. But when you worship, consider how God is asking you to change your life throughout the week. And your Father who sees your heart will reward you.

#### Discipleship Groups and Bible Study

When you study the Bible, you must not be like the hypocrites who chase after every source of information available so that their knowledge amazes the people around them. Their knowledge is their reward. Instead, study your Bible carefully, expecting God to transform your heart. And your Father who knows your heart will reward you.

#### Evangelism

When you share your faith, do not be like the hypocrites. For they schedule their evangelism and target people with no regard for the person they are targeting. The number in a book is their reward. Instead, invest in peoples' lives quietly, living an exemplary life before them, taking advantage of the opportunities to share truth day by day. Then your Father who sees your quiet influence will reward you.

- **How will this discussion change the way you approach your "religious" activities?**

This question is meant to be a response and application question to the entire study, particularly the brainstorm about possible "other topics." I would return to the big idea, and call for a personal challenge to respond:

Big Idea: True religion is doing spiritual activities to draw closer to God, not to look religious.

Application Point 1: We need to be doing "religious" activities to grow in relationship with God and others.

Application Point 2: The reason why we do "religious" activities is as important as doing them.