

STUDY GUIDE

DUTCHTOWN BAPTIST CHURCH

AUTHENTIC

SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY HYPOCRITICAL PEOPLE

MATTHEW 23:2-7

05/15/2016

MAIN POINT

If we live for anyone other than an audience of One, we will eventually become hypocrites.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

In order to introduce this week's session, spend a few minutes talking as a group about the skills and characteristics required to become a great actor or actress. Which actors and actresses do you admire most?

What kinds of roles allow actors and actresses to shine the best?

What traits or habits identify a person as a mediocre performer?

What ideas or images come to mind when you hear the word "hypocrite"?

Why do you think it's difficult to be authentic and genuine as a follower of Christ?

In this study we will talk through the practices of a sincere faith, but we won't take those practices seriously until we recognize the danger of being artificial. Hypocrisy is so dangerous; that's why Jesus minced no words when it came to the subject. As James MacDonald will help us see, if we live for anyone other than an audience of One, we will eventually become hypocrites.

UNDERSTANDING

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

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 23:2-7.

What sticks out to you the most about these verses?

Why do you think Jesus takes hypocrisy so seriously?

Jesus got straight to the point with the scribes and Pharisees. Spoken by Jesus, this was a divine proclamation of judgment. He pronounced God's verdict on the hypocrites and pointed to their future sentencing in eternity. That's a serious proclamation for those who act the part of being close to God when their hearts are really far from Him. As James MacDonald will show us, then, we must pursue authenticity with a sense of urgency.

WATCH THE TEACHING SEGMENT FOR SESSION 1 FEATURING JAMES MACDONALD.

What did you like best in James's teaching? Why?

What emotions are you experiencing after hearing James teach about hypocrisy?

How do Christians often make salvation complicated?

One of the habits of hypocritical people is that they make salvation as complicated as possible. When we do this, we preach a message contrary to that of Jesus. The message of salvation is simple, and it's open to whosoever comes to God. Hypocrites make salvation complicated by leading people into religious systems instead of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

How would you explain the doctrine of salvation to someone who's never heard of it?

Why is it easy for Christians to drift into hypocrisy?

Often we drift into hypocrisy because of how deeply we care about how we appear to others. We are committed to building up our own reputations even as we rot on the inside because of unrepentant sin.

Why is it damaging for Christians to practice hypocrisy in the church? In our culture?

Hypocrisy is ammunition for opponents of the gospel. When we are hypocritical, we testify with our lives to the inauthenticity of our experience with God. And, as people observe those characteristics in us, they project that same attitude onto the church and even God Himself.

Of the seven habits of highly hypocritical people, which have been the most damaging to you personally?

Which of the seven habits have you been forced to confront in your own heart?

APPLICATION

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

Which of the seven habits of highly hypocritical people is most convicting to you?

What are some specific ways you are going to keep an eye on that habit this week?

What is one way you'd like our group to pray for you as you do?

PRAY

Close your group by praying through the specific requests of your group made during the last application point.

Visit LifeWay.com/JamesMacDonald to purchase the study guide for more in-depth personal and group study.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 23:2-7

23:1-3. The religious leaders from 21:23-22:46 were still part of Jesus' audience, but he turned to address his disciples and the sizable crowd. The temple courts, where he was speaking, were a popular place during Passover week. He had spent most of the day in debate with the leaders, publicly demonstrating their lack of qualification for their role and responsibilities. He then turned to the onlookers to help them understand how to live under such poor leadership.

Moses' seat referred to Moses' role as teacher and leader-judge of Israel (e.g., Exod. 18:13). The current leaders were the successors to Moses, as Israel's leaders. God's people needed leaders to teach God's Word, to help the people interpret it accurately, and to challenge them to apply it in their daily living. There is a place for bowing to authoritative teaching. Certainly much of what the first-century leaders taught was accurate and helpful. Jesus commanded the people to do everything they tell you. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees in particular were generally more conservative in their respect for the Word of God, taking it at face value. But people often learn from example more than by word. This aspect of the hypocrites' leadership was abysmal.

23:4. Through the man-made laws of the Pharisees (Matt. 15:1-9), they introduced burdens of obedience that were impossible for people to carry. Yet, they mercilessly held the people to these burdens. The shoulders were the place for carrying weighty burdens, putting the entire strength of the body under the burden. In contrast, the finger represented the weakest part of the body. The hypocrites put forth no effort to aid their followers in pleasing God, which was the fundamental purpose of God's Word. This was no mere mistake or oversight on their part; they were not willing to move the burdens. Theirs was a prideful, status-seeking ministry. Jesus' attitude was just the opposite.

23:5-7. Not only were the hypocrites unsympathetic, but they were also insecure. They constantly advertised their "spirituality" and status in an effort to feed their weak egos through the attention of others. Their insecurity masqueraded as arrogance. They did everything in their power to cause others to think they were superior to the average Jewish citizen. They did their "good" deeds purely for applause. They even fooled themselves into believing they were righteous.

Phylacteries were small boxes attached to the left arm or the forehead and worn during prayer. They contained small portions of Scripture that the Pharisees wore, in a legalistic interpretation of the Shema, particularly Deuteronomy 6:8: "Tie them [these commandments] as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads" (see also Exod. 13:9; Deut. 11:18). They literally wore phylacteries on their heads and wrists. God, through Moses' use of a figure of speech, was instructing the people to become servants of the Word of God. But these status seekers made a physical uniform out of it. The hypocrites would broaden their phylacteries, because the more noticeable the box, the more spiritual they seemed to be.

The tassels were blue-and-white cords that Jewish men wore on their outer garments (Num. 15:38-41; Deut. 22:12), and later on the prayer shawl. God had commanded the wearing of the tassels so the Jews would be reminded that God had redeemed them and thus remember to obey his commandments. The hypocrites would lengthen their tassels, because the more noticeable the tassels, the more spiritual they seemed to be.

Banquets and synagogues were only two examples from daily life where many people gathered. These places were prime opportunities for advertising false spirituality. Virtually any event was an opportunity for public honor and recognition. The place of honor and important seats were reserved for the most spiritual—those with highest authority and greatest wisdom. These people loved to be seen and to parade their spiritual accomplishments in public ways.

Jesus said that the hypocrites love (phileo) these attention-gathering methods. They would do anything to get attention. Recognition was their god, replacing the God they should have been loving with all their heart, soul, and mind (Matt 22:37-38).