

Guided Bible Study: Week 5

April 18-24, 2020

During the time we cannot meet publicly due to the Corona Virus emergency, Rick is going to post a guided Bible study on here to help fill the void left by not having Sunday School and Wednesday night classes. We encourage you to read the passage in the Bible together with your family. Questions and brief comments to help guide your study appear here. We are going to feature Jesus' SERMON ON THE MOUNT from Matthew chapters 5-7. We will post the study for a new section of this passage each week.

Matthew 6.16-18: Jesus mentions fasting a few times. He deals more with why and how to fast than He ever goes right out and commands fasting. For any not familiar, "fasting" as referred to in Scripture is going without eating for a particular period of time in order to think and pray, draw nearer to God, and in some cases deal with a problem or situation in ones life. Sometimes it is a total fast. Some times it might be going without certain foods. Most of the ones in the Bible seem to have been total.

The point Jesus makes here is that a proper fast that does any good is one that's not an obvious or publicized ritual (like was common among the Pharisees of His day). It is kept private and never made a show off. If you want to fast effectively don't tell anyone else about it unless you just have to because they need to know why you aren't eating. Even then, keep it low key. Ideally couple it with extra prayer, Bible study, and God-directed thought.

Matthew 6.19-21: How secure are earthly things? How fast can a good job or valuable property be gone? How quickly can stocks lose their value? We have seen the answer to this during the Covid-19 crisis and, depending when businesses get back going in full swing, we might not have seen the worst of it yet. On the other hand, God and heaven are eternal. If we put the emphasis in life on our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, our reward can never be taken away from us. We could walk away from it but no one and nothing else can rob us of it. Where we are putting our greater investment of energy and resources is where our greater interest in life will lie. (Note verse 21.) [DISCUSS: Where are your individual priorities? Where are your family priorities? Are you more concerned about getting to heaven or about having earthly stuff and having an earthly good time?]

Matthew 6.22-23: [DISCUSS: What is your vision for your life? What are you attracted to? What do you tend to look at and what is its effect on your thoughts and life?] See **I John 2.16**. The things we see is one of our greatest sources of temptation. We also see this reflected in the

temptations Jesus endured when the devil showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and said they could be His if he bowed down and worshiped the devil. It is important we guard what we look at and where we cast our vision for life. Read **Philippians 4.8-9**. These verses are a good guide for what we “look at” and “look for” in life. [DISCUSS: What does this say about what we watch on TV or the internet and even what we read.]

Matthew 6.24: Just take this at face value. Jesus doesn't sugar coat anything. Where is our emphasis in life, God's things or things that bring us earthly riches? [DISCUSS: How does this affect our giving? How does this affect our time and effort?]

Matthew 6.25-27: In translations that divide the chapter into sections these verses may appear separate from verse 24 (as in the NIV) but they really belong with it in my way of thinking. Jesus does not mean to say not to work and provide a decent living for ourselves and our families. See **II Thessalonians 3.6-13**. In the II Thessalonians passage we learn not only that people should work but also that those who refuse to work often end up causing trouble in the church community.

Therefore, Jesus is not saying to not work and to just let God zap us with blessings. He is saying to avoid making our priorities that of getting more and more earthly things. He is also saying to have faith that God will reward our work with enough to get by on. He doesn't promise us earthly riches, though many of us are truly blessed in that way, but He promises He will take care of us if we do what we should. (By the way, if you are doing your best to provide and circumstances leave you short of necessities, don't hesitate to let your fellow Christians know. Sometimes God uses us to bless each other.)

[DISCUSS: How does what this section teaches free us to give generously and to help others?]

Matthew 6.28-34: Most of this section further illustrates what Jesus has said and we have discussed in the verses just before. Two highlights jump out.

The first highlight is in verse 30 in which Jesus shows that how we act in this area of trust and generosity is a matter of faith. The easy part of faith might be trusting God with our unseen eternity. It gets harder when it affects our financial and material “bottom line”. Do you really trust God to provide for your life on earth? [Discuss this.] If we trust Him then quit worrying even in difficult times.

The second highlight is in verse 33. What great advice about every aspect in life! Put God and Jesus FIRST. If we do that, God will make everything else fall in place. [DISCUSS: Is God in first place in your personal life? Is God in first place in your family life?]