

Message.

Genuine spiritual maturity is an internal transformation of the heart rather than a performance of external religious rituals. When the pursuit of human approval or personal significance outweighs a primary love for God, it produces a hollow hypocrisy that masks internal decay. True faithfulness focuses on justice, mercy, and faithfulness—virtues practiced not to earn divine favor, but as a response to having already received it. Ultimately, *the weightier matters are forming Christ in us by loving God first and above all else.*
#bccBIGidea

Prayer.

Heavenly Father,
You require perfection and holiness, but You never said we had to accomplish it on our own. You have conquered evil and allowed me to be Your child. Continue to shape me to think, love, and act like You.
Amen.

Engage.

Read Matthew 23:13–36 (The Seven Woes)

- In verse 13, Jesus indicts the leaders for shutting the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. How can "knowing the Bible" but lacking a heart for God practically prevent others from entering into a relationship with Him?
- Looking at verses 25–26, Jesus emphasizes cleaning the *inside* first. What are specific examples of "internal" cleaning versus "external" polishing in a person's spiritual life?
- Verse 23 lists justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Why do you think it is easier to focus on meticulous rules (like tithing mint and dill) than it is to practice these three virtues?

Read 2 Timothy 3:1–7 (The Appearance of Godliness)

- Verse 5 describes people "having a form of godliness but denying its power." Based on the passage, what specific behaviors or attitudes characterize a "form" that lacks actual spiritual power?
- Verse 7 mentions those who are "always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth." What is the biblical difference between gaining information and encountering truth?

Read Matthew 11:28–30 (The Easy Yoke)

- Jesus describes His yoke as "easy" and His burden as "light." How does this contrast with the "heavy, cumbersome loads" He describes the religious leaders as tilling in Matthew 23:4?
- How does the command to "learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart" redefine the goal of spiritual discipline?

Day 1. The "Inside-Out" Cup

Scripture: Matthew 23:25–26

Discuss: *Smear something messy (mud/syrup) on the **inside** of a clear cup, then wipe the **outside** until it's perfectly shiny.* If I offered you a drink of water in this cup, would you take it? Why not—it looks sparkling clean on the outside!

- Jesus said people can be like this cup. What kind of 'muck' do you think stays hidden on the inside of a person even if they look like they are following all the rules?
- If you wanted to fix this cup, would you keep scrubbing the outside, or start on the inside? Why?
- How does knowing God already sees our 'inside' change the way we pray?

Pray: Lord, help us to be more concerned with our hearts than our shine. Wash our hearts clean today

Day 2. The Gnat and the Camel

Scripture: Matthew 23:23–24

Discuss: *Show them a tiny crumb (the gnat) and a large stuffed animal or a picture of a car (the camel).* Jesus told the leaders they were careful to catch a tiny bug in their juice, but they didn't notice they were swallowing a whole camel! What do you think he meant by that?

- Jesus listed three 'Weighty Matters': **Justice** (making things right for others), **Mercy**: (showing kindness when it's not earned), **Faithfulness** (staying true to God's heart, even when it's hard)
 - If you saw someone being treated unfairly or left out on the playground, what is one thing you could do to 'make it right' for them, even if it might be a little scary to speak up?
 - Think about someone who was mean to you or didn't play fair today—if you had the chance to do something kind for them instead of 'getting them back,' what would that look like?
 - If a friend promises to stand by you on the playground every day, but only shows up when things are fun, are they being faithful?
 - Jesus said the leaders were 'blind guides.' Does a faithful person follow what they feel like doing, or do they follow what God has said in His Word?
 - If someone obeys their parents but is mean to their siblings all day, which 'matter' are they forgetting?
- Why is it sometimes easier to follow a small rule (like cleaning your room) than a 'weighty' one (like being truly kind to someone who was mean to you)?

Pray: Jesus, help us care about what You care about: being fair, being kind, and staying close to You.

Day 3. The "Look at Me" Trap

Scripture: Matthew 23:5–7

Discuss: *Have them look at an image of a **Phylactery** (tefillin) and ritual **Tassels** (tzitzit).*

The leaders made these boxes and tassels extra big so everyone would see how 'holy' they were.

- If you were trying to make everyone think you were the 'best' Christian, what are some things you might do to show off?
- Does doing something good just so people will clap for us make our hearts more like Jesus, or more like the Pharisees?
- If God is the only one who sees you do something kind, is that enough for you? Why or why not?
- How does it feel to know that God isn't looking for us to be 'impressive,' but just to love Him?

Pray: God, thank You that we don't have to perform for You. Help us love You more than we love being noticed.