



# Active Faith

Session 12 • Matthew 25:31-46



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## ENGAGE

**PREPARE:** Display **Pack Item 7** (*Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 25:40*).

**READ:** Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 97.

**ASK: What are the advantages of knowing the criteria by which you will be evaluated? What are the disadvantages of not knowing?** (p. 97)

**DISCUSS:** Ask adults to share how they feel about performance reviews at work. Lead a discussion on measurements and standards used in various professions for such reviews.

**CONTEXT:** Review this content from **Understand the Context** (p. 97) to explain Jesus's message in the earlier parables:

- “Beginning in Matthew 24:45, Jesus told three parables about preparedness. The first contrasted the actions of a wise, sensible servant with the actions of a wicked servant while the master was away (24:45-51). The second parable (25:1-13) concerned ten virgins who were part of a wedding celebration. . . . The prepared virgins accompanied the bridegroom to the feast. The unprepared ones failed to be ready and lacked enough oil to light

the bridegroom's way to the marriage feast. . . . The third parable in the Olivet Discourse tells of a master and servants (vv. 14-30). . . . The bottom line is that we are to be prepared and faithfully carrying out the work given to us by our Master.”

**SHARE:** Note that while Jesus used parables in Matthew 24–25 to explain an eternal “performance review,” this passage should be interpreted as a direct prophecy from Him regarding judgment in the last days.

**SAY:** *As we dig deeper into this eternal “performance review,” reflect on what your life says about Christ each day.*

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## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read **Matthew 25:31-33** aloud as the group listens for the terms describing Jesus.

**ASK: What do these verses teach about Jesus's role in the final judgment?** (p. 99)

**SHARE:** *Jesus referred to Himself as the “Son of Man” (v. 31). While He came humbly to Bethlehem, His return will be marked by glory and majesty. As He judges, He will separate individuals. Things like ethnicity, social status, and birthplace won't matter. Jesus will judge each person, not countries or nations.*

**EXPLAIN:** Identify the two groups Jesus mentioned:

- **(25:32-33)** Jesus used a metaphor to picture the two groups, sheep and goats. The sheep Jesus put on his right and the goats on the left. In that society, these domesticated animals often were pastured together and may have looked similar from a distance. But sheep were valued more. When evening came, the shepherd would place the goats with thinner hair in a warmer place, while the sheep with heavier wool stayed in the open. Shepherds also separated the goats from sheep for milking and for slaughter. Given the context of judgment, this might fit the setting better.

**ASK: What is the significance of the right hand and the left hand?** (p. 99)

- **(25:33)** For most people, the right hand is the stronger of the two. The Bible describes God's power as being in His right hand (Ex. 15:6). Ancient statues and wall-carvings show that people in Middle Eastern cultures received rewards or favors with the right hand. Those depicted on a leader's right hand were the favored ones. Further emphasizing the importance of the right hand, after Jesus ascended, He took His place at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 8:1; also Acts 7:55). The right hand, then, is the place of honor and power.

**TRANSITION:** *The right hand refers to a place of honor, while the left hand suggests disgrace. As Creator and King, Jesus has the right to separate the nations, but He also has a standard to determine who goes where.*

**READ: Direct the group to read**

**Matthew 25:34-40** silently, underlining every word that describes the struggles people were having and how those needs were met.

**ASK: What evidence distinguishes between a righteous and unrighteous person?** (p. 99)

**EXPLAIN:** Lead a discussion based on the group's responses to the question. Note that once Jesus (the King) separated the sheep and goats, He began to explain His criteria:

- "The rewards were based on their actions of ministering to the King. In each case, the King was the recipient of the care they had given. A note of caution and clarification is necessary at this point. Although these righteous ones were applauded for their acts of compassion, these acts did not earn them the reward of the kingdom. This account is not teaching salvation by works. The clear teaching of the New Testament is that no one can merit or earn God's gracious gift of salvation. That comes by the grace of God through Christ's achievement on the cross. These actions of compassion by the righteous ones were the outflow and evidence of a right relationship with God (see Eph. 2:8-10)." (p. 101, Day 2)

**ASK: What obstacles prevent us from ministering to the needs of others?** (p. 99)

**EXAMINE:** Encourage adults to work together in teams of three or four. Direct each team to read the passage again and to focus on the ways the sheep ministered to others. Urge each group to identify practical ways

believers can provide similar ministry to others today. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share what they discussed. Record their responses on the board.

**READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 25:41-46 aloud** as the group considers the similarities and differences between these verses and Matthew 25:34-40.

**ASK: What are the contrasts between these two sets of verses?** (p. 99)

**SHARE:** Allow adults to share their observations about verses 34-40 and verses 41-46. Contrast the situations faced by the two groups:

- **(25:41)** For the sheep, the invitation was to “come,” while the goats were told to depart from me. The sheep inherited the kingdom, but the goats were sent into the eternal fire. In the Bible, fire is a common image for judgment, especially God’s ultimate judgment. Hell is not a metaphor. It is real place of torment that will serve as the eternal destination of those whose names are not found in the book of life (Rev. 20:15; 21:8).

**SAY:** *Jesus made it clear that eternal punishment in a place of torment is real. Hell is not a metaphor or philosophical idea. As believers, we should recognize that those who reject Jesus will spend eternity in hell—and we should do all we can to convince them to turn to Christ before it’s too late.*

**ASK: What prevents some people in our culture from believing the biblical teaching about hell and eternal life?** (p. 99)

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## CHALLENGE

**SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from this week’s Bible passage, considering how these truths should shape our relationships and our ministries:

- We should live our lives knowing we will stand before Jesus one day.
- We demonstrate our love for God when we minister to other believers.
- We should recognize that unbelievers will be eternally separated from God and will face everlasting punishment.

**DISCUSS:** Direct a volunteer to read the **Apply the Text** activity on page 99. Allow the group to suggest ways they have shown compassion in the past and how they could again in the future. Stress that today’s focal passage reminds us that Christ looks at the heart.

**PRAY:** Allow adults to spend a few minutes in silent prayer, talking to God about how He wants to work in their lives. Close in prayer, asking God to give each adult a clear vision for showing mercy to other believers and showing grace to the world.

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## AFTER THE SESSION

Send a group email or text to the adults in your Bible study, reminding them of Matthew 25:40. Encourage anyone who has had a chance to minister to the “least of these” to share their stories.