

Matthew: But Do Not Practice

Discussion Guide for October 24 and 25, 2026

Summary

Leadership matters, and anyone with influence or authority over others is a leader. In Matthew 23:1-12, Jesus rebukes the scribes and Pharisees for four failures: not practicing what they preached, legalism, doing everything to be seen, and a lack of humility. The message calls us to lead like Jesus, with servant humility.

Ice Breaker

Think of a leader who has had a lasting impact on you, such as a boss, coach, teacher, or parent. What did they do that made their leadership good (or not), and how did it affect you?

Key Verses

1. Matthew 23:1-12
2. James 1:22
3. Matthew 11:28-30
4. Matthew 6:1
5. Philippians 2:8-11

Discussion Questions

1. The message defined leadership as influence and authority over others. Where do you have influence or authority in your life (home, work, church, friendships)? How does seeing yourself as a leader change the way you think about those roles?
1. Jesus told the crowd to obey what the religious leaders taught but not to follow their example, because they did not practice what they preached. Where do you see a gap between what you say you believe and how you live?
1. The religious leaders added "fence laws" on top of God's Law and made faith a heavy burden. What man-made standards have you seen the church hold to, and how can we tell the difference between legalism and lovingly encouraging obedience to what Scripture teaches?
1. Jesus said the religious leaders did their deeds to be seen by others, and the message offered a prayer: "Lord, remind me I have an audience of 1." Where are you most tempted to

practice your faith for the approval of people, and what might it look like to do it quietly for God instead?

5. 1. In God's upside-down kingdom, the humble are exalted and the self-exalted are humbled. Why is humility so countercultural, and how does Jesus' example, from the manger to the cross, shape how you want to lead?

Life Application

This week, ask God: Where do I lead, and how can I lead more like Jesus? Then take two concrete steps. First, examine your life by asking, "Do my behaviors align with my beliefs?" Pick one area where there is a gap, such as reading the Bible in front of your kids or praying right away when a coworker shares a need, and take a step to close it. Second, think of someone who models humble, behind-the-scenes service and leadership, and send them a text, email, or card thanking them for their faithfulness. Also take time to ask, "Do I care too much about the opinion of other people when it comes to the practice of my faith?" Come ready next time to share what you did and how it affected you.

Key Takeaways

- 1.** 1. Leadership matters. Anyone with influence or authority over others is a leader, and God holds spiritual leaders to a higher standard.
- 2.** 1. Hypocrisy is the opposite of integrity. Followers of Jesus are called to live out what they believe, because our inconsistency affects a watching world.
- 3.** 1. Legalism turns faith into a burden by adding man-made rules, but teaching and obeying what the Bible actually says is discipleship, not legalism.
- 4.** 1. Live out your faith for an audience of one. Our faith should flow from a heart transformed by the Holy Spirit, not from a desire for the approval of others.
- 5.** 1. God's kingdom is upside-down: those who humble themselves will be exalted. Jesus is both King of the universe and its most humble servant, so lead like Jesus, with servant humility.