

Questions:

- Take a moment to reflect on a challenging moment from your day. Consider: How would I want to have been treated in this circumstance? What would it look like for me to have responded accordingly?
- What wide gate are you most naturally drawn toward? What is appealing about that gate?
- What would it look like to walk through the narrow gate, in the way of Jesus?

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Read verses 15-20. In a nutshell: be very discerning about who you follow.

We don't talk about prophets much today, but consider these the "ancient influencers." They are the ones who speak (on behalf of God) about how we should live.

Jesus warns us that there are many who will present as the real deal, people to be believed, imitated, and obeyed; but don't be fooled. Look at the deeper, lasting fruit of a person before you champion their message.

NT Wright puts it this way: *Look at the life of the person who is offering you advice. Think of it like a tree. Can you see healthy, tasty fruit on this tree? Can you see other people being genuinely nourished by it? Or is it, in fact, producing a crop of lies, immorality, and greed?*

Eugene Peterson writes, "A genuine leader will never exploit your emotions or your pocketbook."

So how do we spot false prophets? The obvious examples are the religious leaders whose ministries have crumbled because of moral failure. Think Ravi Zacharias, Jerry Falwell Jr., and Carl Lentz. But it's

not fair to only point fingers at those in the spotlight, and it's foolish to think false prophets only exist in religious circles.

Questions:

- Who are the top three influencers in your life?
- What kind of fruit do they produce in their own lives? Is it consistent with their messaging?
- Is there anyone you pay serious attention to whose fruit you should take a deeper look at? Is there anyone you should unfollow because of this teaching?

Read verses 21-28. The first half of this reading (vs. 21-23) is scary. Could we spend our whole lives thinking we are a Christian, meet Jesus, and realize we had it wrong?

First off, these verses should be read as a continuation of verses 15-20. It's a warning about what counts. It's not enough to simply claim Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior and do great deeds, even spiritual deeds. What matters is the "renovation of your heart."

So maybe it should scare us a bit. What counts is the inner working of Jesus in our lives to convict and transform us into someone he recognizes as God's image-bearing son/daughter. In keeping with the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, he's reminding us that *outside* descriptors are not the real thing. It's what's inside that counts.

Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock...

The point is to practice what he's preaching. He's serious about our obedience. Not because he's some mean, power-hungry overlord, but because he wants our house to stand strong when the storms come. And they will come.

Bob Goff says that he no longer attends Bible study! Instead, he started "Bible Doing." The point of this group wasn't to understand Scripture and expand your thinking—it was to move from words to action so that we, and the world around us, might be transformed.

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes.

They marveled. This teacher was different. He wasn't a copycat or imitator. He was the real deal, one who embodied what he taught. The kingdom—and the King—are here.

And *that* concludes the Sermon on the Mount.

Questions:

- Where is the greatest gap between what you believe in your head and how you live in your daily life? Spend a few moments inviting Jesus to close that gap.
- On what foundation have you built your life? How fit is your foundation to weather the storms?

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The Transforming Power of God's Kingdom

Chapters 8-10

When Jesus wrapped his teaching on the mountainside, those who heard were astounded because he spoke with such great authority. Matthew now leads us down the mountain to witness nine stories of dramatic healing to show us just what kind of authority Jesus has. Woven through these stories of healing are two moments where Jesus calls people to follow him. It's as if Matthew is breaking the fourth wall, looking at you, and extending the same invitation: are you ready to experience the healing