

MATTHEW



STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

This week's sermon was titled, "Take Off Your Mask." Let's start with a simple acknowledgement. *We all wear masks.* We're going to be given a chance to dig a little deeper into this as the discussion goes on, but let's begin by sharing a few of the masks we wear. Maybe we put on a smile while in the grocery store even though our kid's screaming is draining us. Maybe we act strong with a friend or family member. There are so many options.

Share a time when you felt the need to "put on a mask". What were the circumstances, and what were you trying to conceal?

Why do we wear masks? Consider some common reasons such as fear of rejection, desire for control, cultural norms, fear of vulnerability, and self-protection. Which of these resonates most with you?

Text: Matthew 23 and Hypocrisy

Jesus accused the Pharisees of being hypocrites (one who wears a mask). He gives many examples of this, but many of them revolve around his opening claim that they "Lay heavy burdens on others without lifting a finger themselves."

As you look at the list of accusations Jesus levels against the Pharisees, which feel most relevant to the present-day American church? What do we need to learn from these accusations?

Jesus gives two exhortations during the accusations:

1. "For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."
2. "You will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

What implication do these two exhortations have for you, for our church community?

Your Move: Taking Off Our Masks

We acknowledge three critical actions to help us take off our own masks:

Be Humble: The first step to taking off our masks is admitting we wear them.

Be Vulnerable: Vulnerability involves risk, but it is necessary for genuine connection and growth. With whom can you share that you have been putting on a mask, what you've been hiding, how have you been hiding it, and why?

Give Thanks to God: How does giving thanks to God help us avoid hypocrisy? How can focusing on God's goodness and deeds free us from self-centeredness?

Challenge: Identify one specific mask you want to remove this week. Commit to being humble and vulnerable with a trusted person and to giving thanks to God daily.