



## Chapter 6

*Authenticity* is a word that carries weight these days. We celebrate people around us who are “authentic,” and greatly value environments where people can be “authentic.” Conversely, we are repelled by those who appear inauthentic. We tend to not trust them. Likewise, we look for environments where we too can “just be ourselves.”

### Icebreaker:

1. Can you relate to this desire for authenticity? If so, how do you respond when you sense it is lacking in a relationship or setting?

We saw last week how *salt* and *light* are fitting metaphors for God’s Kingdom Community. As we continue on in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’s words help us see even more about what it means for us to be that true, authentic salt and light.

### Verses 1-16

In chapter 5, Jesus demolished the notion that righteousness is simply the *avoidance* of certain outward “sinful” actions, like murder and adultery. Here, in chapter 6, He confronts the opposing idea that the *display* of certain outward “religious” actions can make us righteous. In both cases, Jesus keeps pressing the claim that *authentic righteousness is far more than merely avoiding or adopting certain outward behaviors*.

In Jesus’s day, giving, praying, and fasting likely had greater potential to impress others near the “street corners” of society than they do in ours. In fact, it may be more common for us to seek to impress others by how well we can blend in to our culture (perhaps that’s a different problem!). Even so, it’s still possible for us to seek to be noticed by others—especially by others *inside* the church—as we go about our religious activities. We too fall prey to the temptation to try to win others’ approval.

2. Giving, praying, and fasting are all practices of Jesus’s Kingdom Community, yet we are told to “beware” in verse 1 as we participate in them. What Christian practices do you find especially tempting to do so others will take notice?
3. How would giving, praying, and fasting “in secret” safeguard them—and other practices—from being done in an inauthentic way?

4. Read the Lord's Prayer (v. 9-13) together. What are one or two ways it instructs us on how to pray to "your Father [who] knows what you need before you ask him"?

### **Verses 19-24**

A desire to impress others "horizontally" will hinder us from pleasing our Father "vertically." We should not be surprised, then, that a similar idea applies toward our "horizontal" and "vertical" treasure. Surely none of us would turn down the opportunity to exchange a short-term, fading, and insecure treasure for an eternal, lasting, and secure one...right?

5. On a global scale, you and I are quite wealthy even if we don't feel it. Take a minute to identify some of the common earthly "treasures" we enjoy. In what ways are these susceptible to decay or some other form of loss?

6. How can earthly treasure act like a master in competition with God? Is there anything we can do to help each other live out Jesus's call to serve God rather than stuff?

### **Verses 25-34**

Those who store up treasure in heaven may be in danger of missing out on one of America's great pastimes—worrying. Worry is so enmeshed in our thinking that we can even feel like we're being irresponsible if we're not worried! Jesus is calling us to a different way.

7. How does worry keep us from seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness (v. 33)?

8. If you're using this resource in a group, talk about what's causing you the most anxiety right now and take time to pray together about these concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> **Leader Note:** Some may disagree with this assessment of our culture—and for good reason! For example, our culture is also deeply influenced by social media, which is arguably a realm where authenticity is lacking (at least on some of the more popular sites).

<sup>2</sup> **Leader Note:** Verses 22-23 are confusing! Jesus likely is using a play on words here where "healthy" can also be understood as *generous* and "unhealthy" can be taken as *ungenerous*.

## Tying the Bow

So, what does a “salty” and “light-casting” community look like? It’s a community dedicated to generosity, prayer, and fasting—yet it doesn’t advertise these as attention-seeking displays. It’s a community that relies exclusively on the Lord to provide all that it needs, and it would rather distribute than stockpile God’s gifts. It’s a community that goes “all-in” trusting God each day in a world that seeks satisfaction from everything but God, or, at least, in addition to God.

In short, this is a community that puts its faith into practice even when no one is watching.

As we wrap up chapter 6, consider how you would answer these:

How *are* you being...

How *will* you be...

How *would you like to be*...



...“salty” and “light-casting” in your community?

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<sup>3</sup> **Leader Note:** Consider, for example, that “More than one billion people in the world live on less than one dollar per day; about three billion live on less than two dollars per day. Between 12 and 20 percent of Americans live below what we call our poverty line.” See Scot McKnight’s *The Story of God Bible Commentary: Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013) 203.