

**TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
IHOP BIBLE STUDY
Topic: Matthew 6: 1 - 24**

The gospel of Matthew's message is powerful and relevant to our current human situation. Matthew's purpose is to give us a training manual for teaching the Deeply Satisfied Life. This material is developed for the early church but is applicable for us today. Matthew's teaching role model is Jesus. The "Deeply Satisfied Life" is the experience ("Gut Trip Analysis") of the term Sanctification which is an Old Christian Code Word understood as "Head Trip Analysis."

This is our seventh lesson in this series, and is associated with, "The Teacher's Handbook –Part 1: Transparent Ethics." My reflections on the gospel give us the overall title of "**The Training Manual For Teaching The Transparent Sanctified Life.**"

With this metaphor established, let us continue.

A Partial Summary Chart of the Gospel of Matthew											
Tools for teaching The Methods For a Happy/Holy Life											
The Teacher's Handbook – Part I: Transparent Ethics											
Trans- parent happi- ness	Teach- er's chall- enge	Indica- tive Ethics or WWJD	Watch your focus	Watch your priori- ties	The Trans- parent focus	Teach- ing style	Chang- ing lives	Staff: quali- fica- tions	Trans- parent Task	Grad- uation Add- ress	Affirm- ing creden- tials
5:1-12	5:13-20	5:21- 48	6:1-24	6:25- 7:29	8:1-18	8:19- 22	8:23- 9:8	9:9-17	9:18- 34	9:35- 10:42	11:1-19
4	5	6	Lesson 7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15

I. Read the assigned reading at one time.

II. The theme of this lesson is "Watch your focus."

What is the "focus" Matthew is embracing? As I was chewing this over in my mind, the closing verse in last week's lesson caught my attention, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is Perfect" (5:48).

WS: Always, this statement raises for me the questions of what is our human purpose. Our old catechisms answered this question using the style of our Old Code Words. "We are created to praise God." An experiential "Gut Trip Analysis" version replies, "Our purpose is to live in At-One-Ment with all things. In this way we fulfill our created purpose of living the humane and gracious life while working for justice and mercy. "

Focus: An intimate relationship with Perfect At-One-Men

This statement is filled with old Christian code words. Perhaps a transliteration will suffice: *“Live in an intimate relationship with Perfect At-One-Ment.”* This is the fundamental focus for Christians, in particular those seeking to experience their faith, rather than just understand it.

WS: Another way of saying the same thing is that human beings are here to please Perfect At-One-Ment. Our happiness is a secondary experience. Paradoxically, as we please Perfect At-One-Ment we will please ourselves. The way in which we make the relationship intimate is “to do what we do for Jesus;” i.e., we make ourselves look good when we make Christ look good.

Focus: *In the soup of reality, it is the spiritual pieces that are the sweetest.*

WS: In reading the following, think “3-D Glasses.”

Last week we explored a little bit of this theme of the “one reality.” It is helpful to give it another go, because of our present day confusion in Christian circles about living in a parallel universe.

Much of Christian theology embraces two realities. One is the human/natural reality, the other is a spiritual reality that co-exists above or beyond the natural reality; i.e., in heaven. This dual universe is supported in the statement by some branches of Christianity that the world is only 5,000 years old, because this is what the Bible describes, and the Bible is infallible and is to be interpreted literally. This “infallibility” and inerrancy are gifts from the spiritual universe, and not the physical/natural universe.

The problem this causes for thinking people is that we live in an UNI-verse and not a parallel-verse.

One reality and prescriptive lenses--

The suggestion I make is to understand that we live in ONE REALITY. This reality is a soupy mixture of natural and spiritual elements. The only way to focus on these two simultaneous dynamics separately is to view them through a set of prescriptive lenses. One lens illumines the physical/natural and the other lens to illumine the spiritual.

The sweetest pieces—

The soup of the one reality has two tastes: the physical/human taste is characterized as The Way Life Is—“if it can happen it will.” It is not always so sweet, but it is meaty. The Spiritual taste is experienced when we live in harmony and peace, when we live At-One with all things. This is experienced as a peace that passes understanding. This is how the spiritual part of the soup is the sweetest.

Focus: *The reward for the deed is found in the deed itself.*

This axiom is based on the knowledge that God is only experienced as LOVE. Yet, God is THE GUARANTOR of the reward for our deeds.

God guarantees the reward of gravity. We can drop a heavy non-Christian and a light Christian off the top of a 10-story building and both hit the ground at the same time. God is not the punisher, because, the reward for our deed is found in the deed itself. God Guarantees it.

God guarantees the reward of our social laws. Individuals choose to drive the wrong way on I-135, and they will get a ticket. God is not the punisher, because the reward for our deeds is found in the deed itself. God Guarantees it.

God guarantees the reward of our moral laws. Individuals choose to be abuse to their children and their children will be taken from them. God is not the punisher, because the reward for our deeds is found in the deed itself. God Guarantees it.

WS: Sorry for the poor illustration. You can fill in the blanks. However, the axiom still is true, "The reward for the deed is found in the deed itself."

IHOPer reflection: Fortunately, this is not always true. There are more abused children that I dare guess. Threats and social codes to do affect or deter perpetrators; this is true especially in today's society. I may sound pessimistic, but I see it so much more in the classroom. I just turned in a suspected sexual abuse to SRS last week. All this are sign and I have strong doubt that anything of promise will be done for the child.

WS: Yes and my daughter brought us a story of a little girl in her pre-school class reporting she wanted to go visit mommy, because her boy friend (who watches her while mommy works) hurt her. My daughter will call the SRS on Monday!

III. Now, apply these principles to the following:

WS: To answer the following, begin by asking first asking "What is the relationship to Perfect At-One-Ment?" Second, "Describe the physical/natural and then the 'spiritual' focus in this soup." Then, last ask, "What is the reward?"

A. 6: 1 – 4 Acts of righteousness: giving to the needy.

What is the relationship to Perfect At-One-Ment?

WS: Right living is associated with At-One-Ment. When we practice the ethic posture of "WWJD -Doing what we do for Jesus" results in right living.

IHOPer reflection: My sense of this is that the goal of giving to others with the goal of having others see what I do arises out of an attempt to impress upon others what I really do not believe about myself. If I can impress them, then maybe I can believe good about myself. Thus the acts of "almsgiving" are not charity but taxes that I pay to gain a sense of value. Thus, I am divided, i.e., not At-One with myself. Also, I am not giving, I am attempting to buy.

WS: This is an interesting analysis, but the acts you've described are related to unrighteousness and not righteousness. Using your analysis you used on a previous study, "social justice" is a righteous act.

In the "soup of the one reality," describe the physical/natural and the spiritual focus.

WS: Hunger and physical needs drive a wedge in our At-One-Ment with self and others. Spiritual hunger does the same thing. These are the antithesis of At-One-Ment. In satisfying the needs of the hungry, we all experience the restoration of At-One-Ment.

IHOPer reflection: I suppose that one could say that there is a **spiritual focus** in this in that the almsgiver is troubled about how short s/he sees him/herself. This person does not live in a state of At-One-Ment. In this troubled self-evaluation s/he is attempting to do something to overcome the inner troubled-ness. Their **physical/natural focus** seems to be on how this person survives in the environment of self-depreciation. Unfortunately, the self-centered stance in which this person in living only exacerbates loneliness and self-depreciation.

WS: My intention is to acquaint the "physical/natural focus" resulting in a "troubled self-evaluation," and "self-depreciation." My relationship to the "spiritual focus" results in a "positive self-evaluation" and "self-appreciation."

What are the rewards found in the deed itself?

WS: Giving results in At-One-Ment.

IHOPer reflection: The **physical/natural rewards** come in the various rewards that society hands out to people who indulge in these sorts of tax payments. I give large sums of money to the cause of snowshoe rabbits in Australia and those who are into this sort of cause give me plaques that I can hang on my wall.

Unfortunately, when I look at these plaques, I know that I am really no better for having done that because my reasons for doing it were **shallow**, as shallow as I feel about myself. I know that the people who really know me know how shallow all of this is. Thus, I slip into **further self-depreciation**. This is my reward.

WS: If the reward for the deed is found in the deed itself, can't the reward be associated with what is "deep" as well as with what is "shallow?"

B. 6: 5 – 15 Praying in secret: not babble; forgiveness of sin (separation)

What is the relationship to Perfect At-One-Ment?

WS: "Babbling" is the antithesis of At-One-Ment. Peacefulness is the result of living in At-One-Ment. **Vs. 14—**forgiveness achieves At-One-Ment.

IHOPer reflection: This gets at the very essence of prayer. As I see it, prayer is more an attitude than a treatise of words. In the words of one of our hymns, "Prayer is soul's sincere desire, unuttered or expressed, the notion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast." True prayer is an attempt to come into unity (At-One-Ment with Being. Praying for public approval is styled to impress others rather than to help find one's fulfillment in Being.

WS: Wow! This is beautiful and poetic. Thanks.

IHOPer reflection: I agree. Prayer, I believe, also unites our intellect with our soul. *..aka* our creator. And, prayer can be quite simple if it is truly from the heart. The other day I was driving in my car and just stopped at a stop sign and *really read S.T.O.P.* I asked the "I AM" to fill me with love so that I wouldn't feel wanting. It started to rain. . . Filled up? Opened up? Receiving? Receptive? What do you think?

WS: Absolutely wonderful. Recently I read a Buddhist author who reported that he used his time at stop lights to monitor his breathing. In this way, he looked forward to being slowed down and stopped so that he can perform this spiritual exercise.

In the "soup of one reality" describe the physical/natural and the spiritual focus.

WS: The natural and physical arena makes "me" the focus. This is the focus of Pride. Observe in the Lord's Prayer that Jesus does not say, "My Father. . ." but rather, "Our Father. . ."

IHOPer reflection: I think this is identified above.

What are the rewards found in the deed itself?

WS: The natural/physical relationship results in separation, while the spiritual results in fulfillment of our intended human purpose of being authentically grounded humans (humane and gracious), and not inhuman (racist) or unhuman (self-depreciating.)

IHOPer reflection: The reward of praying in secret is that there we find ourselves and discover the Love of God. We discover that we are of value, and we learn how to truly reach out to so that our life is fulfilled. We are At-One with others and with Being that we call God.

WS: Amen.

C. 6: 16 – 18 Fasting in secret: Do it for Jesus.

What is the relationship to Perfect At-One-Ment?

WS: Pridefulness is the antithesis of At-One-Ment. Fasting done with a spiritual perspective results in opening our spiritual eyes.

In the “soup of the one reality” describe the physical/natural and the spiritual focus.

WS: The physical/spiritual focus is on “me.” The spiritual focus fulfills our intended purpose of being fully human, and pleases Perfect At-One-Ment.

IHOPer reflection: I understand that when people deprive themselves of food long enough they have some hallucinatory experiences which sometimes are very meaningful to them as they reflect on them afterward. I suppose this releases some of the unconscious data to them. I just don't have much to add to this.

What are the rewards found in the deed itself?

WS: The physical/natural reward results in deeper hunger. The spiritual reward results in fulfillment.

IHOPer reflection: This is one that eludes me. I have fasted for the purpose of beginning a weight loss program but never for the purpose of any spiritual development. I would suppose that it is closely related to the issues surrounding praying in secret.

WS: For several years I fasted 60 to 70 days a year as a spiritual exercise. My short course on fasting is that it is necessary to fast ABOUT something, and to fast OVER something; i.e., to fast ABOUT growing older, and to fast OVER turning 70.

Fasting doesn't make us spiritual better. That is an impossible goal. Fasting is done to sensitize us to life in the spirit. The focus changes from feeding our bodies to feeding our souls.

IHOPer reflection: I've never fasted other than during Lent. I have a friend who is Orthodox and they fast all the time. . . I mean all the time. I think that they figured that they fast for half of the year when it's all added up. Most of the fasting is with out food; this or that, depends on the fast. Some of the fasting is no sex. What's to gain? I respect the devotion, but would rather be more conscientious of healthy living, including eating and sex.

WS: Poverty, Chastity and Obedience - these are the markers of any "Personal Journey." Sometime I will share with the users of this Commentary the "Journey Charts," sometimes known as "The 144's." These were developed by the Order Ecumenical as a part of their curriculum on *The Religious Mode*. These are charts that enable deep reflections. Chastity is not sexual abstinence but "single-minded," as in "being chaste to the job at hand." Maybe, when the occasion arises, I'll mentor those who are interested through a 3-day fast (water only). You'll know when you are ready.

What are the rewards found in the deed itself?

WS: The meaning of the word "hearts" is associated with the meaningfulness of living. Polishing the silver of our lives with nurturing things brings about more and more real authentic and genuine living as human and gracious people.

IHOPer reflection: I suppose one gains from the experience that is its reward

WS: This is right on. But my experience with fasting did not result in anything hallucinogenic, at least not in any medical sense of that term. There is the experience of a clearer inner vision, which I suppose can be extrapolated as being drugged.

D. 6: 19 – 24 Treasurers in heaven (*Watch this word "Heaven." It is a parallel universe word. From our perspective it is translated as the experience of the Place of Perfect At-One-Ment.*)

What is the relationship to Perfect At-One-Ment?

WS: Storing up treasures on At-One-Ment is a deed that creates full humanness.

IHOPer Reflection: I believe this is calling us to focus on those things that are of permanent value rather than being caught up in the accumulation of those things that are of temporal value. The permanent value matters are those things that help us to become fulfilled and at-One with ourselves, our neighbors and Being itself.

WS: Absolutely!

In the "soup of the one reality" describe the physical/natural and the spiritual focus.

WS: Storing up physical/natural treasures are subject to the laws of rust, moths, and mold. Spiritual treasures are not subject to physical/natural laws.

IHOPer Reflection: If one focuses on accumulation of things limited to this time and space, an addictive dynamic gets involved. As one seeks to gain value in this accumulation s/he finds that it is never enough and must always have more to be content and of value. Thus, we become possessed by them.

WS: In the association of "treasurers in heaven," being "possessed by our possessions" is the result of a "physical/natural focus."

IHOPer Reflection: A caveat here is that this scripture does not really decry having temporal things. It calls us to keep them in perspective. Our first call is to develop this At-One-Ment status. As we come to this, we discover that these things of this time and space do not possess us but we are its master. My dad taught me that when we could

not share what we have it then possesses us. It is only as we are able to put away the things that rust can in any sense enjoy them.

WS: Ah, ha! This is what I mean by a “spiritual focus.”

IHOPer Reflection: Possessions can possess us. However, some possessions bring memories that I would otherwise forget. I love going through some things from my children and remember the stories behind the possession. Am I the master then, or is it possessing me?

WS: No! Our possessions have no power other than what we give to them. The goal to be achieved is in the axiom, “When we want nothing, we have everything.” The goal of the spiritual life is to be able to say, “I am grateful for everything.”

Christian faith is both an “in spite of” faith and it is also a “because of” faith. This is illustrated in the statement, “I’m grateful to God in spite of what happened to me.” However, Christian faith also is in the statement, “I’m grateful to God because of what’s happened to me.

When shit happens we are not being taught a lesson! God is only a God of love! But The Way Life Is (TWLI) is full of shitty things. The next IHOP reflection says it better.

What are the rewards found in the deed itself?

WS: The meaning of the word “hearts” is associated with the meaningfulness of living. Polishing the silver of our lives with nurturing things brings about more real living.

IHOPer Reflection: It strikes me that the rewards found “in the deed itself” is in being able to truly have things and not be destroyed by them. While we would not want to lose them, we can lose them and not lose ourselves. We can live beyond them and that living is the finest reward we can have.

WS: Yes, yes, yes! This is super stuff.

IV. Extra Credit: Ground the two terms “Good eyes” and “Bad Eyes.” (6 22, 23)

WS: “Bad eyes” only look through the physical/natural lenses and miss half of the picture that is “the sweetest” part. “Good eyes” look through both lenses to identify what is the real world and what is the world of the spirit.

In other places I have made statements about “The Real” and “The Really Real.” “The Real” is The Way Life Is or TWLI. “The Really Real” is our intended humanity of living in AT-One-Ment with all things by living the humane and gracious life while working for justice and mercy. TWLI can be described as the way in which we experience raw existence. The Really Real is the live of our intended creation.

IHOPer Reflection: This brings to mind the time when the fellow came to Jesus asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responds with a question, “How do you read the scriptures?” (KJV and RSV) The most important matter involves how we view matters. The fellow responded to Jesus with the Jewish Shema, “Love the Lord with all your heart, and soul and mind and strength, and your neighbor as yourself.” *The issue in life is not what we see so much as how we see it.* When people are going through

various struggles with a therapist, one of the therapist's efforts is to help them "reframe" what has happened to them. The issue is not so much what has happened but what meaning can be attached to it.

IHOPer Reflection: BAM! No different than Dan Brown's book, "Angels and Demons." I think. The *axis mundi* for example.

Going back to the 'code' words. Look from the other side of the stained glass. I've started doing that, one was with my father and the other with being interviewed for my position at school. **I have a choice! I do have a choice with what my response will be to the situation. I am a VICTOR! (Or is it VICT-ESS?)**

Choices are easier for me in the present tense. It's that past baggage that's the most difficult. I have turned around my thinking about the loss of my father to MS into what are the gifts that I have received because of that disease? I think I'm going to write a book on that one. If I word the *what happened* and ask what are the gifts of it, I seem to be able to move forward and examine the situation from the *other side*. . .a better side and much better choice. This last divorce is another good tally mark. My gifts are many. . . from that. Good choice on not being a victim. I wouldn't have come this far if it hadn't been for that separation. Now to work on other stuff. . . (Do I ramble and take up too much of your reading time?)

WS: Your self-depreciation stepped into ruin one super reflection. Just share yourself girl. Your decision is if this dialogue is worthwhile for you to spend a little bit of your eternity sharing it with me. I find the time I take to dialogue with you is worthwhile for me to take a little bit of my eternity to share it with you.

IHOPer Reflection: As we change our view of what happened, we change how we respond to TWLI. Nothing can separate us from the love of God but our own "darkness" that can be more than we can handle.

WS: Geez, man! Sometimes you knock my socks off. "Bad eyes" are those whose eyes are closed and the issue becomes WHAT WE SEE rather than HOW WE SEE IT. The interesting thing about "Open eyes" is that our situation (TWLI) does not change, but our relationship to TWLI changes.

Ground the term, "Serving two masters." (6: 24)

WS: Why does money get such a bad rap? This question was raised at the IHOP meeting. The consensus was that money, in and of itself, is value free. However, money can enslave us, and this leads to dissatisfaction as we can never get enough.

My axiom is that, "When we do not want anything, then we have everything."

Good stuff here. Thanks to all.