



Leader Notes:

In general, you want to allow about 10 minutes for the icebreaker to allow the group to get “warmed up” and talking before the discussion. This also allows for a subtle introduction into the lesson.

You’ll also want to allow about 40 minutes to an hour for the lesson and discussion, and another 10-15 minutes for prayer at the end of the meeting. These times are for a one-hour meeting. Adjust the timing as needed based on your group.

It’s important that you keep in mind that this is a guide for group discussion. ***You should tailor this study to your group.***

Introduction/Icebreaker:

- Ask group members to describe one of their most embarrassing moments.
- Allow them to discuss this.
- Then ask them **what made that moment so embarrassing?**
 - *This is the segue into the study. We’ll be exploring how we do certain things that make people feel like they’re outsiders. Sometimes when we do something embarrassing, we’re embarrassed because we’ve done something out of the norm, something that sets us apart and makes us feel like an outsider.*

Sermon Discussion:

- Ask the group:
 - Was there anything in today’s sermon or service that stuck out to you, challenged you, or confused you?
- *You don’t have to ask these questions exactly, but a version of them. This gets your group thinking about the worship service, and this will help them develop the habits of engaging more actively and listening more intentionally during the service and sermon. Allow discussion on their responses.*

Scripture Discussion:

- Have the group read Luke 11:37-54
- Have the group look at verses 37-40, and ask them: “Why was the Pharisee surprised that Jesus didn’t wash his hands?”
Jewish people became ceremonially unclean during the normal circumstances of daily life, and they were “cleansed” by pouring water over their hands. Notice Jesus’ response in verse 41.
Ritual purity was important to the Pharisees, so they washed themselves and things they used in ritual baths. The majority of Pharisees during this time followed the teaching of the Jewish rabbi Shammai, who said that the outside of a cup could be clean even if the inside were not. But the teaching of the Jewish rabbi Hillel was that the inside must be clean, too. Jesus seemed to side with Hillel on this issue, making a figurative point that we must be “clean on the inside” and not just put on appearances.
- Look at v. 42. What does Jesus confront the Pharisees on here?
They made it a point to tithe, and at times we know that the Pharisees even made their large amounts of tithe an issue for public pride. But what did they neglect? They gave a tenth of their money and goods, but they were not concerned with justice or the LOVE OF GOD. They followed the letter of the law and missed the intent. For a deeper look, read Deuteronomy 5:6-21; 6:4-9
- Look at v. 43 and summarize the issue Jesus was pointing out to the Pharisees.
A little background may help here. In the synagogue there were benches in the front near the scrolls, and the most important teachers and leaders had the reserved right to sit there. This was a position where they could be seen and noticed by all. The basic concept is that they were concerned with their appearance of being righteous, and they were concerned with getting prestige and benefits from being “the righteous ones.” They wanted to have a good reputation and be honored. This is a pride issue.
- Look at v. 44. Explain this background to the group: In the Jewish custom of the time they could be considered unclean (defiled) for touching anything considered dirty, and so they had rules and regulations to determine what was dirty. These were extensive lists that stretched into all areas of life. The law even said that if your shadow touched a tomb/grave, then you were unclean. So, during the time leading up to the Passover Feast each year, they would whitewash the tombs to make them visible so that passerby would see them easily and know to avoid them. Look at what Jesus says in Matthew

23:37. Here in Luke, he says they are like “unmarked graves that people walk over without even knowing it.” To step on a grave is to become dirty and unclean.

➤ Ask the group to think about what is ironic about a whitewashed tomb? *It looks clean on the outside, but think about what’s inside a grave/tomb. Certainly this is not a clean interior considering first century burial practices.*

➤ Ask the group to consider what Jesus is saying about the Pharisees by describing them as “unmarked graves.” *They are making people unclean. All those who associate with them are unclean, because they only have an appearance of being clean on the outside, but the inside is rotten and dead.*

Jesus’ comparison of the Pharisees to unmarked tombs reeks of irony. The Pharisees attempts to maintain rigorous boundaries of purity fail to protect them from being impure in the eyes of God. By neglecting justice and the love of God, they became the impure objects they tried so religiously to avoid. Their religion created a grand façade, but left them empty inside.

- Look at verses 45-52.

➤ What does Jesus confront the lawmakers on here?

○ Look specifically at verses 46 and 52.

➤ When have you faced religious people who’ve loaded you down with burdens or religious rules and regulations you could hardly carry.

Intellectualism, if given too much emphasis, can keep us from relationship. It sounds weird, but our knowledge (intellect) can keep us from knowing (relationship). This is the hypocrisy that turns so many away.

Jesus refers to Abel as the first prophet (whose blood cried out from the ground) and Zechariah who in the Jewish Old Testament is the last martyr mentioned (2 Chronicles 24:17-25). He’s alluding to the fact that the generation in which he lived would commit an atrocity far greater than killing a prophet, they would crucify the very Son of God.

Application:

- In this passage Jesus uses a meal as an occasion for moral correction by confronting religious leaders who were missing the point of spirituality. They were focused more on religion (law-keeping) than faith (loving God and responding to His love). They had set up what John Ortberg describes in his book *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, as “boundary-marker spirituality.”

- What are the boundaries we've established in our faith community?
- What boundaries/rules/regulations have you encountered in pursuing God?
- How can we overcome boundary-marker spirituality?
- A recent study revealed that the primary challenge in helping people grow spiritually is that many people equate spirituality with rule following. In his upcoming book, *The Me I Want to Be*, John Ortberg reminds us that Jesus didn't say "I've come that you might follow my rules." He said, "I have come that you may have life and have it in abundance." (John 10:10b)
 - How have you encountered rules centered Christianity?
 - What might some of the possible consequences be if we become a community that follows a list of religious rules but neglects justice and the love of God?
- Rules-centered religion tends to create pride and judgmentalism.
 - How have you experienced this in yourself? In others?
 - What steps will you take to eliminate this from your life? From your community?
- Take a look at Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Matthew 23:37-40.
 - What do these passages say about religion based on rules as opposed to genuine faith?
 - Share one way you plan on pursuing justice and the love of God instead of just putting up a façade.

Prayer Time:

Remind group members that none of us have arrived, and we're all still seeking a deeper level of faith.