**Live in Community**

 Small Group Study

**Volume Overview**

**Honor God**

With all my heart I will praise you, O Lord my God. I will give glory to your name forever. ([Psalm 86:12](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ps86.12))

*Most people think of worship as exclusively songs and music. We think worship is something we do in a service on Sunday mornings. But the Bible calls us to give our entire life as worship. We honor God with our songs and praise, but all of life is an opportunity to show God honor. We worship best when we make it a lifestyle, expressing our gratitude, prioritizing our time with Him, purifying our heart and actions, and generously sharing with others. We worship as we honor God with our whole life.*

**Session Overview**

**Purify Your Heart**

**Biblical Encounter:** Religious Leaders Learn about Real Purity ([Mark 7:1–23](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk7.1-23)).

**Outcome:** Honor God by committing to have a pure heart, not just by following acts of religious tradition.

*In this session, we once again see how the religious leaders of Jesus’ day set out to attack Him. This time, they asked Jesus why His disciples didn’t wash their hands before they ate. As crazy as it seems, the religious leaders followed many extrabiblical religious rules and expected that everyone else follow them, too. They allowed their traditions to get in the way of following God.*

*Jesus answered by stating that we honor God by having a pure heart, not by following acts of religious tradition. He went on to challenge the leaders by stating that their hearts were far from God because they had substituted tradition for purity. We can be tempted to get caught up in the same mindset. We can find ourself expecting certain behavior from people and miss the intentions of their heart.*

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| *No supplies are needed for this activity.****Getting Ready*** • ***First time leading* Live *for Youth? Look here for the*** [**Facilitator Guide**](https://0b769b0ed3569ef9d18b-f88d8272f61086866d50d048b43ef630.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/sites/biblengagementproject/Listen_Facilitator_Guide.pdf)**.** |

*To access session content and videos from a computer, visit:* [***BibleEngagementProject.com/downloads***](https://bibleengagementproject.com/downloads)

**Engage**

**Welcome**

*Take this time to welcome everyone, introduce new students, learn names, and thank everyone for coming. Your friendliness here can create a comfort level that encourages student participation later.*

**Opening Prayer**

*Prayer thoughts: Take time to thank God for His presence. Ask that students would listen and learn from the Bible in order to live out God’s truths. Ask that everyone would grow in their understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.*

**Introduction**

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| **QUESTION**What’s your favorite food? |

Imagine you’re about to sit down to eat a meal with Jesus and His disciples. But you notice His disciples didn’t wash their hands first. Would you say anything? That’s what happened in today’s Bible story. Some religious leaders confronted Jesus when His disciples broke one of the religious traditions about handwashing.

Most likely, you’ve been in a similar situation when someone corrected you for something you didn’t think was a big deal. At church, maybe someone told you that there was no running inside or no drinks allowed in the sanctuary. Does it surprise you that Jesus and His disciples went through similar things? Today we’ll find out what matters much more to Jesus than other people’s expectations and traditions. But first, let’s play a game.

**Group Activity**

**Name That Tradition**

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| *No supplies or prep are needed for this activity.* |

Since our Bible story is about some religious leaders who judged others for not keeping traditions, let’s play a game about traditions. We need three judges and then the rest of you will form two teams.

• *Choose judges and assist students in forming teams.*

Now quickly choose a spokesperson for your team who will say your official answers.

• *Pause to allow the teams to make a choice.*

The teams will take turns saying one popular Christmas tradition. After a tradition is given, the judges will give a thumbs-up if they’ve heard of it or thumbs-down if they haven’t. So, make sure you’re not saying some unique tradition only your family does! There are two ways to get a strike in the game. If two judges give a thumbs-down or a team can’t think of a popular Christmas tradition to say, the team gets a strike. Just like in baseball or softball, three strikes mean your team is out and you lose the game.

• *Play the game and declare the winning team.*

Great job, everyone! You listed several popular Christmas traditions that probably many of us follow. Not everyone follows exactly the same traditions though—and that’s okay! But it wouldn’t be okay to start judging others for not following exactly the same traditions as us. Yet, that’s sort of what happened in today’s Bible story. Before we talk more about that, let’s check out this video.

**Watch**

**Consider What the Bible Says**

*Ensure each student has access to a Bible, preferably the same version.*

That video was a great way to introduce the real point of today’s Bible story. The religious leaders in Jesus’ day followed traditions and rules, and they wanted Jesus and His disciples to follow them, too. But Jesus often didn’t do what people expected. Let’s read about what happened.

**The Religious Leaders Asked Jesus a Question**

Read [Mark 7:1–5](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk7.1-5).

Today’s Bible account starts with some religious leaders coming to Jesus. This seemed to happen a lot during Jesus’ ministry. As a popular and influential religious teacher, other religious leaders wanted to see if Jesus and His followers lived up to the standards they expected.

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| **QUESTION**What did the religious leaders notice about Jesus’ disciples? |

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| **QUESTION**How does the Bible describe how the religious leaders washed their hands? |

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| **QUESTION**Does this seem like a silly tradition to you? Why or why not? |

These verses suggest that the religious leaders observed lots of traditions like this. People had to remember all sorts of rules. If not, they could be reprimanded by those leaders. It was a pretty serious thing in that culture.

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| **QUESTION**What do you think it would have been like to live with so many rules or traditions? |

The more we read the Bible, the more we learn about Jesus and His expectations. Reading stories like today’s gives us examples that help us learn how He wants us to live. In this encounter, Jesus stood up to this group of religious leaders. They questioned Jesus about how His disciples acted. But Jesus skillfully used this encounter to teach the religious leaders the truth about living a pure life.

**Did You Know?**

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| Ritual purity served as central part of life in first-century Israel. When looking at the archaeological remains of Jewish villages of that day in the land of Israel, most have access to at least one *mikvah* (a ritual immersion bath) which was used as part of staying ritually pure. |

**Jesus Answered the Religious Leaders**

Read [Mark 7:6–13](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk7.6-13).

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| **QUESTION**Does Jesus’ response to these powerful religious leaders surprise you? Why or why not? |

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| **QUESTION**What did Jesus say was wrong with how the religious leaders handled their traditions? |

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| **QUESTION**How would you sum up Jesus’ response in one sentence? |

There was probably nothing wrong with the tradition of handwashing. Today, we know that it’s pretty important for hygiene! But Jesus’ harsh response to the leaders was because they put their traditions over God’s laws. We often read about Jesus speaking kindly and showing love toward others, but not this time. He wasn’t afraid to speak up when needed. Jesus told the religious leaders that what’s inside a person matters much more than what is seen on the outside of a person. A pure heart matters more than washed hands.

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| **QUESTION**What was the point Jesus made about honoring parents in verses [10–12](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk7.10-12)? |

The religious leaders used a tradition of giving to God as an excuse to not take care of their needy parents—even though that went against God’s commandment to honor parents ([Exodus 20:12](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ex20.12)). Jesus called the leaders hypocrites for trying to look like they were honoring God while actually disobeying God. They were only pretending to honor God.

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| **QUESTION**What do you think Jesus meant by saying that the religious leaders canceled the Word of God? |

The religious leaders made their tradition more important than God’s Word. They canceled out what the Scriptures directed for the sake of their man-made traditions. It can be easy for us to do the same thing. For example, we may drive by an accident where someone needs help so that we can be at church on time.

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| **QUESTION**What are some other ways we could make the same mistake as the religious leaders? |

We know that our outward behavior often shows what’s on the inside of us—good or bad. At the same time, we need to be careful that we don’t judge others solely by what we see on the outside. We don’t always know where someone is at on their faith journey.

**Jesus Explained Real Purity**

Read [Mark 7:14–19](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk7.14-19).

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| **QUESTION**How would you put what Jesus said in these verses in your own words? |

The religious leaders thought that following these rules made them pure in God’s eyes. But Jesus made it clear that we’re defiled by what comes out of our heart. People’s attitudes, speech, and character were, and are, much more important to Jesus than their handwashing routine or what they had for lunch.

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| **QUESTION**Do you think people today are more likely to judge others by the religious traditions they follow or by the person’s attitude and character? Why? |

The message Jesus gave is that we honor God most by having a pure heart rather than just by following a bunch of rules. The things in our heart influence how we live. Let’s read the rest of what Jesus had to say about this.

**Jesus Had the Final Word**

Read [Mark 7:20–23](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk7.20-23).

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| **QUESTION**If you summed up this list into one do or don’t statement, what would it be? |

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| **QUESTION**Are these things we can hide, or are they things others can see in our life? |

Jesus’ list of wrong things is a mixture of internal and external. This is important to notice because it’s not just the bad things we do that others can see that are problems of the heart. Most likely, we’ve all messed up in one or more of these areas. Like the religious leaders in the story, each of us can be tempted to deceive others, and ourself, by living like a believer on the outside but not on the inside. Instead, let’s commit to make Jesus the King of our heart and allow His Holy Spirit to help us remain pure.

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| **QUESTION**How can someone who knows you well help you live a purer life? |

**Reflect**

**Honor God by committing to have a pure heart, not just by following acts of religious tradition.**

If we’re not careful, we might find ourself living to please others rather than Jesus. The religious leaders followed many traditions. Some did so to appear more spiritual, or closer to God, than others were. Some also criticized others for not following the rules. But Jesus let them, and us, know that our focus should be on first having a right heart. Ultimately, the most important thing we can do is honor God by living a pure life. How do we do this? We can honor God by allowing Him to show us things that might need to change in our life. It’s what comes from our heart that either defiles us or helps us live a pure life.

**Listen to God**

Let’s take time to consider how our life demonstrates a real trust in the Bible. These questions are meant to serve as a conversation between you and God. Sharing your responses with the group is completely voluntary.

• *Pause for a few moments of silent reflection after reading the questions. Then ask students if they want to share. Sharing your personal response may also be helpful to the students.*

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| **QUESTION**When it comes to living a pure life, what’s the biggest change you noticed in your life since coming to Jesus? |

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| **QUESTION**How do you know when God is telling you to make changes that keep your heart pure? |

**Activate**

Look at the person on your left and right. This week, your job is to pray that the Holy Spirit will help each one to have a pure heart and live a purer life. Let me challenge you to pray for these two people each day in the next week.

**Conclusion**

Jesus went to great lengths to help the religious leaders understand what it meant to follow God. They focused more on following rules, but Jesus pointed out that they should have focused on honoring God by having a pure heart. He gave those listening to Him two great examples and a list of things that defile someone.

We can learn a great deal from this. We can’t allow traditions or man-made rules to get in the way of honoring God. The best way to honor Him is to live a pure life. We can do this by allowing God to continue to change our heart, attitude, and actions.

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| **Salvation Opportunity***Include this if you think there may be some in the group who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus.*Making Jesus number one begins by surrendering your life to Him. Perhaps you’ve never asked Jesus to forgive you and be your Savior. For some, you may have prayed at some point in your life, but you’ve drifted away from Him. Today is a chance to renew that relationship.**Is anyone here that we can pray for who doesn’t have a relationship with Jesus or wants to renew their relationship with Him?***Take a moment to acknowledge those who respond, and thank them for their desire to make things right between themselves and God. Pray with them as you close in prayer or after the group time is over. Following group time, talk more about where they are in their walk with God and how you might be able to help.* |

**Prayer**

Thank You, Heavenly Father, for being patient with us as we learn to prioritize our relationship with You. Forgive us for neglecting You or not having You be number one in our life. Thank You for challenging us with this story and encouraging us to discover what is truly most important. We love You. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

**Dismissal**

As you work through the devotions this week, make it about growing in your relationship with Jesus rather than just being something you do, like a tradition. See you next time!