

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, August 28–September 3 (B) – Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Living in Christ: *Start from the Inside*

Focus Question: *How does the content of our heart impact our behavior?*

word of life

“Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.” Mark 7:14-15 (NRSV)

Read Mark 7:1-23

Not everyone who met Jesus was impressed with him. That’s especially true of the Jewish Pharisees and scribes. These educated men were not fools. They had read and studied the scriptures. Consequently, they knew the difference between correct and incorrect behavior for anyone who tried to follow God’s teachings. It was the task and privilege of the Pharisees and scribes to pass on the traditions of the faith and to teach people appropriate behaviors pleasing to God.

1. *What else do you know about the Pharisees and scribes?*
2. *What was the relationship between Jesus and these groups?*

The Pharisees and scribes felt they were right to criticize the disciples of Jesus for eating with defiled hands. Washing hands was not only a matter of hygiene; it reflected proper religious behavior. The disciples simply did not wash their hands – this was a basic breach of proper conduct. The Pharisees and scribes believed the actions of the disciples reflected the teaching of Jesus. So, they challenged Jesus directly. “Why do your disciples not live according to the traditions of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” (Mark 7:5 NRSV)

3. *What is the real issue behind the question?*
4. *Do you believe the Pharisees and scribes desire to positively resolve this conflict? Why?*

Jesus clearly saw through the behavior of the Pharisees and scribes. These learned men may have known the letters of the traditions and laws, but they missed the spirit behind God’s teachings. Jesus quoted from the prophet Isaiah to these men who were avid students of the scriptures, “This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me teaching human precepts as doctrines.” (Mark 7:6 NRSV)

5. *What is Jesus trying to say to the Pharisees and scribes?*
6. *Is it possible to hold on to traditions of God, but lose God in the process? How so?*
7. *How might you describe modern-day Pharisees and scribes?*

In verse 14 of the same chapter, Jesus addressed the crowd again. He desired to make his point by urging each person to listen and understand.

8. *What makes it so difficult to listen and understand?*

Jesus turned things upside down by teaching that people cannot get defiled by putting things inside the mouth, but behavior itself can become toxic. The disciples could not quite grasp this radical teaching. Jesus expounded by giving a long list of behaviors that come from the heart and have the potential to hurt someone. A person does not do evil because he or she has eaten with unclean hands. It is far more complicated than that. Jesus is dealing with the human spirit by addressing issues of the heart.

9. *What is the point of the teaching of Jesus?*

word among us

A little boy was eating breakfast with his grandmother. When it came time to eat his toast, he refused to eat the crust. The grandmother pleaded, "If you eat your crust, it will make your hair curl." The boy got big tears in his eyes, "But I don't want curly hair. Please don't make me eat my crust."

1. *Can you relate to the little boy?*
2. *What were some strategies used to convince you to eat certain foods when you were young?*

Many have been persuaded to eat carrots for good eyesight or drink milk for strong bones. These comments are based on scientific research about nutrients found in food – far different from unfounded claims about bread crusts.

3. *How does eating certain foods (such as caffeine or sugar) impact your behavior?*
4. *Does eating certain foods force you to act or not act certain ways?*

In the Old Testament time many laws were developed concerning ritual purity, especially in regards to food. For many people, those rituals became an empty practice without any connection to God. For example, prophets such as Isaiah challenged people not to fast from food as they continued to treat other people unjustly. (Isaiah 58:5-9) Following God meant more than following rules about eating.

5. *Does attending worship or taking communion automatically make you a good person?*
6. *What determines a "good" person?*
7. *What reaction do you have when you encounter an active member of a church who blatantly acts opposite of Christ? (Perhaps it is best not to say names.)*
8. *How can a person learn to "talk the talk and walk the walk"?*

Jesus clearly realized it was possible for a person to follow every aspect of the law and yet be a deceitful, evil person.

9. *How do the remarks of Jesus apply today?*
10. *How might this exchange of Jesus be updated for a modern-day audience?*

Daily discipleship is about walking with Jesus every day of life, allowing him to fill our hearts and spirits. This commitment leads to a life overflowing with the spirit of Jesus.

11. *How does one start from the inside to allow Christ to fill us?*
12. *What do you hope to remember from this lesson?*

Prayer

Gracious God, start from deep inside my heart and transform my life so I might be a faith-filled follower of Jesus. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 58:5-8

last word

Each day this week,
pause and consider
what is stirring in your heart.



Daily Discipleship

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