

Inside Out Small Group Guide

Warm-up Question: (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. Do you have (or have you had in the past, perhaps as a child) a cherished item of clothing? Explain.
2. Do you like taking pictures of people or places?

Read the following passage: Luke 11:37-44.

Jesus is invited to eat a meal with a religious leader who is surprised when Jesus doesn't give his hands a ceremonial washing before eating. As you probably know, people living in the first century were not aware of germs as a cause for disease. So the Pharisee is not repulsed because he's imagining that there are microorganisms all over Jesus' hands as Jesus eats. Rather, he's thinking that being out among sinners and Gentiles would have defiled Jesus in a religious sense, and, therefore, Jesus needs to wash to become ritually pure. Jesus uses this opportunity to draw attention to the fact that the Pharisees had become obsessed with external concerns to the neglect of much more important heart matters such as love, justice, and generosity.

Questions for Discussion (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. Our culture assigns a great deal of significance to physical appearance, body type, material possessions, the homes we live in, the vehicles we drive, the schools we attend, and many other externally visible qualities and factors. Why do you think this is? How do you think this impacts how we live and think about ourselves? What external factors do you think tend to most impact how you think about yourself or others?
2. For centuries leading up to the time of Christ, the Jewish people faced a significant struggle to maintain their unique identity in the shadow of larger and more powerful people groups. Because of this struggle, they often elevated the importance of external "identity markers" such as circumcision, keeping the Sabbath, and food laws. What are some ways we use external factors to try to establish or maintain our identity?
3. Paul's letter to the Galatians addresses a church in which many Gentile believers were feeling pressured to adhere to the Mosaic Law in order to be fully accepted by God. Read Galatians 1:6-10. Paul contrasts seeking the approval of God with seeking the approval of human beings. What do you think Paul means when he writes, "If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ?" What are some ways living for God's approval might impact our decisions and behavior?

4. How can we know we have God's approval?
5. It is often the case that we want to change our circumstances and God wants to change us. How do we know when we should try to change an outward circumstance and when we should focus on an internal transformation?
6. Read Proverbs 4:23. What does this Proverb mean?
7. What's the difference between healthy self-examination and an unhealthy preoccupation with self or an overly critical view of self? Do you regularly engage in healthy self-examination? Explain.
8. Read Matthew 6:3-4, 6, 17-18. Why did Jesus give these instructions? How are they relevant for us?
9. Do you have any trustworthy friends or family members with whom you can be truly vulnerable? Explain.
10. What can you do this week to put more attention on growing inwardly?

Pray