

Leader Guide: April 26, 2026

Cleansing from our Laws

Sermon Series: Learning the Way of Jesus

Passage: Mark 7:1-23

Big Idea

We try to manage our “uncleanness” through outward performance (legalism), but Jesus addresses the true problem—the heart—and offers cleansing as a gift through his work, not ours.

1. The Mask We Wear

Main Question:

Where are you most tempted to “wear a mask” in your life, and what are you trying to hide?

Follow-ups:

- What situations make you most aware of needing to “perform”?
- What do you fear would happen if people saw the real you?
- How does hiding affect your relationship with God? With others?

Leader Insight:

Expect some hesitation here—model honesty if needed. Normalize the struggle without minimizing sin.

Key Takeaway:

Legalism produces image management, not transformation. The gospel invites honesty because our acceptance isn’t based on performance.

2. Outside-In vs. Inside-Out

Main Question:

What are some “outside-in” strategies you rely on to deal with sin or brokenness?

Follow-ups:

- When you feel “off,” what’s your first instinct—change behavior or bring it to God?
- Which habits help you actually connect with Jesus vs. just feel productive?
- Have you ever improved externally but still felt unchanged internally?

Leader Insight:

Affirm that disciplines (Bible reading, habits, etc.) are good—but press the why. Are they a means of communion or control?

Key Takeaway:

Behavior change alone can’t heal the heart. Transformation flows from a changed heart, not just improved habits.



3. Modern Legalism

Main Question:

Where do you see people (including yourself) trying to prove they're "good enough"?

Follow-ups:

- What are the "unwritten rules" in your social or professional circles?
- When do you feel most judged—or most judgmental?
- How do you know when something good (like discipline or justice) has become a way to justify yourself?

Leader Insight:

Help the group see that legalism isn't just religious—it shows up in everything. Avoid turning this into culture wars; keep it personal.

Key Takeaway:

We all create systems of righteousness. **Legalism isn't about religion—it's about self-justification.**

4. Receiving vs. Performing

Main Question:

Do you find it harder to receive grace or to do things for God? Why?

Follow-ups:

- What makes it uncomfortable to simply receive from God?
- Do you ever feel like you need to "earn your way back" after sinning?
- How do you know when you're relating to God as a Father vs. a boss?

Leader Insight:

Some may struggle with passivity here—clarify that grace leads to transformation, not apathy.

Key Takeaway:

The gospel says: **You are cleansed first, then you live differently—not the other way around.**

5. Living as Someone Who Is Clean

Main Question:

When you feel guilt or shame, what feels more real—your failure or Jesus' forgiveness?

Follow-ups:

- What do you tend to do with shame—hide, fix, numb, confess?
- What would it look like to believe that Jesus' cleansing is truer than your feelings?
- How might that change the way you approach God this week?

Leader Insight:

This is the heart of the discussion—slow down here. Let people sit in the tension between what they feel and what is true.



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Good Shepherd

Key Takeaway:

In Christ, cleansing is **objective reality**, not a subjective feeling. We learn to live from what is true, not just what we feel.

Closing Reflection (Optional)

You might end with something like:

- “Where do you need to let Jesus cleanse your heart—not just adjust your behavior?”
- Invite silent reflection or brief prayer.

Leader Reminders

- **Keep bringing it back to Jesus.** The goal is not self-improvement but heart transformation through him.
- **Watch for moralism creeping in.** If the conversation drifts toward “try harder,” gently redirect to grace.
- **Create safety.** Vulnerability grows when leaders go first and respond without shock or quick fixes.
- **Don’t rush.** Depth matters more than covering every question.

Summary Truth to Reiterate

You don’t clean yourself up to come to Jesus. You come to Jesus, and he cleans you from the inside out.