



Real Devotion

Session 2 • Matthew 15:1-11,16-20



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Make copies of **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Traditions of the Elders*).

ASK: What are some things that you demand to be genuine in your life? (p. 17)

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 17. Highlight the importance of genuine relationships, especially when it comes to one's relationship with God.

ASK: What are some things that can make our relationship with God superficial?

EXPLAIN: Point out that, in Jesus's day, religious leaders had added so much to God's laws that it was hard to know what was true and what was legalism. Highlight this content from **Understand the Context** to provide additional context:

- “In Matthew 12, the Pharisees had challenged the disciples and Jesus over failure to keep their traditions regarding the Sabbath. In chapter 15, these religious leaders challenged the disciples and Jesus concerning their failure to keep dietary laws regarding the ceremonial cleansing

of the hands. Jesus condemned the Pharisees and scribes for their unbelief and their adherence to man-made tradition. . . . [Jesus] pointed out that what a person eats doesn't make a person unclean. Rather, uncleanness comes from within a person's heart.” (p. 17)

TRANSITION: *Over time, the Jewish religious leaders began focusing on their man-made rendition of God's genuine law. Today, we'll consider Jesus's definition of true religion.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 15:1-6 aloud as the group listens for why Jesus was being reprimanded by the Jewish leaders.

CONTEXT: Point out **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Note that this encounter took place in Galilee, though the leaders had come from Jerusalem. Share this to help identify Jesus's opponents:

- **(15:1)** “Pharisee” means “separatist.” Pharisees were proud of their rigorous keeping of both the written law of Moses and an oral law passed down over time. The primary stress of the Pharisees was on ritual purity, Sabbath observance, and tithing. Scribes were “experts in the law”

(Luke 11:45-46,52; 14:3) and “teachers of the law” (Luke 5:17; Acts 5:34). They not only copied the law, but they also taught their interpretation of God’s Word. Some scribes were Pharisees, but not all Pharisees were scribes.

DISCUSS: Give each learner a copy of **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Traditions of the Elders*). Allow adults a few minutes to scan the article. Facilitate a discussion on the difference between man-made traditions and God’s Word.

- **(15:2)** “The tradition of the elders” refers to hundreds of laws and practices the Pharisees and their scribes had added over the centuries since the Jews had returned from Babylonian captivity. They considered them to be as equally authoritative as the original law of Moses. Failure to “wash their hands” before eating was not just about hygiene, but about ritual purity.

SHARE: Emphasize that Jesus had little use for man-made rules, so He pointed out the hypocrisy of His accusers. Use content from page 21 (Day 2) to explain the practice of Corban and how the leaders were encouraging people to break God’s laws.

ASK: Why is it easy to confuse human rules with God’s commands? (p. 19)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 15:7-11 aloud, instructing the group to listen for Jesus’s complaints against the Jewish religious authorities.

SHARE: Explain that the Greek word for “hypocrites” relates to an actor who puts on

a mask to play a role. As a group, consider why this term appropriately described the Pharisees and scribes. Briefly discuss how Isaiah’s prophecy supported Jesus’s criticism:

- “Isaiah denounced the people of his day for their inauthentic worship. They gave the appearance of a genuine relationship with God through their worship. In reality, they were simply going through the motions while ignoring God’s desires.” (p. 22, Day 3)

GUIDE: Note that Jesus turned His attention to the crowd and explained that moral purity begins with the heart. Highlight that what goes into a person’s mouth (like food) has no real impact on spiritual health. Instead, we have to be careful about what goes into our hearts because that is what reveals our spiritual condition, whether we are loyal to God’s Word or drifting farther from Him.

ASK: What tempts our hearts to drift from God? (p. 19)

READ: Direct the group to read Matthew 15:16-20 silently, imagining Jesus’s voice as He spoke these words.

ASK: How do you imagine Jesus’s tone? Angry? Frustrated? Compassionate? Why? (p. 19)

EXPLAIN: Point out that Jesus’s disciples approached Him in verses 12-15, concerned that He had offended the Pharisees. Share that Jesus pointed out that they were “blind guides” (v. 14) who led people astray. Note that when Peter asked Jesus to explain His teaching, he revealed that he’d missed the point.

CONTRAST: Summarize the following content to reveal how Jesus contrasted the physical body with the spiritual one:

- **(15:17-18)** Jesus was not merely describing the process of digestion. His point was that this natural, physiological process has no impact on a person's relationship with God. Verse 17 explains the first part of Jesus's statement in verse 11, while verse 18 explains the second part of verse 11.

HIGHLIGHT: Write the word *heart* on the board. Encourage adults to share different ways we use the word "heart" in our culture. Direct them to read Matthew 15:18-20 again silently. Lead a brief discussion on how Jesus was using "heart" as He spoke to His followers. Affirm that the heart is the core of our spiritual lives, so we need to take seriously what we allow to take root in our hearts as believers.

ASK: How can we evaluate our hearts to prevent sinful attitudes from taking root? Why is it important to examine our hearts for sinful attitudes? (p. 19)

SAY: *Jesus was pointing His disciples to the most important element: a heart turned to God. No amount of outward obedience or acts of piety can replace a genuine heart of worship and love. If we want to follow Jesus in a genuine way, we have to reject superficial religion the way He did.*

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week's Bible passage:

- Honor God's laws above all other rules.
- Pray for your heart to remain close to God.
- Reject superficial religion and focus on what matters most.

REVIEW: Invite adults to share which is the most difficult for them to obey in genuine faith. Challenge them to spend time in prayer this week reviewing the list and asking God to fill in the gaps they experience in their lives.

DISCUSS: Direct the group to the **Apply the Text** suggestion on page 19. Invite them to share ways they can encourage other believers toward a deeper relationship with God.

ENCOURAGE: Remind the group to use the **Daily Exploration** on pages 21-23 to dig deeper into God's Word this week.

PRAY: Close the session in prayer, inviting God to help adults honor Him above every other standard. Urge the group to identify ways they can reject superficial religion so God can give them pure hearts as they draw close to Him.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send the group a text or email to let them know you are praying for them and suggest they share any prayer requests they might have with you. Add a prayer that they will grow in their devotion to Jesus.