



[TEACHER NOTE: Illustration. Before your meeting begins, buy a box of doughnuts, preferably Krispy Kreme when the Hot Now sign is on. Empty the box either by storing the doughnuts in a new container or by eating all twelve in your office by yourself; you deserve it. Then take the empty box and place it on a table in your youth space. When the unsuspecting students come in, allow them to open the box and find it empty. Feign surprise. Pretend to share in their disappointment. Or blatantly laugh in their faces. Repeat.]

[SLIDE 1.01] *Empty Theme Verse Video*

Hook:

Tonight, when many of you walked in, you got a surprise: doughnuts! At least, that's what you thought. You spotted the box. Your mouth started to water. You approached the box, imagined that first bite, reached for the lid, opened it. And... empty!?! Is there any feeling worse than finding an empty box of doughnuts? Because now, not only is the box empty, but your belly is empty.

If you felt empty when there were no doughnuts, imagine how the doughnut box felt. Doughnut boxes are made to hold doughnuts. Without any doughnuts, this box no longer fulfills the purpose for which it was created. If this doughnut box could talk it would probably say: "I want doughnuts." [TEACHER NOTE: Consider puppeteering the doughnut box by opening and closing the lid to pretend it is talking. The more ridiculous, the more rememberable. (And yes, rememberable is apparently a word).]

Tonight, we begin a new series that will focus on this feeling of emptiness. Not just the feeling of physical emptiness, but the feeling of spiritual emptiness. To use a big phrase, we're talking about the *existential longing* which every person feels. It's the feeling that there must be more to life. It's the sense that something is missing. It's the feeling of being empty.

Humans have felt this way since the beginning of time. Why? Because ever since humans rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, we've had a deficiency. The sin Adam & Eve committed caused a separation between humanity and God. Without God, humans are left with a desire for their

Creator, whether they realize it or not. The lack of the presence of God in our lives leaves us feeling empty. It leaves us with a longing. It's a longing that can only be fulfilled by a relationship with God. Why does it feel like there should be more to life? Because there is more to life: God.

All too often, we try to satisfy our longing for God with other things; the wrong things. We try to rid that empty feeling with things that create an even greater longing. Let me give you an example...

The religious leaders of Jesus' day tried to fill their emptiness with traditions and rules. So much so, that by the time Jesus came on the scene, they were obsessed with the laws of their religion.

[SLIDE 1.02] The Bible refers to these religious leaders as Pharisees, Sadducees, and/or scribes. These were the experts in Jewish law. They spent their lives studying, memorizing, and following the rules.

There's a great example of this in the Bible, when one day, they see Jesus' disciples eating...

Book:

[SLIDE 1.03] **Mark 7.1-3 ESV** *Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders...)*

Now you might be thinking, the disciples didn't wash hands before eating? Nasty! Don't they know about covid? The flu? But notice that the verse says: "hands that were defiled." This is more than not using soap and water and singing happy birthday while you scrub your hands.

The religious leaders are talking about "ceremonial cleansing," an elaborate process of ritual purification. And it's something they made up. [TEACHER NOTES: more information is available on this in notes for the corresponding verses in the ESV Study Bible.] You can search the Bible cover to cover, but nowhere in God's laws will you find instructions about doing this before casual dining. You will, however, find instructions to priests about this type of washing before performing a sacrifice. [Teachers Note: see Exodus 30.18-20.]

Over the years, these religious leaders began to apply these special practices to their everyday lives. They decided that the same fancy bath a priest took before carrying a sacrifice into the temple should be performed before they carried food to their face. Do you see a little bit of the ego these guys had? The point of the ritual was to clean the priests because they were entering the temple: a pure space where God's presence dwelled. The Pharisees started acting like their body was a pure space and an offering was being made to their mouths – so they needed to perform the same ritual before eating.

The religious leaders did this with many of God's laws. They took the instructions God provided in the Old Testament and expanded them. Where God said not to work on the Sabbath, they wrote books defining what counted as work. They created new and more strict rules and tried to force the people of Israel to follow them. God created the Old Testament laws as a way for people to connect with Him. The Pharisees were obsessed with the laws, not the connection with their Creator.

So, when they saw the disciples eating without first doing some ritual washings, they confronted Jesus. It's like they wanted to point out how much better they were than Jesus' disciples. They wanted to make Him out to be a fraud because His followers weren't following their ideas of holiness.

Here's how Jesus responded...

[SLIDE 1.04] Mark 7.6-8 ESV *And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."*

Jesus didn't hold back. He called them "hypocrites!" He used the words of an Old Testament prophet against guys who were supposed to be experts on Old Testament prophecy. He pointed out that they weren't obsessed with obeying God, they were obsessed with *looking* like they obeyed God. As Jesus pointed out, they left God's instructions and started following, the "tradition of men." The Pharisees were trying to fill their emptiness with manmade rules. They thought the right behavior would bring them fulfillment.

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