



Note: For those using the included PowerPoint presentation, the manuscript progression to each slide is denoted with [Slide #].

[Leader tip: A fun intro/countdown is the Handwashing 101 free resource on DYM: <https://www.downloadyouthministry.com/p/freebie%3A-handwashing-101/creative-programming-4692.html>]

[Slide 1] It's time for a serious conversation about handwashing. We haven't spoken about that enough over the last few years, right? Your hands are disgusting collections of germs and bacteria. Seriously.

[Leader tip: I just wanted to tell a funny story tied to handwashing – come up with your own, or just say, “a friend of mine told me this story once:”]

A few years back, we did a middle school event here at the church and at the end of the night there was a half-finished bag of Doritos still left. I love Doritos. They're amazing. So, I took them home, where my wife asked if she could have some. The problem was, I wanted all of them. I love her, but I really love Doritos, y'know? Desperation triggered inspiration, so I said, “Sure, but I feel I need to let you know that I have no idea how many middle school dudes stuck their hands in this bag. And you have to wonder, how many of them washed their hands after going to the bathroom?” She was like, “Ew, what's wrong with you? That's disgusting, I don't want any.”

Sweet victory. Until I went to reach in for a chip ... and paused. I had played myself because I know those boys, and there is no way they had washed their hands. I had to throw away the bag.

What does all this have to do with the Bible? I'm glad you asked.

[Slide 2] *Mark 7:1-2 (NLT) ¹ One day some Pharisees and teachers of religious law arrived from Jerusalem to see Jesus. ² They noticed that some of his disciples failed to follow the Jewish ritual of hand washing before eating.*

First off, of course the disciples weren't washing their hands. Other than Peter, they were all teenagers¹, and hand washing is not something teen guys are generally known for. [Rabbi's typically recruited disciples around the age of 15-18 years old and Jesus seems to have followed that pattern.] But is that what this was really about?

Not in the way we think of it. This was not about hygiene; they weren't worried about germs or things like that in the way that shapes our concerns around washing hands today. It was a ritual for spiritual purity.²

[Slide 3] *Mark 7:5-15 (NLT)* ⁵ *So the Pharisees and teachers of religious law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples follow our age-old tradition? They eat without first performing the hand-washing ceremony."*

At some point during the pandemic, the phrase, "hygiene theater"³ was coined to describe people – and more often businesses and organizations - going way beyond what was necessary or even effective to clean and sanitize for covid. It gave a sense of security but didn't actually do anything to prevent the spread of covid. That's kind of what was going on with these Pharisees and religious leaders. They even had a prayer about it:

[Slide 4] ***"Blessed be Thou O Lord, King of the universe, who sanctified us by thy laws and commanded us to wash the hands."***⁴

Plot twist: these hand-washing ceremonies that they required everyone to perform weren't actually commanded by God for the people. In fact, according to Scripture, only the priests were required to perform this ceremony before entering the Tabernacle.⁵ The Pharisees took these priestly requirements and applied them to everyone in a mistaken belief that if they went way beyond what God required, then they were in no

¹ Ray Vander Laan, Stephen Sorenson, and Amanda Sorenson, *In the Dust of the Rabbi: 5 Faith Lessons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 25.

² *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 1639.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hygiene_theater

⁴ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), Kindle location 4047.

⁵ Ibid.



- What is your first reaction to this moment in Jesus' ministry? What stands out to you?
- What did the Pharisees think was the problem? Were they right to be upset? Why or why not?
- What does Jesus say is the problem? How would you explain His reasoning to someone else?
- Why is the heart so important?
- Is Jesus saying external and physical things are unimportant and only the spiritual matters? Why or why not?
- In what ways is Mark 7:1-23 an example of people taking the Bible too far?
- In what ways is Mark 7:1-23 an example of people not taking the Bible seriously enough?
- What traditions can get in the way of pursuing God today? Are there any in our church?
- Luke writes about the treasury of the heart. How does someone produce good or evil things from their heart?
- What do you need to do this week to produce good things from your heart? How can we help?