

WEEK OF JULY 5, 2026

**5-Day Devotional
based on Sunday's message:**



Clean Vs. Unclean
Mark 7:1-23

Provided by



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Mark 7:1-23 (NLT)

One day some Pharisees and teachers of religious law arrived from Jerusalem to see Jesus. They noticed that some of his disciples failed to follow the Jewish ritual of hand washing before eating. (The Jews, especially the Pharisees, do not eat until they have poured water over their cupped hands, as required by their ancient traditions. Similarly, they don't eat anything from the market until they immerse their hands in water. This is but one of many traditions they have clung to—such as their ceremonial washing of cups, pitchers, and kettles.) So the Pharisees and teachers of religious law asked him, “Why don't your disciples follow our age-old tradition? They eat without first performing the hand-washing ceremony.” Jesus replied, “You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote, ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship is a farce for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.’ For you ignore God's law and substitute your own tradition.” Then he said, “You skillfully sidestep God's law in order to hold on to your own tradition. For instance, Moses gave you this law from God: ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and ‘Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.’ But you say it is all right for people to say to their parents, ‘Sorry, I can't help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.’ In this way, you let them disregard their needy parents. And so you cancel the word of God in order to hand down your own tradition. And this is only one example among many others.” Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. “All of you listen,” he said, “and try to understand. It's not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart.” Then Jesus went into a house to get away from the crowd, and his disciples asked him what he meant by the parable he had just used. “Don't you understand either?” he asked. “Can't you see that the food you put into your body cannot defile you? Food doesn't go into your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer.” (By saying this, he declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God's eyes.) And then he added, “It is what comes from inside that defiles you. For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.”

Day 1: The Mirror

Devotional

Have you ever noticed how quickly your mind evaluates people? It happens without much effort. Someone cuts you off in traffic. A coworker says something insensitive. You scroll past another argument online and immediately decide who's right and who's wrong. Sometimes our conclusions are correct, but sometimes they aren't. Either way, our hearts naturally look outward before they look inward. The Pharisees did the same thing. After traveling a long distance to investigate Jesus, they noticed one thing, that His disciples weren't following the ceremonial handwashing traditions of the elders. It's striking, isn't it? They stood in front of the Son of God, yet their attention settled on dirty hands. Jesus could have argued about the tradition itself, but He didn't. Instead, He quoted Isaiah, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." In one sentence, Jesus redirected the entire conversation. The real issue wasn't what the disciples' hands looked like. The real issue was what the Pharisees' hearts looked like. It's much easier to identify what's wrong with someone else than it is to honestly examine ourselves. Yet, spiritual growth almost always begins with the same question, "What is God showing me?" Before His Word changes our families, our workplaces, or our churches, it first changes us. That can be uncomfortable. It can also be wonderfully freeing. When we stop trying to measure everyone else, we become far more available for God to reshape our own hearts.

Going Deeper

Traditions are not the enemy in this passage. Many traditions help us remember God's faithfulness and worship Him well. Jesus' concern was something deeper. The Pharisees had slowly begun giving their traditions the same authority that belonged to God's Word. That temptation still exists today. Whenever my preferences become the standard by which I judge another believer, I've begun drifting toward the same mistake. Healthy traditions point us to Christ. They should never take His place.

Bible Verse

"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." — Mark 7:6 (NLT)

Reflection Question

What is one area where God has recently been speaking to your own heart? Am I quicker to notice what others need to change than what God wants to change in me?

Today's Practice

The next time you find yourself criticizing someone today—even silently—pause for a moment and pray: "Lord, before You change them, continue changing me."

Prayer

Father, thank You for loving me enough to search my heart. Forgive me for the times I have been quicker to evaluate others than to listen to Your voice. As I read Your Word this week, help me receive it with humility. Show me where You are shaping me, correcting me, and drawing me closer to Christ. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and help me become more like Jesus today. Amen.

Day 2: The Source

Devotional

Have you ever caught yourself saying, “If only...”? “If only my schedule weren’t so busy.” “If only my boss appreciated me.” “If only my spouse understood me.” “If only people would stop treating me this way.” We all do it. It’s natural to believe that our greatest struggles are caused by the people and circumstances around us. If those things would simply improve, we think life, and maybe even our walk with God, would be much easier. Jesus offers a very different perspective. When He gathered the crowd in Mark 7, He challenged an assumption that had shaped religious thinking for generations. Many believed that impurity came from outside. For example, from unclean food, unclean people, or failing to follow certain traditions. Jesus said the real problem wasn’t outside at all. It was inside. That doesn’t mean our circumstances don’t matter. Difficult people can wound us. Disappointments can discourage us. Temptations are real. However, they do not create what is in our hearts. They reveal it. Think about squeezing an orange. No matter how much pressure you apply, orange juice is all that comes out. The pressure doesn’t create the juice. It simply reveals what was already inside. Life works much the same way. When we’re tired, criticized, overlooked, or frustrated, what comes out of us often reveals what has been quietly growing in our hearts all along. Anger, impatience, pride, fear, bitterness, or perhaps grace, patience, humility, and trust. Jesus isn’t trying to discourage us with that truth. He’s inviting us to look in the right place. If our greatest problem were outside us, we would spend our lives trying to control our circumstances. However, because our deepest problem is within us, Jesus offers something far better than changed circumstances. He offers a transformed heart.

Going Deeper

Jesus begins His list of sins with “evil thoughts” before mentioning outward actions like theft, adultery, or slander. That order is intentional. Every sinful action begins somewhere long before anyone else sees it. It begins in our thoughts, desires, attitudes, and motives. That is why Christianity is much more than behavior management. God is not merely interested in making us look better on the outside. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, He is transforming us from the inside out. As our hearts change, our words begin to change. Our relationships begin to change. Our habits begin to change. Real transformation always starts deeper than behavior.

Bible Verse

“It is what comes from inside that defiles you.” — Mark 7:20 (NLT)

Reflection Question

What situations most consistently reveal impatience, fear, pride, or frustration in your life? Is there an area where you’ve been asking God to change your circumstances when He may first want to change your heart?

Today’s Practice

The next time something frustrates you today, resist the urge to immediately blame the situation or another person. Instead, quietly ask the Lord, “What is this moment revealing about my heart?” Listen before you respond.

Prayer

Father, Thank You for caring about more than my outward behavior. Thank You for loving me enough to address the deeper issues of my heart. When difficult circumstances reveal impatience, fear, pride, or selfishness within me, help me resist the temptation to make excuses. Instead, give me the humility to bring those things honestly before You. Continue Your work of transforming me from the inside out until my life increasingly reflects the character of Jesus. In His name, Amen.

Day 3: Create in Me a Clean Heart

Devotional

Most of us don't like being wrong. When we're confronted, our first instinct is often to explain ourselves. "I didn't mean it that way." "I was just having a bad day." "They started it." "If you knew everything that happened, you'd understand." Sometimes those explanations are true. However, they can also become a way of protecting ourselves from honestly facing what is happening inside our hearts. David chose a different path. After his sin with Bathsheba was exposed, he didn't try to rewrite the story or defend his actions. He didn't compare himself to someone who had done worse. He didn't bargain with God or promise to make it up somehow. Instead, he prayed one of the most honest prayers in all of Scripture: "Create in me a clean heart, O God." David understood something that Jesus would later teach so clearly in Mark 7. Our deepest problem isn't simply what we do, but who we are apart from God's transforming grace. That realization could leave us feeling hopeless. Instead, it becomes the doorway to hope. The moment we stop pretending is the moment God begins doing some of His greatest work. Repentance isn't about proving how sorry we are. It's about agreeing with God. It's saying, "Lord, You're right. What You have shown me is true. I need You." That kind of honesty is never something we have to fear. The God who exposes our hearts is also the God who heals them.

Going Deeper

Notice the first word in David's prayer: "Create." David doesn't ask God to polish his heart. He doesn't ask Him to repair it or give it a fresh start. He asks God to create something that doesn't yet exist. Only God creates. That is why the Christian life is built on grace from beginning to end. We cannot manufacture a pure heart through greater discipline, stronger willpower, or better intentions. We certainly grow through spiritual disciplines, but those disciplines don't change us by themselves. They simply place us in a position to experience God's transforming work. Repentance is not earning God's acceptance. It is opening our hands so we can receive His grace.

Bible Verse

"Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me." — Psalm 51:10 (NLT)

Reflection Question

Is there an area of your life where you've been making excuses instead of honestly talking with God about it? What would it look like to pray David's prayer with complete openness today?

Today's Practice

Set aside five quiet minutes today. Read Psalm 51:10–12 slowly. Then simply sit before the Lord and pray, "Create in me a clean heart, O God."

Prayer

Father, Thank You that I never have to hide from You. You already know my heart completely, yet You continue to invite me into Your presence with grace and mercy. Give me the courage to stop making excuses and the humility to agree with You whenever You reveal sin in my life. Create in me a clean heart. Renew my love for You, restore the joy of my salvation, and continue shaping me into the person You created me to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 4: A New Heart

Devotional

Have you ever promised yourself, “This time will be different”? Maybe it was after losing your temper. After speaking words you wished you could take back. After falling into the same temptation again. After another week of putting off the habits you knew would help you grow closer to God. Most of us know what it’s like to become frustrated with ourselves. We want to change. We even mean it when we say we’re going to change. Yet before long, we often find ourselves battling the same attitudes, the same habits, and the same struggles all over again. That can leave us wondering if lasting change is really possible. Into that struggle, God speaks one of the most hope-filled promises in all of Scripture. Through the prophet Ezekiel, He doesn’t say, “Try harder.” He doesn’t say, “Do better next time.” Instead, He says “I will.” “I will sprinkle clean water on you.” “I will cleanse you.” “I will give you a new heart.” “I will put My Spirit within you.” Those words remind us that our hope has never rested on the strength of our resolve. It rests on the faithfulness of our God. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, forgiveness is only the beginning. God begins a lifelong work of transforming us from the inside out. The Holy Spirit patiently reshapes our desires, our attitudes, and our character so that, little by little, we become more like Christ. Sometimes that growth is obvious. More often, it’s gradual. We usually notice it only when we look back and realize we’re no longer the person we once were. That isn’t because we became stronger. It’s because God has been faithfully keeping His promise.

Going Deeper

One of the most encouraging truths in the Christian life is that God never asks us to become someone new before He makes us new. The world often tells us to change so we’ll be accepted. The Gospel tells us we are accepted through Christ, and from that place of grace, God begins changing us. That doesn’t mean we become passive. We still read Scripture. We pray. We gather with other believers. We obey what God teaches. However, we do those things differently now. We aren’t trying to earn God’s love. We’re learning to live from it. Every act of obedience becomes a response to His grace rather than an attempt to deserve it.

Bible Verse

“I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you.” — Ezekiel 36:26 (NLT)

Reflection Question

As you look back over the past few years, where can you see evidence that God has been changing your heart? Is there an area where you’ve become discouraged because change seems slow? How does God’s promise in Ezekiel encourage you today?

Today’s Practice

Take a few minutes today to thank God for one specific way He has changed you since you began following Christ. Then ask Him to continue His work in one area where you’re still growing. Remember that spiritual maturity is measured more by faithfulness than by speed.

Prayer

Father, Thank You for loving me too much to leave me where I am. Thank You for Your promise to give me a new heart and to place Your Spirit within me. When I become discouraged by my own weaknesses, remind me that You are still at work. Help me trust Your timing, depend on Your Spirit, and walk faithfully with You each day. Continue shaping my heart until my life reflects the character of Jesus more and more. In His name, Amen.

Day 5: True Freedom

Devotional

Our world talks a lot about freedom. We celebrate the freedom to choose, the freedom to speak, the freedom to pursue our dreams, and the freedom to live life on our own terms. Those freedoms are gifts, and as believers we should be grateful for the many blessings God has given us. However, Jesus reminds us that there is a freedom even greater than anything a nation can provide. It is the freedom of a heart that no longer has to be controlled by sin. That doesn't mean we never struggle. Every believer still battles temptation, disappointment, and old habits. However, those things no longer have the final word. Because of Christ, we are no longer defined by our past. We are no longer prisoners of guilt. We are no longer powerless to change. The same Savior who exposed the condition of our hearts in Mark 7 went to the cross to make those hearts new. Through His resurrection, He offers forgiveness for our failures, freedom from sin's penalty, and the daily presence of His Spirit to lead us forward. That kind of freedom isn't just something we celebrate. It's something we learn to live. Each day becomes another opportunity to trust Christ instead of ourselves, to choose forgiveness over bitterness, humility over pride, generosity over selfishness, and hope over fear. Little by little, the new heart God has given us begins to shape a new way of living.

Going Deeper

Freedom in Christ is sometimes misunderstood as the absence of rules or responsibilities. Biblically, freedom is much richer than that. Before Christ, we were enslaved to sin and unable to please God fully. Through Christ, we are set free, not so we can live however we want, but so we can finally become the people God created us to be. That changes the way we view obedience. We don't obey because we're trying to earn God's approval. We obey because we already have it through Jesus. Obedience becomes an expression of love instead of an attempt to prove ourselves. That is the freedom every heart longs for.

Bible Verse

"So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free." — John 8:36 (NLT)

Reflection Question

Where have you experienced the freedom Christ has already brought into your life? What is one area where He is inviting you to trust Him more fully as you continue growing in your new life?

Today's Practice

Before you reach for your phone tomorrow morning, pause for just a moment and pray: "Create in me a clean heart, O God." Carry that prayer with you throughout the day, trusting that the God who began His work in you will continue to shape your heart.

Prayer

Father, Thank You for the freedom that only Jesus can give. Thank You for forgiving my sin, making me new, and faithfully continuing Your work in my life. Help me walk each day in the confidence that I belong to You. When I am tempted to return to old patterns of thinking or living, remind me that I have been set free in Christ. Continue creating in me a clean heart, and may my life increasingly reflect the love, joy, peace, and hope that You have placed within me. In Jesus' name, Amen.