



**LIKE  
HIM**  
A 90 DAY STUDY OF MARK

# A Matter of the Heart

January 28 - February 3, 2024

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## **90 DAY MEMORY STATEMENT**

**I am His child, deeply loved, totally forgiven, fully pleasing and complete in Christ.**

## **MAIN POINT**

Although we often focus our time and energy on what is on the outside, it is what is on the inside that matters most.

## **INTRODUCTION**

**Have you ever tried any extreme diet fads? If so, which one(s)?**

**What was your experience like with that fad and what motivated you to try it?**

**What are some of the reasons people obsess over what they eat?**

**How does the amount of time and energy you invest in your physical health compare with the time and energy you invest in your spiritual health?**

Today's discussion is about what defiles us. We spend so much energy on what is on the outside—from diets and exercise to appearance—and that's important. But far too often we fail to take measures to ensure what is on the inside is fed and grown into who God desires. Jesus criticized the Pharisees for being obsessed with diet restrictions when their hearts were defiled. His criticism is a challenging reminder to us that what is on the inside matters most.

## **UNDERSTANDING**

**READ [MATTHEW 15:10-20](#).**

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 15:10-20 is a part of Jesus' response to a question raised by a Pharisee who was trying to prove Jesus was an enemy of the Jews. The Pharisee confronted Jesus with the question, "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they don't wash their hands when they eat!" ([Matthew 15:2](#)).

**Read Matthew 15:10-11 again, which is Jesus' response to the Pharisee's question. What was the problem with the Pharisees focusing so much on dietary rules and restrictions?**

**What did the Pharisees miss as a result?**

The Pharisees focused on dietary laws rather than on dishonesty and hypocrisy—issues of the heart. Dietary laws are found in Scripture, mainly in Leviticus. Those laws, combined with a great many more from the oral tradition, served as one of the chief markers of Jewish identity in the first century. Jesus rendered them all moot. The image is clear. No one could possibly be made morally impure by what goes into his or her mouth. The point is the Jewish religious leaders were confusing tradition with moral purity.

**While Jesus exercised patience with many sinners such as the woman at the well and His disciples, why did He criticize the scribes and Pharisees so harshly?**

Jesus often reserved His harshest rebukes for the most religious people. This fact should give all of us reason to pause and think carefully about what we are doing and why we are doing it. Blindness has a way of creeping up on us. To illustrate, we are not initially aware of the lack of clarity from a cataract. Left untreated, however, it will render sight useless. Similarly, religion can have a deceptive quality. For this reason, we must pay close attention to God's truth, not merely familiar interpretations or that which we are comfortable hearing.

**READ [MATTHEW 15:15-20](#).**

Peter asked for Jesus to clarify His teaching, which He did in verses 16-20. Jesus gave a very simple biological illustration. Food goes in, is processed, and exits. How could that possibly render anyone morally impure? The implication is that the extensive dietary laws which were staples of Pharisaic teaching were useless in leading a person to God.

**What does that which comes out of one's mouth reveal about a person?**

**How can a person be defiled by that which comes out of the mouth?  
Describe how this has proven true in your own life.**

**Read [Jeremiah 17:9](#). What does this verse reveal about our hearts?  
How does it relate to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 15?**

Jesus clarified His meaning by illustrating the defilement that comes from the heart. He used the plural verb form in each example, indicating that all kinds of sin under each category are included. He began with evil thoughts, for they give birth to evil actions. Jesus taught clearly that character is rooted in the heart. That presents a problem to us because we all have heart trouble, as Jeremiah 17:9 reveals. This fact has a number of implications, including that we have no hope of developing godly character on our own.

**Now read [2 Corinthians 5:17](#). Why is this verse such good news when you think about the things that come out of your mouth and the nature of your heart?**

Our hearts are sinful by nature, which means that, when left unchecked, they will defile everything we do and who we are. But in Christ, we have been made new, which means our hearts are clean. This process is both immediate and ongoing. God has made our hearts new, but we will continue to struggle with sin as long as we are on this earth. That is why it is so important for us to invest in being fed and grown into who God has called us to be. Consider Solomon's teaching in [Proverbs 4](#).

**READ [PROVERBS 4:23-27](#).**

**Based on Jesus' teaching in Matthew 15, why is it urgent that you guard your heart?**

**Proverbs 4 not only challenges us to guard our hearts above all else, but it also tells us how to do so. What does it teach us to do?**

**How do the things listed in verses 23-27 affect a person's character?**

Since character is a matter of the heart, Scripture commands that we guard the heart above all else. Attacks come from the world, the flesh (our sinful human nature), and the Devil.

They come daily; they come unexpectedly; they come relentlessly. We must be on guard at all times. Why is this so important? Because the heart is the source of life. The direction of our lives and all we think, say, and do begin in the heart. When our hearts give way to evil influences, our lives inevitably are thrown off course.

## **APPLICATION**

### **READ [PSALM 51:10](#).**

In these verses, David prays for spiritual renewal. What does David's prayer teach us?

When you compare your attitude and actions with who God wants you to be, where do you see immediate need for change?

What are some ways we can help each other not get distracted by rules and issues that take away from the good news of the gospel?

## **PRAYER**

Spend some time praying silently as a class for a renewed sensitivity to what is in our hearts and the need for repentance. Pray together that the Lord would grant honesty and receptivity to the awareness of sin in our lives. Close by praying Psalm 51:10 over your group.

## **COMMENTARY**

### **MATTHEW 15:10-20**

**15:10-11.** Having dealt with the real issue that stood between him and the hypocrites, Jesus returned to their original questions about handwashing ([15:2](#)). Instead of addressing the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus summoned the crowd, as though to invite them into the debate and to evaluate who was right about ritual handwashing. He then addressed the crowd. Listen and understand is essentially the same as, "He who has ears, let him hear" ([11:15](#); [13:9](#)). Only those who would "hear" with a heart of faith and "understand" would accept Jesus' answer to the question of the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus responded to the question of 15:2 with a "parable" (cf. 15:15) which reversed the assumption underlying the original question. The Pharisees and scribes assumed that ritual defilement came from unclean things outside the body, entering through the mouth. Jesus said that defilement comes because of unclean things from within a person's body exiting out through the mouth. Unclean is from a word meaning "to make common," as opposed to ceremonially holy and pure. Jesus was not denying that people can become unacceptable before God. He differed with the religious leaders on how a person becomes defiled before God. They said God evaluated what goes into a person from outside, but Jesus said God evaluated what comes out of a person from inside.

**15:12.** Some time after this confrontation, the disciples tried to point out to the Lord that the Pharisees were offended at Jesus' words. They were probably referring to the entire sequence, including the confrontation over oral tradition ([15:3-9](#)) and Jesus' parabolic defense of his disciples' ceremonial hygiene practices (15:10-11). This began another of Jesus' private conversations for his disciples' ears only, continuing through 15:20 and including Jesus' explanation of the parable.

**15:13-14.** Of course, Jesus was aware of the Pharisees' offense; he had intended to trip them up. His response, "Leave them," did not deny the real danger involved in angering the Jewish leaders. His best course of action was to stand by the truth, not trying to pacify the Pharisees and not trying to convince them further about their faults. Jesus' calm confidence came out

of the assurance that the Pharisees would be judged justly—both by God (15:13) and by the natural consequences of their own blindness (15:14). The plant terminology (15:13) brings to mind the parable of the weeds ([13:24-30](#), [36-43](#)). The hardened hearts of the Pharisees were not products of God’s work. Although they claimed to represent God, they were actually some of the “weeds” planted by the Evil One. They were among those who, in rebellion against God, did evil themselves and caused others to do evil as well ([13:41](#)). So they would experience God’s judgment. We will always have false religion in this world.

Using another illustration, Jesus said that the Pharisees were blind guides (15:14 also [23:16](#), [24](#)). He may have been referring to a title the Pharisees had given themselves—“guide of the blind” ([Romans 2:19](#)). Any effective guide must know where he is going to guide another person. The foolishness of the situation is self-evident; only seeing people can guide blind people. A blind guide would be both arrogant and in serious denial about his own condition—both of which were true of the Pharisees. The Pharisees thought they understood the law, but they were really ignorant of the law’s meaning and guilty of contradicting it. Thinking they were leading those under them along the right path, they were actually leading themselves and their followers into eternal danger (into a pit). They were unwittingly bringing judgment on themselves.

**15:15-16.** Peter, acting as the spokesman for the disciples, asked Jesus to explain the parable. The disciples needed the explanations, but their “ears to hear” allowed them to accept the truth of the parable. Jesus expressed disappointment in the disciples’ lack of understanding. The word still compares Peter’s lack of understanding with that of the Pharisees. If the disciples had understood the superiority of cleansing of the heart over ritual outward cleansing, they would have understood the parable. It was their inability to understand this principle that prompted Jesus’ disappointment more than their inability to understand the parable. Their perspective, like that of many Christians today (more “politically correct” than biblical), was shaped and influenced more by their culture and peers than by their Lord and his Word. Though loyal and open to being taught, the disciples were often as far off the mark as the Pharisees were.

**15:17.** Jesus began explaining the parable by showing the things that go into a person’s body from outside are harmless to his standing before God. We must distinguish carefully between washing for practical health purposes and the ceremonial washing that was at issue here. If a person eats food with hands that are not ceremonially washed, the food is, in reality, no more or less clean (spiritually) than if that person had ceremonially washed. The body treats it the same either way. A person’s decision one way or the other on ceremonial washing has no bearing on his or her standing before God. Even if the food or a person’s hands are physically contaminated, and he becomes ill from the contamination, does not indicate he is unacceptable before God.

**15:18-20.** Jesus then revealed that it is not the mouth of a person that is the source of defilement, but the heart. The heart represents the invisible, “inner person.” The inner person includes the mind and will—those components that determine moral character. The heart (not any external influence) is the source of all evil character, not the physical or spiritual “dirt” on a person’s hands. The “renewing of your mind” ([Romans 12:2](#)) is critical for every believer. Christ detailed here the principle that a person is as he thinks in his heart. Entry into the heart is through the eye and the ear, not the mouth.

Jesus listed seven defiling sins that begin in a person’s heart. Some of these manifest themselves through avenues other than one’s mouth (e.g., murder, theft), but Jesus was not

inconsistent here. Although the debate began over eating and washing, Jesus now began to broaden the discussion to encompass the whole-person expression of the evil in one's heart. The mouth happened to be one of the most prominent tools for good and for evil ([James 3:1-12](#)). Jesus' list of sins was not meant to be comprehensive, but he gave a series of examples. Jesus mentioned adultery, a sexual sin that defiles a marriage vow. Sexual immorality is a broader category that includes all kinds of sexual sin. Slander includes all abusive speech, whether against God or other people.