



## LEADER'S GUIDE / SESSION 5 - A QUESTIONABLE BEHAVIOR

### SERIES BIG IDEA

Live your life in such a way it causes people to question why...and then tell them.

### MESSAGE BIG IDEA

Many times we simply get swept into the same cultural norms as everyone else, whether that be in the church, at school, work, our home, or in “the world.” Jesus challenged everyone’s heart by challenging their practices, asking why do you do what you do? The church (much like our culture) has a history of focusing on the external, while Jesus focused primarily on the internal. During this talk we’ll do all we can to get to the heart of our behavior.

### SCRIPTURE

Matthew 15:1–20 (The Message)

1-2 *After that, Pharisees and religion scholars came to Jesus all the way from Jerusalem, criticizing, “Why do your disciples play fast and loose with the rules?”* 3-9 *But Jesus put it right back on them. “Why do you use your rules to play fast and loose with God’s commands? God clearly says, ‘Respect your father and mother,’ and, ‘Anyone denouncing father or mother should be killed.’ But you weasel around that by saying, ‘Whoever wants to, can say to father and mother, What I owed to you I’ve given to God.’ That can hardly be called respecting a parent. You cancel God’s command by your rules. Frauds! Isaiah’s prophecy of you hit the bull’s-eye: These people make a big show of saying the right thing, but their heart isn’t in it. They act like they’re worshiping me, but they don’t mean it. They just use me as a cover for teaching whatever suits their fancy.”* 10-11 *He then called the crowd together and said, “Listen, and take this to heart. It’s not what you swallow that pollutes your life, but what you vomit up.”* 12 *Later his disciples came and told him, “Did you know how upset the Pharisees were when they heard what you said?”* 13-14 *Jesus shrugged it off. “Every tree that wasn’t planted by my Father in heaven will be pulled up by its roots. Forget them. They are blind men leading blind men. When a blind man leads a blind man, they both end up in the ditch.”* 15 *Peter said, “I don’t get it. Put it in plain language.”* 16-20 *Jesus*

*replied, “You, too? Are you being willfully stupid? Don’t you know that anything that is swallowed works its way through the intestines and is finally defecated? But what comes out of the mouth gets its start in the heart. It’s from the heart that we vomit up evil arguments, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, lies, and cussing. That’s what pollutes. Eating or not eating certain foods, washing or not washing your hands—that’s neither here nor there.”*

### ICEBREAKER

Do you like to make New Year’s resolutions? How well do you usually follow your resolutions?

### QUESTION 1

In Jesus’ day one gained influence and clout in the Jewish culture if he/she was perceived to be really good at following Old Testament Law. While following the Law was good, the Pharisees had used following the Law to make themselves look better than anyone else. Jesus was not happy about this. In this passage, the Pharisees try to call out Jesus’ disciples for not following the Law fully—and Jesus takes the opportunity to share what he thinks of the Pharisees.

What do you think about Jesus attacking these religious leaders’ ideology? Does it feel out of character for him? Why or why not?

*Leader’s Note: You will never find Jesus taking someone to task for their wrong-doings and messed-up-ness when they come to him with a humble heart, seeking forgiveness and a chance to start over. But the prideful, arrogant, so-called religious elite? He had no time for them. Jesus must have made his followers a little nervous with his harsh words for the Pharisees. But Jesus has no soft spot in his heart for fakes.*

### QUESTION 2

There are two important points in Matthew 15:1–20

1. You can’t fake your way into living a questionable life, and
2. What comes out of your mouth starts in the heart.

Living a questionable life is not just about changing how we act—it’s changing our heart first.

What are some ways that people try to change their behavior?

*Leader's Note: For a timely example, have group members consider how we normally try to accomplish New Year's resolutions. You can refer back to the answers given in the icebreaker.*

### QUESTION 3

If living a questionable life isn't about simply acting differently, what is it about?

*Leader's Note: To truly live a questionable life, we have to be changed from this inside out by the Holy Spirit. First and foremost, we have to have a relationship with Jesus. That relationship will change our hearts, and we'll be compelled to do and say things that will be questionable to those who don't have a relationship with Jesus.*

### QUESTION 4

Who do you know that lives a questionable life? What's so questionable about his or her life?

*Leader's Note: Try to pull out specific examples, people that group members know personally. It's okay to start with well-known people, but then move closer to home.*

### QUESTION 5

Christian psychiatrist Frank Lake and theologian Emil Brunner developed the Cycle of Grace—a way to live that keeps us grounded in Christ and lets his grace flow out of us to others. There are four steps in the cycle:

**Step 1: Acceptance:** Accepting our identity in Christ at a heart level.

**Step 2: Sustenance:** Engaging practices that keep us connected to God.

**Step 3: Significance:** Allowing God's grace to flow through us to others.

**Step 4: Achievement:** Taking action and doing things as an outflow of God's grace in us.



This cycle starts in the heart by truly accepting who we are in Christ—that our value and worth are not dependent on what we do (or don't do). Instead, it's based on the fact that God made us and loves us.

Why do you think **acceptance** is the first step in the Cycle of Grace?

### QUESTION 6

Let's talk about step two for a moment - sustenance. How do you best connect with God? What kinds of things sustain your relationship with God?

*Leader's Note: This can be different for everyone. Here are just a few examples: reading the Bible, going to church, connecting with others in a small group, praying, taking a walk in the woods, journaling, exercising. Challenge group members to think beyond Bible study and prayer to unique ways they connect with God and feel his presence.*

### QUESTION 7

The Cycle of Grace is very questionable in our world. Most people follow a cycle that works in the opposite direction: We **achieve** to show people we are **significant**. We hope this significance **sustains** us through the challenges and problems of life, and we hope that someone will eventually **accept** us.

*Leader's Note: We burn out, we think too highly of ourselves, our idea of worth changes based on our achievements, we spend our lives trying to prove ourselves, etc.*



What happens when we follow this cycle instead of the Cycle of Grace?

### QUESTION 8

Following the Cycle of Grace makes our lives questionable. Where are you in the Cycle of Grace? What step can you take this week in the Cycle of Grace?

*Leader's Note: This application question opens up the conversation to a lot of things. You might discover that a group member has never accepted Christ. Others may have been following Christ for years but still have been trying to achieve their way through life. Those group members will need encouragement to connect with Jesus in a personal way during the week to let his grace flow through them. Whatever comes out in this question, determine to support your group members wherever they're at.*