

Discussion Guide

Summary

In this sermon drawn from Matthew 23:25-28, Pastor Chris explores Jesus's sharp rebuke of the Pharisees for cleaning the outside of the cup while leaving the inside full of greed and wickedness. Using vivid illustrations like a clogged dishwasher line, a lemon car, and a personal experience of being stuck in freeway traffic on the way to church, Pastor Chris challenges listeners to examine the true condition of their hearts rather than simply maintaining an outward appearance of righteousness. The core message is that God, as seen in 1 Samuel 16:7, does not look at outward appearances but at the heart, and that authentic faith requires honest self-examination and a willingness to let God work on us from the inside out.

Pastor Chris draws on Matthew 15 and Proverbs 4:23 to reinforce that what flows from the heart determines the quality of our lives and witness. He openly shares his own struggle with pride and image-consciousness while stuck in traffic, admitting that his heart in that moment was no different from the Pharisees he was preaching about. The call to action is clear: stop pretending everything is fine, identify areas where you are failing to practice what you preach, and invite God to do the internal work needed so that you can live with genuine freedom, authenticity, and faithfulness.

Questions

- Pastor Chris compared the Pharisees to a clogged dishwasher line and a lemon car, things that looked fine on the outside but were broken inside. In what ways can that kind of hidden brokenness show up in our spiritual lives?
- Jesus says in Matthew 23:25-28 (NIV) that the Pharisees cleaned the outside of the cup but left the inside full of greed and self-indulgence. Why

do you think it is so tempting to focus on outward religious behavior rather than the condition of our hearts?

- In 1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV), God tells Samuel that people look at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart. How does knowing that God sees your heart change the way you approach your daily walk with Him?
- Pastor Chris was very transparent about how, while stuck in traffic, his thoughts were more focused on his own image and reputation than on a family that had just lost a loved one. Have you ever caught yourself in a similar moment where your heart revealed something you did not like? What did you do with that realization?
- Matthew 15:18-19 (NIV) says that the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart. What are some practical ways we can be more intentional about what we feed our hearts and minds each day?
- Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) says, 'Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.' What does guarding your heart look like in a practical, everyday sense for a follower of Jesus?
- Pastor Chris described the habit of saying 'I'm good' when we are actually struggling, and connected that to the Pharisees' pattern of performing righteousness while hiding inner pain. How can our small group become a safer space where people feel free to be honest rather than just saying what sounds right?
- Pastor Chris asked a pointed reflection question: Is there an area in your life where you are failing to practice what you preach? Without needing to share every detail, what makes it hard to honestly face those gaps, and what would it look like to take one step toward closing them this week?

Life Application

This week, take time for honest self-examination. Identify at least one area in your life where your outward actions or words do not match what is truly going on in your heart. Write it down, bring it before God in prayer, and create one concrete step you will take to address it. This is not about shame or

performance. It is about inviting God to do the internal work that leads to real freedom and authentic faith. Consider sharing your commitment with a trusted friend or someone in this group who can encourage you and hold you accountable.

Key Takeaways

- God is not impressed by outward religious performance. He looks at the heart, and a life that looks polished on the outside while harboring pride, selfishness, or hypocrisy on the inside is not the life He calls us to.
- What we feed our hearts and minds matters deeply. According to Matthew 15, the things that defile us come from within, which means spiritual health requires honest attention to our inner life, not just our outward behavior.
- Authenticity is not weakness. Being honest about our struggles, failures, and doubts is actually a mark of spiritual maturity and creates the conditions for genuine growth and community.
- We are all capable of Pharisee-like thinking. Pastor Chris's own story from that morning is a reminder that the tendency to prioritize image over substance is something every believer must actively guard against.
- Guarding your heart, as Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) instructs, is an ongoing, active discipline. It means regularly inviting God to examine and heal what is inside so that what flows outward reflects the character of Jesus.