

Jesus clarifies what defiles a person in Mark 7:14–23. Francis noted that we often make the same mistake, blaming all sorts of external issues for our sin, as opposed to realizing the real issue is within our hearts. We have to change from the inside out. **What “external” things are you blaming your sin on? What has to happen for you to allow Jesus to change your heart?**

As we dive into chapter 8, note that Mark purposely organized his gospel to emphasize Jesus’s power. This week’s section shows repetition of key events: 6:30–7:37 mirrors nearly identically 8:1–30. We see two miraculous feedings, two sea trips, two confrontations with the Pharisees, two object lessons with food, two sets of healings, and two declarations of faith in Jesus.

Read Mark 8:1–10.

In what ways is this miracle of feeding the four thousand similar to feeding the five thousand in Mark 6:30–44? How are these two miracles different?

Read Mark 8:11–21.

After reiterating the results of both of his multiplication miracles in Mark 8:20–21, Jesus asks, “Do you not yet understand?” You can almost feel the sadness and confusion coming off the page. After all he’s done, how can the disciples still not understand who Jesus is? But before we jump to condemn the disciples, **how do we, too, respond to Jesus in a similar way? Do you live in a way that exhibits a clear understanding of who Jesus is and what he’s done for you?**

Read Mark 8:22–30.

In Mark 8:22–26, a man comes to Jesus to have his blindness healed—fairly routine, right? But it takes Jesus two tries to get him seeing again.

Before we start to wonder if Jesus somehow flubbed the miracle, notice that we’ve seen throughout the whole passage: two of everything. Mark’s doubling-down effect comes to a point here. It takes two intentional actions on Jesus’s part for the man to see clearly.

After restoring sight to the blind man at Bethsaida, and the “double effort” we’ve seen in this week’s passage, Jesus

asks his disciples an important question in Mark 8:27–30.

What does he hope his disciples see clearly?

Do they?

In what ways do you feel you see Jesus more clearly now? How does this passage increase your understanding of him and his mission?

LAST WORD

Next week’s study is going to put Peter’s confession to the test. In fact, Mark 8:22–30 forms the first of two bookends making the point that Jesus wants his followers to see clearly—not just who he is, but what his mission ultimately is.

Throughout our passage this week, Jesus has been teaching the disciples important lessons about not only what he’s doing in the world, but also how he wants them to live. Mark gives us a repeated set of stories to double-down on the point—discipleship is all about living the way Jesus lived.

But living in faithful obedience to Jesus starts with surrendering our hearts to him. Francis reminded us that it’s not so much about what we do, but more about the condition of our hearts.

As we conclude today’s lesson, take a moment as a group to be silent before God. **Have you allowed Jesus to change your heart? What areas of your life are you still holding on to? If you feel comfortable doing so, have a few people share with the group.**

Horizontal lines for writing.

In the same way, Mark presents the Pharisees in chapter 7 as also taking advantage of God’s generosity, using their own legal traditions to ignore caring for elderly parents.

So, as you sit down to eat your next meal, stop and pray for a moment. In your prayer celebrate the provision that Jesus offers you—not just in the food you’re about to eat, but also in the resources you need to be about his mission.

In what ways have you been tempted to take God’s generosity for granted? Discuss or write down actionable ideas about how to practice gratitude.

2. Background: Ceremonial Cleaness

The Pharisees attacked Jesus and his followers for eating without first washing their hands. Mothers everywhere may applaud them, but Jesus rebuked them. Why? The Pharisees were focused on the wrong thing. They were not so much concerned about cleanliness—as in, not carrying dirt or germs—but rather cleanness, a term describing ritual suitability.

The concept of cleanness goes back to the Law of Moses, in which God instituted conditions on how he could be approached. To be in God’s presence, a person needs to be in a state of holiness. A person who is clean is in a state of holiness; therefore, becoming clean is essential for entering into the presence of God. Likewise, anything that makes a person unclean separates that person from God.

Generally, anything associated with health or life would be designated as clean. For example, a perfect one-year-old lamb was an acceptable sacrifice, but a lamb that was lame—or nearer to death, less than perfect—was unacceptable. If something or someone was unhealthy or associated with death, they were unclean. Skin diseases, illnesses, touching a corpse, or participating in sinful activities all could make a person temporarily unclean.

An unclean person could go through a process to become clean—make a suitable sacrifice (Leviticus 1:3–17), allow the right amount of time to pass (Lev. 15:19), participate in a symbolic ceremony, such as a ritual washing (Exodus 30:17–21). This was likely what the apostles did not do before eating, prompting the Pharisees’ complaint.

Horizontal lines for writing.

In the Gospels, we see Jesus change the rules: he touched the unclean personally to cleanse and purify them, illustrating that he holds the power to transform the lives of individuals. Jesus’s touch healed or restored dead people (Mark 5:21–24, 35–43), those with skin diseases (Mark 1:40–45), even those suffering an unnatural blood flow (Mark 5:25–34) to a state of cleanness.

In Mark 7:15, Jesus proclaimed that nothing going into a person can make that individual unclean—only things coming out of a person. In this passage Jesus abolished the defiling physical and animal aspects that made a person unclean.

He confronted the religious leaders by exposing their hypocrisy: they were very concerned about how the people followed every tiny regulation, which could be trumpeted about to show their “righteousness.” They were too busy looking good to prioritize actually doing good: they were neglecting the commandments of God to love their neighbors, honor their parents, uphold justice, protect the vulnerable.

Consider your spiritual life. How are you busy following the rules, spoken or unspoken, in your faith tradition?

How have you unwittingly added conditions to your righteousness, behaving as if adherence to traditions or rules will determine how pleased God is with you?

It’s easy to mask our inner motivations with outward activities. Think of your church or family life. **What sort of actions look righteous? Now, how can a person engage in those while inwardly being unrighteous? When have you done this? How can you avoid such double-mindedness in the future?**
