

WARM-UP

- Do you have a favorite family tradition? Share it with the group.
- Share a time you said sorry and were surprised that the other person forgave you.
- Have you ever taken part in a discussion or demonstration against what you felt was an injustice? What happened?

WORD ¹⁶*Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, ¹⁷learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.* **ISAIAH 1:16-17**

(Read also **ISAIAH 1:12-15, 18-20.**)

In this part of Isaiah's prophecy to Israel, God's people were coming to worship Him, bring offerings, and follow prescribed rituals, as He had commanded. However, their lifestyles were full of *iniquity* and their hands were *full of blood* (Isaiah 1:13, 15). The truth is, God does not want meaningless rituals from us that do not reflect a life with Him. Let us look at three things God wants in our relationship with Him.

1 | God wants our faithfulness.

“Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.” ISAIAH 1:13

God wants us to be faithful to Him, not to the rituals we connect to Him. The people of Israel did all the rituals properly—all the assemblies, offerings, and feasts. However, they openly sinned against God at the same time. We can't say we follow God and “prove” it through empty rituals, while still doing what He hates. What are some present-day rituals or traditions we might be performing empty?

2 | God wants righteousness and justice in our everyday actions.

“. . . learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.” ISAIAH 1:17

God wants us to learn to *do good* and *seek justice*, which takes changing from the inside out. Not only this, we are to keep away from injustice as well, which takes repentance. Furthermore, we are to speak up and take personal involvement when we see injustice being done to others. God tells us that we are the salt and light of the earth (Matthew 5:13–14). How did meeting Christ spur you toward acts of righteousness or justice? What act of righteousness or justice do you believe God is asking you to become personally involved in?

3 | God wants a real relationship with us.

“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” ISAIAH 1:18

God described the people of Israel as those who *have forsaken the LORD* (Isaiah 1:4). However, He did not just want them to come back and follow Him mindlessly. God wanted a real relationship with them, and invited them to accept His offer to make their sins *white as snow*—as if they had never sinned. He is extending the same invitation to us today. Instead of a relationship of face-value service and faithfulness, God is seeking out a true, vibrant relationship with each of us so we can be transformed to be more and more like Him. What is one time you did something you felt was unforgivable, but experienced God’s grace and forgiveness anyway?

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APPLICATION

- Have you accepted God’s invitation to make your sins as if they never existed and to have a real relationship with Him? If not, would you like to do so today?
- Is there an area in your life that you see is not consistent with your relationship with God? How is God asking you to address this part of your life?
- As salt and light of the earth, God wants us to speak and act for justice and against oppression on behalf of the vulnerable. What’s one thing you can do this week to stand for righteousness and justice? Are there areas in your life that may be contributing to injustice? What can you do differently?

