Nov 1, 2026 – Questions to Discuss and Consider at Home or in Small Group

“The Pharisee Masquerade” – Mark 7:1-8

1. When you reflect on your daily life—at work, at home, or at church—what "costume" or public image are you most tempted to curate to ensure you are seen as capable, holy, or in control?

2. Since we live in a NoVA culture, how does the habit of maintaining "spotless records" and managing security clearances quietly bleed into your spiritual walk with God?

3. In Mark 7:6–7, Jesus reaches back to Isaiah 29:13 ("This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me"). In Isaiah's historical context, God's covenant people maintained meticulous temple liturgies and fluent religious talk while practically trusting in human alliances and self-protection rather than Yahweh. Why does Jesus draw a direct line between Isaiah's audience and first-century religion? How are we today tempted to use fluent theological jargon or active church attendance as a smoke-screen for functional self-reliance?

4. How does viewing God's law as a diagnostic mirror (to expose heart motives) differ from viewing it as a checklist to earn God's approval or manage your reputation?

5. In what ways do we try to turn our relationship with God into quantifiable, measurable metrics ("Miracle Gro Pharisee juice"), and what does this do to our inner joy?

6. Why is the vulnerability of trusting God in our pain and uncertainty so terrifying that we would rather clutch the illusion of control through external rules?

7. Look at Jesus' diagnosis in Mark 7:6 ("their heart is far from me"). Have you ever felt the exhaustion of being spiritually "busy" while feeling completely distant from God's love? What did that feel like?

8. What does it mean to you personally that Jesus—the only One with truly clean hands and an unblemished heart—was treated outside the city gates as the ultimate hypocrite so that you could be declared righteous?

9. How does knowing that your standing with God is permanently sealed in Christ change the way you handle a public meltdown, a work setback, or an embarrassing failure?

10. Read Psalm 131 alongside Powlison's "Anti-Psalm" (see italicized text below). In what area of your life are you acting like a "hungry, demanding infant," and what would it take to rest like a quieted, weaned child in the Father's lap today?

    "S*elf, my heart is proud. I'm absorbed in myself. And my eyes are haughty. I look down on other people. And I do chase after things too great and too difficult for me. There's a whole lot of things I chase after. So, of course, I'm noisy and restless inside. It comes naturally. I'm like a hungry infant fussing on his mother's lap. Like a hungry infant, I'm restless and demanding and worried. I scatter my hopes onto anything and anybody all the time."*

11. In the parable of Snoopy clutching his dry, flavorless bone while standing before a bowl of meat: what "dry bone" of self-reliance or performance are you being invited to drop today so you can receive the rich feast of Christ's grace?

12. If our motives in this fallen world are never 100% pure, does that mean we shouldn't attempt good works or serve God? How does the Gospel free us from the paralysis of waiting for a "flawlessly pure heart" before stepping out in obedience?

13. Why is pretending to have a pure heart and obscuring our mixed motives far more spiritually toxic than admitting our divided affections? How does the masquerade actually keep us from experiencing God's love?

14. Our response statement invites us to offer God an "authentic, albeit divided heart." What does it look like practically to bring the selfish, resistant parts of your heart directly to Christ in confession, rather than trying to sanitize them before you come?

- God rejects the mask of the hypocrite because His law is designed to expose and direct the inward heart motives, not merely dictate outward behavior.
- **Y**et our flesh leads each of us to become a hypocrite, curating an outward costume of righteousness that avoids all external corruption to win approval, while excusing an unconstrained, self-indulgent heart within.
- Though completely spotless and true, Jesus was condemned in our place as the ultimate hypocrite on the cross, bearing the righteous punishment for our false, devious lives to clothe us in His righteousness.
- Anchored in Christ's finished work, we are free to step out of the costume of the hypocrite and get to offer God an authentic, albeit divided heart in grateful love.