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“the words you speak come from the heart—that’s what defiles you.” Matthew 15:18

- 1) Read Matthew 15:1-20. Is there anything from the sermon or passage that you found confusing, surprising or encouraging?
- 2) Does tradition have bring up positive or negative ideas? What’s wrong with the tradition of the Pharisees? What do they assume it is doing for them? What does this tell you about how to worship God?
- 3) What does Jesus say is wrong with us? Eugene Peterson’s definition of a sinner reflects Jesus’ teaching on the heart. How does this change the way you look at your own traditions? Evangelism? Parenting?

“The word sinner is a theological designation. It is essential to insist on this. It is not a moralistic judgment. It is not a word that places humans somewhere on a continuum ranging from angel to ape, assessing them as relatively “good” or “bad.” It designates humans in relation to God and sees them as separated from God. Sinner means something is awry between humans and God. In that state people may be wicked, unhappy, anxious, and poor. Or, they may be virtuous, happy and affluent. Those items are not part of the judgment. The theological fact is that humans are not close to God and are not serving God.” ~Eugene Peterson

- 4) Shame nags all of us. It alienates us from ourselves (I hate me) and from other people (I don’t belong here) and from God (I’m disgusting). Consider this modern description of shame below. Do you see yourself in it? Read Zechariah 3. How does Jesus, ‘the Branch’, clean us up to make us able to come into God’s presence?

“Do you know what shame feels like? Real shame. You know, when you’ve done something, when you’ve hurt, disgusted someone so completely you can see it in their eyes. The black oozing junk inside you; you sweat it through your skin, but it keeps spreading, Until you would do anything not to feel it. Anything.”

- 5) Christians, by faith in Jesus, are made priests who are clean. How does this affect your religious traditions (prayer, Bible reading)? What about godly neighbor love?
- 6) Take time to praise God for His cleansing grace and for those who are haunted by their shame (inside and outside the church).