

Small Group Guide: Desiring Righteousness vs. Appearing Righteous Ezekiel 14-15



Summary:

In Ezekiel 14-15, we're confronted with a powerful message about the difference between desiring righteousness and merely appearing righteous. God sees beyond our outward actions into the depths of our hearts. Are we truly seeking Him, or are we just putting on a show? This passage challenges us to examine our motivations and reminds us that God values genuine repentance over religious facades. The story of the elders coming to Ezekiel illustrates how easy it is to fall into the trap of spiritual hypocrisy. We're called to turn away from our 'heart idols' and pursue authentic righteousness. This message resonates deeply with our modern struggle to live out our faith in a world that often values appearance over substance. Let's reflect on how we can cultivate a sincere desire for God's righteousness in our lives, trusting that He will guide us towards true holiness.

Key Takeaways:

1. God sees our hearts, not just our outward actions.
2. Desiring righteousness is more important than appearing righteous.
3. God's judgment comes after persistent unfaithfulness, not on a whim.
4. The righteous are protected even in times of judgment.
5. A fruitless faith is useless in God's kingdom.

Discussion Questions:

1. The sermon mentions the difference between "struggling with sin but desiring righteousness" and "desiring sin but wanting to appear righteous." How do you see this playing out in your own life or in the church today?
2. God tells Ezekiel that the elders have "set up idols in their hearts." What are some modern-day idols that people might set up in their hearts?
3. How does the example of King David's repentance contrast with the attitude of the elders in this passage?
4. The sermon mentions that "repentance is a changing of the mind." How does this definition challenge or expand your understanding of repentance?
5. What does it mean to be a "fruitless vine" in God's kingdom? How can we ensure we're bearing fruit in our faith?
6. The passage mentions Noah, Daniel, and Job as examples of righteousness. What characteristics do you think made these men stand out to God?
7. How does the idea that "the righteous do not experience God's wrath" impact your understanding of end-times events or God's judgment?

Practical Applications:

1. Heart Check: Take some time this week to examine your heart. Are there areas where you're more concerned with appearing righteous than actually desiring righteousness?

2. Fruit Inventory: List out the "fruits" of your faith. How is your relationship with God impacting your daily life and actions?

3. Repentance Practice: When you catch yourself sinning this week, practice immediate repentance. Remember, it's about changing your mind towards sin, not just feeling bad about it.

4. Idol Identification: Reflect on what might be taking God's place in your heart. Commit to removing one "idol" and replacing it with time spent with God.

5. Righteousness Pursuit: Choose one area of your life where you want to grow in righteousness. Make a plan to pursue growth in that area this week.

Closing Prayer

Encourage group members to pray for each other in their pursuit of true righteousness and fruit-bearing faith.

5-day Bible reading plan and devotional guide:



Day 1: Desiring True Righteousness

Reading: Psalm 51:1-12

Devotional:

David's heartfelt plea for forgiveness in Psalm 51 echoes the message from Ezekiel about desiring true righteousness. Unlike those who merely want to appear righteous, David's genuine repentance demonstrates a deep longing for God's cleansing and renewal. Today, reflect on your own heart. Are you more concerned with appearing godly to others, or do you truly desire righteousness in your innermost being? Ask God to create in you a pure heart and renew a steadfast spirit within you. Remember, God sees beyond our outward actions and looks at our hearts. Pray for a genuine desire for righteousness that stems from a love for God, not a need for others' approval.

Day 2: The Danger of Hidden Idols

Reading: 1 John 5:18-21

Devotional:

The elders in Ezekiel's time had "set up idols in their hearts," a sobering reminder of how easily we can allow things to take God's rightful place in our lives. John's warning to "keep yourselves from idols" is just as relevant today. What hidden idols might be lurking in your heart? Success, comfort, relationships, or even religious activities can become idols if they take precedence over our relationship with God. Take time to examine your priorities and affections. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any areas where you may be placing created things above the Creator. Commit to removing these idols and recentering your life on Christ, the true God who gives eternal life.

Day 3: God's Patience and Justice

Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-13

Devotional:

Ezekiel's prophecy reveals both God's patience in dealing with persistent unfaithfulness and His eventual judgment. Peter reminds us that God's patience is for our salvation, but His day of judgment will surely come. How does this balance of divine patience and justice impact your view of God and your own life? Are you taking advantage of God's patience to grow in holiness, or are you becoming complacent? Remember that God's desire is for all to come to repentance. Thank Him for His patience with you, and ask for the strength to live a godly life in light of the coming day of the Lord.

Day 4: Bearing Spiritual Fruit

Reading: John 15:1-8

Devotional:

The imagery of the fruitless vine in Ezekiel finds a powerful parallel in Jesus' teaching about the vine and the branches. Christ calls us to abide in Him so that we may bear much fruit. This fruit is not about mere outward appearances but about the genuine transformation that comes from a living connection to Jesus. Reflect on your own life – are you bearing the fruit of the Spirit? Are you seeing evidence of God's work in and through you? Remember, apart from Christ we can do nothing. Pray for a deeper abiding relationship with Jesus, asking Him to prune away anything that hinders fruitfulness in your life.

Day 5: God's Faithfulness to the Remnant

Reading: Romans 11:1-6

Devotional:

Even in pronouncing judgment on unfaithful Israel, God promised to preserve a faithful remnant. This theme of God's faithfulness to a remnant runs throughout Scripture and finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Paul reminds us that God has not rejected His people, preserving a remnant chosen by grace. This truth offers hope in times of spiritual darkness or personal struggle. No matter how dire circumstances may seem, God always preserves His faithful ones. Are you feeling alone or discouraged in your faith journey? Take heart in God's unwavering faithfulness. Pray for the strength to remain faithful, knowing that you are part of God's preserved remnant, sustained not by your own efforts but by His grace.