

## HAPPY GLOBAL HANDWASHING DAY!

Today is Global Handwashing Day! This “holiday” has been around since 2008—though it’s not actually a holiday as much as an advocacy day.

Visit <https://globalhandwashing.org/global-handwashing-day/about-ghd/> for more information. It is a good cause to support, because thorough handwashing with soap is one of the most consistent and one of the easiest ways to slow down or stop the spreading of disease. For our purposes in LINC, we will focus on the role ritual handwashing has played in the Jewish and Christian faiths, along with how we can use physical handwashing as a reminder to keep ourselves spiritually clean as well.

### Clean Versus Clean

Handwashing has been proven to be effective in improving global health, but it’s only since the 1980s that the information has been used by organizations such as the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to create standards and guidelines to encourage proper and frequent handwashing—for example, signs posted in restaurant restrooms reminding employees to wash their hands before returning to work. Years ago, in some places, doctors and nurses were resistant to emphasizing the importance of handwashing because for centuries people believed water carried the illnesses. Water alone cannot rid your hands of all germs and bacteria, but soap attaches to those germs and water washes them away.

### Is It Possible to Be Too Clean?

According to the CDC, antibacterial soap is no more effective against viruses, dirt, and many germs than regular soap. In fact, for the antibacterial soap to do its job and adhere to more bacteria than the traditional soap, it would need to be on your hands for over two minutes. Most of us hardly wash the standard twenty seconds, and some bacteria on your skin have positive roles to play; if they are removed, you are left more vulnerable. Theories are being tested to determine if the use of the antibacterial soaps creates stronger, more resistant bacteria. So as in handwashing where frequent and consistent practice is best, in our faith lives, keeping our hearts and spirits clean takes the practice of frequent and consistent habits while allowing room for grace to do its job too.



## TIP FOR THIS ISSUE

When talking about spiritual practices of any kind, there is always an aspect of personal comfort and fit with the habit itself. Some people are more contemplative, others more active. Some people like multisensory rituals such as candles or incense; others enjoy writing. Remind students that in deciding to try a spiritual practice, they can commit to a week without it being the long-term solution for their spiritual journey—but they’ll learn more about themselves and their relationship to God if they try.

## WASHED CLEAN

**Question of the Day:** What habit do you have that others find bothersome?

**Purpose:** To remind and encourage teens that it's the little things they do every day that lead to a healthy spiritual life.

**Cultural Connection:** Global Handwashing Day

**Topic:** Spiritual Cleanliness

## RITUAL CLEANLINESS

**Leviticus 11:31-34**

*If any of these creatures fall into a pottery jar, everything inside it will be unclean; you must smash the pot. —Leviticus 11:33*

### Commentary:

In ancient cultures it wasn't typical to wash before eating like it is today. Why? First, water was precious and hard to come by; people usually had to walk miles to get to the well. Second, dirt was more commonplace; people were used to being dusty. Finally, disease was not well understood; people faced suffering and death more often.

Leviticus is mostly a book of laws the ancient Hebrews practiced not just in an effort to be healthy but also holy. Following these dietary laws set them apart from the surrounding cultures.

Certain types of bathing, especially prior to important events like marriage, are still carried out in a spiritual way by many observant Jews. In Orthodox households, a small pitcher of water is kept near the food so that even a small child running into the home hungry will stop to rinse his or her hands and say a short prayer before eating a snack. It is beautiful to watch the purity of heart in that practice.

### Questions to think about:

- ▶ Have you ever considered the connection of saying grace before a meal to these holiness codes?
- ▶ What role might praying before meals play in your life? Is it just habit? Can it increase your awareness of God's presence?



A Jewish man in Israel washing his hands before praying at the Western Wall

## IN WORD AND DEED

**Matthew 15:1-11**

*It's not what goes into the mouth that contaminates a person in God's sight. It's what comes out of the mouth that contaminates the person. —Matthew 15:11*

### Commentary:

Jesus pulled one of his showing-off-for-the-Pharisees stunts in this passage. They called out Jesus and his disciples for not following the law by washing before eating; Jesus returned the insult by calling them hypocrites.

In Jesus' teaching, we are reminded that to change the rules for our personal benefit is to disobey God. Instead, Jesus tells us that the more we know and understand God, the more we learn to follow the meaning and not just the letter of the law. So, the ritual washing before eating is not the most critical of the holiness codes. How we act toward one another is what truly sets us apart from the world's culture.

### Questions to think about:

- ▶ When have you found yourself behaving in a way you know is wrong just to be accepted?
- ▶ How have you been treated when you've said "no" to an action you were expected or pressured to do?
- ▶ How can you support your friends, at church and at school, when they are faced with modern-day Pharisees trying to challenge their integrity with hypocrisy?



**If handwashing with soap were widely practiced, approximately 230,000 deaths could be avoided. Yet, on average globally, handwashing with soap is only practiced 19 percent of the time.**

# TEACHER BIBLE PREP

Can you imagine Jesus washing your feet?

## CONSISTENCY

**John 13:1-11**

*Jesus responded, "Those who have bathed need only to have their feet washed, because they are completely clean. You disciples are clean, but not every one of you."*

—John 13:10

### Commentary:

This is a beautiful passage about Jesus washing the disciples' feet. In today's context, verse 10 is especially important. Jesus physically washes the disciples' feet after a long journey, but he speaks metaphorically about their spiritual health and cleanliness. They have bathed recently, so only their feet are dirty. Likewise, we may attend church regularly and be bathed in the love and grace of God, yet we still sin. We need prayer and regular spiritual disciplines to keep our souls refreshed between regular services. And, we even may need annual deep-cleaning efforts like mission trips or spiritual retreats to restore us to our best selves. God knows when our souls are in need of care.

### Questions to think about:

- ▶ When have you felt most spiritually refreshed and renewed?
- ▶ How can you bring that sense of renewal to your life every day?
- ▶ What is a spiritual practice you can add to your routine?



## DEVOTION: CREATE IN ME

I once worked for a senior pastor who would eliminate the words "help me . . ." from any congregational prayer. In his opinion, instead of asking God to help us do something, we should ask God to take action in our hearts or move us to action with the Holy Spirit.

In Psalm 51:10, the prayer offered is for God to "Create a clean heart for me." It's not a prayer that says, "God, please help me be pure and clean." God is the actor in this change. We must open our lives to the power of God's Holy Spirit if we are to fully accept the power of God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

If possible, play for your students the song "Trinity" by Jennifer Knapp at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIZh\\_6tw5kc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIZh_6tw5kc).



[http://www.allthelyrics.com/lyrics/jennifer\\_knapp/trinity-lyrics-174382.html](http://www.allthelyrics.com/lyrics/jennifer_knapp/trinity-lyrics-174382.html). Also consider printing lyrics for students to read while listening.

After the song, ask students to name one thing they want to ask God to do in their lives. Close in prayer by reading aloud Psalm 51:9-13.

**NEXT WEEK:** October is Clergy Appreciation Month, so we thought it would be more than appropriate to highlight the importance of encouraging our pastors and other clergy staff! In next week's issue of *LinC*, we'll remind teens of the resource available to them in their home church's clergy.

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Available by e-mail subscription by calling toll free: 800-672-1789. Also available for download from <http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/digitalstore.aspx?vl=Digital%20Curriculum&catname=LINC&sortorder=5>.

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**Getting Ready:** You will need copies of Youth Page 6, pens or pencils, Bibles, markerboard or large sheet of paper, appropriate markers, pitcher, bowl, water, washcloths, and church bulletins or worship guides.

**Before the Session:** Invite a pastor to visit your class and participate in the High School discussion for Talk Topic 1.

## OPEN

### Simon Says?

(5–10 minutes)

One leader (from the youth) stands in front of the group and gives a command. When the leader says, “Simon says . . . [insert command],” then the teens must do whatever the leader commanded. If the leader says, “[command]” without first saying “Simon says,” the teens should not do it. If someone does it anyway, he or she is out of play and must take a seat. Remind youth as necessary to be respectful of differences in ability, appropriateness regarding clothing, and so on when giving commands.

## EXPLORE

### Talk Topic 1: Ritual Versus Rule

(7–10 minutes)

#### Middle School Option

Allow a few moments for teens to complete the questionnaire on Youth Page 6. Ask students to talk about their favorite holidays and the activities and traditions involved. Use the following questions to guide and prompt discussion: “Do you know when or where your family traditions originated? Did grandparents hand them down? Are they new? Did any begin as a joke but become a yearly ritual for your family? Which traditions have the most meaning for you?” Introduce the idea of traditions becoming rituals, which essentially means traditions filled with great meaning for the participants.

Ask and talk about the following:

- ▶ How does doing the same activity or eating the same food connect us to those who came before us?
- ▶ How do these actions encourage the spiritual connection the holidays represent?

Read aloud some of the commentary about the Leviticus holiness codes in Teacher Bible Prep, along with Leviticus 11:31-34. Say: “Following the ancient Levitical law was about creating traditions, rituals to make their families feel special and honor God. It wasn’t about following silly rules about hooves and scales and breaking pitchers.”

#### High School Option

Say, “Leviticus is a hard book to read with its talk about sacrifices, blood on altars, and ways we defile ourselves before God.” Allow some time for the group to read a chapter or two all the way through and notice how difficult it was to be a faithful Hebrew in ancient times.

Then, using the commentary in Teacher Bible Prep, help teens understand the difference between rules and rituals. Ask:

- ▶ What does it mean when we do something because it has importance?
- ▶ How did following these rules make the Jewish people feel connected to God?

Bring some of your church bulletins to class. Discuss the segments of your worship service and the role each plays in connecting you as individuals to one another and you as a collective congregation to God. Ask and talk about the following:

- ▶ Which of these acts of worship stem from the ancient codes?
- ▶ Which were changed and challenged by Jesus?
- ▶ How can you use this discussion to help you be more aware and attentive during worship?

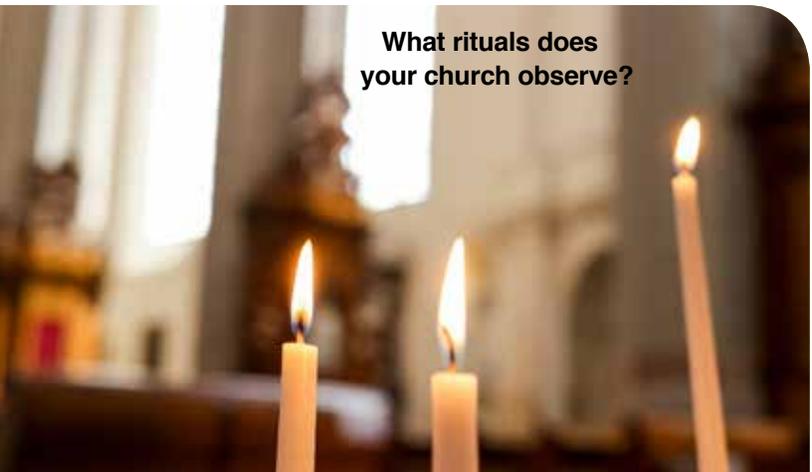
### Talk Topic 2: Do As I Say . . .

(8–10 minutes)

#### Middle School Option

Use the scenarios on Youth Page 6 to introduce the idea of hypocrisy to youth. After they’ve discussed them in small groups or as a large group, read together the passage from Matthew 15:1-11. Challenge them to consider what Jesus is saying about following the rules. Ask:

- ▶ What were the Pharisees trying to accomplish in this particular text from the perspective of being leaders of the faith?



What rituals does your church observe?



## Talk Topic 3: Wash Away Sin (6–12 minutes)

### Combined Middle School and High School Option

Provide a large pitcher of water, a large empty bowl, along with a stack of clean washcloths or hand towels (one per person) next to a chair. After asking a student to read aloud the focal Scripture, explain that students will wash one another's feet. Emphasize there won't be any touching or scrubbing of the feet. You may want to help by holding each person's ankle over the bowl. Follow these steps:

1. The leader (to demonstrate for youth) kneels in front of the chair with the bowl in front of him or her and the pitcher and cloths to the side.
2. The first teen removes his or her shoes and socks and sits on the chair. (A person wearing tights or hose may go to the restroom and remove, or continue to wear them since the water will seep right through.)
3. The leader kneeling uses the pitcher to pour a slight amount of water over each foot, typically one at a time.
4. The leader kneeling takes a cloth and wraps the feet, one at a time, to dry off the majority of the water.
5. The leader kneeling stands up.
6. The teen sitting takes the place of the leader/kneeler and repeats steps 2 through 5 for the next person in the group who sits.

Continue until all teens who want to do so have participated. Encourage but do not force anyone to take part in this activity.

Consider playing calming or meditative music to help teens focus, but giggling is likely and that is OK. Teaching new spiritual practices to youth requires understanding and patience, but we shouldn't neglect them.

If time permits, lead a discussion around the commentary and questions in Teacher Bible Prep to help teens understand how we can practice being clean in heart and soul.

### TAKE AWAY

Regular prayer and a spiritual connection to God keeps our hearts and spirits clean. Say this verse as a breath prayer every time you wash your hands this week: "Create in me a clean heart, O God."

- ▶ Do you have rules in your church that seem unnecessarily strict?
- ▶ When you have lock-ins or play games during youth group, are there restrictions on places or items you can use? Why do you think that is?

On a markerboard compile a list of the rules in your church, both official rules and unofficial rules. Then, allow a few minutes for students to consider the "why" behind some of the rules and lead a discussion around their ideas. The goal is for youth to understand the meaning behind the rules in order to better follow Jesus' teaching: How we respond due to the importance of and respect for the rule is more important than following the rule simply because it exists.

### High School Option

Allow students to vent a little about people they know and think are hypocritical. Remind them that name-calling and judging are *not* the goal. The goal *is* to identify the struggles people have with integrity. Also, challenge teens to open up and tell about a time when they acted hypocritically.

Read aloud Matthew 15:1-11, talk about the commentary, and ask and talk about the questions in Teacher Bible Prep. Then, ask teens to read the scenarios on Youth Page 6. Talk about how they would respond as the adults in these situations. Then ask, "How would Jesus respond to someone struggling with hypocrisy and integrity?"

### BONUS SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Lead a discussion around how the youth balance being faithful, even being witnesses to their faith at school without becoming self-righteous. Like the Pharisees in the Matthew passage, there are many high schoolers who have claimed a deep personal faith in Jesus Christ but who struggle with living according to Jesus' teachings among the high-school culture. Encourage youth to openly discuss topics such as dating, parties, language, and cheating as opportunities to live with integrity or witness to their faith. Also, suggest they share ideas about how to handle difficult situations with friends or peers.

# WORKING IT OUT

## DO AS I SAY . . . SCENARIOS

**1.** Jenna is riding home with Mr. Browne after babysitting for his two kids. He and Mrs. Browne are good friends with her parents, and they all go to church together. During the ride, Mr. Browne is smoking cigarettes. He keeps the window down and uses an ashtray, but Jenna thinks it's gross. When he sees her expression, Mr. Browne gets a sad look on his face. He tells her he understands that she doesn't like the smoke. He says he doesn't like that he smokes, but he can't seem to stop. In a stern voice he tells Jenna she should never start smoking, emphasizing it's the worst decision he's ever made. After Jenna arrives home, she asks her mom why Mr. Browne would say that to her and why he would keep smoking if he feels the way he said. What would you say to Jenna if you were her mom?

**2.** Deshawn is going on a mission trip with the church youth group. The teens at church are surprised. He usually only comes to youth group with his friend, Michael, and Michael isn't going on the trip. Everyone knows Deshawn likes to party on the weekends and never talks much in group discussions. While on the trip, Deshawn opens up to one of the counselors and says he doesn't like how he is and that he wants do better. He says he feels like a hypocrite when he acts all tough, but it's how his friends expect him to act. What would you say to Deshawn if you were his counselor?

## In the Bible: Readings for the Week

**MONDAY:** Read Psalm 18:20.

Our reward for being spiritually clean isn't always material goods. Seek God's rewards of grace and forgiveness today.

**TUESDAY:** Read Proverbs 20:9.

None of us are clean without the forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ.

**WEDNESDAY:** Read Ezekiel 36:25.

Sounds a lot like baptism, doesn't it? Coincidence? I think not. God has sought to clean us of our sin since the garden of Eden.

**THURSDAY:** Read Mark 1:40-42.

Jesus wants to make us clean; we need only ask.

**FRIDAY:** Read 1 Corinthians 6:11.

It is not what we used to be but what we are now that matters—new in Jesus Christ.

**SATURDAY:** Read Hebrews 1:3.

God is worthy to be praised. Continue to pray for a clean heart today and every day.

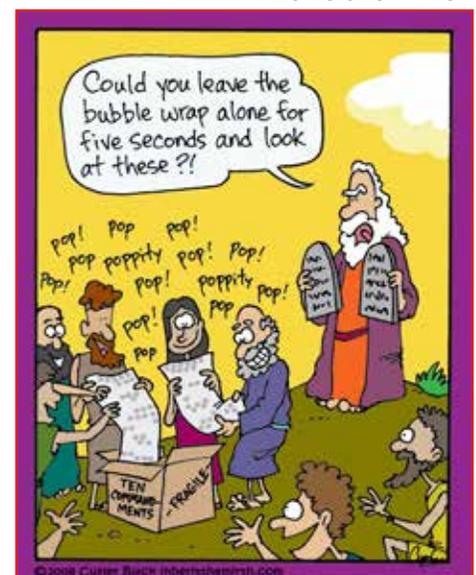


## Ritual vs Rule

Answer the questions below about how your family spends the holidays.

1. What is your favorite holiday?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your favorite holiday food?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the silliest thing your family does when you're together?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you ever serve others on a holiday?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What means the most to you when you spend time with your family?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Inherit the Mirth



## WHAT'S TRENDING?

How many times a day do you wash your hands? Tweet or post your response with the hashtag #washcount on Twitter to @YMPartners or on facebook.com/youthministrypartners