

## **Living In Reality**

### **Small Group Guide**

**Warm-up Question:** (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part altogether, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. If you could trade lives with one person from a movie or show, who would you choose?
2. If you had an extra 10 hours in your week, what would you do?

**Read the following passage:** Mark 7:1-8

When talking to the Pharisees, Jesus references Isaiah 29:13, where God laments over a people who honor Him with their lips but whose hearts are far from Him. This scripture resonates deeply in our modern, image-focused society, where external appearances often take precedence over internal transformation. Through the lens of Isaiah's prophecy and Jesus' critique of the Pharisees in Mark 7 and Matthew 23, we are challenged to confront the ways we might be going through the motions of faith without truly engaging our hearts. To grow, we must avoid the danger of hypocrisy and pursue the importance of vulnerability in our spiritual journey, encouraging us to embrace authenticity and allow God to transform us from the inside out.

Vulnerability allows us to reflect on the state of our hearts and to be honest with ourselves and God. Whether we are longtime believers or skeptics, the invitation remains the same: to come as we are, letting go of pretense and embracing the genuine, transformative work that God wants to do in our lives. Through this journey of authenticity, we can experience the fullness of life that Jesus offers, free from the hollow facade of empty ritualism.

**Questions for Discussion** (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. How does Isaiah 29:13 challenge your understanding of what it means to truly worship God?
2. In what ways do you see the pressure to maintain appearances affecting your spiritual life?
3. Can you identify any areas in your life where you might be "going through the motions" rather than engaging with God authentically?
4. How do you think the Pharisees in Mark 7 might have justified their focus on external rituals? Do you see any parallels in today's religious practices?
5. Have you ever felt disconnected from your faith because of empty rituals? How did you navigate that experience?

6. What does vulnerability in your relationship with God look like to you? How might embracing vulnerability lead to deeper spiritual growth?
7. How does the story of Bernie Madoff serve as a cautionary tale for living a life that looks good on the outside but is hollow on the inside?
8. Jesus calls out hypocrisy in Matthew 23. How do you think this message applies to our lives today, even if we don't consider ourselves Pharisees?
9. What are some practical steps you can take to ensure your faith remains genuine and not just a checklist of religious duties?
10. How can our small group support each other in the journey toward authenticity and deeper connection with God?

**Pray**