

# The Toothpaste Sermon

## UPPER ELEMENTARY LESSON PLAN

**Theme:** It's what is in our heart that counts.

**Scripture:** Mathew 23:25-26

**Memory Verse:** Matthew 23:26, 'First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.'

## The Children's Sermon

Hey kids, today we're going to talk about something really important, and it's called "Hypocrisy in religious practices." That's a big phrase, isn't it? But don't worry, I'll explain it so it's easy to understand.

First, let's talk about what it means to be a hypocrite. Imagine you have a friend who tells you that lying is bad, but then you catch them telling a lie. That's being a hypocrite - saying one thing but doing another. Now, when we add "in religious practices" to it, we're talking about people who act very religious and say they follow God's rules, but their actions don't match their words. They might pray out loud where everyone can see them or make a big show of being kind at church, but then act mean or selfish when they think no one is watching.

Jesus talked a lot about this. He wants us to be real with our faith, not just pretend. It's like if you made a beautiful drawing for your mom, but you only did it so she would give you cookies. Your heart wouldn't really be in the gift, right? Jesus wants our hearts to be right when we do things for God, not just looking for a treat.

Now, let's imagine you're at the playground, and you see someone playing alone. You remember hearing at church or at home that it's good to be kind and include everyone. So, you go over and ask them to play. That's doing what you believe in your heart, not just because others are watching, but because it's the right thing to do. That's being true to your faith.

But, if you only asked them to play because you saw a teacher watching and you wanted to look good, that's a bit like being a hypocrite. You're not doing it because you care, but because you want to look good. That's what we mean by "Hypocrisy in religious practices" - acting religious just to show off, not because you really believe it or feel it in your heart.

Jesus tells us a story about two people who went to pray. One was a Pharisee, a very religious person, who prayed loudly, thanking God that he wasn't like other people who do wrong things. Then there was a tax collector, who quietly asked God to forgive him for his mistakes. Jesus said the tax collector was the one who really got it right because his heart was in the right place. He wasn't trying to show off; he was being honest with God.

So, what can we do to avoid being hypocrites in our faith? Well, it starts with our hearts. We should do kind things because we really want to help and show love, not because we want a gold star or a pat on the back. When we pray, we can talk to God like we're talking to a friend, honestly and from our hearts, not just saying words we think sound good.

Remember, God sees everything, not just what we do in public, but also what we do in private. He knows our hearts and loves us very much. He wants us to be real with Him

and with others. So, let's try to live our faith truly, being kind, loving, and honest, whether people are watching or not.

And if you ever find yourself wanting to show off or do something just for praise, take a moment to think about why you're doing it. Ask God to help you do things for the right reasons, with a heart full of love and honesty.

So, kids, let's remember that being true to our faith means more than just looking religious. It means living out our beliefs with genuine hearts, both in public and in private. Let's ask God to help us avoid "Hypocrisy in religious practices" and to live in a way that truly reflects His love and kindness.

Let's pray together: "Dear God, help us to be honest and true in everything we do. Help us to avoid hypocrisy in our religious practices and to live our faith with genuine hearts. Thank you for loving us, no matter what. In Jesus' name, Amen."

## Bible Memory Verse

**Matthew 23:26, 'First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.'**

You Will Need:

- Plain white cups (ceramic or plastic)
- Washable markers
- Wet wipes

Get Ready:

- Gather all materials and set up a clean workspace for each child.
- Write the memory verse on a large piece of paper or whiteboard where all the children can see it.

Do This:

1. Ask the children to think about what it means to 'clean the inside' of themselves, like their thoughts, attitudes, and hearts towards others. Discuss briefly.
2. Give each child a plain cup and washable markers. Instruct them to draw or write on the inside of the cup things they think represent a 'clean heart' (e.g., love, kindness, honesty).
3. Once they have finished the inside, they can then decorate the outside of the cup to reflect the outward actions that show a clean heart. Encourage creativity!
4. After everyone is done, use the wet wipes to clean the inside of the cups, demonstrating how Jesus cleans our hearts. Then, discuss how our cleaned hearts can influence our actions to also be clean and kind.

## Bible Interactive Experience

You'll Need:

- Transparent jars or clear plastic cups (one per child)
- Permanent markers
- Washable markers
- Paper towels
- Small pitcher of water
- Printouts of Matthew 23:25-26

Get Ready:

- Write "Heart" on paper towels using permanent markers and place them inside each jar or cup.
- Set up a station with the washable markers, jars or cups with paper towels, and the pitcher of water.
- Prepare printouts of Matthew 23:25-26 for each child.

Do this:

1. **Read and Reflect:** Start by reading Matthew 23:25-26 together. Discuss what it means to clean the inside (our hearts) and not just the outside (our actions seen by others). Emphasize that God cares about our hearts' cleanliness more than our external appearances.
2. **Illustrate the Inside:** Give each child a jar or cup with a paper towel inside it. Ask them to use washable markers to write or draw on the outside of the jar things that people might do to appear good on the outside, such as "being nice for show," "praying loudly in public," or "pretending to care."
3. **Clean the Inside:** Then, explain that just like in the scripture, it's what's inside that counts. Pour water into each jar, letting it touch the paper towel (heart). As the water touches the paper towel, the marks on the outside will start to blur and fade, symbolizing that when we focus on cleaning our hearts and intentions, our outward actions will naturally reflect our inner purity. Discuss how this change is similar to what Jesus teaches about being clean inside – in our hearts and minds.
4. **Reflection and Sharing:** After the activity, encourage the children to share what they wrote/drew on their jars and how the activity helped them understand the

scripture. Conclude with a prayer asking God to help everyone focus on keeping their hearts clean and pure.

## Snack Activity: Heart-Clean Cupcakes

You'll Need:

- Cupcake mix (any flavor) and necessary ingredients (eggs, oil, water)
- Frosting (white or cream colored)
- Food coloring
- Small candies or edible decorations
- Cupcake liners
- Mixing bowls and spoons
- Oven and cupcake baking tray

Get Ready: Preheat your oven according to the cupcake mix instructions. Line the cupcake tray with liners.

Do this:

1. Prepare the cupcake batter according to the package instructions. Discuss Matthew 23:25-26, focusing on cleaning the inside (our hearts) rather than just the outside. As you mix, talk about how we mix various ingredients to make something good, just as we should fill our hearts with good thoughts and actions.
2. Before baking, ask the children to choose a small candy or edible decoration that represents a good deed or quality (like kindness, patience, or love). Place this in the center of each cupcake batter filled liner. This represents keeping good things at the heart.
3. Bake the cupcakes as directed. While they cool, discuss the importance of what's inside us (our character and faith) over outward appearances. Once cool, use the

frosting mixed with a bit of food coloring to decorate the cupcakes, but leave a small window or design revealing the candy inside. This symbolizes that, while it's nice to look good on the outside, what's truly important is what's on the inside.

4. Enjoy the cupcakes together, reflecting on how we can focus on being clean and pure in heart, just as Jesus teaches.

## Game Activity: Heart Clean-Up Relay

You'll Need:

- A large open space (preferably outdoors)
- Two sets of 'dirty' (crumpled paper balls) and 'clean' hearts (red paper hearts)
- Two large bins or baskets

Get Ready: Before the game, write various 'inner qualities' on both sets of hearts, with positive traits (kindness, honesty, patience) on the clean hearts and negative traits (jealousy, dishonesty, impatience) on the dirty hearts (crumpled paper balls). Place an equal number of dirty and clean hearts at one end of the play area, and the empty bins at the other end, creating two identical setups for two teams.

Do this:

1. Divide the children into two teams. Each team lines up at the starting line, opposite their set of hearts and bin.
2. At 'Go,' the first player from each team races to their pile of hearts, picks up a heart, and decides if it's a 'clean' heart (positive trait) or a 'dirty' heart (negative trait). They must place clean hearts in their team's bin and throw dirty hearts into a 'discard' area.
3. After placing or discarding the heart, the player races back and tags the next player in line, who then does the same.

4. The game continues until all the hearts have been sorted. The team that finishes first, with all their clean hearts correctly placed in their bin, wins.

This game teaches children that just like in the game, in life it's important to cultivate and keep 'clean' (positive) traits in our hearts, as emphasized in Matthew 23:25-26, and discard the 'dirty' (negative) traits.

## Craft Activity: Clean Heart Cups

You'll Need:

- Clear plastic cups
- Permanent markers
- Cotton balls
- Dirt or potting soil
- Small slips of paper
- A Bible

Get Ready: Read Matthew 23:25-26 to understand how Jesus wants us to focus on cleaning the inside (our hearts) rather than just appearing clean on the outside.

Do this:

1. Give each child a clear plastic cup and permanent markers. Have them write or draw symbols of external actions on the outside of the cup (like going to church, reading the Bible, helping others) to represent how people see us from the outside.
2. Next, fill the bottom of the cup with dirt or potting soil to represent the 'dirt' or sin in our lives that can make our hearts unclean.



3. On small slips of paper, have the children write or draw internal qualities Jesus wants us to have (like love, kindness, forgiveness). Insert these slips into the cotton balls to represent cleaning our hearts from the inside.
4. Place the cotton balls into the cup, on top of the dirt, to show that what Jesus really cares about is the cleanliness of our hearts, not just our external actions.

## Prayer Activity: Clean Heart Workshop

You'll Need:

- Plain white t-shirts (one per child)
- Fabric markers or fabric paints
- Washable markers

Get Ready: Read Matthew 23:25-26 to understand the message about the importance of having a clean heart and being pure on the inside, just as we appear on the outside.

Do this:

1. Start the activity by discussing Matthew 23:25-26 with the children. Explain how Jesus criticized those who focused on appearing righteous outwardly, while neglecting the purity of their hearts. Emphasize that what's inside our hearts is most important to God.
2. Give each child a plain white t-shirt and washable markers. Ask them to draw or write on the t-shirt what they think represents the 'outside' - how people might see us or how we want to be seen by others.
3. After they finish the outside, give them fabric markers or paints to decorate the inside of the t-shirt (they can turn it inside out) with words, symbols, or pictures that represent what they want their heart to be like before God - kind, honest, loving, etc.

Explain that just like they are decorating the inside of the shirt to reflect what's truly important, our hearts should be clean and pure in God's eyes.

4. Conclude the activity with a prayer circle, inviting each child to pray for help in keeping their hearts clean and focusing on what truly matters to God.