

Expect to Experience God Together in Community (Approximately 30 minutes)

Invite brief introductions if needed. Share check-ins and pray together, asking God to expose pretense, deepen grace, and speak through his Word.

Icebreaker: “Weakness, Hypocrisy, or Both?”

Setup: Read each situation, asking the group to identify it as:

- **Human weakness**
- **Hypocrisy**
- **Both**
- **Not enough information**

Read each situation aloud:

- Someone loses their temper, admits it, apologizes, and seeks help changing.
- Someone speaks about generosity but is privately dishonest with money.
- A church leader preaches sexual integrity while concealing ongoing sexual sin.
- Someone repeatedly struggles with a sin but discusses it honestly with an accountability partner.
- A Christian condemns another person’s behavior while refusing to examine their own.
- Someone avoids church because Christians fail to live consistently.

Discuss:

- What separates an honest struggle from hypocrisy?
- When does inconsistency become pretense?
- Why is hypocrisy especially damaging when practiced by spiritual leaders?
- How can admitting sin weaken hypocrisy’s power?
- Why might someone use another person’s hypocrisy to avoid examining their own life?

Say: Every Christian still struggles with sin, but hypocrisy hides the struggle behind a mask. Grace makes honesty, repentance, and change possible.

If you don’t want to do the icebreaker, choose one Conversation Starter:

1. What is the difference between struggling with sin and pretending you do not have sin?
2. How has Christian hypocrisy affected your ability to trust a church or another believer?

Transition

“Why should I come to church when it’s made up of a bunch of hypocrites?”

Sometimes that question exposes a legitimate wound. Churches and leaders have hidden sin, misused authority, and harmed people while maintaining a righteous appearance. Jesus never minimized such hypocrisy.

At other times, the accusation becomes a shield. Focusing on another person’s failure allows us to avoid examining ourselves and responding to Jesus.

All have sinned. Every person needs the Savior. The answer to hypocrisy is honest self-examination, confession, faith in Jesus, dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and life within an accountable Christian community.

Expect to Encounter God in His Word *(Approximately 45–50 minutes)*

Background *Read in advance and share briefly as helpful.*

In Matthew 7, Jesus confronted people who scrutinized others while ignoring their own sin. He did not prohibit accountability. He corrected its order and attitude: examine yourself first, then help another person with humility.

In Luke 18, a Pharisee used religious performance to elevate himself while a tax collector admitted his guilt and appealed to God’s mercy.

The gospel dismantles hypocrisy and self-righteousness. We cannot save ourselves by appearing righteous. Jesus died for sinners, and the Holy Spirit enables those who receive him to change.

Christian community supports that process. Confession, prayer, encouragement, and accountability help believers leave their masks behind and live by grace.

Read and Discuss God’s Word Together

Begin With Your Own Heart *(Approximately 12–15 minutes)*

Explain that the Greek word translated “hypocrite” referred to a stage actor performing behind a mask. Hypocrisy conceals who we are, demands from others what we excuse in ourselves, or maintains a spiritual appearance without integrity.

Read Matthew 7:1–5 aloud. *Choose two or three questions:*

- What contradiction did Jesus expose?
- Why are we better at recognizing another person’s sin than our own?
- What did Jesus require before helping someone with the speck in their eye?
- How does removing your own log change the way you approach another person?
- Where do you hold others to a standard you excuse yourself from following?

Jesus changed the order and attitude of accountability. The hypocrite says, “Let me correct you while protecting myself.” A disciple says, “Let God examine me so I can help you humbly.”

Come to God Without a Mask *(Approximately 10–12 minutes)*

Read Luke 18:9–14 and 1 John 1:8–9 aloud. *Choose two or three questions:*

- What did the Pharisee’s prayer reveal about him?
- What did the tax collector understand about himself and God?
- Which man returned home justified, and why?
- According to 1 John, what happens when we deny our sin?
- What does God promise when we confess it?

The church’s deepest problem is not that sinners enter it. The problem comes when sinners pretend they do not need grace. God meets honest confession with forgiveness and cleansing.

Depend Upon Christ and Walk by the Spirit *(Approximately 10–12 minutes)*

Read Romans 5:6–8 and Galatians 5:16, 24–25 aloud. *Choose two or three questions:*

- What was our condition when Christ died for us?

- What does the cross reveal about God’s response to our sin?
- Why can religious performance never replace Christ’s grace?
- What does it mean practically to “walk by the Spirit”?
- How should you respond when the Spirit exposes a contradiction in your life?

Christians are not people who no longer sin. They admit their need for a Savior and learn to depend upon the Holy Spirit. Grace forgives sin and leads us out of hiding toward change.

Grow Through Honest Christian Community (Approximately 12–15 minutes)

Read James 5:16 and Hebrews 10:23–25 aloud. Choose two or three questions:

- Why is confession to a trustworthy believer valuable?
- What responsibilities do believers have toward one another?
- What could be lost by attempting to follow Jesus alone?
- What makes a church or group safe for honesty and accountability?
- How can this group encourage transparency without pressuring people?

Christian community is renewed by building relationships where truth, grace, confession, accountability, and encouragement are practiced.

Leader safeguard: Do not pressure anyone to disclose private sin, trauma, or another person’s wrongdoing publicly. Confidentiality must never conceal abuse, threats, or danger.

Bring It All Together

Choose one or two questions as time permits:

- How should Christians respond when someone identifies real hypocrisy in the church?
- What mask are you most tempted to wear around other Christians?
- Where do you need the Holy Spirit to bring your conduct into agreement with your beliefs?
- How can you distinguish a church where sinners are growing from one where hypocrisy is protected?

Expect to Experience God Through Faithful Response (Approximately 10 minutes)

The church is not a museum displaying morally perfect people. It is a hospital filled with people who need the grace of Jesus and are learning continually how to live with the grace he generously provides.

That truth cannot excuse concealed sin or protected leaders. A healthy church brings sin into the light, offers the gospel, practices repentance, holds people accountable, and depends upon the Holy Spirit for change.

Another Christian’s hypocrisy does not remove your responsibility before God. Do not allow someone else’s failure to keep you from the Savior you need.

Invite each person to choose one faithful response:

- **Own your sin:** Ask God to reveal where your conduct contradicts your beliefs.
- **Confess honestly:** Name your sin to God and, when appropriate, to a trustworthy believer.
- **Receive Christ:** Stop trusting religious performance and place your faith in Jesus.
- **Walk by the Spirit:** Receive God’s forgiveness and surrender control to the Holy Spirit.

(Why should I come to church when it's made up of a bunch of hypocrites?)

- **Choose accountability:** Identify a mature believer with whom you can practice honesty and prayer.

Allow a brief time of silent examination. Pray for people wounded by church hypocrisy, humility to acknowledge sin, courage to repent, dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and churches marked by integrity.

Before leaving, confirm the time, location, and preparation for the next gathering.