

TOXIC

DAY 1

Have you ever baked with yeast? There are two things to remember about baking with yeast. First, yeast is alive; therefore it grows. Second, yeast spreads through the entire loaf! *Can you see how this could become a powerful picture of how a person's life could be taken over by small things that get out of control?*

What if there were something so toxic with the power to enter our lives in a very small way yet take over so quickly we hardly noticed before it was too late?

READ Deuteronomy 16:4a.

As Pastor Paul teaches from the Old Testament, he tells us how yeast is a powerful metaphor for sin. Sin, like yeast, has the power to enter in a small way and quickly take over that which it touches. An entire feast was dedicated to the purging of yeast in one's life; a powerful reminder to purge the sin out of our lives, home, family, community, and nation. The Jewish people, to which Jesus spoke, would have grown up hearing many teachings about yeast and sin. It was an established negative image in the Jewish tradition.

READ I Corinthians 5:6-8. *How does the Apostle Paul use this same image and metaphor? What in your life has the power to take over like yeast?*

SHARE your thoughts with a friend today.

DAY 2

READ Matthew 16: 5-12

Jesus uses the imagery of yeast in a surprising way. In Jesus' day, like in Old Testament days, yeast was a major part of life. Not only was it a well-known religious metaphor, but bread was a part of everyday life. Jesus used the presence of bread to take the metaphor of yeast to the next level: the heart. Instead of using yeast as a warning against sin in their lives, Jesus warns the disciples of the dangers of **yeasty religion**. The teachings of the extreme religious groups focused on the wrong things. This type of religion, like yeast, can permeate our souls and become toxic in our lives. It's powerful enough to enter discreetly and in a small way, but takes over quickly and completely.

Toxic religion is full of hypocrisy, legalism, and judgmentalism. The real danger is when it consequently spreads to the brain and heart. It has the power to fool you into thinking that you're right or that you've got it together and figured out. It feeds on itself and builds YOU up rather than God. It fools you into thinking it's all for God when in reality God doesn't desire any of that for you. How dangerous! He simply wants a relationship with you and for you to be a loving person.

READ John 17:3.

DAY 3

Most of us tend to believe God agrees with our side of an issue.

Is it common for people to use God to justify agendas, opinions, and actions?

In Jesus' day, four religious groups represented these two extremes.

Throughout his teaching, Jesus warns against the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, and the Teachers of the Law. These four groups, represented four viewpoints, two extremes, and one big problem. The Pharisees and Teachers of the Law were

the conservative extremes of the day while the Sadducees and Herodians were on the liberal extreme of the spectrum. The only time these groups cooperated enough to get something done was in plotting to kill Jesus. These groups collectively felt threatened by Jesus because He saw past the outside appearance right through to the heart of the issue. Jesus warns against these groups over and over because collectively they represent one major problem for people after God's own heart. All of them were filled with toxic religion that's far removed from God's desire for our lives. When this toxicity is established in our hearts, God becomes distant, sin becomes common, and love grows cold.

What do you feel when you hear the words liberal or conservative?

Have you bought into the extremist view? Feelings of anger toward one group?

Total agreement with one group? Apathy?

Take time today to evaluate your heart on this issue of extreme sides and opinions.

READ John 17:3; Luke 10:28; Matthew 5:43-48.

DAY 4 AND DAY 5

There are signs that your faith is getting toxic and falling into the traps of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Are you ready to take a pH test to examine your own level of toxicity?

READ and PRAY Psalm 139:23-24.

READ it slowly out loud several times.

In the next two days, take time to READ and THINK through the following questions honestly. DO some self-searching and truly EVALUATE your heart. For best results WRITE your thoughts in a journal, then SHARE your thoughts with a trusted friend.

Do you place emphasis on doing outward things that show others God accepts you?

Do you obsess on traditions or formulas as spiritual goals?

Are you joyless, cynical, or hypercritical of others?

Are you prideful and isolated?

Are you harsh and judgmental toward "sinners" while secretly struggling with sinful habits?

Do you allow questionable behaviors in your own life and become defensive, cynical, and judgmental about people who restrict those behaviors in their life?

Do you refuse to embrace change?

Do you persecute those who don't agree with your views?

Do you view God as a harsh and distant task-maker?

If you answered **yes** or found yourself defending the idea behind the question, it may be time to examine your heart for toxins. The danger of toxic religion is the speed at which it can take over the whole person.

Don't take it lightly. Jesus knows that a dead soul is at the heart of toxic religion.

He fought against it so strongly that they killed him for it.

TAKE some time today asking God to open your mind and heart to examine and reveal any present toxins.

PRAY that as toxins are revealed, you would be open to change and healing.

READ Matthew 7:21-23.