

DEVO ~ Week of August 8 - 12

DAY 1

READ Matthew 16:5-12.

In our **TOXIC** Series earlier this year, we learned that the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees was full of hypocrisy, legalism and judgmentalism – it was toxic. Toxic religion is far removed from God's desire for our lives and leads us to become less and less like our Rabbi. **READ** through the warning signs which caution us that our faith may be getting toxic and falling into the traps of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. **READ** and **PRAY** Psalm 139:23-24. **TAKE** time to read it out loud - *slowly*. **ASK** God to open your mind and heart to examine and reveal any present toxins.

Do I place emphasis on showing others how spiritual I am?
Do I focus on traditions or formulas as spiritual goals?
Do I enjoy being seen as spiritually mature or knowledgeable?
Am I overly critical and cynical of others?
Am I harsh and judgmental toward "sinners?"
Am I resistant to change?
Do I frequently think about "how things should be" or "how they used to be?"
Do I focus on what I think is wrong with others?
Do I look down on, maybe even have contempt for, those who don't agree with me?
Do I see these warnings for everyone but myself?
PRAY: Father, open my eyes to see the truth of my own heart.

DAY 2

READ Matthew 23:1-7, 13-33.

Toxic religion can so easily seep into our hearts, our minds, our families, and even our churches. The real danger of toxic religion is the ever-increasing self-certainty and personal justification. We become more convinced we're the ones who have it right. It's others who need correction. Remember, hypocrisy kills spiritual growth by hiding dysfunction and sin even from ourselves.

READ through the scriptures again. **CONSIDER** Jesus' warnings:
Could these words of caution and warning be for me?
SPEND time today journaling your thoughts.

DAY 3

READ Acts 9:1-9.

Our faith becomes toxic and in danger of legalism whenever we're preoccupied with outward behaviors rather than issues of the heart. We become so focused on non-essential and/or insignificant behaviors that

we lose sight of the central issues which matter to God. Even good, right and healthy behaviors, when they become the point, miss the heart of what God wants for us. The most damning aspect of this toxic religion is how it brings a sincere belief and sense of certainty - a certainty which we harshly impose on others. With that certainty also comes the danger of desiring to be right, more than desiring God Himself.

DAY 4

READ Luke 15:1-2.

As toxic as judgmentalism is in our own hearts, it doesn't simply stay there. It's like yeast! Judgmentalism seeks out others who judge to align and reinforce its own certainty. It can take over a friendship, family, group, or church. It also cripples our own or our corporate ability to value, learn from, or love others.

Can you value and learn from someone with a different opinion
(*an opinion which matters to you*)?
How do you respond when someone offers a different thought or points out a lack of clarity on your part? What does your heart tell you?
Can you receive info which doesn't line up with your thinking without dismissing or devaluing the person or group?
Has judgmentalism crept into one of your relationships or group to which you belong?

DAY 5

READ Matthew 23:1-7, 13-33.

Do these words apply to my behaviors – the motives of my heart?
Could they be a caution and warning for me?
Hypocrisy distances us from ourselves and others, except for those who join our hypocrisy.
Authenticity (*the ability to know and be known by others*) is the key to fighting negating hypocrisy in our lives.

Last fall, we asked, "How do we move authenticity from our heads to our hearts?" We discovered that we must be willing to push beyond our feelings of fear and shame to honestly connect with another and confess our own fears, pride, and brokenness.
How is this journey going for you? What avenues of awareness do you have? What reflective practices have you put in place? To whom have you given permission to speak truth into your life? Does your small group allow you to be authentic and encourage others to do so as well?