

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Luke 12:1-12

“Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” (12:1b) This is the overriding command/instruction of this passage.

We’ve already seen Jesus take the Pharisees to task (see previous passage). Now He turns His attention to His disciples so that they would not follow the example of the Pharisees nor be influenced by the Pharisees. (Their influence and example is their “yeast” metaphorically speaking.) Why? What was wrong with their influence/example? It was “hypocrisy”. This is the Greek word for “acting” (think “actor” in a play or movie). Scholars (Biblical, historical, linguistic) believe that Jesus was the first person attributed to using this word in this way...i.e. negatively, so much so that today we all immediately have a negative reaction to the word hypocrisy/hypocrite. Jesus was saying they are “actors”...i.e. they’re not real, they’re two-faced, it’s all for show...like an actor playing a part, not being their true selves. Jesus warns His follower (then and now) to not be like that.

The Pharisees “acting”/hypocrisy was in order to puff themselves up, to make people think that they were more holy and righteous than they really were. It would be easy for us to point the finger at the Pharisees for their blatant hypocrisy, but the reason Jesus gives such a strong warning is because it is such an easy trap to fall into...even without meaning to. The apostle Peter at one point even falls into this trap. Many years after this warning by Jesus (maybe up to 2 decades later) the apostle Paul called Peter out for his “acting” (see Galatians 2:11-13)

Q. When are you tempted to “act”...to make yourself look better than you really are? Or, perhaps another way of asking that: when do you feel like you can’t be real, can’t let people see the real you, and end up putting on a façade?

Q. Why do you think hypocrisy/acting/not being real is such a big deal to Jesus?

In John 4:23-24 Jesus says, *“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.”* (NIV) “In truth” really has 2 components to it: understanding God accurately and bringing our true/honest self to Him. If we’re not bringing our true self to Him, our offering (the offering of ourselves to Him) is fake and thus pointless. And keep in mind “worship” is much bigger than gathering weekly with other believers for a “worship service”. Every aspect of our lives is the arena of worship. We need to be real, genuine, authentic all the time. But doesn’t that make us vulnerable? Yep...and Jesus addressed that in verses 4-12. But before we get there, what do we make of verses 2-3? About hidden things disclosed? I take that to mean that no one is that good of an actor. What is real will eventually be made known. Our true selves eventually come to the forefront. Masks will eventually come off. It behooves us to be true/real, not fake/hypocritical.

Q. In what contexts do you find it easy to be real/authentic, and in what context do you find it challenging, threatening or dangerous?

What typically causes us to “act”? Fear. Fear of what others will think of us. Fear that we will be considered less than. Fear of harm. Fear of pain and suffering. In verses 4-12 Jesus lays out what we should fear and what we should not fear.

The challenge in this passage is to figure out who Jesus is referring to in verse 5, *“Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.”* (NIV) There are only 2 options...but those options are as diametrically opposed as they could possibly be. Jesus is either referring to God or Satan. I am not going to tell you what I think. You discuss that amongst yourselves...

Q. In 12:5, do you think Jesus is referring to God or Satan? Why do you think that?

Regardless of where we land on that question, a major chunk of the point remains: we are not to fear people...even to the point of death, we aren't to fear our fellow man. That is not to say that our fellow humans can't hurt us...they certainly can. But there is something worse than physical death. And if we aren't to fear physical death, then we needn't fear persecution, or put downs, or being ostracized, marginalized, etc. We are to trust the love and care of our heavenly Father. He knows our situation, our experiences, our feelings. If He knows the sparrows, and if He knows the number of hairs on our heads, we can trust Him to know the details of our circumstances.

Q. Do you ever question/doubt that God knows and cares about you? Explain. (Keep in mind that not changing our situations/circumstances is not the same as not caring about our situations/circumstances)

There are 2 BIG reasons why fear (particularly of our fellow humans) is bad...one of which is specifically mentioned in this passage and one that isn't. Let's start with the one that isn't. We are called to love our fellow humans. But if we fear them, it will restrict/limit our capacity to love them. Verses 8-10 speak toward the other reason we shouldn't fear. Fearing other people, particularly in what they might think of our relationship with Jesus, only negatively affects our relationship with Jesus...which is the MOST IMPORTANT thing. We should do everything in our power not to harm that most precious of all things, but rather do everything in our power to cultivate that relationship.

In the picturesque language of this passage Jesus is basically saying: “What's worse: to be disowned by man or disowned by God?”

Of course we should probably deal with “blasphemy of the Holy Spirit” since it is the “unforgivable sin” ...which is pretty bad. We'll let our brother N.T. Wright speak into that: *“In the midst of all this comes a dire warning which many have found disturbing. One may be forgiven for speaking against the Son of Man, but will not be forgiven for blaspheming against*

the Holy Spirit. In Mark and Matthew this saying occurs when Jesus has been accused of casting out demons by the prince of demons. If you say that the Spirit's work is in fact the work of the devil, you have begun to call evil good and good evil, a moral cul-de-sac without turning room. Here in Luke 12 the intention seems broader. Someone who sees Jesus at work and misunderstands what is going on may speak against Him, only to discover the truth and repent. But if someone denounces the work of the Spirit, such a person is cut off by that very action from profiting from that work. Once you declare that the spring of fresh water is in fact polluted, you will never drink from it. The one sure thing about this saying is that if someone is anxious about having committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, their anxiety is a clear sign that they have not."

This passage concludes with an exhortation to trust the Holy Spirit. When the time of testing ("testing" in this case being pressure from fellow humans) comes, we can trust that the Holy Spirit will provide the guidance to us in what to say (or not say).

Q. Do we regularly put ourselves into situations where we need to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us? What can/does that look like?

In conclusion, let's keep in mind that one of the main things followers of Jesus are called to do is to testify/witness to who He is. The reigning King of everything. If all we do is gather together and express this belief/truth in an echo chamber of people who already agree with that, we're not doing all that we're called to do. (There is nothing wrong with gathering to worship together, by the way, but we are called to far more than that.) We are called to proclaim and embody the great truth that Jesus lives and reigns and is in the process of renewing, restoring, reconciling all things. This will naturally draw us into tension, if not conflict, with some who have a different agenda than His. We are not to fear such people. Regardless of how they react/respond, we point to Jesus, we draw people's attention to Jesus, we live loyal to Jesus.

Q. For those who attended service this past Sunday, share your thoughts/feelings of the video that was shown.