



EXODUS

Healing from Toxic Religion – Part 2

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July 21, 2024

This Sunday, I want to take you on a journey – a journey out of toxic religion. To do that, I want to tell you a little of my own story; what led me out of religious fundamentalism, the breaking that occurred in me and the flaws I began to see in my own beliefs and practice. I want to teach you how to recognize toxic environments but more importantly, I want to teach you how much God longs for you to experience Him as He actually is. It's my prayer that this message will lead to a spiritual breakthrough for you.

1. MY STORY

❑ It all came crashing down

"A marriage bound together by commitments to exploit the other for filling one's own needs (and I fear that most marriages are built on such a basis) can legitimately be described as a 'tick on a dog' relationship. Just as a hungry tick clamps on to a nourishing host in anticipation of a meal, so each partner unites with the other in the expectation of finding what his or her personal nature

demands. The rather frustrating dilemma, of course, is that in such a marriage there are two ticks and no dog!" – Larry Crabb, *The Marriage Builder*

Healthy relationships are built on mutual caring, not mutual needing

❑ All of this led to a radical exposure

...of my failures

...of my beliefs

"You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you. It's easy to say you believe a rope to be strong and sound as long as you are merely using it to cord a box. But suppose you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn't you then first discover how much you really trusted it?" – C.S. Lewis

...of my God image

2. THE DISCOVERY OF MY TOXIC FAITH SYSTEM

❑ In toxic churches, it's all about conformity

The external becomes more important than the internal

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands'?" Mark 7.5

He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery..." Mark 7.20-21

Bounded set thinking vs Centered set thinking

- Bounded Set Thinking
- Centered Set Thinking

Breaking the Bondage of Legalism

58% of respondents said they agreed with the statement, "I feel like I don't measure up to God's expectations of me."
– The Barna Group

66% of respondents agreed with this statement, "Rigid rules and strict standards are an important part of the life and teaching of my church." – The Barna Group

Since it's not safe to be who I really am, I learn how to hide

False Self-Assessment

- I am reluctant to admit my weaknesses and flaws to others.
- I look for the approval of others more than I should.
- I get offended easily and become defensive when people criticize me.
- I often become harsh and impatient when things are moving too slowly or my expectations are not met.
- I say "yes" when I would rather say "no".

- I beat myself up when I make mistakes.
- I have difficulty speaking up when I disagree or prefer something different.
- I have a number of people I am struggling to forgive.
- My fears often cause me to play it safe “just in case.”
- My body is more often in a state of tension and stress than relaxed.

“One thing I’ve learned from believers and activists alike is that community can be built around a common self-righteousness or a common brokenness. Because both are magnetic. People are drawn toward folks who have it all together, or who look like they do. People are also drawn toward folks who know they don’t have it together and are not willing to fake it.” – Shane Claiborne

❑ The tools to keep you in line are guilt and shame

“Guilt trips are a form of verbal or nonverbal communication in which a guilt inducer tries to induce guilty feelings in a target, in an effort to control their behavior.” - Psychology Today, Apr 7, 2019

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the Exodus narrative, it is clear that delivering the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage was not nearly as difficult as delivering them from the mindset of slavery. As Pastor Keith pointed out, there are many ways this still holds true even today. We can be delivered from a bad situation, or an addiction or terrible choices, but still desperately need healing inside or else we may end up right back in the same situation with a different person or

different substance. Can you think of ways you have seen this played out in your personal life or those you care about? Why is it more difficult to change one's thinking than it is to change one's circumstances?

2. As Pastor Keith shared how he and Brenda nearly destroyed their own marriage, what stood out to you most in the things he shared? Was there any part of his story you could personally relate to? If so, what and why? Why do so many troubled marriages resist getting the help they need? Have you ever had any experiences with 12 step recovery that you would be willing to share?

3. One of the dominant characteristics in all toxic religion is conformity – an emphasis on external behavior over internal transformation. Jesus rebuked this approach in the Pharisees of His day. Pastor Keith also emphasized what distinguished the way Jesus thought and defined spirituality versus how the Pharisees thought and defined it. What is the difference between bounded set thinking versus centered set thinking? How do toxic churches use bounded set thinking? Why do people think more like the Pharisees than they do like Jesus?

4. Take some time to discuss Shane Claiborne's quote, do you agree with it or not? Have you seen this in churches or groups that you have been a part of?

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5. What have been your experiences with guilt and shame as it relates to your church experiences or how you were parented or even how you were taught? Why is guilt or shaming someone so toxic? What effect does it have on people?

6. Were there any other significant learnings or takeaways from today's message for you?

