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How to Walk Through God's Process with Toxic People

TOXIC PEOPLE

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Speak badly about others.
Are negative.
Lack compassion.
Take up way too much of your time.
Constantly have drama going on.
Lie to you.
Criticize you.
Talk more than they listen.
Play the victim.
Lose their temper.
Have to be right.
Treat others poorly.
Are self-obsessed.
Try to control you.
Have addiction issues.

Living in God's design for His church as His family together on His mission is no fairy tale. It isn't an effortless, painless process. It is fraught with many challenges from the enemy and unfortunately with people. Some people can be more motivated by self or the enemy than by God. This causes people to become toxic; even in the church.

We have a nearby town founded on zinc mining in 1913. When toxic chemicals identified in the soil became too hazardous, the government condemned the town in 2006 and offered buyout to the residents. Now it is a ghost town. This is similar to what happens with toxic people in the church. If left

unattended they can pollute the whole city of God (Mt 5) and cause it to become a ghost town of its former life.

Jude describes this phenomenon in the early church. Toxic people had come into the church and were polluting it.

Jude 1:3-13 My dear friends, I really wanted to write you about God's saving power at work in our lives. But instead, I must write and ask you to defend the faith that God has once for all given to his people. (4) Some godless people have sneaked in among us and are saying, "God treats us much better than we deserve, and so it is all right to be immoral." (turn God's grace into license). They

even deny that we must obey Jesus Christ as our only Master and Lord. But long ago the Scriptures warned that these godless people were doomed...(8) The people I am talking about are behaving just like those dreamers who destroyed their own bodies. They reject all authority and insult angels...They are like senseless animals that end up getting destroyed, because they live only by their feelings... (12) These people are filthy minded, and by their shameful and selfish actions they spoil the meals you eat together. They are like clouds blown along by the wind, but never bringing any rain. (MSG These people are warts on your love feasts as you worship and eat together. They're giving you a black eye—carousing shamelessly, grabbing anything that isn't nailed down).

Toxic people are those who either never embrace, or drift away from God's design for how His family is to walk together seen in Ephesians 4 as well as other passages. God's design is walking in "humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance (Ephesians 4:1-2), kindness, tender-hearted, forgiving each other as Christ forgave us" (Ephesians 4:31). The toxic, however, ignore or turn away from these things and become filled with "bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor or stirring up strife, slander, and malice" (Ephesians 4:32). They become gossipers, naysayers, bullies and generally negative people.

Toxic people seem to change the atmosphere of a room when they walk in. We can expect them from people like Herod or Pilate but Judas was one of His own. These are the most painful.

Ephesians 4:1-32 walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, (2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, (3) being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...(25) Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another. (26) BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, (27) and do not give the devil an opportunity...(29) Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification... (31) Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. (32) Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Over the past 40 years of helping start, lead, and equip churches I have seen my share of toxic people. The can be **Sherman Tanks** who intimidate and run over people with their strong-willed opinions; **Snipers** who make accusations and insinuations about people in

front of others or behind their backs, **Volcanos** and **Landmines** who blow up with uncontrolled emotions and usually say awful things; **Crybabies** who constantly complain about almost everything; and **Wet Blankets** who are not happy people and see themselves as victims of almost everything.

Some come into the church toxic while others became toxic over the course of time. I remember hearing one's leader's response to a person coming into a church and within a month began to toxically challenge everything,

"This guy is toxic, just let him go and bless another church"...ouch!

It can be said of toxic people.

Instead of every joint supplying (Ephesians 4:16) the only exercise the toxic get is running others down and jumping to conclusions.

When you consider a prominent metaphor for God's design of the church, (the body of Christ) the toxic are usually jawbones who pollute and tear down rather than backbones who are laying down their lives to see His people become who God has called them to be.

Toxic people are like cancer, they need to be healed or removed lest their toxicity spread.

I remember one leader who had helped disciple a friend years earlier and opened a door for him to come and be a part of the church he was leading. Within a few weeks this man was presenting pages of notes about all the things this leader and the church were doing wrong. Instead of taking notes during the sermon about things God was revealing he used the time to write a dissertation about all the things he didn't like. You can imagine what happened. He became very toxic and over the course of a few months he left.

This guy ended up spreading his toxicity to others and resulted in some leaving the church. Unfortunately, not many months later this man also left his wife. The way we treat Jesus' bride is often an indicator of how we will treat our own bride. What was even worse was that some who embraced his demonic toxicity suffered the same fate in their own marriages. God help us!!!

How do we handle toxic people?

We have to respond clearly with Christ's character. The biggest issue is to take the high road of the Spirit in how you respond. One place it is exemplified is in 1 Peter 3:15-16. We can't ignore the clear boundaries of God's word, but we must point them out with the character Jesus calls us to walk in.

1 Peter 3:15-16 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

God's process of toxic people being healed or removed

When toxic people are not healed and end up remaining in a church it is hard for that church to truly move forward. When toxic people cause problems or leave a church there is a process of healing and recovery. It is painful but most of the time the pain will lead to eventual gain. Here are some of the stages of the process.

- **People repent or leave:** Toxic people either humble themselves and are healed or they leave and sometimes sway others to leave as it says in Jude 1:13 "they take anything that isn't nailed down."
- **Questions arise, are faced, and God purifies through them:** This is true among those who stay when others leave. It is just like a parent who leaves a marriage. The family disruption causes questions. Even the existing leaders face their own questions, "Could we have done anything differently? Are we off in what we believe or how we are applying it?" This can be a redemptive process if we embrace the conviction of the Spirit and not the condemnation of the devil. Condemnation leaves no way out, but conviction says, "Here is the problem and you can change." Through questioning the revelation God has given to a church gets sifted and purified, and they come through clearer and stronger.
- **Adjustment period:** The church must adjust to the new reality without the toxic people there. They find a new normal.
- **Healing:** If a church moves forward in God they begin to heal, trust begins to grow, and fresh focus comes. Toxicity doesn't come into a church overnight and

it usually takes time for the effects to be removed, but eventually the atmosphere is cleared.

- **Strength, recovery, and hope for the future:** It works like someone bouncing back from a surgery. Through healing, physical therapy, and movement they regain strength and health.

Thankfully even during lamenting over the effects of toxic people, we believe that, as it says in the book of Lamentations, "God's mercies and compassion are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22-23). If we stay soft towards Him, God gives us strength to walk through the purifying process and we become better for it.

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