The Leaven of Life

Garrett Hall · Luke · Luke 12:1-3; Luke 12:4-7; Luke 12:8-12

AT A GLANCE

In a Luke series message on 12:1-12, following Pastor Cormac's walk through the woes that closed chapter 11, Garrett Hall takes Jesus' warning about the Pharisees' leaven and widens it. Small, quiet, private rhythms work like yeast in dough, spreading unseen until they shape the whole life. Jesus sets integrity against hypocrisy, trust against fear of man, and acknowledgement against denial, and invites us to be dough in the hands of a baker.

- Hidden habits do not stay hidden; whatever leaven we work into private life eventually rises into public view, so congruence between dark and light matters.
- Jesus does not condemn fear but redirects it: fear of God, rooted in his numbered-hairs love, frees us from the fear of man.
- Disciples who deny Christ in weakness can return and be forgiven; blasphemy against the Spirit is a settled, baked-in rejection of grace, not a stumble.

> *"The small, quiet rhythms of our spiritual life create the largest impact on our relationship with God and others."*

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

Luke 12:1-3 — [1]Many thousands of people came together. There were so many people that they were stepping on each other. Before Jesus spoke to the people, he said to his followers, "Be careful of the yeast of the Pharisees. I mean that they are hypocrites. [2]Everything that is hidden will be shown, and everything that is secret will be made known. [3]What you say in the dark will be told in the light. And what you whisper in a private room will be shouted from the top of the house." (ERV)

Luke 12:4-7 — [4]Then Jesus said to the people, "I tell you, my friends, don't be afraid of people. They can kill the body, but after that they can do nothing more to hurt you. [5]I will show you the one to fear. You should fear God, who has the power to kill you and also to throw you into hell. Yes, he is the one you should fear. [6]When birds are sold, five small birds cost only two pennies. But God does not forget any of them. [7]Yes, God even knows how many hairs you have on your head. Don't be afraid. You are worth much more than many birds." (ERV)

> Luke 12:8-12 — [8]"I tell you, if you stand before others and are willing to say you believe in me, then I will say that you belong to me. I will say this in the presence of God's angels. [9]But if you stand before others and say you do not believe in me, then I will say that you do not belong to me. I will say this in the presence of God's angels. [10]Whoever says something against the Son of Man can be forgiven. But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. [11]When men bring you into the synagogues before the leaders and other important men, don't worry about what you will say. [12]The Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say." (ERV)

The argument

Small, Quiet Rhythms Shape a Whole Life Because Leaven Works Unseen — Growth and decay both arrive incrementally, never instantly

Garrett Hall mixes flour, sugar, instant yeast and warm water on the platform and lets the dough sit through the service. His claim is that this is what Jesus is doing with leaven in Luke 12: a little goes in, and over time it works through the whole. He reads the twelve verses as three comparisons, hypocrisy against integrity, fear against trust, denial against acknowledgement, each naming something small we mix into the dough of a life. None of it is dramatic or sudden. As he puts it, "Spiritual growth and decay happen incrementally. They don't happen instantly." What forms a person's walk with God and others is the quiet, repeated, mostly private choice, more than the dramatic moment.

> **Insight** — *What we repeatedly allow into private life is already forming the person we are becoming, for better or worse.*

Integrity Means the Dark and the Light Tell the Same Story — Jesus warns his disciples first, and warns them toward something

Garrett Hall draws attention to the end of verse 1: Jesus speaks "to his disciples first." This is a word to those who love him, set against the Pharisees of Luke 11, clean outside and full of greed within, tithing while neglecting justice. Hall hears a positive in the warning: if hypocrisy is the leaven to refuse, integrity is the leaven to add. He admits his own wish for visitors to find a spotless house, then names the truth: "I'm a sinner, just like all of us," and there is "more truth and integrity to acknowledging that than pretending." The test he presses: "Is what I'm saying and doing in the dark congruent with what I'm saying and doing in the light?"

> **Insight** — *Because nothing hidden stays hidden, the faithful response is private congruence, honoring instead of gossiping and confessing instead of posing, rather than a managed facade.*

Jesus Re-Aims Fear Rather Than Abolishing It — The fear of God is rooted in a Father's love, and it frees us from people-pleasing

Garrett Hall observes that Jesus "condemns fear of man, not fear of God." Verse 5 points to the one whose authority reaches beyond death. Hall relays Leon Morris on Gehenna: distinct from

Hades, the rubbish tip outside Jerusalem where a fire burned, and so a fitting symbol of punishment. Verses 6-7 then supply the ground of that fear: sparrows not forgotten, hairs numbered. Hall compares it to the healthy fear he had of his parents, "rooted in the knowledge that they loved us." He confesses that people-pleasing is "one of the great struggles of my life," and that he began kneeling each morning "because I needed my body and my mind to agree with my heart."

> **Insight —** *Only the one who holds eternal authority and counts the hairs on our heads can loosen the grip of the people whose approval we crave.*

A Disciple's Denial Can Be Pulled Out of the Dough, but Hardened Rejection Cannot — Verse 10 read through the leaven image

Verse 10, Garrett Hall says, raises one of the most debated questions of our day: why a word against the Son of Man is forgiven but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not. He reads it through the leaven image. Peter denied Jesus three times and was met at a breakfast and restored; a disciple who repents can have the leaven pulled back out. Quoting H. W. Beyer, he locates the unforgivable sin "not of the uttering of any form of words, but of the set of the life," a continuing rejection of grace, the dough "fully baked." Grace is no license, yet Hall will assume no one is beyond reach, since God may pull someone out thirty years or thirty seconds before they die.

> **Insight —** *Grace meets the stumbling disciple again and again, while the danger lies in a settled life that has stopped hearing conviction.*

Acknowledging Christ Is an Act of Dependence on the Spirit Who Supplies the Words — We are the dough and God is the baker

Garrett Hall recalls working as a waiter, where one cook called him a Bible thumper and another said he worshiped Satan. He wrestled with how boldly to acknowledge Jesus. Months later, after a friend's death led him to AA, that cook asked, "I don't know how to pray. Can you teach me?" Hall gives the glory to God. Verses 11-12 ground this: the Spirit teaches what you "ought to say," which he notes some scholars translate "must say." "If I'm trying to change hearts, I'm just going to weigh myself down and become unhelpful." The question he leaves: is your daily life acknowledging Jesus or quietly editing him out to avoid friction?

> **Insight —** *We cannot manufacture conversions or conviction; we can ask the Spirit for words, speak, and leave the growing to the Baker.*

Cross-references

- Luke 11 — The previous week's woes on Pharisees and lawyers, which defined the hypocrisy Jesus warns against in 12:1

- John 21:15-17 — Peter's denial answered by Jesus' three-fold restoring question at breakfast, showing a disciple's denial is forgivable

DEVOTIONAL

A bowl of dough sat on the stage all morning, and for long stretches nothing seemed to be happening. Flour, sugar, a little yeast, warm water. No one watching could name the moment it began to rise, yet by the end it had grown. Jesus' word to his disciples works the same way: the leaven is small, and the dough does not announce what is changing in it. That is both sobering and tender. Sobering, because the whispers in private rooms, the sentence softened to keep the peace, the subject changed at the convenient moment, are not nothing; they are working. Tender, because the same is true of small mercies: a shortcoming confessed to a friend, a knee bent before the day begins, a quiet prayer on the way into a meeting. And beneath the leaven is the Baker. The fear Jesus commends is not the fear of a stranger. It is the fear of one who counts the hairs on your head and forgets not one sparrow. Such authority does not crush; it steadies. It is why a disciple who has stumbled can come back and be forgiven yet again, and why the dough need not be managed by anxious hands. You cannot make yourself rise. You can only stay in the bowl, near the hands that knead. Let the day's small rhythms be ones that lean on him, and let the growing be his.

Reflection

- Where is there a gap between what you say and do in the dark and in the light, and what would it cost to close it?
- Whose approval most shapes how you speak or stay silent, and how might knowing God numbers your hairs loosen that grip?
- What small, quiet rhythm could you begin that would place you more openly in dependence on the Baker instead of in control?

Closing prayer

Father, we are grateful to be yours, and grateful that when we pray, you hear us. Jesus, thank you for the convicting words you spoke today, words of love, trust, and truth. Holy Spirit, as we leave this place and enter conversations, give us the words to say. God, we acknowledge that we are the dough and you are the baker. Put the leaven into our lives that would grow us into people who look more like you.

FORMATION

One thing to remember

You are the dough and God is the baker: you cannot control your own growth, only position yourself in daily dependence on him.

This week

This week, begin each morning on your knees, telling God you depend on him, as Hall does. Then, before each meeting or conversation, pray a ten-second prayer: "Holy Spirit, would you guide my words even today?" Rest in his love and help rather than your own control.

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