

YOU'RE NOT THE BOSS OF ME

From the Heart

Early on, most of us learn to monitor our behavior— to restrain our actions in order to maintain relationships, employment, and good-standing with those around us. But it is possible to modify our visible behavior while still harboring a heart controlled by toxic emotions like anger, envy, greed, insecurity, and fear. Jesus argued that human beings are not tainted by external factors like accidental breaches of etiquette or minor misbehavior, but by the toxic internal emotions that cause us to dishonor God and others. If this is true, it's not enough to monitor our behavior. We've got to go a step further and examine the condition of our hearts before we can say no to the toxic emotions that compete for control of our lives.

Start Talking

Have you ever accidentally breached a social norm you weren't aware of? (Maybe you were in a foreign country, at a friend's house for dinner, attending an unfamiliar kind of church.) What happened?

If you had to choose, would you rather live with internal emotional disarray, but the approval and admiration of those around you? Or internal peace and contentment, but some social disapproval? Why?

On a road trip, do you prefer to be in the driver's seat? Or do you find it more fun to kick back in the passenger's seat, stretch your legs, and enjoy the ride? Why?

What About You?

1. Do you think it is possible to uphold all the appropriate external signs of good behavior while being internally controlled by toxic emotions like envy, anger, and insecurity? Explain.
2. Are you ever aware when you are operating out of a toxic emotion? How do you know?
3. What signs have you noticed that could clue you in when you are on the verge of handing control to some toxic emotion?



4. Which of the following emotions have a tendency to become the boss of you: Anger, Envy, Insecurity, Guilt, Fear, Greed?
5. What do your interactions look like when you are taking cues from this emotion?

Look It Up

Read the Following Passage: Matthew 15:1-20

6. What's the difference between the accusation the Pharisees level at Jesus' disciples in this passage, and the sin Jesus accuses the Pharisees of committing for the sake of their traditions? Which seems more damaging in your opinion?
7. In this passage, Jesus highlights a disparity between conduct that honors God, and that which merely appeases human rules. How can you distinguish between the two in your own life?
8. Why do you think Jesus so strongly insists that it is not outward-facing conduct, but toxic emotions *within* the human heart that "defile" human beings before God? What difference does this distinction of being "infected" from the inside actually make?
9. If right living were merely a matter of monitoring our behavior, it would be fairly simple. Yet, Jesus insists that behavioral issues are mere symptoms of a larger disease, and that it is therefore necessary to monitor our hearts and minds for toxic emotions. How do you think a person can begin this process of reflection?

Putting It All Together

10. Think back to the toxic emotions that tend to grab the driver's seat in your life. When are these emotions likely to fight for control this coming week?
11. What can you do to prepare for those situations in advance? How can you pre-empt the fight for control?
12. Can you think of anybody in your life who would be willing to partner with you in the fight for control by occasionally checking in, or calling out toxic emotions when they see them?
13. Jesus pointed out areas where the Pharisaical tradition surrounding good behavior kept people from prioritizing what was actually good. Do you foresee any times during the coming week when might you be tempted to keep some set of man-made "rules" at the expense of honoring God? How can you remind yourself to prioritize the things that honor God over the traditions and patterns of behavior that may get in the way?

