

3 Thieves That Can Destroy Your Relationship With God and People

We often allow our lives to get clogged with envy, jealousy, selfish ambition and other kinds of rottenness. It's time to toss out the leftovers!

It shocks people to learn that my five kids consume about two gallons of milk and a loaf of bread every single day. That's why trips to our local grocery store are quite the adventure for me. I'm always pretty pleased with myself when I don't pass out after the cashier announces the total amount I owe.

Most of the time cashiers and bag boys have no idea I'm buying just one week's worth of groceries. They automatically assume I'm stockpiling for some impending disaster. But they're not totally off-base. The impending disaster comes as I try to fit an aisle's worth of groceries into a tenth-of-an-aisle-sized kitchen.

Out With the Old

After my last shopping adventure, my 10-year-old daughter, Allie, helped with the putting-away process. "Mom," she said, "I can't get all the new groceries to fit in the refrigerator with all this other stuff in here." So I suggested she make some room by throwing out food that had gone bad.

She looked at me with fear and doom in her eyes. "You mean you want me to clean out the refrigerator?" she asked.

I glanced over as she slowly removed and opened the first plastic container, handling it like a vial of toxic waste. "Mom, there's something in here ... ," she said, with a frightened, then a disgusted, and finally a sort of amazed

look on her face. "I have no idea what this is."

"Probably some leftovers," I said reassuringly. But as I studied the contents myself, I realized I had no idea what it was either. Do you know how unnerving it is to find leftovers growing in your fridge and have no clue what they're left over from?

"Could it be a chicken?" Allie asked. "I think I see a beak."

We both shuddered, and Allie quickly dropped the container and its contents into the wastebasket. We also tossed a brown, slimy bag that must have been lettuce in another life, some spaghetti that seemed to have made its own meatballs, and a little surprise butter dish that contained something that was definitely not butter. Before long, all the old junk had been thrown away and the fridge was filled with fresh new groceries.

I don't think Allie was too traumatized by the ordeal—but come to think of it, she's stopped eating anything with chicken in it.

Get Rid of Jealousy, Envy, Selfish Ambition—and More

The entire episode made me think about how much we can "miss" spiritually when we hang on to old things that are rotten. The Lord wants to supply the new, but we tend to hang on to fleshly old stuff.

Jealousy, for instance, can be as putrid as month-old chicken. Left alone, it will mold and ferment just like that container of "whatever" Allie found. It can squeeze out the peace that's ready and waiting "in the grocery bag."

Isn't it sad to imagine God the Father saying, "Oops, no place in here for this piece. The bag's too full of rottenness." Proverbs 14:30 says, "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones" (NIV). (Is it just me or are you also

picturing a petrified chicken bone?)

Jealousy and envy start to grow when we stop celebrating the success of others. We allow a rejoicing opportunity to mold into selfishness, wondering why we didn't receive the blessing instead of someone else.

Make room for peace. Make room for Jesus.

Let Him fill every corner of your heart. He brings with His peace the whole list of fruit from Galatians 5:22—love, joy, goodness and all the rest.

This fruit doesn't need preservatives—it never shrivels, never rots, never even needs a seal-and-burp container. Plus, it's healthy and gives life to our bodies. Now, those are the kinds of provisions we really need!

Galatians 5:19-21 lists the rotten things that God's fruit can replace. Paul named them "the acts of the sinful nature." Jealousy appears in verse 20 and envy in verse 21.

Here's some good news to store up: As we make room for Jesus and stockpile His virtues, we begin to automatically chuck jealousy, envy and the like. Even after God stuffs His long and wonderful list of virtues into our lives, there's still plenty of room left over for more goodness!

Sorry, did I say, "left over"? Don't worry—it has nothing to do with moldy chicken.

It would do us all good to take this wise counsel to heart: "But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

"For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving,

considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness" (James 3:14-18).

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