

### **Focus Text**

“When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. Jesus said to them, “Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, “We brought no bread.” But Jesus, aware of this, said, “O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” **(Matthew 16:5–12, ESV)**

### **Beware the Leaven**

After Jesus addresses the religious leaders and tells them they will receive no sign except for the sign of Jonah, he departs. Matthew 16:5 mentions that they reached the other side, though Matthew doesn't specify where. Given that the next story takes place near Casera Phillipi, to the north, we might infer that Jesus begins walking north, possibly back to his hometown. However, Matthew is more focused on conveying a theological lesson than on detailing their journey.

Before delving into the concept of leaven, which is the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees, we turn to the practical needs of the disciples. Midway through the stories, the disciples get sidetracked by their physical needs. Instead of focusing on spirituality, they start worrying about their empty stomachs. Jesus begins by warning them to beware of the leaven, and immediately the disciples think of bread. Even as Jesus teaches, they discuss among themselves where to get food and who to buy bread from, as Jesus advises caution regarding certain religious leaders. Jesus then refocuses their attention, reminding them that he is not speaking about the physical need for bread. Instead, he is teaching them to exercise wise discernment when listening to spiritual teachers. He points out the absurdity of their concern about food, given that they have witnessed him feed 5000 and then 4000. One lesson from today is that God will provide for our physical needs if we are obedient to Him and wise with the resources He has given us. I once heard the phrase, “Don't sweat the small stuff,” and though I can't recall the author, they said that when you fall in love with Jesus, everything else becomes “the small stuff”. Physical needs are important, and we are commanded to love

## 6.5.2026 Discover the King “Beware the Leaven” Matthew 16:5-12

and care for the poor, as the early church did by selling everything they had to ensure no one among them lacked physical needs. However, focusing solely on the physical is a fool’s errand. Jesus wants them to prioritize their souls and be mindful of whom they learn from, as God will provide bread when needed. A practical application for us today is to remember that while it’s important to work hard, save, and use our resources wisely, that’s not the entirety of life’s challenges. How are you caring for your soul? Do you regularly read the scriptures? Are you praying consistently? It’s crucial to remember that humanity doesn’t live by physical bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Jesus invites his disciples and us to consider our spiritual health as a primary goal.

After his challenging encounter with the religious leaders, Jesus warns the disciples to be cautious of their leaven/teachings. Leaven, the yeast that causes bread dough to rise, is generally seen as a positive thing in modern baking. However, in Israel’s central story, their freedom from the Egyptians is symbolized by avoiding leaven in their bread. On the night of the Passover, when Pharaoh released the Hebrews, they had to leave so quickly that there was no time for the bread to rise. Interestingly, no leaven was included in any grain offerings to the Lord, symbolizing the freedom He provided. Jesus is urging his disciples to be discerning about the teachers they listen to, as the religious leaders were sowing doubt and dissension about Jesus being the Messiah. The spiritual lesson for us today is to question whether those we learn from are centered in God’s Word, both in their teaching and in their character. The Bible is more than just a collection of facts and figures; it reveals all that is necessary to live a life pleasing to God and outlines the path of salvation centered in Jesus. That’s why here at Good Shepherd, our Sunday morning gatherings are centered around the scriptures because one of our primary goals is to help committed followers of Jesus **Learn** more about him, and that primarily happens through the scriptures themselves.” The disciples eventually realized that Jesus was not speaking about physical bread but warning them to be wary of the teachings of these corrupted religious leaders in the future.

### Application

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” **(2 Timothy 3:16–17, ESV)**

“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” **(1 Corinthians 11:1, ESV)**

As your pastor, today’s scripture brings me a deep sense of humility and serves as a heartfelt reminder for all of us within our church community.

First and foremost, let’s remember that the core teachings of our church should always be rooted in the scriptures. They are the essential guide given to us by Paul in Second Timothy. As spiritual leaders, whether we’re teaching in Sunday school, guiding our children, or speaking from this pulpit, our first duty is to cultivate a genuine love for Jesus before we can effectively lead and teach others. Paul himself urged the church in Corinth to follow his example, just as he follows Christ’s.

This week, let’s focus on reflecting on our actions and conduct. We’ll have a little homework to work on together next Saturday evening, where we can all take a moment to self-reflect and evaluate how well we’ve been learning and showing the love of Jesus. Thank you, and may God bless us all. Amen.

### Weekly Spiritual Self-Reflection Homework

**Instructions:** At the end of the week, reflect on your habits and conduct. Use the 1–10 scale for each question:

- 1 = Not at all
- 5 = Sometimes / Needs improvement
- 10 = Consistent and faithful

Category	Question	Score (1–10)
Bible Reading	Did I read my Bible daily this week?	—
Christlike Living	Did I live in a manner that honors Jesus this week?	—

### Optional Reflection Notes:

- What helped me grow spiritually this week?
- Where do I need to be more faithful next week?

Take a few minutes to pray over your reflection and ask God for strength to continue growing.

### **Additional Notes**

“In ancient Jewish culture, leaven symbolized decay and corruption—a view incompatible with God’s perfect holiness.[1] This theological framework shaped Old Testament practice in several ways.

Leaven was strictly prohibited in food offerings dedicated to the Lord by fire[2], since fermentation represented spiritual contamination. However, leavened bread was required for peace offerings and for the two wave loaves at Pentecost[2]—suggesting that while fermentation disqualified offerings meant for God’s direct consumption, it was acceptable in communal meals involving human participation.

The most significant Old Testament practice involved Passover. During the Exodus, Israelites ate unleavened bread due to their hasty departure from Egypt, and this practice continued in all subsequent Passover observances.[2] This unleavened bread, or bread of affliction, reminded the Israelites of their hasty departure from Egypt and warned them against corruptive influences. [3]

Jesus wasn’t rejecting the Old Testament framework—he was operating within it. While leaven was usually a symbol of evil in rabbinical thought, Jesus used it adversely to describe the corrupt doctrine of Pharisees and Sadducees. Like leaven working through fresh dough, the ideas of these groups were gradually infiltrating people’s minds, spreading until they had penetrated every part of their thinking.[1]

## 6.5.2026 Discover the King “Beware the Leaven” Matthew 16:5-12

Notably, there is only one instance in the New Testament where leaven functions as a positive metaphor—when Christ illustrated the kingdom of God’s cumulative, pervasive influence on the world, showing how a mere spark of God’s Spirit, love, and hope can work through an entire community to catalyze spiritual growth.<sup>[1]</sup> Jesus’s warning against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees thus represents the dark side of leaven’s power, while the kingdom parable reveals its redemptive potential.”<sup>1</sup>

“Jesus’s warning about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees points not to actual bread but to their teachings. ([Matt 16:5–12](#)) The disciples initially misunderstood, thinking Jesus was concerned about their forgotten provisions, but Jesus clarified that his warning had nothing to do with bread. ([Matt 16:5–12](#))

The metaphor of leaven—a substance that permeates and transforms dough—captures how corrupted doctrine spreads and influences thinking. The search results reveal what specifically constituted this dangerous teaching. The Pharisees prioritized human traditions over God’s commandments, breaking divine law for the sake of their own practices. ([Matt 15:1–20](#)) Their worship was hollow—honoring God with lips while their hearts remained distant, and what emerged from their mouths revealed inner corruption. ([Matt 15:1–20](#)) They preached without practicing, imposed heavy burdens on others while refusing to bear them themselves, and performed their deeds for public recognition. ([Matt 23:1–36](#))

The Sadducees presented a different but equally problematic error. They denied fundamental realities—resurrection, angels, and spirits—that the Pharisees acknowledged. ([Acts 23:8](#)) Jesus identified their core problem: ignorance of both Scripture and God’s power. ([Matt 22:29](#))

By warning against their leaven, Jesus urged the disciples to reject both the Pharisaic corruption of God’s law through human tradition and the Sadducean denial of spiritual realities. The warning operates on two levels: it exposes the hypocrisy and false authority of these groups, and it calls believers to guard against allowing distorted teaching—whether legalistic or rationalistic—to shape their understanding of God’s kingdom.”

---

<sup>1</sup> [1] Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort, in *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 322.

[2] Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., in *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995). [See [here](#), [here](#), [here](#).]

[3] Barbara J. Bruce, “[Leaven](#),” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), [1022](#).