

DEVOTIONAL

HEART HEALTHY

Opposition: Hardened Heart // January 30, 2022

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discussion Starter: What words would you use to describe a hard heart? A soft heart?

Key Text: *"Blessed is the one who fears the LORD always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity."*
(Proverbs 28:14)

In this lesson, we will focus on the causes and cures for a hard heart. But first, let's remind ourselves how the Bible uses the word "heart." In Scripture, the heart refers to the core of human personality. The Bible says that the following are all products of the heart:

- Grief (John 14:1)
- Desires (Matthew 5:28)
- Joy (Ephesians 5:19)
- Understanding (Isaiah 6:10)
- Reasoning (Genesis 6:5; Hebrews 4:12)
- Words (Luke 6:43-45)
- Faith (Hebrews 3:12; Romans 10:10)

What is a hard heart?

Jesus tells us that a hard heart describes a person who is dull to see, understand, hear, and remember. In Mark 8:17-18, we see that Jesus' own disciples suffered from hard hearts. They were concerned with their lack of bread, forgetting how Jesus had recently fed thousands of hungry people with just a few loaves. Jesus says to them, *"Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?"*¹⁸ *Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?"*

Discuss: Forgetting God's power and blessings is something we all struggle with sometimes. How can we improve our ability to remember God's power and blessings?

1. The cause of a hard heart: Sin

The cure for a hard heart: Confession

Romans 1:18-24 tells us that godless and wicked people who "suppress the truth" are eventually given over to the sinful desires of their hard hearts. Even believers can experience a slow, desensitizing effect on their hearts when they relentlessly continue to engage in disobedience and neglect to confess their sins (1 John 1:8-10).

Discuss: It has been said that one of the wisest things a Christian can do is to keep short accounts with God. That is, don't allow too much time to go by without allowing God to examine your heart so you can identify and confess sin to Him. Do you think keeping short accounts with God is wise? Why or why not?

Discuss: With 1 John 1:9 in mind, why is conviction of sin a blessing to us?

2. The cause of a hard heart: Worry The cure for a hard heart: Prayer

Our hearts often fill anew with fear and anxiety when a new storm arises in our lives. Jesus said, “*the cares of the world*” can choke out the heart-softening effect of God’s Word (Matthew 13:22). Of course, this leads to a hardening of the heart. Notice the instructions Paul gives us for winning over worry and experiencing God’s peace in our hearts in Philippians 4:6-7: “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*”

1) **Don’t worry about anything.** “*Do not be anxious about anything...*” (v.6a)

2) **Pray about everything.** “*...but in everything by prayer...*” (v.6b)

And here is the result according to v.7b: God’s peace will guard your heart (the origin of anxious emotions) and your mind (the origin of anxious thoughts).

Discuss: Why would worry and fear eventually lead to a hard heart?

Discuss: Why would praying about everything – not leaving anything out – be essential to experiencing God’s peace in our hearts and minds?

3. The cause of a hard heart: Pride The cure for a hard heart: Humility

The root of Pharaoh’s hard-heartedness was his pride and arrogance. Even though he had personally witnessed God’s powerful hand at work through ten plagues, Pharaoh’s hardened heart caused him to deny the sovereignty of the one, true God. (For more information on Pharaoh’s hard heart, see “For Further Study” below.)

And when King Nebuchadnezzar became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men (Daniel 5:20–21).

David humbly prayed in Psalm 139:23-24: “*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*”

Discuss: What different requests does David make of God in Psalm 139:23-24? How can each of these prevent hardening of the heart?

For Further Study:

“Why Did God Harden Pharaoh’s Heart?” article at www.gotquestions.org

Anxious for Nothing by Max Lucado

“7 Powerful Warnings of a Hardened Heart” article at www.crosswalk.com