

# OPEN BIBLE CHURCH

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## SERMON TITLE

**Matters of the Heart, part 3**

## SERIES

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## KEY SCRIPTURE

**Various**

## SYNOPSIS

A hardened heart hinders spiritual sensitivity, but God can soften even the most callused one that returns to Him in honest surrender

## HIGHLIGHTS





## ☛ **Matters of the Heart, Part 3**

### **The Hardened Heart: When We Become Numb**

#### **Series Recap: Matters of the Heart**

Over the past two weeks, we've discovered that our hearts are desperately sick and need God's complete renovation. Last week we tackled the divided heart which needs correction so that God occupies first place in every area of our lives. Today, we're addressing something that is subtle, dangerous, and can happen to any of us. We're talking about the hardened heart.

I want to start today by asking you a question, and I want you to be honest with yourself. When was the last time you were truly moved by God's Word? Not just intellectually interested, not just nodding along because it made sense—but moved. When was the last time you felt genuine sorrow over your sin? Or deep gratitude for God's grace? If you're struggling to remember, that might be a sign that your heart has become hard.

Now, I'm not trying to guilt you. Heart-hardening is a real thing, and it can happen to any of us. In fact, the longer you've been a Christian, the more at risk you are—not because God becomes less amazing, but because we become desensitized. We hear the same truths over and over, and they start to feel like background noise.

Today we're going to talk about what causes a heart to harden, what the warning signs are, and most importantly—how God softens hard hearts.

#### ☛ **HOW A HEART BECOMES HARDENED**

A hard heart doesn't usually happen overnight. It's **a gradual process**. It's like how your hands develop calluses when you do manual labor. The first time you pick up a shovel, you might get blisters. It hurts. But if you keep doing it day after day, your skin toughens up. Eventually, you can't feel much through those calluses. They protect you from the pain, but they also keep you from feeling much of anything else.

That's what happens spiritually. We get hurt, we get disappointed, we get busy, we get cynical—and slowly, layer by layer, our hearts develop spiritual calluses. We stop feeling as deeply as we once did. The Bible talks about this in several places. **Hebrews 3:12-13** says, "See to it that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily... so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."

Notice that phrase: "hardened by sin's deceitfulness." Sin is deceptive. It convinces us that we're fine when we're actually drifting. It convinces us that we're still close to God when our hearts are actually growing cold. So what causes this hardening? Let me give you a few things.

☛ **First, unrepented sin.** When we know we've sinned and we don't deal with it, it creates a barrier between us and God. And the longer we leave that sin unconfessed, the thicker the barrier



becomes. We stop sensing His presence. We stop feeling conviction. Our conscience becomes dull. It's like spiritual noise-canceling headphones, except you're the one who put them on.

☞ **Second, unanswered questions.** Maybe you prayed for something and God didn't answer the way you wanted. Maybe you went through something painful and you don't understand why God allowed it. And instead of wrestling with those questions honestly before God, you just shut down. You stop engaging. You put up walls to protect yourself from further disappointment. And those walls don't just keep out the hurt—they keep out God too.

☞ **Third, constant exposure without response.** This is the one that's particularly dangerous for people who've been in church a long time. You hear sermon after sermon, you read your Bible, you know all the right answers—but you never actually respond. You never let it change you. It's like listening to a smoke alarm going off until you don't even hear it anymore. The alarm is still sounding, but you've tuned it out. (And yes, I'm aware of the irony of warning you about this in a sermon that you might also tune out.)

Pharaoh is the classic example of this. In Exodus, God sends plague after plague on Egypt, and each time Pharaoh's heart becomes harder. Pharaoh kept resisting, kept refusing to respond, and eventually his heart became so hard that he couldn't respond even if he wanted to. Ten plagues. Ten chances. And by the end, Pharaoh's heart was harder than the bricks the Israelites were making.

### ☞ **THE SYMPTOMS OF A HARDENED HEART**

So how do you know if your heart is becoming hard? Let me give you some warning signs. Think of this as a spiritual checkup. No co-pay required.

☞ **First, spiritual apathy.** You used to care deeply about your relationship with God, but now it feels like you're just going through the motions. Prayer feels like a chore. Reading the Bible feels boring. Worship doesn't move you. You show up to church, but your heart's not really in it.

☞ **Second, defensiveness.** When someone speaks truth into your life—whether it's from the pulpit, from a friend, from your spouse—your first reaction is to defend yourself. You make excuses. You deflect. You get offended. That's a hard heart resisting conviction.

☞ **Third, cynicism.** You've become negative and critical. You're quick to point out what's wrong with the church, what's wrong with other Christians, what's wrong with the sermon. You've lost the ability to receive anything with humility and gratitude. If you find yourself mentally rewriting the sermon while I'm preaching it, we might need to talk.

☞ **Fourth, numbness to sin.** Things that used to bother you don't anymore. You've made peace with sins that you once struggled with. You've rationalized them, compartmentalized them. Your conscience doesn't sound the alarm like it used to.



☞ **Fifth, resistance to change.** Deep down, you don't really want God to mess with your life anymore. You're comfortable where you are. You like your routine, your priorities, your way of doing things. And the idea of God calling you to something different, something costly, something uncomfortable—you don't want to hear it.

☞ **And sixth, lack of compassion.** You've lost your burden for people who are lost. You don't pray for them. You don't share the gospel with them. You've become more focused on yourself, your comfort, your preferences, than on the people around you who desperately need Jesus.

If any of those resonated with you, you might have a hardened heart. Don't panic. But don't ignore it either.

### ☞ **THE DANGER OF A HARDENED HEART**

Before we get to the solution, I need to give you a warning. A hard heart is spiritually dangerous. In Matthew 13 Jesus is explaining why He teaches in parables, and He quotes from **Isaiah 6:9-10**: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused..."

☞ **A hard heart keeps you from perceiving spiritual truth.** You can hear the Word of God, you can be in the presence of God, and it makes no impact because your heart has become dull, unresponsive. And here's what's scary: If you keep hardening your heart, keep resisting God's Spirit, keep saying no to His conviction, you can reach a point where you're so calloused that you can't hear Him anymore.

**Hebrews 3:7-8** quotes Psalm 95: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." Notice the word "today." Not tomorrow. Not next week. Not when you get your life together. Today. Because tomorrow might be too late. You might not hear His voice as clearly tomorrow as you do today. The longer you wait to respond, the harder your heart becomes.

Think about it like frostbite. When your fingers are exposed to extreme cold, they start to go numb. At first, you feel the pain, the cold, and you can do something about it—get inside, warm up, maybe have some hot chocolate. But if you ignore it, if you stay out in the cold too long, eventually you stop feeling anything at all. Your fingers turn black and you lose them. Permanently. A hard heart is spiritual frostbite. At first, you feel the conviction, you sense God ☞ calling you back. But if you keep ignoring it, **eventually you stop feeling anything**. And that's when you're in real danger.

A hardened heart is a serious thing, but the good news is God specializes in softening hard hearts.

### ☞ **HOW TO SOFTEN A HARDENED HEART**

Okay, so here's the question: If your heart has become hard, what do you do?





☞ **The first step is to acknowledge it.** Don't minimize it. Don't make excuses. Just be honest before God. Say, "God, my heart has grown cold. I'm not where I used to be. I've become hardened, and I need You to soften me."

That's what David did. Look at **Psalms 51:10-12**. David had sinned grievously—adultery, murder, cover-up. Basically, he'd checked all the boxes on the "How to Mess Up Spectacularly" list. And when the prophet Nathan confronted him, David could have defended himself or made excuses. But he didn't. He broke. And he prayed: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation." David knew he couldn't fix his own heart. He needed God to do it.

☞ **The second step is to return to what you know is true.** When your emotions are numb, when you're not feeling anything, you can't rely on feelings. You have to go back to the truth. You have to remind yourself of who God is, what He's done, what His Word says—even if it doesn't move you in the moment. When your heart is hard, you hold on to truth, and you trust that God will restore the feeling in time. I've had to do this before. In fact, a few years ago my faith was tested and I began to question God. During that time, I wrote these lyrics:

*Are you still there? Do you still care? Do you hear my cry? As I ponder, my mind wanders, and I wonder why... all the trouble; will I crumble; how will I survive? Are you still there?*

*Lord, I'm so weak. Do you still speak? Do you see my pain? My heart's breaking. My faith's shaking underneath the strain. All the questions. So much tension. Is my faith in vain? Are you still there?*

*Lord, I know you're faithful and true. What you say is what you will do. So help my faith find the way back to you... By your grace I will still trust in you.*

I wasn't really feeling my walk with the Lord. I was doubting and questioning. But in the end, I had to remind myself of who God is and what he has promised. I held to what I knew was true.

☞ **The third step is to repent specifically.** Not just a vague "I'm sorry for being distant." But actually confess the specific sins that have built up calluses on your heart. Name them. Bring them into the light. Ask God to forgive you and cleanse you. **1 John 1:9** promises: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

☞ **The fourth step is to re-engage with God's people.** Isolation hardens hearts. We need each other. We need people who will speak truth to us, pray for us, encourage us, challenge us. **Hebrews 3:13** says, "But encourage one another daily... so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." Don't try to fight this battle alone. Get in community. Be honest with safe, trusted believers about where you are. Let them help you. I know vulnerability is terrifying. But spiritual isolation is more terrifying.



☞ **And finally, ask God to break your heart again.** This might sound strange, but we actually need our hearts broken by the things that break God's heart. We need to weep over sin again. We need to feel the weight of lostness again. We need to be moved by grace again.

### ☞ **THE HOPE FOR A HARDENED HEART**

Here's what I want you to hear: God doesn't want your heart to stay hard. He's not standing at a distance, arms crossed, waiting for you to get it together. He's pursuing you. He's calling you ☞ back. **He delights in restoring wandering hearts.**

Look at **Hosea 2:14**. God is speaking about His people who have abandoned Him, and listen to what He says: "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her." God allures. He draws. He speaks tenderly. Even when we've hardened our hearts toward Him, He hasn't hardened His heart toward us. He's not giving us the silent ☞ treatment. He's not playing hard to get. He's all in. **He pursues us.**

Jesus told a parable about this in Luke 15—the story of the Prodigal Son. The son takes his inheritance, leaves home, wastes it all, and ends up feeding pigs. He's at rock bottom. And when he finally comes to his senses and heads home, what does the father do? He doesn't stand on the porch with his arms crossed, making his son grovel. He doesn't make him fill out an application to be re-accepted into the family. He runs. He runs down the road, embraces his son, throws a party. That's your Father. That's how He responds when a hard heart begins to soften, when a cold heart begins to warm, when a distant child begins to come home.

### **CONCLUSION**

Church, if your heart has grown hard, today is the day to do something about it. Don't wait. Don't assume it will just get better on its own. It won't. But I also want you to know—there's hope. God can soften the hardest heart. He's done it before, and He'll do it again. He did it for David. He did it for the Prodigals who came home. He can do it for you. Maybe you need to pray David's prayer right now: "Create in me a pure heart, O God."

*"Father, we confess that our hearts have grown hard. Some of us have been going through the motions. Some of us have been resisting Your conviction. Some of us have let sin build up walls ☞ between us and You. We're sorry. We don't want to stay here. We're asking You to **soften our hearts again. Break through the calluses.** Remove the stones. Give us hearts that feel, hearts that respond, hearts that love You the way we once did. **Do the work that only You can do.** In Jesus' name, Amen."*