

Soften Your Hardened Hearts

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[0 : 00] All right. Well, it's good to have the opportunity to see our children cared for and taught by our teachers. And so, man, just grateful for our children's ministry workers and the work they've just done over the many years of the ministry of our church and this opportunity they have to raise our young children to know the Lord, to know him better. Well, as we prepare to return to the subject of how we come to soften our hardened hearts, let me first lead us in prayer as we prepare to hear God's Word. Our Father, I recognize there's a bit of a catch-22 in this sermon, Lord, in that if we don't have softened hearts, it's hard to hear your words. Yet, we need to hear your words to have our hearts softened. So, I'm asking for the intervention of your Holy Spirit our efforts are futile unless your spirit is at work. And yet, we ask, Lord God, that he may help us, giving us eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to understand, that you may make clear the wisdom that we're going to encounter in God's Word, that you give clarity to me and clarity to my speech. And Lord God, that we ourselves may find that there is a deep wisdom, a great wisdom, one that moves us and transforms us. Lord, we come to know you through your Word. We come to know you through all the ways that you revealed yourself to us. And we pray that we may come to know you better and find that there is real hope in knowing Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

All right. Well, once every few years, I don't know, do you guys ever get on YouTube and sometimes get lost down a rabbit hole of videos every once in a while? Is that a, okay, it's not just me. All right, every once in a while that happens to me.

And there's a one particular, it's been a few years since I've spent some time seeing some of these, but there's a whole slew of videos out there of just really interesting phenomenon. It's videos of people who are colorblind. I'm not colorblind. I don't know if anyone here is colorblind. I've since learned that some people are colorblind and they just haven't, they spend years of their life and have no idea that they're colorblind.

But there's a video of colorblind people who for the first time get to see the full spectrum of colors. They've gone all their life, sometimes decades of their life, and certain colors they're not able to see. They're not able to distinguish between red and green. That's one of the most common kinds. It's sort of a muddy brown looking color. And for the first time, they get to see the full spectrum of colors. They get to see what most of us take for granted. And they're able to do that because a company called Enchroma accidentally stumbled on a technology, a special set of glasses.

And these glasses help to draw out the distinctions between the different wavelengths and light. They sort of give the eyes of colorblind people a little bit of extra help. And all of a sudden, they're able to tell colors apart and to distinguish colors in a way that they never could before.

[3 : 30] And can you imagine that? Imagine for the first time in your life, you look all around you and you discover colors you literally have never seen and never even imagined were real.

And the reaction, it's what makes these videos precious. You know, of course, like I'm not seeing any new colors. What is special about the videos is the reactions of people who've put on these glasses, their eyes adjust, and they look around at the world around them. You know, they, for the first time, they look around and they look at the grass and the trees and they see all sorts of shades of green they never saw before. They look at flowers and see brilliant red flowers where before they couldn't tell the flowers apart from the leaves. They look in their children's eyes and see what color they are for the first time. And their reactions range from baffled to quietly stunned to freaking out to breaking down in tears. And I would just add a word of caution, too. Don't go watching the videos with your kids because sometimes the language is just as colorful as the colors that they're seeing. But it's pretty, it's just this absolutely fascinating response. And it makes me think, what would it be like to put on those glasses and all of a sudden there's this, the whole world looks different. And all of a sudden you see for the first time what everyone else around you has been talking about all your

life and that you couldn't see and you couldn't understand. What would it be like? And it's so funny to see some of them, they're just actually almost overwhelmed because this world of these sort of muddy, indistinct colors all of a sudden is transformed into these blinding, vibrant hues that most of us have become accustomed to. And one of the most common responses from the people wearing these glasses, probably the single thing that's said the most besides the colorful language, is that they turn to their family and to their friends who are standing around them and all in tears and they ask them, is this what you see all the time? Is this what you see all the time? Last week we thought about that question a little bit. We considered a question that Jesus Christ posed to his disciples. Are your hearts hardened? Are your hearts hardened? And Jesus identified that there was a resistance, a resistance in his disciples, a resistance to seeing, a resistance to understanding, a resistance to trusting Jesus. And Jesus asked his disciples further, having eyes, do you not see? Having ears, do you not hear? And we explored how Jesus, he demonstrates through his ministry that even his own disciples can, they can, they can see and respond to him, but their sight is blurry and they're not far removed from the enemies of Jesus. They're not far removed from the Pharisees who their eyesight isn't just blurry. They are completely blind to who Jesus is.

And as for us today, perhaps colorblind is a good way to describe us. Colorblind. Most Christians I talk to, they can see Jesus better than his first disciples did. They're not quite as baffled by all that Jesus says and does. I mean, Jesus tells the disciples over and over and over again that he's going to Jerusalem, he's going to suffer, he's going to die, he's going to be raised to life again. And no matter how many times he says it, it just, in one ear, out the other, they just can't make sense out of it. They dismiss it, they filter it out. And now we see things a little bit more clearly on this side of the cross, on this side of the empty tomb. But that's thanks to the Holy Spirit who has not only given us the words of scriptures that tell us the truth about who Jesus is, but the Holy Spirit has revealed Jesus more fully to every Christian. He's illuminated, he's lit up the truth of who Jesus Christ is. So we've gone from this place of just darkness where we can't see anything at all, from darkness and blindness to now things are illuminated, things can be seen, and we're walking around, we're seeing the truth, and we're seeing who Jesus is, fully God and fully man. We're seeing what he has done for us, and we've put our faith in him. And we're colorblind still. There are aspects of Jesus, hues and tones and shades and brilliance that most Christians I encounter seem to be missing. We seem to be missing. We're looking right at Jesus, and I don't know about you, but sometimes Jesus seems to many of us to be this drab, muddy, brownish-looking person. He doesn't come across in vivid color. He doesn't cause us to marvel.

Our hearts are hardened. Now, where does your mind go? Let me ask you this question, because I think this shows how drab and colorless the Jesus that we look at is. Where does your mind go when it's free to wander? What thoughts do you tend to come back into your mind when you're left by yourself? Who or what do you talk about when you're with friends and you're free to set the subject of conversation? Who or what do you do like talking about? How often is the answer to those questions Jesus? How often have you come to church on Sunday morning, and your mindset is, honestly, you're just trying to get through the worship service to get to what you really want to do later today. That's what you're really excited about. That's what's vivid and colorful. How dispensable to you, how dispensable to you is it to gather to worship Jesus Christ? Is it a small thing to neglect it?

Maybe our hearts are hardened still. You know, we're not rock hard, not like the Pharisees, but hardened nonetheless. You know, we're just, there's that stiffness. We're colorblind, and Jesus doesn't come across in vivid color. The last time we considered what, what it is about Jesus that we react to? What is it that we react to with a hardened heart? What is it about Jesus that we find hard? What is it that our hearts are resisting? Well, here's the things that we considered as we looked at Mark chapters two and three. Just as review, we found that number one, a hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who forgives our sin. A hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who forgives our sin. Number two, a hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who honors us with his presence. Hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who honors us with his presence. Number three, a hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who shatters our conventions. Number four, a hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who interprets God's expectations of us. And number five, a hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who helps us flourish.

[10:58] And it's so funny that like, why would we be resistant to those things? But as we saw last week, it's when we dive into the details of what those things signify and what that means and the things we're gonna have to give up to really buy that and to really believe that about Jesus.

Oh man, we're not sure we wanted Jesus to be like that. We're not really sure we want Jesus to play that role in our lives. We're not really sure that we want to believe that God would send his son to be all those things.

And so we ended the sermon with, I made a promise that we would come back this Sunday to learn the process, to learn the process by how a heart is hardened and then the process of how that heart can be softened again.

And so that's what we're going to spend our whole time on today. How is a heart hardened step by step and the process of how a heart can be softened step by step.

And so we know a heart can grow resistant. We know eyes can grow blind. Ears can go deaf. But how did we get our hardened hearts?

[12:03] What got us here? What got us to be colorblind? For many of you, maybe many of you, that's a process that actually has happened since becoming a Christian. You had this love and joy for Jesus.

Everything seems so vivid. And now you feel that you've lost your first love. You've lost the love that you had at first. Even as Christians, it is possible to nurture a hardened heart.

It's possible to nurture a hardened heart. And I'm going to explore four ways that a heart is hardened. Four ways that a heart is hardened. And so these four attitudes are present in each one of us.

When we nurture these four attitudes, when we indulge them, and these are things that we all experience from time to time. These are all sins that come, that can crop up. But there's a difference between putting us, fighting a sin, putting it to death, calling it what it is, repenting of it, turning away.

And there's a difference between doing that and on the other hand, indulging it, letting it dwell in you, letting it sink in and soak into you and just living and wallowing in it. And so there's four attitudes that we indulge over time.

[13:09] And as we indulge them, our hearts are hardened. So here are four ways a heart is hardened. First, a heart is hardened through pride. A heart is hardened through pride.

And we've all been there, haven't we? Oh boy. There is a universal human aversion to shame. We don't like shame. We don't want to feel small and lowly and weak and insignificant. Oh, we don't like that. So we look for ways to elevate ourselves, to make ourselves feel significant, to burnish our reputations, to boost our esteem.

And we look for ways that we can find ways to do that either by our connections with something or someone else or through our own efforts and our own accomplishments and achievements.

And there may be never have been a more achieved, successful man than Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who we heard about this morning from Daniel chapter four. And a chapter later in Daniel chapter five, here's how the prophet, here's how Daniel describes Nebuchadnezzar to one of his successors.

[14:20] He says, O king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar, your father, kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him.

Whom he would, he killed. And whom he would, he kept alive. Whom he would, he raised up. And whom he would, he humbled. But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne and his glory was taken from him. And we read all about that. Nebuchadnezzar was a great king. He was a king over kings, a king of kings. He was the ruler of a mighty empire and he knew it and he acted like it.

His heart was lifted up. His spirit was hardened so that it had dealt proudly. And back in Daniel chapter four, we are told the words of pride that Nebuchadnezzar had spoken.

Is not this great Babylon which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty. His make Babylon great project had succeeded.

[15:39] One of the joys of being a king is, you know, the rest is we kind of have to sort of conceal our pride. We're really, really careful about it. Okay, we, because we know that if we start to boast and get arrogant, all the people around us are going to put us in our place.

And so we're really careful. We're really careful about letting this sort of thing out. And one of the joys of being the king of kings is you don't have to be careful about it. You can just say, you can just say what you really think.

We want to feel great. Nebuchadnezzar not only got to feel great, he got to express that feeling fully. Oh man, what a joy that must have been to him to be able to just like let out all that was on his heart.

Let go all these expansive feelings about himself and how great he was. And Nebuchadnezzar though, he was put in his place. He was immediately met with a response. Even if on earth there was no voice that could put him in his place, there was a voice from heaven that could put him in his place.

And that voice said, while the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven.

Oh King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken. The kingdom has departed from you.

[16 : 50] The kingdom has departed from you. Nebuchadnezzar was about to be judged. He was about to be driven insane for seven years. Why?

Because of his pride. His pride hardened his heart. And so he was blind to the one who truly is the king of kings.

He was blind to the supremacy of God, that it was God who made him great, not himself.

Nebuchadnezzar elevated himself as more than a creature.

He elevated himself to the status of creator. And a proud heart is one that does not carefully recognize that distinction, that you are not the creator, you are just a creature.

And so the one true creator reduced him to the lowest form of creature, reduced him to the status of a wild animal, driving him insane.

[17 : 50] In the Lord's Prayer that Jesus teaches us in Matthew chapter 6, there's a famous line in which Jesus prays, thy kingdom come.

It's a plea that God's kingdom, God's reign, would be fully established, would be finally established on the earth. That is an amazing prayer. What a stunning prayer, thy kingdom come.

It is not the prayer of a proud heart. There have been many Christian thinkers who have taken that and flipped it on its head and observed that, you know what the prayer of a proud heart is?

The deep down, the voice of a proud heart prays this, my kingdom come, my kingdom come. It is the prayer of a Nebuchadnezzar. It is the wish that I could be on the throne, that I could be recognized recognized as a great person, a great person who does great things, a person of distinction, a person of fame, admired by all my peers, all the likes and all the video views and all the things that people look up to.

Someone whose perspective reigns supreme, everyone who listens to me agrees with me, gets in line with how I see the world, aligns themselves with me.

[19 : 16] You can see how this might harden your heart. When you're at the center of your life story, when you are the central character in your life story in the world, the story of your life is a story of you and how everyone has treated you and how people have responded to you and whether they have supported you and whether they have elevated and esteemed you.

It is you that reigns supreme. Any truth that might humble you, any truth that might put you to shame in your mind, you will suppress.

You will suppress it. You won't even see it. You won't be able to hear it. You won't have ears to hear. Your heart will grow harder. To be proud is to have a heart that does not fear the Lord.

It does not tremble because that sort of heart does not see that our God, our Lord, He alone, He is great in power and significance. We fear what is great in power and significance.

And a heart that is proud does not fear the Lord because it sees Him as small in power, small in significance. A heart is hardened through pride. Then second, a heart is hardened through fear.

[20 : 34] There's actually a bit of a progression here. A heart is hardened through fear. Here's how this builds on pride. The irony is that when you elevate yourself and you no longer fear the Lord, your efforts are to elevate yourself, you need the Lord to be small, pocket-sized, forgettable, and you no longer fear Him.

He is at best an accessory to your life. He is at best someone who exists to make you feel better about yourself. And when you have reduced God in size, then you start to fear anything and everything else.

You start to fear anything and everything else because it quickly becomes apparent. If you have lived, I've never met anyone in their 30s who, unless they're a narcissist, still has this, who still believes that the world is their oyster and they can do whatever they want and they're unstoppable.

You soon figure that out pretty quickly. That's not true. There are a lot of threats in this world, threats to our safety, to our status, to our success, to our relationships and our pleasures, threats to our health and wellness.

The world is full of threatening things, things that will bring us down. That's certainly been a lesson driven home to us in a time of ugly politics, a time of persistent pandemic, in a time of smoke-filled skies and wildfires.

[22 : 10] At any moment, we could be driven out of our town and we know it. We're a people under threat and we've been so busy elevating ourselves and we've convinced ourselves that, oh, God is small.

He's small. He's forgettable. And because God is small, we're now afraid of everything else. And there is something that fear does to us. There is something that fear does to us at this point.

Fear gives us blinkers. And I'm not talking about turn signals on a car. Some of you maybe wish more people would have blinkers, be using their blinkers. But I'm talking about the original blinkers, the blinders that you put onto a horse.

And so a horse has got, he wears, sometimes you put blinkers on a horse. Why would you do that? Does anyone know? Why do you put blinkers or blinders on a horse? So they don't get distracted. What does it do? What do the blinkers or blinders do? They keep it focused. They keep the horse looking straight ahead. They keep it not from looking at all the other things around it that are getting anxious.

[23 : 20] You know, that's something that happens actually to us. Like, it's funny because blinkers help actually reduce a horse's anxiety because it doesn't get distracted by all the scary things around it. But the ironic thing is for us, when we are fearful, when we are afraid, it's like a set of blinkers comes on.

When we're anxious, when we're afraid, we get blinkers. Our eyes fix and focus on what we perceive as the threat. Everything else gets blocked out. We don't carefully evaluate the threat from different, we don't stop and see it from different angles that might bring us wisdom.

We don't take a step back and really see things clearly. Your mind gets kind of warped, doesn't it? I don't know about you, but if you have ever lived in a state of fear or anxiety for a long period of time, it's like living in a valley choked with wildfire smoke.

You can't even breathe and everything seems, your whole way of thinking gets fogged up.

Sometimes you need a word from a friend to reframe things and it's like climbing up on a mountain and all of a sudden you breathe more clearly and you see more clearly and you're like, what in the world was going on with my thinking?

You perceive a threat, you get fearful or anxious and then you react. You react knee-jerk, fast, instinctively and usually very foolishly. Now, if you're hiking on a trail and you're in a true threat situation, let's say a bear is charging at you on a trail, that's actually exactly what you want.

[24 : 53] You want blinkers. You don't want to slow down. You don't want to consider the situation from different angles. You don't want to be like, hmm, how is God providentially at work in my life right now as this bear charges at me?

I wonder what promises and instructions God has given me right now in his word, the scriptures. Let me pull up my phone. Let me call some friends and hear some words of reminder for them. You know, let me call the local wildlife office and see what all their perspectives are on it.

No! You instantly react out of fear. You, you know, you focus on the threat, you've just got one thing on your mind, there's a bear, and you react and that's appropriate. But what if you live that way all the time?

What if all of life is full of threat? Our pride has convinced us that God is not great. And so we no longer have a great God who is telling us things like this, fear not, for I am with you.

Fear not, for I am with you. We don't hear that voice or if we do hear that voice in scriptures over and over and over again, it doesn't mean much to us because God is not that great.

[26 : 09] He's not that big. And instead, we're afraid all the time. We're worried. We're anxious about money. We're worried and anxious about other people and what they could say and what they could do and what they're thinking about us.

We're worried and anxious about suffering and death. And when you cultivate this state of fear and you settle down there and you make it your home, those blinkers remain.

And they remain until you can't even imagine that there's anything other than what you're looking at, anything other than what threatens you. It controls you and dominates your life.

Sometimes we turn back to God. Sometimes people who have spent so long in the state of fear and they turn back to God and they have forgotten what he's really like because their eyes have not been on him.

They have not been paying attention to all that they find in scripture and they don't even know how to read the scriptures and to see the goodness of God anymore and they look to him and they see God as, okay, now he's great. I see him, but I don't see that he's good anymore.

[27 : 11] He just looks like a threat too. And so rather than this fear of God that sees him as great and as good and just, and so this fear is reassuring and reverent.

Instead of seeing God as this powerful father who is with me and is working for my good and so I fear before him in a healthy and good way.

Instead we see him with this blinded, slavish terror. We blinker out his obvious goodness. Here's one of my favorite examples and here's just a perfect example of what blinkering looks like in a person.

Here's something from Judges chapter 13. God promises a son to a man named Manoah and to Manoah's wife and when they realize that it's God, they're encountered God and they've been speaking to him in person, Manoah completely freaks out.

He says, we shall surely die for we have seen God. Because to see God meant that you were going to die. And then his wife speaks up and makes him kind of look like a fool.

[28 : 22] Many of you men know that experience with your wives because she sees a lot of things that Manoah has blinkered out. His wife said to him, if the Lord had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands or shown us all these things or now announced to us such things as these.

All Manoah is doing is just reacting out of fear. He only sees one thing a threat. He's blinkered out all these obvious things that why would God have done all this stuff if he were just going to kill us? Hello. When our hearts become proud, they then become fearful. And when they're full of fear, we can no longer hear the promise of God, fear not, for I am with you.

The Lord's Prayer begins with the phrase, our Father who art in heaven, our Father who art in heaven. But a hardening heart has convinced itself, I have no Father in heaven.

I have no Father in heaven. If there's anyone in heaven, he's not a Father to me. And blinkered by our fear, you can no longer see all the good around you.

[29 : 40] You grow resistant to seeing God as good. You grow resistant to seeing the goodness and the beauty of Jesus Christ. A heart is hardened through fear. And then third, a heart is hardened through disgust.

A heart is hardened through disgust. There's one particular fear that runs through a proud heart. It is the fear of being attached to a shameful person or to a shameful event.

The fear of being attached to a shameful person or a shameful event. Maybe you know you've done something horrible. Maybe you know something horrible has been done to you.

You know you ought to be better. You know you ought to be doing better. And you're disgusted with yourself. If everyone knew who you were and what you did and what happened to you, you're convinced they would share your disgust.

Or, you know someone else who has done something horrible, someone else who has said something horrible, or someone who has had something horrible done to them.

[30 : 50] And you're disgusted with that person. You don't want your kids to be around someone like that. You don't want them to get contaminated.

Or to be honest, maybe you're just disgusted that they're so weak and so pathetic. We have special labels we've learned to apply to people like these. The weak and pathetic people.

We call them, you know, in politics, we look at the people who don't think like us. Oh, they're just a bunch of sheep. That person's a welfare queen.

Oh, this friend of mine, what a drama queen. We have all these labels and names and things that we use to ridicule and dismiss the pathetic people. The kind of thing you'd say to a friend with a smirk on your face.

And so, these labels help you to quarantine yourself away from them. Your heart gets hardened toward that person. Your heart gets resistant to letting them associate with you.

[31 : 51] The last thing you'd want is to be stuck in a family with them. And oh boy, that's something that's really scary about Jesus because he has a way of sticking us in a family with people like that.

We distance ourselves from people made in the image of God and when we do that we distance ourselves from God. which is something that Jesus never did. Last week we saw how Jesus, he horrified the Pharisees because he would go and he would actually sit down and have dinner with tax collectors and sinners.

Consider then this moment in Jesus' life. Let me show you another, just here's, you can just sense the disgust here. In Luke chapter 7 Jesus allows something to happen that is just absolutely scandalous and his Pharisee host is disgusted.

In Luke chapter 7 one of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table and behold a woman of the city who was a sinner when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house brought an alabaster flask of ointment and standing behind him at his feet weeping she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he said to himself if this man were a prophet he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him for she is a sinner.

[33 : 30] As Pharisee he is blinded by his disgust. His heart is hardened. All he sees is this woman of ill repute this prostitute getting up close to Jesus she is using her tears she is using her hair on him to clean him she is kissing his feet she is anointing him and boy if you think that would be weird and awkward and scandalous in our culture multiply that by five or ten.

That was way out of line. That's the kind of thing that's scandalous if the Pharisees were on social media they would be sharing this with one another they would be all shaking their heads oh man we thought this Jesus guy was a pretty good rabbi but boy how far he has fallen he's no prophet at all Messiah are you kidding me disgusting disgusting so when they're discussed they go blind to who Jesus is as we learned last week they are no longer they by this point are no longer engaging in good faith with Jesus they're no longer dialoguing with him in good faith they're no longer humble and and trying to learn and understand who he is in fact right before this event in Luke chapter 7 Jesus accuses them of playing games with him being childish the Pharisees don't want to get themselves contaminated they want to make themselves holy by dealing with shame their way by handling shame themselves they do not want to submit themselves to

Jesus and they do not want to submit to his plan to make them holy through faith in him that through him they can be made holy not through their own efforts in the Lord's prayer Jesus urges us to pray to God hallowed be thy name and what you're praying when you do that is you pray that God's name be recognized and revered as holy he is the one who makes people holy but what we are effectively praying is hallowed be my name hallowed be my name I want to be made holy on my own terms by my own efforts to be separated from all the disgusting things and if there's something about disgusting about me I just want to make sure nobody finds out to hide to cover it up to point out all the other disgusting people out there so no one looks at me and we don't know how to run to our God who makes us holy our pride leaves us vulnerable to fear and one fear in particular that Jesus may expose your shame that you might get attached to a shameful person that you might that Jesus might get himself caught up in shameful things like the Pharisees we no longer see Jesus as he is a heart is hardened through disgust so now the fourth and final way our hearts are hardened a heart is hardened through disobedience a heart is hardened through disobedience because our pride our fear our disgust they now are in the driver's seat and they now lead us to speak and to act in disobedience to God we violate and defy his law we violate his right expectation the right expectations that govern our relationships we violate his expectation of how we ought to behave we misrepresent the character of God that we are meant to reflect and every time you sin every time you disobey your heart gets a little bit harder a little bit harder harder harder harder and that is why we are warned in

Hebrews chapter three exhort one another every day as long as it is called today that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin for we have come to share in Christ if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end as it is said today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion you see it was God he was the one who rescued the people of Israel from slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt and yet God's people rebelled against him in their disobedience they hardened their hearts and when we disobey our minds become further deceived when we

disobey we go more blind and more deaf than we ever did before Israel's hearts became hardened and the irony of that was their old master Pharaoh was known for having a heart that was hard that he hardened against the Lord and all of a sudden they're behaving like

[38 : 32] Pharaoh they remained like their old and terrible master became more and more like him instead of becoming holy and good like their new Lord and master the Lord's prayer teaches us to say to God thy will be done but that's not the way the hardened heart thinks the hardened heart has a desire for a disobedience and so its prayer is this my will be done my will be done a heart is hardened through disobedience and so through these four attitudes our heart grows progressively harder and finally it has replaced the Lord's prayer and it's replaced it with its own creed I have no father in heaven hallowed be my name my kingdom come my will be done on earth what do you think is this the kind of prayer that you want to govern your life is this the creed by which you wish to live the prayer of a hardened heart or do you want your heart to soften do you want to put on new glasses see the world in new colors to look at Jesus Christ the son of God and with new life to see him as he is as he really is so much better than you ever thought to see yourself and to see the people in the world around you in brilliant color like you've never seen them before then soften your hardened heart soften your hardened heart it's time it is high time to remember who God is and who you are it is now time to get ears to hear eyes to see a heart to understand we've learned that there is a process by which your heart is hardened and did you know that there is a process by which your heart may be softened there is a process by which your heart may be softened there is the Holy

Spirit he has showed us the way the way that he blesses the way that he encourages us as we walk the path he's spoken through the scriptures he's passed on to us what Jesus Christ has said here's the wisdom that shows how to soften your hardened heart there are many scriptures we can turn to that will show us this wisdom I think what I'm going to tell you none of it is going to seem foreign to you if you've spent any time reading the Bible but I find Matthew chapter 11 verses 25 to 30 to be very helpful for this if you've got your Bible it'd be helpful to turn there it's on page 816 and here's what we read in Matthew chapter 11 verses 25 to 30 at that time Jesus declared I thank you father Lord of heaven and earth that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children yes father for such was your gracious will all things have been handed over to me by my father and no one knows the son except the father and no one knows the father except the son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light this is a passage on a personal level that when

I was a younger and more foolish man I looked at this and be like oh yeah this is one of those favorite verses ones that you know it's not tough enough it's like I wanted one that had a bit more of an edgy and more of an attitude and the longer that I've lived the more I've seen the effects how how hard it is to soften our hearts and how much suffering we bring on ourselves and on other people through our hardened hearts and how prevalent and powerful the sin is and how much we need a savior the more I'm seeing we need this we need to hear this let's move through this passage let's learn five ways to soften your hardened heart first soften your hardened heart by admitting your lowliness you soften your hardened heart by admitting your lowliness look at what he says in verses 25 and 26 at that time Jesus declared I thank you father Lord of heaven and earth that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children yes father for such was your gracious will now isn't that remarkable because Jesus is thanking

God his father and what he's thanking God his father for is this he's marveling that these things are what his father has chosen to do that he is Lord of heaven and earth and what is he doing he is hiding the knowledge of who his Messiah is he's hiding the knowledge of who his Messiah is who is he hiding it from the wise and understanding people like the Pharisees men like Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar the great the mighty the wise the proud and who does God reveal Jesus to little children the lowliest sinners the littlest children this is the good news of God's kingdom this is the gospel story when we look at the gospel through the lens of honor and shame the way that the readers of that culture would certainly have looked at it through we see the gospel story expressed in this way God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble he hides things from the proud and the wise he reveals them to humble

children the only ones who can enter his kingdom that's grace that's this unmerited favor and kindness it's the gracious will of God here's how James

Jesus brother here's how he puts it in chapter 4 of his New Testament letter here's what God does for us here's how you respond by admitting your lowliness he gives more grace therefore it says God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble submit yourselves therefore to God resist the devil and he will flee from you draw near to God and he will draw near to you cleanse your hands you sinners and purify your hearts you double-minded be wretched and mourn and weep let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom humble yourselves before the Lord Lord and he will exalt you James says when you look at your sin and you look it in the eye and see it for what it is and you weep and you mourn over it and you mourn because you feel your lowliness because you're no longer in denial about your shame and you let it affect you and you don't try to deflect away from it and cover it up you let yourself feel it and you bring it to God and you admit it all to God and you tell him the truth and you humble yourself before the Lord and you let go of all of those efforts that you pour so much energy into to manage your shame to save face to prop up your self-esteem and you stop pouring all your energy into that and instead you humble yourself before the Lord and you know what happens when you do that he will exalt you isn't it great to let God manage your honor and not you to just be so free how free would you feel if you didn't have to do that anymore God opposes the proud but he will give grace to the humble you come to the Lord and here's what you say I'm just a child I only have my sin I only have my weakness my inadequacy my unworthiness that's all I bring nothing in my hands I bring simply to that cross I cling soften your hardened heart by admitting your lowliness and second soften your hardened heart by confessing your ignorance soften your hardened heart by confessing your ignorance here's what

[47 : 32] Jesus says in Matthew 11 verse 27 all things have been handed over to me by my father and no one knows the son except the father and no one knows the father except the son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him God the father wants everyone to honor his son you know that that is the father's deep motivation out of love for his son that's why he created the world that's why he saved you if you are a Christian because he wants everyone to honor his son Jesus Christ and so he hands over all authority to his son he hands him the keys to his kingdom and the only way to know God and the only way to know him as your father is to know his son Jesus Christ that is why no other religion can lead you to God that is why no other religion can save that is why it is only faith in Jesus Christ that can save because it all goes through his son whom he loves there is only one man who knows the way out of guilt and shame and death there is only one man who knows the way to God confess your ignorance you do not know the way you are ignorant to the way you all you know is you you know the man who knows the way to the throne of God you know the only one who knows the father you do not know God apart from his son Jesus Christ that's all you know I know him and he knows the way perhaps you've attended a church for many years and if you have had a church attended a church for many years at some point you might all of a sudden find that the blinders have dropped and you the and you find yourself learning a stunning new spiritual truth has that ever happened to you you've been church for decades and all of a sudden some sort of stunning truth about God is revealed to you something that you never knew before and and now all of a sudden seems so obvious how did

I not see this how did I not understand this about God how did I not know this about the world around me how could I have been so blind I ought to have figured this out by now don't act so surprised why would you think you can know anything of God at all is it not the grace of God that you know him at all only his grace is it not only through his son that you can know him it is good to confess this to God it is good to agree with him that this is true it is good to say I don't know the way Lord I don't know the way I don't even know how to live it's good to say father I do not I do not know you and I cannot know you unless your son chooses to show me who you are that is the only way I can know you soften your hardened heart by confessing your ignorance third soften your hardened heart by trusting Jesus Christ soften your hardened heart by trusting Jesus Christ yes he is the way verse 28 he speaks to you these words of invitation come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest come to me in your pride in your disobedience you have been laboring hard laboring to keep yourself elevated and esteemed come to me in your fear in your disgust you are heavy laden by cares and by anxieties come to me bring your pride bring your fear your disgust your disobedience that's all you have anyway bring these things lay them down at the foot of the cross come to me as you are and I will give you rest it is time to be set free it is time to stop trusting

yourself and to start trusting Jesus it is time to stop believing in yourself and to start believing in Jesus it is time to believe that he was crucified for you and he rose again for you and he is seated at the right hand of God for you so that you too can die and rise again and reign with him forever and ever what more can he say what more can he do that would lead you to trust him he has done it all and now you must decide will you trust him or won't you will you trust him or won't you soften your hard heart by trusting Jesus Christ fourth soften your hardened heart by enjoying Jesus Christ in verse 29 Jesus assures you that he really is good he really is good take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls you will find rest if you know him truly if you know that he is with you this is not the sort of rest that you might find you know in this nice poster of a serene mountain lake and there's a cabin and you're like ah if only I were there I would have rest this is the kind of you know because anyone can offer you that kind of rest when all the circumstances of your life are perfect and serene and peaceful this rest that Jesus offers is rest that comes in a turbulent world in the middle of it in a world ruined by sin in a world shaken by conflict full of death and disease

and decay and in the middle of all that storm he is your joy and you can say to him I find rest in you Lord if you truly knew his heart you would enjoy him you would enjoy knowing him if you knew him if you just truly knew him to the depth of his heart do you ever have that do you have a friend of yours that when you first got to know him you didn't know them that well and you weren't that drawn to them but the more you got to know them the more you thought this person is wonderful I just enjoy them and I can't wait to be with them and I the more I know them the more I love them the more sweet they are to my taste that's what Jesus is like you would enjoy him more than anyone you've ever met if you really knew his heart he's just better he's better than you you know he's even better than you why would you not trust him he's not abusive like many of the people you've known he's not a bad leader he's not out to use you up spit you out he's better than any master you could enslave yourself to he's better than any wealth you could possess he's better than any pleasure you could pursue he's better than any person you could ever win over enjoy him know him soften your heart and heart by enjoying

Jesus Christ and then fifth and finally soften your heart and heart by obeying Jesus Christ soften your heart and heart by obeying Jesus Christ because just as disobeying Jesus will harden your heart the reverse is true your heart grows softer as you obey him you obey him and you find that he really is good think of that line from that hymn Jesus Jesus how I trust him how I've proved him or and or I've proved him over and over why?

because I obey him and I found that he really is good I know many people who have disobeyed Jesus Christ and come to deeply regret it I have never met anyone who obeyed him and came to regret it when you obey him you come to realize bit by bit that you are not alone that he is with you that he is good that's why he tells you in verse 30 my yoke is easy and my burden is light Jesus isn't like the legalistic and abusive Pharisees of his day he isn't like them he doesn't load us with burdens hard to bear it's funny because we're used to looking at God's law and thinking of it as heavy and hard and burdensome and yet in 1 John chapter 5 we're told his commandments are not burdensome his commandments are not burdensome why not?

[56 : 58] well they are burdensome if you're trying to do it out do them out of your own power in your own strength out of your own energy for your own honor to elevate yourself they are burdensome if you try to do them from a hardened heart but for a softened heart they are easy and light because a softened heart is relying on his spirit is walking in step with him is drawing near to him Jesus' commandments are impossible to obey unless he is with us and we are with him united with him trusting and depending on him and then they are easy say to him I will do your will Lord I will do your will admit your lowliness confess your ignorance trust Jesus Christ enjoy him obey him begin to practice these things and God himself will begin to soften your hardened hearts and the God of peace will be with you our father we are people who perhaps for many of us we know that way of the hardened heart the hardening heart better than the way of the softening heart

Lord we repent I myself have I know I've I'm often guilty of of all that pride of centering my life and my story on myself and what's happening to me and am I being elevated enough am I being protected enough I grow fearful I grow disgusted with others and myself and I disobey you Lord let us walk in this better path we are low we are ignorant lowly we are ignorant and so we come to you we trust your son he is good he is brilliant we have been colorblind to him but he is so good and so we come to him and we want to obey him and I know that as we depend on him and rely on him we

will find that obeying him in fact is a light burden and an easy load because he is with us
Lord let us practice these things and bit by bit soften our hardened hearts Amen the Teachout the
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