

# Hebrews 3:7-19

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you're looking in one of the Pew Bibles, it's found on page 1002. We are looking at Hebrews chapter 3, verses 7 through 19 this morning.

Hebrews chapter 3, starting at verse 7. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.

On the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for 40 years. Therefore, I was provoked with that generation and said they always go astray in their heart.

They have not known my ways. As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest. Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

But 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.

[ 1 : 23 ] As it is said today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt, led by Moses?

And with whom was he provoked for 40 years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?

So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. When I was growing up outside of Boston, I played ice hockey for the town youth hockey program.

And when I was in sixth grade, I had a coach named Jack. Jack fit some people's stereotype of a native Bostonian hockey fan coach. He yelled a lot.

He cursed a lot. He was missing a couple of teeth. And he had a definite Boston accent. Jack chose to have our weekly team practices on Saturday mornings at either 6 or 7 a.m.

[ 2 : 25 ] on alternating weeks in the coldest rink in our area. There was no heat in the locker rooms in the middle of winter. It was freezing. But he always began with enough skating drills to leave us sweating bullets, gasping for air, pleading for a water break.

Jack was a tough guy. The next year, I moved into the next age bracket. And I had a different coach. Coach Bill introduced himself to us the first day of the season.

And I remember him saying, I want you all to know I'm not a yeller. I love the game of hockey. I want to help you improve. But I'm not going to scream and holler a lot. Bill was a nice guy.

Even tempered, kind, reasonable. Now, because he was a nice guy, he sometimes had trouble maintaining control over a team of rambunctious middle school boys, as we were.

Well, this fall, we're looking at the book of Hebrews. The book of Hebrews is written in the style of a coach addressing his team. At the end of the book, the writer describes his book as a word of exhortation.

[ 3 : 29 ] But the author of Hebrews is neither simply a tough guy who just yells and screams all the time, nor simply a nice guy who's just kind and positive and affirming all the time.

The book of Hebrews contains some of the sweetest comforts in the Bible. Passages that Christians have turned to over the years and held on to again and again for encouragement and comfort in hard times.

And at the same time, Hebrews contains some of the sternest warnings in the New Testament. Passages that can make us cringe in fear when we read them. Now, the passages we've read in the last three weeks, from chapter 2, verse 5, to chapter 3, verse 6, have been full of comfort.

So we've seen over the last three weeks that Jesus tasted death on our behalf so that he could bring us with him to glory. We've seen that he shared in our flesh and blood human nature, that he became our brother and was made like us in every way.

And so he can identify with us. And we've seen that Jesus was faithful and that he continues to be faithful as the son and the builder of God's house. But this next section, what we'll be looking at for this week and the next two weeks, from chapter 3, verse 7, to chapter 4, verse 13, is full of warnings.

[ 4 : 50 ] Don't harden your hearts. Don't fall away. Don't miss out on God's promise. And the comforts and the warnings are right next to each other. And they don't cancel each other out or weaken each other, but rather they reinforce and strengthen each other.

You know, Coach Jack was a tough guy. But occasionally, he would praise us for a job well done or a game well played. And when he did that, that would make my Saturday morning.

His encouragement was all the more meaningful in light of his normally rough, tough demeanor and his high standards. And Coach Bill would occasionally get fed up with our laziness and our antics, and he would get in our face.

And he'd call us to a higher standard. And when he did that, we'd listen, because it contrasted with his normally laid-back attitude. You see, when somebody really knows you well and has proven their commitment to you, you'll take their admonitions and warnings all the more seriously.

When someone has high standards and doesn't flatter others simply to gain their approval, you'll find their encouragements all the more meaningful. Because you know they're genuine and not fake.

[ 6 : 04 ] So I pray that as we dig into Hebrews, as we see both the encouragements and the warnings, that we'll hear them as words from Jesus Christ himself. One who loves us and is committed to us and is unwaveringly loyal.

And yet, one who doesn't hold back from speaking truth to us and warning us of very real spiritual dangers so that we don't fall into them unaware.

Now, this morning's passage is primarily a warning, but even within this warning, there's encouragement as well. So we're looking at verse 7 through 19, but the heart of the passage is in 12 through 14, which is what I want to focus on for most of the time.

And in these verses, we see three things. We see a warning in verse 12. We see a command in verse 13. And then we see a motivation in verse 14. So first, the warning in verse 12.

Well, the warning in verse 12 flows out of the long quotation in verses 7 through 11, the quotation from Psalm 95, which we read earlier in the service. The writer of Hebrews, he's basically preaching from Psalm 95 in the next chapter and a half.

[ 7 : 15 ] So if you notice, he quotes pieces of it five different times. Chapter 3, verse 7 through 11, chapter 3, verse 15, chapter 4, verse 3, chapter 4, verse 5, chapter 4, verse 7. And he's doing that.

He's sort of, he's basically expounding and preaching and applying this psalm to his hearers in the present day. Now, the first half of Psalm 93, as we heard earlier, it's a summons.

It's a call to praise God, praise God for his greatness. He's the great king over all the earth and over the mountains and the sea, as well as for his kindness. Because it says he's our maker, our God, our shepherd.

But then the second half of the psalm, which is quoted here as a warning. Don't harden your hearts as you did back in the wilderness. It's looking back to the time when the people of Israel were going through the wilderness after they had been delivered from slavery in Egypt.

And the writer of Hebrews is saying as Christians, you're in a very similar place spiritually. If you look back to chapter 2, verse 14, he says, Jesus has liberated us from lifelong slavery under the oppressive rule of the devil.

[ 8 : 27 ] Just as the Israelites had been liberated from lifelong slavery under the oppressive rule of Pharaoh in Egypt. God had delivered them wonderfully, miraculously, brought them out.

And then chapter 3, verse 1 through 6, we saw last week that Jesus is compared to Moses. Moses was great and faithful, but Jesus is even greater.

So we've experienced a great deliverance in the past. We have a promise of great things to come in the future. But our life right now is a long walk through the wilderness. We're not yet in the promised land.

We're in this middle stage where life is hard. And it's easy to get discouraged and lose heart. You know, in almost any worthwhile endeavor, the beginning is full of excitement and energy and hope. But the middle stage is when the going gets tough. And it's easy to lose heart. If you go for a hike to climb a mountain, there's an initial energy and excitement as you set off on the trail into the woods and start climbing.

[ 9 : 37 ] But after a while, the trail just seems to wind back and forth. And you've crossed the same stream five times. And your feet are now wet. And as you get higher, the wind picks up and it gets colder.

And you start to think, wouldn't it have been just wonderful if I was sleeping and resting in my bed? Or in the rhythm of the school year, the excitement of a new semester fades into the weariness of midterms.

Or in work, the relief of a new job offer or a promotion can sometimes fade into the drudgery of the daily grind. Or in marriage, the honeymoon of bliss fades into the reality of facing differences and conflict and unmet expectations.

Now, it's not all bad. There's good things along the way. But in all these cases, the temptation is to give in to weariness and become bitter.

The word translated rebellion in verse 8 and verse 15 could also be translated bitterness. It's the bitterness that makes us draw back and say, why did I ever get married in the first place?

[ 10 : 57 ] Maybe it would have been better if I just stayed single. Or why did I ever set out to climb this mountain? Maybe this trail is just a dead end, going round and round in circles.

Maybe this mountain doesn't have a summit at all. Now, when you think of it, that's an irrational statement. But we make a lot of irrational statements and don't realize it.

It's the same thing with being a Christian. The exhilaration, the joy of being a new Christian can sometimes fade into the difficulties of fighting temptation and facing opposition and being called to make sacrifices and not seeing immediate results.

All of us can become weary. And if we're not watchful, weariness can easily turn into bitterness and hard-heartedness. And that's the warning that the author gives us.

Today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as you did back then in the rebellion, in the bitterness. Now, he's referring primarily to when the people of Israel had gone through the promised land and they had come to the edge of the promised land and sent in some spies to check it out.

[ 12 : 14 ] It's recounted in Numbers 13 and 14. He's referring back to that passage. There's a few parallels. But two of the spies come back and they say, This land is great. It's exceedingly good. If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land just as he promised.

So do not fear. The Lord is with us. The other ten spies say, The land is very good. But the people who dwell in the land are strong and tall.

And their cities are very large and fortified. And compared to them, we seemed like grasshoppers. Now, what was the difference in those two reports? There was no factual difference.

They had the same experience. They saw the same land. They agreed it's a good land. The difference was in the value that they placed on certain things. For Joshua and Caleb, the two faithful spies, God was the foremost value in their minds.

And so they were talking about God. They were confident in God's greatness and confident in God's goodness. They were realistic about the challenges they were facing. But they trusted God's promise and his provision.

[ 13 : 22 ] For the other ten, the people of the land were the biggest thing in their minds. We seem to ourselves like grasshoppers.

And so we seem to them. That was their conclusion. It's almost a comical description. I mean, really, they weren't that tall. But their lack of trust in God gave them a twisted view of themselves in relation to others.

It's like using a camera to take a picture of people, except the auto-zoom lens focuses in on the person's shoes. And so the shoes are prominently displayed in the photo, and everything else is fuzzy and out of focus.

You see, when our heart focuses in on something other than the Lord himself, when something else becomes bigger or better in our minds, we lose perspective.

It could be a good thing that we focus on. The desire to get married. Or the desire to have children. Or even the desire not to have children for a time. Or to lose weight.

[ 14 : 34 ] Or to gain muscle. Or to advance in a career. Or to take some time off and relax. Or it could be a bad thing that occupies our minds. A relationship that went sour.

Or a paralyzing grief. Or a life-threatening illness. Now, all these things are very real things. They're not unimportant.

It's appropriate that we give proper attention to them. That we pray about them. And pursue wisdom in regards to them. But it's very easy for any of those things to become bigger in our minds than God himself.

They begin to dominate our thought life. They consume our emotional energy. They become the default topic of all our conversations. We post about them on Facebook. We read about them in our spare time.

They become the grid through which we see the rest of the world. And everything else we experience seems to point us back to whatever that thing is. They become the object of our focus.

[ 15 : 38 ] And everything else becomes fuzzy. Including God. Now, maybe we're still very engaged in spiritual activities. Maybe we pray a lot.

But our prayers, again, begin to focus on that one thing. That particular desire. God, please give me that one thing. And if you give me that one thing, then I'll know that you love me.

And that you're good. But you see, if we say that, we've latched on to something else. That's become bigger in our hearts than God.

And we've made God merely a means to an end. Instead of the beginning and the end of all things. Or maybe our appetite for spiritual things diminishes.

We go a few days without praying. And we hardly notice the difference. Because our mind's occupied elsewhere. We pick up the Bible and read a chapter or two.

[ 16 : 38 ] And it seems boring. And distant. And lifeless. The truths about God's holiness. And God's power. And God's love. And God's wisdom don't draw us in anymore.

Maybe we engage in practices that some time ago would have made us feel guilty. Because we know that they're not pleasing God. But now we justify them.

Because they help us achieve our goals. Or numb our pain. That is what verse 12 and 13 describe. As an evil, unbelieving heart. That is being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

You see, that's not just something that happens to really bad people. Who do really weird and crazy things. We are all vulnerable to this dynamic.

Of a heart that grows hard. Of a heart that just gradually stops believing. That God is greater than all things.

[ 17 : 40 ] And better than all things. That he is great and he is good. And Hebrews warns us. Against that bitterness.

That hard heartedness. But then in verse 13, he doesn't just give us a warning. He gives us a command to counteract. You might see this as a preventative medicine.

To counteract this spiritual disease. He says, exhort one another. Every day. As long as it is called today. So that none of you may be hardened.

By the deceitfulness of sin. Now it's interesting. Both the warning and the command. In verse 12 and verse 13. They're not simply addressed to us as individuals. They're addressed to us as a community.

He doesn't say, in order to guard your heart. Against the deceitfulness of sin. You should constantly self-examine. Yourself. Now that's not a bad idea.

[ 18 : 41 ] To examine our own hearts. Periodically. But that's not what he says here. Because in many cases. We're blind. To our own greatest weakness. That's the deceitfulness of sin.

We don't recognize. That we're falling into it. Even as we are falling into it. Earlier this week. I was talking with somebody. Who has experienced rock climbing.

And he was explaining to me. That if you're doing a dangerous climb. That you will literally tie yourself. With a rope. To another climber. And you will take turns. Advancing up the rock.

And using your safety gear. To attach yourself securely to the rock. So that as you. As you climb. One of you. Will always be. Securely. Fastened.

To the rock. If you fall. Your partner will catch you. And if they fall. You can catch them. Now in some cases. If you're a really good rock climber. Being tied to somebody else.

[ 19 : 40 ] Can slow you down a bit. And so some rock climbers. Refuse to do this. They refuse to be tied. To anybody else. And they insist on going it alone. But the consequences.

Of going it alone. Can be disastrous. You might not always die. But you can easily break a limb. And by going it alone. So that nobody else.

Can slow you down. You're also forfeiting the opportunity. To help a weaker climber. Learn by climbing alongside you. So let me ask you.

Are you trying to go it alone. As a Christian. Or have you tied yourself. To other believers. As you seek to be anchored. Together. To the rock. Who is Jesus Christ.

Hebrews says. Exhort one another. Every day. And three times he says. Today. Today. Today. Don't wait for tomorrow.

[ 20 : 34 ] Or next year. This is not a good idea. To keep in the back of your mind. For whenever you can get around to it. This is an important matter. That calls for decisive. Daily action.

Are you in relationships. With other Christians. On a daily basis. Where you are exhorting. One another. Means urging one another on.

Encouraging one another. Cheering on. One another. If you're married. Do you seek to encourage your spouse. Spiritually. Every day.

A few weeks before. My wife and I got married. She said to me. I think we should commit to pray. Every day. In marriage. And I hemmed and hawed. I said. Well that sounds a little legalistic.

I think we should pray regularly. But I don't see why it has to be every day. But she insisted. And since I was already an elder here at Trinity. And elders are supposed to be devoted to the word of God and prayer.

[ 21 : 34 ] I felt too ashamed to refuse. So I agreed. She was right. She was so right. And I'm so thankful that she insisted.

On a daily discipline of prayer. Because the daily routine of prayer. Is especially important. On the nights when we don't feel like praying together. When we've just had a fight.

Or when one of us is annoyed. Do you know how hard it is to pray with someone. For someone. When you're mad at them. You have to either not pray.

Or give up your anger. That's the point. Daily prayer prevents us. From going to bed angry. It forces us to work through our conflicts.

It prevents us from hardening our hearts. Against each other. And against the Lord. Now by the way. That is one reason. Why you should not marry someone. If they are not a fellow believer.

[ 22 : 35 ] In Jesus Christ. Because you will lack. A consistent spiritual foundation. For your family. You will not be able. To stand together as a team. In spiritual matters.

And exhort one another. As fellow sharers in Christ. Encourage your spouse. Spiritually. Every day. If you're a parent. Do you seek to encourage your children.

Spiritually. Every day. Over the summer. We were having dinner. With a Christian family. While the kids were playing. I asked the dad. I said. How are you trying to. Lead and care for your family.

Spiritually. He said. Well. You know. We've actually started. Having a family Bible study. He said.

The kids are old enough. To understand at least some things. The youngest is three. So we started by reading through.

A children's Bible story book. And would read one story each night. But now we're actually reading directly. From the Bible. We're just going through the book of John. Reading a little bit each night. We read a little bit. Talk about it briefly.

[ 23 : 34 ] And then we pray. And he said. I have to travel a couple of days. A week. During the week. For work. But recently. I've started calling home on Skype. And so we've been doing.

Our family prayer time. Over Skype. And I was challenged. By his example. This guy is not a pastor. He's not an elder in a church. He's actually never even taught Sunday school in a church. Or a Bible study. He didn't go to seminary. He didn't go to Bible college. But he's living out this command. In his family context. Deuteronomy 6 says this.

These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children. And talk of them when you sit in your house. And when you walk by the way. And when you lie down.

And when you rise. He's saying not just at set times. But throughout the normal context. Of everyday life. Speaking freely. With our children. About God.

[ 24 : 29 ] His greatness. And his goodness. Parents. That's the primary way. That our children will learn about God. It's not through. The children's ministry classes.

That are happening next door. Those are very helpful. They're a helpful supplement. Sort of like taking a vitamin. But if you just take a vitamin. Once a week. And don't do anything else. It won't have much effect. The main way that our kids will learn about God. Is through our daily example. Every day of the week. So encourage your children spiritually. Every day. Now what about if you're single. You might be asking. Are you involved in Christian community. Where you are giving and receiving. Daily exhortation. You know it's not enough to simply come once a week. To a large gathering. And hear a sermon. From a distance. Behind a pillar. Yes I know some of you are behind there. That's okay. [ 25 : 27 ] You need to be. In ongoing relationships. With other Christians. Where you can live out this command. And this is hard. Because the society we live in.

Is structured around. Individual privacy. And mobility. Rather than. Stability. And community. And so we need to be intentional.

Otherwise. This usually won't happen. Now you might ask. Where do I start? Well first. Go to a small group. Whether it's on campus. With a campus fellowship. Or one of the Trinity small groups. Where you can begin to develop relationships. With other Christians. Where you're regularly. Encouraging one another. Second. Find a prayer partner. Another guy. Or another girl. That you commit to pray with. Every week. If you're struggling. With a specific sin. That you often fall into. Ask them to hold you accountable. So that you don't just. [ 26 : 25 ] Fall. And keep falling. But that when you fall. You have someone. That you're tied to. Who will help to catch you. And remind you. Of who you're connected to.

Jesus. Third. I would challenge you. To consider your living arrangements. Throughout the history of the church. Single people. Of the same gender. Have often banded together. To live in community. And carry out God's work together. In the Middle Ages. These communities developed. Into monasteries. Now monasteries. Generally have a bad reputation.

In the Protestant church. Because in some cases. They became totally. Set apart from the world. Morally corrupt. And theologically in error. But in the beginning. They were communities. Of single men. Or single women. Who devoted themselves. To prayer. And study. And acts of mercy. And hospitality. And evangelism.

[ 27 : 19 ] They became a family. To people who had. No family. They took people in. Who had nowhere else to go. And they courageously. Extended the love. Of Christ.

In dangerous parts of the world. And as they did that. Being single. Wasn't simply. An unwelcome burden. It wasn't simply.

A license to do. As they pleased. It became a kingdom. Focused calling. Being single. Does not need to mean. Being solitary.

Alone. Unfulfilled. Or selfish. In Christ. Your singleness. Whether you are young. Or old. Is an opportunity. For single minded. Devotion.

To the king. And freedom. To invest. In his kingdom. So we've seen the warning. Against growing bitter. We've seen the medicine.

[ 28 : 13 ] Exhort one another. Encourage one another. Every day. And finally. In verse 14. We see the motivation. The driving force. Behind all this. He says.

We have come to share in Christ. If indeed. We hold our original confidence. Firm to the end. Now in one sense. Verse 14. Is a warning. He says. If we don't persevere to the end.

In faith. Then we have not truly. Come to share. In Christ. Christ. In other words. It's possible. For a time. To have an appearance. Of being Christian.

Without the reality. Of sharing. In Jesus. Just as in any group. That has a mission. There are some people. Who really believe. In the mission. And some people.

Who come along. For side benefits. For example. For several years. I led. Spring break trips. For college students. Where we worked. With Habitat for Humanity. Building houses.

[ 29 : 08 ] And every year. Some students. Came on the trip. Because they really wanted. To help people. By building houses. Alongside them. Other people came. Because they wanted. To hang out with friends. And because we went.

To Florida. In March. And because the trip. Was only a week long. We would usually. Manage just fine. But one year. The weather was cold.

