



**Faithful to God-Part 3**  
**Pursuing Loyalty to Christ as a Team Effort**  
**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

My wife and I have been prayerfully considering selling our home and moving into this area a little bit closer to our church and our new offices, and where we trust God will provide us with a place. And in so doing, as you can imagine, we've encountered hundreds of those real estate flyers and high-gloss home advertisements. And, you know, after a while, it all just kind of gets fuzzy because you realize that, you know, it's just one side of the coin, you know. All you get are these wonderfully positive aspects of the house. We've yet to see a flyer that says, "Great home, neighbors are a pain in the neck." But you know that's true with a lot of these houses that we've looked at. They're just not on the flyer. Or, "Great spacious family room, but that road, that dangerous street right next to the house—going to kill somebody one day." Never have that. We only have the positives.

Now we expect that. Anytime a seller's out there making his flyer, we expect them to emphasize the positive. It's when they get to the place of distorting reality that we get a little concerned. And they do that a lot with the pictures. Have you noticed this?

I looked at a house where they had this great big glossy color picture on the flyer of the backyard view. At least I thought it was the backyard view, right? Little did I know that they took the picture from the upstairs bathroom window, standing on a chair, on their tiptoes, before they built the house that's now in the way of that view. It just wasn't there when I showed up. It's a bit deceptive. And that's the problem. I understand if you want to emphasize the positive, but we cannot twist the truth.

And when it comes to Christianity, I find a lot of us, in our zeal to represent Christ in this world, we get in the habit of emphasizing the positive, and there's nothing wrong with that. I mean, I'm all for it. There's a lot of great things about following Christ, but we cannot distort reality. And oftentimes in our presentation of Christianity to our friends or to the world, we have gotten to the place where we have tried to take out an aspect of Christianity, I think, that is a bit uncomfortable for people and that they struggle with. And it's not the best view. And there are problems and we never seem to state them.

As a matter of fact, we've begun to twist reality when we talk about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, or when we talk about our personal walk with God, or embracing Christ as our personal Savior. You've heard all those phrases, right? Do you know you're never going to find those in the Bible? As a matter of fact, you will rarely find the word personal, and when you do, it will never be in reference to your relationship with God, or your embracing of Christ.

As a matter of fact, you don't find the word personal, because if you look at the word personal, in any lexicon or dictionary, you get words like private or exclusive or my own. You get a lot of personal pronouns like me and mine and I, but the Christian life is never presented that way. As a matter of fact, in Scripture, it is presented as a corporate reality. You see the words like family. You see the words like body. You see the words like all together. You see the word like congregation show up repeatedly. You see the concepts that relate to the Christian life as a corporate and group relationship to God, which really chafes against our understanding of a lot of things in our American individualistic culture.



And we need to recognize it's a bit of a distortion of the truth when we say things about Christ to the exclusion of the people. Because in reality, I guess it's like those home ads. You don't see tracts that say, "Jesus is great, but his people will drive you crazy every now and then," or "They're a pain in the neck," or "They can really be trouble." And yet that's the reality. And people sometimes don't see that.

As a matter of fact, in one book I was reading this week about people's perception of the church, he said, "Listen, I don't go to church. I am my own church." That was his perspective. The problem is it's obviously far askew from anything in Scripture. God has called us to a corporate relationship with God. Do we each have to come and embrace repentance and faith on our own? Absolutely. We have to do business with God one-on-one, but we step into a relationship that is not personal. It's team. It's body. It's together. It's congregation. Important for us to recognize that.

As you open your Bibles up, if you would, to Hebrews chapter 3, in our third installment of this four-part series on understanding our call to faithfulness, what you need to realize is, so far we've talked a lot about you being faithful to Christ and that one day you want to hear from Christ, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And unfortunately, that can leave you with the impression that it's kind of every man for himself. You know, just go out there and do the best you can.

But what you need to get is something that our English language doesn't do very well. It doesn't distinguish between you and all of you. Because in Scripture, what you have is when you read the word you, the second person pronoun, you usually read it and accept it and identify with it as you as a person, personally and individually. But you know, that's not usually the case.

As a matter of fact, out of the 3,000 times you see the second person pronoun in the Greek language in the New Testament, two thirds of it is not you, it's all of you. And if we were in the south we could preach it that way. We wouldn't say you, we'd say y'all, and that would be helpful, because in English, proper English, we don't make that distinction. So you read all these verses about you being faithful, but in reality the Bible is calling y'all to be faithful.

And as a matter of fact, when we reach this section in the text, verse number 12, he's saying, and y'all need to look out for each other in being faithful. Because my responsibility before God is not just that I hear from him, "Well done, good and faithful servant." It's that I do something to make sure that you hear it too. Oh, and by the way, you need to help make sure that I hear it in my life.

We all stand before God personally one day. I recognize that reality, but God has called us to a corporate identity and a corporate responsibility to see to it—verse—that none of, guess what it is? Y'all has a sinful and unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. Make sure, brothers, that doesn't happen. And if there's any question about the mutual responsibility here, look at the next verse.

But encourage—here's a phrase—one another. And you see that all over the New Testament. Is that a familiar phrase? One another? All the time in Scripture. There are actually near 30 commands for us to see a mutual one another responsibility. Different commands—there's 29 of them that I personally counted—different ones in the New Testament say we ought to do this to one another, that to one another. We ought to be responsible for this in one another's life. And in this text, here's one of them:



we ought to be encouraging one another daily as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Do you see the group responsibility there? We've come to share in Christ if we hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at first. And that brings up bells and whistles and sets off alarms in some. That's why you need to be here next week, because we're going to deal with that. Part number four. It's our mini excursus to deal with this passage and all these repeated comments about holding firm until the end. We'll touch on it today, but we'll expand and unpack it next week, Lord willing.

Verse 16—I'm sorry, verse 15. As has just been said, and this is a quotation of Psalm 95, and Bob just read it for us tonight:

Today, if you would hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.

Who were they who had heard and rebelled? Were they not all those that Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for 40 years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter into his rest if not those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter because of their—here's the problem—unbelief.

There's responsibilities here, and it's important for us to get that, that we have a responsibility before God, a mutual responsibility to help each other get across the finish line so that we can all individually, one after the next, hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

How do we do that? We'll take a look at it again in verse number 12. It starts with the verb here, "See to it." "See to it." It's an analogy and we use it a lot. We use this, we talk about "be on the lookout for" or "keep an eye out for" or "be sure you're watching for." "Look around, keep your eyes open," he says, "so that none of you has a sinful or unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God."

## 1. Keep an eye out for symptoms

And here's the theme—we already got it last week—of a hard heart. That was the picture. Matter of fact, he repeats it and says, "We've already told you that." There in verse number 15, "If you'd hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." The concern is a hard heart.

As a matter of fact, just so that you can get the connection, why don't you go and get your pencil in your Bible and circle these words. Let's start in verse number 8 from last week's text. There it is. It says, "Do not"—circle it—"harden your hearts." Don't harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion. And then we read it again here in verse number 13: "Encourage one another daily so that none of you may be"—here's our word again—what is it? "Hardened by sin's deceitfulness." And then we just read it in verse 15: "If you'd hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as they did in the rebellion."

As a matter of fact, just for completion's sake, look across the page at chapter 4, verse number 7, where he says it again: "Today, if you'd hear his voice"—circle it—there's the adjective—"Don't harden your hearts."



Don't have a hard heart toward God. Now, that's a metaphor I understand. But it is something about our corporate—our individual health, rather—that does affect our corporate health. But it's something about someone's heart, the internal part of them that relates to God. That they are in their spirit, if you will, in their mind, in their heart. They are connecting with God, and the goal is to have a soft heart, obviously, in contrast to a hard heart.

Now, what does that mean? What is that all about? The hard heart is described in Scripture—take a look at it—in verse number 12 with two words. Let's underline these: "See to it, brothers, that none of you has..." Here's the two things that describe a hard heart: sinful and unbelieving.

Now, the Bible says—and it's just laid on you the responsibility—that as you hang out with the body of Christ, and you look at the person next to you, you should be concerned about the status or the health of their spiritual heart, if you will. You ought to be, in some sense, concerned with their heart. And whatever it means—hard heart—it means sinful and unbelieving. But whatever that is, it's a bad thing, and I need to be looking for symptoms of that. And I need to say, "I want to make sure that's not happening in your heart."

Now, does that feel uncomfortable? It feels uncomfortable for me to preach it. Does it feel uncomfortable to hear it? That you're supposed to be a heart inspector, right? Do you ever hear that? "Christians are—I'm not a fruit inspector. I'm not the Holy Spirit in their life. I can't do all that." Have you heard that before?

We have a responsibility in this text that it says, "See to it, look around, keep your eyes open, keep an eye out," that the people around you hear that they don't have a hard heart, that their heart is good, their heart isn't bad.

Just so we get a little more comfortable with this, I want you to keep your finger in this text and turn back with me to the book of Acts, just to establish the fact in the beginning of the book of Acts that God's standard in the Bible is a kind of mutual experience that none of us have probably ever experienced unless you just came from the Christian commune in Texas somewhere. It's not a familiar experience for us. And the depth of the mutual relationship and concern is found in Acts 4—one picture of it. You can see it throughout the book of Acts. But take a look at the words that are used here.

Their hearts were exposed to one another. They knew where each other's hearts were. They played the cards face up on the table. They didn't game each other. They didn't play politics with each other. They were honest. They were forthright. They were authentic.

And it says in verse 32—look to the bottom of chapter 4—consider how far different this is from our 21st century American experience. He says in verse 32, "All the believers were one in heart and mind." That's an amazing thought right there. They were in sync. They were beating together.

And you want to see what it looks like in practical life? "No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own." That's interesting. You claim that your possessions are your own? Oh, you'd better believe it. You do.



I've given this illustration before, but if I said, "Okay, ushers, let's pass that bag again. Everybody throw your car keys in that bag. And then we're going to have a big pile on the back and you just pick whatever one you want. You need a car? Maybe you rode the bus here and you just pick one up. Go for it. Because that car, whatever. You can clean the glove box out later. You'll see each other next Sunday. Just pick a car and go."

You know what kind of car key I'm looking for in that pile. I don't know if there's any in there, but I'm looking for it. And that's the reason that we're never going to do this because our hearts are so individualistic. We're so into our stuff. And I'm concerned about getting the car. I like my car. That's it. It's not yours. It may not be the car I really want, but I'm moving that—whatever. It's my stuff. Stay out of it, right?

If you want to borrow it—oh, maybe. Let me check with my Allstate insurance guy. Oh, Kenneth, this is going to be our... Will I be okay? We're all into protection. We're not into that kind of mutual dependence. We're not into that kind of anybody's possessions—well, whatever. Whatever you need.

They—look at the next word—"they shared everything they had." Now imagine that. Shared everything they had. Which, by the way, started with a heart and a mind that's in sync and open and transparent and authentic. No hiding. No games.

What did that create? A powerful church. "With great power, the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them." Apparently, God approves of this kind of relationship. "And there were no needy persons among them." And from time to time—if you can imagine—those who owned lands or houses sold them and brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet. And it was distributed to anybody who had need.

You need a place? Oh, here, here. I just had another condo turned in today. What do you know? Here you go. Can you imagine?

That is a kind of mutual dependency, a mutual interdependence, a commitment. That's an openness. That's amazing. We're a long way from it. And that's one reason, because we don't experience this, that it's hard for us to think about meddling in someone else's life. I don't want to look into your life and see your heart. Whatever, I'm worried about my own heart, man. I've got enough problems to deal with here.

And the Bible says, no, you've got to keep an eye out for symptoms of a bad heart, and you've got to see to it that no one that you're sitting next to at church has got a bad heart, a hard heart. You need to make sure it doesn't have these symptoms.

Back to our text. What are the symptoms? Two things: sin and unbelief.

Sin—let's define that, okay? That means we're supposed to be in a church where everyone is sinless, right? Let's go find that church. You've heard the old story: don't join it though, because what'll happen? You'll ruin it. Can't find the perfect church. Find the perfect church, join it, you'll mess it up.



Here's the thing. The text obviously isn't talking about, well, you know, everybody's got to be perfect in the church. Of course we're all in process. You agree with that, right? We're all in process.

Let's define it this way: obviously there's a kind of heart here that is sinful, okay? It's a pattern of sin. Let's jot down symptom number one this way—letter A, if you will.

## **A. A pattern of disregarding God's rules**

There's a hardness of heart that they just don't listen to what God says, and they're putting him off. They got a wall up and they're not interested in hearing what God has to say about it. "I got this figured out. Don't bother me with it. I don't want to hear it because I'm going to do it my way."

It's that kind of hardness to the rules of God. And therefore, they walk in their lives and they transgress the rules of God. And when you see that, the Bible says, that's a symptom and it's bad.

As a matter of fact, it's not just in this text, though we see it in verse 12. Look in the next verse: "But encourage one another daily, as long as it's called today, so that none of you may be hardened by"—here it is again—there's the word—"sin's deceitfulness." Make sure you don't see that. Or another word for it, a synonym, if you will, in verse 15: "Today, if you'd hear his voice don't harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." You're breaking God's rules. You're rebelling against what he said.

The illustration in the text we looked at last week is in the little desert town of Kadesh Barnea where God said, "Go in and take the land. Even if it's hard, I'll be with you." And they said, "Nah, that doesn't seem right to me." They disregarded the rules of God, the law of God, the instructions of God, and they said, "I'll do it my own—my own way."

If you see that, you've got an appointment on your calendar because you've got to talk to that person. You see the pattern of that? You've got to deal with that.

You've got to be perfect to do it, though, right? No. Obviously, we're all in process. But the concern is that I don't see that happening—not only in my life. I want to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant." But you know what? My responsibility is to make sure you hear that, too. And therefore, I'm concerned if I see a pattern in your life like this.

Or, the second thing is an unbelieving heart. Well, who's going to be here and not believe, right? We're all going to believe, right? We're surely all trusting. We all believe this stuff.

Yeah, well, this is not maybe a black and white kind of thing. The concept of belief is: here were people in the desert. They left Egypt. Sure, they believed God enough to leave Egypt, but they didn't believe God enough to walk into the promised land because that was too hard.

When it came to trusting God, they trusted God in the things that were easier as compared to the things that were harder. And therefore, when they hit the steep incline, they said, "No, I don't want to do that." Why? Because, "I just don't know. I don't know if God's going to handle that. I don't know if



God's going to come through for us there. The people in the land are big. I don't know if you saw their cities. Their walls are high and fortified. And I don't think—you know what? I don't want to widow my wife and orphan my kids. I can't do that."

I obey God to a place of comfort and convenience, and as long as I can handle it and it feels okay to me, I won't trust God beyond that.

When we see people putting up walls and parameters and saying, "I'll trust God this far, but no further," you know what? We got to have an appointment. We got to talk about that. And my concern for you—because we've all done this—is that we don't do that, because that's the responsibility we have in a mutual community of people that are trying to obey God and trust God.

And when I see chronic disobedience or when I see hardness of heart that manifests itself in a not trusting God for the hard stuff, man, we got to get together. We've got to talk. I can't see that happening in your life.

Who are you, right? Fourth person of the Godhead or what's with you, right? You're perfect, right? No, man, I'm not perfect. But you know what? God has laid that responsibility on me. And if I don't talk to you about what I'm seeing in your life, then I could be wrong, right?

Do you ever have chest pains and it's not a heart attack? It happens occasionally, right? Maybe it's not what you think it is, but you've got to investigate. You've got to check it out, because there's a hard heart there. The Bible says you've got to deal with it. "See to it that nobody among you has a sinful or unbelieving heart that's turning away from the living God"—trusting.

Or maybe you're seeing verse 14. There's another manifestation of an unbelief, a disbelief, a lack of trust. Look at verse 14: "We've come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had..." Maybe they're starting to wane a little bit in this.

See, the Christian life, the real Christian life, is a life of progress and growth. Do you know anybody who's going backwards in the Christian life? Oh, they're still coming maybe to church, but they don't have the same passion and trust in Christ they had a year ago. Yeah, you need a meeting. You got to talk to that person.

I just want to encourage you that the Bible is full of motivation for us to do this. And I know it's hard.

One passage—I'll just give you this one—James chapter 5. Please look at this with me after you jot it down. James 5, verses 19 and 20. And I know it feels risky and I know it feels uncomfortable. And who am I to meddle in their life? You know who I am to meddle in your life? Just an obedient Christian trying to do what God asked me to do. That's what I am. And that's what you should say.

Here's motivation for you. And it's going to risk. It's going to feel like risk, isn't it? It's going to feel like you're going to risk your relationship with that person. That's okay. It's a risk you've got to take. Most loving thing you can do.



When you see unbelief, when you see waning belief, when you see a belief that seems temporary, when you see sin—breaking of God’s rules—look at verse 19: “My brothers, if any one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back...”

I mean, let’s think of it that way. Because you know the words you think of? Confrontation. “I don’t want to confront.” Rebuke. Correction. Oh.

Look at it with this metaphor. Someone’s wandering and you’re bringing them back. Oh, you terrible person. No, that sounds pretty good. That’s the picture of the shepherd, isn’t it? Who sees the sheep wandering and goes and brings them back.

Why? Because the shepherd thinks he’s a know-it-all? No. Because the shepherd thinks he’s perfect? No. Because the shepherd hates the sheep? No. Because the shepherd loves the sheep.

And you’re wandering right now. Your faith is waning. I see chronic disobedience in your life—or at least it looks like it. Can we talk about it?

“My brothers, if anyone should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this, whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death”—and you don’t want to see that. You don’t see the wolves get them—“and cover”—I love this—“a multitude of sins.” Because you know, if they continue down that path, they’re just going to rack up a life of more disobedience and more lack of trust. And you’re stopping that. And God says, man, that’s a good merit badge to earn. “I’ve turned a wanderer back to the path.” That’s a good thing. And God is constantly framing it in that way.

As a matter of fact, those that don’t have the backbone to do that, I don’t really think you respect those people as much as you think you do. Here’s a passage just to jot it down. And I’ll read it for you, but Proverbs 28:23: “He who rebukes a man in the end will gain more favor than the one who flatters him with his tongue.”

And we have a choice when we see someone who’s exemplifying unbelief, waning faith, disobedience in their life. We can say, “Oh, I hope everything’s good. Okay, see you later.” Or we can say, “Man, can we get together? Because this doesn’t look right. Can we talk?”

And I know that feels hard, but the Bible says you ultimately gain more favor in the end than someone who’s just good at saying, “Hey, you look great today. Praise God. Go have a great week in Christ.”

One more—can I give you just a reference? How about Leviticus 19:17. Leviticus 19:17: “Rebuke your neighbor frankly so that you will not share in his guilt.” Now it gets scary, doesn’t it? Because there’s the other side of the coin. Not only will you earn a nice merit badge from God and everyone will be happy that you’ve turned a sinner from his way, the Bible says if you don’t, you’re going to share in his guilt. God’s going to say, “Didn’t you see that guy straying? What did you do about it?” Nothing.



What if they don't listen? You have big leather straps, and we got this thing that goes on your head. We put you in the back here and we turn on the electricity. That didn't work. There's a rack and we stretch them and we hear a vertebrae pop. Is that what we do? No.

Some people are not going to listen to you. They're not going to listen to you. And a lot of times you get to that point when you've said, "This is wrong and I think you're off the path and I'm telling you, I think it's time to get back on," and they go—whatever they say—"I don't like you." And at some point you've got to say this: okay.

As a matter of fact, Paul was a little more dramatic about it. He did this: okay. There comes a point when we do that, right? There's not some kind of life control group that we're in, right? You don't get it straight, we put you in the chair. We put you in light therapy. That's what we do. We have this big high beam light, and we just shine it right in your face. And we keep it there until you repent.

I'm sure those will be excerpts from the CD, and I'll be accused of that, but I'm being facetious.

Keep an eye out for symptoms of a hard heart and know it's our responsibility to keep an eye out for that. And if this brought any guilt in your life because you're thinking, "I know somebody's wandering off the path," and you're going, "Oh, guilt, guilt, can we get on to the next point?" Next point gets worse. You don't want me to go on to the next point.

Just mark their initials down on the margin of your worksheet or something and say, "I need to make an appointment." And you know why? Because there's big consequences. Verses 16 through 19, rather—Hebrews chapter 3, verses 16 through 19.

You've got to know the story for this to have the full weight of the effect. Look at the plural pronouns here: "Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt?"

Now, Moses led out of Egypt Caleb and his family, Joshua and his family, Joshua and his good buddies, and his friends, and his neighbor, and his second cousin. All those people were led out.

When they hit Kadesh Barnea, what did they think? "Let's take the land." Caleb—was he for it? Thumbs up, man. Let's go get it. We can do it. Okay. Were they obedient or disobedient? Obedient. Did they trust God or not trust God? They trusted God. Okay.

So God just separated the group and sent in the believing people into the promised land and sent the unbelieving, disobedient people out in the desert, right? That's not what happened. And there ends the problem.

"With whom was he angry for 40 years? Was it not those who sinned?" Well, it wasn't just those, because everybody's body fell in the desert except for two guys that were representative of those who were obedient. "And to whom did God swear that they would not enter his rest if not those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter because of their unbelief."

But there were pockets—trust me—of people that trusted God. Moses himself. Did he make it to the promised land? No. But he wasn't part of that group. He knew what God had told them to do. Matter of fact, that was a crisis point for Moses in Numbers chapter 14 that we saw last week.

What's the point?

## 2. Know our corporate health is at stake

Unchecked hearts—hard hearts, unbelieving hearts, sinful hearts—affect us all. And as God looks at the people of God gathered in geographic locations, whether it's in Orange County or whether it's in Elgin, Illinois, or wherever it is, he's seeing that group and he knows that a set of hard hearts there can affect everything and everyone. Because you don't sin in a vacuum. You affect all kinds of people with hard hearts. Hard hearts are like cancer. It just spreads and it affects many, many people.

By the way, let's tie this back to the theme of the morning or the afternoon or the evening. Let me just make this statement clearly: the low points in biblical history were when individualism was at its peak within the people of God.

The low points in biblical history were when individualism was at its peak—like in the book of Judges, if you know your Old Testament history. Here was a time repeatedly described as everyone doing what was right in their own eyes. It's the last verse in the book of Judges. He says it again. Everybody's doing whatever—what they think is right. Everybody's just on their own page, doing their own thing, having their personal relationship with God. It was the low point repeatedly in biblical history when everyone did whatever they thought was right, when there wasn't a mutual dependence, a mutual accountability, when there wasn't mutual confrontation when needed, when there wasn't a directing, an eye out for the neighbor—when it was all about me and my relationship. They were the low points, because the sinful patterns in individuals' lives began to affect the culture of the whole.

These are good statements, if I may say so myself. You don't want me to say that again. That one just came out, and I don't know if I can say that one again. The individual—I'm going to try, though—the individual sin of the individual... This is wrong. Now I've blown it. I've told you what I'm trying to do, and I can't do it. It affects the culture of the whole. That was the last line of it. I need dinner right now.

The individual problems, the individual hard-heartedness, it affects the culture of the whole. Let me give you some examples. This is a hard-hitting one from Jeremiah chapter 9. I'm tempted not to turn you there, but now that I said that you want to see it—Jeremiah chapter 9.

The sinful—and here's how I put it in my notes—the sinful common denominators take root in the culture of the redeemed, and when it does it affects everything. The sinful common denominators take root.

Now look in Jeremiah chapter 9. You wouldn't think these are big sins. A little, you know, just trying to make the sale, so we don't always tell the truth about the products we're selling in the marketplace.



Well, that individual unchecked heart had spread and multiplied until there was an entire culture within Jeremiah's day, where now God's perspective on the whole group was this, even though there were some honest people among them.

He says in Jeremiah 9, verse 3: "They make ready their tongue like a bow to shoot lies. It is not by truth that they triumph in the land." Oh, they get their positions and they get their sales and they get their next client, but they're doing it deceptively. "They go from one sin to another; they do not acknowledge me," declares the Lord.

"Beware of your friends; do not trust your brothers." For every brother is a deceiver and every friend is a slanderer. Friend deceives friend, and no one speaks the truth, God says. "They have taught their tongues to lie; they weary themselves with sinning. You live in the midst of deception; in their deceit they refuse to acknowledge me," declares the Lord.

Therefore, this is what Yahweh Almighty says: "See, I will refine and test them, for what else can I do because of the sin of my people? Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks with deceit. With his mouth each speaks cordially to his neighbor"—"Hey, how you doing?"—"but in his heart he sets a trap for him." "Should I not punish them for this?" declares the Lord. "Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?"

Nation? What do you mean? Do you see how the unchecked hearts had gone on and created a commentary from heaven on the whole nation? And you know what happens? God sends them into exile. And here comes the king of Babylon to take them away. Why? Unchecked hearts.

Our corporate future is dependent on you and I caring about each other hearing one day, "Good and faithful servant." Therefore, we've got to make those appointments. And we've got to talk to our friends. And we've got to say, "Man, it looks like you're just not trusting God like you should."

"Who are you?" You know what? I'm just someone trying to save the future of our church. That's all. Our corporate health is at stake.

And if you think it takes a big contingent or a majority to take the group down, it doesn't. How about this? Joshua chapter 7. You know the story of Achan? Do you remember that story? If you don't, you're Achan. I'm Achan. Let's look it up. Joshua 7. Half of you looked at me like, "Who?" Achan. We better look at that.

You could say—and I know you can look at Hebrews 3 and say, "Well, you know, most of the people disbelieved God." Well, it doesn't always have to be that way. As a matter of fact, a smaller portion of hard hearts can take the whole ship down.

Look at Achan in Joshua chapter 7. This is such a bizarre entry statement on the chapter. Because if you study the chapter, you know, it just seems like an overstatement. It says, "But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things." Is that what your Bible says? You know, that's not entirely true. I mean, that's not specific or technically accurate. Because it wasn't the whole nation that did this. As a matter of fact, we're going to find out it's one family. One family of hard hearts.

“Achan, son of Carmi, son of Zimri, son of Zerah”—if you have any confusion about who he is, right? It’s his whole genealogy, man. And here’s the neighborhood he lives in. “He’s from the tribe of Judah.” Guess what? He’s the one who took some of these things.

So Yahweh’s anger burned against—Achan, son of Carmi, son of Zimri, son of Zerah, from the tribe of the neighborhood of Judah—is that what it says? Burned against Israel. It’s a fly in the ointment, guys. Don’t like it.

So Joshua sent men from Ai, which they just got done with Jericho. Problem is, Achan took some stuff from Jericho when they weren’t supposed to take anything. So Joshua’s looking at this little town named Ai that’s after Jericho, and he says, “No big deal.” It’s near Beth-Avon, it’s east of Bethel. And he said, “Go up, spy out the region.” So the men went up and spied it out.

They returned, they said, “Oh, not all the people need to go up against Ai. Just send two or three thousand men to take it. Don’t worry all the people. Let’s just have our picnic and potlucks, and we’ll just send a small contingent up there to take it. Only a few men are needed.”

So about 3,000 men went up, and they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed 36 of them. How many died in the battle against Jericho? Zero.

Now they’re going to go take a little town. You just took New York without one casualty. Now you’re headed to Blythe. You got it, baby. See, now you’re egging me on in this. If I end up in Blythe, I’m going to blame you partially.

You just took New York—you’re trying to take Blythe. It’s not a problem, you think. And yet now 36 people die. They chase the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this the hearts of the people melted and became like water and said, “Wow, Blythe can take us. We’re in trouble.”

And Joshua tore his clothes—sign of the ancient Near Eastern grieving and despair—and he fell on his face on the ground before the ark of Yahweh, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same thing. They sprinkled dust on their heads. It was a dirty, ugly mess.

And Joshua said, “O Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we were content to stay on the other side of the Jordan. O Lord, what can I say now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people in the country will hear about it, and they’ll surround us and they’ll wipe us out. They’ll wipe our name out from the earth. Oh, then what are we going to do for your great name? God, you’re going down and we’re going down.”

What’s the problem? And Yahweh says to Joshua, “I feel so bad for you. I don’t know what we’re going to do.” What does God say? “Stand up. Stand up. What are you doing on your face?” Well, I’m mourning the loss of the life battle.



And God says, “Israel has sinned.” Now again, that’s a bit of an overstatement, isn’t it? Can you imagine God looking at heaven saying, “Why is that not happening?” and he says, “Compass Bible Church has sinned.” We’re going, “What are you talking about?” Doesn’t take a big contingent. “Israel has sinned.”

God saw the community as infiltrated by sin because of the decision of one small clan, one small family. “They have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen; they have lied; they have put them with their own possessions. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run, because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.”

You shouldn’t have taken anything from Jericho. “But God, we didn’t. Most of us did great.” Yeah, but there’s some unchecked hearts that need to be checked.

Know that our corporate health is at stake. There’s nothing I want more than the success of Compass Bible Church. I think that’s God’s will for us. But you know what? If we all want to have personal relationship with God and never concern ourselves with each other’s holiness, with each other’s faithfulness, we’re destined for failure. Because God’s going to look at us and say, “Compass Bible Church is in sin.” And we’re going to go, “Well, most of us aren’t.” “Yeah, but some of you are, and should care enough about your church to correct that.”

The diagnosis is a hard heart. The prognosis for unchecked hard hearts—what is it? It’s bad. It’s the demise of the whole organization.

If you want to see a guy that had a great deal of courage in dealing with this—and I preached on this. I think I put the sermon reference on the back of the worksheet there—the message on caring enough to confront. We kind of made our hero out of a guy named Phineas in the Old Testament, a priest who was so concerned about the success of Israel and the zeal of God, he had zeal for God’s honor, that he was willing to correct the problem when he saw it. Go study that passage sometime. Numbers chapter 25, verses 1 through 12, for starters. We don’t have time to look at it tonight, or get the CD and listen to it, or just study it on your own.

But our corporate health is at stake, and I think when we see that, we’ll lovingly and kindly, but vigorously and fervently, get involved in trying to correct it. If not, the whole lampstand will be affected.

All right, well, that’s the diagnosis and that’s the prognosis if you got unchecked hearts, and we learned it from the history of Israel. But what’s the prevention? Because I’m telling you, prevention’s better than surgery, don’t you think? And it’s better than death. That’s what I’m thinking. So how do we fix it? How do we prevent it? How do we keep this from happening?

There’s one command here in verse 13 that makes it very clear for us. Here’s the prevention. Here’s how we keep it from happening. And notice, man, you’re not going to like it because there’s a lot of work here. Here it is:

“But encourage one another once a week at least.” Oh, I misread that. Sorry.

“But encourage one another daily as long as it’s called today so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”

### 3. Urgently encourage vigilant fidelity

I tried to make that a little more user-friendly, but I couldn’t do it. Urgently—as long as it’s called today, do it now. Then, encourage—more on that word in a minute—vigilant fidelity. Why? Because sin is deceitful. It’s deceitful. It’ll trick you.

Fidelity—I want to be faithful to God. So what I want to do every day, I don’t think we should go through the day saying, “What have I done today to encourage somebody’s vigilant fidelity? How can I help somebody obey God? And how have I heightened their awareness of trying to serve and love and obey God?”

And what’s the word encourage? Let’s take that apart. Encourage is the one command here—to encourage one another daily. And you’ve heard this. That’s why I’m going to use it: *parakaleo*, *paraklete*. Have you heard that one before? Sunday school grads? Who’s called the *parakletos* in Scripture? Holy Spirit. And have you heard these sermons before?

*Para* is the Greek preposition alongside of—to come alongside of, to be alongside of, to be next to. *Kaleo* is the verb to call. And that’s why even this is sometimes translated about the Holy Spirit: the advocate. Because a lawyer is the one you call when you get in trouble, right? I’m in trouble, call the lawyer. He’s going to come and help me and fight the battle for me in court, okay?

The picture is the same here. *Parakaleo* is to come alongside and to help. I want to help. I want to support. Now someone’s facing temptation to be sinful or temptation to lose their faith. They’re doubting in some way God’s provision or God’s—or whatever. And I want to say, “I want to come alongside every day, someone, and help them fight this deceitful battle against sin, this battle against the deceitfulness of sin.” That’s what I want. I want to come alongside and help. *Parakaleo*. I want to be next to them and help them.

You know what that spells? It’s not an individual personal relationship and walk with God. It’s corporate. And every day someone ought to be coming alongside of you, and you ought to be coming alongside somebody else. As a matter of fact, if two are good, three’s better. A cord of three strands—it’s not easily broken. Let’s get together and do this.

Does this sound like later in the book where it says you ought to be every day getting together as you see the day of—coaching? All the more you ought to be coming together and stimulating one another love and good deeds. You’ve heard that verse before? You ought to be doing that all the time.



And you can do this: “Whatever, I’ll see you at church next week.” And you know what? You’re trouble waiting to happen. And it may be you next.

And I don’t want to play the heavy here, but listen, if we don’t make this a regular pattern—man, once a day, just a phone call, three-minute phone call. “Hey, just want to call you. Keep walking with Christ. If you’re facing the trial, I’m here to talk, whatever.” Great. Okay, serve God. Even if you did that, okay, and checked it off and said, “Daily, I’ve done that,” I think we would make a bit more progress in guarding our walk with God. And each one of us can hear at the end of the finish line, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

I put a verse on the discussion questions, and I hope you do them this week. One of the verses I highlighted near the end of the question is Isaiah 35, verse 3. It says, “Strengthen the feeble hands and steady the knees that give way.” And that’s not a picture of my own. That’s a picture of me coming to help you.

It’s just like Hebrews 12:12, by the way, which says, listen, if there’s weak arms or feeble arms or weak knees, fix it. Get in there and fix it.

Some of you have had knee injuries, am I right? Had a knee injury in the room here somewhere? And what do you do? I mean, you go to physical therapy, but you’re gonna go out—if you’re gonna do anything again after the knee injury—and you put some kind of brace on it, right? *Parakaleo*—you’re coming alongside, you’re putting something strong alongside of that which is weak.

I blew my knee out twice growing up and through college. I mean, just full-blown, you know, it’s really gross. It’s a little bit like Theismann, only about a foot higher than that. It was awful. And you know what I needed? I needed therapy. And they threatened surgery. And praise God I didn’t need it because I wore my brace, and I got that thing strong, and I went through the process of trying to get it back the way it needed to be. That’s why I stand like this instead of like this, by the way. I just realized that it was my right knee.

But you know what you need in those situations? You need help. And all of us face our battles, and someone next to you is facing their battle, and all I’m telling you is you need to be the leg brace in their life.

Why is it so urgent? Why is it urgently do this? Why is it every day? Here’s a verse for you to jot down. Proverbs 29:1. Matter of fact, this one’s so important. Let’s end on this one and let’s have you look at it. Proverbs 29:1.

Why is this so urgent? Well, not only because our corporate health is at stake, but because I don’t know how long—I don’t know how long—God’s going to let that person walk down that path of compromise. I don’t know. Look at it. Proverbs 29, verse number 1:

“A man who remains”—what’s the word? You know how often that shows up in Scripture? Now, that’s not much of an American metaphor. I don’t think you’ve used that in a sentence this week.



Maybe you have. I don't know. But picture what that is. Stiff-necked. Maybe you have a stiff neck. I don't know. Have you seen anybody with a stiff neck? Look at the stiff neck. Okay.

Now that's an interesting picture or discussion of someone's posture as opposed to the way God wants them. The hard heart has a stiff neck. See? Soft heart, pliable neck.

Do you see what the neck does when it's pliable? Watch the people on the airline about an hour into the flight, right? Their neck's just—they're pliable. They move. They go this way, right? They bow. They're humble. They're contrite. They're responsive.

"The man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will be suddenly destroyed—and that without remedy."

And I don't know where that person's at on his walk of stiff-neckedness. But I want to get involved and say, "Hey, please, today, reconsider what you're doing."

And what happens if they keep doing this to us? Okay—Paul dramatic—wipe the dust off your feet, gotta move on. But you know what? I gotta care enough at least to get involved. And I should do it today because I don't know—I don't know if it's the fifth rebuke or the eighth rebuke or the eighteenth rebuke, but their future's at stake.

It's interesting how we teach our children at prayer time to do two things. We tell them to fold their hands and bow their head. That's so important—not physically but spiritually—to bow our heads before God and to say to him, "God, if I'm going down the wrong path, I want to fix it. God, I want my neck to be stiff. I want to be pliable. I want to be responsive."

So next time you tell your kids at the dinner table, "Fold your hands, bow your heads," remember what God's getting at, at least in the stiff-necked analogy, is that we're going to be responsive to the word of God. We're going to trust him. We're going to do what he says.

Why don't we bow our heads and talk to God?

God, this posture is important for us. Maybe this week as we bow our heads in prayer around the kitchen table or maybe at a meal or maybe before we go to bed at night, maybe in the morning when we get up and spend time in your word—as our head bows down, which it doesn't have to—but God, if it does this week, I pray we would remember that what you're looking for in our lives is a responsiveness, a soft heart, a heart that trusts you, a heart that's ready to respond to your voice, a heart that's soft toward you and a head that's ready to be humble and to bow.

And God, I pray for those that we sit next to in this auditorium, that we sit next to in our Bible study group, in our small group, maybe even in our partner's relationship. We want to risk enough to say, "Man, how you doing? How's your heart? How's your neck? Are we responsive? Are we soft? Are we pliable? Are we obedient to God?"



And God, I know you are just so ready to bless a group of people that have this perspective, and that's what I pray for. God, I pray that for Derrick and his church in Elgin. Pray that for us here in Orange County.

God, I pray that for all the churches that want to be responsive to you, that they would have this pliable heart. They would be ready, God, to hear from you and obey. And God, I know that you're ready to bless. The Scripture is so clear on that. Your eyes are going to and fro throughout the whole earth, looking for someone's heart that's completely yours. God, may you see in us, in this organization, a group of people with bowed heads, soft hearts.

And God, as you do, I just know we won't be able to hold back your blessing in our lives. The things you'll do in and through us will be tremendous. So God, we want to affect the world for you. We want to always be working to plant new churches. And God, we pray that each of them would be responsive to you. God, help us to care about our corporate health by being willing to discuss individual health with the people that we know and care about. And if you brought a name, a face to our minds during this sermon, I pray you would be faithful to follow through. God, thanks for loving us and caring about us so much, providing us these instructions for our good and for your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.