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“When God Heals a Hard Heart”

Ezekiel 11

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People get hard hearts for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, because of sin, people become hardened toward God. Sometimes, because of a difficult life, the decision is made to build a hard exterior shell around the heart so no one can get in. Sometimes, because of the fear of being vulnerable, people believe it’s easier to hurt others before being hurt again. Sometimes, because of pride, people make a decision to be tough and independent, and live as though they have no need for God or others. Whatever the reason, God is in the business of healing hard hearts and making them tender again. Pastor Gary encourages us to open our hearts and allow God to do a little heart surgery.

1. **Ezekiel 11:9-12** – *“And I will bring you out of its midst, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and execute judgments on you. You shall fall by the sword. I will judge you at the border of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD. This city shall not be your caldron, nor shall you be the meat in its midst. I will judge you at the border of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD; for you have not walked in My statues nor executed My judgments, but have done according to the customs of the Gentiles which are all around you.”*
 - a. The Babylonians were the instrument of God’s judgment against the Jews, which included spending 70 years in captivity in Babylon.
 - b. During the years of captivity, God purged the people of their practices of idolatry.

2. **Ezekiel 11:17-20** – *“Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.” ’ And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statues and*

keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.”

- a. Pastor Gary said: “When God [used] this analogy, and he [said] about the people of Judah at this particular time in their history, [that they had] stony hearts, [he wasn’t giving them a compliment]! He [wasn’t] affirming them, he was calling them out. He was letting them know that they were stubborn. He was letting them know that they [weren’t] malleable, they were not soft, they were not tender toward him, [life, or one another]. They [had] hard hearts. ... They had lost the capacity to be molded and shaped by God. ... The good news is that [God] was going to providentially intervene... [by giving them a new heart].”

3. How do we get a hard heart?

- a. Some people may have had a hard life, and the way they deal with it is to build a shell or a wall around their life, so that no one can get inside.
- b. Some people may have the fear of being vulnerable, and because they’ve been hurt, they hurt others before others can hurt them.
- c. Some people, because of their pride, become tough and independent, not needing God or anyone else.
- d. Pastor Gary said: “I think that God wants to help [people] today. ... I don’t think that anybody who has a hard heart, if you’re willing to admit you have one, wants it. I think most people who recognize [that they have a hard heart] dislikes [having a hard heart]. And I guarantee you, God doesn’t [want us to have a hard heart]. God does not want people to have a hard heart toward him, [others, or life in general].”

4. How did the people of Judah get hard hearts?

- a. The people of Judah, like people today, get a hard heart little by little over time.
- b. Pastor Gary shared the 1:60 rule of navigation.
 - i. For example: for every degree a plane is off course, the plane will be one mile off every 60 miles, so a plane going from New York to Los Angeles (approximately 3,000 miles) would be 100 miles away from the intended destination if the plane veered two degrees off course.
- c. [Ezekiel 11:12](#) - “... [you] have done according to the customs of the Gentiles which are all around you.”
- d. The people of Judah incorporated the practices and customs of idol worship from their ungodly neighbors.
- e. Pastor Gary said: “Over time, they were seduced by their culture. It happened one tiny degree at a time. Pay attention to this, because it’s liable to happen in our own lives if we’re not wise to this. You can start to look at the culture and you can start to think, ‘Other people don’t think that this particular thing

is that bad, so I guess it's really not.' [So], before you know it, you think it's okay. You, then, embrace it [and celebrate it, and maybe even practice it]. There's always been two standards: the standard of God and his view of right and wrong, good and evil, truth and falsehood; and then you have the world's view of good and evil, right and wrong, truth and falsehood. Sometimes those things line up together, [but] most times they do not. So, what happens is, that we have to decide if we are going to live by the standard that God has determined or if we are going to adjust to and live by and get absorbed by and seduced by the culture around us that has a very different definition of things related to good and evil, right and wrong, truth and lies. What happened here with the Jewish people was that they were seduced by the Gentiles, by the pagan [countries] around them, who didn't worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, [but] worshiped different gods. [The] Jewish began to talk like them and live like them and worship like them. [It] happened slowly, one degree at a time, until eventually, they were so off course that the Jewish people had no regard for God, just like the nations around them."

5. Pastor Gary said: "Do you know somebody, perhaps you are that person, [who] starts out walking with God, [who] is close to him, but slowly, over time, you begin to see the culture around you as [being] normal and acceptable, and then you begin to adopt their practices. You talk like them, you walk like them, [and] you live like them. You worship like them. One degree at a time, until you have no real regard for God, just like the rest of the world around you. It's a dangerous thing we must be aware of; it's what happened to the Jewish people. ... Are you aware when this happens? It's easy for any of us... because it's so subtle, so seductive to end up, kind of conforming to the way culture is, [and] to accept things that the culture accepts, and to slowly over time end up looking more like the culture than looking like Christ. Are you aware of [this] when it happens? Do you have [a] trigger in your heart, [an] alarm that goes off that makes you aware and then you realize, 'I've got to rein this in, [because this] isn't becoming of a follower of Christ. This won't bring glory to God. This makes me look too much like the world and not enough like Christ. I've got to stop doing this or stop talking like that or stop going there.' ... **The culture is not your enemy; the culture is your mission field. But, if you're not careful, the culture will make a mission out of you!** That's a fact. ... We want to influence the culture with the good news of Christ. We want to love people who don't know Christ. ... Be very, very careful, that your mission field does not make a mission out of you!" (Emphasis added)
 - a. **Ezekiel 11:12** - "... [you] have conformed to the standards of the nations around you." (1984 NIV)
 - b. A more literal translation of the Hebrew words conformed and standards, would be: "They were fashioned, squeezed, and molded by the customs and

manners of the culture around them.”

- c. **3 John 11a** - *“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good.”*
- d. **Romans 12:2** - *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*
 - i. We will not be able to test and discern what God’s will, unless we have first decided not to be conformed to the pattern of the world.
 - ii. We won’t know the will of God until we are walking with God in right relationship.

6. Pastor Gary said: “If we end up, as the Jewish people did, conforming to the standards around [us], instead of the standards of God, [we] will develop a hard heart toward God, because that’s inevitably what happens. If you want to be living according to the system and standards of the world, then every time anything about God comes up you [say to yourself, ‘I don’t want to hear it!']’ And, any time somebody confronts you about your life, you [say to yourself, ‘I don’t want to hear it!']’ ... This is why the Jews did the extreme thing, which was to kill the prophets [of God, because they didn’t want to be under conviction].”

- a. Jesus was deeply troubled and moved by the fact that the Jews
 - i. **Matthew 23:37** - *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, **the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!** How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but **you were not willing!**”* (Emphasis added)
- b. The good news for each of us today is that Jesus’ love can melt hard hearts!

7. **Ezekiel 11:19-20** - *“Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.”* (Emphasis added)

- a. Five times in these two verses God said he was going to do something, and not one time was it dependent on the people!
- b. We should thank God that he does things for us and the that things he does aren’t contingent on our willingness.
- c. God is always the initiator in our lives!
 - i. **Romans 5:8** - *“But God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Ezekiel 11:9-12, 17-20** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s remarks concerning the hard heart analogy God

used to describe the people of Judah. (See #2a above)

3. Spend time talking about the points Pastor Gary made concerning developing a hard heart. (See #3 and #4 above)
4. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about times when they've gone off course because they've developed a hard heart. (See #4 above)
5. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about the subtle seduction of the world/culture. (See #4e above)
6. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the culture being our mission field, and the warning to be alert, because the culture wants to make a mission out of us. (See #5 above)
7. Read and discuss [3 John 11a](#) and [Romans 12:2](#).
8. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's remarks concerning the hard-heartedness of the people of Judah. (See #6 above)
9. Read and discuss [Ezekiel 11:19-20](#). (See #7 above)
10. Allow the people in your group to share their experience about the way the Holy Spirit performed "heart surgery" by taking away their heart of stone and giving them a heart of flesh and a new spirit.
11. Close your time in prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)