

The way we prosper spiritually, is to listen to God, and then respond! We hear what he says, and we receive, and believe it! God's truth, God's word, God's voice, received, and believed, and kept, in our heart, has the power to transform us, to sanctify us. Jesus said, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth". He said, "If you abide in my word you will know the truth and the truth will set you free".

Every few years, you will hear some new theory of spiritual growth, or how to experience God. I am all for those goals! But so many times we are looking for a secret, when the secret is simply to hear what God says and respond with a tender and believing heart! The message from this passage is, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart".

The first part of this chapter is about how Jesus is far greater than Moses! And IF those who resisted the voice of God, through Moses, lost such a massive privilege as going into the promised land, those who harden their hearts against the voice of God TODAY, spoken about his Son, stand to miss out on massive and incredible promises God has for them!

The passage IS a warning! A warning AGAINST a hardened and unbelieving heart. AND it is an encouragement FOR us to believe and to keep our hearts in a state of faith and trust and confidence.

\*The main exhortation in these verses assumes that the Holy Spirit has spoken and that he speaks to us today, and that we may PRESENTLY hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. All this is in the very first phrase, “The Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice,”. We hear the Holy Spirit’s voice in scripture. The Holy Spirit daily moves and speaks in our hearts. He leads and teaches us! John said the Holy Spirit teaches us about all things!

The speaking voice of the Holy Spirit is very real and alive! It is important to believe that the Holy Spirit speaks to you, and that you might hear his voice even “Today”. To lose faith in the reality of his voice in your heart is often the first way to harden yourself!

Second: \* We see that...He speaks TO our hearts and it is OUR HEARTS that we must not harden against his voice. Your heart is the essential you. It is made up of your thoughts, your affections, your choices, your will. You think in your heart, you rejoice, or sorrow in your heart, you love a person, or you love God with your heart, you choose what you do in your heart. Whatever you do, wherever you go to, however you spend your time, you are choosing to do that in your heart! Life doesn’t just happen!! Your life and what you do, and love, and what you give yourself to, flows out of your heart!

Proverbs 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it”. The NASB says, “Watch over your heart

with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life”. To merely follow your heart, without guarding and tending your heart, is a recipe for spiritual shipwreck. But if you set your heart on God and to love God good things will follow! Augustine said something like, “Love God and do what you will”. He said that because he KNEW that what you do flows out of your heart. The big issue always is to get your heart right!

\*Your heart is your point of contact with God. It is the place God communicates or speaks with you and you respond to him with your heart. What is going on in your heart IS what is going on between you and God. You chose to respond to God a little, or much, with your heart. Many times in the Bible we are exhorted to love God and serve him, with all our heart.

It is BECAUSE what we do with our hearts is so determining of everything about us, this passage warns us against responding with indifference, or hardness of heart, when the Holy Spirit speaks.

And in a very real sense we cannot respond to what he said yesterday or what he might say to us tomorrow. He speaks today! We can never presume that we will hear him tomorrow, or some other time. When he moves upon our heart, we must give him a full, response.

So...One of the things we must pray for ourselves and each other is listening, responsive hearts. Many times Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear”. As you read the scripture, or someone shares a word for you, or you listen to a message a church, or even in the quietness of your own heart, do you listen for HIS voice? When church is over, have we let him speak to us? Do we expect him to speak to us? Are we willing and eager to hear what he has to say?

This is our most basic spiritual duty, to keep our heart sensitive and tender to His voice!

We must especially watch the condition of our heart when we are going through a difficult time. The people of Israel hardened their hearts “during the time of testing in the wilderness”. When you feel that you are under a hard test, or in a wilderness and just can’t seem to sense God’s favor, watch your heart especially, at those times.

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The warning in this passage is that there is real danger in a hardened heart. It is not just that it is better to listen to the Holy Spirit or we should listen, or that we will be better off to listen. But very GREAT LOSS comes to those who remain in a hardened condition. Verse 19 “So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief”. They lost out on something! They were not able to enter! Their resistance and unbelief affected their lives, and their futures, greatly!!

Our response to his voice, in our hearts has everything to do with whether we enter into the promised land or remain in the wilderness. It has everything to do with whether we enter into his rest or not. Ultimately it has to do with our eternal salvation! Those who practice giving swift and wholehearted response to the Holy Spirit are those who thrive and bear fruit, they are happy in Christ, and continue firm to the end. So Hebrews warns us..

Verse 8 “Do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness, 9 where your ancestors tested and tried me, though for forty years they saw what I did. 10 That is why I was angry with that generation; I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’ 11 So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’ ”

Verse 16 He further clarifies who these people were who hardened their hearts and had dire things happen to them: “Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? 17 And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

The author refers us back to the Israelites during the exodus from Egypt. He calls this “the time of testing in the wilderness”. They did not believe God in this test!! They did not trust God to bring them into the promised land. They complained, and grumbled and even said they wanted to go back to Egypt; they forgot all the miracles God did for them and rebelled against going into Canaan

because they feared the people, and the thick walls of their cities. They tested and provoked God for 40 years! So they missed out on all the bounty and the blessing of the land God had for them! And their “bodies perished in the wilderness”.

I want to be careful here not to make this passage overly graphic, yet the image of dead bodies strewn across the wilderness, is meant as a powerful message to us about the seriousness of resisting the voice of God! The outcome of hardened unbelief is not a pretty sight. Hardened hearts never result in anything good in the long run.

Notice in these warnings how a hardened heart is equated with unbelief and rebellion and disobedience and “turning away from the living God”. Many people regard unbelief as a kind of weakness over which they have no control. God does not view it that way! Let’s use a human example. If one of your children would say to you, Mom, or Dad, “I simply do not believe you!”. I don’t believe anything you have said and I don’t believe anything you say. I have been trying to believe you for a long time, and I wish I could, but I just don’t believe you.

You would not say, O sure, that’s fine. I understand that! No problem! You would have right kind of anger about it! Partly because of the direct offense toward you but also because you know that any kid who thinks like that is NOT headed toward a good life but is headed for trouble! Likewise unbelief angers God. And I think for the same reasons! Because it reveals resistance to God in our hearts and because he knows it leads to our own disaster.

Adolf Saphire said, “Unbelief is the mother of all sin and sorrow. FOR unbelief is departure from the living God. As long as you trust God, you are near him. The moment you doubt him, your soul has departed into the strange country. Faith is the link between God’s fullness and strength and our emptiness and weakness.”

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The ultimate argument against unbelief, is our eternal salvation and blessing in Christ. Verse 14 “We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firmly to the end”. This is a theme of Hebrews!

“Belief” in Jesus is not only a statement of creed. It means to “trust” in Jesus or to place “confidence” in Jesus. It is necessary for you to hold that confidence firm to the end! It just is! Jesus said, “The one who perseveres to the end will be saved”. Some might say, “I thought I just need to start well and it doesn’t really matter if I end well or not!” That is taught by many but it runs up against scripture after scripture. Genuine faith by its very nature lasts!

And there is not one place in the New Testament that gives comfort and encouragement to those who turn away from God, harden their hearts in unbelief, or rebel against God. We share in Christ IF...

So ...Are these warnings good for us to hear or not! Some would say we shouldn’t talk about stuff like this! I do think if we

overemphasized them and they became the main story, that would not be right. But obviously the Holy Spirit thinks they are important! Please note that this warning isn't really from the author of Hebrews! He attributes it to the Holy Spirit. "The Holy Spirit says...". I am going to do the same. Don't blame me for this warning!!

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In light of the grave spiritual dangers of a hardened heart, how can we guard against hardening our heart?

One: Pay attention to your own heart and guard it against unbelief. Verse 12 says, "See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." See to it...that you do not let this happen! Be careful that this is not going on in your heart. Elders are to watch over your soul. We all watch over each other in some way. But ultimately you are charged to keep your heart open and sensitive to God, and free from bitterness or resistance.

Verse 13 "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness".

One of the main ways you guard your own heart against hardness is... "mutual encouragement". You put yourself in a position to be continually encouraged in the things of God. Be at things that

encourage a believing heart! Listen to things that encourage your faith in Jesus. Be with people who will encourage belief. “Your vibe will determine your tribe”. Beware if you find your heart inclined to run more with people whose hearts are not soft toward God! Spend much time with those who will encourage a believing heart in you!! Make sacrifices to regularly be around those who are full of faith and the Holy Spirit!

This is so basic yet in the body of Christ it is a rare thing to find those who make mutual edification and encouragement much of a priority! This verse says, “encourage one another..”. That means receiving AND giving encouragement! Both! We come together to BE encouraged, AND to GIVE encouragement. We CHOOSE to place our own heart in an environment where we are encouraged. AND we want to help create an environment where OTHERS are encouraged.

Part of the reason for you to get out of bed and come to church, or to a Bible study group, is for your own heart, of course! But you also come, thinking “there may be some soul, some person, or perhaps many that you can encourage today”, simply by being here, simply by being with them, or a smile, or a warm welcome or a hug, or some expression of love, or an encouraging word of some kind! We are in a battle to believe and to keep our faith strong. We are in this together. Therefore encourage one another daily!! NOT JUST ON SUNDAY!

May the Lord awaken our hearts to how important this is!!

Finishing strong is something you can't do on your own! John Piper said, "Unbelief is such a constant and dangerous temptation that we must help each other fight it off." One of the main purposes we gather is to fight off unbelief and to encourage robust faith, trust and confidence in Jesus!

Let's make it our serious priority to be an encouragement to each other's faith! When you are with your spouse, or your family and kids, or when you are with other believers, choose to be the one who says things that increase the level of faith in the room. Be the one to say things that encourage faith and belief and confidence in Christ!.

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I want to end this morning by going back to Psalm 95. Much of our passage is from that Psalm.

"Come! Let us sing joyfully to the Lord! Let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation.

**2** Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us shout with songs of praise to him.

**3** For the Lord is an awesome God; a great king above all divine beings.....

**6** Come! Let us worship and bow down; let us kneel in the presence of the Lord, who made us.

7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the flock in his care. If only you would listen to his voice today,

8 do not be stubborn like your ancestors were at Meribah, as on that day at Massah, in the wilderness,

9 where your ancestors tested me.

They tested me, even though they had seen my awesome deeds.

10 For forty years I loathed that generation, so I said, “They are a people whose hearts continuously err, and they have not understood my ways.”

11 So in my anger I declared an oath: “They are not to enter my place of rest.” (ISV)

We are called to be happy in God, to express that with joyful singing and thanksgiving, and even shouts of praise. We are called to worship the Lord, to bow down and kneel before him. We are reminded that we “the people of his pasture”, “the flock in his care”. Then it says...listen to his voice today!!

God is not asking for some great and difficult performance from us! He is asking us to open our hearts to him, without any hardness! He is asking us to enjoy him, to praise him, to sing, to worship to enjoy being his people the flock in his care! That is such a much better place for your heart to be than in a state of indifference, or hardness!

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Is your heart in the state it needs to be in today? Has there been any indifference, or hardness or aloofness from God creeping into your

heart? Today would be a good day to soften your heart and ask the Lord to cleanse your heart from all unbelief.