

GUARD YOUR HEART – PART TWO

C. Stephen David | *Ekklesia Evangelical Fellowship* | December 4, 2022

Hebrews 3:7-12, Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice [**Deut. 27:10; 28:1,15**], 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 forty 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.

Let’s dig deeper into the heart of the Israelites and examine ourselves:

- ❖ **Reminding the church about the failure of the Israelites, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:6**, Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

a. PAIN:

Israelites before entering into the Promised Land:

- ❖ **Exodus 19:7-8**, So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, “**All that the Lord has spoken we will do.**” And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord.
- ❖ **Numbers 14:11**, And the Lord said to Moses, “**How long will this people despise me?** And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?”
 - Mostly like a wedding vow in marriage but care not after marriage.
 - We elders face a similar situation in elders’ interview when we speak about the church covenant. After that, some despise it.

Point: People emotionally claim their faith in God and love towards Him at the beginning, but it is their response in pain that shows their true allegiance to God.

Why does God allow pain? C S Lewis: God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

- ❖ **Deuteronomy 8:2-3**, And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your **God has led you these forty years in the wilderness**, that he might humble you, **testing you to know what was in your heart**, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna...

Three Observations:

- i. God is omniscient. There's a difference between intellectual knowledge and empirical (experiential) knowledge.
- ii. Suffering/pain **doesn't make** people weak/disobedient/rebellious. **It shows** how weak/disobedient/rebellious they are on the inside. **AFFLICTIONS EXPOSE THE REALITY OF OUR HEARTS.** Discover the condition of our hearts in pain.

Paul David Tripp and Timothy Lane in “How People Change”: We, too, are in the wilderness of a fallen world. We have not yet entered the Promised Land of eternity, so we face hardships like Israel did...While external conditions can be very influential in our lives and should not be ignored, the Bible says that they are only the occasion for sin, not the cause. **Difficulties in life do not cause sin.** Our background, relationships, situation, and physical condition only provide the opportunity for our thoughts, words, and actions to reveal whatever is already in our hearts. **Our hearts are always the ultimate cause of our responses, and where the true spiritual battle is fought.**

Self-examination: What is God revealing about my heart in this pain/suffering? Before we pray for our deliverance, it is good for us to know our heart's condition.

Questions for reflection:

- What do the pressures in life speak about our negligence to personal relationship with God? Do we have a heart that is thirsty for God?
- What do the pressures in life speak about our love towards our spouse? Do we have a heart that unconditionally loves our spouse?
- What do the pressures in life speak about our commitment to God's church? Do we have a heart that is committed to loving and serving God's church?
- What do the pressures in life speak about our sinful reactions? Do we have a heart of purity?

What do pressures in life speak about the idols in our hearts?

- iii. Israelites placed physical comforts over God. They grumbled, for the comforts of life were more important than living for God. Beware of the same attitude!
 - ❖ **Exodus 17:7**, they tested the Lord by saying, **“Is the Lord among us or not?”** **THEY DETERMINED THE PRESENCE OF GOD BASED ON THE ABSENCE OF TROUBLES.**

Leonard Ravenhill: “My goal is GOD HIMSELF. Not joy, not peace, not even blessing but HIMSELF...my GOD.”

Note: Blessed are those who love God supremely because they have nothing to lose, for God is eternal and faithful and the most magnificent being.

Encouragement for believers from

- ❖ **1 Peter 1:6-7**, In this you rejoice (hope of salvation), though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, **so that the tested genuineness of your faith**—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Warning for believers from

- ❖ **Luke 8:13**, And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; **they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.**

What is your response when you go through pain? Persecution, Sickness, Financial crisis, Loss of loved one, Hurt in relationships, Unanswered prayers...

b. PLEASURES:

Israelites after entering into the Promised Land:

- ❖ **Deuteronomy 8:12-15**, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, **then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God**, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery,

Exhortation for believers from:

- ❖ **Luke 8:14**, And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the **cares [anxieties of life]** and riches [**love of money**] and **pleasures of life**, and their fruit does not mature.
- ❖ **1 Timothy 6:10**, It is through this craving [**for comforts of life, love of money, pleasures**] that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. [FRUGALITY IS A MISSING VIRTUE IN OUR TIME]
- ❖ **Proverbs 30:7-9**, Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, **lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the Lord?”** or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God. [Don't underestimate the power of prosperity]

- ❖ **The crisis of the last days in the church, 2 Timothy 3:4**, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

C.S. Lewis, in his classic book *The Screwtape Letters*, a senior demon says to a junior demon: “I know we have won many a soul through pleasure.”

Consider these pleasures choking your inner life:

Evil pleasures:

- Pleasure of indulging in laziness over taking pains to discipline one’s life.
- Pleasure of sexual immorality over seeking the pleasures of God.

Good pleasures turning evil:

- Pleasure of making money over expending our lives for God’s glory.
 - I spoke to a man (unbeliever) last week who made a lot of money and saw the emptiness of it, saying to me, “If you keep 1Cr before me, it is nothing.”
- Pleasure of finding security in earthly possessions than in Christ Jesus.
- Pleasure of worldly status over identity in Christ.
- Pleasure of buying things over saving money and being generous in giving.
- Pleasure of the comforts of life over being patient in difficult times.
- Pleasure of entertainment than having the joy of spending time in prayer and God’s Word.
- Pleasure of phone, social media (What’s App, Facebook, Instagram), TV and YouTube, and Games over spiritual disciplines.
- Pleasure of people’s attention and appreciation over the attention and commendation of God.
- Pleasure of family time/fun over family devotions/encouragement.
- Pleasure of vacation over solitude with God.
- Pleasure of sleep over diligence/discipline for good purposes.
- Pleasure of lukewarmness over God’s communal activities and serving God’s people.
- Pleasure of reading news/watching sports over reading to nourish your soul.
- Pleasure of people (family, friends) over pleasure in God.
- Pleasure of chatting with one another over encouraging one another in Christ.
- Pleasure of food over fasting.
- Pleasure of ministry [preaching, teaching] over the pleasure of being with God.

Note: Pleasure has greater potential than pain to lead us astray from God.

Self-examination: What is God revealing about my heart in this temptation for pleasure?

Remember: The pleasure of loving the Creator over everything is supremely greater than the pleasure of seeking to find our pleasure in the creation. In fact, the pleasure that we find in creation is more satisfying when it emerges from our supreme pleasure in the Creator.

Pain and Pleasures: Take care, pain/pleasures expose the heart and trigger unbelief (lose focus on Christ) and can lead you away from the living God.

Caution: The danger of falling away from the living God and rebellion against Christ is much worse than the Israelites who couldn't enter the Promised Land.

❖ **Hebrews 3:7-8**, Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, **do not harden your hearts** as in the rebellion,

❖ **Hebrews 3:15**, As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, **do not harden your hearts** as in the rebellion."

❖ **Hebrews 4:7**, "Today, if you hear his voice, **do not harden your hearts.**"

Encouragement to unbelievers: If you have been listening to the Gospel of Christ, do not harden your hearts. Do not live in unbelief and reject God's free gift of eternal life. Turn to Christ, who died for your sins and rose again from the dead.

Encouragement to believers: Guard yourself against every pain and pleasure that leads you astray from your faith in Christ and devotion to Him. Christ is our salvation.

Puritan John Flavel wrote: The greatest difficulty in conversion, is to win the heart to God; and the greatest difficulty after conversion, is to keep the heart with God.

Illustration: Almost every time I work on a laptop and the battery goes down, I see the sign, Your battery is low. 10percent left. Charge now. DO YOU OBSERVE THIS IN THE CONDITION OF YOUR HEART IN CHRIST?

1. Examine your heart every day. Consider its reactions to pain and pleasures.
2. Confess your idols of the heart.
3. Feed your faith with God's Word. As Paul wrote, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).
4. Constantly look (gaze) at Christ and seek to find your sufficiency in Him. Flee from distractions.
5. **Most vital, Hebrews 3:13**, 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.