

## RECOVERING OUR INTIMACY WITH GOD ([Psalm 95:1-8](#))

### [Psalm 95:7-8 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice,

<sup>8</sup> Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness,

### A CONTRARY MIND-SET

Why does the psalmist plead with us, “**Do not harden your hearts**”? Why does the writer of [Hebrews](#) focus such attention on that kind of heart ([chapters 3–4](#))? Is it possible that the consequences of a hardened heart are more costly than we imagine? Why is God so concerned about this type of spiritual condition?

There are three significant reasons.

*Hardening your heart requires a conscious effort.* It is something you do to yourself. “**Do not harden your hearts,**” writes the psalmist. We must make a deliberate choice to respond to God rather than to resist His leadership and suffer serious consequences.

Occasionally I meet people who try to excuse their own bitterness by detailing the circumstances they believe have brought it about. In reality they have brought it upon themselves; they have chosen not to respond properly. Inevitably you can find someone who has walked through circumstances that are similar or worse and yet came out with a sensitive heart and a gracious spirit. These people made right choices in regard to difficult situations. You cannot always control your circumstances, **but you can (and do) choose your response.**

I was once approached by a man driven with an obsession to bring down a company that had terminated his employment in Johannesburg, South Africa. His choice to ignore Scripture and take vengeance into his own hands had made him a bitter, cynical, resentful man. Little did he know that his rage was even bringing on physical consequences that would ultimately cause an untimely death. Throughout our conversation he was determined to show me what “**they**” had done to him. Like the ten fearful spies, he was more taken with the size of the giants than with the size of his God. He refused to make room in his life for mercy or for God’s grace, preferring to allow hatred to fester and conquer his heart.

Unfortunately, his story is not unusual. Many people have hardened hearts because of their ongoing refusal to submit to a sovereign Lord. They must bear personal responsibility for such hard-heartedness. **It cannot be blamed on God or others since it is the result of their conscious choice.**

*Hardening your heart also registers a cumulative effect.* The effect of wrong choices increases with each successive resistance, making further disobedience even easier. As **William Mason** states, **“Each day we wait to obey God leaves one more day to repent of and one less day to repent in.”** Hard-heartedness can easily become habitual, closing our hearts more and more to God and making it harder and harder to engage in regular prayer and worship.

The Hebrew word translated **“harden”** in this passage refers to the process by which something is made dense or thick. It is the picture of a callus, the successive layers of skin that develop to resist irritation. Maybe some of us sense such a condition in our own hearts. Perhaps God has been speaking to us about some issue, but we have not yet responded with surrender. Perhaps we sense a loss of fellowship in our relationship with God and have lost confidence in the effectiveness of prayer (which is to say, we no longer have assurance that God cares and will answer with grace). **Is it possible that our current indifference to His will is just one more link in a long chain of resistance?**

*Furthermore, hardening our heart results in a continuing expression.* Each time Israel resisted God, it became even easier to say no to His leading. I once heard it said of someone, **“He finds it easier to climb a tree and tell a lie than to stand on the ground and tell the truth.”** A greater affinity for untruth than for truth makes it easy to say no to the Spirit’s promptings. Israel developed a predisposition to sin that ultimately led them to practice idolatry and even child-sacrifice! The hardening of the heart is a serious matter!

We would not think of standing on a street corner, shaking our fists toward heaven, and shouting in open defiance against God. But we have less obvious ways of being just as obstinate in resisting His way for our life and ignoring the principles of His Word. We can become like the child who hears but does not obey the voices of his parents. He assumes that if they are serious, they will continue to call, but in the meantime he keeps playing outside.

**God is calling us to conquer the land through prayer.** What are we doing “in the meantime”? **Will we pretend to be spiritually deaf, or will we return to the practice of persevering prayer?**