

## OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

IN A LIVING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD  
MAY 24-30, 2015



### MAIN POINT

Living by the Spirit is about listening to God—when hear his voice we must not harden our hearts. We must listen and obey.

### THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. What are some warning signs (road signs, ingredient warnings on foods or cleaners, wet floor signs etc.) that you typically see every day?
2. What warning signs do you wish were in place for your spiritual journey with Christ? How would you want those warning signs delivered or displayed?

**Leader:** Warning signs appear everywhere. In fact, we see so many that sometimes we overlook them. Or worse, we start to ignore them. Imagine, however, how dangerous driving would be if all road signs suddenly disappeared. Or think of how many people would get hurt by carelessly walking too near a construction site, taking the wrong medicine, or getting too close to wild animals. We need the warning signs. We dare not ignore them! In Hebrews 3:7-15, the biblical writer posted an urgent warning for believers. We must not let the tests of life harden our hearts against God. The journey of faith is a lifelong trek, requiring us to maneuver through twists and turns that put our devotion to Christ to the test. We have a mutual responsibility as believers to warn and encourage one another daily in this matter.

### DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREWS 3:7-12.

**Leader:** The book of Hebrews was likely written to mostly Jewish Christians who were being persecuted for their faith. Here in chapter 3, the writer sought to encourage these Christians to stand firm by remembering the failure of their ancestors. The writer of Hebrews calls us to refuse to be like Israelites who failed to enter into the promise land because they hardened their hearts against God's Word.

3. What does it mean to "harden" one's heart? How did the Israelites mentioned in these verses demonstrate that they had done so (for examples of times the Israelites hardened their hearts, see: Ex. 16:1-3, 17:7; Dt. 33:8; Num. 13:31-33)?
4. What caused the Israelites to harden their hearts to God? What causes people to harden their hearts and refuse to listen to God's voice today?

**Leader:** To harden one's heart means to neglect God's glory and rebel against God's rule, it is rooted in a lack of trust in God's character and promises. The Israelites hearts hardened because they were focused on their circumstances (hungry, thirsty, and afraid of the inhabitants of the Promised Land) rather than on the Lord who had delivered them and promised to protect, provide for, and preserve them.

The writer quoted Psalm 95:7-11, which refers to the Israelites' disobedience in refusing to take the Promised Land out of fear of its inhabitants. Their disobedience was rooted in a lack of trust in God. The readers of Hebrews would have been familiar with this event. The Israelites had hardened their hearts during the 40 years they were in the wilderness. Hardening the heart involves a refusal to listen to God, choosing instead to disobey God and reject His call. The recipients of Hebrews were in danger of repeating the same sins of the Israelites (turning their backs on God).

**5. What signs had God given the Israelites that they could trust Him (for examples see: Ex. 7:20-24, 13:21-22, 14:21-31, 16:11)? What signs has God given us today?**

**Leader:** God had sent 10 plagues on Egypt, parted the Red Sea, fed the Israelites with bread from heaven, and led them by pillar of fire by night and pillar of cloud by day. The signs of God's faithfulness were everywhere!

Its easy to think that the signs of God's faithfulness were more obvious in the past than they are today, but God has actually given us an even greater sign than any of the signs he gave to Israel, namely the testimony of Christ's resurrection in Scripture. Our problem is not a lack signs, but the hardness of our hearts. Ever since the fall, people have faced the same fundamental problem: we listen to ourselves rather than to the Lord. We harden our hearts against God and instead of looking to His protection, provision, and power, we trust in our own wisdom and abilities. Such thinking landed the Israelites in the wilderness when they should have been in the Promised Land. Similarly today, when we neglect the Lord, we will find ourselves overwhelmed by our circumstances and failing to live in the joy of knowing the Lord.

**6. What is the ultimate sign of God's faithfulness to us today (see Rom. 5:8; 1 Pet. 3:18)? How might we actively acknowledge this sign? How might acknowledging this sign soften your heart?**

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREWS 3:13-15.

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**7. What are some signs or indicators that a person might be developing a rebellious heart? How should we respond when we sense this in ourselves?**

**Leader:** While a heart that is hard to God's Word is often difficult to detect, there are signs we can watch for in our own lives and in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Immediately after warning his readers not to turn away from God in unbelief, the writer of Hebrews encourages believers to take an active role in other's lives, encouraging one another's faith. That tells us that one sign of a "sinful, unbelieving heart" is separation from community. Other signs of unbelief might include but aren't limited to justification of behavior, defensiveness, unwillingness to be corrected, and a lack of brokenness for the sin in one's life. When we see such signs crop up in our lives and in the lives of others, we must not stand idly by but rather "encourage one another as long as it is called today."

**8. In light of the temptation to turn away from Christ, what does the writer of Hebrews challenge us to do in verse 13? How can we help each other persevere in faith? What does this tell us about the importance of community?**

**Leader:** The word “daily” (v. 13) implies frequent contact. The reference “today” (v. 13) communicates urgency and shows that believers are to stay in regular contact with each other. When believers live in isolation, they become more susceptible to “sin’s deception” and temptation. Christians grow better through fellowship with each other. There are no lone ranger Christians, we are saved individually but God calls us to work out our salvation in the context of community. The local church is an essential part of God’s plan to preserve our faith to the very end.

**9. How might knowing that your relationship with God is based on His grace and not your good works serve as a source of encouragement to remain faithful for the long run?**

**Leader:** Christ can help us remain faithful. The word “companion” (v. 14) also is translated “partaker.” It describes a partner or someone who shares something. With Christ as a companion, all of His resources are available to strengthen us and help us endure.

### DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**10. What are some practical measures you might take to guard against developing a hard heart towards God? What role should we as members of this Growth Group play in each other’s lives in terms of helping one another listen to God?**

**11. How might we cultivate a deeper daily awareness of God’s present and past faithfulness in our lives?**

### PRAYER

Pray today that the Lord would soften the areas of your group member’s hearts that have become hardened towards Him. Pray that God would help us to remember His present and past faithfulness in our lives so that we would listen to and obey His Word.

### FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
  - **How aware are you of the signs of God’s faithfulness in your life? What is one step you could take this week to deepen your awareness?**
- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- The challenge to memorize Hebrews 3:12.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

HEBREWS 3:7-15

3:7. Hebrews 3:7 begins with another therefore that reminds us to consider what came before it. What comes after the term is based on what came before it. The main point of the preceding verses is captured in 3:1 in the command for us to fix our thoughts on Jesus. This is no mere mental exercise. We can find fresh courage and spiritual stamina if we keep thinking about, considering, meditating on, and focusing on Jesus. He is the Source and Perfecter of our faith (see 12:2). He is the One at the starting line of our journey, and He is the One at the finish line to welcome us onto the victory platform.

Moses led the Israelites out of physical slavery in Egypt, but Jesus leads His followers out of the eternal bondage of sin and death into eternal life. Moses was faithful as a servant in God's household of faith, but Jesus Christ is faithful as the Son in God's household. Believers make up that household of God as they hold on to their courage and confidence in Christ (see 3:6). Holding fast and being obedient are what the Old Testament wilderness generation did not do. They are an example of where faithlessness leads those who travel its path.

Interestingly, the writer of Hebrews brought up the example of the disobedient Israelites by quoting a passage from Psalm 95 rather than by drawing upon the record in Exodus and Numbers. He introduced the passage by saying the Holy Spirit said it. Two points are important to note about this reference. First, it shows the inspired writer of Hebrews understood all Scripture to be authored by God in the ultimate sense. What we have today in the Bible is truly God's Word. Second, it shows that believers of every generation are accountable to follow the spiritual guidance in all of Scripture. The word today makes the biblical warning in Hebrews 3 (and Psalm 95) relevant to every reader of every generation. Hebrews 3:7 can and should rightly be read this way: "Today, if I hear God's Word."

3:8-9. Hebrews 3:8, following the lead of Psalm 95:8, begins with a prohibition. Christ's followers must carefully avoid letting their hearts grow calloused to God's Word. This is what happened to the Israelites in the wilderness.

The phrase in the rebellion refers in Psalm 95:8-9 to an incident of the Israelites grumbling about a lack of water. That incident is described first in Exodus 17:1-7. However, that incident was neither the first nor the last time the Israelites displayed a spirit of unbelief. They complained bitterly at the Red Sea (see Ex. 14:11-12). In the wilderness they grumbled about a lack of water (see Ex. 15:24), a lack of food (see Ex. 16:2-3), and about hardships (see Num. 11:1). God was testing them, but instead of growing in their faith they tested God. They grew more and more distant from Him. Their rebellion reached a tipping point when they refused to enter the promised land (see Num. 14:2-4, 11-12). Only two of Israel's leaders at the time, Joshua and Caleb, stood boldly with Moses and urged the people to move forward in faith. Only those two men of that generation were allowed to eventually enter the promised land.

3:10-11. The Israelites' rebellious spirit continued despite the plentiful evidence of God's faithfulness toward them. He guided them, provided for them, and protected them throughout the 40 years they wandered in the wilderness; but the people kept rebelling. Individual incidents became a pattern of faithlessness. God's verdict was that the people always went astray in their hearts. All that God did for them was met with unfaithfulness. Their hearts were hardened, despite His being gracious to them in so many ways. Hebrews 3:10 describes an unbeliever's consistent pattern of rebellion, not a believer's occasional stumbling in his or her daily walk with God.

3:12. Verse 12 grabs our attention by giving us the main thrust of the warning. First, in light of verses 7-11, the readers of Hebrews were to watch out that unbelief did not take root in their lives or in any fellow believer's life. In other words, they were to be concerned both for themselves and for one another as the body of Christ. The idea of watching out is the same warning found also in Hebrews 12:25, where the readers were to take care not to reject the message of Christ. In Luke 21:8, Jesus used the same expression to warn His disciples about being misled by a false messiah. Paul gave a similar warning about false teachers in Philippians 3:2. In Hebrews 3:12, the writer addressed believers to warn them that each one should examine his or her heart

so that none of them would possess a heart of unbelief. Any believer can stumble into sin. God's grace is sufficient to forgive us of our sins as we confess them (see 1 John 1:9). However any professing Christians who develop a pattern of disobedience and retreat from their confession of Christ as Savior and Lord are warned to make sure, to watch out, to see to it that their faith in Christ is genuine.

As surely as God judged and punished the rebellious Israelites in the Old Testament, He will hold accountable disobedient believers today. For genuine believers, that judgment will be disciplinary in nature and redemptive in effect. For unbelievers, judgment can result in an ever-hardening heart in this life and an eternity in hell in the life to come. The stakes are that high. There the warning is passionate and urgent: Do not harden your heart to God's voice!

3:13. Verse 13 tells us how to carry out the command of verse 12. We come alongside one another as believers to exhort and encourage each other. We do this day after day. As recipients of God's grace, each of us can be a vessel of grace to other believers, encouraging all to endure and grow in faith (see 1 Pet. 4:8-10). We endure in community and as a community. God has designed it this way!

None of us are called to walk the road of the Christian life alone. We are sure to fail if we try! Haven't we all been carried along by others at times when we were at our weakest? We live out our faith together, as God's sojourning people of faith. This is why Hebrews 10:25 commands believers not to neglect meeting together. Do not miss church if at all possible! The gathered meeting is when the people of God encourage and exhort one another in the faith. We sing doctrinal truth in our hymns. We hear the Bible preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. We read the Word together, confess our sins together, worship and pray together.

We need one another as believers, because sin is subtle and deceitful. Remember the Garden of Eden? The serpent told Eve a mixture of truth and error—this is deceit at its core. It can slowly erode our faith and harden our hearts.

3:14. Hebrews 3:14 is similar to 3:6, arguing backwards from the present to the past. If we persevere now and until the end, then we know (now in the present) that we have (in the past) become partakers in the salvation Christ has accomplished. We are in Him. Our present walk with Christ is evidence that our past confession of Him as Lord and Savior was true. The phrase companions of the Messiah is also in 3:1, where believers partake of or are sharers in a holy calling. The past action of believing in Christ for salvation has continuing effect in the present and the future. Our profession of faith in the past is proven to be valid by the fact that we persevere to the end.

The logical progression is this: We know that in the past we have come to know Christ if we are holding fast to Him in the present and continue to do so until the end—all by His grace and for His glory. Genuine faith is a persevering faith. This verse means that if someone does not have faith that endures, then it is not genuine faith. It is false faith, since the faith that God gives and sustains is one that endures. He will keep and preserve His children until the end. Not one will be lost!

3:15. Practically speaking, we as believers come to have a growing confidence in Christ as we continue to walk with Him. Our faith grows because we see how God's grace carries us through the difficult seasons of life. When we are pressed because of the trials that God sovereignly brings into our lives, we can know that He has brought these to us. We can also have confidence that He fully intends to carry us through those hardships. It strengthens our hope and builds our faith when we see how He sustains us by His grace. He builds endurance in us, and from this we come to know an even greater assurance. Therefore we can boast in Him. He alone gets the praise and glory when He works out perseverance and faithfulness in our lives.