

Equipping Thoughts for Leaders

6 Things to help leaders avoid hard-heartedness



December 31, 2019

Celebrated one day and despised the next...Welcome to Leadership!!!

Almost every leader can identify with something Jesus went through during His last week on earth. When He came into Jerusalem people celebrated His coming by waving Palm branches and shouting, "*Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!*" (Matthew 21:8-10).

About a week later many of those same people were shouting something less celebratory, "*Crucify Him, Crucify Him*" (Mt 27:22-23).

Our life, counsel, and care for people can be celebrated one day and despised the next, sometimes by the same people. Ugh! Jesus experienced this but during His last dying breaths made sure He didn't allow unforgiveness to affect His heart towards them or His Father, "Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing" (Lk 23:34).

Leaders are to have a thick skin but never a thick heart

As I was once mulling over some difficult pastoral issues the Spirit sharply spoke a phrase to me. "Leaders must have thick skin but never a thick heart!" Ouch, I immediately knew the not so subtle rebuke and encouragement towards His design.

Shepherding God's people can be very challenging because sheep often get caught up in a multitude of destructive places that cause them injury. When the shepherd attempts to try to untangle them and bring oil to their wounds, those same sheep can often bite at them! They can equate the delivering hand with the pain they are in, causing them to misplace their reactions towards the one trying to help.

Sometimes it seems that shepherds find themselves in no win situations. It is hard for them to stand by and do nothing when sheep are caught up in bondage. Yet when they reach out to help, they know it will probably be resisted or resented. What is a leader to do when they find themselves in those situations?

Something That is Always Right

One thing we must always do is to avoid our own hearts going astray!

We must always remember that we are not "fighting against flesh and blood" (Ephesians 6:12, 2 Corinthians 4:3-4). It isn't the person who bites at us that is our biggest problem. It is the **demonic deception in them** and the **demonic influence upon us** trying to pollute and harden our hearts.

A polluted or hard heart is deadly for leaders. It will affect their relationships with God as Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God" (Matthew 5:8).

It will also affect their approach towards people. They will become callous, impatient, and frustrated. If it goes on, they will become aloof, religious, and their hearts will not be in what they are doing. This is opposite of the incarnational nature of God.

A hard-hearted person is usually closed emotionally, lacking compassion, unfeeling, and stern. This usually causes them to be unable to connect on any level other than a surface one. Hardheartedness causes shepherds to overreact and skin the sheep rather than shear the sheep.

**It is the duty of a good shepherd to shear his sheep,
not to skin them. Tiberius 14 - 37 AD.**

The Bible warns all believers, and especially leaders, against hardheartedness. Instead we are instructed to put on God's heart towards people.

- *Colossians 3:12-13 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; (13) bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*
- *2 Timothy 2:24-26 The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.*
- *2 Timothy 4:2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.*

6 Important Steps to Avoid a Polluted or Hard Heart

1. Consistently walk in face to face interaction with Jesus who is the source of light and transformation.

- *2Co 3:18 ESV And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*
- *Psa 36:7-9 The sons of men take refuge under the shadow of Your wing...(9) For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we shall see light.*

He comforts us and corrects us when we begin to head down the road of hard heartedness.

2. Consistently practice forgiveness

Jesus did this at His darkest and most painful hour, “Father forgive them, they know not what they do” (Luke 24:33-46). In His most difficult time of suffering Jesus chose to guide His heart towards forgiveness.

When we refuse to forgive, we may mistakenly think we are punishing others but in fact we are polluting and punishing ourselves.

3. Be humble and acknowledge your own imperfections.

God is “opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5, James 4:6, Proverbs 3:34). Humility through acknowledging our failures goes together with practicing forgiveness. Forgiving others is connected to recognizing you have failed and

hurt others at times. Hard-heartedness is often a form of pride in which we put ourselves in the seat of the perfect and look down on other's who aren't

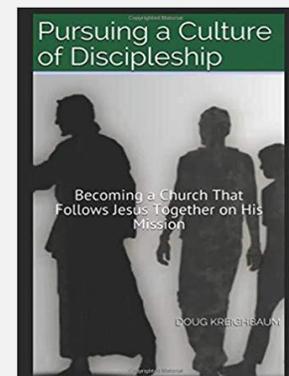
4. Be thankful to God.

We are instructed that "in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Do not quench (put out the fire of) Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:18-19). Gratefulness is one of God's main ways to stimulate Holy Spirit's activity and to keep our hearts from becoming hard. When our hearts are hard Holy Spirit is quenched. All through Scripture we are reminded to be thankful because this is the best way to live.

5. Realize that "God works things together for our good" (Romans 8:28) so remain soft and tender as God makes us more into His image.

When we remain flexible and malleable before God, He will even use difficult things to change us and shape us into His desire and image, which is the best kind of life to live.

Knowing that God is always working in us and on us to lead us into more of His life helps us endure the pressure of the sins of others without us becoming hard. It is better to be malleable than to have to be "crushed by God" in order to be remade.



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- *Jeremiah 18:4 NLT "But the jar [the potter] was making did not turn out as he had hoped so he crushed it into a lump of clay again and started over."*

6. Avoid lawlessness by being governed by His Spirit through His Word.

Jesus described a characteristic that would mark the last days.

- *Mat 24:12 Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold.*

Thoughts, feelings, and actions that are not restrained by God's moral law (lawlessness) will pollute and harden our hearts. This results in love growing cold and Jesus said that in the last days this would happen to *most people*.

Culture mistakenly tells us that freedom is a lack of any impediment to what we want. God clearly declares that this doesn't lead to freedom but bondage. Jesus said it over and over when He spoke of "laying down our life as the pathway to His life and freedom."

Freedom doesn't come by believing alone but following Jesus and putting His word into practice. This is how we avoid lawlessness which will affect our hearts.

- *Joh 8:31-32 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; (32) and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.*

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Putting these six things into practice amid the disappointments of people and warfare of the enemy will help us keep our hearts soft before God and others.

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