

The Potter Works Only with *Soft Clay!*

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When I was a boy, growing up in India, I often went to a potter's house near my high school. I was fascinated to watch him make clay vessels. During those visits, I never saw the potter take a hardened lump of clay and put it on his wheel to make something out of it. He, just like every other potter in the world, used only soft and tender clay to work with. So does God!

The prophet Jeremiah tells us that God is like a potter and His people are the clay He wants to form into a beautiful vessel. In order to accomplish this, God looks for soft and pliable hearts.

Man measures the quality and usefulness of a person by his education, ability and expertise. Yet God determines his true value by the condition of his heart: "*Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart*" (1 Samuel 16:7).

What Happens if the Clay is Hard?

If the clay is hard, the potter will spend days pouring water on it and pounding it thoroughly until it becomes soft. It took God 20 long years of "pouring and pounding" until Jacob's heart became soft enough. Moses needed 40 years of desert life to become the meekest man on earth (Numbers 12:3) who could lead Israel out of Egypt.

The Bible warns us not to harden our hearts: "*Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts*" (Hebrews 3: 15).

It is possible for us as believers to have a tender heart for a season, but then when God speaks to us about an issue, to choose not to humble ourselves but rather to harden our hearts. This is not a good place for us to be, because the Bible declares: "*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*" (James 4: 6).

The Lord will not let us just go. He will allow circumstances to pound us so our hearts will once again become soft and pliable. The people of Israel are the perfect example of this. Just think of how many times God allowed them to face famines, hardships, oppression, defeat and captivity in order to soften their hearts and help them return to Him!

What Causes Our Hearts to Become Hard?

Being poisoned by negative talk. One person in a church ministry is dissatisfied, bitter, critical and unwilling to change. He starts to talk negatively and poisons others. Soon the atmosphere of love among the brothers and sisters is replaced by disunity, anger and hardness of heart toward each other and the Lord.

An elevated view of ourselves. We feel important because we do something significant for God's Kingdom, and we don't recognize that our heart is filled with pride, arrogance and an exalted view of ourselves. Often the symptoms don't show up until years later when our heart is no longer soft in the Potter's hand.

Rebellion. Any form of rebellion is like a tiny seed that, if not dealt with, will grow and eventually harden our heart and bring destruction. It begins with a tiny issue or a thought like this one: "Who does he think he is to tell me what to do? My life is none of his business!" - and it ultimately ends in death.

What Should We Do to Keep Our Hearts Soft?

Don't take God's grace for granted. Grace is given to those who are humble, not to those who are right or feel indispensable.

Watch over your heart (Proverbs 4: 23). Don't keep company with those who spread negative talk, sow disunity or have a rebellious spirit. Love them and pray for them, but have no part with them. Believe me, you and I are not strong enough to withstand the poison they spread. It's in the atmosphere, and we breathe it whether we intend to or not.

Submit to one another (Ephesians 5: 21). Don't fight for your rights. Be willing to give up something. Learn to let it be.

Don't think of yourself more highly than you should (Romans 12:3). Remember that all the gifts, talents and ministry you have are given to you by the Lord. Nothing is of yourself. It's all God's grace.

Be careful from whom you receive counsel. That's especially important when you are disappointed because your expectations are not met. Don't go to a brother or sister who is not mature in the Lord and who sympathizes and agrees with your complains and tears. Instead, go to someone who is mature and who can help you see the hand of God and His purpose behind the things you face.

Repent and run to the cross. If need be, do this a thousand times a day to maintain the tenderness of your heart. Whenever you seek the limelight, want to take credit, get hurt or when your expectations are not fulfilled and your plans don't work out, don't fight; go to the cross.

God always seeks to do one thing with us on the Potter's wheel—not to make us more powerful and famous, but to make us more like His Son, the Lord Jesus.

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