

X-Formational Worship Week Five “Hard Hearts?” Believers Statesboro 6-17-18

“I Will Meet You”

God’s intent and purpose for worship is that we meet with Him (Exodus 30:6). Jesus promised us in Matthew 18:20 that He would show up and meet us every time we get together in His name. I firmly believe that Jesus keeps that promise, shows up, and God enjoys meeting with us and speaking to us.

So, I have to ask myself sometimes, “why do I not always feel the presence of the Lord during my worship times, or why do I take His presence for granted, or why do I seem indifferent to Jesus meeting with me?”

- I find myself taking for granted the presence of Jesus, and not even noticing when He comes into the room.
- Could it be that we can get too familiar with the presence of the Lord?
- Could it be that the longer we experience His goodness and mercy that we become sort of num to it all?

Hard Hearts?

Mark 6: 45-52 Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. ⁴⁷ Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. ⁴⁸ He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, ⁵⁰ because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” ⁵¹ Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, ⁵² for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

The disciples had just witnessed a great miracle; Jesus walking on the water and calming a storm. He showed them that he even had authority over the physical elements of the world.

They were amazed, completely amazed.

Why? Because they had not understood about the loaves.

That is the loaves and fish that were multiplied right before they got in the boat, recorded in John 6:30-44. Jesus prayed, blessed, and multiplied five loaves of bread and two fish to feed five thousand men, and the women and children.

Why didn’t they understand the implications of this multiplication miracle? Here is the problem:

Mark 6:52 for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

Sometimes our hearts can get hard to the things of God.

- Maybe we see the goodness of God too much? Maybe we don’t see it enough?
- Maybe we are surrounded by God’s presence, but we are just too busy to notice.

Dads, this is Father’s Day and I’m not trying to single you out, but I am a Father too and I know how it gets sometimes.

- We are called to be the spiritual leaders of our homes.
- Everyone is looking to us for support, strength, and leadership.
- Our wives and children seem to “get” this presence of God thing better and quicker than us.
- Life gets busy and overwhelming, we try to make it in our own power and strength, and the next thing we know, we have a hard heart and can barely feel anything, much less the presence of the Lord!
- Then we find ourselves sitting in church, arms crossed, wishing we could feel something.

I understand. I’ve been there far too many times.

Break Up the Fallow Ground

Dads, what do you do when you want to plant a garden. You break up the hard ground, you plow, you till the soil, so that the new planted seeds will have fertile ground to grow.

Hosea 10:12 I said, ‘Plant the good seeds of righteousness, and you will harvest a crop of love.

But before you plant these good seeds of righteousness...

Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and shower righteousness upon you.’

Plow up the hard fallow ground of your hearts. Here the NIV uses the words “hard ground”, but KJV uses the “fallow ground”. Fallow ground was usually cultivated land that was allowed to lie idle during the growing season. This is interesting, because this paints a picture of ground or the ground of our hearts that was once fertile and growing, BUT becomes hard and rugged, unable to bear fruit until it is broken back up again.

Why break up the fallow ground? So, that you can receive from the presence of the Lord again. So that you can meet with Him and enjoy His presence and hear His voice.

Repent

Hebrews 3:13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

If you don't willingly break up your hard heart, don't be surprised if God allows it to be broken another way. Allow brokenness to soften you, not harden you.

Acts 3:19-20 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰ and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.

Remember

Jesus caught His disciples worrying or arguing about the fact that they forgot to bring provisions, bread, with them, one day as they were setting sail in a boat.

John 8:17-21 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? (Hard Hearts) ¹⁸ Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?"

Here is the key! Don't you remember? Hey, remember what I have already done for you!

¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied. ²⁰ "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven." ²¹ He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

Remember, God's goodness. Remember God's faithfulness. Remember his provision and abundance expressed toward you in the past. If God's been good to you so far, what makes you think that He is going to forsake you now, no matter what you are facing!

Remember the bread, the miracles of God in your life! Remember and take a gratitude pill!

Psalms 103:2 Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits

Next Life Transformation Step: I will keep a gratitude journal this week and find one thing every day to be grateful for.

In the words of the hymn: "*Count your blessings. Name them one by one. Count your many blessings. See what God has done.*"

Refocus

In the parable of the sower, Jesus talks about seeds (the word of God) that falls on various types of soil. Some of the seeds fell among thorns and were choked out, or as Jesus explains it...

Mark 4:18-19 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; (Remember God wants to meet with you and speak to you.) ¹⁹ but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

- Dads, church, are the worries of this life, choking out the words that Jesus is speaking?
- What about the deceitfulness of wealth? "I need to provide for my family!" The next thing you know, you provided, but you lost your priorities, and possibly even your family in the process.
- What about the desire for things; things that really don't matter in the long run?

Don't let the "cares of this world" choke out the word of God speaking to you, or the presence of God leading you.

Take time today to refocus on what is really important!

Worshiping is taking our eyes off of our external circumstances and focusing on God.

- We stop focusing on what's wrong with us or with our circumstances.
- We start focusing on what's right with God.

Worship is zooming out and refocusing on the big picture.

- It's refocusing on the fact that two thousand years ago, Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sin.
- It's refocusing on the fact that God loves me when I least expect it and least deserve it.
- It's refocusing on the fact that God is going to get me where God wants me to go.
- It's refocusing on the fact that I have eternity with God to look forward to in a place where there is no mourning or sorrow or pain.

Worship is refocusing on the fundamentals of our faith, and here is what happens:

- God restores the joy of our salvation.
- God breaks open the fallow ground of our hard hearts!

Ezekiel 36:26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Refuse

Refuse to be denied the presence of the Lord. Worship Him no matter what!

In *Acts 16*, Paul and Silas are in a **prison cell in Philippi** because Paul casts a demon out of a fortune teller. Her master doesn't like it because she loses the ability to predict the future, so he has Paul and Silas arrested. They were **severely beaten**, and then they were thrown into prison.

That's a bad day!

Acts 16:23-24 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

- Paul and Silas are **emotionally and physically and spiritually spent**. They are drained to the last drop with nothing left to give.
- Their **backs are bleeding** from their beating. They are **black and blue** all over.
- They were ticked off about the mob, and to top it off they landed in the maximum-security cell in stocks! It just doesn't get much worse than that.

That's why this next verse is so amazing to me.

Acts 16:25 says, "Around midnight, Paul and Silas were complaining about their circumstances." **No...** *Acts 16:25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.*

Paul and Silas refused to let anything rob them of their praise and worship of God.

- Not a bad day, not prison, stocks, and beating.
- Not over business at work, friends, and family.
- Not sports, and entertainment.
- Not bad times from the past, not all the things that normally harden one's heart!

Paul and Silas refused to be denied their meeting with Jesus. In a church,? No, they were not. In a prison? Yes, two coming together on official Jesus business and Jesus showed up!

Worship restores spiritual equilibrium.

- It helps you regain your perspective.
- It enables you to find something right to praise God about even when everything seems to be going wrong.

Is it easy? Absolutely not! Nothing is more difficult than praising God when everything seems to be going wrong. But one of the purest forms of worship is praising God even when you don't feel like it because it shows God that your worship isn't based on circumstances.

Worship is based on the fact that **GOD IS WORTH IT!**

Paul and Silas knew that Worship sets the stage for miracles!

Worship causes **spiritual earthquakes** that can change the topography of your life and sometimes worship causes literal earthquakes as well!

Acts 16:25-31 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose.²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped.²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."

- Dads, want to see God save you and your household? What about your extended family?
- What about your fellow work friends? What about your community?
- Would you like to hear them say, "What must I do to be saved?"

Well, break up the hard ground around your own hearts first. **Repent, Remember, Refocus, and Refuse** to let the circumstance of life keep you from your appointment with Jesus!

A worshiper always finds a reason to praise God because they're always looking for a reason to praise God.

Next Life Transformation Step: As an act of worship, I choose to focus on what's right about God, instead of what's wrong with my circumstances and refuse to be denied my meeting with Jesus.

Life App Group and Family Devotional Application

1. God's desire and purpose is for us to meet with Him, and Jesus has promised to always show up (Matthew 18:20). How have your meeting times with Jesus gone this week?
2. Was there a time, when the hardness of your heart has made worship difficult for you?
Or are you currently struggling?
3. How would you advise someone to break up the hard ground around their heart?
4. Remember and share of God's mercy, grace, provision, and goodness to you.
5. What were the three things (Thorns) that choke out the word of God in our hearts? What's your struggle?
6. How do you worship God, even on bad days?