

SERMON  
SERIESAND WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE  
TO PLEASE HIM, FOR WHOEVER  
WOULD DRAW NEAR TO GOD  
MUST BELIEVE THAT HE EXISTS  
AND THAT HE REWARDS THOSE  
WHO SEEK HIM.

## HEBREW'S



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HEBREW'S  
VERSE BY  
VERSE STUDYLET US DRAW NEAR IN  
*Faith***SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 3:7-19**

To understand the danger of a hardened heart.

**Read the Text:**

"Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, 9 where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. 10 Therefore, I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' 11 As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.' 12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. 15 As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." 16 For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.'" (Hebrews 3:7-19, ESV)

**Study the Text:****Watch Out!**

Verse 12 issues an important command: "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." The phrase "take care" is the imperative form of the Greek term βλέπω (blepō), which means "to see or exercise sight." In other words, the author of Hebrews is saying: "Look out, or watch out!" And this warning is based on history, namely, the Israelites' rebellion in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt. Verses 7 through 19 form a history lesson to show why, if those who witnessed God's miraculous and redeeming power could harden their hearts and thus miss entering God's rest, so too are we at risk of hardening our hearts. Below is a breakdown of the key concepts in this passage.

**THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Verse 7 begins with another Psalm, but before we even unpack the Psalm and attempt to understand how it is being utilized, we must first consider the very important phrase: “as the Holy Spirit says” (Heb. 2:7). The author of Hebrews elsewhere appeals to the divine inspiration of Scripture mediated through the Holy Spirit (Heb. 9:8) as well as the role of the Spirit in helping us understand truth (Heb. 10:15). The agency of the Spirit as author over Psalm 95 is significant because it means that Psalm 95 didn’t just have relevance for the original audience, but ongoing relevance for readers of every generation.

**PSALM 95**

The portion of Psalm 95 quoted comes from verses 7-11. The Psalm recalls the Israelites’ rebellion and hardening of heart in the wilderness after leaving Egypt, and two key words help us understand what it means to “harden” our hearts.

1. Rebellion - This is the Greek term παραπικρασμός (parapikrasmos), but in the original Hebrew version of the Psalm, it’s the term “Meribah.”
2. Testing - This is the Greek term πειρασμός (peirasmos), but in the original Hebrew version of Psalm 95, it’s the term “Massah.”

Put together, these two terms point us toward Exodus 17. Exodus 17 is the well-known story of Moses striking the rock to give water to the Israelites, but its subtext helps us understand what hardening one’s heart looks like. The people had been supernaturally redeemed from the bondage of Pharaoh in Egypt and led powerfully away from the Egyptian army. The LORD subsequently drowned the Egyptian army after splitting the Red Sea and leading His people to the other side by Moses’ hand. They had experienced God’s blessing and provision time and time again.

And yet, they still were disgruntled: “Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ And Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?’ 3 But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, ‘Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?’” (Ex. 17:2-3). Even though God had shown them repeatedly that He would care for them, they still cursed God’s servant Moses in a total lack of faith. Everything God had done for them was still not enough. And so God commands Moses to strike the rock with his staff, and “water shall come out of it” (Ex. 17:6). And verse 7 ends by saying: “And he called the name of the place Massah (i.e., “testing”) and Meribah (i.e., “rebellion”), because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, ‘Is the LORD among us or not?’”

This is the story Psalm 95 has in mind, and the story that the author of Hebrews has in mind as well. That’s why verses 16 and 17 go on to say: “For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?” The answer is, “yes, it was them!” It was the Israelites who had seen all of God’s goodness and yet still questioned Him. This story is meant to be an object lesson for us today, warning us: “Don’t be like them! Don’t presume upon the blessings of God! Don’t question the providence of God for His people!” Why? Because none of those people saw the Promised Land! They did not enter the “rest” God had reserved for them. They rejected Him; therefore, He rejected them. And so we, who have received more than they had, must be all the more diligent to not harden our hearts, lest we miss out on the “rest” God has reserved for us, as well.

**THE ANTIDOTE TO HARDENING**

What are we to do, then, in order to avoid such peril? Verse 13 tells us: “But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Exhortation in the

community of the faith is the key to resisting a hard heart. What does “exhortation” mean? It’s the Greek term παρακαλέω (parakaleō), and it means “to call upon or beseech.” It’s a call to action! It means that Christians are to, within the context of the local church, hold one another accountable and call one another to action when they see evidence of a hardening heart. It means, practically, saying to another person: “Hey, I notice you seem very bitter or resentful towards God because He hasn’t done \_\_\_\_ for you, but consider all of the things He has done for you. Don’t harden your heart to His goodness.”

### **FALLING AWAY**

One interpretive issue that sometimes arises is the concerning words of verse 12: “leading you to fall away from the living God.” This sounds like a “loss of salvation.” However, two things must be said in response. One, this passage (like all passages) should be read in concert with the whole of Scripture. Scripture is clear that salvation is not something someone can lose. Two: the language indicates an act of the will on the part of the individual. It’s the term ἀφίστημι (aphistēmi), and it means “to withdraw or retreat.” It’s the same term Jesus uses to describe those who “believe for a while, and in time of testing, fall away” (Lk. 8:13). However, notice what else Jesus says of these people: they have “no root.” They are not like those who have a firm foundation. In other words, they were never really saved. They didn’t have any rooting in Christ. They gave intellectual assent, but never thrust the care of their lives upon the living God. But, how do you know for sure if someone is or isn’t saved? You don’t, really. And so the warning to exhort one another is all the more important.

### **THE REAL PROBLEM**

Finally, the author ends this passage by exposing the real underlying issue: “So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief” (Heb. 2:19). Was it the hardening of hearts that caused their issues? Yes, but their hearts were hardened ultimately “because of unbelief.” You could literally translate “unbelief” as “unfaith.” It’s the Greek term ἀπιστία (apistia), which is the combination of the prefix ἀ, which indicates negation, and the Greek noun πίστις (pistis), which is usually translated as “faith.” It was a negation of faith that led to their demise. It was unfaith that caused them to miss out on the “rest” God had prepared for them.

## **What About Now?**

The main objective of this text is to warn us of the danger of lacking faith, which leads to a hardened heart. That’s the real issue, and the issue that we are being called to address as well. Whenever we call into question the goodness or faithfulness of God in light of some difficulty we face in our lives, we are in essence living with *unfaith*. And if we give ourselves over to this unfaith, it causes a hardening of our hearts to occur, wherein we are more and more unable to see God’s goodness when He acts. Why? Because we expect the opposite, and we begin to look for any evidence that He has done that. And, critically, we miss out on all of the evidence that suggests the contrary. So we must take great care to call one another to correction when we see evidence of hardened hearts in our community. It can feel unloving to call out someone for this kind of thing, but it’s actually the most loving thing you can do, for it might save them by “snatching them out of the fire” (Jude 23).

## **Study Questions**

### **Day One**

1. Read Hebrews 3:7. Who wrote the Psalm being quoted?
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- 2. Read Hebrews 3:7-11. Which Psalm is being quoted here? What story does this recall?

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### Day Two

- 1. Read Hebrews 3:12. What is the command in this verse? What does it mean to “fall away?” (Hint: see above notes)

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- 2. Read Hebrews 3:13. What are we to do with one another in order to avoid hardening our hearts?

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### Day Three

- 1. Read Hebrews 3:14-15. What have we come to share in if we hold to our confession? If share in this confession, how does that motivate us to exhort one another?

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- 2. Read Hebrews 3:16. Who heard and yet rebelled?

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### Day Four

- 1. Read Hebrews 3:17-18. Who was God provoked against? Who missed out on His rest?

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- 2. Read Hebrews 3:19. What was the ultimate underlying issue that led them to miss out on God’s rest?

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### Discuss the Text!

## Session 7 Discussion: Exhort!

It’s very uncomfortable to “exhort” another Christian. We often fear being seen as “judgmental” or “self-righteous.” However, the Scripture tells us to do this as an act of love. Exhortation is beneficial. Certainly, we sometimes can be judgmental, so when we do exhort, it needs to be done with wise counsel, but that doesn’t change the fact that it still must be done. To avoid exhorting one another is to risk allowing those in our community to harden their hearts and risk judgment. Talk as a group about how to navigate this very important practice.

- 1. Icebreaker: Do you think Christians should “call out” one another in love? Why or why not?

2. Have you ever been called out by another brother or sister in a healthy manner? What was the result?
3. Have you ever had to call out another brother or sister that seemed like they were drifting? What was the result?
4. Is it wrong if you know a professing Christian is living sinfully and you don't confront them? Why or why not?
5. How do you safeguard the practice of exhortation from self-righteous judgment?
6. Kid Talk (For Home): Talk to your child about the last time you had to discipline them. Explain to them what would have happened if they had been allowed to continue doing what they were doing. Then ask them which is worse: the discipline or the potential outcome of being left alone. Then explain that this is what Christians are to do with one another: discipline in order to avoid real danger.

## Takeaways:

1. Psalm 95 (a psalm about Exodus 17) is an example for us, to warn us from hardening our hearts against a gracious and loving God.
2. A hardened heart is the result of no faith.
3. We face the potential for real destruction if we live with no faith.