

## Exodus: The Way Out of Hardheartedness

### Welcome/Prayer

### Foreword

In this sermon series, “The Way Out,” we’ve been studying the book of Exodus and discovering that God can and will provide us a way out of all places and situations that hold us captive. Recall from the preceding lesson the scriptural reference about the risk of becoming hardhearted when we put off making good choices and godly decisions (ref. Hebrews 4:7b NLT). In this discussion guide, we’re looking at Pharaoh’s hardheartedness in order to understand the way out of our own hardheartedness when it happens to plague us.

### Introduction

The writers of the Bible speak about the possibility of hardheartedness, and not only as it related to Pharaoh. Numerous scriptures note that the Israelites (ref. Psalm 95:8, Ezekiel 3:7), Jesus’ disciples (Mark 6:52, 8:17), and the Early Church (Hebrews 3:8, 15; 4:7) were not immune from this “heart disease.” As we look at the ninth chapter in the book of Exodus and examine how Pharaoh’s hardheartedness developed, we’ll see the way out of our own hardheartedness that God provides to those who seek Him and follow His lead.

1. Who is someone (real or fictional) you would consider hardhearted? What makes them so?
2. What might cause us to become hardhearted in our relationship with God?

### Preparation

Read the following text related to today’s message:

#### **Exodus 9:27-30, 33-35 (NIV)**

<sup>27</sup> Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. “This time I have sinned,” he said to them. “The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. <sup>28</sup> Pray to the Lord, for we have had enough thunder and hail. I will let you go; you don’t have to stay any longer.”

<sup>29</sup> Moses replied, “When I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands in prayer to the Lord. The thunder will stop and there will be no more hail, so you may know that the earth is the Lord’s. <sup>30</sup> But I know that you and your officials still do not fear the Lord God.”

<sup>33</sup> Then Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city. He spread out his hands toward the Lord; the thunder and hail stopped, and the rain no longer poured down on the land. <sup>34</sup> When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again: He and his officials hardened their hearts. <sup>35</sup> So Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the Lord had said through Moses.

### Break it Down

As we explore the subject of hardheartedness, let’s consider answering three questions related thereto.

#### **How does hardheartedness happen?**

Pharaoh was caught in his own “vicious circle” of hardheartedness. God was unleashing plagues on his land; when Pharaoh could stand it no longer, he repented (v. 27). Following this declaration, the Lord graciously relented (v. 33b), a demonstration of His character. Yet, despite the mercy God showed to the Egyptian king, Pharaoh reneged and refused to release the Israelites (v. 35). If we examine our own lives, we’re likely to find a similar circle of behavior.

1. Describe a time you've been caught in a "vicious circle." (e.g., a situation you've found yourself in and promised it would never happen again)
2. What is the difference between regret and repentance?
3. What are some things you know about God and His character?
4. Share about a time when someone reneged on a promise to you (or when *you* reneged). Why do you think that happened, and what did that cause you to feel?

### **Where does hardheartedness lead?**

The word, *harden*, means "to make hard, dull, or insensitive." The heart, in ancient and present times, represents the center of one's emotions. Accordingly, if God captures our hearts, we belong to Him. When we look at Pharaoh, we see where hardheartedness leads. Through his vicious circle of repenting and then reneging, Pharaoh closed himself off to God and became calloused and insensitive to God's mercy and grace. This can happen to us, too; a perpetual cycle of sin and rebellion could potentially lead to our own hardheartedness, wherein we willingly disobey God's commands, fail to recognize His hand at work in and around us, and become insensitive and unresponsive to His Word. If left unchecked, we run the risk of losing our lives to our own hardheartedness.

1. Describe a time your heart has been captured by someone or something. What did you do as a result?
2. Have you ever acted insensitively to God's grace? Unresponsively or indifferently to His will? Describe what caused that to happen and what the result was.
3. Do you believe that if we resist God long enough, He will finally say, "Enough is enough," and we will find ourselves cut off from Him? Why or why not?

### **What is the way out of hardheartedness?**

If you've ever found yourself in a vicious circle of any type, you know how difficult it is to free yourself from its deadly spiral. Awareness of that reality is the first step out of hardheartedness. When we realize and acknowledge our own inability and trust in God's ability, He will set us free and show us the way out of our hardheartedness and foster in us a willing, obedient spirit (see Ezekiel 36:26).

1. What is a habit that was or has been hard for you to break?
2. Describe a time God has helped you do something that you couldn't do on your own.
3. What does a new heart and new spirit look like?
4. When has a sense of conviction brought change to your life?

### **Conclusion**

Hear the word of the Lord, spoken first to the nation of Israel and then later repeated to the early followers of Jesus: "Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. You must warn each other every day, while it is still 'today,' so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. Remember what it says: 'Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts....'" (Hebrews 3:12-13, 15 NLT)

1. What sin do you continue to commit despite your best intentions? Ask God to set you free.
2. If you're feeling dull and/or insensitive to the things of God, ask Him to give you a new heart and a responsive spirit.

### **Close in Prayer**