

Thirsty for a Soft Heart

“Your heart has layers and layers of callouses.”

This was God’s response after pouring out my painful heart to Him.

I had just experienced a year of traumatic events, one more hurtful than the other. There were challenges I’d never faced, a series of turbulent situations, and a succession of surprise attacks from the enemy. It felt like I had been swept over Niagara Falls in a barrel, unable to tell which end was up.

Physically, a callous appears on our bodies when there is pressure on an area of our skin, causing a hard surface to form. I have a callous on my finger from gripping my pen too tight when I write. Callouses protect our skin. We’re fearfully and wonderfully made by our Creator.

Spiritually, however, hardness of heart can transpire from abrasive circumstances or suffering one hurt too many. Our hearts can also become calloused when we turn to someone or something besides God, searching for what only God can give. When we look to an idol, we turn away from Him. This hardens our hearts.

Symptoms of hardness of heart are many and varied. A calloused spiritual heart can manifest as passion loss, indifference, a feeling of numbness, or doubt. It is also noticeable when we isolate from people and God (isolation equals desolation), when our devotional time becomes dry and rote, or when we become jaded critics. Dire spiritual consequences can result from a hardened heart.

The disciples had just witnessed the miracle of feeding the 5,000. Immediately after, while they were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus came walking on water toward them. The disciples were terrified of Him and cried out in fright. Mark

6:52 tells us why: “. . . for they still didn't understand the significance of the miracle of the loaves. Their hearts were too hard to take it in.”

A hardened heart thwarts our spiritual understanding to the point that even miracles no longer impress. It's difficult to experience personal revival when our hearts are hard. No, it's downright impossible.

When God exposed my hardened heart that day, after recovering from the shock of my true heart condition, there were specific things I did to cooperate with God in softening my heart. These prayer directions served to give Him full access to my hardened heart. They saved my spiritual life.

Here are the eight steps I took to position myself for God's heart-softening. I implore you to go through them, one by one. Your spiritual life may depend upon them:

1. **Get honest with God.** Lay your heart on God's altar and pour it out to Him—all of it. Bring your bottled-up distress, questions, loss, habitual sin, lurking anxiety, anger, and unmet needs to the Lord. God can take it; His shoulders are broad. Get brutally honest with Him. Bring the contents of your heart into the light of Christ Jesus. Light chases darkness.
2. **Surrender your pain to Jesus.** If you don't, you'll build a memorial to those traumatic events, pitch a tent at its base, and camp out. No, instead give your hurts and disappointments to God and leave them there. God longs to turn your battle scars into beauty marks so that you reflect the image of our Savior.
3. **Extend forgiveness.** If you walked into a convenience store to buy a loaf of bread and the price tag read \$100, would you buy it? Of course not. You would say, “That costs way too much!” Unforgiveness comes with an enormous price tag. It will weigh you down with a heavy emotional burden you were never intended to carry. But

here is the highest price of all: if you don't forgive, you won't be forgiven. Therefore, forgive whomever, whenever, of whatever. Forgive, let go of resentment, and repent of bitterness. And while you're at it, extend God's amazing grace to yourself as well.

4. **Intentionally cast your care upon the Lord.** Sometimes you barely catch your breath from one trial before you are afflicted with another. Therefore, it's vital to ensure you aren't shouldering the care of anything that has occurred. What problems or people are you still carrying? Picture yourself walking up to the throne of Jesus and placing your burdens in His hands: "Jesus, they're Yours."
5. **Ask God to perform spiritual heart surgery.** Our loving Heavenly Father wants to reach His healing hand into your spiritual heart to heal wounds, soften scar tissue, and tear down walls. Give Him permission to speak to your heart, convict your heart, strengthen your heart, and deposit the desires of His heart. Let God do a transforming work in your life by giving Him full access to your heart.
6. **Recalibrate your expectancy.** When you're sucker punched by the enemy, it's like you've experienced your own spiritual Pearl Harbor. This can deal a blow to your faith. If you aren't careful, your expectations of the future can reflect the hardships you've faced. Ask God to recalibrate your faith to echo Jeremiah 29:11: "'For I know the plans that I have for you,' says the Lord. 'They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.'"
7. **Refocus your vision.** Somewhere along the way of being turned upside down, your purpose probably got a little (or a lot) blurry. Prayerfully revisit your personal mission statement and let the Lord give you laser-focused vision. Ask Him to reignite your passion to continue running the race of your calling with reckless abandon.

8. **Learn every lesson.** Our lives are lived in seasons. And there are reasons for every season. Mine every lesson, revelation, and wisdom nugget you can from what you've just experienced. God is a multitasker and uses it all—the good, bad, and the ugly—to prepare us for His overall plan for our lives. Take everything you've learned in the wilderness into the next season of promise.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Are you presently experiencing symptoms of hardness of heart?
2. Are you struggling with a particular hurt?
3. Why do you think a hardened heart impedes personal revival?

Personal Prayer for Revival

I ask You to reach Your healing hands into my spiritual heart to smooth any callouses and soften scar tissue. Tear down any walls I have built to protect myself from future hurt. You are Lord of my life and Protector of my heart. Open the eyes and ears of my heart so I can see and hear You.

Help me to guard my heart. I turn back to You in any area I may have turned to an idol. Break up the fallow ground of my heart so that I'll be thirsty for You once again.

I love You, Lord! In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

—Jamie Morgan from *Thirsty: A 31-Day Journey to Personal Revival*.