

A Study of the Heart Week 5
Hardened Hearts Become God-manipulating Hearts¹
1 Samuel 4

Review:

Everyone lives for some kind of treasure.

Whatever you treasure will control your heart.

Whatever controls your heart will control your behavior.

If lasting change is going to take place, it must take place through the heart.

How are you guarding/keeping your heart?

1 Samuel 1 – A desperate heart becomes a dependent heart.

1 Samuel 2 – A complacent heart becomes a compromising heart.

1 Samuel 3 – A listening heart becomes a fruitful heart

The hardened heart 1 Samuel 4:1-4

1. The elders lead the people into deadly arrogance.
 - They asked the right question: *Why has the Lord defeated us today?*
 - They never stopped to examine themselves to listen to the answer.
 - Instead they reached for the Ark.

2. The Ark
 - God condescends to the sensory needs of His people - tablets, manna, Aaron's rod, foot stool of God's throne, mercy seat
 - All point to His covenant rule, His mercy, His power and His presence
 - They are all significant teaching things but only pointers
 - Why did they take the ark?

3. "It" (vs. 3) not "Him"
 - They put their trust in "it" not "Him". They march out with it and are confident in it. Notice the commentary in v. 4 – This is the ark where God dwells.
 - They still do not really want God. They chose not to consult Him.
 - Wouldn't you be concerned when you saw Hophni and Phinehas present?
 - In essence they are trusting that through a thing they can manipulate God to work for them.
 - Application: We can do the same thing with our devotions, prayer, Bible study, church attendance, etc.
 - In our hearts we hope to manipulate God to work for us rather than seeking to know Him.

¹ This material is derived from a friend and mentor, Phil Smuland.

Can God be manipulated? 1 Samuel 4:5

1. This is essentially superstition like a lucky rabbit's foot.
2. Like a pep rally – “Who’s got spirit?” “We’ve got spirit!”
 - We want a formula for spiritual blessing and success.
 - They were holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power...2 Timothy 3:5
 - What did David want when he was pursued in the wilderness? See Ps 63.
 - We tend to want to reduce our relationship with God down to a few easily transferrable maxims. There is a world of difference between *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Purpose Driven Life*

Where God is...1 Samuel 4:6-22

1. When God is not present an ark is just a box.
2. When we seek to manipulate God, He seems to step aside, which eventually orchestrates our own defeat. (4:21, 22 – Ichabod – glory has departed)
3. God dwells with the broken and contrite of heart. Isaiah 57:15
4. Those who seek Him receive blessing even greater than they could have asked or imagined. Ephesians 3:20, 21

Discussion questions week 5

Group Discussion:

Would you describe your current walk with God as one of love, awe, worship and joy? Or, might it better be described as perfunctory, dutiful, dull?

In Revelation 2:2-4 the believers are doing what they are supposed to do but they no longer love Him. Discuss possible reasons why they are doing the right things without being motivated by love.

Could it be that you are doing Christian things to merely keep Him at arms length or to manipulate Him?

What does manipulation of God look like in your own life? Is it active or could you be passive aggressive with God (sulking, hoping He will feel sorry for you and allow you to get your own way?)

Is your prayer time and Bible reading just another attempt at control and manipulation? Do you feel that God owes you something for the time you spend with Him or for the service and obedience you render Him?

Review Romans 8 and close in prayer.

Personal Reflection and questions to discuss with a friend:

What things do you desperately want in your life? (Your core desires when it is all said and done. Your life values)

Have any of these values or desires changed over the years?

What has been added to your list?

What has been dropped from your list?

How does God figure into it all?

What do you want from Him?

Where have you been disappointed with life?

Have you ever told God about those things?

Do you ever think Him as a God who messes with your life?

How convinced are you that He is seeking you out as His beloved child?

Get coffee with someone this week and discuss your answers to these questions.