

“Do Not Harden Your Hearts”
For Our Good Always
Downtown
September 5, 2021

Good morning, my name is Brandon if we haven't met. I'm one of the pastors at our Lexington church. I was here for many years before we launched Lexington, almost since the very beginning of our Downtown church. So I'm excited to be with you guys this morning.

Last week, we talked about the biblical category of conscience. How everyone has a conscience, and how our consciences are affected by sin and culture. We introduced a concept called moral foundations theory that helps us see that our thinking about right and wrong is not neutral. It argues that different cultures base their sense of right and wrong on different receptors, kind of like the 5 categories of taste buds. This is really a part 2 of that sermon, so if you missed it you'll need to catch up. But, as a recap, those moral taste buds are:

Care/Harm | Fairness | Loyalty | Authority | Sanctity

Morality is complicated. It's nuanced and requires lots of wisdom. Last week, we talked about how all 5 of these categories have really important biblical concerns that fit into them when looking at God's moral vision in Scripture. And we showed you how different commands in the 10 Commandments actually fit into these categories. For example, murder is wrong because it harms people. Honoring your father and mother is right, because they are authority figures. Taking God's name in vain is wrong because He is sacred and not to be devalued or degraded.

Where we left off last week was that different cultures have different sensitivities, and as a general rule our culture tends to be very sensitive to things that activate the care/harm and fairness foundations. We know things are wrong if they hurt others. And over on the far side, we so devalue the category of sanctity that we don't really even have a category for it. It's like a lost language to us that something could be wrong even if we can't find a victim it hurts.

To bring up an example from last week, this is why we may intuitively sense that something like cannibalism is wrong, but we don't have the language to say why if all we have is care/harm language, because who does it hurt? This is also the reason why the one lady in the video we just watched said she is more inclined towards Jesus because of what she perceives to be love and compassion in His teaching, but does not have a category for the God of the Old Testament (even though, spoiler alert: they are one in the same.)

Just to be clear, the care/harm foundation is a very good, very biblical, and very necessary foundation that is seen all over Scripture. I in no way mean to diminish it's importance. Obviously it's incredibly important for a humane morality. Don't kill people. Don't steal their stuff. Treat others as you would want to be treated.

We have a 2 year old boy named Ames who is quite a handful. He's at the stage where every week he says something we didn't expect him to. Recently it has been us telling him he can't do something and all of a sudden he says, "Why not?" And we're like, "*When did you learn to say that?*" He also has gone through a bit of a biting stage. And you know, it's one thing when they bite a time or two--it's another when you pick them up from Kidtown and brace for what they might say.

For my wife and I, that is just not going to fly, so we've been doing our best to train him out of it. The other day he bit his older brother, and I took him straight to time out and in my most serious dad voice I said "You will NOT bite people," and he said "Why not?" Like an adorable little sociopath. And I said, "Because it hurts people!" And he said, "Ohh."

Preventing harm is very important when thinking about morality. But what I want to discuss today is the potential danger anytime a person, or a group, or even a whole culture prioritizes one of these categories to an extreme and loses the others as a sort of balance. It's probably easier for you to see this in ways other groups do this that you probably don't. So for example:

If a person were to base their sense of morality almost solely on the foundation of sanctity. That certain things are wrong because some god figure says they are wrong, and therefore they are evil and vile and degrading to the very Earth...what that person might wind up as is an extreme Islamic terrorist. They think they are ridding the Earth of the moral filth us Westerners bring with our rampant sexualization and "anything goes" morals. They are exclusively operating inside of the sanctity category as though it's all that matters. And in doing so, oftentimes do great harm to others. But their only way for discerning if something is right or wrong is whether or not it is holy or degrading. And without care/harm to also consider, they think it is righteous and virtuous to eliminate whatever is degrading and polluting our world.

We see that super clearly, and we rightly say "That's bad." Let me give you another one...

If a person were to build their sense of morality solely on the foundation of group loyalty...that's not a bad foundation by any stretch. Humans have needed to build cohesive groups to survive and deal with threats. But if one were to go overboard with that, do you know what might happen? He or she might wind up here:



A passion for patriotism might progress to an idolatrous devotion to a political figure, and might even progress to white nationalism and racism for some, and land you in jail.

Now my assumption would be that most of the people I'm preaching to would see both of those examples I just mentioned very clearly. You'd be like "Yep, I see very clearly what can happen when our moral thinking gets pigeonholed to one thing. That can be disastrous and lead to extremely unChristian places." I don't sense a lot of danger from either of those particular extremes for our people.

But today I'm trying to ring a bit of an alarm bell that we may be more in danger of doing something very similar in a way that is much more difficult to see. I want to try to help you see the potential danger of only caring about issues of care/harm when it comes to morality.

Because if you only care about sanctity, you might become a terrorist...If you only care about loyalty, you might become an insurrectionist or racist...And if you only care about care/harm, you very well may end up labeling God Himself as *evil.*

You'll be left with no ability to understand God as who He truly is or understand His morals.

Turn with me to Hebrews 3. We're going to look at a passage about people who appear to be Christians who "fall away" from God, and talk about why that seems to happen in our context when people use care/harm language to label God as the bad guy. As you turn, I have some backstory for the passage.

In week 1 we talked about how the Ten Commandments are actually part of a salvation story. God miraculously rescued the nation of Israel from brutal slavery to the Egyptians, brought them to Mt. Sinai, and gave them the commandments as house rules. These laws would be how they would learn to be sons and daughters of God and not slaves to an oppressive regime. Humans with dignity, not creatures of burden.

But there were serious issues from the start. Literally while Moses is on the mountain receiving the 10 Commandments, the people get tired of waiting and fashion a golden calf to worship. They worship this image and have a party that based on Hebrew word play we believe would have been rated R, at least. So...not such a good start.

This angers both God and Moses, and fun fact Moses actually takes the first tablets of stone with the commandments inscribed on them and shatters them on the ground when he sees this. After the dust settles, and Moses gets a replacement copy, they set off on a journey to the promised land. The trip takes much longer than anyone expected, because God was not going to let egregiously rebellious people ruin the humane community He was trying to create. The journey turned out to be a testing and purifying one, and, long story short:

Not everyone who started at the mountain made it to the promised land. Hebrews 3 explains why:

7 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.'"

God was provoked by their idolatry, ingratitude, and refusal to trust Him even after all they'd experienced. These people literally watched the Red Sea stand up like a wall, but somehow still rebelled against God when things took longer than they hoped. Some were unable to handle their story being different from what they expected.

12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

"Falling away" is the biblical term for someone who seemed to be a Christian, or a follower and worshipper of the God of the Bible. They gave every appearance of this--but then walked away.

This has been a concern and a warning for Christians throughout the ages. The reasons people walk away from Jesus in different times and cultures vary, but the warning stays the same.

Some of the ancient Israelites lost patience and began to think God wasn't trustworthy. They grew angry and bitter toward God because they didn't understand why it was taking so long.

At the time when Hebrews was written, the reasons were different. Hebrews is another name for Jewish people, and at the time many Jews were confused about how Jesus was different from some of their expectations of the Messiah. They didn't understand why many Jews weren't accepting and following

Jesus. It was disorienting for them. So the book makes the case that Jesus is the true fulfillment of all we see in the Old Testament and pleads with them to trust and follow Him.

Living in a very different time and context, our reasons will be different. But they still circle around the same core issue that God doesn't operate in all the ways we expect. Just like them, we often grow confused about God and if not resolved that confusion can lead to a hardened heart.

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.

Then comes the plea again, the refrain of this passage.

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.

So the writer of Hebrews, speaking to Christians of his day, reaches back and uses this ancient story as a parallel and a warning. Some of them didn't make it. They hardened their hearts towards God. They fell away.

The central metaphor for "falling away" here is hardening. It paints the picture of a person's heart who once was open, warm, and trusting of God that is now closed, cold, and distrustful. As you may know from experience, when someone's heart becomes hardened, they become very difficult to reach or reason with.

The interesting thing about this passage is that it claims we both harden our own hearts *and* we are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. The refrain of the passage, "*Do not harden your hearts,*" implies that you play a role in this hardening. It's an active process to a certain degree. But also it says we are to encourage one another every day so that none of us will be "*hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*" And when you are being affected by something deceitful, you don't always know it's happening. It can feel more like a process that happens to you.

I believe this is the reason so much caution is given here. It's both something that happens to us gradually over time, that we may not see happening, and it's something we have agency over and participate in. The warning here feels like -- "This may be happening to you without you knowing it--don't let it happen!" Because of this complexity, we are called both to protect ourselves against this hardening effect, and also to protect others.

In an effort to encourage you today so that you won't be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, I want to tell you a primary way I see this hardening process take place in our culture. It's not the only way people "fall away," but it's absolutely a primary one, and I would argue, the one that's hardest for us to see.

Here, hardening often happens through a process of eventually labeling God as immoral, as the bad guy. Because the primary category we have for right and wrong is care/harm. And if you overvalue this foundation at the expense of others, I fear it will only be a matter of time before you end up deciding that God is the one doing the harming.

Let me show you what I mean. I'm gonna put this all the way on the bottom shelf and start with an extreme example. We'll work outside-in.

Nadia Bolz Weber started a church in Denver that she led for 10 years before leaving to become what she calls a "public theologian." I name her because she has a platform with many Christians who are questioning their faith, and I think it's important for you to see her reasoning.

She is someone who has definitely labeled the God of Scripture as the bad guy. She is not in the vicinity of biblical Christianity, and by that I mean she does not necessarily believe Jesus physically existed (essential for Christianity), or that He raised from the dead (essential for Christianity). And while serving at this church, she had a drag queen Minister of Fabulousness on staff.

The logic in this quote is as straightforward as it gets:

["If the teachings of the church are harming people, (which she of course thinks they are) then we need to rethink those teachings."]

In other words, "Care/harm is literally the only category I have for morality." If the God of Scripture demands limitations on behavior that people perceive as harm, then He is the bad guy and we need to either reject or redefine Him.

In her book, *Shameless: The Sexual Revolution*, she calls out "harm that's been done to people as a result of what the church has taught them about sex, body, and gender." She explains: "You can draw a straight (bleeping) line from what people were told in church and the harm in their lives." And if she was just talking about weird purity culture stuff from the 90s, I might understand. But she's not, at all. She's talking about the idea that God would put restrictions on consensual human behavior. She makes it clear that in the 10 years she pastored her church, she "never once told people what to do with their junk."

She also believes the idea of God having wrath on sinners who rebel against Him is "punitive and unthinkable." Again, if you translate that into the language of moral categories, it means that she so values the foundation of care/harm that she has no category for God's wrath.

From my experience, that is often what "hardening" looks like today in our culture. Deciding that the God revealed in Scripture, with all His limitations on human behavior that I don't understand, isn't and can't possibly be morally good. He is an evil, controlling oppressor. He's the bad guy.

In the context of our culture, I can see why someone gets here. The God of the Bible asks me to do things that sometimes I don't want to do. He asks me not to do things that I do want to do, in my flesh. So if I listen to the cultural forces that tell me I should always be free to chase after any desire unless it hurts someone, then before long God will necessarily be cast in the role of oppressor. He's harming me and harming others, so He must be revolted against or radically altered. And the reason this can be so tricky, or deceitful, is that you actually use your most functioning moral category to pronounce judgment on God. So it can feel like you are doing the right thing!

It's very sad for me to think about, but most of the Christian leaders who had the biggest impact on my faith growing up have also "fallen away," using the language of Hebrews. And most of them share a very similar story.

I don't know if any of you have ever heard of Joshua Harris, but he wrote a book in the 90s called "*I Kissed Dating Goodbye*." He basically argued that dating had become too flippant, and that Christians should pursue more of a courtship model where you only date when you are ready to pursue marriage.

In hindsight it had some pretty big flaws, and a 21 year old shouldn't have written the definitive book on dating. But at the time it greatly influenced the way I thought about dating. Now if I were to write a book on dating for Christian men today, it might be titled *For Goodness Sakes Ask a Girl Out...* but that was a different time.

Joshua Harris went on to be lead pastor at a well-respected, reformed megachurch. Until 2019, when after leaving his church he also announced that he was getting divorced from his wife, and that he no longer considered himself a Christian. In his announcement, that surprised many people like me, he framed his deconversion from Christianity in the context of repentance. He repented from being a Christian, and he apologized that his writing and speaking about God's restrictions on sexual behavior "*contributed to a culture of exclusion and bigotry.*" He used care/harm language to judge God--the God He once loved, trusted and submitted to.

There was also a musician named Derek Webb. He was the stuff of legend for a particular type of young Christian in my time. He was a thinker too, and he would host these live shows where he would alternate teaching and singing. His music was far from the white-washed, minivan-driving mom Christian music on the radio. It was honest and raw and stirring. His most famous song, *Wedding Dress*, said words you'd never hear on Christian radio. He was a hero in the faith to me. Profoundly influential.

Until he walked away from the faith on a very similar path. He went from writing songs about the beauty of the gospel to writing a recent song called "Some gods deserve atheists." In other words, the God of the Bible is oppressive and harms people, so He deserves to be rejected.

That is just two examples, and if I had more time I could do more. The common thread in all of them is that they decided the boundaries for human behavior laid out by God in Scripture are "harmful." Oppressive, restricting. So they labeled God as the villain. They did not wake up one morning and go "*I don't believe Jesus existed anymore,*" or "*I now find the resurrection hard to believe*" -- the reasons for their shift dealt with morality. They decided God was the bad guy.

I said we'd work outside in, so here's what I'll tell you--this is not some theoretical thing I'm talking about that happens "out there." I could rattle off enough names of people who used to sit exactly where you sit to make me cry. People who were LifeGroup Leaders here. Recovery leaders. Missionary Members. Culture setters in meaningful ways, 5, 10 years ago. And a very sad amount of them are no longer following Jesus, generally speaking, for very similar reasons. I still love them dearly and can get misty eyed thinking about them.

Most of them, again, did not wake up and go, "*I just can't wrap my mind around the Trinity anymore.*" They, over time, labeled God as the bad guy. They decided that the vision of morality the God of Scripture called them to, or their friends to, was simply unacceptable.

It's the same story almost every time. If the only category you have for morality is care/harm, then you will eventually look at any law or rule God gives and you will say "*Well who does it hurt?*" Who does it hurt if I marry a non-Christian? Who does it hurt if my girlfriend and I are sleeping together before marriage? Who does it hurt for me to pursue a lifestyle outside of God's design? And if you can't come up with a reason that is compelling to *you*, then you'll end up deciding God is wrong. That He can't possibly be good.

So I don't mean to sound alarmist when I echo the words of this passage to be careful, watch your heart, and encourage others so this won't happen to them. But I would like to get your attention, because I think it is very important. And I worry this is very difficult for us to see.

In the Atlantic article “How Americans Became so Sensitive to Harm,” Conor Friedersdorf discusses a cultural current that makes this even more difficult for us to see clearly. The article is about a psychological term called “concept creep.” Which simply means the meaning of certain concepts like the words trauma, abuse, or bullying literally creep over time. They went from having severe and objective meanings at a certain point in time, and over time the concepts “crept” downward, to include less and less severe things, and also crept outward, to include more and more categories of things.

Just to give an example, the word “trauma” in the DSM, the manual used for psychological diagnoses, used to have a very clear definition. It was something that would devastate almost anyone, like being sexually assaulted, or fighting on the frontlines of a war. In culture, the concept has crept downward and outward, such that recently I read an article where a writer said watching his college football team lose was a source of psychological trauma. To be fair, I was sad watching my Tigers lose last night. Jesus still reigns but Clemson football doesn’t anymore, anyone wanna say *Amen* to that?

But still, that’s absurd, right? And more importantly, if we allow that word to be used for something that minor, then we have no word left for the rape victim. And that is very problematic.

And if a whole culture perceives harm in smaller and smaller things, in more and more categories, it sets us up to be unusually sensitive to harm. This causes all sorts of breakdown and problems, as we begin to perceive harm or malice in places it was not remotely intended. This is an extreme example, but picture a young employee and a very reasonable boss. The young employee gets a bad performance review, goes to the boss and accuses him of emotionally abusing him. The boss is like, “*No--I just told you you were not doing a good job.*” Then the employee says “*Now you’re gaslighting me.*” It can descend into chaos very quickly.

Friedersdorf ends his article by saying this: “*Many who push for more sensitivity to harm seem unaware of how oversensitivity can do harm.*”

Unfortunately, in this kind of environment this oversensitivity often gets directed at God. He becomes the source of trauma, and can start to be viewed as this cosmic bully in the sky.

And here’s what might be the most heartbreaking part of all this. Flip over to Hebrews 4 and let’s pick up where we left off. Hebrews 4:1-7. This is speaking about the Israelites who rebelled against God in the wilderness, and I want you to pay attention to where God was trying to take them.

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” 5 And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.” 6 Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

Here’s the thing: God is not and never has been the bad guy. God’s intention was to take them to, quote “His rest.” The promised land. The ache of their souls. The land flowing with milk and honey.

Their hearts hardened against the most benevolent Being you could ever imagine. Somehow they became convinced that He was the bad guy.

He was trying to take them to a land with no more slavery. No more evil warring nations nextdoor who would stampede the city at night and kill their loved ones. He was trying to create a community where no one would worship idols and the destruction they bring with them. Where no one would dehumanize themselves by bowing down to a created statue. Where kids grew up to be kind and joyful humans because they learned to honor authority. Where they didn't have to worry about anyone lying about them or slandering their reputation. Where they didn't have to lock their doors because no one would covet or steal, and they never had to worry about their husband or wife breaking their heart by cheating on them.

He is the best good guy ever.

Even still, their hearts grew cold and hard. They became convinced that God was wrong for what He asked of them. To wander around while the disobedient ones who would ruin it for everyone else died off, eating the same old manna every day. They labeled God, with those stunning intentions, as the bad guy.

You have to think in all the disorientation that must come from people assuming you are the bad guy, God may have thought *"If you could only see what I see."* Like, He's watching them traipse through the wilderness, and their hearts are clenching up more by the hour, and He looks over and sees the promised land. If you could only see the rest that awaits you. It's better than a spa day. It's better than the meat pots you had in Egypt. If you could only see the freedom from your own destructive tendencies. Freedom, even, from your own hardened heart. Freedom from the fear of others sin against you.

If you saw it the way I see it, you'd love it just like I do and you'd lay down literally anything to get it. When you don't see where God is taking you, and why, it becomes easier to harden your heart against Him.

It's kind of like the commandment "Observe the Sabbath, and keep it holy." Built on the sanctity foundation, it is one of the commands we really struggle with. We aren't so much opposed to a day off, but don't know what it would even mean to "keep it holy." And if the only foundation you have is care/harm, then you will probably rebel against this or maybe even despise it's restrictiveness. Unless you are convinced by an argument of why a day off is a good way to "care" for yourself.

What if I don't want to keep the Sabbath this week? What if I need to work more right now? What if it just doesn't work with my schedule? What if people don't want to do this, how is that just? Are you gonna force people to do something they don't want to? What kind of God are you if you do? Are you just manipulating us, controlling us?

A few years ago, Adam, one of our pastors went to Israel and got to experience a Sabbath there. The whole nation shuts down to observe this holy day. Everyone, in a spirit of unity, is preparing for it, purchasing their groceries. They went and had a long, 4 hour Sabbath meal with a family, and there were other neighbors or friends there. They sang songs that everyone knew. The kids were there participating as well. They had rehearsed jokes that people must have known were coming but laughed anyway. Everyone celebrated and rehearsed God's goodness and their family and their nation.

And somewhere in the midst of it, he was like *"Oh. I see it now. This is different. This is what it means for a day to be set apart, holy. And I would really like my kids to get to experience this."* Like, how much healing would it bring to America if we all did this for a year? Have your neighbors over for a long meal full of ritual and tradition rehearsing the goodness of God and expressing gratitude for all we've been given? That would be deep medicine for us.

If you could only see what I see...that our frantic busyness and loneliness and the sense that our productivity determines our value could be dealt a death by weekly meals together with friends, on days of no labor, full of intentional gratitude towards God? Would you give up the restriction of your freedom for something as beautiful as that?

If you could only see what I see...what if every child in our land never had to give a second thought to whether or not Mommy and Daddy love each other and will be faithful to each other and will always reconcile no matter what? If the fear or disorientation of adultery and divorce never crossed their little minds? Would you submit to restraints on your sexual freedom for something far more glorious?

If you could only see what I see...how much peace and security and relief would be ours if all of our dealings with each other were honest. If there was no deceit, no slander, no false witness, business was always conducted fairly.

If you could only see what I see, your heart would not want to harden. All it takes is the right perspective to see that God is not only benevolent, but brilliant. But you have to realize that God has more moral categories than you probably have.

Conclusion

For those who hardened their hearts in the rebellion, their entire focus was right here. On the frustration and difficulty of the wilderness. They had a one-world view, and what God was asking of them made no sense to them because of it. But God had a two-world view, because He knew the promised land was coming. He knew that all of the difficulty and sacrifice would be more than worth it.

Later in the book of Hebrews, we see the same idea. In chapter 11, the author gives some examples of those who did not harden their hearts or fall away. It mentions all of these prominent figures who trusted God until the end of their lives, even though they did not get to see the fulfillment of God's promise in Jesus.

Hebrews 11:13-16

13 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

We too, in our secular culture, have a one-world view. Where this life is all there is, at least functionally. So we have a constant temptation to only care about and love this world. To do what we want in this world. To follow our desires here.

And if that's your only time horizon, then Jesus' call to deny yourself and follow Him makes no sense. Why would you? Why would you lay down your desires? Why would you obey Him, follow His design for life, and accept the inherent difficulty of following Jesus? In this view, the moral thinking of our culture makes way more sense. Don't do anything that makes your life more difficult.

But God aggressively claims a two-world view in Scripture. He says that there is a better country that awaits us on the other side of this one. A heavenly city beyond our wildest dreams. He claims that this life is nothing but a short walk through the wilderness, if you will. And what comes after it is either a literal eternity of unimaginable bliss, or an eternity of suffering, regret, and deep grief. Those whose hearts

softened toward Him in repentance and faith are in paradise, and those whose hearts remained hardened and rebellious are eternally separated from any source of goodness.

And if that is the case, then trust in God's authority makes all the sense in the world. Repentance of our sin and self-denial makes all the sense in the world. Accepting whatever hardships come with following Jesus in your life is a no-brainer. Anything else would be illogical.

Our culture will never have this two-world view. In fact, they will think it's ridiculous. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:18: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Those that fall away trade a two-world view for a one-world view. They trade the wisdom of God for the wisdom of the world. They trade being different, and set apart from the world for believing everything the world believes.

So my goal for us would be to settle in to being the right kind of different. The right kind of set apart. The right kind of weird. I do not have in mind Christian t-shirts or bumper stickers, that's not what I mean. I mean a deep and settled peace that we know what God's heart for us is, and we know where He's taking us, so we are really okay sticking out here and being thought of as foolish or behind-the-times.

If we come under God's authority and embody His morals, we are gonna be different from the world. We will be quite distinct from the culture around us. And this is not something to mourn, but is for our good and theirs. So we get to increasingly say, "*If you could only see this the way I see it, you might love it too.*" Living for eternity will never make sense here. But if eternity exists, it will never make sense to not live for it.

Here is what I will leave you with: God is not the bad guy. He never will be the bad guy. He wants you to be in the true and better promised land. He wants you to be in paradise, and He's diametrically opposed to anything that would keep you from getting there. Sin cannot be tolerated there, because it would quickly spread and ruin it. So sinners must repent to enter.

This is why He pleads with you, "*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart.*" So that 10 years from now, we will not have hardened our heart and fallen away. Instead, Lord willing, we will delight in His law, marvel at His design for life, and be more convinced than ever that He is for our good.

And we will be 10 years closer to that better country, our eyes and hearts trained on the joy that lies within it.