

## Tender Hearts

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God seeks to reshape our hearts. Being our Maker, God recognizes that we are what fills our hearts. Lust and pride corrupt the desires of our hearts. The hurt we experience through the exercise of our lust and pride, also known as sin, can harden the heart. Some people have become hard-hearted throughout life. Bad experiences have produced bitterness, anger, and hostility in their heart. Yet, God seeks to soften hearts like this through the Gospel.

*“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).*

*“Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind” (1 Pet. 3:8).*

Both Paul and Peter instructed Christians to be tenderhearted. This term appears in the middle of a list of other attributes of Christians. For this reason, the term is rarely emphasized. Yet, tenderheartedness is critical for our development as the image-bearers of God.

Being tenderhearted is about having a kind, gentle, sentimental nature. Puritan preacher, Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646) described the tender heart in the following statement:

*“A tender heart is such a heart as doth easily yield to God, yield to God’s touch...Lay your finger upon wool and it yields, but lay your finger upon a stone and it will not yield; lay your finger upon flesh and flesh will yield, but lay your finger upon iron and that will not yield. A heart that yields to God, that’s the soft, tender heart; and the heart that holds out against God, that’s the hard heart. When a man will easily yield to the touch of God’s word he shall easily be convinced by God’s word.”*

Paul, Peter, and Burroughs must have been thinking about God’s renewal when they wrote about being tenderhearted. The prophet Ezekiel wrote of a coming time of heart renewal: “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26).

God’s people, Israel, had become hardhearted as a result of their idolatry. However, hardheartedness was not just a problem among Israel. Hardheartedness was a problem of the world. Hardheartedness is our problem. When we worship the idols of money, sex, and power, our hearts will become as hard as stone. Yet, God by the Spirit can give us a new, tender heart that yields to His voice. In the remaining article, consider some qualities of a tender heart.

**1. Tender hearts seek protection from sin.** Tender hearts are easily penetrated. They are vulnerable. Therefore, they need protected and guarded from harm. Solomon urged, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23).

Some who have been hurt close their heart. They do not want anything or anyone in their heart. This is not what Solomon intended. Solomon warned about allowing the wrong things into our hearts. He was concerned with allowing sin to fill our hearts. If sin fills our hearts, sin will flow out of our hearts. However, if we will our hearts with love, truth, and goodness, righteousness will flow out of our hearts.

**2. Tender hearts are sensitive to the distress of others.** God uses the tenderhearted to help the distressed. Tenderness is required to see those seeking Jesus. Without genuine affection, we will view those in sin without compassion. We cannot be useful to Jesus until we develop empathy for those lost in sin.

Jesus trained the apostles to share the Gospel with the lost. Training the apostles did not just involve teaching them a doctrine to preach. Jesus labored to soften their hearts. For example, Jesus and the disciples were traveling one day. He sent James and John into a Samaritan town to see about spending the night. The Samaritans refused to have Jesus and the apostles stay the night with them. The message of the Samaritans was clear: no Jews allowed.

The inhospitality of the Samaritans enraged James and John. In a fit of anger, they asked Jesus, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9:54). As far as James and John were concerned, the Samaritans were no better than the prophets of Baal that Elijah had killed generations earlier.

Surprisingly, Jesus responded, "...Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:55 KJV). James and John had hearts of stone. Jesus' heart was set on the salvation of all people, even the Samaritans. If James and John were going to share in the work of Jesus, they had to share in His heart.

**3. Tender hearts are forgiving.** When our hearts are softened to ours and others' need for salvation, we will become able to forgive. In Paul's use of the term, he lists tenderheartedness before forgiveness (Eph. 4:32). This tells us something about the relationship between the two attributes. We cannot forgive unless we first have a tender heart. Forgiveness that comes from a tender heart will lead to healing.

## Conclusion

In the words of Burroughs, tender hearts yield to the word of God. A tender heart is a meek and submissive heart. The effects of a tender heart are best seen in Jesus. He was obedient to His Father. He served the least among Him. He loved the unlovable. He patiently developed men who were violent, impulsive, and power-hungry to carry out His work. God can do wonderful things for any whose heart yields to the Gospel.

We need to affirm the virtue of being tenderhearted. This type of heart is never promoted in the world. The world values ambition and self-reliance. The self-righteous hostility of James and John continues to be embraced as leadership styles. Yet, Jesus continues to call for meekness. If you want to be light in a dark world, radiate the brightness of a tender heart.