

SOWING THE HARD HEART-1

Hear God's Word

"Who is the LORD, that I should obey him...?"

...By this you will know that I am the LORD...."
- Exodus 5:2, 17

Hard-heartedness is characterized by...

- blatant disobedience or a stubborn spirit
- a lack of concern for spiritual things
- returning to sin once things get better
- ignoring the testimony of others
- trying to bargain with God

Jesus' parable of the sower and the soils will help you hear God's Word and develop a heart that God can bless. God's work in our lives is dependent upon our willingness to "hear" and respond to God's Word. The story of Pharaoh (Exodus 7-11) provides a sobering account of the tragic results of resisting God.

Welcome/Worship

How has God recently gotten your attention—either through His *mighty* "right hand" or His *merciful* "left hand"? Why is it so important to God that you recognize Him as the Lord? Why should that be important to you?

Spend time in praise and prayer acknowledging that "*God is God, and you are not.*"

Word

Read Exodus 9, which captures most of the dynamics involved in the story of "the clash of wills" between Pharaoh and God. Make whatever observations you'd like about the text as you read through the passage together.

1. Obviously, Pharaoh's *pride* made him resistant to God's Word (notice Exodus 5:2). However, there are a number of other reasons we might be resistant to "hearing" God's Word. How has either *pride*, *fear* or *bitterness* kept you from "hearing" (responding to) God?
2. Why do you think God removes the plague every time Pharaoh promises to let the Israelites go, even though He knows that Pharaoh will change his mind each time? What does this teach you about *why* and *how* God hardened Pharaoh's heart?
3. What were God's reasons for causing Egypt to suffer the plagues? Could God have achieved His purposes without the plagues? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. Share an example of how, like Pharaoh, you resisted God's Word in one of the following five ways (see the list). What was the outcome? Who (or what) was your "Moses," the one who forced you to see the need for God in your life? How did you react to this person, back then? Now?
5. At this point in your life, is your pressing need to learn more or to practice what you have already learned? Be specific. How would you like the group to pray for you?

Works

Spend the remainder of your time ministering to, and praying for, one another.