

## Dirty

Chapter 5: Hard

*I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.*

*-Jerimiah 17:10*

I'm constantly being drawn back to my childhood. I think our early years are the key to the difference between normal and abnormal. How do we become who we are today? I suppose we all start out the same at birth. Sure, the circumstances are different for each of us, but, in the beginning, there is a baby. Why do I sometimes feel dirty in the company of others? I'd like to think it all began with a baby. In those first few days we are loved. Someone went through the whole nine-month process to see a baby. There was stress, pain, frustration, and elation to hear the cry of a child. Then life's lessons come filtering into the life of that child. For some unfortunate souls, all hell breaks loose.

For a select few, a baby's heart can grow hard for some very harsh reasons. Some children are born into an unwanted family. Unwanted: that is an interesting term. There are unwanted mothers. There are terrible fathers that nobody wants or deserves. How would you like to begin as a baby unplanned, abandoned, or dumped? It's making me sick just thinking about it. Who does not want to hold their child? There are unfortunately some people who are not thrilled about having a baby.

A few mom's find themselves swallowed up by Postpartum Syndrome. For some unknown reason, a woman can go into distress over having a child. A few Dad's decide to drink, hit, or abandon their child after birth. For some unknown reason, they can't be the dad they always dreamed of. Maybe it's all the expectations. Maybe it's the pressure of caring for someone for the first time. Either way, a child is born and life begins. Sometimes it begins well and sometimes they are born into a harsh world.

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In 1995, Morgan Hill was dumped in the trash by an un-wanting Mother. She received a second chance by the grace of God. A construction worker accidentally found the baby and took it to the Hospital. Years later Morgan found out what really happened to her. She took it upon herself to find and thank the man who saved her. Bad things do happen to babies. Good things happen too. Morgan could have hated the world for being discarded. Yet, she chose to be thankful, grateful, and loved.

As we grow up, there is a change. That change is brought on by the world around us. We assume we are loved. We assume that people care. At some point, we find out that some people don't love and don't care. That can change who we are. Why? I think it's because we were influenced by people and events. Some things affect us positively while others mark us with negative scars. Either way, as we develop, so does our perspective on life.

I know people who are terrible humans. Their attitude could affect me. I have felt glad I am not one of the mean people. It's sad but it's their life. I have said I'm lucky I don't have to take that person home. In a way, I have also said that these people have to go home with themselves. Certainly, a rotten person is horrible at home as they are at work. If not that's one hell of a mask they wear. Yet, what happened to make them nasty?

Morgan Hill said at 20 years old **“I could not thank him enough,” Hill said. “He gave me a chance to live a second life. Because if he didn't find me, I would not be here to help others and show soon-to-be mothers that there are so many options out there and you don't have to throw your baby away.”** Babies become the people we meet. We work with them, live with them, and play with them. There is no way we can avoid people. I mention Morgan Hill again because she had every reason to hate, yet she loves. Her circumstances could have changed happiness to hardship, but it didn't.

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For some reason, we are forever change and groomed by the events in our lives. I have friends that have influenced me. I remember reading that a teenager was reportedly influenced to commit suicide because of an Ozzy Osborne song called *Suicide solution*. Influenced, enticed, convinced: is it possible? It breaks my heart. However, in many circumstances there are great stories of overcoming life's trials. Many successful people are driven by the pain they have suffered. Some are strong while others seemingly can't handle it.

I remember a story of a girl going to a councilor because she just could not get past a nagging feeling. The councilor used hypnosis to get to the bottom of the problem. What came out was sexual abuse by a 12-year-old family member. Was it real? Is that the real cause of their pain? Who knows. What became of it was this. They were 30 years old now. It had been almost 20 years since the alleged incident. This family member threw their uncle (who is now 42) under the bus, threatened his family, job, and life just because they believed the councilor. Was it called for? Was it justice? Did it redeem them? Did it make their hearts hard?

In these first pages, I wanted to paint a picture. Life gets to us. Some have it tough while others have it pretty good. I bet the Queen of England has had a great life. Yet, maybe not, even the Queen has had to endure bad memories. I bet John Wayne lived a fairy tale life as an actor. Did he? We assume a lot by the life people portray. Money and happiness are far apart, I have seen some polls that seem to say we believe money could help bring happiness. Yet time and time again, money, success, and fame are our undoing. Nothing is what it seems.

As kids, we love the princess stories. We dream of being rescued and swept away to a castle. Within all these dreams, there are expectations. A dream just might be a dream and nothing more. Life is hard. This chapter is called *Hard* because life looks easy for some and hard for others. Stories of dream filled lives are about people. Some of those stories depict people who

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became hard. We were all babies at one time that were changed in a story. What is your story?

Did it make you hard inside?

Mary Schmich, of the Chicago tribune wrote an article in 1995 called *Wear sunscreen*. At one point in the article she says ***“Live in New York City once, but leave before it makes you hard. Live in northern California once, but leave before it makes you soft.”*** It seems natural to believe that babies begin as loving people. What reasons do they need to hate, kill, and insult? A child in Africa can be born into poverty or riches. A New York kid can be swallowed by the city that never sleeps. I know NFL football players that grew up in poverty on the streets of Los Angeles. I suppose life is what you make it. Every baby has a chance no matter the circumstances.

I certainly don't want to belittle a bad beginning for a child. A dumpster is no way to start. Poverty in the ghetto is no way to begin. The streets are tipped in the wrong direction for some children. Digging out of poverty to success takes way more work than the Queen's son. Equally, digging out of being abandoned in a dumpster takes work. A lot more work than coming into the world in the loving arms of a mom. We can get hard if we stay too long. We can go soft if we have it too easy. Yet, I hear story after story of people rising above and sinking below their circumstances.

I want to begin looking at hardness of heart in several ways. For starts, each of us is building a wall. Pink Floyd constructed a massive musical hit with *Another brick in the wall*. It was the story of a boy that was forever hardened in his heart by tragic events. Brick by brick we put another on top of another until we can't see people anymore, and conversely, they can't see us either. I liken it back to the masks we wear. I feel some can take them off; while, others have

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them sealed on their face with crazy glue. They are forever changed, forever hardened in their hearts. They are building masks and building walls.

Hard hearts can begin in bad places. Nobody plans to harden their heart. Pharaoh of Egypt lived a life of luxury. He owned a nation to some degree. What he said goes. What he wanted done was done. How could a man who had everything get a hard heart? In Exodus 9 of the Bible it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Did God, do it? There has been plenty of arguing over that point. What I think is meant is that God allowed the heart of Pharaoh to speak. He did not want to let his slaves go. He did not want the free help to leave. Pharaoh was the entitled. God was not going to deny him anything. That produced a hard heart.

Pharaoh did not live in a bad place but his heart was in a bad place. There are expectations he put on himself. A lifestyle he desired. A certain sense of respect he needed from people. He wanted it his way because it had always been his way. That is the first type of person I wanted to explore. Sometimes we gain a hard heart because we were spoiled. Possibly it's more on expectations. I feel that normal people want things to remain normal. They expect life to flow straight down river. People outside that norm ruffle feathers and make bends in the river. Normal wants a straight line.

Imagine the pressure to keeping things normal. I have a friend who is that type of person. Their house is clean. Their hair is perfect. The clothes are well picked. The car is new. House is impressive, and the lifestyle is continually fed with trip after trip. Is it a dream life? Maybe, but the energy spent maintaining that lifestyle is tremendous. I have seen things in their life go wrong. I have noticed the clenched jaw, quiet manner, and decisive answers. There is controlled and being controlled. Maintaining perfection in an imperfect world must be hard. It makes you hard.

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I also have a family member that hates a lot of things. It does not take much to blow their stack. They have a really hard heart. I feel that it's freedom they lack. In both of these people's lives they think they are free to run amuck to keep things comfortable. In the end, I think they deny themselves freedom. The freedom to accept defeat, change, differences, and anything else life throws at them. I bet they make mistakes when the pressure builds far more often than others. I have seen both of them panic when life goes to hell.

I can just imagine Pharaoh sitting there watching the Hebrews leave. He saw his own people heaping gifts on these slaves just to get them out of town. The humiliation to his kingdom. There was no freedom to improvise. No freedom for change. No freedom to find new ways. He would never allow that. It makes for a hard heart. The anger, resentment, and loathing in his heart. That type of beating is tough on a heart. Becoming a hard heart takes time. You need it to be like a stone so it can't be hurt, can't be changed. They call the final stone in a wall: the capstone. I suppose it is the last brick in the wall. The last straw. That is where hard heart begins.

A person who has everything needs to avoid everything. That seems so weird but story after story proves it. Howard Hughes was a multi billionaire. He was innovative and inventive. His mind was free to explore. What a great success story. Yet, as he became more famous it became a drug. There were more chances, more money, and more successes to collect. In trying to maintain this drug, he became more paranoid and more reclusive. He died a lonely man. A man with a hard heart. He was the staple of the abnormal, but built a wall of normalcy to keep things the same. It's possible that drove him crazy.

I think that is why the so called normal people can't stand the abnormal. The nonchalant attitude drives them nuts. I do wonder that if Howard Hughes was an out of the box thinker, then what happened? I think he let his own chaos over power him. It crushed him. He begged for

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normalcy. Pharaoh needed control to maintain normalcy. My family member can't control other people and that ruined their normalcy. That other friend I have needs the pristine life to legitimize normality. In all of them grew a hard heart. They became increasingly hardened towards others, because others don't play ball that way. Life does not play ball that way.

I find that when push comes to shove, hard hearts breed hard hearts. The expectation that some put on others is overbearing. I do not want to put my story on display. I have in other writings and in all honesty, am tired of mentioning it. With that said I am a great example. Life has tried to give me a hard heart. I think to some degree I have one. It's hard not get tougher in the old ticker when people push and push. Maybe I expect too much from people. I think I want to learn. People have something to give. I respect that in people. I freely let people give and that was a good thing. Yet, when your "give" to me becomes commands, and commands become domination, my heart began to harden.

In a way, it became: *I hate management; I hate leadership. I hate being used and abused.* Some of these feelings are warranted but not all of it. I have a friend who says he noticed I expect far too much from myself. I totally agree. I like having a perfect sick time record. I love having perfect attendance. I tried harder to maintain great marks. I work harder and expect less from others. I wonder if I am building a hard heart one brick at a time. To my defense, I have lived a life of family abuse. The mental bashing, I have taken is ridiculous. *Poor baby, patrick.* This does not need to be a pity party. However, nobody needs to be told they are less than stellar all the time. Hearts get hard when there is no break in the bashing.

I got lucky one day. I was sitting in a sociology class, and the young teacher was saying that the homeless need our help. They are the unfortunate. In my heart, I believed that was wrong. The homeless are the lazy, unproductive, and dregs of society. In the class, she rebuked

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me. Yet, she explained the truth about the homeless. I investigated her claims and cried all the way home. She had humbled me in front of all those students. Yet, she changed my heart. Maybe she took off a couple of bricks. I felt like the Grinch whose heart grew three times that day. Maybe the story people have is not what we see. Maybe, life gets in the way. Hard hearts come from bad circumstances. Sometimes those people end up on the streets. They become the neglected, the street people. I have a heart for the rest of these thanks to a teacher who could see what my hard heart could not see.

There is a story of a serial killer named the Son of Sam. He eventually got caught and ended up in jail. He came from a Christian home. Somehow and some way his heart went cold. He became an uncaring killer. One day, in jail, he was talking with another cell mate across the hall. They were sitting there just doing their time. Each one recounted how they got there. In the conversation, it came around that they both hailed from good loving homes. Then it hit them both. Oh, my God we both bought the lie. The lie was that their parents were stupid and did not know the truth about anything. Together that day, they both realized the truth. They were wrong. What a crazy feeling it must have been to know your hard heart came from “you” accepting a lie.

You see, there was no reason for these two to be sitting together in prison. There was no reason to kill. All those bricks built up. All the anger ensued. All the love and all the teaching from loving parents met a thick brick wall. The realization was not that their parents were right. No, it was that they had every opportunity to not be in jail, yet here they found themselves with hard hearts and busted lives. There is head strong and heart strong. Isn't that Pharaoh in a nutshell? Some like to blame God because he allows hard hearts. Well, to be fair, God allows freedom. Freedom to choose hatred or love. Freedom to build walls. We have the freedom to allow head strong to manufacture a hard heart.



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In all these stories, including mine, walls are built. I'm not sure we can avoid that. Life makes scars and walls. That day in sociology class I learned something more. It's our nature to build walls. Yet, we have the freedom to understand. To listen and accept others for who they are. To be a friend first. Brick by brick we build hard hearts. I believe that brick by brick we can tear down walls too. Life just might be about building and breaking down walls.

I have said I won't be crushed in a relationship like in my first marriage. I have said I won't treat my kids like my parents treated me. I won't be lazy. I was told that I am not very masculine by some of the dearest people to me. I will be a man! I will pursue the perfect life to please the perfect people. Brick by brick I have allowed my wall to be built. My heart is turning cold and hard. Even I have said in my stupidity "I am poorer than you, so I will work twice as hard to own what you own, to do what you do." How do you undo that mess?

See I am a good example. Normal people have rules and guidelines to live a normal life. Abnormal people have rules too. Oh, they say they don't but I know the truth. You push and push to keep things strange. You refuse to comply. You reject the normal. I get it. I'm not normal. I do the hardest assignments. I read the hardest books. I am the one who can't sit still. Abnormal people resent those who claim their nuts. Hell, we should not care but we do. The so called normal should not give a flip about the weird but they do. Rules and expectations create hard hearts.

Brick by brick we build hard hearts. Sometimes it's the masks we wear. I am energetic and inventive. Yeah, nice terms, but I never quit. There is little time to smell the roses. I'm responsible and the leader type. Yeah, but your strict and over bearing. We know it and we see it. We also need to maintain the fake mask and the brick building process. There are moments we

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laugh at others. What fools they are. Yet, in the mirror, we mock ourselves. The pressure to maintain a certain look or lifestyle is nuts.

I just watched a clip from Simon Sinek on Millennials. Older people love to bash the lazy millennials. I suppose my parents bashed my generation too. That's how some of those bricks got there. Nice of me to reciprocate that to my kids. Anyhow, Simon went through four reasons millennials are possibly lazy. In the end, he gave another great insight into my terrible parenting skills. We protected this generation. We don't spank, lecture, and fail them because it hurts their little hearts. Those little hearts feel victimized in the real world. Whose fault is it. Who is building their walls?

I wonder if we train our kids to put life on a pedestal? We ask Santa to bless us. We pray to God to bless us? It's all about nice and not naughty. We give hugs and blow kisses on boobies. We want them to feel better. It's not like we teach our kids to be pessimistic. We don't continually tell them the sky is falling. Yet, I wonder if kids think we do. Is this all done in a charade of life. Hoping for the best and avoiding the worst. We hear of life going south. That happens to other people. Our life should be a place where dreams do come true all the time.

Hollywood is certainly a dreamer's paradise. They wrap life up in a bow. Relationships in the movies and on TV happen in the blink of an eye. There is always very little courting, conflict, yet there is always a ton of forgiveness. We are groomed to believe in miracles. Do we realize that miracles are such because they are rare? Within all this expectation, it's no wonder our kids get hit with a reality two by four in life. Kids are trained by Teletubbies and Barbie's that life is safe, fun, and kind. It's unrealistic what we teach our kids.

When life goes down, and it will, do those we trained gain hard hearts? We said it was safe, promising, and fair. Those participation medals were supposed to work. Oh, they worked

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alright. They added more bricks to a hard heart. Where do their hard hearts come from? It's from saying it will be ok, fair, and just. Possibly weak parenting produces hard hearts in their children.

*Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them. Proverbs 13:24*

Is God wrong? Is Spanking a good or terrible thing? These are questions that don't have easy answers. If you just dismiss one way to train a child or the another, you might find yourself with a complicated child. Children used to be given mentors. People who had lived life's troubles. They trained children to endure and succeed. They say that the best offence is a good defense. I just feel that if we avoid trouble then we end up playing the victim card. The victim card is where disaster is lurking. A spankless generation is now more violent and judgmental than ever before. Why is that?

When trouble comes we are left standing at the mirror wondering what went wrong. Certainly, I am a victim somehow? I feel we equally put ourselves on a pedestal too. I read this book years ago, called *Is it love or addiction* by Brenda Schaeffer. She pointed out that we paint a picture of what love looks like. We then try and put that picture on people. When they don't respond the way we pictured or dreamed, then things go wrong. That's the gist of it with life's expectations. We expect results. In prayer and wishes we expect results. Again, when results are not favorable were left standing at the mirror wondering what went wrong.

Hard hearts come through expectations. Poor little Patrick has been hurt by people. I expected too much. Maybe, but shouldn't we expect something? I believe so. I don't think we have a right to be happy or prosperous. Some people disagree. When things go wrong they add another brick. I think we should expect to be treated fairly. We should expect to be loved. I

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would hope in goodness. Yet, it's not always the case. We should hate mean actions. We should hold people accountable. We harden our hearts when we assume we have a right to an easy life.

It's always comes back to what is normal. Normal is the comfort zone for many. A place of reliability, stability, and predictable things. We hope for these things but it's not a right. Nobody will get everything right. Last night I was watching hockey and Johnny Hockey of the Calgary Flames shot a knuckleball right over the net. It was a terrible shot. Yet, it hit the glass and bounced back off the goalie and in the net. Terrible aim but great results. The goalie thought terrible aim and terrible results. Johnny and the goalie hoped for different results. Life is unpredictable. We have no right to normal.

Life tends to knock us off the pedestal. I have tried to put the likes of Tiger Woods on one. His estranged wife knocked him off with a golf club. A hurricane tends to knock life off a pedestal. Why would a God-fearing church get crushed in a storm? Because normal is not a right. We have no right to normalcy. We dream of perfect relationships but we don't have a right to one. We demand perfect workplaces, but trust me, workplaces will never be perfect. Life will never respect us. Sorry, but that's life.

So, here we stand looking at people. We feel dirty because they judge us. We feel dirty because we don't measure up. We feel dirty because we think we are to blame. Most of the time we blow it because of expecting too much of ourselves. Mistakes will happen. People are different and we expect the normal far too often. People will never treat us exactly as we desire. We may think we have a right, but what we think and what is reality are two entirely different things.

Are you angry at that relative who always laughs funny at dinner? Are you annoyed at the co-worker who thought of something you didn't? We harden our hearts by our own expectations.

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We get annoyed when people don't accept us. Relationships get strained by misunderstandings. I know of a TV personality that was killed because someone hated their role. It does not take much to add a brick. A date is turned down. A friend does not show up. Brick by brick we are masters at building masks and walls. A hard heart never is forged by accident.

Here is a sobering example of inadvertently creating a hard heart. This is my view on drugs and our community. In days gone by there was an initiative called Prohibition. Society was forced not to drink. It became against the law. I bet the church community thought it was a victory. For thirteen years, a silent war was waged until this law was repealed. This was a victory for drinkers. During those 13 years, I suspect that the church believed it was doing the right thing even though it was not popular. I bet those who fought to end prohibition thought they were doing the right thing too. Both sides were building hard hearts.

The thing is this. In the years since the repealing of Prohibition, how many people have had their lives ruined by alcohol? How many deaths? How many unwanted pregnancies? What has been the medical cost? These days they are moving towards ending the prohibition on drugs. Even with all the deaths; All the money made by organized crime; people are fighting to legalize pot. Is it in the name of freedom? Do we have a right to choose? We do, but when some else dies from a drunk or drug addicted person whose fault is it?

I am not coming down on any side. Freedom to choose is the freedom God gave us. Let's take a peek at the church side. When they tried to limit freedom, did they count the cost? Has church attendance declined since the turn of the century? Oh, yes it has. I toured the back roads of Nova Scotia. I have never in my life seen so many empty churches. Church attendance and belief in God has steadily declined. I suppose you could say that is true since drinking went up. I

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am just wondering out loud who had the hard hearts. Did the church have blinders on? Did the drinking advocates have blinders on? I bet both sides dug in. Both sides build hard hearts.

I'd like to end this chapter with this thought. People get hard hearts when they make a definitive statement like "We affirm we are right." Each time we do, our hard heart receives a brick. The drunk drivers and their victims are in-sequential. Hard hearts only champion the cause, not the effects. It's the same for the church. They believed they knew right from wrong. In a way, they should be the champion of morality. So, it gave them the right to legislate morality? Again, the cause is morality. We are the keepers, so we must uphold it by all costs. Even the cost of God given freedom.

It was the same in Jesus day when his disciples plucked grain heads on a Sunday. That was work and you must not work on Sunday even if your starving. Jesus pointed out over and over that the religious rulers had hard hearts. Jesus also said over and over "I desire mercy not sacrifice." Over several years, Syria has used chemical weapons on opposing people in their own country. The amazing part is the rest of the world. They are arguing over the type of response. Yes, a response based on morality. Yet, people are dying by chemicals. Mercy means help. Sacrifice means doing the right thing regardless of the image it makes of you. Isn't it true that hard hearts ignore mercy for image?

The victims always lose. The cause is always the winner. The normal person must classify the abnormal. The rich must make classes to keep people apart. In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were signs saying *no blacks allowed*, gosh even in churches for goodness sake. What were they thinking? Laws saying women cannot vote. What were they thinking? On and on I could go feeding the walls of the broken hearted. Life is hard. Why must we add to it and or be the cause of it. It's crazy that we love babies but hate their ethnicity or class. It's insane to ignore

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the victims just because you must be right. I have felt dirty because you have to win. Do I have to be labeled? Why is it so hard to accept people as they are? Does it hurt that much? Is hurting others to make yourself feel justified worth that much?

If I feel dirty inside, then what to do and where to go? I have always debated the answers. Some say that a good self-help book will ease your soul. I have been to seminars on self-esteem. The speaker is usually uplifting and inspiring. Some people find solace in a bottle of beer. Others find safety in a joint or drug. All of these things help to various degrees. Yet, we know that books finish; seminars end; and drugs and alcohol run out. What then? Where is the safe place where hearts won't go hard?

There is a place that is safe. I visited a church in my teenage years, but it never stuck with me. It had been over 18 years since I entered another church building. That night it was raining and cold. A large man with Jesus like eyes took my hands and made them warm. In that moment, he stole my heart. I think a few bricks came tumbling down that day. True Christian love is a wonderful thing. These days my heart is fairly hard towards the Christian organized church. This institution rests on a pedestal. This is the house of God. A place of honesty, goodness, and love.

In all the abuse, I had received in life there must be a safe place. A place where people never averted their eyes or strain their smiles. A place where warm hands should rescue the dirty. It would be easy to say it rests in a friend. Yet, most people have few friends. Maybe it's in a counselor, but sessions end. Books end, seminars end, and family is complicated. There must be a place of hope? It's time to go into the hands of the church.