

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Basics: Practices of Believers

Pt 4 Obedience

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 08.30-31.08

Right now I want you to take out your outlines and your notes for tonight. We are going to be continuing our teaching on the basics. If you are new to Crossroads and you've just shown up, we are in the midst of a series that are called the, "Basics—practices of every believer". And basically what we're doing is we're going through week after week and I'm just trying to pull out some of the most elementary spiritual disciplines that we need to incorporate into our lives. Now you might get to the end of this series and you might be thinking, well, he missed some or he should have included this. This is not supposed to be an exhaustive list. In fact, you know how this all came about? I was sitting across the table from a young man over lunch and he asked me, "What are just the basics that I need to be doing in my Christian life?" And I pulled out a napkin, literally pulled out a napkin, and just off the top of my head I wrote a list of about six-seven-eight things. And I gave them to him and I said, "Here, you know....now let's figure out how...how to do that." And that's really how this series developed. I thought, you know, if this is a question that was coming from him, this might be a question that's coming from many of you. And so there'll things I've left out and there will be things I probably should have included in this series but that's...that's the beauty of my profession. I can just...we can just talk about this later. We don't have to have everything all neat and packaged. You know why? Because the Christian life isn't like a all nice, neat package. There are some things you need to hear at a certain stage in life and you kind of get those and it's time to grow and time... But then there's times you got to circle back around and you got to hear some of the fundamentals again. And that's really what...what we're doing. We've been talking about worship—that was our first week. And I didn't necessarily mean to confuse you by having this idea of corporate worship but rather the idea that...behind that is more...the...we're giving glory to God with all of our lives...that all aspects of our lives are really to give glory to God. But then I asked the question, "Ok, what'll we do when we fail to give God glory in our lives?" Well, that comes into the next basic and we talked about confession and the idea of how we come to the Lord and we receive his forgiveness through confession. And then last week, we talked about the practicalities of faith. Not a theological concept. It's easy to have a theological definition about faith but what are the practical, down-to-earth, grassroots elements, of living out our faith. And we talked about that last week. If you've missed that message, those are available at the resource center or online.

Tonight we're going to talk about obedience...something we've just seen portrayed before us and something that probably you would think, well, of course, this is going to be in a list of the basics....that we're called to be people who obey. It really shouldn't shock us because Jesus said in John 14, he said: If you love me, you will...what? keep my commandments. If you love me, you're going to obey me by keeping the commandments...by doing what I say. So that's pretty natural and to be honest with you, I really don't need to go into much more detail than that. It's pretty cut and dry. We're called to be people who are loved by God to obey. Now we're not talking about being people who obey to obtain salvation. This is something that happens after we begin a relationship with Christ...that we then follow that relationship of grace through our obedience. Really, the larger question that we have to be asking of ourselves tonight is

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what is it that keeps me from being obedient? What is it that keeps me from consistently living a life of obedience? The answer to that is the heart—the human heart. Because...what is the Christian heart prone to do? It's prone to wander; you notice that? Our hearts are prone to leave like the hymn writer says: It's prone to leave the One we love, the God we love. Now if you're a brand new believer, you might find that hard to believe. Because there is a sense of excitement, a newness when you go to follow Christ, but as you follow him, you find that your heart has a tendency to wander. And the scriptures call that a development of a hard heart. Your heart moves from a soft state, pliable state, to a harder state...a hard state...to some points where it's actually rock hard. Now that's an interesting turn of a phrase if you think about it—a hard heart. The heart is an organ that was never meant to be hard. It was always meant to be fleshy and pliable and healthy and working. But I'm not referring to a literal organ. Neither is scripture. When scripture talks about our heart, it talks about us as the central element of who we are...us as the central nature...my central being. That's the idea of the heart when we read of the heart in scripture. Remember what Jesus said when he said: This is the greatest commandment. He said: Love the Lord your God with all your...what? with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the first, the great commandment which is interesting because that's how the Bible works. I don't... if you've figured this out yet but the Bible is a large book, and yet it narrows itself at very strategic points. It narrowed itself, for example, down to the ten commandments. And then it narrows itself down again to the great commandment. And what is the great commandment? To love the Lord, your God with all your heart. Now why did Jesus say that? Why didn't he say, oh, love the Lord, your God with all your liver? Or all your lungs? You know, all your stomach? It's because your liver or your lungs or your stomach doesn't represent the central you—your heart represents the central you. Your heart represents your desires and your intentions and your will and your words and your behavior and your emotions. And so when scripture says that you have a hard heart or your heart is no longer pliable, then basically what it is saying, it's saying that the central being, your central being, is becoming hard. Now it's really fascinating to do a study of people who have a hard heart in scripture and you would expect the people to be on that list would be...to be pagans and kings and pharaohs and Pharisees and Gentiles and, of course, they're part of that list. But what is really fascinating that when you study into scripture, you find that people who display sometimes the hardest hearts are the people of God. People just like you and me...people who are disciples and who are apostles. To give you an example of that if you want to take your Bibles and turn for a moment with me to the book of Mark, chapter 16. It's the last chapter in the book of Mark...Mathew, Mark, then Luke. Mark is the middle gospel—story of Christ. In the last chapter, verse 16, it talks about his resurrection and how he appeared to Mary Magdalene and then he appeared to the two disciples on the road and then he comes and it's almost to the end of the book now and...he appears to the eleven in verse 14. Now the eleven had not believed the stories or the rumors that he had actually come back from the dead. Can you believe that? These are the people who were the closest to Jesus. And in verse 14, Mark writes: Afterwards, he...that's Jesus...afterwards...what? after the resurrection, he appeared to the eleven, not the twelve. Judas had hung himself at this point. So he

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appears to the eleven, themselves, as they were reclining at the table, most likely in the upper room. And he what? He rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart which tells us that you can be very close to Christ and your heart very quickly can slip into a state of hardness....away from the desire of obedience. And...you see...we would expect those who are outside of God to have hard hearts but it's something else to hear that those of us who are attempting to walk close to God can be in danger of having a hard heart. God said, speaking through the prophet of Ezekiel, he said: I'm going to give them one heart...I'm going to give them a new spirit...I'm going to put with them...them this heart....and I'm going to remove the heart of stone and I'm going to give....and I love this phrase...I'm going to give them a heart of flesh. I'm going to take out the heart of stone and when they become my followers, I'm going to give them a heart of flesh. Which means, really, what we should strive to be or people who always have soft, pliable, obedient hearts and, when our hearts turn hard, it really is reminiscent of a time before we knew Christ.

And so you know what we need to do tonight? We don't need to talk about obedience. Obedience is simple. That's a simple lesson even to teach. What we really need to talk about is the heart. How do we keep our hearts soft? How do we keep our hearts from becoming hard? Well, what does a hard heart look like? What are the symptoms of a hard heart? I put just a few examples in your notes. And really, these are just concepts...these are possibilities. I think these are...these are pictures into the human heart—a hard heart. For example, one who complains frequently—someone who is just never really satisfied. And by the way, you don't...you don't always have to complain outwardly. You can be complaining inwardly...kind of grumbling to yourself which is really a reflection of what's going on deep inside. Compares arrogantly...look into life of someone else and you think, why are they acting that way or why are they being that way. And you compare them to yourself and there is an arrogance that...almost where you're putting them down. Do you ever do that? Ah...criticizes styles and personalities...critiques others' successes. Which by the way, the last three all have to do with relationships with other people. Do you compare, do you critique, do you criticize other people? Then we switch and it's kind of more towards our relationship with God...cynical of God's work. When you see somebody else doing something in the name of Christ, are you cynical because you didn't do it or we didn't do it or this church didn't do it. Are you cynical when somebody else is doing a work of God that you weren't a part of? Or it's not part of your theological tradition. Now, I come from a very small, theological tradition called the Reformed Tradition. And sometimes these can be the most cynical people on the face of the earth as if to say, we have it...as...we're the only way. And you have to be careful to get into that camp...into that mindset. Callous to worship...it's where you come and, you know, you might see someone worshipping with a different style than you...they're raising their hands or closing their eyes and then...then you're not expressive that way and so there's just a little bit of callousness to the way their worshipping. Or you compromise with your morals and your values, in other words, you fall into sin in disobedience, or constrained capacity to love. Now you might be thinking...well...how do you know these are the symptoms of a hard heart? I mean,

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where is the scriptural proof of all these symptoms? Right? I mean, I don't see any passages besides...so who are you to say that these are the symptoms of a hard heart. Well, I didn't take them from scripture. I took them from my own life experiences. I...I took them from things I've learned about myself when I've watched my own heart move from soft and pliable to hard and rigid. You might find that somewhat shocking but you need to understand that this is a universal problem for Christ followers....that it doesn't matter who you are or what your job might be...what your role in the body...it's the idea that we all have times where our hearts are prone to wander...to slip from pliable, soft hearts to hard hearts. What can you do about it? What do we do about it when our hearts are hard? And maybe you're here tonight and you're thinking...it sounds kind of like me and maybe that's some of my problems...maybe I'm not growing because my heart is hard and it's callous. What do you do when your heart is hard? There is a passage of scripture I remember learning years and years ago when I was in college. And it's a passage of scripture I still go back to today and I go back to it time and time again because these are the words of Christ in the book of Revelation to the seven churches that are in Asia Minor. I want you to turn there, Revelation, chapter 2. While you're doing that I just want to give you kind of an overview of what you're going to read here in this passage. Revelation 2 is about halfway through a vision that John, the writer of the book of Revelation, is receiving and he is seeing Jesus. And Jesus is speaking to seven literal churches, churches that existed. But these churches are also models for churches of all ages and for believers. I think that there can be clear understanding that this can be very personal too. And he's giving them commendations, telling them what they're doing right but then he's also turning it on them and he's saying these are the things you need to fix. And the very first church, the church at Ephesus, we find has a hard heart and he gives them the formula, the pathway to a soft heart. Listen to the passages as I read it: To the angel to the church in Ephesus write: The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the golden lampstands...that's just language...poetic language...that is talking about Christ who is walking among the churches...the lampstands. And now these are the words of Christ to this church but you might want to think of them as the words of Christ to you if you have a hard heart. Cause... I know your works, and your toil and patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you've not grown weary. Now so far, this is really good. I mean...I want to put myself here because he says I know your works...and I know you're working hard...I know you're toiling...I know you're people are practicing patience. I know that you are a church that cannot stand evil so you're a church that's about truth and that you're even suffering for the sake of truth. This is a church that's receiving high marks. They also don't grow weary when they do good. They move forward...they're not giving up. Then in verse 4, everything changes. He says: But I have this against you. And I imagine as if they're sitting there kind of content with what they're hearing and then he says but I have this against you...and their eyes go wide and their mouths drops open and suddenly they're full on...they're tuned in. What is he saying that he has against me? But I have this against you...that you've abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore,

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from where you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. There he...there he goes. He tells us how to have a soft heart...how to soften a hard heart. You know what I want you to do tonight? I want you to make these notes very personal. The notes that we gave you to fill in, you fill in what you need to fill in. There's going to be some things that you...you might not even need to jot down but there are going to be some things that are said tonight that are going to zero in and key in. If you have a desire to have a soft, pliable heart, there will be things the spirit will be saying to you tonight that you need to key in on. It's as if you heard these words but I have this against you. Write those down. That's why these are personal notes...cause this is a personal journey. I don't want you to just to know the facts. To know facts goes beyond the essence of basics...basics is how do I apply this to my life...how do I put this into the mill of my life and work it? So this needs to be personal for you.

What are some of the things that we...we learn? Well, first, we learn that there's a realization when he said in verse 4: I have this against you. There is a realization. That must have been shocking. But you know, that's how it starts. That's how it starts...your movement towards a soft heart is...somewhere there's a realization...there's a wakeup. Maybe it's an event. Something happens in your life. It could be a tragic event. It could be an accident, could be a death, it could be a relationship that crumbles...something that God is using it to pull you in to himself. Maybe that will be the realization or it could be a message. Very clearly, the word of God says that it will speak like a sword...a dagger cutting through into our flesh. Sometimes the messages from servants will be that thing that God uses to create a realization of our hard hearts. Other times, it...it'll be like a confidant or friend who will have the tenacity to tell you the truth. By the way, this is what the writer in Proverbs is talking about in Proverbs 27:17. He talks about iron sharpening iron. We need those people in our lives to sharpen us. Sometimes it's an internal struggle. More often than not in my life, it's an internal struggle. There's something that keeps gnawing away at me and I cannot let it go. And I think that's because a heart once softened by the Spirit cannot bear to be hardened for long. You just get this sense where you have to take care of this and it's an internal struggle. It's a realization. From there, he says, you go from realization to I want you to remember. That's verse 5: I want you to remember...remember therefore from where you have fallen. Remember the relationship you once had. Remember. There's something about memories that tend to spark us forward. The...the clearest memory for me is when I had first given my heart to the Lord. I was about twenty or twenty-one. It was a very tumultuous time in my life. Now I gone to a Christian school and raised in a Christian family and yet I...I really didn't key...I didn't kind of zero in on it...I just didn't have a sense of the personal element of following Christ until a friend helped me see what it meant to be involved in the relationship. And I remember those days. I remember reading the Bible...sitting in my room at a desk and just reading for hours through the word of God ...reading about stories I'd heard all my life and just fascinated by the fact that I actually found them in the word of God...and then attempting to apply them. ... just some random story, but actually apply them to my life. I mean...I mean it was so fresh. And prayer...and prayer for me was...I mean...it was raw in those days. You

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were just hanging on. And I remember getting to this concept that I'd never really understood before that I was called to surrender to not just a friend and not to just a lord but to a king who was a king and that I was a subject. And...we didn't grow up in a tradition where we went to a church where we got on our knees or anything like that so that was completely foreign to me but I had this sense I should bow before my King. And I remember the day I did this for the first time. Again, I'm in this little bedroom and the door was closed and I remember just kind of pacing around because I felt somewhat awkward about this. And finally, I got down on my knees as an act of submission and I prayed to Jesus. And I just remember this feeling and then getting up from that experience and thinking that the whole unseen universe had been watching me at that moment. And just feeling again a sense of awkwardness, yet freshness and alive. And I remember back to those days. I think about those days and I...I often say to myself, you know, when a heart grows cold, it doesn't get down on its knees to pray. In fact, it doesn't pray at all. So there is a sense, you got to remember, where is it that I came from? Did you notice by the way the single issue that Christ had against the church at Ephesus was that they forgot. They forgot and the text says...their first love. They forgot Jesus. The better translation is that they forgot your first love, you...you left your first love behind. It wasn't that they had just dismissed Christ, it was just that Christ was no longer the most valuable thing in their lives. And that's often the key, isn't it? He's just becomes valuable, not the most valuable.

And so what is the call? The call is to remember. I think by now, you know, I love the apostle Paul because no-holed barred sets it out there. And in the book of Philippians, we see this great transition that takes place in his life. He tells us that everything else is worthless. Just listen to it. It's in Philippians 3a, he says: Indeed, I count everything as loss because of...listen...the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for his sake, I have suffered loss of all things, count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. Listen to it. Do you hear what he's saying? He's saying Christ is of first importance; He is the most valuable thing in my life. And that's the call that Christ is making tonight. Is he the most valuable thing in your life? Or has your heart hardened just a bit? He's valuable; he's just not the most valuable.

And then he says, repent. You move from remembering to repentance. You move from what you realize you need to do to actually doing it. And that's what we pick up in verse 5. He says: Remember therefore from where you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. Now if you remember our teaching on confession, that confession, was openly admitting a wrong. But repentance, listen, is a change in action. Confession is openly admitting; repentance is a change in action. And you know what I think is interesting? That Jesus chose the words strategically repent. Because what is he saying? Clearly he wants an action change. This is not just a mind change. It's not lip service. He says I want you to do the works at first. Now really that's a lousy translation...because what it's better to understand is do the first love acts. That's what it means. Do the things you did at first when you were loving Jesus. Now we're not going to read them but I want you to look at the passage, Matthew 6:6, that's in your program.

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And I want you to write beside it, prayer. And then, there's another verse right below that, II Timothy 3:16. We're not going to read that passage either. But I want you to write beside that verse, Bible. You can read these passages later. But this is the gateway into repentance; back to the word, back to prayer; back to the central, basic elements of what it means to fall in love with Christ. That's where it started for you; that's where it will continue for you. It's that sense of realization of remembering of repentance and then the last, I just threw in there. It's to repeat; to repeat. And what do you mean by that? Well, I mean you repeat. I was having a conversation with my daughters and they're kind of adolescents and so we...they're girls so they're into being clean and pretty and all that but we still have to help them. Right? I mean, you have to help your children understand how to do things. And so Michelle was saying, you know, when you wash your hair, you need to really scrub your hair, you know, don't do it quickly. So I said to Twin A, I said to her, "Have you ever read the bottle of shampoo while you're standing in the shower? What's it say?" She says...she said it. She obviously had done it; she had read the bottle. What's say? Do you know? It's shampoo, rinse and what? Repeat. Right! And so I asked her, I said, so what does that mean? Does that you mean that you repeat it right away or do you do that the next day or next week or in a month? What does that mean? It means repeat. It means whenever you're washing your hair, you do it again. ....there's a sense to it; there's a rhythm to it. It's not just a quick shake of the hair. You know...it's...you've got to lather it up, you've got to rinse it off, you...then you do it again. And you know, that's...that's the model here. That's the same concept of the discipline of obedience...it's a daily activity. You see, if you keep your heart soft, daily soft, repeating soft, you know what? You never have to worry about obedience. You just never have to worry about it.