

# Transformation of a Heart

## Simons Beach Chapel

May 20, 2007

*This message was written specifically for the girls of Simons Dorm at The Stony Brook School—a Christian college prep boarding and day school for students in 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade—for their traditional end-of-year beach Chapel. Yet, it is a message I am thrilled to share with you, since it is both a reflection of what the Lord has done in my life and a culmination of Biblical truths worth living by.*



## On My Heart

There is so much the Lord has put on my heart to share with you. The struggle has not been, “What should I say?” rather “What shouldn’t I say?” I both want to teach you God’s word afresh, and also give you practical application. The only way I know how to do that is by sharing with you what the Lord has taught me recently through both His Word and some difficult circumstances. I am going to be raw, honest, and soul-bearing, trusting that you will find me if you have unanswered questions. This is an open dialogue; I just happen to get the first 30 minutes of the conversation.

## Prayer

*Lord Jesus, we come before you right now begging for open hearts and minds, for the ability to hear your truth. Father, I ask for your words to come from my lips and your message to penetrate the hearts of these girls. Please, Lord, cement this lesson in the very fabric of our beings. Lord, help me to reveal it with gentleness and compassion, yet without compromising the Gospel in any way. In Jesus Name. Amen.*

## Intro

I am going to unpack for you today a life principle that I’ve knick-named “A Heart Check-Up.” It is the culmination of my personal life experience combined with Scripture and Biblical concepts I’ve gleaned from many Bible teachers, such as Beth Moore, Maxie Dunnam, Kay Arthur, Charles Stanley, and Henry Blackaby. Essentially, the idea of a heart check-up was inspired by a precious verse found in Ezekiel 36:26:

**NLT: And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.**

**NIV: I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.**

## Part 1: A Heart Checkup

One thing I never considered when I was your age was the condition of my heart. See, each experience we have in life influences our beliefs about ourselves, others, and God. We carry those beliefs with us in the form of stones in our

heart: some are the size of boulders, others are tiny little pebbles. Over time, all those stones can make for a pretty heavy heart and rob us from living the life we dreamed about. So, what do we do to keep our hearts healthy and not weighed down by life's circumstances?

## The Heart Can Be Filled by Stones

What is the state of your heart? Is it filled with stones? Do you know how to unload those heavy stones? What I've put together is a heart check-up mapping out how to bring our heavy hearts before the Lord and have Him transform them into a heart of flesh.

The first part of the check up is to consider the *Hardening Process*, which has four steps that often move in sequence. Each step can be solely responsible for depositing a boulder, rock, pebble, or even layers of sand, in our heart.

### The Hardening Process

1. **Hurts**—done unto to us by others or committed by us to others or ourselves; e.g., abuse, parent's divorce, death of a parent or sibling, drug and alcohol addiction, moving frequently, being bullied, being a bully, broken relationships
2. **Believing Lies**—Satan's handiwork to get you believe wrong thoughts about yourself, others, or your circumstances; e.g., you're not worth anything, you're not smart enough, pretty enough, strong enough (emotionally or physically), they hate you, you deserve to be hurt
3. **Rebellion**—Acting out against God's instructions; e.g., lying, stealing, cheating (on school work or a boyfriend), promiscuity, drug and alcohol use and abuse, deception with your friends or parents, attitude
4. **Unforgiveness**—not forgiving others nor accepting God's forgiveness offered to you through Jesus Christ; e.g., harboring hatred or anger toward those that hurt you, your parents, your friends, not owning up to your own sin, not allowing God to forgive you and continuing to live with blame, guilt, and shame

We've all been through something that causes hardening of our heart. Once we've identified the source(s), we will be able to move into the *Transforming Process*, as long as we have a willing spirit to do so. There are four steps here, too:

### The Transforming Process

1. **Trust God**—to give you a new tender, responsive heart through the truth and with Jesus Christ as your Savior
  - *Ephesians 3:17 NLT: Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him.*
  - *Psalms 62:8 NIV: Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.*
2. **'Fess Up**—confess your sins and need for the Jesus to be your Savior; tell God everything
  - *Romans 10:9-10 NLT: If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.*
  - *Psalms 139:23-24 NIV: Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*
3. **Right Living**—repent from your sins and commit to right living
  - *Ephesians 4:22-24 NIV: You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*
  - *Matthew 3:2 NLT: Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*
4. **Forgive**—accept God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ and also forgive those you have sinned against you
  - *Ephesians 4:32 NIV: Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

- ❑ **Psalm 86:5 NLT:** *O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help.*

Remember, however, you will need to do a heart check-up often through your life. Each time a new hurt gives way to believing lies, rebellion, and unforgiveness, there will be a stone (and sometimes multiple stones) deposited in your heart. But as you choose to trust God, ‘fess up, pursue right living, and practice forgiveness, God will transform your stony heart to a heart to flesh.

## Part 2: Lessons from Ezekiel

It is by no accident that the verse about a stony heart being transformed is written in the book of Ezekiel. It was a message sent to a rebellious people, the Israelites, held in captivity. Ezekiel, barely 30 and still training to become a priest, was made into a prophet by God and given the mission to declare judgment and destruction on Israel. The Lord told Ezekiel that the people wouldn’t like the message. They would continue to rebel and refuse to listen to the truth. Surprise, surprise. Picture these Israelites with a serious case of senioritis. They hadn’t been interested in listening to God for years, never mind now while they were still in captivity. They were rebellious and trapped by their sin. Their hearts were filled with stone. God wanted them to be alive and have hearts of flesh!

In many ways, I’ve lived much of my life like the Israelites, not being interested in what the Lord wants me to hear or believe. When I began reading chapter 18, it was as though the Lord came down in a booming voice and said, “Elisa, this chapter is for you girl. It is your problem. You are just like the Israelites in their rebellious ways and refusal to hear my truth. You, too, think I’m not fair. But I am. When will you learn?”

Listen carefully to what God said and begin to ask yourself, “Am I like the Israelites? Am I like Mrs. Pulliam? Where do I fit into this picture? Has my heart been hardened by the same rebellious sins that hardened the Israelites’ hearts?”

### Ezekiel 18 (The Message) - Judged According to the Way You Live

- 5-9 "Imagine a person who lives well, treating others fairly, keeping good relationships—doesn't eat at the pagan shrines, doesn't worship the idols so popular in Israel, doesn't seduce a neighbor's spouse, doesn't indulge in casual sex, doesn't bully anyone, doesn't pile up bad debts, doesn't steal, doesn't refuse food to the hungry, doesn't refuse clothing to the ill-clad, doesn't exploit the poor, doesn't live by impulse and greed, doesn't treat one person better than another, But lives by my statutes and faithfully honors and obeys my laws. This person who lives upright and well shall live a full and true life. Decree of God, the Master.
- 10-13 "But if this person has a child who turns violent and murders and goes off and does any of these things, even though the parent has done none of them— eats at the pagan shrines, seduces his neighbor's spouse, bullies the weak, steals, piles up bad debts, admires idols, commits outrageous obscenities, exploits the poor"—do you think this person, the child, will live? Not a chance! Because he's done all these vile things, he'll die. And his death will be his own fault.
- 30-32 "The upshot is this, Israel: I'll judge each of you according to the way you live. So turn around! Turn your backs on your rebellious living so that sin won't drag you down. Clean house. No more rebellions, please. Get a new heart! Get a new spirit! Why would you choose to die, Israel? I take no pleasure in anyone's death. Decree of God, the Master.

"Make a clean break! Live!"

### Similar Sins

Does it sound a least a bit like the sins committed everyday in our culture? “Don’t seduce a neighbor’s wife”—well what about the TV show, *Desperate Housewives*? “Don’t live by impulse and greed”—what about the million dollar game show, *Let’s Make a Deal*? “Don’t treat one person better than another”—when was the last time you really played fair with friends and didn’t choose someone simple because of what they could do for you?

God, in this amazing passage, sets the rebellious Israelites straight and calls them to account for their own actions. He is giving them a clue into to why their lives are so darn difficult and weighed down. Their hearts were stony hard,

filled with all sorts of sins; stones the size of boulders, rocks, pebbles, and sand. He wanted them to “clean house” and stop the “rebellions.” He wanted them to live and not die. There was a reason for His decrees: He wanted them to live!

## Part 3: Life Circumstances and Transformation

I just didn’t stumble on these scriptures and have an ah-ha moment. No, I was face down, sprawled out before the Lord seeking Him with all that I had left in me. I was so weighed down by carrying too many stones in my heart I could barely take another step. I can only stand before you now because I faced the truth of my hardened heart and allowed God to walk me baby-step by baby-step through the transformation process.

### **Boulder of Hurts** [uncover the boulder and place it in the clear bucket, my empty heart]

For me, the first stones laid in my heart were boulders. Boulders of hurt done unto me. As early as age three, from what I can remember, I was hit by my father. I can’t tell you why or how often. I thought it was because I was too fresh. While my father hit me, my mother always seemed to be standing by, just watching. By the time I was in middle school, dad stopped hitting me. He began to see the violence he trained up when he saw me attack my sister or mother, and sometimes him, in fits of frustration and rage.

### **Rocks of Rebellion** [place the rocks into the bucket]

On top of the boulder of hurts, I heaped on rocks of rebellion. I acted out, both looking for acceptance from friends and also thumbing my nose at God and my parents. By the time I was in high school, I had a laundry list of rebellious and sinful deeds: shoplifting, lying, bullying, promiscuity, drinking, sneaking around, cheating, cussing like a sailor.

### **Pebbles of Believing Lies** [pour the pebbles into the bucket]

Alongside the boulders and rocks were the endless deposits of pebbles: pebbles of lies. I believed it was all my fault my dad hit me. I believed my mother didn’t really love me. I believed that I was ugly, fat, and stupid. I believed that in order to get a guy to like me I’d have to offer myself to him. I believed that if I got married, had babies, and lived in a house all my own, life would be fine. On all those lies, I built a life that was unstable and in constant disarray.

### **Sand of Unforgiveness** [pour on the sand]

The boulders of hurts, rocks of rebellions, pebbles of lies, were not emptied from my heart when I became a Christian in college. Instead, I took a bucket of sand and dumped it over all those stones until they were completely covered. The result was an even heavier heart.

When I accepted Christ into my heart as my Lord and Savior, I took a huge faith step by believing Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of my sins so that I may go to heaven. The goal of getting into heaven was my motivation for believing. I was sure that all my rebellious ways were dooming me to hell and needed another option. I wanted a clean slate—to begin again—and to have the past locked away for all time. Essentially, I was looking for an insurance policy to guarantee a spot in heaven and I was willing to pay the monthly premium of obeying God from that point forward.

At the same time, I wrongly believed that accepting Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of my sins wasn’t retroactive. I also didn’t want to own up to my old rebellious ways. But by not doing so, I was carrying around additional stones of shame and guilt. [place those on top of the sand] I tried to divide my life into the before and after Christ, yet my past weighed heavy on my heart with each step I press onward.

The side effects of carrying around a burdened, stony heart are painful. You become tired and weary, especially emotionally. I was more and more angry, resentful, irritable, anxious, and ultimately depressed. It was unbearable, not only for me but also for my husband and children. They, and a few close friends, were the only ones who felt the side effects because I knew how to pretend everything was okay and I was strong! I put on a little make-up, grabbed my classroom dress, donned a polite smile and no one knew. I busied myself with activities, Bible studies, ministries, and hobbies. All the while, my heart was spiritually and emotionally nearing death.

### **Unloading the Sand and Picking Out the Stones Through Trusting God**

I finally listened to the advice of close, God-loving friends and sought help from a professional Christian counselor. With my counselor’s guidance and God’s abundant grace, I saw how the hardening of my heart—the deep sadness combined with immense rage and desire to just run away—was laid pebble by pebble, stone by stone. Hurts.

Blame. Unforgiveness. Guilt. Shame. Lies. Rebellion. Disobedience. Those are the things that turn a heart to stone. Sin, just like the Israelites' sin, and refusal to turn to God, hardens a heart. I learned that my present day issues and struggles were deeply tied into not dealing with my past honestly before the Lord, and not laying any of it at the foot of the cross.

The only solution to relieve the pain was the exact opposite of what I thought I would be true. Instead of moving forward, heaping on more sand, I would have to begin a major excavation expedition. I'd have to return to the past and revisit those old, haunting and hurtful memories, pulling them out stone by stone. But this was a journey I did not have to embark on my own. This was a God appointed excursion that He'd been waiting fifteen years for me to join Him on. And He blessed me with more than one tour guide: Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, my counselor, my beloved husband, profound Bible studies and teachers (like Beth Moore and her book, *Get Out of That Pit*, and Kay Arthur's, *Lord, I Want to Know You by Name*), and the loving support of friends and family.

The journey has not been easy, but it is the most worthwhile trip I've ever been on. The tears shed this time were even more painful than the ones released years ago, but the result is a lighter load to carry. For example, I went back to the early memories of being hit by my dad as well as the years of feeling unloved by my mother. Thanks to the careful questioning and prodding by my counselor, as well as extensive time in prayer, what I uncovered was that I believed my worth was based on my performance because just being me wasn't good enough. That's a lie! I am totally worthy just as God made me. I am made in His image. I am the daughter of a Most High King. I am redeemed by the blood of Jesus. All these truths came rushing forth, as the Holy Spirit drew on Scriptures I've heard and studied over the years.

I was set free from the lies—that wrapped up so many hurts—by the truth. John 8:32 says, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." With Christ as my truth, the boulders laid in my heart were emptied one by one, and now reside at the foot of the cross. I believe now that God never left me. He held me in his arms. He, Jesus, took the beating with me, for me. On the cross of calvary. He died for me, for the forgiveness of my sins, my parents sins, all of our sins.

I have also been able to forgive my parents and pray for the Lord to have mercy on them. I see how badly they were hurting, and how in their own brokenness then unintentionally hurt me. Do you know that my dad was beaten by his father, and his father before that? I too, have the ability to beat my own children, yet never have! Only by God's mercy! Only by His mercy! The legacy of abuse that dates back at least two generations has been broken permanently. It tried to rear its ugly head, using my stony heart as a launching pad, but instead has been conquered by Christ, creating a new legacy of freedom found in Jesus and a new heart of flesh.

### **The Process of Transforming a Heart of Stone to a Heart of Flesh**

The process of my heart being transformed to stone spanned my lifetime. While the first stony deposits were not of my own doing, I carefully deposited rock after rock and boulder after boulder—through believing lies, rebellion, and unforgiveness—leading to the hardening of my heart. I was much like the Israelites, turning from the life giving love of God. Step by step I've been learning how to unload the stones in my heart. As I continually undergo a Heart Check-Up by trusting God, 'fessing up, pursuing right living, and practicing forgiveness, my heart becomes transformed into flesh, and into a tender, responsive heart.

## **Where do you start?**

I hope and pray that by sharing with you about how my heart was hardened, you will be challenged to undergo your own heart check-up with God and allow Him to do some open-heart surgery now. Trust me, the sooner the better!

Will you begin this process by praying Psalm 51? Listen to these verses, take in God's truth, give Him yourself and let Him wash you clean in Jesus.

*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Psalm 51:10-12*

## *A Gift for You...*

My message to you is almost finished, but I want to leave you with a gift to remember the power of God at work and His ability to transform your heart. In this bag, I have four things to help you move forward in your relationship with the Lord.

1. **A Stone with a Heart.** This little stone is to remind you about what can happen to your heart when you walk away from the God of Truth and Love. Put it in a place that will capture your eye and beckon you to a heart check-up with the Lord.
2. **Heart Check-Up reminder and Scripture Study.** This is one way you can go about your heart check-up, and read more about what God desires for you in your relationship with Him. I've given you five verses to read per week for four weeks. If you take the time to read these verses, look them up in your Bible, study them in context, write them down, turn them into prayers, and apply them in your lives, you will be on your way to seeing God transform your stony heart into a heart of flesh.
3. **A Prayer Journal.** My relationship with the Lord seriously began to grow about five years ago when I started using a journal to copy down Scriptures and write out my prayers. I hope you will use this along side the Scripture study and grow in your faith as you see evidence of your conversations with God.

I know some of you may choose to not use it, but I pray that you will at least keep it as a reminder of what a true gift looks like. See, I'm giving this to you, but I, personally expect nothing in return. I want you to love God with all your heart. I want you to live a full life with Jesus. It is not about me. It is about you. I don't expect anything in return. That is what love really looks like. So even if this journal does nothing in your relationship with the Lord, keep it as a symbol of what true love looks like. And if some guy comes along expecting something in return, just remember that that is anything but true love. But that is a whole other talk...for another day.

4. **A Marker.** This is where my end of the conversation ends and yours picks up. What I want you to do is grab a handful of stones from right where you are sitting, and while I'm passing out these bags, I want you to begin thinking about the things that have made your heart stony. What hurts, lies, rebellions, and unforgiveness have you stored up in your soul? When you get your bag, take out the marker and start writing on those rocks. Use initials or letters or symbols to jot write down the things that made your heart stony. Once you have a few minutes, in silence, to write down your thoughts, come and meet me at the shore.

What you just did is the process of confession. It is reflecting back and owning up to our own sins as well as getting real before God and telling Him what has run amuck in your life. That is our part in confession. The next step is to receive God's forgiveness, yet in order to do that you need to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior: that He lived this earth, as fully man and fully God, was crucified on the cross so that His shed blood would pay the price for all our sin, and He rose again on the third day in order to fulfill the plan of God as revealed through the Scriptures. It is through Christ that total forgiveness and freedom is ours. Without Him, we may get a glimpse and taste of it, as the Lord beckons you to come to Him. But with Him, you get it fully. It is up to you. God leaves that door open and allows us to walk through it at our own timing and choosing. But I don't want to leave here today without you having a clear picture of how God goes about forgiving each one of us. Bible teacher Beth Moore wrote this in her most recent book,

**Here's how confession works: we lay all our sins at God's feet; He picks them up and throws all of them behind His back. (*Get Out of That Pit*, p. 130)**

So, this is what we are going to do. Everyone line up with your back to the water. I'll count to three and then let's toss our stony hearts into the ocean. Picture, as I do that, that is what God does with your sin each time you confess, but for Him it is not a struggle to toss it far away. He says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far He has removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:2) It is so far tossed away from you, so entirely washed away, that you no longer have to live with it. Whatever you believed, blamed, or bargained for while sinning is gone. You can walk upright, free, and forgiven. Allow God to put all your sins behind your back, and transform your stony heart into a heart of flesh.

One, two, three... You are forgiven!