

Several years ago, I was at a women's retreat where the speaker used a visual that really grabbed me. She gave each of us in the room a marble and a small lump of clay and used them to question us about the attitude of our hearts. Would we allow our hearts to be molded by the hand of the Potter, or would we be hardened to His voice like the marble? I remember squeezing the marble in one hand, clay in the other, closing my eyes, fully aware that God was going to use this kinesthetic and visual lesson from Him for years to come.

As I was reading this morning, Hebrews 3:12-15 took a high jump off the page to grab my attention: *"See to it, brothers and sisters (that's US as believers), that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first."*

Immediately, the marble and clay from years before came to my mind. God led me to a time of reflection...He was asking me to search what areas of my heart have been hardened by sin's deceitfulness. One of the sneakiest things that I believe Satan does in my life is convince me that my sins aren't really that sinful. Sometimes I don't even call sin "sin" anymore. Hardening our hearts and turning away from God are not just the "majors" that come to our minds. *"Well, I haven't had an affair,"* or *"I don't get drunk or steal or lie."*

When I really allow God to search my heart, He shows me that I have not only done some of these "majors" within the boundaries of my motives, but I have also turned my back on Him in many other ways as well. Most of us, if we're honest, could say the same thing. Let me just use realistic parallels from above. *(On the soapbox)* Each and every time we lust over a "star" on the big screen or think that someone's spouse is better than ours, we've fallen short of His plan for those of us who are married. Every time we run to alcohol for the sake of our sanity or to cope *(even if it's just a little)*, it is beyond the scope of the freedom He's given us. And can we actually say we don't ever steal or lie if we think outside the box of what's culturally acceptable? All of these things came to my mind today, as well as cynicism, self-defeating talk, gossip, impatience, worry, pride and so on. As uncomfortable as it is to speak so bluntly, I feel quite certain that each one of us could fill in our own blanks if we open ourselves up to it.

Let's not add guilt or condemnation to our list, my friends, but I believe the Scripture is here not only to give us a positive boost of energy, but also to correct our behaviors and our motives. The verse above says, "encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today..." We don't know how long we have on this earth to do what He's called us to do. If our hearts become hardened as marbles, it is difficult to encourage one another Today, isn't it? That's because we're so bogged down with sin that we aren't calling "sin," it cripples our effectiveness to do so.

"Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." (Hebrews 4:7)

If you have heard His voice today, as I have through the power of His Word, which is *"living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword (vs. 12),"* take a moment to consider what He's asked you to do in these verses. *"There is therefore, no condemnation, for those who are in Christ Jesus...(Romans 8:1),"* but His desire is to free you from what binds so that He can mold you as clay. Together, let's lose our marbles for Him—as long as it is TODAY— so that we can encourage and share in Christ, holding His confidence firmly till the end.

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have One who has been tempted in every way just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:14-16)