

We're gonna pick right back up where Matt left off last week. We'll be in Hebrews chapter 3. And while you're turning there, let me just tell you this. The nature of what we're gonna be talking about today is the heart. This message is highly applicable. It is built off of commands. It's just two short verses. Everything has been leading up to now. The author is saying, "Now, do this." And what he's telling us to do is be mindful of our hearts. And so what I did is, I went out and did a little research on the heart, because I wanted to find out about heart disease. Because, essentially, that's what the author of Hebrews is talking about here, is a spiritual heart disease. So, I went onto the websites of the American Heart Association, and the statistics absolutely blew me away. Did you know, every thirty seconds in America, somebody dies of heart disease? Every thirty seconds. That means by this time tomorrow, 2,600 people, moms, dads, wives, husbands, sisters, brothers, friends will die because of heart disease. It is the No. 1 killer among both males and females. Two Fridays ago was a national "Wear Red Day" for females, to raise awareness of heart disease in America. It is the No. 1 killer. It accounts for nearly 50% of every death. The No. 1 killer worldwide. No respecter of gender, of race, of color, of ethnicity, of nationality. It is the No. 1 killer, more than all cancer, more than all car accidents combined. I just couldn't believe it. And the Scriptures in Hebrews 3 are going to talk about the same thing. Except this heart disease is not physical so much as it is spiritual, but the effects are just as devastating. And I'm sure you have seen, just as I have seen, this happen in somebody's life. In a heart that was once so vibrant and would beat with life and passion plaque begins to build up through the arteries, and blood doesn't quite get there as fast, and the passion and the vibrancy and the life is choked out. And this passage is going to speak to us this morning about how we can prevent spiritual heart disease.

Let me give you the background. If you haven't been with us, we're in the Book of Hebrews. And the Book of Hebrews starts off, and it's written to a group of Jewish believers and they were in danger of drifting away from the faith. And so, the author of Hebrews is writing to them, warning them against drifting, saying, "Do not drift away from the faith." And in Chapter 1, he writes about the greatness of Jesus as compared to the angels. So he deals with the spiritual and heavenly realms. And he says that Jesus is greater than the angels. He goes on, in Chapter 2, and talks more about that, how Jesus is greater than the angels. In Chapter 2, he says, "This salvation that Jesus has offered us is so great. It is much greater than anything we have known before. For Jesus is superior. So, how do we expect to escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" Then, he moves into Chapter 3, and he moves from the spiritual, heavenly realm down to the earthly realm and he says, "Jesus, yes, is better than the angels, but also..." to these Jewish people, "better than Moses." Moses came and offered promise to the Israelites as he lead them out of Egypt and he lead them out of exile into the promised land. And Moses was just a stud. And he said, "[Jesus] is better than Moses."

And last week, Matt talked about this. He talked about the rest that God offers, the rest that God offers in the house that He is building. That Jesus has built a house with promised rest for His people. And that promise is for you and for me to enter into the rest that God has for us. And He gives the example of the Israelites. And he says the Israelites left Egypt, headed towards the promised rest that God had for them, but because of their disbelief, they were not able to enter. And because of that, they wandered for forty years until they perished, never entering the rest of God. This passage, Hebrews 3, is set up as a warning for you and for me. That we would not follow suit after the Israelites. That we would not be disobedient in our disbelief and not enter the rest of God. Because the rest of God is what we all long for. It is what our soul aches for. It is the soothing balm, ointment that just satisfies. It's what you and I want. And He's saying here, encouraging us to go get that rest, to obtain it, to have it, to live in it and warning us that if we don't get it, we will wander in unrest.

That's where we pick it up, in Hebrews 3:12-13. Read this with me, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." This morning, I want to talk about two ways that we can prevent heart disease. Two ways that we can prevent heart disease, so that we can enter the rest that God has for us.

The first way we can prevent heart disease is by continual check-ups. Check-ups help us prevent heart disease. Verse 12 says this, it starts out right at the beginning, "Take care." This is a command; it's for you and me to look at. The word there means "look." "Look intently, examine closely. Look at your hearts, brothers and sisters. Take care." And what you are to take care of, what you are to look intently for, what you are to examine closely is to see if you can locate, within your heart, any sense of unbelief, any sense of this evil unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. "Brothers and sisters," the author is saying, "take care, examine closely, be involved in continual check-ups that you might be able to locate an evil, unbelieving heart in you" Next Friday, I have a doctor's appointment. Does anybody do the annual physical? One of you? Good, I want to recommend that for the rest of you guys. One of the more awkward exams that I have been a part of. You walk in, you go in there and then they leave, and you just kind of undress and sit there in like this weird robe that's like paper mâché robe. And you're in there and the doctor comes back in and just starts examining you. I don't know how else to say it. She takes my blood, she takes my blood pressure, does a chest x-ray, runs an EKG monitor on my heart and then pokes and prods and it's just this real awkward deal. It's a little intrusive. Honestly, it's a little intrusive, but it is absolutely necessary. I go to the doctor in order to see if there is anything in my heart that needs help. How is my health? How am I doing? I go there in an effort to see what I'm all about, where my health is. I'm getting diagnostic tests run, in order to prevent heart disease or other ailments that could prove to be a disaster in my life. I would be a fool to not go, especially if it's preventative. And the Scriptures are saying this to you and to me, "Take care, look intently, examine closely and make sure that there is not in you this evil unbelieving heart." I have a responsibility for my personal health. The Scriptures call me to take into account of my life. And the Scriptures call you to do the same thing. Take care, look intently, examine closely that in you there is not to be found this evil, unbelieving heart.

But I don't only have a responsibility for myself; I have for this body. Because it says, "take care, brethren," plural, "that there not be in any one of you," plural, "an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God." So, I don't only have a personal responsibility for my own heart health, but, I have a responsibility for the health of this body. I have a role to play in this body, in this group known as the Village Church to maintain the health of this body. That we are to locate the evil, unbelieving heart and encourage that heart to walk in obedience. So that I need people to come along side me, you need people to come along side you to encourage you, to prod you, to look at you, to examine you, to see what is the condition of your heart, because sin is deceitful and eyes become blind. So, I need the eyes of this body examining me to see if there is a trace of unbelief with in me, to see if there is a trace of disobedience withing me, because this little disease will fester, choke out the life from my heart, I enter unrest and fall away from the living God. My prayer for this morning is that we would see the gravity of this passage, that we would really take in what it's saying. This type of heart, this heart, which is described as evil and unbelieving drifts away from the living God. I have a responsibility to maintain my own personal health, and you have a responsibility to help me maintain my personal health. I have a responsibility to you, you have a responsibility to me that we would look intently, examine examine closely, that we would take care to find this.

Now, there are a couple of ways that we can neglect heart health altogether. There are a few ways that you and I could absolutely neglect taking care of our hearts. One is just by avoiding the whole thing altogether. That we are scared to death to look within. That I don't want to look in my heart for fear of what I might find. I don't want to look in there, because then I might have to face the music that there is junk in my heart. Well, the reality is I know there is junk in my heart, I just don't want to face the diagnosis. So, I avoid the appointment altogether. I'll just cancel that appointment

next week and just live as if nothing is the matter. And I'm deceiving myself and I hope that I'm deceiving you. So, I'll just avoid the appointment altogether. But the crazy thing is it could be prevented if I looked within. If I took the exam, it could be prevented. But I avoid it and I neglect the health of my heart. Next thing I know, I'm falling, drifting, rebelling against the living God.

The second way I can neglect the health of my heart is this: I just withhold some information. This one's a little bit more insidious and probably a little bit more common among us. That I would just withhold the information. So, I go to the appointment next week, and I walk in and I just don't tell her that I am having fainting spells or that my heartbeat is a little irregular or that sometimes I think it skips and that I've been under a lot of stress or pressure. I don't tell her about family history of heart disease. And I just withhold this pertinent information and just walk in and go, "Did you find anything?" "No, no. Everything's good." And then I leave. So, I leave under the false assurance that all is well, but really, in the back of my mind, knowing that I withheld information that was more than likely pertinent to the thoroughness of that exam. So, how does this play out for us? Accountability groups, community groups. You walk into an accountability time with a buddy, with a friend. You walk into a time where the nature of you do is examine the heart. And yet, you and I withhold the information that is necessary for my brother or my sister or my wife to encourage me to walk in the obedience that I need the encouragement to walk in. And yet, I withhold the information that could prevent a disaster. And so, I live in 99% accountability, which is one of the most dangerous types there is. And I live under the guise that "all is well," when really, I haven't shared "all" that is in my heart. So, I live in false community. I live in false accountability. It would just be stupid for me to go to the doctor and not share with her what's going on with me. It is silly for us to walk into community, in a place where the nature of what we do is examine intently our hearts, and yet we don't share our hearts. I just think that you and I don't see the weight here, the gravity of what is really going on. See, what's at stake is the rest that God has promised us. What's at stake is a relationship with the living God. To avoid this is to walk down the path that leads to heart disease. And maybe you and I don't see the urgency in this matter, but the Scriptures are telling us, "It's urgent; this is a warning; take heed" is what the author is saying.

And just an observation from my life is that the older generation tends to avoid, tends to not really share the heart, not really do much there, and so withholds the information. And the younger generation tends to share but not do anything about it. They just let it out there, but then "Yeah, me too. Okay, great." And we just walk on as if heart disease is something to be played around with. This text is a warning. It's a warning for you, and it's a warning for me, that heart disease is fatal. It's nothing to play around with. And we can prevent it with continual check-ups.

Verse 13 gives us the second way we can prevent it. And it says this, "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." The second way that you and I can prevent heart disease is by constant encouragement. You can encourage me, and your encouragement to me helps prevent heart disease in my life. I can encourage you, and my encouragement to you helps you prevent heart disease in your life. The Scriptures say, "Don't fall into this disease of the heart, which is called 'evil' and 'unbelieving' and falls away from the living God," not a dead doctrine, not a philosophy, not a tradition, the living and personal God. The way you can avoid that is by encouraging one another day after day, while it is still called "today."

So, here's a question. How do I encourage you? In what manner am I to encourage you so that you don't develop this kind of heart? And in what manner are you to encourage me so that I don't develop this kind of heart? Have you ever had real awkward encouragement? The kind that you're not sure what to do with. Those kind of backhanded encouragements. I'll share an example from my life. I spoke at a camp about a year and a half ago. And you know, you leave the camp and everyone's like, "Hey, great job...Thanks for coming...Thank you..." "Thank you....It's good to be here... What a blessing..." You know, we're leaving and this guy comes up to the car and Natalie rolls down the window. And he said, "Hey, thanks for being here." And I was like, "Oh, it was great. Thanks for having me." And he said, "I just want you

to know. I have heard a lot better speakers than you, but none with as big a heart." I was like, "Hey...thank you...wow...I feel so encouraged." I felt like saying, "I've heard a lot better encouragement than that, but you're an idiot." I mean, what do you do with that backhanded encouragement? Here's one I love, and when I get up here, I realize that people are disappointed that Matt's not here, I get it. Paul Matthies and I talked about this last night. Literally, every time after the sermon, somebody who's a regular attender will come up and say, "Hey, I just wanted to be honest. When I saw you get up, I was really disappointed, but you did a good job." What do you do with that? Is that the kind of encouragement that's going put a fire under me and make me really excited? What happens is, we just go in the back and laugh and just go, "I can't believe somebody would say that." So, if you've said that to me, I'm sorry but I think it's funny. It's just hilarious.

So, how do I encourage you? How do you encourage me? Is that it? Is that the nature of the encouragement? Because the Scriptures are saying, "Encourage one another day after day after day." So, how am I to encourage you? How are you to encourage me? Somebody, last service, told me that my shirt looked like a dish towel. Is that the encouragement we're looking for? No. The Scriptures say that the nature of the encouragement that I need from you and you need from me, in an effort to prevent heart disease is this, that you would encourage me to walk in obedience. Remember the context here, that the Israelites failed to walk in obedience. And because of their disobedience, they didn't enter God's rest. Hebrews 3:7 says, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." If you hear His voice today, Matt said it last week, "Don't take a step back." Encouragement is needed from you and from me for us to take the steps forward, because they're scary steps at times. Obedience is not always logical, it's not always easy, it's not always rational, but it is always better. And I need you to encourage me, and you need me to encourage you to walk in obedience with Christ. That is the nature, if we hear His voice, don't harden your heart. Walk, take the step forward in obedience. There have been times in my life when I have not done this. There was a time in my life when I knew clearly that God was asking me to take the step forward. I chose not to and lived in unrest for a year and a half. And that whole year and a half, I spent justifying why I didn't take the step forward as if I didn't hear His voice clearly. And over time, my heart began to get harder; I began to justify how I was living this way; and it all goes back to a time when I clearly heard His voice and I chose not to respond in obedience. He says, "Encourage one another, day after day." Encourage me and let me encourage you to walk in obedience that if we hear His voice, we would not harden our hearts. Now, see the urgency here. Look at the text, verse 13, "encourage one another day after day" while it is still called "today," so that the habit of our lives, day after day after day after day, we encourage one another to walk in obedience with Christ. We encourage each other while it is still called "today." The reason we do it today is because tomorrow is not a guarantee. The author is wanting you and wanting me to see the urgency in the matter, that we would encourage one another day after day while we have the opportunity to do so. There is too much at stake. Encourage me today, allow me to encourage you today to walk obediently with Christ while we still have the opportunity to do it.

And the reason we are to do it is given at the end of verse 13, where it says, "...so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." That's the reason, because the heart that is hardened by the deceitfulness of sin falls away from the living God and does not enter the rest that is promised. So, I need you to encourage me to not disobey the Lord. I need help. I need it, because sometimes obedience means I live in loneliness. Sometimes, obedience means that I don't understand or can't put my arms around it. Sometime, obedience means sacrifice. Sometimes, obedience means walking into a situation that I'm entirely unclear of. Sometimes, obedience means breaking a relationship. Sometimes, obedience means mending a relationship. And sometimes, those things are incredibly scary. I need you to come along side me, and you need me to come along side you to encourage you to walk in that obedience, so that His voice is still able to be heard, that our hearts would not become calloused and hardened. Because eventually, they stop beating. Heart disease is really kind of a scary deal.

And the Scriptures give us two clear indications on how we can avoid it. One is that we take care. One is that we are engaged in continual checkups. And that if we go to the checkup, we give the person pertinent information that is

necessary to know what's going on in the heart. And the second way we can prevent heart disease is by constant encouragement. So, continual check-ups and constant encouragement help prevent the hardening of the heart.

I have a friend that I have kind of watched this take place in his life in the past. You can almost see it happening. You can just see, kind of, the heart begin to be hard. And what was once so vibrant is now just barely a pulse. You guys know people like that. They're brothers, they're friends, they're moms, they're dads, they're sisters, they're aunts. And you know what? You and I have walked through that same deal. Most of us have. There's just too much at stake to ignore it. Heart disease is a pretty crazy deal. And the Scriptures are saying, "Hey, don't mess around with this." This is a warning. Don't mess around with this. Take care and encourage one another, because this heart that drifts away doesn't find the rest that God has promised and that God has offered. And it just tends to wander until it expires in the wilderness. And that's not life; that's not what I want.

So, here's a couple of things I want to leave you with. Set up an appointment, set up a time to get your heart checked out. Maybe go to the park this afternoon and sit in the care because it's freezing, and you just sit there and examine. Honestly, "Where am I? What is going on?" If you're in a home group here at the church or if you're in accountability, walk into that honestly. Set up the appointment to examine the heart. Because it says that sin is deceitful, and next thing you know, it's over, you're sucked in. So, set up that appointment. Do it today while it's still called "today." And the second thing that you and I need to be doing is exercising in encouragement. Encourage one another. So, who do you need to encourage? Who is encouraging you? Is your life open enough to receive it? Are you available enough to receive the necessary encouragement that you need to finish this race called faith?

Let's pray, "Father, I thank You for Your word. And in just two short verses, You have given us such a great, great helps. And that You've warned us, God, You've told us that our hearts are deceitful and they are so easily led astray. And they're not led astray from a tradition, a culture. They're not led astray from some dusty book, but they're led away from You. And You're described as the living God. So, we're led away from life. We're led away from the rest that You have offered to us. And You've told us to take care and encourage one another, and that we're not in this alone, but we're in this together. And Father, I pray that You would give us the courage to get our hearts checked out, God that You give us the courage to encourage one another. God, I pray for healthy relationships in our lives. I pray for relationships that build us up, edify us to walk in obedience with Your son Jesus, and above all else, God, I am so thankful that You have not left us to do these things in our own efforts, but that You've given us Your Holy Spirit. And the Spirit is the one who conforms us into the image of Your son, so that I don't have to white knuckle this thing and grip real hard and try and make my heart clean, but that You have promised the help of Your Spirit to lead me, and to guide me, and to change me, and to transform me into the image of Your son. And so, my hope is not in my own ability; my hope is in You. And God, I know that this is Your will for my life, because You have told me so in Hebrews 3:12-13. So Father, I ask that You would change us and You would make this place, You would make this church a healthy church, one that desperately looks within and examines closely the nature of our hearts, so that we can live in Your rest. And I pray that we would be a people who encourage and come up along side and help and guide and walk with one another. And Father, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen."