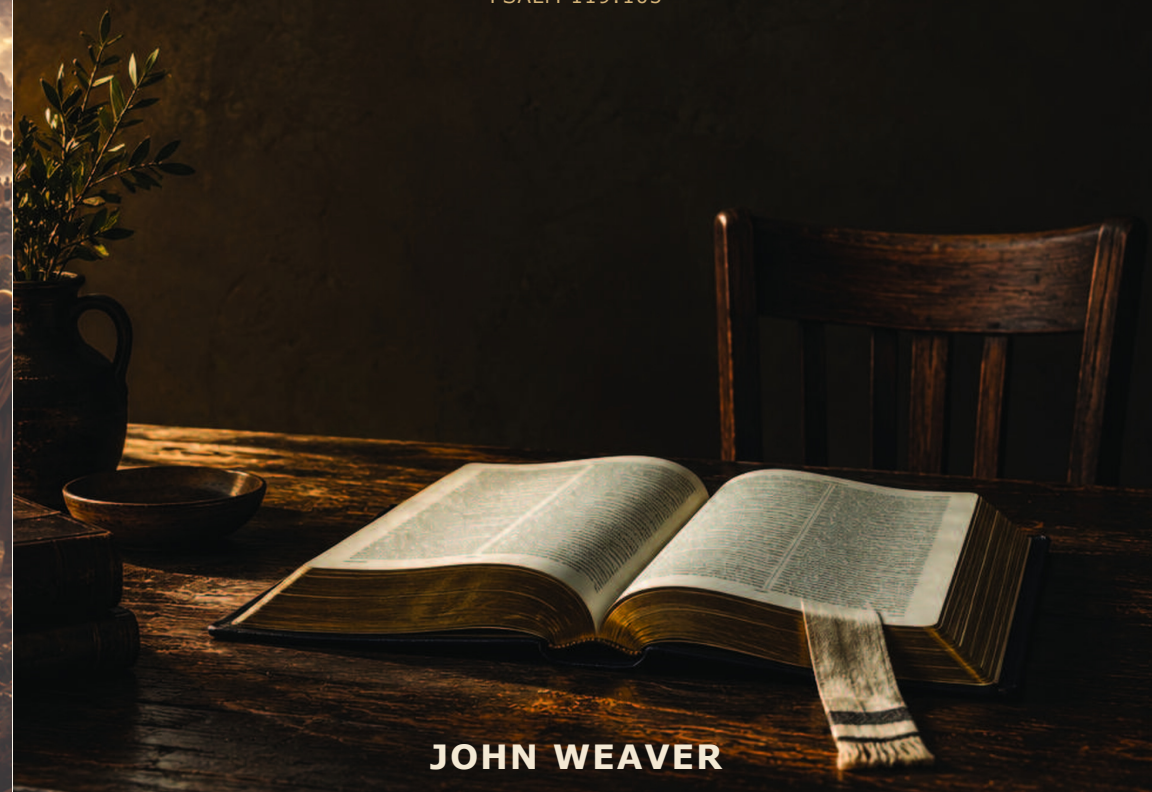
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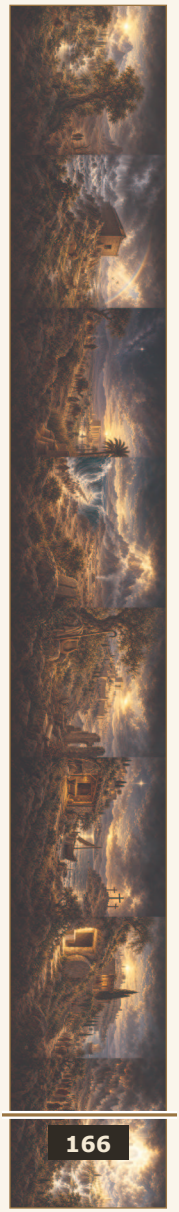
"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE



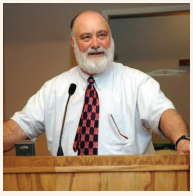
For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it.

EZRA 7:10, EXCERPT

A prepared heart is attentive, teachable, and ready to act. John Weaver examines the relationship between spiritual readiness, the study of God's Word, and faithful obedience. These messages call believers to consider their motives and habits, seeking the help of God while taking seriously the responsibilities He has placed before them.

"If our hearts are ever prepared to do what is right, God prepared them."

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.

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CHAPTER 1

Prepared Hearts

Part One

Proverbs 16:1 says, "The preparations of the heart in man and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." Hosea 10:12 says, "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord till he come and reign righteousness upon you."

Introduction: The Problem of Christian Failures

Why are there so many failures in the Christian life? How is it that so many seem to stumble and fall by the wayside? The highway of life is littered not only with what we would call ordinary, everyday Christians, but with elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers, seminary professors, counselors, and even pastors. When we hear the vulgarity, immorality, and outright rebellion of many who profess Jesus Christ, it does not surprise us any longer. Why?

The answer is that such conduct has become a daily occurrence, and we have grown immune to its horribleness. We have almost developed an attitude that, when we hear about a preacher falling

into sin, we simply make a game of it and say, "Well, who's next?" Have you ever wondered why there are so many failures in the Christian life? It seems as if teaching, preaching, and counseling are to no avail. You look around, and it seems as if the entire world has gone mad and Christians have gone mad with it.

Many times I talk to Brother McCurry, especially when a counseling situation is involved, and say, "Has the whole world gone crazy and you and I are the only two sane people left in it?" He says, "Well, I'm not so sure about you sometimes." When he asks the question, I repeat that same answer back to him. But it is astounding that so many professing Christians are blinded to reality.

The Need to Return to Basics: Prepared Hearts

Their senses are dulled, and they are totally confused as to what is right and what is wrong. I am not just talking about the world, the country, or the nation as a whole, but about professing Christianity. We have not only lost our work ethic, but our basic decency and common sense as well. The average Christian is blown and tossed to and fro with every slight of man and every possible doctrine. You do not know how many calls I get every month from people telling me about the dreams they have had and the importance of their dreams.

I'm not going to tell you that sometimes a dream may or may not have some significance, but I'm going to tell you this: if you want to really dream some dreams, you just eat your peanut butter mayonnaise pickle and mustard sandwich before you go to bed. And you're going to really dream some dreams. And let me tell you, it's a fact. Whatever is constantly and consistently on your mind when you go to bed at night, if you go to bed tired with that on your mind, usually that's what you're going to dream about. And everybody dreams. You simply may not remember some of them.

But the point I'm trying to make is, we put more stock in our dreams than we do in the word of God. Now, the point I'm trying to make is this: it is simply time to get back to basics, for you and I to understand some fundamental truths from the word of God. I want you to see today the absolute importance of prepared hearts.

Biblical Examples of Prepared and Unprepared Hearts

I want you to look in your Bibles. Hold Proverbs 16, of course, and Hosea 10; we're coming back there. But look in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles chapter 12 and verse 14. Then we're going to the book of Ezra, chapter 7. Notice, if you would please, 2 Chronicles chapter 12, verse 14, and then we're going to turn right over to the book of Ezra. We're talking about King Rehoboam, and King Rehoboam was Solomon's son. Look at what the Bible says. The Bible says in 2 Chronicles 12 and verse 14, "And he," that is King Rehoboam, "did evil because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord." Isn't that amazing? King Rehoboam did evil. Why? Because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.

Now, look in your Bibles to the book of Ezra, right over a few pages, Ezra chapter 7, and notice, if you would please, verse 10. What is said concerning Ezra? Here the word of God says this, Ezra 7 and verse 10: "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."

Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Lord. We are talking about prepared hearts. The Bible said in 2 Chronicles 12:14 that Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, did evil because he prepared not his heart. Ezra did that which was right, and the answer is that he did prepare his heart. In other words, there was a fundamental demand for what you and I would call heart preparation.

As you read through the Bible, you will find these phrases occur quite frequently. In 1 Samuel 7:3, Samuel spoke unto all the house of Israel, saying, “If you do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” Notice what he says: “prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only.”

In 2 Chronicles 19:3, referring to King Jehoshaphat, the prophet said, “Nevertheless, there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast prepared thine heart to seek God.” He had not only taken away their groves, but had prepared his heart to seek God. As you read through Scripture, the important thing to note is this: here is one

man who prepared not his heart to seek the Lord; here is another individual who prepared his heart to seek the Lord. Closely connected is the phrase that he prepared his ways to seek the Lord. Sometimes the Bible speaks of a wicked man who prepared not his ways to seek the Lord.

The Rise of Heart Preparation

In 2 Chronicles, chapter 20, verse 33, we read, “Howbeit the high places were not taken away.” Why? “For as yet the people had not prepared their hearts unto the God of their fathers.” So they allowed some idolatrous high places because the people had not prepared their hearts to seek the Lord God of their fathers.

Now look in 2 Chronicles, chapter 27, verse 6. The Bible says about Jotham, “So Jotham became mighty.” Why? “Because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.” We are talking about prepared hearts.

Someone has aptly said that a prepared heart is much better than a prepared sermon. A prepared heart will make a prepared sermon, and a prepared heart will also make the necessary application to one’s life from a sermon. That is, they will learn to take the truth of God and apply it into every area and every sphere of their lives. The truth must be received in the heart and then brought into the whole conduct and experience of life.

The two texts for today are Proverbs 16, verse 1, and Hosea 10, verse 12. These two texts show us some vital and important truths concerning heart preparation.

The Rise of Heart Preparation: Its Origin in God's Sovereign Grace

The very first thought is the rise of heart preparation. In other words, Proverbs 16, verse 1 teaches us that all true biblical and godly preparation has its origin, has its rise, in the sovereign grace of God. The Bible says, “The preparation of the heart in man and the answer of the tongue are from the Lord.” Note that first phrase in verse 1, “The preparations of the heart in man,” and then look at the last phrase, “is from the Lord.” If you and I inquire as to the source and

origin of heart preparation, the answer is revealed in Proverbs 16, verse 1. Everything originates with God. He is the center from which everything flows. May I remind you of what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 11, verse 36: “For of him, and through him, and to him are all things.”

“For of him,” that is originally, “and through him,” that is providentially, “and to him,” that is ultimately, “are all things.” So all things then stem and flow from the sovereign grace of God. The doctrine of total depravity necessitates the fact that the rise of heart preparation originates with God.

The doctrine of total depravity necessitates this truth. Romans 3 provides a multitude of passages, but this one should be sufficient. Romans 3, beginning with verse 10, says, “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

Now, based upon verse 11, how many really understand? None. How many really seek after God? None. Then it is absolutely necessary that the origin of heart preparation originate with God, because man is absolutely, totally depraved, and he is not going to seek God initially or originally. That is why the Bible says the carnal mind, that is, the fleshly mind, is enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God. Neither indeed can be. Very obviously, when we are talking about heart preparation, we must understand that the true source of heart preparation is from God himself.

John Gill, an old expositor, gives a statement regarding Proverbs 16, verse 1, especially “the preparation of the heart in man is from the Lord.” He says, “The sense of these words, according to our version, depends upon the next clause. And the meaning of the whole is that man can neither think nor speak without God.”

The orderings or the marshallings of the heart, as it may be rendered—that is, of the thoughts of the hearts, which are generally irregular and confused—the arranging of them in order, as an army in battle array, or as things regularly placed on a well-furnished table, the fixing of them on any particular subject, though about

things civil and natural, so as closely to attend to them and proceed in a regular manner, and the consideration of them are not without the concurrence of divine providence. John Trapp, another old expositor, said, “He saith not of man, as if it were in man's power to dispose of his own heart, but in man, as holy wrought of God. For our sufficiency is not of ourselves, but in him.” These men are saying very clearly that everything originates with God.

When the Bible says, “The preparation of the heart in man is from the Lord,” it means simply this: If our hearts are ever prepared to do what is right, God prepared them. If our hearts are ever prepared to pray, God prepared it. If our hearts are ever prepared to repent, God prepared it. If our hearts are ever prepared to turn to the Lord, God prepared it. If our hearts are ever prepared to trust Christ, God prepared the hearts. The preparation of the heart in man is from the Lord.

You and I cannot do anything initially or originally. Everything originates with God Himself. Isaiah 64:6 makes this absolutely necessary: “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” Very clearly, then, if all of our righteousnesses are nothing but filthy rags, we cannot do anything.

There is an excellent illustration of God preparing the hearts of a people in 2 Chronicles 29. There was a great revival under King Hezekiah. In verse 36, the Bible says, “And Hezekiah rejoiced in all the people, that God had prepared the people, for the thing was done suddenly.” When there was a great awakening, a great revival, and a turning back to God, it was because God had prepared the people. Now look in chapter 30 and verse 12.

You will see the same truth repeated, but stated a little differently: “Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes by the word of the Lord.” The king and the princes were commanding that which was right and biblical. Note what the Bible says: “Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to obey.” What is that saying? It is saying that God was preparing the heart. The great revival under Hezekiah was therefore the result of God sovereignly and graciously

moving upon the people and preparing their hearts to seek Him and obey Him.

That is the only thing that you can say. The source and origin of all true heart preparation is of God, the one true and living God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Very clearly, then, the rise of heart preparation originates from God Himself.

The Responsibility of Heart Preparation: Man's Duty to Seek God

Now, secondly, the responsibility of heart preparation. If you look in your Bibles to Hosea chapter 10 and verse 12, you will see that we are not responsible simply to sit around and wait for the Lord suddenly to break forth upon us. We need to meditate on Hosea 10:12: “Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy. Break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.” Hosea said this to a wicked people. In verse 13 he says, “Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity, ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.” He was telling these wicked people, “It is time for you to sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground. For it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.”

You may ask, “Brother Weaver, I do not understand. How can Proverbs 16:1 tell me that the preparation of the heart in man is from the Lord, while Hosea 10:12 tells me that I am to break up my fallow ground and seek the Lord?” The answer is simple: Proverbs 16:1 speaks about ability, and Hosea 10:12 speaks about responsibility.

Those are two totally separate things. Just because someone has responsibility does not necessarily mean that he has ability. We can say it like this: to God belongs the grace; to us belongs the responsibility. Or we could say it another way: to God belongs the ability; to each of us belongs the responsibility.

It is true that God must prepare our hearts. Yet Scripture teaches us that we are responsible to seek Him to prepare our hearts. We are His creatures. Because we are His creatures, because we are created

in His image, we owe Him glory and obedience. Because we are fallen creatures, we owe Him repentance and faith.

Here is the question: “If I am responsible to do something, and yet I do not have the ability to do it, then I must be absolved of my responsibility.” Oh no, it does not work like that. It does not work like that in Scripture, and it does not work like that in real life. You may go to the bank and borrow fifty thousand dollars. You sign that note at ten percent interest, and you pledge your house against that loan. Now you have entered into a contract. Whether or not you are really getting any substance is not the point; I am just making an illustration.

You leave the bank, and on the way out you have a wreck. Thirty days later, you wake up in ICU. Not only are all your savings gone, but even the money you borrowed from the bank for your business investment is gone. Finally, two or three months later, when you are in a wheelchair, someone pushes you down to the bank. You look at the bank loan officer and say, “Sir, I realize I borrowed this money and I realize I owe it to you, but as you can see, I was in a wreck, and now I am unable to work. So I am no longer responsible to pay my bill. Just write it off.” Is that what the banker is going to do? He will probably say, “Sir, you either have that money in here by six o’clock tomorrow or get out of my house.”

Just because you have lost your ability does not mean that you have lost your responsibility. We have to remember that when man sinned—speaking of the original sin—the sin was not God’s; it was man’s. Just because man has lost his ability does not mean that God has lost His ability to command. Just because man has lost his ability does not mean that he has lost his responsibility. We may have lost our ability to obey, but God did not lose His right to command.

Therefore, He commands that we seek Him. When you come to a passage like John 6:37, where our Lord says, "No man can come unto me except the Father who sent me draw him," what is He talking about? He is talking about ability. No man has the ability to come to Christ savingly in and of himself. But He goes on to say that the Father draws. In other words, what you and I must do—and this is part and parcel of our responsibility—is seek God for grace and

ability to fulfill our responsibility. We must say, "God, I can't. You've commanded me, but I can't. I don't have the ability. Lord, You must even give me the ability to fulfill my responsibility."

What did our Lord say in John 15:5? It seems to me He said this: "Without me, you can do very little." Is that what He said? "Without me, you can do a tiny bit." Is that what He said? "Without me, you can do" what? Nothing. Not one thing. That means we must have Him to enable us even to seek Him and fulfill our responsibility.

Now let me ask you a question. When you get up each morning, do you plan on committing wickedness? Do you sit down and say, "Now let me see, what can I do today? Can I lie? Can I steal? Can I commit adultery?" No, you don't do that—not as Christians. You don't get up every morning and plan on committing wickedness. Yet the truth is that many times you do commit wickedness. So why? How is it that real, genuine Christian people—not false professors—can seemingly just fall into things when they should not? How can that happen? How is it that you fail to stand when you need to stand, do what is wrong when you should do what is right, or are so easily persuaded into doing what is wrong when you know it is wrong?

The answer is that you have not prepared your heart. Do you realize that a prepared heart is a heart that keeps you from falling? It allows you to stand when you need to stand and do what is right in the face of what is wrong. That is why it is called a prepared heart. If you knew a hurricane was coming through, and they were saying it was going to be a bad one...

And there's a possibility we're going to be out without electricity for a week or two. Would you just simply go on about your business? No, you'd store up some water, some flashlights, batteries, some food, maybe try to get a generator. What would you be doing? You would be preparing so that you could withstand what was coming. The same thing is true spiritually. We have to have a prepared heart.

Now, look in Hosea 10 and verse 12. Watch carefully. He says, "Sow to yourselves in righteousness. Reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord till he come and reign righteousness upon you."

Now, I've got some bad news for you. Here it is. Hosea 10 and verse 12 speaks of work. Hard. Backbreaking work. It speaks of plowing, breaking, harrowing, sowing, reaping, seeking.

Now, if you've never been raised on the farm, you don't understand the metaphors that our Lord is using here. Let me show you something. Hold Hosea 10. We're coming right back there. We'll look in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 9. 1 Corinthians 3 and verse 9. I want you to see what the Apostle Paul said concerning the church of Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3 verse 9. Paul says, "For we are laborers together with God."

That is the preachers, the apostles, the teachers. We are laborers together with God.

Now it just makes a distinction. "You are God's husbandry. You are God's building." So the very first thing when he says "you are God's husbandry," guess what the word husbandry literally means. You are God's tillage. He's using the illustration of farming. So the word husbandry actually means tillage. Here then are plowing, fallowing, sowing, harrowing, watering, reaping, threshing, and feeding on what you and I would call well-directed labor.

All of these pictures are applied to the human heart and the work of God upon the human heart. Actually, this passage speaks then of correction, contrition, conversion, receiving the grace of Christ, bringing forth fruit, and living a godly, obedient life. That's what this verse basically speaks about. But I want to show you what the most fundamental requirement really is. He said in verse 12, "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground." Now, note that phrase, "break up your fallow ground." All of us know about sowing. We know about reaping. We know about seeking. We know about raining. But most of us really do not know what he means when he says "break up your fallow ground." Now, the word fallow in the context refers to unplowed or unbroken or unprepared ground.

The Meaning of Breaking Up Fallow Ground

Everyone in this room knows it is absolutely necessary to prepare ground before you plant. There is no farmer or gardener who simply

goes outside, throws his seed on top of the ground, turns around, and walks away saying, “Well, I can hardly wait until harvest time.” It does not work like that. Our Lord tells us in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8 what happens when people throw seed upon the ground in that manner.

The fowls of the air come and take it away. When the seed falls on hard, packed ground, nothing can penetrate. Our Lord is telling us that if there is to be a reception of the seed, then the ground must be prepared. When he says, “break up your fallow ground,” literally what he is telling us is to plow thoroughly our fallow ground—to break it up totally and completely.

Jeremiah 4:3 declares, “For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, break up your fallow ground and sow not among thorns.” Break up your fallow ground and sow not among thorns. Isn’t that interesting? Breaking up the ground means ridding it not only of the weeds, but also of the roots and the stumps. You clear that ground and make it possible for that ground to be planted in. I remember when I was a boy, we had to blow stumps. Anybody here ever had to blow stumps?

You would buy dynamite. You had a long piece of iron, and you would pack or make a hole down under the stump. Then you would put that stick of dynamite under the stump, light the fuse, and run like mad. I remember one time I tried to do that in wet, rainy weather, and I bogged down. I got about ten feet, and my foot went down in the mud, and I could not get out. You know what I did? I kissed the ground. I came up with mud all over me. I would rather do that than have that stump blow all over me.

But I am just saying, all that is involved. If you have ever had to clear a field of stumps, which I have done, you are talking about hard, back-breaking work. You have to dig out what the dynamite does not blow up, and then you have to pull the remaining. He said, “break up your fallow ground and sow not among thorns.”

Joel gives us another picture. This is another metaphor, but he is teaching the same truth. In Joel 2:13, God says, “And rend your heart, and not your garments. And turn unto the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and

repenteth him of evil." Note what He says: "And rend your heart, and not your garments." In other words, God would rather have a broken heart than a rent garment. So when He says, "Rend your heart," He is giving us a different metaphor, but the same truth: break up your fallow ground.

The word rend literally means to tear thoroughly. Break up means to plow thoroughly and completely.

The prophet told the men of Judah and Jerusalem to break up their fallow ground and sow not among thorns. What does "sow not among thorns" mean? It means the thorns are already there. The thorns already have a foothold. Thorns are distractful, for one thing, and they can be deadly, by the way. He says, Do not sow among the thorns.

Our Lord explains this in Luke 8, where He speaks of the four types of hearers. "And some," that is, some seed, "fell among thorns." What happened? "And the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it." Then, in verse 14, He interprets it: "And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with the cares and riches and the pleasures of this life, and bring forth no fruit to perfection."

What happens when you sow seed among the thorns? The thorns are usually so tightly packed in the ground that they choke out the seed. No plant, no seed can germinate because of the root system already there by the thorns. So when he says that you are to break up your fallow ground and sow not among the thorns, what is he saying? He is saying that you and I cannot be contented with a passing, casual, light, and useless harrowing.

You know what a harrow is, don't you? I know Ed does, and some of the others. I have an eight-foot harrow and a place where I plant a feed plot every year. There is a certain section that is red clay. I can have my harrow down in the ground, cutting three or four inches down, until I hit that red clay. Guess what? All it will do is break the crust on the red clay. I have to plow that red clay seven, eight, or nine times to break it down, just to get it where it can receive seed.

Things will grow there, but it is so hard and firmly packed that it has to be harrowed. What is really better than harrowing is a turning

plow. A harrow may go down that deep, but a turning plow will go down that deep.

This is what God is saying when He says, "break up your fallow ground" and "break up your fallow ground and sow not among thorns." Do not be content with shallow harrowing. It is insufficient just to get emotional. It is insufficient just to be slightly moved, or to have light use of sin and wickedness. What God is saying is this: I want the ground thoroughly, completely, and totally broken. I want the weeds dealt with. I want the thorns rooted out. I want everything in your life that is contrary to My Word uprooted and taken out of your life. We must deal with our hardness, our impenitence, our bitterness, our rebellion, our wickedness, and our individual sins thoroughly and completely.

We are not to allow any roots to remain. What happens when you leave roots in a field? They come right back. Has anybody ever heard of Johnson grass? There is an old story about Johnson grass. Johnson grass really builds soil. The seed salesman came to a farmer and said, "You need to plant this Johnson grass out in your fields. It will really build that soil." The farmer said, "What if I ever want to get rid of it?" He replied, "If you ever want to get rid of it, just ask me, and I will tell you how to get rid of it." The farmer said, "Fine," and planted it in his field.

And all that stuff multiplies and multiplies and gets so thick. And finally, the farmer just couldn't plant. So he called the salesman and said, "How do I get rid of the Johnson grass?" The salesman says, "It's very easy. Move off and leave it." That's the only way you can get rid of it. Move off and leave it. Why? Because you can't get all the root system. I want you to look in your Bibles to the book of Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 15. Look what the Bible says. Hebrews 12 verse 15. The Bible says, "Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." Note, "looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." You leave the roots, and you've got problems. Hebrews 12 verse 15, he says, the root will spring up and trouble you and many will be defiled. So when you leave the root, please understand this, folks, it does not just trouble you.

It troubles many as well. So God says the ground must be thoroughly, totally and completely broken.

Now, let me try to tell you, in fact, I want you to follow me very quickly through the Bible. I want to show you what God is talking about. Look in your Bibles, if you would, first of all, to Psalm 34. Here's what God is looking for when He's talking about a prepared heart. Watch carefully. In Psalm 34, beginning there with verse 18. Psalm 34, verse 18.

The Evidence of a Prepared Heart: Brokenness and Contrition

Notice what the Scripture says. Psalm 34, verse 18. "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." You know what a broken heart and a contrite spirit are? Those are the evidences of a prepared heart. You know what a broken ground is? It's ground that is soft and pliable and easy and ready to receive seed. Look in your Bible to Psalm 51 and verse 17. Look what David said. Psalm 51 and verse 17. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Did you hear that? A broken and contrite heart, O Lord, thou wilt not despise. A broken and contrite heart is a prepared heart. It has the fallow ground all plowed up.

It has the roots and the thorns taken from it. Look in your Bibles to Isaiah 57 and verse 15, Isaiah 57 and verse 15. Here's a passage that is so wonderful, so beautiful. Look what the Bible says concerning God Himself. Isaiah 57 and verse 15. "For thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity." So God is saying, here's what I say. "Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity,

“Whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and revive the heart of the contrite ones.” Isn’t that interesting? God said, “I dwell in the high and holy place,” but that is not all. He also dwells in a broken and contrite heart. He will revive the heart of the broken and the heart of the contrite.

Look in your Bibles to Isaiah 66:2: “For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord, but to this man will I look.” You want God to pay attention to you? “But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word.” You want God to pay attention to you? God says that you must have a broken and contrite heart and tremble at His word. That means you want His truth and His word more than anything else. You break your heart, plow your heart, and get rid of the thorns and weeds to receive His word. God says, “I’ll pay attention to you. I’ll pay close attention to you.”

James says essentially the same thing, stated a little differently. James 1:21 says, “Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness and receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls.” “Lay apart” means put aside all filthiness and overflowing of naughtiness—all wickedness. You put that aside.

It means you pull up the thorns, the weeds, and the roots. You get all that out of your heart. Then you receive the engrafted word with meekness, which is able to save your soul. There is no way you can truly receive the word of God without dealing with the thorns and weeds in your life. That has to come first. We must break up our fallow ground; we must lay apart before we can ever receive.

The breaking up of sinful hearts is a singular means to prevent the breaking down of the family. You know why most families are broken down? Because their hearts have never been broken up. The breaking up of the heart is one of the most singular means to prevent the breaking down of the church. The breaking up of sinful hearts is one of the most singular means to prevent the breaking down of the nation.

We must either break up or break down. That is true individually. It is true in our families, our churches, and our nation.

The truth is, we must either break up or break down. You look at where we are in our nation. I could dwell on this for an hour, but look at the condition that our government is in. Some of you have heard this, and some of you have not. I do not watch the night show, and I do not watch Jay Leno. I would not stay up that late for any committee. But I did like one thing. Someone sent me what Jay Leno

said this past week: “If God had intended for us to vote, he would have given us candidates.” You understand the humor in that.

But look at the state of our government, the state of our economy, and the state of our judicial system. Look at what is happening in our churches and in our homes.

Is it not common sense, as well as biblical understanding, to assume that one of the main reasons we have not reaped a biblical revival or a spiritual awakening in our homes, churches, and nations is that we have never prepared our hearts to receive such a blessing? There has never been a breaking up. We either break up or we break down. How in the world can you sow, water, or harvest something that was never planted to begin with? You cannot. And you cannot even plant until you break up the fallow ground.

Applications: The Urgency and Continuity of Heart Preparation

Here are the applications. First, see the duties to which we are called. These duties are given to us under the figure of husbandry, or tillage. We must borrow the expressions of the farmer and learn to plow, to break up, to sow, and to reap.

Look in your Bibles at Hosea, chapter 10. You know the truth of Deuteronomy 28, but here it is again in verse 12: “Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and reign righteousness upon you.”

The passage continues: “You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped iniquity, you have eaten the fruit of lies, because thou didst trust in thy way and in the multitude of thy mighty men.” If we would not be brought into bondage to sin, tyrants, and oppressors, we must learn to do what God says and return to God’s service. How do we return to God’s service? Initially, by breaking up our fallow ground. Therefore, we must break up the fallow ground.

We cleanse our hearts from all the corrupt affections and lusts, as weeds and thorns. We get rid of them, deal with them, and repent of them. As God said, a broken and contrite heart He will not despise. Then, of course, we sow to ourselves in righteousness. How do you

sow to yourself in righteousness? The answer is simple: by obeying the word of God, by doing that which God commands.

It is obedience to Him. That is why He said, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever man soweth, that shall he also reap." Now listen: he that soweth of the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting; but he that soweth of the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. How do you sow to righteousness? You sow by obeying the Scripture. Every action that you and I perform is basically a seed sown. We are going to reap from our attitude, our words, and our actions.

Then he says, let us seek the Lord. My dad, who had been dead for about twelve years, was a farmer. He came home one day spitting mad, and then he started laughing. I asked, "What in the world is wrong with you?" He said, "Well, I just got mad at a bumper sticker that I saw." The more he thought about it, he said, the more he realized the truth of it. The bumper sticker said, "Legalized gambling. Farmers should not be the only ones that have all the fun." He said, "You know, there's more truth to that because it is a gamble without the blessings of the Lord."

You may plow your garden, plant your seed, fertilize, and water, but if God does not bless it, it does not amount to a hill of beans. We must seek God to bless us in doing that which is right, using the means that God has ordained. So he says we must seek the Lord.

It is not only time that you and I prepare our hearts; it is high time that we prepare our hearts.

Now, if you want a spring garden, are you going to plant it in January? Of course not. There is a season for planting a spring garden. If you want to reap in the summer, you have to plant in the spring. It is just that simple. Sometimes Alice and I are gone when planting time arrives, and when we get back home, she has to double up. I tell everybody, that is our garden: I plow it, and she plants it. But when time is almost gone, you had better hurry if you want to get any seed in the ground.

Do you realize that we should always be preparing our hearts and planting good seed? The truth is, there are special times of planting, and we must plant those seeds when God's grace and God's mercies

are abounding. What did he say? "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found. Call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him." In other words, there is a special designated time that many times God gives us to seek Him. If we do not seek Him in that time, we miss all of His blessings.

Look in your Bibles to Hosea 10 and verse 12: "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord till he come and reign righteousness upon you." Now look in verse 13: "You have plowed wickedness. You've reaped iniquity. You've eaten the fruit of lies because thou didst trust in thy way and in the multitude of thy mighty men."

Here is the question: If we have served sin, ourselves, and the enemy with such hard, arduous work as plowing iniquity, shall we not give at least the same amount of effort to God in plowing and planting righteousness? Farming is hard, necessary, and constant work.

We live in a day when people think they can simply go to the store and buy what they want to eat. It was not like that a hundred years ago, and most people have no earthly idea that without farming there is no food. You have seen the bumper sticker: "When you criticize farmers, don't talk with your mouth full."

Without farming, there is no food. In other words, it must be done or we are undone as a nation. The same is true of heart preparation. It must be done or we are undone. Heart preparation has to be constant and continual. I cannot live off the garden that we planted ten years ago, because everything planted then is gone. I cannot even live off the garden planted three years ago. If I want food on my table, I must plow, plant, harvest, water, and reap constantly and continually.

Likewise, I cannot live off repentance that I gave ten years ago. I must repent now. I cannot live off prayer that I gave six months ago. I must pray now. I cannot live off seeking the Lord ten years ago. I must seek the Lord now. Heart preparation is constant, consistent, and continual. When you get up in the morning, you must say, "Lord, I want you to prepare my heart. Lord, I want you to help me

to prepare my heart by seeking you, breaking up my fallow ground, dealing with wickedness and sin in my life, and giving me the principles of your word so that I may obey them."

Without heart preparation, you cannot face the world, the devil, or sin successfully. David said, "My heart is fixed, O God." That is what we need: a fixed heart.

Let's pray. Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ that you would help us and teach us, Lord. Do not simply build us up in the most holy faith, but may we have a prepared heart. If our hearts are unprepared, we will fail. Lord, I pray that you would work in each of our lives. May we be determined, by the grace of God, to do that which is right and to seek you daily to prepare our hearts, as thou didst tell us to do: to stand, and having done all, to stand in a wicked and evil day. May your life, your love, your grace, and mercy be in us. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Prepared Hearts

Part Two

Review of Part 1: Rise and Responsibility of Heart Preparation

Proverbs 16 and Hosea chapter 10 bring us to the subject of prepared hearts. For those who were not here last week, this is the second part of a two-part message, so I will review enough to bring you up to par quickly. Proverbs 16:1 says, “The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord.” Note that first part: “The preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord.” Hosea 10:12 says, “Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.”

Last week, I began by asking a leading question: Why are there so many failures in the Christian’s life? In the multitude of Christians’ lives, these things ought not to be and should not be. In fact, on the way over here today, Kathy and I were talking about a preacher who was having severe problems—scriptural problems. Yet most

Christians face all of these problems and failures. Why in the world is that?

One answer is that they never prepare their heart, and they never seek God to prepare their heart. Last week, I covered two points. First, I showed the rise of heart preparation. If our hearts are ever prepared, God must prepare them. That is why Scripture says, "The preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord." If our hearts are ever prepared to pray, God prepared them to pray. If our hearts are prepared to live right, God prepared us to live right. If our hearts are prepared to repent, God prepared us to repent.

We cannot do these things in and of ourselves. Even the doctrine of total depravity necessitates that everything originate with God. Scripture says, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things." Everything is of him originally, through him providentially, and to him ultimately.

The second point was the responsibility of heart preparation. Although the grace belongs to God, the responsibility belongs to us. Hosea 10:12 says that we are to break up our fallow ground. "Fallow" refers to ground that has been unbroken, hard, and firmly packed.

In Jeremiah chapter 4, Jeremiah said basically the same thing: "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns." The whole point is that it is our responsibility to seek the Lord, asking Him to enable us to deal with the sins, wickedness, bitterness, resentment, and anything else in our lives that is contrary to the Word of God. It is our responsibility, yet we cannot do one thing apart from Him. God is certainly not going to repent for us, although He gives us the grace of repentance. God is not going to believe for us, although He gives us the grace of faith. It is our responsibility to seek Him for grace to fulfill our responsibilities.

We have considered the rise of heart preparation and the responsibility of heart preparation. One of the greatest failings in the Christian's life is failing to obey the command of God in Proverbs 4:23. This is a passage to which we will return before the message is over. The Word of God says: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Note the phrase, "Keep thy heart with all diligence." The word "keep" literally means to guard and protect.

The Hebrew is very emphatic: “Keep above all things,” or “set double guards around your heart.” You and I are therefore accountable and responsible to keep our hearts. Once our heart has been prepared, we are responsible to keep it prepared. I previously concluded the message by giving a comparison between farming and keeping the heart.

The Necessity of Continual Heart Keeping

When God says, “Break up the fallow ground,” we cannot continue to reap fruit and live off a harvest picked ten years ago. In other words, the ground must continually be prepared, and harvest must continually be planted if we are going to have any fruit. Likewise, in the Christian life, we cannot live off repentance given ten years ago, or six months ago, or prayers offered two weeks ago. Just as the ground must constantly and continually be prepared in farming, our hearts must likewise constantly and continually be prepared. When we cease to keep our hearts, we cease to prepare our hearts.

God is the source and origination of all true heart preparation. But, as I pointed out last week, the responsibility to seek Him and prepare our hearts is ours. The ability is His, and the responsibility is ours. When we fail to seek Him to give us grace to fulfill our responsibility, we fail in keeping and preparing our hearts.

Rehoboam: A Warning of Unprepared Heart

Here is a good illustration. Last week I quoted 2 Chronicles 12:14, but this passage shows us more concerning the matter. Here we read about Rehoboam: “And he,” that is, King Rehoboam, “did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.” This is a very clear statement. The reason Rehoboam did that which was wicked, wrong, and evil was that he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.

Rehoboam was the king of Israel, the son of Solomon and the grandson of David. He inherited the throne when he was forty-one years of age, at the death of his father Solomon. The interesting thing is that, at the beginning of his reign, his heart was tender toward the Lord, and he was very obedient.

For instance, in 2 Chronicles 11:1–4, we see what happened at the word of the prophet of God to Rehoboam. “And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he gathered of the house of Judah and Benjamin an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against Israel, that he might bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam.” The kingdom was split, ten tribes belonging to Jeroboam, and Rehoboam was gathering the warriors to fight and bring Israel back to himself.

But the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah the man of God: “Speak unto Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren: return every man to his house: for this thing is done of me.” They obeyed the words of the Lord and returned from going against Jeroboam. Initially, all it took was for the man of God to speak to Rehoboam, and Rehoboam obeyed. He did not go up and fight; he did not go contrary to the word of God.

In 2 Chronicles 11:17 we read, “So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong, three years: for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon.” Rehoboam reigned seventeen years, and only during the first three years did he walk after the ways of David and Solomon.

What happened? During those first three years, evidently, he prepared his heart. But 2 Chronicles 12:14 tells us that afterward he did evil. Why? “Because he prepared not his heart.” That sounds familiar, does it not? Have you ever known people who were interested in doing right temporarily, or who would do right for a period of time, and then grow weary in doing right, or in obeying the Word of God, and cease?

The Call to Permanent Heart Fixing

Has it ever entered your mind that weariness in the things of God is a sin? Galatians 6:9 says, “Be not weary in well doing. For in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” Second Thessalonians 3:13 says, “But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.”

Yet we tend to think that if we kept our heart this week, we can slack off next week; if we read our Bible this week, we do not have to read it next week; if we prayed today, we do not have to pray tomorrow; and if we watched diligently and kept ourselves from temptation today, tomorrow we can give in to it.

It is like the individual on a diet who goes three days without eating what he should not, then, on the fourth day, believes he has been so successful that he will reward himself with a banana split. People do that in the Christian life. They think they can do right for a little while and then do wrong, supposing God will overlook it because they have done right for a short period of time.

We must strive to have our hearts prepared and fixed permanently. I realize that this will not really happen until our glorification. But you and I cannot give in or give up, thinking that our preparation will take care of us only for a brief period. Has it ever dawned on you that you really do not have to sin? I know that you are going to sin, and I know that you are sinners. I am certainly not teaching sinless perfection. But according to Romans chapter 6, if we have been in Christ Jesus, if Christ Jesus is our Lord, then we are freed from our servitude to sin. It is true that we sin, but it is also true that we do not necessarily have to sin.

You say, "How can you say that?" Look in your Bibles to 1 John 2 and verse 1. John wrote to those Christians, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." He said, "These things I write unto you, that ye sin not."

He was giving them these words to keep them from sinning. The average Christian, when he wakes up in the morning, does not plan to do evil or wickedness, but somehow he ends up doing it. Somehow he falls into the temptation of the stare and commits sin. But John says, "I write these things to you that you might not sin." If you prepare your heart and fill your heart with the Word of God, then he says you are not going to sin.

Dwight L. Moody had written in the flyleaf of his Bible, "Either this book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book."

I am certainly not endorsing his theology, but I am endorsing what he wrote in the flyleaf of his Bible. That is the truth, folks.

Here are three verses that everyone should memorize: Psalm 119, verses 9 through 11:

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

The same is true for an old man as well:

"Wherewithal shall an old man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

In other words, it is the Word of God that is going to keep us from sinning. One of the reasons Rehoboam sinned was because he did not prepare his heart. The word "prepare" means to establish. It means to fix, to prepare, or to apply. Actually, the word means a deliberate effort over a prolonged period of time—a deliberate effort over a prolonged period of time. So when we talk about heart preparation, we are not really talking about something that can be done in a moment of time. It is something that is going to take a good while.

I have convictions today that I never had forty years ago. Moreover, I have convictions today that I am stronger in than I was five years ago. Why? Because of the truth of the Word of God. Every Christian is like that. Every Christian should be like that. The idea, then, is that there is a deliberate effort in preparing the heart, biblically speaking.

David's Fixed Heart in the Cave

The word "prepared" in our Bibles is sometimes translated a different way. Four times the word "prepared" is translated "fixed." Two of those times are here in Psalm 57. Look what David said: "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed." "I will sing and give praise." Now, what is that? "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed."

The question has got to be asked: Why is David saying that? What is the incident surrounding it? How do we know what David is talking about? Look at the heading of the psalm: “To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave.” Psalm 57 was written by David when he was hiding from Saul in the cave. Saul was chasing David, trying to kill him.

The history is recorded in 1 Samuel 24: “And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi. Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats. And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave. And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily. And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. And he said unto his men, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.”

So David stayed his servants with these words and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave and went on his way.

There is more to this story, but notice that David and his men are hiding in the cave. Saul comes in, and the Bible says he came into the cave to cover his feet. I know a preacher who was speaking to a group of Christians about how Saul had some type of suffering, or thin blood, because he had cold feet, and went into the cave to cover his feet. I sat there, and my mouth fell open. When he finished, I walked up to him and said, “May I tell you what Saul was doing in the cave?” He said, “Well, sure. He went in to warm his feet.”

I said, “No, you weren’t raised on a farm. Covering the feet means he was going to the bathroom. That’s why Saul went into the cave. That’s how he covered his feet.” While he was using the bathroom, David slipped up and cut off part of the garment because it was lying

on the ground. The preacher hit his head and said, “Oh, no. I’ve used this illustration all over the country.”

But now watch this. Here is the point: David is in the cave, and Saul is in a helpless and defenseless position. Why was Saul chasing David? So that he could kill David. Now David has the perfect opportunity to kill his enemy. His men are saying, “Look, God has delivered him into your hand. He’s helpless. He’s defenseless. Kill him!”

David said, “I’m not going to kill him. I’m not going to touch him. He’s the Lord’s anointed. God anointed him to be king.” Later, David said it like this: “His time shall come that he’ll die in battle, or God will kill him some other way. My hand is not going to be upon him. I’m not going to kill him.”

Now go back in your Bibles to Psalm 57. Here was David’s heart preparation. David was not going to have the kingdom by violence or by murder. True, it probably would not have been classified as murder, although Saul was very helpless and defenseless at that particular point. But the truth of the matter is this: David said, “I’m not going to touch him. He’s God’s king.”

God can kill him in his time. Saul was wicked and violent toward David. David said in Psalm 57:4, "My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let thy glory be above all the earth. They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves."

David said, "They are trying to kill me on every hand." But then, in verse 7, he says, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed." He had determined that he was not going to kill Saul and that he would have the kingdom only through God giving it to him. David had already prepared his heart, knowing what he would do and what he would not do. Had his heart not been prepared, he might have succumbed to the pressure to rid himself quickly of his enemy. But he prepared his heart and said, "I'm not going to do that." When David said, "My heart is fixed," it was the same word as "prepared."

It means to be established, fixed, prepared, arranged, and settled. David had already settled his heart: "I'm not going to kill him." To be fixed means to be firmly in position, stationary, not subject to change or variation, and firmly held in the mind. One of the keys in preparing our hearts is determining beforehand what we shall do or shall not do in any given situation.

With Joseph and Potiphar's wife, do you not think he considered what he would do if such a situation arose? When she laid hold of his robe, he let her have it and ran out of the room. Part of our heart preparation is determining beforehand what we will and will not do. A prepared heart can do what is right even in the most serious, heart-wrenching, and life-threatening circumstances, because we have made up our minds to do what is right. A prepared heart keeps us from entering into temptation, no matter how beneficial or enticing it appears.

The Reality of Heart Preparation

We prepare our hearts not only by breaking up the fallow ground—that is, ridding them of sin, wickedness, and rebellion—but also by sowing the good seed of the Word of God in them. That is when we, by the grace of God, are determined to do that which is right in every situation.

The Reality of Heart Preparation: Evidence in Actions

Now, thirdly today, we come to the reality of heart preparation. I have given you the rise of heart preparation and the responsibility of heart preparation, so now we come to the reality of it. How do I know whether or not my heart is truly prepared? Let me make it a little more personal. How do I know whether or not your heart is truly prepared? Someone may say, “Come on now, Brother Weaver. Nobody but God knows the heart.”

No, the Bible does not say that. I know only God knows the heart perfectly. The Bible does say that man looketh upon the outward, but God looketh upon the heart. Yet the Bible nowhere says that only God knows the heart. I can know your heart, and you can know my heart. How? Because the Bible says in Proverbs 23 and verse 7, “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Do you realize your actions

reveal what is in your heart? Your attitude reveals what is in your heart. Your words reveal what is in your heart. “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” What we are in reality in our hearts will be manifested and demonstrated by our actions.

Look in your Bibles, if you would please, to 2 Chronicles 19 and verse 3. Let me demonstrate what I am trying to teach you. Here is the statement concerning Jehoshaphat: “Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God.” So the prophet tells Jehoshaphat, “You’ve prepared your heart to seek God.” How did the prophet know Jehoshaphat had prepared his heart to seek God? The answer is because he had taken the groves out of the land.

The word “groves” there is literally wooden images. What exactly were these wooden images? The word refers to the Asherah. Another word is the Astarte. An Asherah or Astarte, sometimes Ashtoreth, was a Phoenician goddess, or an image of a Phoenician goddess. The Asherah was a fertility goddess who supposedly was the mother of Baal, whose worship was concentrated in Syria and Canaan, and the wooden object represented that worship. Our King James Bible usually translates this as “groves,” except where it gives it as “Ashtoreth.” The Asherah then existed in the southern and northern kingdoms of Israel. Jezebel of Tyre apparently installed the worship of Asherah in the north when she married Ahab in 1 Kings chapter 18.

The principal symbols of this deity were located in Samaria, Bethel, and Jerusalem. In 1 Kings 14:23 we read, “For they,” that is, the people, “also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree.” So they built them groves. What were they building themselves? They were building these wooden objects, which were used in the worship of Asherah. These were nothing more than out-of-the-way, secret places for sexual sins, where the sexual sin was done in honor and in worship of Asherah.

How do we know that Jehoshaphat prepared his heart to the Lord? Because he was getting rid of idolatry and immorality. Idolatry and immorality always go hand in hand. You cannot have

one without the other. Jehoshaphat put away these wooden objects; he was putting away idolatry and immorality.

Here is the negative side of preparing the heart. This is still basically what is known as breaking up your fallow ground. The negative side of preparing the heart is nothing more than dealing with the sins in your life, the sins in your family, and the sins and wickedness that you know of and that you have a responsibility to deal with. That is the negative aspect. What is the positive aspect of preparing the heart?

Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord. The Bible says concerning Ezra, “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.” Notice that Ezra prepared his heart first of all to seek the law of the Lord.

Now let me ask you a question: Why did Ezra prepare his heart to seek the law of the Lord? So that he might do it. And then secondly, that he might teach it. You know, the real reason you want to study the Word of God is so you can obey it and apply it. It does not do you any good to memorize Scripture merely to improve your intellect or to demonstrate your ability to quote Scripture. Scripture is given for application in our lives and for obedience to the Lord. So Ezra then, the Bible says, prepared his heart to seek the Lord, the Lord God, that he might actually do it, and that he might actually teach the commandments.

Romans 1:1 shows us the positive side of preparing the heart. The Bible says, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God." Note the phrase "separated unto the gospel of God." Had not Paul separated himself from Judaism? Yes. Had he not separated himself from sin, rebellion, and wickedness? Yes. Why, then, does the verse not say that? Because it is not telling what Paul separated himself from, but what Paul separated himself unto. In other words, there is a negative and there is a positive.

It is not enough—listen carefully—it is not enough to turn from sin. We must turn to the Lord. Remember the story our Lord gave concerning the man who swept and garnished his own house and

kicked the evil spirit out. The evil spirit walked about and said, "I'll return to my own house." Finally, he returned, having carried more evil spirits, more wicked than himself, with him. This shows the absolute valuelessness of self-reformation. In other words, it does you no good to turn from unless you turn unto.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:9, Paul wrote concerning the Thessalonian Christians: "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you." In other words, they demonstrated the truth: "and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." They did not simply turn from idols. That is the negative. They turned to God. That is the positive. Then they served the one true and living God. So, in preparing the heart, there is the positive as well as the negative.

There is another phrase that helps explain heart preparation, found in 2 Chronicles 27:6: "So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God." It does not say that he prepared his heart; it says that he prepared his ways. The emphasis is not merely on what he turned from, but on the way he ordered and directed his life before the Lord his God.

Prepared Ways Follow a Prepared Heart

Is it possible to prepare your ways without preparing your heart? The answer is no, because a prepared heart will always seek prepared ways. The Bible says in Psalm 37 and verse 23, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way." Once you have a prepared heart, you have prepared ways. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his ways.

I have often been asked concerning that verse, "Who is the 'he'? Is that God delighting in the ways of the man, or is that man delighting in the ways of God?" The answer is, it is both. Certainly, God delights in a good man walking obediently. And certainly, a good man walking obediently delights to do that which is right and pleasing to God.

Let me illustrate what I mean by a prepared heart seeking a prepared way. Let us suppose that you and I wanted to commit the

sin of drunkenness. I will confess to you that I have never been drunk in my entire life, and I do not plan on starting now. I have never had a beer in my entire life, and I do not plan on starting now, either. Although I have never been drunk, I know how to get drunk. You know how to get drunk. If we really wanted to get drunk, we would prepare a way to get drunk.

How would we do that? We would visit all the bars, all the liquor stores, all the friends who had plenty at home, and then our own shelf where we kept plenty of it. In other words, if I genuinely wanted to get drunk, I would leave early enough in the evening to make all the rounds, and by the time I got home, I could assure you I would be good and soused.

That is just a silly illustration, but suppose you and I do not want to commit the sin of drunkenness. What are we going to do? We are going to avoid the bars, the liquor stores, and the homes of people who drink too much. If we truly want to avoid drunkenness, we have to prepare our way so that we will not be tempted or fall into it.

There is preparation that needs to be made. If I am going to be holy and pure in my thoughts, as well as in my life, I must not only avoid pornography, but lustful situations, suggestive movies, and compromising situations.

Alice and I were talking about this last evening. Let me explain something about pornography and why it is so vicious and wicked. Pornography may start out merely as pleasing and titillating to the flesh, giving you all kinds of thoughts that might excite you. But the Bible says in Romans chapter 1, speaking about certain people, that they were burned out. Pretty soon, what you and I would call normal pornography will no longer excite you because you have been burned out. Then it takes something else—pedophilia, or bestiality. Until finally, you are totally consumed.

Here is the point: If I do not want to end up like that, I must prepare myself and say, “I am not even going to start. I am not going to look at it. I am not going to indulge in it. I am going to determine that I will keep my heart and my mind pure.”

Proverbs 4, verse 23, says, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” How do I know whether or not I am

keeping my heart? How do I know whether or not you are keeping your heart? Let us look carefully at Proverbs 4:23: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”

"Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil." Now watch carefully: "Keep thy heart with all diligence." How do I know whether or not I am keeping my heart? If I am keeping my heart, I will put away from me a froward mouth and perverse lips. My eyes will look right on, and my eyelids will look straight before me. I will ponder the path of my feet and let all my ways be established or prepared. I will not turn to the right hand or to the left; I will remove my foot from evil. I will do that which is right. If I am not keeping my heart, I will not do any of those things.

If we are keeping our hearts, we are guarding them, pondering the path of our feet, and trying to establish and prepare our ways so that we will not sin against God. If we are going to do that which is right and holy, we have to say, "Lord, our hearts must be prepared."

If you are going to obey God, how can you obey Him if you do not know His Word? How can you please Him if you do not know what pleases Him and what displeases Him? The positive side of preparing the heart requires us to use the means that God has ordained: personal study of His Word, prayer, communion with the saints, and, above all, the preaching of the Word of God.

The Role of Preaching and Teaching in Heart Preparation

Romans 10:17 is a very important part of heart preparation, and it is a passage everyone can quote: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” If I wish to increase my faith, I must not only exercise my faith; I must make sure that I hear the Word of God, because faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. So what most people do is say, “What I’ll do is get some CDs of the Bible, put them on, and listen to the Bible being read, and I’m hearing the Word of God.”

I am certainly not condemning that. I think you should hear all the Bible that you can hear. But that is not what this context is speaking about. You may ask, "Well, what is the context speaking about?" Go back to Romans 10:13: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?" "And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Now the question is, in this context, what is he talking about? He is actually talking about listening to preaching. He is talking about listening to the Word preached—not just to the Word read, but to the Word preached.

Let me make a statement that the Bible will prove: There are things, there are truths, that you will learn from the public preaching of the Word of God that you will never learn through private Bible study. I am not denigrating private Bible study. You should study your Bible privately. You should read it. You should do everything you can to learn it and grasp it. But that still does not negate the fact that there are truths you learn from preaching that you will never learn any other place.

You say, "How can that be?" Look in Ephesians chapter 4, beginning with verse 11: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers"—actually, they are together: pastor-teachers. Why did God give these gifts to the church? "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

Notice why He gave some pastor-teachers: “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” If pastor-teachers were given for the edifying and building up of the body, is it reasonable to assume that you can be built up and edified without pastor-teachers? The answer is no, because pastor-teachers are God’s gift to His church.

This makes perfect sense. If I want to know something about anatomy, I am going to talk to Dr. Brissies. That is their field; that is their life. If I want to know something about veterinary medicine, I am going to talk to Dr. Holmes. That is his field; that is his life. If you want to know something about preaching, teaching, and the Bible, usually you would go to a pastor—and I am talking about a real, genuine pastor. Why? Because that is his life.

Can I learn anything about chiropractic? Sure I can. But could I become a master in chiropractic if I studied it only five minutes a day? No. Could I become a great veterinarian by studying veterinary medicine five minutes a day? No. Are you going to grasp the truths of God’s Word simply by studying it five, ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes, even an hour, a day? No. God has chosen men who have given their lives to studying truth. Usually, those men will have far more truth than someone who simply reads a Scripture or a passage a day and goes on his way to work.

Now, that's only common sense, folks, that's biblical sense. You know, the Bible says in Titus 1 and verse 3, that God chose to manifest his word through preaching. Did you know the Bible said it's by the foolishness of preaching, God chose to save those who believe? By the way, I'll show you this from the Bible. Do you realize there are three things that are absolutely necessary to perfect you or mature you in Jesus Christ?

You say, "What are they?" Well, look in your Bibles to the book of Colossians. Just over it: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. Colossians 1 and look in verse 28. Here are the three things that are absolutely needed and necessary to mature you in the Christian life. The Apostle Paul says concerning Christ, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect," that is, or mature and complete, "in Christ Jesus." Now, what three things are absolutely

necessary to present a man perfect or mature and complete in Jesus Christ? Preaching, warning, or euthanic confrontation, and teaching. Paul says you must have preaching, you must have admonishment, and you must have teaching.

You cannot arrive at maturity without it. So it's the preached word then that increases our faith. It's the preached word that is heard and applied that increases our faith. Make a suggestion and think about this. Do you realize if most Christians would be faithful to the preaching and the exposition of the Word of God, and then once they heard it, if they applied it to their lives, most counselors

would go out of business. Even Christian counselors. In fact, I know pastors who do not even engage in private counseling. And their attitude is this: "You want counsel? Come to Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night services. That's where I do my counseling." In other words, and in one sense of the word, folks, that's really true. I don't quite go that far because I know there are some people like me that might need to hear the same truth three or four times, you know. But the fact is, folks, if we listened and if we applied, if we obeyed, we wouldn't have near the problems that we have.

We must have preaching, we must have teaching, and we must have admonishment. Now, let me make some applications, and I'm going to try to tie this to a close and bring it to a close. There's a negative and there's a positive side to heart preparation. The negative side, of course, is breaking up our fallow ground. The positive side is finding out what God's will and God's word is in preparing our ways.

Applications: Seeking God, Using Means Dependently, and Praying Against Evil

It is our duty to seek God to prepare our hearts. Ours is the responsibility; His is the ability. Psalm 10:17 says, “Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart.” Do you realize that if you seek God to prepare your heart, He has said your heart will be prepared? Those who seek Him will not be disappointed. “Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart.” If we come to God and say, “God, we want

grace to fulfill our responsibilities. We want grace not to sin against Thee. We want grace to do what is right," God says, "I'm going to give it to you." God is far more interested in your doing right than you are in doing right. If you seek Him to prepare your heart, you will find Him. The second application is this.

Whenever we use the means God has ordained—whether private study in the Word of God, prayer, fellowship with the saints, or the public preaching of the Word of God—we must use those means with entire dependence upon Him, trusting Him to make them effectual in our hearts. All of my Bible reading will be useless unless God opens my eyes. All of my prayer will be vain unless I pray in the Spirit and according to the will of God. Whatever means I use, I must use them in entire dependence upon God to make them effectual.

Thirdly, one of the things we need to determine in our hearts is that we are not going to sin against God. I realize there are sins of ignorance. We can sin ignorantly and not even know that we have sinned. But I am not talking about sins of ignorance. I am talking about being faced with something we know is wrong. We know it is wrong to steal, commit adultery, murder, defraud, fail to keep our word, or fail to pay our debts. Therefore, we must determine in our hearts that we are not going to sin against God.

We must not only pray to that end; we must prepare our ways to that end and practice those ways. We must learn to stand against the smaller temptations, the smaller sins. It is just like Lot when he was crying to the angel, saying, "Oh, let me escape thither, to this city over here. Is it not a little one?"

That is the way we do it: "Well, this is just a little sin. It really does not matter that much." But if you cannot stand against the little sins, how in the world are you ever going to stand against the big sins? Every huge, large temptation is only made up of a series of smaller temptations. If you learn to stand against the smaller temptations, you will be more determined when the larger one comes along. You will say, "I am not going to do that. I am not going to sin against God."

In 1 Chronicles chapter 4 and verse 10, we find Jabez. This ought to be our prayer: "And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh

that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!" And God granted him that which he requested.

I want the blessing of God, and I want my coast enlarged. But whether God ever enlarges my coast or blesses me abundantly, I still want to be delivered from evil, that He would keep me from evil, that it might not grieve me. I have heard people all my life give raving testimonies of how God delivered them from whoredom, drunkenness, dope, and all this kind of stuff—down in the gutter, and God raised them up. I am thankful for everyone God has ever raised up and saved, but I would rather God save me from all those things and keep me out of the gutter, and still save me by His grace. You do not have to lie in the gutter to be saved. We can learn to pray with Jabez that God's hand would be upon us, that He would enlarge our coast, bless us, and keep us from evil, that it might not grieve us.

Our Lord said, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation." When He taught us to pray, He said, "Deliver us from evil." We need to determine in our hearts that we are not going to sin against God. If our hearts are prepared, our ways shall be prepared as well. We will look for a way to obey God and stand against wickedness.

Let us pray. Father, we thank Thee for the Lord Jesus Christ today and for His so great salvation, His bountiful mercy to us. We are thankful for Thy providence, provision, and protection. Above all, we pray that Thou wouldst keep us from evil, that it might not grieve us and that we might not sin against Thee. Make us holy as Thou art holy. Enable us to bring our lives into conformity to Thy Word. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray. Amen.

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Chapter 2: Prepared Hearts Part 2
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