

May 14, 2023

RESOLVED: Better Choices, Better Life
1 - I am kind.

Why is it that we are not always as kind as we would like to be?

I Don't confuse SYMPTOMS for ROOT causes

Symptoms:

- Unkind when too busy
- Unkind when too stressed
- Unkind when someone was unkind to you

Root cause is deeper inside of us:

- It's not because of someone else
- It's not because of something else
- It's because MY HEART is calloused or hardened

Good News: TODAY IS ABOUT HOW

God is in control and can soften the hardest hearts.

- **The easy way:** is Cooperating with God.
- **The hard way:** is Resisting the easy way.

I have experienced both ways, and God isn't done shaping my heart. I still struggle.

- **My empathy antenna is way too short:**
 - *Empathy is the ability to understand and feel the feelings of another person.*
 - One of the reasons my empathy antenna is way too short is that I am frequently **PRE-OCCUPIED** with **"My drive for success antenna."**
- **PROBLEM:** Constantly living in my head, tuned into "My Drive for Success Antenna", *I tune out all other voices!* Some "tiny" voices, saying "Papa"... "Papa". And some more important voices!! My hearing is not what it used to be, but it's not my hearing that's the problem; it's my habit!
- **"Let me be FRANK for a moment". Actually, "I was FRANK for a long season."** **Here's the story:** My wife couldn't get my attention using my name, so she called me FRANK, and that got my attention!
- **I frequently live in the wrong "MINDSET".** It's not the mindset of Jesus. He constantly has the spiritual frequency of his heart "tuned into" Loving God and People and NOT the wrong definition of success, by way of ambition.

When your values are clear your decisions are easier.

Here's an example

Late to work: On a busy morning heading to work, a woman noticed an elderly man struggling to carry his heavy bags up the stairs. Despite being in a rush, she paused and offered to help him. She sacrificed a few minutes of her time and carried his bags to the top, providing him with much-needed assistance. **Which of her antennas was longer and stronger?**

God has many ways to change even the hardest heart.

Daniel chapter 4 is a story about the hard way to learn.

II. The root cause of unkindness is PRIDE

Daniel 4:4 (NIV) I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous.

Notice where the king's antenna was focused.

But God can change the hardest of hearts, and he used a nightmare to confront this King.

Daniel 4:5-19 (NIV) 5 I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. 6 So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. 7 When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. 8 Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.) 9 I said, "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me. 10 These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. 11 The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. 12 Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed. 13 "In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven. 14 He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. 15 But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. " 'Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. 16 Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him. 17 " 'The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.' 18 "This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you." 19 Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said,

“Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you.” Belteshazzar answered, “My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!”

Do you notice Daniel’s empathy antenna here? He cares for this pagan king. Daniel proceeds with GRACE and TRUTH.

Daniel 4:20-27 (NIV) **20** The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, **21** with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds— **22** Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth. **23** “Your Majesty saw a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live with the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.’” **24** “This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: **25** You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. **26** The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. **27** Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: **Renounce your sins** by **doing what is right**, and **your wickedness** by **being kind to the oppressed**. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.”

III. Turning from pride requires HUMILITY

Someone said, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It's thinking of yourself less. Humility is thinking more of others."

The Anonymous Good Neighbor: A family in a neighborhood was going through a tough time financially. Their neighbor, knowing their situation, anonymously left bags of groceries on their doorstep every week. The neighbor sacrificed a portion of their own grocery budget to ensure that the struggling family had enough to eat.

The Lunch Table: In a school cafeteria, a group of students noticed a classmate sitting alone at a table. They sacrificed their usual social circle and invited the classmate to join them, ensuring that they felt included and valued.

Did King Nebuchadnezzar listen to Daniel’s Advice? Not at first. He had to learn the hard way.

Daniel 4:29-34 (NIV) **29** Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, **30** he said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?” **31** Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. **32** You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to

anyone he wishes.” **33** Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. **34** At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

Humble yourself and KEEP looking up to heaven. That’s the easiest way to allow God to change your heart!

Daniel 4:36-37 (NIV) **36** At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. **37** Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

I don’t know if Nebuchadnezzar ever fully turned away from his pagan idolatry to serve God but I believe his kingdom benefited from now trying to apply what Daniel advised.

I’d like to conclude with a story of someone else with a hard heart who did turn to Jesus.

A few years ago, a young pastor, fresh out of seminary, was asked to visit a dying man in a Washington, D.C., hospital. An aggressive bone cancer was eating away the man's life. He was not a Christian. On the few occasions when the pastor presented the gospel there was no spiritual response, but a friendship formed. Through a number of visits, the pastor learned that this dying patient was a remarkable, self-made man. He was raised in Spain by a loving mother who diligently taught her son the truths of faith. He only listened a little. [Later in life, his experience with church and with sorrows caused him to spurn Christianity] He came from Spain to America knowing no English. He worked hard and studied hard. He eventually went to college, medical school, and then began a highly successful medical career. Despite his early disadvantages, he became skilled, wealthy, and a respected leader in our nation's most prestigious hospitals. He also became more convinced of his atheism. Then came the cancer.

In just a few months the cancer destroyed the accomplishments of a lifetime. His body, once kept in top shape by miles of daily swimming, was devastated. His skills also began to deteriorate with the advances of cancer. With his spirit broken and his body wracked with pain, the man ran out of pride and finally tired of his own answers, and despairing, he asked the young pastor, “If your God can help give me some peace, help me if you can.”

The young pastor could hardly begin to think of what to say. He hesitated, grasped for the right words, and then stumbled forward:

"You've gained everything a man could gain in every avenue of life. You have wealth, respect, achievement. These all may have to be put aside before you gain this last thing you want. In every area of life you have succeeded, except the spiritual area of your life. To succeed there, you must not follow any of the rules you have used before. You cannot conquer the spiritual world by your efforts. To gain spiritual success you must admit your helplessness and inability. You must confess you have nothing to stand on. To enter God's kingdom and know his peace, you

must not come as a self-sufficient man but as a helpless child—you must not come as a lion but as a lamb."

Still there was no spiritual response. Little else was said that night. The man talked no more. A few days later ... he had an operation that he did not survive. A note was discovered written in Spanish in his labored scrawl—the words his mother had taught him, which he had memorized. *"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord ..."*—the words of the Apostles' Creed. The note concluded in English: *"Jesus, I hate all my sins. I have not served or worshiped you. Father, I know the only way to come into your kingdom is by the precious blood of Jesus. I know you stand at the door and will answer those who knock. I now want to be your lamb."*

God can change the hardest hearts and wipe away the darkest sin. He must do it, because we cannot.

Don't try to stand on our accomplishments or goodness before God.

Humble yourself before him. He exalts those who will humble themselves before him.

Talk It Over

SMALL TALK

1. Share a time when you witnessed or experienced the consequences of arrogance or disregard for moral values. How did it impact you or those involved?

VIEWPOINT

2. Nebuchadnezzar and King Belshazzar? How do these differences highlight the consequences of pride and humility?
3. How does Daniel's interpretation of the writing on the wall provide insight into Belshazzar? **Read Daniel 4-5.** What are the key differences between the stories of King's character and his relationship with God?
4. How do **Matthew 23:12** and **James 4:6** teach us about the nature of humility and its impact on our relationship with God and others? How can we practically apply these teachings in our daily lives?

GETTING PERSONAL

5. How do we recognize pride in our own lives? What steps can we take to cultivate humility and kindness towards others?
6. In what ways do the two humbled kings' stories highlight the urgency of addressing our own pride and humbling ourselves before God?

MAKING PROGRESS (THIS WEEK)

7. What steps can we take to show kindness and compassion towards those who are often overlooked or mistreated?