



God Helps Those Who Help Themselves?

Big Idea: Your heart will lie to you. Follow Jesus.

**Read the Bible:
Jeremiah 17: 5-10**

STUDY

*** Before interacting with this guide, all leaders should study the referenced texts using the HEAR Method. It's also important to encourage your group members to read the text using the HEAR Method. ***

H: Highlight, or take note of, things in the passage that stick out to you as you read.

E: Explain what the passage means by asking simple questions of the text:

- **Why was this written?**
- **To whom was it originally written?**
- **How does it fit with the verses before and after it?**
- **Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in the book?**
- **What is He intending to communicate through this text?**

A: Apply the text to your life. What does God want you to learn from this text?

R: Respond to God in prayer.



Jeremiah 17:5-10

⁵ Thus says the LORD:

“Cursed is the man who trusts in man
and makes flesh his strength,
whose heart turns away from the LORD.

⁶ He is like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see any good come.
He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.

⁷ “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.

⁸ He is like a tree planted by water,
that sends out its roots by the stream,
and does not fear when heat comes,
for its leaves remain green,
and is not anxious in the year of drought,
for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;
who can understand it?

¹⁰ “I the LORD search the heart
and test the mind,
to give every man according to his ways,
according to the fruit of his deeds.”



Summary

Mufasa told Simba to, “look inside himself,” and he would find all that he needed. Elsa realized that all she had to do was “let it go” and she’d get along just fine. My generation is the follow your heart generation. Everyone from Disney to misguided preachers have told us to follow our heart.

The problem is that following our heart has led us to a dead end.

God knew that following our hearts was never going to lead to a good place. That’s at the heart of the Jeremiah passage above.

Why is following our heart such a bad idea?

First of all, our heart lies to us. Jeremiah says it’s deceitful above all things. Ever heard, “the heart knows what the heart wants.”? What a lie! The heart never knows what it wants. If it does know what it wants one moment, it doesn’t the next.

This is why Jeremiah points out that anyone who follows their heart is like a juniper plant that is planted in the dessert. It’s destined to suffer and languish and never flourish. Since our hearts listen to lies we would also suffer and languish and never flourish.

On the other hand, Jeremiah points out that those who listen to God, order their lives around his commands, and submit their hearts to him - build a life that is like a tree planted beside water.

We get to choose the kind of life we want, but in order to choose we must decide where we are going to get our directions.



Leading Your Group

Community Time

Start group by asking for Prayer requests and checking in on everyone.

Bible Study

***Have everyone in your group read assigned scripture before meeting. ***

Start Group by Reading Jeremiah 17:5-10

Major Points

1. Our Hearts Lie to Us, Leaving Us Looking for More.

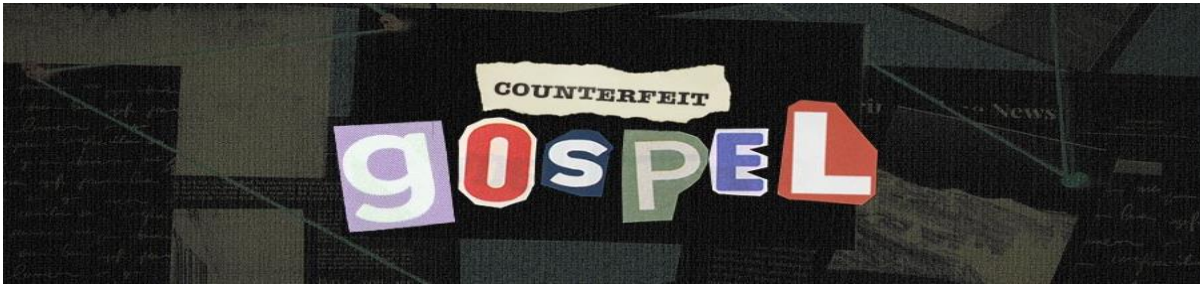
The inevitable destination for those who follow their hearts is frustration and heartache. Our heart is too fickle to be our guide. It never knows what it wants from one moment to the next. It changes desires like Beyonce changes clothes. When we allow our lives to be dictated by a schizophrenic sinful heart it leads to a life on a roller coaster of sinful highs and devastating lows.

We have to get off the rollercoaster

2. Our Hearts Need Truth

To get off the rollercoaster we need a voice of truth capable of overriding the lies our heart so often tells us. This is where God and His word enter in. We were never meant to be guided by our own hearts. Instead, we were meant to submit our hearts to God to allow his truth to determine our direction.

In other words, God's word is meant to be the GPS that guides our life. Sometimes we have to ignore the road signs our hearts throw in the path.



Discussion Questions

1. How do we choose to believe the truth over our feelings?
2. How can we know God's truth? If our feelings lie to us, how can we find what is actually true?
3. What are the results of following our hearts? Where does that lead?
4. What are the results of following God's truth? What do the results of following God's truth look like in our lives?
5. How do we identify lies in our heart?



Resources

Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries

5–10. Complete reliance upon God was basic to the covenant agreement, and here Jeremiah is enunciating a general principle in the light of Judah's periodic political dabblings with Babylon and Egypt (cf. Ps. 146:3). The EVV *shrub* (MT *'ar'ār*) refers to the tamarisk, a dwarf juniper of a particularly stark and naked appearance which *has no prospect of improvement* (RSV *shall not see any good come*, NEB *when good comes he shall not see it*), since its stunted roots do not penetrate to the water-levels beneath the surface. The implications of the allusion would not be lost on the people, who had they lived in a faith-relationship with God could have been flourishing like the green bay tree. For AV *see* (MT *yir'e*) in verse 8 read *fear* (*yirā'*), apparently a transcriptional mistake of one letter in the Hebrew. Unregenerate human nature is in a desperate condition without divine grace, described by the term *gravely ill* in verse 9 (RSV *desperately corrupt*, NEB *desperately sick*). Cf. 15:18 and 30:12, where the meaning 'incurable' occurs. Every generation needs regeneration of soul by the Spirit and grace of God (cf. John 3:5f.; Titus 3:5).¹

5–8. These verses remind us on the one hand of the curses and blessings in Deuteronomy 27–28, and on the other hand of wisdom literature and wisdom psalms such as Psalm 1. If people rely only on mortals (*flesh*) and turn away from God, their lives will be like a shrub in a desert area. They *will not see prosperity* (v. 6; lit. 'when/if good comes'). Even when rain comes, the shrub in the desert will not flourish. The *salt land where no-one lives* is reminiscent of the area around the Dead Sea and Sodom and Gomorrah, a place of barrenness and judgment (see also 4:26; 6:8). These people are the complete antithesis of those who trust not in mortals but in God (vv. 7–8). They do not turn away, but turn towards him in all matters of life. Difficult times may come (*heat*, v. 8), but their lives are rooted in the Source of life, always bearing fruit. God is *the spring of living water* (v. 13). These verses can be applied both to individuals and to the people and leaders who trusted in *mortals* and sought security from various allies (2:13–19, 36), instead of trusting in the Lord and his strength.

¹ R. K. Harrison, [*Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 21 of *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 109.



9–10. Again this is a ‘wisdom saying’, using a rhetorical question to describe the general nature of human beings. However, it fits in a prophetic context, since it emphasizes that no-one is without sin, and this applies to the prophet’s own time. This prophetic message of warning is in the context of analysing the nation’s situation. The people are ‘incurably ill’ (see also 15:18). Only God knows what is really in people’s hearts, minds and thoughts, what are their deepest emotions. He gives them what they deserve. Judgment was deserved in Jeremiah’s day, and God also knew what his enemies had plotted against him (17:14–18). The word for [*examine the*] *mind* is literally ‘kidneys’ (see comment on 11:20).²

² Hetty Lalleman, [*Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), ed. David G. Firth, vol. 21 of *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2013), 162–163.