

Keeping Your Heart Open to Holy Spirit After a Discouraging Failed Relationship

It dawned on me like one of those truths you wish was wrong even though you know it's right. "Oh no," I sighed under my breath, the truth sinking in. It was that moment when I realized that my vision to love Jesus with all my heart was at stake. And the threat came where I didn't expect it—from the pain and hurt I felt in one of my friendships.

It was one of those times we face, hurt and disappointment hanging like heavy weights inside, when pain in a relationship colors everything. And in the middle of the heartache, I did what comes so natural for us all—clambered for a way of escape, a way to self-protect. It was in that anxious clambering that this arrow of understanding struck me, and I knew it was true:

If I don't love well in this relationship—though loving well may be the last thing I want to do—I run the risk of having my heart shut down towards the Lord also.

And in that moment, what may have been somewhat separated before—loving God and loving others—came together in full force. My desire to have an open, tender heart that loved Jesus fully was inextricably tied to my relationships with others and how I walked them out. And unless I fought hard to keep that tenderness and free heart with others, I would sadly wake up one day, years from now, wishing that my heart could move in love and worship for Jesus as it used to, only to find distance and hardness filling the space.

This, to me, was more terrifying than facing and walking out

the difficulty of the relationship that now troubled me.

Self-Protection Costs Us Our Hearts

Broken and sinful as we are, hurt and failure in our relationships are inevitable. What we do in these crises of the heart holds no small impact on every other part of our lives. And this is where the labor comes in. When our hearts are hurt by one another, the easy and enticing route is to flee for safety, distance ourselves and put up barriers.

Far more apt are we to self-protect than live with open hearts. We are experts at living guarded and hesitant. One little inkling of rejection and we forge a barrier between ourselves and another. We erect interior walls of self-preservation in split-seconds. We are geniuses at inserting safe distances and space.

Yet if we shut our hearts down towards each other, no matter how justified we feel, we ultimately also shut down our hearts towards the Lord.

If we take the easy road of self-preservation in our relationships, then over time, we will face the most devastating juncture of all: we will no longer be tender and alive in our hearts towards Jesus. Self-protection may make us feel safe, but in the end, it costs us our heart.

And this pattern does not slow down with time, but only increases. The number of years only multiplies the number of disappointments, difficulties and seeming justifications for offense and bitterness, making the heart that has remained tender and escaped the endless opportunities for jadedness, disillusionment and offense one of the rarest finds on earth.

How Does the Heart Stay Open?

How then will we ever reach our dream of living with an open heart, tender and not cynical? How will we love God and one another with open and full hearts? There is only one way

forward. It is only by the safety of one prospect—Jesus, the perfect one. The safe Friend who sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24).

He comes to each of us in our boarded-up places—He came to me here—where guards are stern and inner vows have been made. With tender eyes that search and know and a heart that loves and covers, He invites the opening.

Where we say we can't trust again—we've been hurt too many times—He draws near, eyes inviting trust, His very being radiating with the light that reminds that darkness has not once from all eternity been found in Him.

And finding our barred-up heart, our stiff-folded arms and reticent stance, He walks in the midst of the relationship that brought the barring. And He opens wide His arms, saying in essence, "It's Me you must trust here."

We Rest Our Vulnerable Hearts in Him Alone

And we then realize. It won't be in another that we finally rest our need for safety—our vulnerable hearts—but in Him. We are all sure candidates for failing one another and thus all rank as *unsafe*. And if we wait for lack of failure, we'll end up shrinking our circles of trusted ones until we've no one left to trust.

Our openness toward others ultimately rests its trust in Him. If He is so safe, then we can keep our hearts open and ward off the incremental residues of offense and jadedness. Trusting Him, we open our hearts and believe all things of one another even through disappointments, the undergirding being not the faithfulness of each other but of Him (1 Cor. 13:7). And this becomes the freeing vision in the middle of our fallouts and heartaches with one another.

There is one among us in whom there is no darkness at all. It's Him we trust (1 John 1:5).

Here—with Him in our midst, safeguarding our vulnerable hearts—we are free to love without fear, without fragmentation, without reservation, even when all the disappointments come. Here our hearts stay open and keep moving forward, abounding in love more and more, tender and without offense until the day we see His face, and love is forever perfected (Phil. 1:9–10). {eoa}

Dana will be one of the featured speakers at Unwavering, our conference focused on strengthening and empowering women of God. Registration for this conference is sold out, but you can still purchase online access through the webstream. Learn more
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