



Thick Skin, Soft Heart, Can't Lose! | Doug Wekenmen | 11.25.17

LG Weekly

START

To get things started, go around the circle and answer the following question:

What's the worst injury you've ever had and how did it happen?

SHARE

There are seasons in the rhythm of Red Rocks Church when it seems timely and appropriate to break from a teaching series in order to allow our teachers the freedom to talk about messages that have been weighing on their hearts for our church family. Over the next few weeks our pastors will be speaking on some really important topics from both the old and new testaments.

Doug opened this week's message asking the question, "How do we love in a world where people hurt each other?" The evidence of a broken and hurting world is all around us. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, all of us have experienced betrayal, abandonment and loss. Perhaps, we've even caused that pain for others. We have been desensitized to acts of violence, hatred and terrorism; they have become the norm—almost expected.

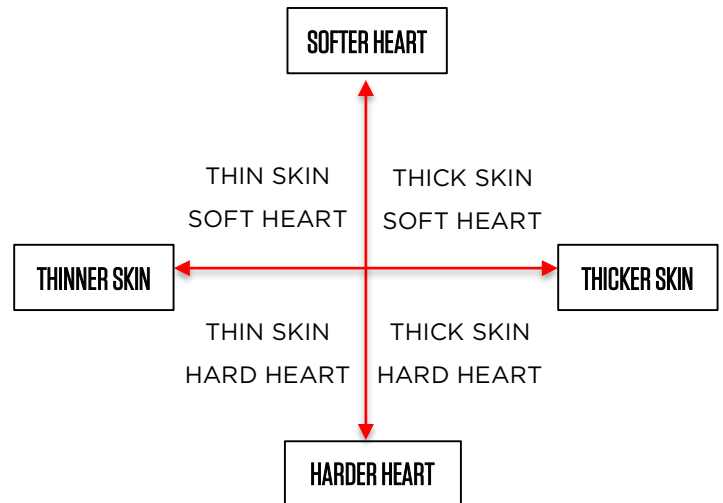
And so we've had to armor-up, stay vigilant and guarded by thickening our skin and hardening our hearts to the brokenness around us. If we're naturally more sensitive and thin skinned, we have allowed the brokenness of the world to change and affect us. And with soft hearts, we desperately want to love, but fear being taken advantage of. Whichever way we lean, if we're being honest, we know our natural response after being hurt is rarely one of love. More often than not we react to being hurt by retaliating, blaming, ignoring, drawing inward, or disengaging.

How are you most likely to react after being hurt?

So how do we respond in love when we've been hurt? Doug encouraged us that with "thick skin and soft hearts, we can't lose!"

Take a look at the graph to the right, into which quadrant do you see yourself landing?

Think of and share an example when you were hurt and responded out of that quadrant.



G R O W

Read Proverbs 19:11

In this proverb, the writer gives us a description of thick skin. Having thick skin means we choose not to be surprised, jaded or offended when we get hurt. Often we think of someone with thick skin as impenetrable, but here the wise man is described as having "discretion" and "good sense." It's this sort of perspective that allows us to be slow to anger and have the ability to overlook an offense.

Like we read in last week's study, "in this world, you will have trouble," (John 16:33). Experiencing hardship and being hurt by others is part of the territory of living in a broken world. Nowhere does the Lord promise us a pain free existence, rather, he issues the command to *love* those who hurt us (Matt. 5:43-47). And having thick skin, the good sense that makes us slow to anger, helps us love when we've been hurt. We need more Christians who have thick skin and are not easily offended, yet are full of love to engage the broken world around us.

Read Colossians 3:12-14

In this passage, the Apostle Paul speaks directly to the character of a soft heart. It's both miraculous and ironic because before his conversion, he had the hardest heart of any Pharisee! But when he met Jesus his life was totally transformed; he put to death what was earthly in him and put on his new self in Christ. Like it was for Paul, having a soft heart means

we no longer walk in anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk (Col. 3:8). We don't lie to one another. Instead we put on this list of virtues that Paul describes in verse 12: compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. We forgive and we stay in relationship when it gets awkward and hard. Having a soft heart means we assume the best and give one another the benefit of the doubt. And when we get hurt, a soft heart responds in love.

Are you naturally more thick-skinned or soft-hearted? Why is the other more difficult for you to embody?

What needs to change in your life in order to cultivate the one that is lacking?

When thick skin and a soft heart combine, the dangers and pitfalls of the other combinations fade away. A thick skinned, hard hearted person reeks of selfishness and a lack of empathy. The hard heart seeks to assert itself above others and is blind to another's pain and experience. A thin skinned, soft hearted person, though able to worship and experience joy, is over-sensitive and weak to criticism. While a thin skinned, hard hearted person, like King Saul in the book of Samuel, is someone who cares nothing for others and only whines and complains about his/her own situation.

A thick skinned, soft hearted person, however, is motivated by love for others and doesn't let that love get stifled when offended. It is the goal of the Christian life to put to death the seed that would have us be thin skinned, hard hearted people. For the sake of the gospel and making Jesus' name known on earth, our effort in thickening our skin and softening our heart is critical.

How would Christianity look different to an unbelieving world if Christ-followers were known for having thick skins and soft hearts? What would be different about the way Christians are often viewed today?

M O V E

So how do we get there? How do we thicken our skin without also hardening our heart? How do we embrace a soft heart and rid ourselves of thin skin?

We look to the example of Jesus, fixing our eyes on him who, with a thick skin and soft heart, endured the cross (Heb. 12:2). Though it seems like a “Sunday-school answer,” in practice, fixing our eyes on Jesus is a lot more challenging. As we allow his love to shape and mold us into his likeness, the Spirit begins his sanctifying work and rids our hearts of the fleshly tendency towards thin skin and a hard heart. It’s a lifelong process. When we grow continually towards having thick skin and soft hearts, it’s then that we are able to live as agents of peace and love in a world where we are bound to get hurt. Because with thick skin and soft hearts, we cannot lose.

In addition to the crucifixion, what are other moments in Jesus’ life where he displayed thick skin and a soft heart?

Based on which area (thick skin or soft heart) needs to be developed in your own life, what can you do today to move more in that direction?

Is there a situation in your life currently where you’ve been hurt and the Spirit is calling you to respond in love? How will praying for thick skin and a soft heart help you in that situation?

P R A Y

As a group, spend some time praying with and for each other. Pray the Spirit will begin to move you more and more towards having thick skin and a soft heart in order to better love a hurting world. If you are in a coed group, consider breaking up into men’s and women’s groups to share more freely.

T O G O

Matthew 22:37-39

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

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