

The Heart of the Matter

Proverbs 4:20-27

HEART SONGS

Many great (and not-so-great) songs have been written trying to capture the plight of the heart. The age old question of “How do you know when you’re in love?” is often answered by, “When all those cheesy *love* songs make sense.”

Heartbreaker, Pat Benatar

You're a heartbreaker, dream maker, love taker
Don't you mess around with me
You're a heartbreaker, dream maker, love taker
Don't you mess around, no, no, no

Total Eclipse of the Heart, Bonnie Tyler

Once upon a time I was falling in love
Now I'm only falling apart
There's nothing I can do
A total eclipse of the heart

Put A Little Love In Your Heart, Jackie Deshannon

Think of your fellow man
Lend him a helping hand
Put a little love in your heart

Achy Breaky Heart, Billy Ray Cyrus

But don't tell my heart, my achy breaky heart
I just don't think it'd understand
And if you tell my heart, my achy breaky heart
He might blow up and kill this man

HEART WORSHIP

Not only is the heart a major theme for musicians, it is a substantial topic in Scripture. The heart is like a recurring refrain through the pages of Scripture depicting the nature of man, revealing his actions and assessing his motives. To talk about the heart is to talk about the **core** of *who a person is*, what *defines* and *drives* them. At the *heart* of the topic on the **heart** is the issue of **worship**. *What do you worship? Who do you worship?* Jesus said it simply, “*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*” (Matt.6:21)

To talk about the heart is to talk about worship. God is jealous for your worship (Exo.34:14), which means He is jealous for your heart (Deut.6:5). As you examine your heart, the idols of your heart become exposed. As you understand your passions and desires, you see those things that compete for your heart’s affection and worship. James 4:1 tells us that wrong desires, or *passionate lusts*, become the source of quarrels and conflicts. You cannot truly love God with all your heart while loving success or control or pleasure or comfort at the same time. Some insightful questions to help examine what idols are competing for your heart’s worship are...

- 1) *What do I want that I'm not getting?*
- 2) *What am I getting that I do not want?*

To know if you're truly worshiping God requires a heart examine, a spiritual EKG, to see if there is anything that rules your heart other than God – **IDOLATRY**. Heart idols are deceptive and we try to keep them hidden, but they are there and need to be removed. They are like cancerous tentacles which attach themselves in difficult places, idols of the heart need to be surgically removed with spiritual skill. Like a patient entering God's exam room this morning for a spiritual EKG, **allow the Lord to be your physician, let His word (in Proverbs) probe within, and follow His prescription for a wise, worshiping heart.**

I. YOUR HEART'S DESCRIPTION

ESV PROVERBS 4:23 *Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.*

The word “heart” is used both in the OT & NT at least 1,015x. In Proverbs, there are 70 verses alone which reference the heart. The Hebrew term *leb* (לב) can be translated “heart, mind, will, inner man.”¹ Its use throughout Scripture often refers to the totality of person’s nature and character, the inner person as contrasted with the outward. It is “*the richest biblical term for the totality of man’s inner or immaterial nature.*”² It comprises three functions of a person: *emotion, thought and will.*

EMOTION/AFFECTIONS

The heart is used in relationship to your emotions, affections, desires or passions. With your heart you can feel great joy, and experience deep sorrow. An example of the heart’s joy is seen in Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel. In 1 Samuel 1-2, we learn about the difficulty and sorrow Hannah felt not being able to conceive. No doubt her heart was heavy and hurting as she witnessed others in her family having children.

Several years into her marriage during a family pilgrimage to the Temple, Hannah poured out her heart to God. He answered, through Eli, by giving Hannah her a son, Samuel; who in turn gave him back to the service of the Lord. Her prayerful response is recorded in 2:1-10 where she emotionally expresses her heart’s affection and passion, “*My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in the Lord.*”

Several proverbs also express the heart’s emotion/affections:

Proverbs 15:13 *A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed.*

17:22 *A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.*

12:25 *Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.*

14:10 *The heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy.*

¹ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *Hebrew-Aramaic and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Electronic edition © 2001 by BibleWorks, LLC

² R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 1980

MIND/THOUGHTS

Another relationship of your heart is with the mind, thoughts and intellect. “*The heart is not primarily the seat of emotions, but rather of intellect, volition and evaluation...the heart is the center of thinking, treasuring and deciding. It is the mind.*”³ Often the Hebrew term is interchangeably translated between “heart” and “mind”. Like a computer’s micro-processor that handles all inputted data, the heart is your internal processor sorting through all the “data” of your life and deciding what to do with it. According to the book of Hebrews your heart has **THOUGHTS** and **INTENTIONS**.

Hebrews 4:12 “*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*”

This makes your heart ALIVE, not empty or passive. You are not an empty vessel that needs only to be filled with the right ingredients to make for good heart intentions. Jesus described our hearts like a storehouse treasury already filled with all sorts of items.

Matthew 12:34-35 *For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.*

Your heart makes thoughtful plans which are often only known to you, but fully understood by the Lord. Your heart’s actions are never a result of some primal, animalistic behavior, nor a random evolutionary process, but come from the cauldron of your heart.

Proverbs 16:1 *The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.*

16:9 *The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.*

19:21 *Many are the plans in the mind (**heart**) of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.*

6:18 *a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil,*

6:14 *with perverted heart devises evil, continually sowing discord;*

WILL/INTENTIONS (MOTIVES)

It is from your heart that your will enacts, your intentions revealed, and your motives are discerned. Your heart is Command Central and is critical to your daily operations. “*The heart is the starting point of the activities of life, it determines the course of your life.*”⁴ The heart is the reason *why you do, what you do*. This is where the difficult work of heart examination takes place. Understanding personal motives and intentions can be complex and intricate, but not all together impossible.

Proverbs 20:5 *The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.*

³ Dan Phillips, *God's Wisdom in Proverbs*, 115, 136

⁴ Frank E. Gaebelien, gen.ed., *Expositor's Bible Commentary: Vol.5*, 926

Even if your motives are hidden or disguised to others, or you do not fully understand your intentions, the Lord does. He has complete control over the purposes of your heart. There is no corner in the crawl spaces of your heart where His light does not shine or His arm does not reach. Everything before Him is laid bare.

Proverbs 15:11 *Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD; how much more the hearts of the children of man!*

17:3 *The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the LORD tests hearts.*

“The heart is the man. It is the seat of all spiritual life, and health, and strength, and growth. It is the hinge and turning point in the condition of men’s souls. If the heart is alive to God and quickened by the Spirit, the man is a living Christian. If the heart is dead and has not the Spirit, the man is dead before God. The heart is the man!”⁵

II. YOUR HEART’S DIAGNOSIS

The heart is a vital organ both physically and spiritually. The degree to which you understand the depth of your heart, will be the degree to which you care for the health of your heart. To do this, you need the proper diagnosis of your heart’s condition. Proverbs often presents matters in a format of comparison and contrast, and the heart is no exception. There are two types of hearts diagnosed in Proverbs.

THE CORRUPTED HEART

PROVERBS 20:9 *Who can say, "I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin?"*

The author of this verse rightly asks the question, *who has a clean heart?* The rhetorical answer is, No one! If the author of this verse is Solomon, he surely was familiar with his father David’s admission in Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Every heart is corrupted by sin at birth. No matter how adorable and innocent a newborn baby is, the heart-breaking reality is they are not exempt from the corruption of sin.

The ugly truth is that the heart is in worse condition than it appears. “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*” (Jer.17:9) If the heart is the central core of your emotions, thoughts and motives, then all these areas are soiled with the filth of sin. Look at what the heart is capable of because of sin:

Perversion toward evil

6:12-14 *A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech, winks with his eyes, signals with his feet, points with his finger, with perverted heart devises evil, continually sowing discord;*

12:20 *Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who plan peace have joy.*

⁵ J.C. Ryle, *Old Paths*, Kindle location 4430

Foolish conduct

12:23 *A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims folly.*

19:3 *When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the LORD.*

Arrogant abominations

11:20 *Those of crooked heart are an abomination to the LORD, but those of blameless ways are his delight.*

16:5 *Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished.*

26:23-25 *Like the glaze covering an earthen vessel are fervent lips with an evil heart. Whoever hates disguises himself with his lips and harbors deceit in his heart; when he speaks graciously, believe him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart;*

What is the conclusion to all this? Your heart is not “basically good.” It is why Neil Young in all his searching will never find that “Heart of Gold”; nor can you live the Disney motto of “Believe in your heart.”

Proverbs 28:26 *Whoever trusts in his own heart (mind) is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.*

Jesus dissected the deceit of the self-righteous Pharisees when He explained to them, “*For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.*” (Mark 7:21-23)

THE REDEEMED HEART

The only cure for the corrupted heart is a **total heart transplant**. The Lord illustrated this through the prophet Ezekiel when He announced, “*And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God*” (Eze.11:19-20). It’s not that your heart simply needs reviving or a spiritual bypass surgery; it needs to be totally replaced.

The Good News is unlike typical heart-transplant patients, there is no waiting list, there are no survival risks afterwards. The requirements are a repentant heart of sin and personal submission to Jesus as Lord. The transplant is made possible by the accomplished work of Jesus Christ, and made effective by the Spirit of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is a skilled physician in saving lives through spiritual heart surgery.

What does a newly, redeemed heart look like:

Teachable

10:8 *The wise of heart will receive commandments, but a babbling fool will come to ruin.*

15:14 *The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools feed on folly.*

18:15 *An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.*

Prudent speech

15:28 *The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.*

16:23 *The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips.*

Grows wiser

14:23 *In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty.*

16:21 *The wise of heart is called discerning, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.*

23:15 *My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad.*

III. YOUR HEART'S PRESCRIPTION

PROVERBS 4:23 *Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.*

GUARD AT ALL COSTS!

After understanding your heart's description and undergoing your heart's diagnosis, it is time to receive your heart's prescription. Even as a Christian you struggle with sinful desires, wrong motives, inappropriate passions and misplaced expectations. These are the affects of remaining sin and will not be completely eradicated until you receive your new, glorified body before God. Until then you are charged with protecting your most valuable asset before God.

“With all vigilance” – The emphasis in the Hebrew grammar is on the diligent purpose displayed in guarding your heart. The Scripture uses many motifs to impress upon you the enormity and urgency of such matters. During seasons of war, there is a constant awareness and alertness to threat of imminent danger. Our enemy is cunning and never sleeps, but often makes us think he is!

Like a Secret Service detail vigilantly protecting the President, or the U.S. Mint Police who guard Ft. Knox, there is to be state of ready alertness protecting your treasure, your heart.

How do you practically guard your heart with all vigilance?

- MOUTH: *Integrity of Speech* – “For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart” (Matt.12:34^{CSB}). *What do you talk about and say in unguarded moments? How does it sound out-loud?* You can learn much about your own heart by listening to yourself.

- EYES: *View towards Christ – “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Heb.12:1-2 ^{ESV}). Who are you looking to for your life’s purpose? What are you looking at that is filling your heart/mind? What are you distracted by that is keeping you from growing spiritually? To quote an old Sunday School song, “Oh be careful little eyes what you see!”
- FEET: *Moral pathway – “Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it. And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house”* (Pro.5:5-8). Beware finding yourself on a path you never intended to go, except by an unguarded heart.

CONCLUSION

PROVERBS 23:26 *My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.*

“The heart is the first and foremost thing which God asks man to give Him...The heart is what the husband desires to have in his wife, the parent in his child, and the master in his servant. And the heart is what God desires to have in professing Christians.”⁶

As you exit God’s exam room this morning, may you see the magnitude of your heart’s description, might you properly assess your heart’s diagnosis, and would you apply the Lord’s prescription for your heart!

⁶ Ryle, Kindle loc.4434-4448

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Mind/thoughts
Will/intentions (motives)

II. YOUR HEART'S DIAGNOSIS

The Corrupted Heart
Perversion toward evil
Foolish conduct
Arrogant abominations

The Redeemed Heart

Teachable
Prudent speech
Grows wiser

III. YOUR HEART'S PRESCRIPTION

Guard at all costs!
Mouth: *integrity of speech*
Eyes: *view towards Christ*
Feet: *moral pathway*