

Lost & Found Center Teaching Series



A HEALTHY HEART PROJECT

Introduction

The goal of this study is for you to begin a journey with me. I consciously started this journey just recently but I am encouraging you to take part as well. I call it a healthy heart project. Scripture says the heart is our most precious component. Let's look at the following verse:

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Proverbs 4:23 NIV

Now most of you would agree with this verse, but how much do you agree? Look at the verse again. This scripture is part of a group of instructions for living. Amidst all those instructions, this scripture bubbles to the top with the "Above all else." You could rephrase it as "if you are going to follow just one instruction" or "before you go onto anything else get this one down first." Get this one down first because from your heart your entire life takes its cue – your entire life.

Who are you really?

Let's look at another verse.

As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man. Proverbs 27:19 NIV

Our heart is who we are. I go over this in more detail in **Seed Your Change**. No matter what you look like on the outside, no matter what kind of education you have or upbringing, no matter what your country or national origin or ethnicity or style or physical attributes or charisma or wealth or health or anything else that can describe you – the real you is your heart. Make sense? I hope this isn't too scary. Because this means that our conventional success in things like a job, in possessions or friends or accomplishments are NOT going to change who you are. We may lose ourselves in a whole lot of stuff, but that's not going to change who we are.

So when God looks at us, what do you think he's looking at anyway? This is not a trick question. He tells us, plainly. Look at the next verse:

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7 NIV

I've quoted this verse in other lessons. This is what the Lord told Samuel when Samuel went out to select a king. Samuel had thought to himself that one of the impressive young men he had just met must have been the Lord's choice. But the Lord spoke up and interrupted Samuel's thought processes. And the Lord clarified himself for Samuel's sake and our sake as well. The Lord looks at the heart. It is silly to say this, but the Lord

doesn't get distracted by any of the things that trap us. Who are we really? The Lord knows. If he looks at the heart, then that is who we are. Or that is what reveals us or reflects us.

Who are we, really? That's what Jesus said when he discussed the good and bad trees.

"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. Luke 6:43-44 NIV

Jesus is using the analogy of trees and fruit to discuss people and their actions. But he makes a distinction between a good and bad tree. That distinction is made at the heart level – the core of the tree. What he's saying is bad trees, like bad people, reveal themselves by what they produce. But, and this is very important, why they produce bad fruit is the result of their heart. This becomes clearer in the next verse.

The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. Luke 6:45 NIV

He's talking about people now and he clearly says that good people bring good things out of the good in their heart and evil likewise. Look at this verse:

A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Matthew 7:18 NIV

This is a very disturbing verse conceptually. It says that there is no use for a bad heart to try to do good. A bad heart cannot do good. This is a slight diversion in our study, but for those who have not put their trust in Christ, there is nothing good that you can do to compensate for a bad heart. Nothing. There is a philosophy of the world that says if I only do enough good it will make up for the failings of my heart. That is ultimately a philosophy of denial. It is a philosophy that refuses to look at the true state of our hearts before a Holy God.

Here's one last example for you. I've used this passage before to explain how Jesus went about clarifying or demystifying who God is and what he's like.

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. Matthew 5:21-22 NIV

Is this passage clearer after the previous verses? I hope so. What Jesus is saying is that simply refraining from murder is not enough. Can you see this? If the condition of your heart is anger and hatred then you exist on the same heart level as a murderer. Just following the rules is not enough. The only thing that matters is what is on the inside. We think that we are good people simply because we haven't committed the big sins. We have no clue. Why? Because God is looking at something different. God looks at the heart.

Tragedy in Being Out of Sync

There is tragedy in being out of sync. There is danger in guarding the wrong thing. There is danger in us not having a clue. When we don't understand what is important then we won't protect what's important as well. When we don't value what God values, we set ourselves up for a rude awakening; we impede our progress; we don't function as intended. We become like the Laodicean church as described by Jesus:

You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. Revelation 3:17 NIV

This is one incredible verse. This is the Lord talking to a people. These people thought they were prosperous. They thought they had achieved. They thought they were valuable. They thought they were content. The Lord sees something different. He sees wretched. It means worthless, despicable and contemptible. He sees pitiful. It means lamentable, deplorable, woeful and pathetic. He sees poor. It means lacking, deficient and inferior. He sees blind. It means lost, dull, unperceptive and unaware. He sees naked. It means stripped, destitute and defenseless. Is this a description of our prosperity generation? This verse shows that some of us, many of us just do not have a clue. When we don't see what God sees, we truly have no idea. This is the Laodicean church. Is this us?

A Healthy Heart Project

So what is a healthy heart again? Good question. Sorry, but we had to lay the groundwork before we could get here.

I want to make this very simple. It's the only way to approach something as complex and elusive as the heart of man. We can search the scriptures and still have a hard time understanding the heart. That's something I can't do - at least not today. There is an easier way though. Let's then define a healthy heart by what a healthy heart does, not what it is. Sound good?

A healthy heart then fulfills its primary intended functions - of which there are arguably only three. These three are laid out specifically in scripture. Here they are in the following verse:

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13 NIV

This is no trick or slight of hand. The most important functions of the heart are faith, hope and love. Say it with me. A healthy heart believes or trusts or has faith, a healthy heart hopes or looks to the future, and a healthy heart loves. Now if we can remember these simple three it will help us along in our project. Again:

A healthy heart believes, a healthy heart hopes, and a healthy heart loves.

In the context of teaching about spiritual gifts, Paul reminds the Corinthian church in chapter 13 how love gives value to everything. Stated simply, the absence of love is the absence of value in the kingdom of God. Paul also tells them that there will come a time when spiritual gifts will no longer be needed and the only things that will survive are the big three: faith, hope and love. If the big three proceed from our hearts then do you see why the heart is of such great value?

A Healthy Heart Believes

A healthy heart believes. This is not intuitive. Does the heart really believe? Yes. Paul says it in Romans:

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Romans 10:9-10 NIV

It says plainly, "it is with your heart that you believe."

Faith is not an intellectual thing is it? If that were so all the intellectuals would be believers. And we know that isn't the case.

Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 1 Corinthians 1:20 NIV

From your experience you know this to be true. You didn't believe because you examined all the evidence. You believed because something in you clicked and responded to the

truth. Scripture says it was your heart. Now the mind comes in after the fact and adds a little understanding and knowledge to the direction your heart has taken.

Let us then become heart experts and learn to diagnose some problems. Do you struggle with faith or believing or trusting God in any area of your life? If this is your struggle, what kind of problem do you have? It is not a confidence problem where you are not claiming what is rightfully yours. It is not an understanding problem where you don't know enough. It is not a scripture problem where you don't read enough.

Since we have just seen in scripture what part of us believes, we must conclude that a lack of faith is a problem with the heart. Our capacity to believe is not dependent on our confidence or our will. Our capacity to believe depends on our heart. A healthy heart believes. Do you see?

A Healthy Heart Hopes

Of these three, hope may be the most misunderstood. I like to say that hope gives things their eternality. Hope is what cause things to last. Hope is all about the future. Hope is about tomorrow.

For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? Romans 8:24 NIV

Hope that is seen is no hope at all. Why, because hope is about tomorrow. The Bible says that hope is one of the big three. After everything to do with this world has drawn to its conclusion, there will still be a tomorrow. God is a God of tomorrow.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13 NIV

God is a God of Hope. There will always be something to look forward to in God. One of my favorite passages that epitomizes this comes from the day of Pentecost. The disciples had gathered together waiting for the Holy Spirit of God who Jesus had promised. When that event occurred they began speaking in languages unknown to them. The people outside thought they had been drinking.

Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

**" In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams. Acts 2:13-17 NIV**

Peter tells the crowd that what is occurring is the promise of the Holy Spirit. This is a great passage. It is definitely a statement of hope. The Lord says he will pour out his spirit and this is how everybody will be affected:

Our children without training will declare the greatness of God.
Our young people, the ones with energy and resources will have purpose in their lives.
Even our old people will begin to dream again. Even our old people will begin again to think about tomorrow.

The Spirit of God in people renews us in hope at every stage of our lives. God is a God of hope. Now that we are growing heart experts, if we are lacking in motivation, if we stop caring about things and people, if we start to give up, if we start believing lies like nothing can improve, what kind of problem do we have? Do we need to improve our attitude? Do we need to start looking at the bright side of things? Our ability to hope is not about our will or determination. If we struggle with hope we have a heart problem. A healthy heart hopes. A healthy heart always looks toward tomorrow.

A Healthy Heart Loves

Lets look at love another way as well. If faith is about believing and hope is about tomorrow then let us say that love is about how much you can carry. What?

Think love, think carry.

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.
Galatians 6:2 NIV

That law is the law of love. What does it mean to carry each other's burdens? Burdens are weights. They are what limit us and keep us back. They are our frailties and our fears and our weaknesses. For us to carry each other's is for us to put up with each other. It means we have faith in what God can do in each other. It means we have hope for each other in a better day.

A healthy heart will carry for as long as needed.

Think about it. In order to judge people you must put down their load. In order to hate people we must decide in our hearts that this person's burdens are not worth carrying, that this person has no hope.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Matthew 18:21-22 NIV

Peter said to Jesus how long must I carry a person's burdens. When am I permitted to lay them down? When can I give up on them? What could Jesus say other than never? When would you want God to be done with you and finally set you down? Love is the willingness to carry.

So back to our diagnoses, when we are unwilling, or fed up with people, when we think it is not worth it to us to put up with them, when we judge or are critical, when we de-value or de-humanize people and we say that we will not waste our time with this person, what kind of problem do we have? When we refuse to carry people's burdens anymore, what kind of problem is that? Fatigue? Nope. It's a heart problem. A healthy heart loves. A healthy heart carries.

The Healthy Diagnosis

The first part of this study was to convince you that a healthy heart does three main things - trusts, and hopes and loves. Therefore, if we have a problem with our faith, or with our outlook of the future or with our ability to carry the burdens of others then we have a heart problem. If we are struggling with faith or hope or love, then our heart is struggling. If this is you, then your heart is not working as intended.

Once we realize where the source of the problem is then we know where the work must be applied. What I want you to understand from this study is that if the problem is in the heart, then the heart needs to be fixed. Fix any other area and you may be able to fool some, but you won't solve the problem.

Not too long ago there was this preacher who had to step down from his position in ministry because of some sin. I don't want to pile on his tragedy, but something he said is very relevant to this study. He said that he began to preach more and more forcefully against the very things he struggled with as a way to combat his desires. I don't want to be callous, but obviously this approach didn't work. When we use the force of our will or even an accountability group to keep us in line, then we have our efforts in the wrong place. He had a heart problem. We have heart problems.

Fixing the Heart

I believe in the Christian life there is a lot of work to be done. There are ample teachings, declarations, and impartations, yet there is work that never seems to get done in our lives. Why? Because we as children of God must learn how to work differently. In the kingdom of God, God does all the work. In God's kingdom, if God doesn't do it, it doesn't get done.

If our hearts need repair and God doesn't fix it, does it get fixed? No. If we could just eat these words, or maybe these:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21 NIV

In this scripture Paul is praising God. He's praising God who can now accomplish things through us. How? "According to his power that is at work within us."

How about this verse:

...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Philippians 2:13 NIV

How about this verse as a final witness:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 36:26 NIV

I'll say it again and again. Christianity is not about great men and women who out of the sheer force of will lay hold of the great things of God. It is his power. It is what he does to us and through us. It is what he makes us.

What then is Our Role?

Our role is first to see. We must face our own condition. The Holy Spirit will let you get a peak at the condition of your heart if you only ask him. Let me warn you first, it could be ugly. If you are like many of us are part of the Laodicean church, it is going to be both shocking and painful. Why would he do this to us? Interesting question. Why would he let us see the true condition of ourselves? Is that the question you asked? Well maybe because he is the Spirit of Truth and that is how he operates. Maybe also he wants us to embrace our next role – that of enablers.

The Holy Spirit is looking for access into our lives, into our hearts, to fix, repair, replace. And of course you're not going to let him fix things if you have a Laodicean mindset and think everything is fine. Now are you?

Do you see? The Lord wants to get us in the following mode:

**Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.** Psalm 139:23-24 NIV

But we need to go there in reality not in pretend fashion. The funny thing about this verse is that God already knows our hearts. He wants us to get to the point where we are ready to see what he wants to show us. Once we see, maybe just maybe, we'll be ready to get serious and give him access to change our heart.

Conclusion

So a healthy heart trusts, a healthy heart hopes and a healthy heart loves. If we have problems with any of these then we have a heart problem. The only way to fix a heart is to work on the heart and that is God's work. Our job first is to see the problem and then give him access to fix us.

Sound too easy? The hard part is always in the seeing. Just like salvation. Salvation sounds more difficult. The hard part in salvation is in the seeing. Only after we see ourselves are we ready to accept Jesus' work. Why would anything else be different in the kingdom of our Lord? Amen.

Notes

For Questions or Comments please respond to lostandfoundcenter@yahoo.com and visit www.lostandfoundcenter.org for additional information.

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