The Heart Of The Matter

Proverbs 4:23 Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

The Physical Heart
It is only about the size of a human fist, but the heart is the only muscle in our body that never rests.

• It is always working,
  o always beating
  o and its perpetual motion keeps us alive.

• The main function of the heart
  o is to act as an engine
  o that allows our body to perform its functions.

• And, Oh, what an engine!
  o It beats an average of 75 times a minute,
  o forty million times a year,
  o or two-and-a-half billion times in a 70-year lifespan.

• At each beat, the average adult heart discharges about four ounces of blood.
  o This amounts to three thousand gallons a day
  o or 650,000 gallons a year
  o —enough to fill more than 81 tanker trucks of 8,000 gallons each.

It is a marvelous muscle that can keep on beating, automatically, even if all the other nerves in your body are severed.

• It recognizes that the rest of your life depends upon it,
  o so it cares for itself,
  o providing precious nutrition to itself
  o before supplying blood to the other parts of the body.

• It has an amazing ability to change and adapt,
  o to be flexible in its environment,
  o to remain supple
  o and to correct dangerous situations.

• It is not unheard of for a heart to create new arteries
  o to naturally bypass old arteries
  o that have become hopelessly blocked.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you haven’t already realized it,

• the physical heart that beats within your chest
  o is the very center and fountain of your life.

• From it everything else flows.
  o Blood circulates into every other part of your body
    ▪ because of that heart.

• You continue to live,
  o breath, think and function
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because of the life that flows from your heart.

Everything about your life depends upon your heart,
without it nothing else works.

The Spiritual Heart
There are 854 references to the heart in the Old Testament alone.

However, in more than 300 cases it has a spiritual significance, rather than a physical connotation.

In Hebrew thought the heart of a man
is much more than just the marvelous muscle
that supplies your body with the essential substance of life,
   it is the spiritual center of a man.

The heart governs all of the actions of a man:
   his character;
   his personality;
   his intellect;
   his thought processes;
   his dreams
   and his aspirations
   all are governed by the heart.

All the issues of life, the writer of Proverbs said, flow out of your heart!

The heart controls and gives character to all that we are and all that we do.

   It is the seat of the will
   the source of all good or evil qualities and behaviors.

   From the fountain of your heart,
your whole life is influenced.

   If the heart is filled with hatred,
   so the man is filled with hatred.

   If the heart is filled with deceit,
   so then the man is filled with deceit.

   If the heart becomes bitter,
it poisons the whole of life.

   If pride rules the heart then pride rules the life.

   If vengeance or retribution consumes the heart
   then it controls the whole life.

A man is what his heart is.

   If the heart is dead to God then nothing in him is alive.

   If his heart is right with God
   then all of his life and living is right with God.

   At the deepest level all of your life is guided and directed by your heart.
   Out of the abundance of your heart,
      all of your life is influenced.

   Because of this, the heart is the focal point of God’s dealings with people.
It is where God meets us,
it is where God appeals to us
   and it is in the heart that men either accept or reject God.

**Inherently Wicked**
The problem is that the heart of mankind has been marred by sin.

- It is inherently wicked.
  - Because of the nature of Adam
  - and because we are born under the curse of sin,
    - everything in our life is contaminated by our heart.
  - Our heart would rather follow after evil than good.
- The character of man is naturally sinful
  - it is an inherited nature that poisons our heart
  - and from those bitter springs,
    - everything about our lives is affected.
- The prophet Jeremiah said:

  Jeremiah 17:9 *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

- It is a common theme in scripture.
  - The heart is presented as being at the very root of men turning away from God.
- Men say in their heart that they don't need God,
  - and thus they turn away from Him.
- The pride of their heart deceives them
  - and they follow after sin.
- They forget in their heart the wonderful works of the one true God
  - and go chasing after false gods.
- Over and over again, the issue resides in the heart.

**A New Heart**
The only solution to the problem is for God to give man a new heart.

- As a matter of fact the greatest realization of the Old Testament
  - is the understanding that man needs a new heart.
- David cried out in Psalm 51:10
  - *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."
- After noting the desperately wicked condition of the heart,
  - Jeremiah shared a prophetic promise from God:

  Jeremiah 24:7 *And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.*

- It was God's desire, from the very beginning,
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- o to establish within man a new heart:
  - A heart that would seek him;
  - A heart that would know him;
  - A heart that would return to Him
  - and be reconciled to fellowship with Him.
- This was God’s supreme desire for man.

Under the inspiration of a divine anointing,
- the prophet Ezekiel looked ahead in time and declared:

Ezekiel 36:26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

- That, my friend, is the heart of the gospel.
  - He came.
  - He lived.
  - He died.
  - He was buried in a borrowed tomb
  - and he rose again on the third day.
- He did it all so that he could create in you a new heart
  - and fill you with His spirit!
- That’s what salvation is about.
  - It is the answer to David’s prayer:
    - Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
- When you repent of your sins and are baptized in the name of Jesus,
  - God has promised that he will fill you with the gift of the Holy Ghost.
- He creates in you a clean heart.
  - He exchanges that old, tainted, hard heart
    - for a new, tender, right heart.
- And he fills you with his spirit,
  - he renews in you a right spirit.
- It is the spirit within you
  - that empowers your new heart
    - to pursue godly things instead of carnal things
    - to strive after the will of God
      - rather than ever whim of the flesh.

That’s why Romans says
- that it is with the heart that you believe unto righteousness
  - and that you obey from the heart
  - and that, in doing these things, the love of God is shed abroad in your heart.
• Because what God does in your life starts in your heart.
  o It is a change of heart.
  o It is a heart surgery, if you will,
• God removes the heart that was tainted by Adam’s sin
  o and he gives you a new heart,
    ▪ new will,
    ▪ new desires,
    ▪ new character,
    ▪ and new nature,
  • all of that flows from a new heart.
• That’s why Paul said in Ephesians that we do the will of God from the heart,
  o because the heart is the source
  o from which this new life in Christ flows.
• If you want to serve God, you need a new heart.
  o The old one is hopelessly marred by sin.
• If you want to live pleasing to God,
  o you need a changed heart,
    ▪ you must let God create a clean heart within you!
• Every man who comes to God in repentance
  o and obeys the gospel
  o is made into a new creature in Christ Jesus.
• A new creature has a new heart.
  o And the new heart desires after God
    ▪ instead of after the things of this world.

Heart Disease
One of the leading killers in our world today is heart disease.
• A diseased heart is a dangerous thing.
  o Because when heart finally succumbs
  o to the corrupting influence
  o that is degrading its performance,
    ▪ your whole life is interrupted,
    ▪ everything comes to screeching halt
    ▪ when the heart stops performing.
• The scary thing about heart disease
  o is that you can have it and not even know it.
• The first indicator that many people ever have
  o that they have a problem with their heart
    ▪ is when their heart falters
    ▪ and creates a dramatic medical emergency.
• Heart disease is a subtle thing.
  o It doesn’t develop quickly
    ▪ and it doesn’t make its presence known
    ▪ until it starts doing damage.
Twelve and a half years ago,

- Harrison was born with a congenital heart defect
  - that required heart surgery when he was only 6 days old.
- My wife and I would soon learn
  - that both of our sons shared similar heart defects.
  - Both have bicuspid aortic valves
  - and both have malformed aortic arches.
- Barring a miracle, the valves will probably require repair later in life.

Because of these anomalies,

- my boys are under the regular care of a cardiologist.
  - A few years ago, at one of our regular checkups,
    - the doctor noted a possible restriction,
    - caused by scar tissue,
    - which appeared to be developing
    - around the site of the surgical repair
    - in Harrison’s heart.
- In that visit we discussed possible non-surgical treatment possibilities
  - and scheduled a follow-up test
  - to gauge the extent of the problem.

As a parent, I was concerned.

- I was prepared to come back the next week,
  - or even the next day,
    - for the follow-up test.
- You can probably imagine my surprise
  - when the doctor announced
    - that the MRI would be done
    - at our next annual checkup,
      - a whole year away.
- I couldn’t believe it.
  - I was ready to find out something right now!

Noting the confusion on my face

- the doctor proceeded to explain
  - that even if there was some problematic restriction from the scar tissue
  - developing at the site of the surgical repair,
    - it wasn’t something that would develop fast.
- He explained that, in another year,
  - we would be better equipped
  - to compare the condition of the repair now
    - to what it would look like then,
    - and assess the situation.
What he said next, however, stirred my soul.

- “In issues of the heart,” the cardiologist said, “things develop slowly.”

Heart problems develop slowly.

- They are subtle.
- They develop so slowly that,
  - in order for the doctor to have a proper perspective of the problem
    - not daily, not weekly,
    - but yearly intervals.
- It takes a year for significant change to be noted.

Let me share with you a spiritual truth, tonight.

- Much of scripture focuses
  - on the presence of spiritual heart disease.
- It is the condition of a heart
  - that begins to turn a person away from God,
    - away from the things of God,
    - and away from the blessings of God.
- It is a condition that endangers the very spiritual life
  - that God has placed within you.
- It threatens the very nature of your walk with God,
  - it robs you of spiritual peace
  - and the security of walking with God.
- And just like natural heart disease, it develops slowly.
  - It doesn’t happen fast.
    - It doesn’t even make its presence known
      - until it begins to damage your walk with God.

Rebellion begins to take hold in the heart.

- Pride begins to flatter the heart.
  - An individual begins to do what seems right
    - in his or her own eyes.
  - They begin to let human reasoning
    - overwhelm the gentle voice of conviction
    - and heart disease begins to take hold
    - of the new heart that God has created in you.
- Bitterness takes time to get a grip on a heart,
  - it doesn’t happen fast.
    - But when it does it chokes the very joy out of life.
- Unfaithfulness takes time to overwhelm a person’s convictions,
  - it doesn’t happen quickly.
    - But when it does it undermines the very essence of godly living.
- It takes time for a spirit to become lukewarm,
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Notes by Pastor Tony McCall

The Pentecostals of Lake City

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The Heart Of The Matter

Keep Your Heart

The process that turns a heart away from God

- is a slow process
  - and if we are going to preserve the new heart
    - that God has placed within us,
    - then we will have to heed the words of our text:

*Proverbs 4:23 Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.*

- If your heart becomes overwhelmed
  - with pride, or lust, or bitterness, or malice
    - then the whole current of your life
    - will be tainted affected.
  - If you allow those things into your heart,
    - even for a short time,
      - then your character,
      - your conduct,
      - and even your sensitivity to the will and ways of God
      - are profoundly affected.
- We must guard our hearts!
  - We must keep it,
  - protect it,
  - shelter it
  - and continually ask God to renew it within us.
- It is the well spring of our lives,
  - the fountain head of all that we are
    - and we can’t afford for those waters to become poisoned
      - by things that are contrary to God.

To “keep” the heart means that we strive to shut out everything that is opposed to God.

- God is a jealous God and He will not share the throne of your heart.
  - You can’t serve God and serve the world at the same time.
  - You can’t serve God and serve the lusts and whims of your flesh.
- When Paul said, in 1 Corinthians 6:12

“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any”,

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• he signified that he was keeping his heart diligently,
  o that he was being careful not to let anything
  o gain the place in his soul that belongs to God.
• There are things I could do, he said,
  o that I don’t do
  o because I refuse to be brought under their power,
  o I refuse to yield to their influence!

A very small object
• placed immediately in front of your eye
  o is sufficient to shut out the light of the sun,
• the littlest of things,
  o placed right next to our eyes,
  o can block the whole of our vision.
• Paul recognized that there are some insignificant pursuits in this life
  o that, if I’m not careful
    ▪ can block out the will
    ▪ and purpose of God in my life.
• He said, I could take those things up,
  o but I refuse to do so,
    ▪ because something in it might take root in my heart
      • and I can’t afford to jeopardize my heart!

To keep your heart with all diligence
• means that you pay close attention to the direction
  o in which you are moving.
• If we aren’t careful the things of the world can gain a hold on us.
• Paul said, in Colossians 3:2
  o “Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.”
• Guarding your heart means that you have to guard your affections.
  o Don’t let anything in this world overwhelm your delight in heavenly things.
    ▪ After the wondrous deliverance of God,
    ▪ after He brought them into the promised land,
    ▪ God admonished the people of Israel, in Deuteronomy 4:9
      • “Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart”
  o If you aren’t careful you will forget what God has done for you
    ▪ and the wonder of God will depart from your heart.
      • That’s a dangerous place to be!

Keep the Heart in the Word
If you want to keep your heart, keep it in the word of God.
• David said in Psalm 119:11,
"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

- We must be careful to make sure that the living word of God
  - is instilled in our hearts,
  - line upon line,
  - precept upon precept
    - let us keep our hearts in conformity to the word of God!
- The Bible is not just a dusty old book
  - that you keep in a corner somewhere in your home,
    - your heart is affected by the words that are written within it.
      - Those words are life.
      - Those words are liberty.
      - Those words are hope.
- In those words the heart is strengthened,
  - faith is renewed,
    - and promises are secured.
- It is the word of God that nourishes our soul
  - and affects the whole of our being
    - with the very mind of God!

It is not enough just to hear anointed preaching on Sundays and Wednesdays.
- Your heart needs a regular infusion of the word of God.
  - Your heart needs to see itself reflected in the words and will of God
    - that is contained within the pages of scripture.
- It is the lifeblood that flows through your spiritual heart.
  - The word of God will change you if you will let it!

After the angel appeared to Mary
- and delivered to her the incredible news
  - that the savior of the world was conceived within her womb,
- Luke 2:19 says that she
  - “kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.”
- Listen to me:
  - Things that are not pondered in the heart are soon forgotten.
- We forget the goodness of God
  - because we don’t take the time to ponder it in our heart.
- We forget the righteous demands of godly living
  - because we don’t ponder them in our hearts.
- We forget the things that God desires within us
  - and the things that he has required of us
  - because we don’t take the time to ponder them in our hearts.
- Your heart needs to ponder the word of God.

Keep the Heart form Sin
To “keep” the heart means to maintain sensitivity to what pleases God and what doesn’t.
• You can't keep you heart and dabble in sin.
  o You need to renew within your heart
    ▪ the realization of the sinfulness of sin!
• Sin separates us from God.
  o Sin drives us from his presence.
• Each of us would do well to consider cost of sin.
  o When you find yourself struggling with the weakness of your flesh,
    ▪ you need to remind yourself of the extreme price that was paid
      for sin!
• We need to be reminded of the absolute horror of the cross,
  o so that we recognize, in our heart,
    o the absolute devastation of sin.
• It is a dangerous thing to become calloused to the effects of sin.

Sin is a deceptive thing.
• It appeals to your intellect
  o and asks you to apply your human reasoning.
• It endeavors to convince you
  o through a series of successive compromises
    ▪ that wrong is right.
• Man has the capacity to make anything seem to be OK.
  o He has the capacity to conceal from himself the truth of the matter
    ▪ and to convince himself that wrong is right.
• The writer of proverbs recognized this.
  o He said, in Proverbs 14:12,
    ▪ “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end
      thereof are the ways of death”.
  o In another place he said,
    ▪ “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is
      not washed from their filthiness.” (Prov. 30:12).

You have to guard your heart from the deceptive nature of sin.
• You can’t afford to be pure in your own eyes
  o when you haven't been washed of the filthiness of sin.
• You might say, Oh Pastor I would never be deceived to such a great degree.
  o But you don’t recognize how subtle and deceptive heart disease is.
• Have you ever pondered it?
  o In a world that justifies perverted behavior,
    ▪ selective murder
    ▪ and aberrant lifestyles,
      ▪ what is sin?
  o There is a large portion of the religious world
    ▪ that has totally lost sight
      ▪ of the absolute reality of sin!
• You must guard your heart against that.
That’s why you need to read the word.
• You need to see the judgments of God,
  • you need to hear the condemnation in the voice of Jesus
    ▪ as he calls the Pharisees a generation of vipers,
  • you need to be reminded of the severity of sin!

The Psalmist asked in Psalm 24:3-4,
• “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?
  • or who shall stand in His Holy place?”
• and the question was plainly answered,
  • “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart.”
• You must keep your hands clean and your heart pure!
  • A “pure heart” is a heart that hates sin.
  • A pure heart grieves over sin, rather than participating in it.
  • A pure heart doesn’t reason within itself
    ▪ but reasons with the Lord
    ▪ who said, in Isaiah 1:18,
      • “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord:
though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as
snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as
wool.”
  • A “pure heart” heart seeks to keep itself undefiled by sin.
    ▪ A pure heart endeavors to keep itself from falling into
      subjection to sin.

Close
1 Samuel 16:7 contains this truth:
• “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart”.
  • We are prone to spend our time focused on the outer man,
    ▪ to try to make sure that we measure up,
    ▪ that we keep up our appearances,
      • but God focuses on the condition of our heart.
• It’s a shame, but its true,
  • we tend to neglect the heart
    ▪ because no one else can see it.
• We spend much more time on the temporal things
  • than we do the eternal things.
• We invest much more energy and effort
  • into things that don’t matter in the grand scheme of life
    ▪ than we put into the heart
    ▪ that is the very source of our life.
• Yet, the Lord “looks on the heart.”
  • He sees its thoughts and intentions.
    ▪ He knows its desires and designs.
      • He beholds its motives and motivations.
• And He deals with us accordingly.

A very searching example of this is found in 2 Kings 10:31,
• “But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart.”
• Jehu was notable because he launched a reformation in Israel.
  o However, his reformation was incomplete
    ▪ because he failed to walk with God with all his heart.
• He despised the worship of Baal
  o which Ahab had fostered,
  o but he tolerated the golden calves
    ▪ which Jeroboam had set up.
• He put away some evil,
  o but he failed to put away all the evil.
• His was a partial repentance.
  o He sought to serve two masters.
• Mark this down,
  o repentance isn’t just the turning away from the worst of sins,
    ▪ it is the forsaking all sin.
    ▪ You can’t hold anything back from God.

Jehu went so far,
• but he stopped short.
  o He put away evil,
    ▪ but he did not do that which was good.
• He heeded not the law of the Lord
  o to walk in it “with all his heart.”
• He thought he could do enough to just get by
  o but he failed to keep his heart pure.
• As a result of his half-hearted effort,
  o the Bible says that Jehu caused Israel to sin
    ▪ and the Lord began to execute judgment on Israel.
  o Later, through the mouth of the prophet Hosea,
    ▪ God promised to bring judgment on the house of Jehu
    ▪ and to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel,
      ▪ all because he stopped short of a pure heart.

The wise man said, in Proverbs 23:7,
• “As a man thinketh in his heart so is he...”
• The question tonight is how do you think in your heart?
  o How do you regard God?
  o How much importance do you assign to His word, His will, and His authority in your life?
• Are you like Jehu?
  o Are you trying to straddle the fence.
• Have you tried to keep your heart pure
  o while keeping one foot anchored in the world?
• You better be careful.
  o You better guard your heart.
• Because you might be able to conceal a matter in your heart,
  o but eventually your heart will betray you
    ▪ because all of your life and living
    ▪ flows out of your heart!
• It's time to clean out the spring from which your life flows.
  o It's time to search your life.
  o It's time to allow God to purify your heart!