

The Healthy Nature of a Heart Check

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I pen the first part of these words as I await a cardio-stress test. Sleep-disrupting chest pains have put me on a path of tests and doctor visits - not to mention worrisome uncertainties and a healthy reality check.

If nothing else comes of these mystery pains, it has proven a good reminder via a living metaphor of the importance of a healthy heart. I will leave it to the medical community to address the need for healthy physical blood-pumpers. My focus here is on and needs to stay first and foremost on my spiritual inner person.

God has spoken often in His word about our hearts - the true inner you. First and foremost, we are told to love Him with all of our hearts. As Rev. R. Munger wrote, our heart is to truly be Christ's home - fully.

Jesus, in comforting His disciples before His death, instructed them that instead of letting their hearts be troubled, they were to believe and trust in Him, just as they did God the Father. This command falls to us as well if we are to have healthy, whole hearts.

We are urged in the Bible to pray for and maintain a clean heart as we guard them with all diligence. It is from our hearts that flow the crucial issues of life.

Thankful hearts are to be cultivated while grumbling, bitter hearts are to be resisted and repented of. The pure in heart are blessed. They are promised that they shall see God.

Jesus taught that our heart, our true person, cannot help but reveal itself over time. It is out of what fills up our hearts that ultimately comes out of our mouths. Also, just as fruit betrays the type of tree it is on, so too our conduct and character bespeaks our heart. Our lives' fruit reveals our roots, our heart, who we really are.

Jesus made clear that we are most defiled not by what we take in (either physically or spiritually), but by the sin that is already deep within us. Though we need to guard our intake, we need to beg God to clean up our hearts because it is our ultimate source of output. While the old adage "garbage in, garbage out" is true, our sin-warped hearts explain why garbage that comes out of us is often due to garbage that is already within.

It was said of King Hezekiah that "God left him to test him and to know

everything that was in his heart" (see 2 Chron. 32:31). Now there is a heart test. Sometimes our hearts need to be tested, proven, revealed, unveiled, and even exposed. God lovingly wants to disclose and help us discern who we really are.

Trials are one of God's means of proving and proofing our hearts, as are temptations, troubles, successes and flattery.

The cardio tests I am taking have two parts: one examines my heart under stress, the other takes readings when I am at rest. Not only do I have to keep pace with an ever-quickening treadmill - one that slightly inclines in slant and difficulty - I will also be checked-over while my heart is at rest.

I hesitatingly confess that the resting part of the test includes being sent out to eat a big breakfast - one of my three favorite meals in a day - and then laying back for x rays (read "nap time"). So much for your sympathy. I knew about the treadmill part; I was surprised (pleasantly) to find out about the breakfast bar half of the exam.

Coincidentally, it is in times of leisure we often fall into sin. It is easy to drop one's guard in times of rest and peace. King David sinned with Bathsheba when he stayed home from the battle. The nation Israel in times of peace often forgot God. The church in America, unlike most of the suffering church around the world, has been tested by our prosperity.

Vulnerability has an ironic nature about it. Just when we think we aren't, we are most. Thus we are warned to take heed when we think we are standing, lest we fall.

When God instructed Samuel to anoint a new king after the evil heart of King Saul became evident, it was internal, not external, matters that needed to be considered over all else. As Jesse's impressive sons were brought before Samuel, they just knew an older, good looking one would be chosen. But it was not to be. God opted for the baby of the family, the lowly sheep-keeping punk of the family who obviously was not even a consideration.

The moral of that story recorded in 1 Samuel 16 is that man judges by outward appearances, but God looks at the heart. We see and judge differently and inferior to God. Just as my health professionals needed radioactive chemicals, electronic signals and x-rays to see my heart, so too we are unable to see people's hearts without cheats. Not so God - read and ruminates on Hebrews 4:12, 13.

God saw in David something I trust He sees in me. Unlike Saul who had an evil heart and later king Solomon who had a divided heart, David was a man after God's heart. He sought God as a thirsty deer seeks, even pants for a refreshing, life-giving spring. What his heart wanted most was to find and commune with the heart of God.

In case you are wondering, so far so good on my heart tests - physical that is. God runs an ongoing test of the other. Just as good news from the doctor does not free me up to eat and live as I want - I still need to drop a pound or two - so too a pure heart today does not excuse me for a lazy or hard heart tomorrow. As they say about stock performance, last week's results do not insure next week's.

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