

Examine Your Heart:
Choose the Right Filter

Intro: General introductory remarks. Theme verse:

Psalm 139: 23-24:

Search me, Oh God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

And see if there be any grievous way in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting!

Desire for this series is to be equal parts encouraging and challenging. Our hearts, and the spiritual battle for our hearts, is the central theme of the entire Bible. Yes, I know that Christ is the central theme, but were it not for God's desire to draw our hearts to him, there would be no need for Christ.

- I. **Definition of Terms:** Heart is used over 800 times in the Bible, and refers to physical, emotional, intellectual, and moral activity. Context is always important. For our purposes, the following definition serves well:
 - A. Heart in the OT
 1. Hebrew "levav" or often "lev": (according to Strong's): used very widely for the feelings, the will and even the intellect.
 - B. Heart in the NT
 1. Greek word "kardia," but carries same idea.
- II. **God has always wanted our hearts (unlike the commonly heard Old Law is physical, New Law is spiritual and about the heart)**
 - A. Exodus
 1. God did everything he could to capture the Israelite hearts:
 - a) **Avenger:** on the Egyptians for killing of baby boys by killing firstborn of every household.

- b) **Leader:** led them out through Moses, but also fire/cloud—made himself visible to them.
 - c) **Defender:** destroyed the entire army in their sight.
 - d) **Provider:** gave them food, drink, and clothing. (Let them get thirsty and hungry—not necessary—could have let these things never run out from their stores).
 - e) **Protector:** defeated their enemies in battle.
 - f) **Lovingkindness:** gave the gift of the Sabbath rest.
2. He **WANTED** them to **KNOW** him, to see his great love for him, and thus to love him. In fact, it is in the giving of the Old Law that we see the command in **Deut. 6:4-5:**
- a) “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.”
3. God didn’t just want some of their heart—he wanted them with all their might: Hebrew “meod.” (Strong’s): vehemently, wholly, diligently, utterly, with muchness, with force.
4. When he couldn’t capture the adult, hardened hearts, he set out to capture the more childlike hearts—hearts that were still soft enough to be shaped. It worked! In Judges 2, we are told that the children of Israel served God all the days of the elders who witnessed the events of Exodus. But eventually, the next generations’ hearts went through a cycle of hardening and softening that continued for hundreds of years, right up to Christ’s day.

B. New Testament gives us

1. God saved his greatest display of heart when he sent Jesus to us. Jesus' very appearance on earth was meant to capture our hearts. What more could God do to show us his love for us than to come down to us and make himself fully relatable?! He was a baby, he was hungry, tired, had to work, homeless, treated with injustice, misunderstood, tempted, frustrated, betrayed, had friends, had enemies. He made himself real so that our hearts could truly see our own potential in striving to be like Him and thus, draw even closer to God.
2. Jesus spends a great deal of time speaking to the importance of the heart in understanding God's will for us.
 - a) Frustration with the Pharisees is that their hearts weren't in their service to God: Matt. 23 calls them hypocrites several times, always emphasizing that they care about show, not heart. They neglect "justice and mercy and faithfulness," and have only the whitewashed appearance of holiness. In short, their hearts were not engaged at all.
 - b) He taught them that the heart is central to every action they take:
 - (1) Harboring **anger/hatred** in your heart= murder.
Matt. 5:21-25
 - (2) Dwelling on lust = adultery (Matt. 5:27-28)
 - (3) Desiring evil for an enemy= evil. (Matt. 5:43-48)
 - (4) Doing good deeds to be seen of men will **ONLY** get you the regard of men—not God (Matt. 6:1-4)

- (5) Praying to God to be seen of men is worthless (Matt. 6: 5-8), as is fasting to be seen of men (Matt. 6:16-18)
- (6) Harboring unforgiveness in your heart will lead to a lack of forgiveness from God (Matt. 6:14-15)
- (7) Where our hearts are is where our treasure will be (Matt. 6:19-24)
- (8) Our heart towards others should be compassionate: (Matt. 9:13) “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.”
- (9) Don’t judge others in our hearts (Matt. 7:1-7)
- (10) If we love him, we will keep his commandments: (John 14:15, 23): He still clearly desires our hearts!
- (11) Mark 7:21: “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.”
- (12) Matt. 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.”

c) He reminds them they of all the things that the Old Law and the history of their nation should have taught them about God: Trust in God’s love for them (don’t worry about what you eat/drink), that he will seek justice for them (turn the other cheek), and that he will protect them (he’s the good shepherd).

(1) He even reiterates Deut. 6:5-6 as the greatest command, but adds

(2) John 13:12: This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

d) Romans 12: Paul reiterates all of these things that Jesus has said as being central to transforming their minds and hearts!

C. Transition: We've established how important the heart is to our relationship with God. Let's look at one of the people in the Bible for whom we have the greatest look into the heart!

III. David—a man chosen by God, whose heart, by every appearance, was dedicated to God. At least 73 psalms written about his relationship with God!

- 1. 1 Sam. 16:7; David's story begins with Samuel reminding Jesse that "God looks at the heart."**
- 2. David was a young man described in 1 Sam 16:12 as "ruddy," "with beautiful eyes," "handsome," and in 1 Sam 16:18 as "skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence (charismatic), and the Lord is with him."**
- 3. Trusted God:** when he stood up to Goliath. He continued to show that same trust and humility once he became king, as time after time, he called on God for permission BEFORE battle. He continued to trust in God and call on him for strength in battle—consulting God before battling even to rescue he and his mens' wives (1 Sam 30).
- 4. Humble before God:** Over and over he gave God the glory AFTER battle. 1 Sam. 17: 46-47; "...that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all the assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand."
- 5. Strong and brave:** (he defeated lions and bears). According to 1 Sam. 18, David became an even greater warrior after this—so much so Saul set him over the men of war.
- 6. Good leader and friend:** gained even the loyalty of the king's son. His family, brothers and fathers, and about 400 men came to him in the wilderness—they were misfits according to 1 Samuel 22:2. "Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul." From these came his

mighty men of valor (the 30 mighty men), who would be with him for years.

7. **Grateful:** In 2 Samuel 7:18-29. David expresses his gratitude for God's lovingkindness toward Israel and more specifically, the house of David.
8. **Just:** . 2 Samuel 9: 15; "And David administered justice and equity to all his people."
9. **Merciful:** Twice he chose not to kill Saul when he could have—because he knew Saul was God's anointed, regardless of how things stood at the moment. After Saul's death, he treated Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son as an honored guest and restored Saul's lands to him. (2 Samuel 9)
10. **Fair-minded:** 1 Samuel 30:25; made it a law that those who went to battle shared equally with those who guarded the baggage.
11. **Loyal.** Mephibosheth; defeat of Ammon (he would have honored his agreement with the Ammonites after the death of their king) in 2 Sam 10.
12. **Accomplished poet and musician:** skilled in the use of figurative language, metaphor, simile, and symbolism, and clearly inspired of God (the prophecies).
 - a) "He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither..."
 - b) "The Lord is my shepherd,"
 - c) "Be a rock of refuge"
 - d) "I have become like a broken vessel"
 - e) "He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses."
 - f) "I am in the midst of Lions; I am forced to dwell among ravenous beasts, men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords"

g) “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path.”

13. **Adulterer and first-degree murderer:** of an innocent and loyal man. He was a “**Judas.**” Explain who Bathsheba was (granddaughter of Ahithophel, David’s advisor; daughter of Eliam, and wife of Uriah, both members of David’s elite fighting unit—men who risked death to bring David a drink of water.)

14. We don’t know exactly what caused this incredible lapse in David’s judgement. He’d been running and fighting for the better part of 30 years. He’d finally built a nice house and settled in to Jerusalem. We just don’t know at what point his heart became distant from God enough that he could be tempted as he was.

This is the man who wrote in Psalm 139:

a) Where can I go from your spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

If I rise on the wings of the dawn

If I settle on the far side of the sea

Even there your hand will guide me,

Your righthand will hold me fast.

Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord,

And abhor those who are in rebellion against you?

I have nothing but hatred for them;

I count them my enemies.

Search me, God, and know my heart;

Test me and know my anxious thoughts.

b) **And then Nathan.** At some point, David’s heart became so separated from God he didn’t even recognize himself in Nathan’s story. David had called down all sorts of justice and vengeance from God on his enemies. Yet he was so

blinded by his rationalization that he couldn't see that he himself had become that enemy—of his own friends.

IV. Once God has our hearts, we have to constantly tune our hearts to keep them in harmony with his.

- A. If we cease to examine ourselves, we are in danger of becoming like the Pharisees or David—so far disconnected from God that we are serving him in vain, or even letting ourselves become enslaved again to sin.**
- B. The parable of the sower shows what happens when we don't internalize God's word. We tend to look at this parable as only applying to whether we believe or not, but 3 of the types of soil involve believers!**
 - 1. If we don't focus on God's word, in knowing God's will for us, then we become like the rocky soil—easily dried up and destroyed because our roots are weak. (Luke 8:13)
 - 2. If we allow the cares of the world to distract us, we are like the soil with weeds. (Luke 8:14).
- C. Phil. 2:13: “...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”** It is a serious responsibility to examine our faith and hold tight to our salvation.
- D. Paul tells us in 2 Cor. 13:5:** Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?
- E. An unexamined heart can get in the way of our “offering.” Matt. 5:23:** So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

F. Remember that at some point, according to 1 Cor. 4:5, God will “disclose the purposes of the heart.”

V. **How do we Examine our own hearts?**

A. **Any exam is only as good as the standard it's held to.** Choose the right standard.:

1. **We have to use the right filter! (photography example)**
2. **The “filter” we look in is God’s word:**
 - a) **Rom. 4:12-13:**“...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. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”
3. **We’re also held to the standard of Eph. 5:1-2:** “...Be imitators of God, as beloved children.
 - a) Means we have to look at God’s actions! Only one place to find that.
 - b) Parents with children understand this mirror concept: Our children mirror us back to them—God calls us to mirror HIM.
 - c) We see ourselves more clearly as we discipline them!
4. **We HAVE to “look in the mirror” at our hearts.** James tells us that if we hear but don’t do, we are like someone who looks in the mirror and “goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.” (James 1:22-25)

B. We all NEED a Nathan in our lives! Someone who loves us enough to reflect God's word back to us. We need to be willing to hear it! We all need to BE a Nathan to those close to us!

James 5:19-20: "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

James 5:16: "Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."

1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (But we have to SEE our sin to confess it).

C. We also all need to be and have people in our lives who point out the beautiful traits of our hearts and encourage us to grow the positive, who help us water and tend to the soil of our hearts so that they don't become weedy, dry, and stony.

Conclusion:

A constant state of transformation, seeking the heart spoken of in Rom. 12:2:
"...but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Pray sincerely, as David did, that God search your heart.

Use Psalm 139:23-24 as a prayer

Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

And see if there be any grievous way in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting!

Can we spend time tonight truly examining our own hearts. Challenge is to come up with one positive aspect of our hearts that we can work to grow, and one negative aspect of our hearts that we need to work on. Can we identify who in our lives can be our Nathan, and who can be our Barnabas?

God has ALWAYS wanted our hearts. He has done everything he can possibly do to show us who he is and why he is deserving of our love. Once he has our hearts, he expects us to keep our hearts—forever. Romans 13 says “love is the fulfilling of the law” because agape is the ultimate weaving of emotion, will, and mind that we should all seek. Tomorrow we will talk about how we can work towards attaining that goal of truly loving others as ourselves.