

Cross My Heart, Part 1

Illustration: “sudden” unexpected avalanche near Denver, CO yesterday

Illustration: heart attack preceded by supposedly unrelated symptoms

Cardiologists use a procedure called an **arteriogram** to diagnose the health of a patient’s heart. It is an X-ray of the arteries taken after dye is injected into the bloodstream, allowing doctors to pinpoint blockages in the arteries that serve as conduits carrying blood from the heart.

But apart from an arteriogram, a life-threatening heart problem can go undetected for years. An individual who has blockage will experience symptoms, but these symptoms may not seem to be directly associated with the heart. Arterial blockage can manifest itself through back pain, inability to sleep, anxiety, loss of appetite, indigestion, nausea, vision change, even loss of memory.

These symptoms are often treated as isolated issues unrelated to the health of the heart, and the right medications can take the edge off most of these symptoms. The problem, of course, is that treating the symptoms masks the real culprit. And it actually delays treatment of the problem, thus leaving the problem to worsen.

Physical heart disease parallels spiritual heart disease.

You have another heart:

- The invisible part of you that philosophers, poets and preachers refer to all the time
- The thing that got broken in the ninth grade when what’s-her-name said she just wanted to be friends
- The part of you that swells up with pride when you see your kids do something great
- The thing that gets all nostalgic when you hear an old song from your dating days
- That mysterious, wonderful, confusing part of you that enables you to love, laugh, fear and experience life
- The sphere in which relationships happen and in which relationships are broken

We are also tempted to treat the symptoms that stem from an unhealthy spiritual heart while ignoring the deeper issues. But as is the case with the physical heart, **eventually the root problem will become the real problem**. Just as a heart attack has the potential to destroy your body, so spiritual heart disease has the potential to destroy you and your most valuable relationships.

Life can be hard on the heart, because the world is full of outside influences that have the power to disrupt its rhythm. Over time you develop habits that slowly erode your heart’s sensitivity. The inevitable pain and disappointment of life cause you to set up walls around your heart. At the end of the day, your heart gets out of sync with the rhythm it was created to maintain. **And if left alone, these “heart attackers” will linger for a lifetime and do incredible damage.**

The reason we rarely stop to monitor our hearts is that it was never encouraged. As children, we were taught instead to monitor our **BEHAVIOR**. If we behaved properly good things happened, regardless of what was going on in our hearts. We modified our behavior to avoid pain, and we’ve been doing it ever since. Consequently, we become much better at monitoring our behavior (actions and words) than our hearts.

But pretending all the time can be problematic because it allows you to ignore the true condition of your heart. Eventually your heart – the real you – will outpace your attempts to monitor and **FILTER** everything you say and do. The unresolved issues in your heart will eventually work their way to the surface. Specifically, they will seep into your actions, your character, and your relationships. If your heart continues to go unmonitored, things will worsen to the point that you are no longer able to contain it with carefully managed words and behaviors.

Maybe you’ve already noticed things starting to slip a bit. Maybe you’ve always been able to contain your anger, but lately there’s an edge in your voice that scares even you. You know you should be happy about the good thing that happened to your friend, but for some reason you’re not – in fact, you resent them for it. You behave like everything is okay – but it’s not. These are merely symptoms of a deeper struggle. Your heart is under assault, and it could be that you are losing – primarily through neglect, because you have not been monitoring it closely.

Evidence of an internal battle includes statements like these:

- I can’t believe I just said that.
- I can’t believe I did that.
- That’s not like me (or later on, “that’s just the way I am”).
- I just “lost it.”
- I don’t know where that came from.

So where DID that come from? From the heart! You think your mistake was an exception – and in one way it was. It was an exception to your general rule of not allowing what’s in your heart to be exposed to the rest of the world. But in reality, that embarrassing mistake was not an **EXCEPTION** to what is in your heart – it was a **REFLECTION** of it!

Have you ever heard this? “He’s got a good heart.” Wrong!

Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV) The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

The people closest to you routinely catch the flak thrown off by the explosive stuff you work so hard to keep hidden. It doesn’t come out among casual acquaintances or in social settings; it comes out among those close to you, when you’ve turned off the safety valve and let down your defenses. That’s why we actually hurt most those we love most.

We are mad but don’t know why. We are discontent but can find no real reason to feel that way. We’re resentful toward certain types of people, though they have done nothing to deserve it. We are jealous while knowing all the time that it is foolish to dislike somebody just for having something we don’t. None of these things make any sense, but they are real. And if left unchecked, they have the potential to drive us into self-destructive and relationship-wrecking behavior patterns.

Your heart seeps into every conversation. It dictates every relationship. It impacts the intensity of your communication. It exaggerates your sensitivities and insensitivities. Everything passes through your heart.

People have even developed language to describe it when things get lodged in their hearts. (“I’ll never let anyone hurt me like that again!”) Out of their mouth pours the junk connected to a wounded heart – and they will insist that YOU are the problem. **Hurt people hurt people.**

Matthew 15:18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

Your MOUTH serves as a stethoscope to listen to your HEART.

Matthew 15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

Heart issues make intimacy difficult to maintain because intimacy revolves around knowing and being known. SECRETS can damage the heart, because they make us build walls in our relationships. That’s because we usually suspect in others what we are guilty of ourselves.

Sometimes these unresolved hurts run so deep that they erase a person’s faith in God. They just can’t believe in a God who would let THAT happen to them or to someone they love.

HOW ARE THINGS WITH YOUR HEART? Not your career, your family, your reputation, or your finances. Your heart. It’s an awkward question.

Proverbs 4:23 (NLT) Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do.

We need more than a sophisticated filter for our BEHAVIOR, we need a new heart! Christianity is not about BEHAVING (just having a Christian “filter”), it is about getting a new heart!

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.

Only God can give us a new heart. Note that He gave this promise to people who already had God’s list of Top Ten Behaviors to guide them. But clearly it wasn’t enough for them to know WHAT to do, they needed to change from the inside out in order to follow through.

“Doctor, fix my heart (so I won’t be so tired), then I’ll exercise” – NO – “exercise and it will fix your heart!”

How long do you plan to let the people and circumstances that have hurt you control you? Pick a date! (not just “pray this prayer” – make a decision!). How long will you let it go on? A day? A week? A month? A year? A decade? Until the day before you die?

Is everything okay with your heart?

- Are you angry at anybody?
- Are you waiting around for someone to come to you to make things right?
- Have you had any extended imaginary conversations with anyone lately?
- Do things come out of your mouth on a regular basis that you have to apologize for?
- Have you secretly celebrated someone’s failure in the last several days?
- Do you have any secrets eating at you?
- Is there anything going on that you hope nobody discovers?
- Is there a question you hope nobody ever asks you?
- Have you lied recently to someone that you love?

GUILT – I owe you (confession)

ANGER – you owe me (forgiveness)

GREED – I owe me (giving)

JEALOUSY – God owes me (celebration)