

Real Devotion
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Matthew 15:1-11; 16-20

Opening: Today we are talking about the heart. Not the miraculous muscle pumping blood through our bodies, but the inner heart spoken about in scripture. How would you describe that heart? What words or thoughts come to mind.

- “In the Bible, the heart is the center of the inner life—the place where our thoughts, desires, conscience, and choices originate.” (Easton’s Bible Dictionary summarized.)ⁱ
- Here is the definition I came up with: “My heart is the ME that can only be seen by ME and God, and God sees it better than I do.” (1 Sam. 16:7)
- Our heart is not only the center of our inner life, but also central to following and living for Christ, or rejecting Him and spending eternity apart from Him.
- We also need to acknowledge that (to quote Larry Gatlin) “...*the heart is a funny thing with a mind all it’s own.*”
- In our brief time together, we will unpack what Jesus said about the heart, what other scripture says, and look at three illustrations to help us tend to our hearts.

(NLT) — **1** Some Pharisees and teachers of religious law now arrived from Jerusalem to see Jesus. They asked him, **2** “Why do your disciples disobey our age-old tradition? For they ignore our tradition of ceremonial hand washing before they eat.” **3** Jesus replied, “And why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God? **4** For instance, God says, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and ‘Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.’ **5** But you say it is all right for people to say to their parents, ‘Sorry, I can’t help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.’ **6** In this way, you say they don’t need to honor their parents.

- If they were traveling by foot, these scribes and pharisees walked about four days to spy on Jesus and try to trip Him up. Their hatred was getting intense.
- They were not worried about hand sanitizing; this was about ceremonial ritual.
- They were worried about ceremonial tradition. Jesus called them out for violating “the direct commandments of God” because of their traditions.
- His example was a religious loophole some of them used allowing them to declare their resources ‘devoted to God’— to keep control of their money while refusing to honor and financially support their aging, ailing parents.
- Jesus was blunt: (last part of verse six).

And so you cancel the word of God for the sake of your own tradition. **7** You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote, **8** ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. **9** Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.’” **10** Then Jesus called to the crowd to come

and hear. “Listen,” he said, “and try to understand. **11** It’s not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth.”

- Jesus’ rebuke to these religious leaders: External religious rituals do not make a person spiritually clean; the real issue is the condition of the heart.
- Jesus disciples were nervous (verse 12), “You ticked off those Pharisees!”
- Jesus responded in verse 13: *“Every plant not planted by my heavenly Father will be uprooted, ¹⁴ so ignore them. They are blind guides leading the blind, and if one blind person guides another, they will both fall into a ditch.”ⁱⁱ*
- Peter spoke up: Explain this parable about not being defiled by what we eat.

(NLT) — **16** “Don’t you understand yet?” Jesus asked. **17** “Anything you eat passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer. [Here is the point] **18** But the words you speak come from the heart—that’s what defiles you. **19** For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. **20** These are what defile you. Eating with unwashed hands will never defile you.”

- Scripture has a lot to say about the heart (mentioned over 700 times in the ESV).
- The heart is fertile soil where both good things and bad things grow. Because of what happened in the Garden of Eden, our biggest crop are the weeds of SIN.
- Our untended heart will sprout weeds of sin on its own. **Jeremiah 17:9 (NLT)** — **9** “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? **Romans 3:12 (NLT)** — **12** All have turned away [from God]; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one.”
- But, when someone trusts Christ as Savior and Lord, God promised in **Ezekiel 36:26 (NLT)** — **26** ...I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.
- We call that REGENERATION. “God gives a person a new heart and new spiritual life through the Holy Spirit.”ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus called it being “born again.” (Jn. 3:3)
- Another illustration: Think of the “new heart” like a **new baby**. When a baby joins the family, the change is apparent, but their growth is far from complete. Their journey of growth and learning starts with the first breath outside the womb.
- We feed, protect, nurture, and show affection, to that baby as they grow. They cannot be left to their own devices.
- The new heart given to a new Christ-follower is like that. There is immediate obvious change, but our new heart is far from fully developed. The development process is called SANCTIFICATION. We (and the Holy Spirit) help our new heart become more like Christ. The problem (mixing metaphors) - those weeds of sin.
- The saved heart has been renewed but still battles sin that sprouts within it.
- In Romans 7:18-23 the Apostle Paul described his own internal battle with sin.
- That’s why Proverbs 4:23 (NLT) says, — **23** Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life. [So, how do we do that?]
- Back to the illustration of our heart as a **garden patch**: We must pull the weeds that grow naturally (sin) and plant good seeds of God’s Word, allowing truth to take root in our hearts. Psalms 119:11 says, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

- Our heart will sprout sin on its own, but what we see and hear provides fertilizer.
- A final illustration: Imagine a “**Ring®**” **doorbell camera**. An IDEA shows up on the doorstep of my mind. I see it and must decide from several choices:
 - If it is an obvious temptation hopefully, I don’t open the door of my mind.
 - If I’m not sure, I open the door enough to decide whether to let it in.
 - If the idea is harmless, I might invite it into the living room of my mind.
 - Let’s jump to the point: Letting that idea into my HEART is not just letting it visit in the guest room, it means giving it my keys, car, checkbook, etc.
- 2 Corinthians 10:5 tells us to: “...take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” *Some thoughts ring the doorbell, but Scripture says we are to **take every thought captive** before it moves into the house.*
- James 1:14-15 says the natural desires in our heart “give birth to sin.”
- *A temptation may show up at the door, but sin begins when we **invite it in and entertain it**.*
- We not only need to guard our heart from bad ideas, we also need to welcome good ones. Philippians 4:8 says, “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure... think about such things.”
- “A thought at the door is not the problem. The problem begins when we hand it the keys.”
- Other thoughts?

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Jesus’ rebuke to these religious leaders: External religious rituals do not make a person spiritually clean; the real issue is the condition of the heart.
- “My heart is the ME that can only be seen by ME and God, and God sees it better than I do.” (1 Sam. 16:7)
- Jesus also taught that defilement doesn’t come from external contamination but from internal corruption.
- Let’s remember the illustrations: the **garden patch**, the **new baby**, and the **Ring® doorbell camera**.
- Our natural heart is like a garden patch where weeds (sin) grow naturally and it must be tended. God’s grace and forgiveness allow us to “pull the weeds” of our sin, and God’s Word provides the “good seed” that produces righteousness.
- When we trust Christ and receive a “new heart” through regeneration and the new birth, real change begins—but it is only the beginning of a lifelong process.
- Just as we would nurture a newborn baby, we must guard and nourish this new life until we are finally perfected in heaven.
- We must be diligent about what ideas we allow through the door of our minds and whether we allow them to settle in our hearts. Scripture calls us to take our thoughts captive and fill our hearts with the truth of God’s Word.
- This week let’s make this our prayer: **Psalm 139:23–24 (NLT)** — **23** Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. **24** Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

ⁱ Easton, M. G. (1893). In *Illustrated Bible Dictionary and Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Doctrine, and Literature* (pp. 316–317). Harper & Brothers.

ⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Mt 15:13–14). Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱⁱ Packer, J. I. (1993). *Concise theology: a guide to historic Christian beliefs* (pp. 157–159). Tyndale House. (Summarized)