



Village Christian Church



(Disciples of Christ)

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Heart of the Matter

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Friends, today you heard me read 8 scripture passages, all of which speak about our hearts. In fact, the references to our heart go on almost endlessly in the Bible. It is mentioned 6, 7 or 8 hundred times depending upon the translation you are reading. If this is any indication, then our hearts must be something very important to God and in our faith!

We also use references to heart a lot in our everyday lives. We say a person has a good heart or a cold one. A soft or a hard one. We tell performers and athletes to put their heart into it. Great sadness is equated to a broken heart. When we seek truth and understanding, we want to know the heart of the matter.

So, why do we talk so much about heart? I think it is because it is both mysterious and fascinating to us. We have a sense of how important it is, and yet we can't explain it very well.

In strict, practical terms we know that our physical hearts are just a pump – a sophisticated muscle that moves blood throughout our bodies. But we also know that's not all there is to us. There's another kind of heart that we all have. It can be much stronger and lasts a lot, lot longer than our physical one = it's our spiritual heart.

Our spiritual heart is what makes the world go round for us. It's how we understand and approach life, and what kind of person we are. Our muscles can make us strong; our brains can make us smart; our skin and hair and other stuff can make us beautiful or handsome; but it's the heart – the spiritual heart – that truly defines who we are... good or bad... brave or cautious... happy or sad... full of life or just surviving... faithful or untrue.

It's our spiritual hearts that define us more than anything else... And that's where God looks when we are examined, because it is the essence of who we are – the bare, naked truth! Consider this with me for a moment:

I believe that most of the really big and pivotal times and events in our lives have a lot to do with our hearts. When I look back at all the turning points, and transcendent times, and low points in my own life, I can see that the condition of my heart had a lot to do with them.

The times I am less than proud of, or even ashamed of, all happened when my heart wasn't right or well. When I've yelled or said ugly, hurtful things it's been when my heart was hurt or angry. When I've been less than honest it's been when my heart was afraid, or just too lazy to deal with the truth. And when I've been intolerant or judgmental of others, it's been when my heart was focused only on myself and what I want.

On the other hand, all the times I'm happy about – when I've been my best self – have happened when my heart was healthy and sound. When I haven't given up even though I

wanted to and when I've overcome obstacles to accomplish something good, it's been with a faithful heart. When I've touched others in a positive way and really made a difference, it's been with a loving heart. And when I've understood and brought acceptance and hope into a troubled situation, it's been with a pure heart that trusts God.

I truly believe that the heart is a much bigger part of who we are than anything else about us. It's condition has a greater impact than our physical bodies, though those can make us good workers or athletes. It's more important than our brains, though those can earn us degrees and honor. And it defines our character more than the color of our skin, our gender, our social status, our bank accounts, or any of those other things that the world tends to put so much importance on.

In fact, I think a person's heart is more vital than all of those other things put together! Which is probably why the Bible mentions it so often.

So now, if you agree with me that our heart is the most important part of us, then what should we do with this knowledge? Well, if we agree that our heart is what truly defines us, and is what God looks at and judges us by, then I think the smartest thing we can do is find ways to take good care of our spiritual hearts. We need to invest our time and attention in things that will help our hearts be good, strong and true.

We know how to take care of the rest of us. We can exercise and stretch our muscles to make them strong. We can develop our minds with reading, studies and tests. We care for our physical hearts with exercise, rest and good food.,,

But how do we take care of our spiritual hearts? What can we do so that God is pleased when he looks at us, and so that we are able to experience life the way God wants us to have it?

I've heard that some people think you're just born with the heart and spirit you have. They think it's just a part of who you are, and nothing can change it. But I don't believe that. I think that we're all born with pure, innocent hearts that seek God – and that if a person ends up with a cold, self-centered or shut-down heart, it's because something happened to cause that. Something contrary to God.

For you see, our spiritual hearts are not beyond the influence of the world. They can be, and are, shaped by our experiences in the world in many ways, both good and bad. I'm not even going to try to go into all of the many things that shape us, but I do want to say that when we are a child we can't help the ways our heart is being shaped... We thrive when love, truth and acceptance surround us – and we just have to cope and survive when evil happens.

Most of our survival techniques in bad environments involve walling off and hiding the pure, innocent, tender parts of our heart where God is. That's just what we have to do when we're young. Now, if we experience enough love in those troubled times, then the walls don't get too thick or last very long...

But, if no one is helping us experience the love and goodness God intended for us to have – then in those troubled times we can hide the tender parts of us so deeply that we don't even remember where they are by the time we're adults.

I know all that sounds very discouraging, but I want to reassure you today – it is not hopeless. It is never hopeless, because God knows what he put in us, and hears our hearts cry from deep inside, and will always keep reaching out and holding onto us no matter what happens or how long it takes.

The key is we just have to reach back. That's really all there is to uncovering and growing the good spiritual hearts that God put into us to begin with. We must keep reaching out for God... for God's love... for God's forgiveness... for God's grace... and for God's wisdom. For there is nothing that God would rather do than to heal our hearts and pour his blessings in when we are open to it.

Therefore, I believe that our number 1 responsibility as adult Christians in this world is to unbury our hearts and open them up for God's healing touch!

It's not easy to tear down the walls we may have built when we were younger to protect our tender hearts. It's not easy to unlearn self-preservation habits or falsehoods or the distrust that we may have needed when we were younger to survive. But I promise you, friends – laying our hearts bare and unprotected into God's hands will always be rewarded!

For no one knows our true hearts better than God, and no one cares more about them either. God created our hearts to be the perfect size and shape for the Holy Spirit and divine love, and the scriptures promise that God will enter and live in our hearts if we let him.

You probably expected me to say something else today. Perhaps that we need to take care of our spiritual hearts by praying more... or by reading the Bible more... or by going to church more –

But for me it's really a lot simpler than that, friends. I believe the key to a beautiful, faithful, strong heart is to work at stripping away our defenses and giving our messy hearts to God. The better we get at doing that, the more love we will have. And the more of God's love we have, the less fear or doubt or loneliness we will feel.

A lot of people go looking for and say they experience God's presence in a church, or in nature, or in other people – and I certainly don't deny that all of those experiences are possible, but what I want to tell you today is that the best way to find God is to open your heart and let God move in.

I have no doubt that you already know how to do that, for I so often do see God in all of you! Today's sermon is merely a reminder for us all to keep that space in our hearts wide open for God – and not to fall back into any old defensive, walled-off habits when life gets hard and crazy, as it so often does.

Let's resolve to keep giving God our hearts every day, and to let divine love guide and protect us! For we each are a beloved child of God, and he will "bless our hearts" when we let him! Amen.