

GateCity Church: Free In Heart

Hazen Stevens - Wednesday, April 19, 2023

I. Introduction

1. The Bible Project Video: "Lev" means "heart" in Hebrew, and it wasn't a body part to the Israelites. They had a broader understanding of heart than we do in our modern context. They thought of the heart as the organ that gives physical life and the place where you think and make sense of the world—where you feel emotions and make choices. (<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/lev-heart/>)

II. The Heart

A. The Value of the Heart

1. What God looks upon
 - a) 1 Sam 16:7 But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but **the Lord looks at the heart.**
 - b) 2 Chronicles 16:9 For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth **to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.** You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war.”
2. Where we keep his commands
 - a) Proverbs 3:1-2 My son, do not forget my teaching, but **keep my commands in your heart,** for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity.
3. Must be guarded for our life flows out of it
 - a) Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, **guard your heart,** for everything you do flows from it.
4. Part of how we love God with all our being
 - a) Matthew 22:37 Jesus replied: **‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart** and with all your soul and with all your mind.’

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5. Deuteronomy 4:4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.[a] **5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart** and with all your soul and with all your strength.

B. The Trouble with the Heart, it is vulnerable to assault...

1. It can be weighed down

a) Luke 21:34 “Be careful, or **your hearts will be weighed down** with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap.

2. It can be deceived

a) **The heart is deceitful** above all things and beyond cure.
Who can understand it?

3. It can be tempted

a) Proverbs 7:25 **25** Do not let your **heart turn to her ways** or stray into her paths. **26** Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng.

4. It can be defiled

a) Mark 7:17 **17** After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. **18** “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? **19** For it doesn’t go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)**20** He went on: “What comes out of a person is what defiles them. **21** For it is from within, **out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come –sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and defile a person.**”

C. The Liberation of the Heart

1. Psalm 51:10 **Create in me a pure heart**, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

GateCity Church: Free In Heart

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2. Ezekiel 11:19 ¹⁹ ^wAnd I will give them one heart, and ^xa new spirit I will put within them. ^y**I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,**
3. Ezekiel 36:26 And **I will give you a new heart,** and ⁱa new spirit I will put within you. ^fAnd **I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.**
4. Jeremiah 31:33 ³³ ^sFor this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: ^sI will put my law within them, and **I will write it on their hearts.** ^uAnd I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
5. Hebrew 8:10 ^hFor this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: **I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**
6. Deuteronomy 30:6 **The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts** and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.
7. Romans 2:28 For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, and true circumcision is not something visible in the flesh. **29** On the contrary, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and **circumcision is of the heart**—by the Spirit, not the letter.[j] That man’s praise[k] is not from men but from God.

D. Regeneration & Renewal

1. “*Regeneration* is a theological term from the King James Version of the Bible. **Titus 3:5** says, “he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of **regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.**” Modern translations use words such as *rebirth* to communicate the same idea.” (<https://www.compellingtruth.org/regeneration.html>)
2. “Of course, after someone is born, it's time to grow. We would rightly be concerned for an infant who remained at infant size with infant abilities for years on end. In the same way, a person who has been regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit should grow spiritually. Growth naturally follows birth. “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation” (**1 Peter 2:2**; see also **2 Peter 3:18**). (<https://www.compellingtruth.org/regeneration.html>)

GateCity Church: Free In Heart

Hazen Stevens - Wednesday, April 19, 2023

3. Romans 12:2 **2** Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

III. Story Work in

A. Story Work in Christian Counseling

1. "Story-based work in counseling has become increasingly accepted and recommended for those experiencing the impact of trauma. Many therapeutic professionals agree that a significant part of the healing process for trauma is the practice of telling one's story. Stories allow the one who has been traumatized to remember and name their experiences, and to make sense of jumbled and often chaotic memories. Stories, when told in safety, can shift trauma from being the main thread so that hope becomes a more central theme. In a sense, stories offer a space for co-regulation, as the one telling the story discovers comfort and a with-ness effect from the one listening. Story-focused work cannot ultimately be a solitary practice because stories must be told in the presence of someone else. One of the healing properties of telling our stories, as Diane Langberg regularly notes, is that another person "bears witness," affirming the reality of our experience. <https://christiantraumahealingnetwork.org/2022/10/story-work-in-trauma-healing/>

B. The Spiritual Power of Allegories & Parables

1. "An allegory is a story in which the characters and/or events are symbols representing other events, ideas, or people. Allegory has been a common literary device throughout the history of literature. Allegories have been used to indirectly express unpopular or controversial ideas, to critique politics, and to rebuke those in power (e.g., George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*). Other times, allegory is used to express abstract ideas or spiritual truths through an extended metaphor, making the truth easier to grasp (e.g., John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Hannah Hurnard's *Hinds' Feet on High Places*). The Bible contains many instances of allegory used to explain spiritual truths or to foreshadow later events. The clearest examples of allegory in Scripture are the parables of Jesus. In these stories, the characters and events represent a truth about the Kingdom of God or the Christian life. For example, in the [Parable of the Sower](#) in [Matthew 13:3–9](#), the seed and different types of soil illustrate the Word of God and various responses to it (as Jesus explains in verses 18–23)." (<https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-allegory.html>)

GateCity Church: Free In Heart

Hazen Stevens - Wednesday, April 19, 2023

2. Luke 13:11 “This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. **12** Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. **13** Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. **14** The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. **15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.**

3. In the coming weeks I want you to consider knowing your own experiences of trial, adversity, pain, trauma, and suffering as one part of a story that is being told by God. When we understand our journey both in our own story, (and as a part of a larger story) from God’s perspective we can navigate the perilous pits that would want to entrap us.
 - a) Ex: The Slough of Despond (/ˈslaʊ ... diˈspɒnd/ or /ˈsluːz/; "swamp of despair") is a fictional, deep bog in John Bunyan's allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*, into which the protagonist Christian sinks under the weight of his sins and his sense of guilt for them.

 - b) Ex: Much-Afraid is besieged at her home by a mob of “her terrible relatives”, who blame her for estranging her family and attempt to persuade her that her husband-to-be, Craven Fear, only needs her help to change his manner and that this is her responsibility. It is during this moment of weakness and confusion that the Chief Shepherd chooses to come for her, but she is paralyzed by her fears and unable to go with him.

 - c) Song of Songs 5:7-8 The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. They beat me, they bruised me; they took away my cloak, those watchmen of the walls! 8 Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you— if you find my beloved, what will you tell him? Tell him I am faint with love.

IV. Examples What Binds the Heart on the Journey

- A. Wrong View of Self & GOd
- B. Misunderstanding the Role of Suffering
- C. Offense with God’s Leadership
- D. Un-forgiveness
- E. Anxiety
- F. False Comfort & Pleasure

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V. Call to Action

A. Jesus understood His place in God's Story

- a) John 13:2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

B. Consider in the coming weeks your own story, where you have been, where you are now, and where you are going. What do you want your heart to be like in your final days, do you want to enjoy the bliss and freedom of heart fully given in voluntary love, or will you end your days with the saddest of epitaphs: "His heart was weighed down..."

C. Or will you believe...God is working all things for good in your story!

- a) Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who^[a] have been called according to his purpose.