

Please open your Bible to the book of Proverbs...Proverbs 4:20-27.

- High Intensity Summer: Rededication, Prayer Walking, Service & Compassion
- Honestly, it has been an INTENSE SUMMER!
- How are you doing? How are you holding up?
- I'm tired. Often cranky. Quite confused with all the news I receive and how I ought to respond.

My friend, Sarah Bourns, is a fantastic writer...and she had this to say within her poem about the Coronavirus:

We've all been exposed.

Not necessarily TO the virus...

We've all been exposed BY the virus.

Corona is exposing us.

Exposing our weak sides, exposing our dark sides...

Exposing our addiction to comfort.

Exposing our obsession with control.

Exposing our compulsion to hoard and our protection of self.

Our junk is laid bare. Our fears made known.

But what Corona reveals, God can heal.

Come Lord Jesus. Have mercy on us all.

- *We've All Been Exposed*, Sarah Bourns 2020

I. What is this pandemic exposing in you? Good or Bad?

- A. Has it exposed your inner fears, your frustrations, your insecurities?
- B. Has it exposed your strengths, your resiliency, your patience, your ability to adapt, or your compassion for others?

II. It's times like these that reveal the condition & content of one's *HEART*.

- A. In fact, in today's passage of Scripture from Proverbs 4, we see that *the heart* is of utmost importance and influences all that we say and do.

III. But first we have to ask, "What is the heart?"

- A. Are we talking about the organ in our chest that pumps blood?
- B. There are many different meanings & uses of the word "heart":
 1. You BROKE MY HEART! (sad; hurt)
 2. I'm having a HEART ATTACK! (refers to the organ that pumps blood)
 3. My HEART IS SET on attending Simpson University in the fall (desire/choice)
 4. He has a GOOD HEART (Beats Per Minute?? No. We're speaking of one's character)

IV. *The heart is a popular theme in songs:*

- A. Bon Jovi said he was "*Shot through the HEART, & you're to blame!*" (*do I need to call an ambulance, Mr. Bon Jovi? Or the police?*)
- B. Deee-Lite, back in 1990, informed us that "*Groove is IN the HEART*" (*oh, that's where my groove is! I've been looking for it.*)
- C. Kanye West sang about a woman who was "*Heartless*" (*is that even possible?*)
- D. Celine Dion's "*Heart will go on...and on*" (*she's immortal*)

V. Then there are t-shirts and bumper stickers that say, *I (heart) NY* (affection)

VI. And I enjoy *Candy Hearts/Conversation Hearts* (shape)

VII. The *HEART* is a key word in the Bible and a major theme in the book of Proverbs (appears about 77 times)

- A. In fact, the last time I preached, I used Proverbs 16:9 as my central text:
- B. 'A man's *HEART* plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.'

VIII. Today's passage of the Bible mentions a number of body parts BUT gives top priority to the *HEART*.

IX. Let's read Proverbs 4:20-27: (this chapter is a father speaking to his son about the benefits of wisdom and obeying God's Word)

Proverbs 4:20-27 (NKJV)

²⁰ *My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.*

²¹ *Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your **heart**;*

²² *For they are life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh.*

²³ *Keep your **heart** with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.*

²⁴ *Put away from you a deceitful mouth, And put perverse lips far from you.*

²⁵ *Let your eyes look straight ahead, And your eyelids look right before you.*

²⁶ *Ponder the path of your feet, And let all your ways be established.*

²⁷ *Do not turn to the right or the left; Remove your foot from evil.*

(NKJV) ²³ *Keep your **heart** with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.*

(NLT) ²³ Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.

- X. Ears, eyes, flesh, mouth, lips, feet... But the condition of the heart is of most importance.
- WHY? Because...according to THIS passage of Scripture... *your heart influences everything in your life!*
 - Your heart gives direction to your eyes, mouth, and feet.
 - Really? Is my pulse, or my BPM (beats per minute) that influential?
 - We need to understand what the Bible means when it refers to “the heart.”
- XI. Here's a mini-survey of the Bible's usage of the word “heart” (thanks to Bibleproject.com for their word study on the heart)
- Biblical authors knew that the heart was an ORGAN in the chest that sustains life.
 - There's mention of a heart-attack in the Bible: 1 Sam. 25:37 Nabal's “heart died within him, and he became like a stone.”
- XII. But the biblical authors talk about the heart in many other ways that might seem strange to us today:
- That's because these writers had no concept of the BRAIN (or any word for it)
 - At times they would refer to the “mind”, they imagined that all of a human's intellectual activity took place in the heart.
 - You *KNOW* with your heart...you *TRUST GOD* with your heart.
 - Your heart is where you *UNDERSTAND* and *MAKE CONNECTIONS*
 - In the book of Proverbs, *WISDOM* dwells in the heart
 - Your heart is where you *DISCERN* between TRUTH & ERROR like Solomon did when he was king (Solomon asked for a wisdom...an understanding heart...a listening heart/a heart with ears!)
 - So the heart is where you *THINK* and *MAKE SENSE OF THE WORLD* (we read about the “thoughts of one's heart” in Gen. 6:5, Matt 9:4)
 - In the Bible, the heart is where you *FEEL EMOTIONS*
 - You feel *PAIN* in your heart, like Hannah did when she couldn't have any children
 - Samuel 1:8 Hannah's husband asked “why is your heart grieved?” (I read that the phrase “a broken heart” comes from ancient biblical Hebrew)
 - You also experience *FEAR* in your heart. Your heart can *MELT* or be *DISTRESSED*. Your heart can even be *DEPRESSED*
- XIII. But on the flip side, your heart is where you experience *JOY*
- In Hebrew, to be happy is to be “GOOD OF HEART” to have a “HEART OF JOY” ...and there's more...
 - In Biblical Hebrew, the heart is where you *MAKE CHOICES* motivated by your desires
 - David had it “in his HEART to build a temple for God” -1 Kings 8:17
 - Your heart is where your *AFFECTIONS* are centered...they are called the “*DESIRES OF YOUR HEART*”
- XIV. The prophet Jeremiah believed that the human heart was *FUNDAMENTALLY WICKED & MESSED UP*.
- “The heart of a human is deceitful above all, irreversibly sick, who can even understand it?” Jeremiah 17:9
 - This is why the only hope for humanity is the total *RENEWAL* of the human heart.
 - In Deuteronomy 30:6, Moses predicted that if Israel was ever going to love their God, their heart would need to be “circumcised” (*I'm no doctor, but WHAT??*)
 - a vivid metaphor of removing evil & stubbornness from the human heart
- XV. God *SPEAKS* to the heart...it's where His Word *LANDS*:
- Psalms 119:11 (NKJV)* Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You
 - (that's why we memorize God's Word...know it “by heart”)
- XVI. In summary, the Bible's understanding of the heart:
- It's the center of one's inner life. The heart is where you do all your *thinking, feeling, and choosing*.
 - It's the *control seat*, the *captain's chair* of your life.
 - The heart is the *laboratory* and *origin* of all that is good & evil in thoughts, words, and deeds.
- XVII. Even today, we understand that a person's heart refers to their character...it's who they are.
- (Date someone, marry someone who has a “good heart.”)
 - With this understanding, let's look again at our passage in Proverbs 4:
 - Proverbs 4:23 (NKJV)*
²³ Keep [Guard] your heart with all diligence,
For out of it spring the issues of life.
 - We *ACT* out of the contents of our heart.
 - The sight of the eyes & the hearing of the ears *EACH* report to the heart.
 - Words come from our heart:
 - Luke 6:45 (NKJV)*
⁴⁵ A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.
 - The mouth announces what the heart is thinking

b) When I spew hurtful, vulgar, and careless words...*or post them on social media...*

c) I don't have a mouth malfunction; it's a heart problem

XVIII. *STORY*: stealing money from the "cup" for the Ice Cream Truck

A. Not a "bad hand"; stealing is a problem of the heart

XIX. *On the flip side...*

XX. On February 20, 1996 the Daily Herald of Chicago reported this story:

A. A newlywed couple left a black-zippered case on the roof of their car as they sped away from their wedding reception.

B. The case had all their wedding gift money in it—\$12,000.

C. By the time they reached their honeymoon destination, they realized what they had lost.

D. "I feel numb," the bride said. "Overwhelmed."

E. David Yi, who was unemployed and struggling to pay bills, found the black bag.

F. He tracked the couple down and returned their satchel, with every dollar intact.

G. When asked WHY he turned in all the money, Yi said, "I guess it doesn't matter whether it's \$50 or \$1,000 or \$1 million. It doesn't belong to me."

1. Something was RIGHT in this man's heart.

2. And his honest actions were an OVERFLOW of his heart.

XXI. *A New Faucet.*

A. Picture this: you go to get a drink of water from your kitchen faucet.

B. But the water is not clean & clear.

1. It's deep brown. It smells. It has dirt, hair, bugs, and who knows what else in it.

C. So what do you do?

1. You go to the hardware store and buy a new faucet!

D. But when you hook up the shiny, new faucet...what happens?

1. The same filth comes out of your shiny, expensive faucet.

E. There is a problem with the WATER SOURCE...

1. THAT is where the work must be done.

XXII. *What's on the INSIDE always makes its way to the OUTSIDE.*

XXIII. *God Wants Your Heart.*

A. Often in Christianity, we focus on Outward Behavior Modification.

1. As if God just wants you to follow the rules.

2. "Stop cursing! Stop speeding! Stop wearing that! Stop watching that!"

XXIV. *God wants your heart.*

A. God seeks to do His transformational work at the very core of your inner being.

B. Two pieces of great news:

1. God is IMMUTABLE...he does not mutate or change

2. We are MUTABLE...we have the ability to change, mutate, and grow.

C. God changes the hearts of men & women.

D. God wants to do His work in the deepest part of us.

XXV. **God wants MY heart...**

A. because if God has my heart, He has ALL of me!

B. (my eyes, my hands, my feet, my thoughts, my words, my actions)

XXVI. *God doesn't just want me to perform loving deeds...*

A. He goes deeper: God wants to transform my heart to LOVE people.

B. Because if I love people, my actions will follow the contents of my heart.

XXVII. *My Buddy Ryan:*

A. 8th grade boy who lived next door, special needs and high functioning

B. Loved to shoot hoops...and would often knock on our door, "Can Travis come out to play?" (I was 33 years old).

C. I knew it was the RIGHT thing, the loving thing to hang out with Ryan...but in all honesty, I dreaded it. Ryan was a disruption to me.

D. *I asked God to change my heart for Ryan.*

E. Over time, God gave me a special place in my heart for my buddy Ryan.

F. I invited him to our High School Small Group (he would sleep & snore)

G. I brought him to the grocery store with my little kids to help me hold their hand in the parking lot.

H. He started coming to our youth group (and the teenagers welcomed Ryan and loved Ryan).

I. Loving Ryan became natural because God changed my heart.

XXVIII.I couldn't muster love on my own...I needed God to change my heart.

- A. Wisdom, & Compassion & Humility & Generosity flow from a Heart that is Governed by God
- B. * You know what else can reside in the heart?
- C. Greed, Lust, Bitterness, Pride, Selfishness, Hatred...these are heart issues.
- D. ...and whatever resides on the **INSIDE** always makes its way to the **OUTSIDE**.

XXIX.Therefore,

- A. *The Bible makes the CARE of our HEART a most important task!*

XXX.Proverbs 4:23

Keep your heart with all diligence (NKJV)

Watch over your heart (NASB); Guard your heart (NLT)

XXXI.Think of your heart as a WELL.

- A. In Bible times, fountains & wells were watched over with special care.
 - 1. Walls, covers, caretakers all "guarded" the well.
 - 2. Imagine if an animal fell into the well...and stayed there?
- B. We vigilantly, by God's strength, guard our heart from being filled with contaminants like Pride, Envy, Lust, Covetousness, Fear, Hatred, & Bitterness.
- C. But to GUARD our heart not only means keeping contamination and filth OUT...
- D. More importantly, to GUARD & KEEP your heart means FILLING IT with that which is GOOD, NOBLE, PRAISEWORTHY, and HELPFUL.
- E. Like a treasure chest (no good if it's empty...fill it with good treasure)

XXXII.Proverbs 4:20-21, teaches us the best treasure to fill our hearts with is God's Wisdom found in The Bible:

²⁰ *My son, give attention to **my words**;*

*Incline your ear to **my sayings**.*

²¹ *Do not let them depart from your eyes;*

*Keep them in the midst of your **heart**;*

²² ***For they are LIFE** to those who find them,*

*And **HEALTH** to all their flesh.*

XXXIII.So, what is the condition of YOUR heart?

- A. What's in there?
- B. What is it filled with?
- C. What's been coming out of your heart?

XXXIV.Raising children reveals our character...reveals the contents of our heart.

- A. Teenagers & Young Adults: The Coronavirus and the shutdown we're experiencing is revealing what's stored up in your heart.
- B. And when something jolts us and we respond in ways that are sinful and ungodly (trust me, I'm there with you)...
 - 1. ...it brings to light what's been hanging out in the darkness of our heart
 - 2. ...and we now have the opportunity to talk to God about what's been hiding in our heart.

XXXV.STORY: I was in a ZOOM meeting awhile back and found myself getting irritated...with people, with the meeting, with the world.

- A. But I stopped and talked to God immediately.
- B. *"God, ugliness is spewing out of me right now."*
- C. *"Father, the problem is not with my teammates nor the meeting...there's something off in my heart...can You help me?"*

XXXVI.God wants your heart today...does He have it?

XXXVII.Will you let God do His work in your heart?

XXXVIII.This message is not about someone else's heart (your neighbor's heart, your child's heart, your mayor or governor or President's heart)...

XXXIX.God has given YOU the responsibility of keeping your own heart with all diligence.

XL. You can ask God right now...and every day...what David asked at the end of Psalm 139:

- A. *Psalm 139:23,24 (NKJV)*

²³ *Search me, O God, and know my heart;*

Try me, and know my anxieties;

²⁴ *And see if there is any wicked way in me,*

And lead me in the way everlasting.

May God change us from the INSIDE OUT.