

Chapter 16

GUARD YOUR HEART!

At the end of a service in a small church in Mexico, a lady in her 60's came forward for prayer for pain in her hips and lower back. She said she had been suffering for about a year and that neither prayer nor physicians had been able to help her. I asked her if something significant had happened about the time the pain started. She told me that about that time some people in the church had started causing problems for her daughter who was the pastor of the church. They had started to slander her, tell lies about her, and this had caused strife in the church and suffering for her daughter. I asked her if she had forgiven those people. She was quiet for a moment and then said no, that she had held a lot of resentment toward them. I told her that I believed there was a connection between her unforgiveness and the pain in her back and asked if she was now willing to forgive them. When she said that she was, I led her in a prayer of forgiveness and then prayed for her healing, and instantly all the pain left her back and hips.

During the course of my years of ministry I have seen many people healed physically as well as emotionally when they obeyed Christ and forgave someone. Before I pray for someone to be healed physically, I always try to determine the condition of her heart. If there is unforgiveness, bitterness, deep grief, anxiety, or fear, then I minister to her heart before I minister to her physical problem.

In a recent book by Dr. Don Colbert titled, Deadly Emotions, he says on the cover page, “You can overcome the deadly emotions that could trigger the disease process,” and then states that:

- Anger and Hostility - are connected to hypertension and coronary artery disease.
- Resentment, Bitterness, Unforgiveness and Self Hatred - are connected to autoimmune disorders, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, and multiple sclerosis.
- Anxiety - is connected to irritable bowel syndrome, panic attacks, mitral valve prolapse, and heart palpitations.
- Repressed Anger - is connected to tension and migraine headaches, chronic back pain, TMJ, and fibromyalgia.

He goes on in the text of the book to quote Dr. Candace Pert, a stress-research pioneer, who said, “In the beginning of my work, I matter-of-factly presumed that emotions were in the head or the brain. Now I would say they are really in the body.” No person experiences an emotion just in his “heart” or in his “mind.” Rather, a person experiences an emotion in the form of chemical reactions in the *body* and the *brain*. These chemical reactions occur at both the organ level – stomach, heart, large muscles, and so forth – and at the *cellular* level. He then lists the results of a number of scientific studies linking the emotions and disease, and I will only mention 3 of the 6 studies from which he quoted:

- A Harvard Medical School study of 1,623 heart-attack survivors concluded that anger brought on by emotional conflicts doubled the risk of subsequent heart attacks compared to those who remained calm.
- A heart disease study at the Mayo Clinic found that psychological stress was the strongest predictor of future cardiac events, including cardiac death, cardiac arrest, and heart attack.
- In a ten-year study, individuals who could not manage their emotional stress had a 40 percent higher death rate than nonstressed individuals.

Dr. Francisco Contreras, who is the director of a cancer hospital, was quoted in Charisma magazine as follows: “More than 80 percent of my patients experienced a traumatic event within three years of their cancer being diagnosed. Topping the list were: (1) the death of a child (2) a divorce (3) a job layoff.

A favorite Scripture passage for many is found in Proverbs 3:5-8, which says: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones.” Christians tend to put their faith in the “Spiritual” category, but the Bible says that faith and trust in the Lord leads to inner peace that affects our emotional and physical health, and science seems to be confirming the wisdom of the Bible.

Dr. R. T. Kendal, who was pastor of Westminster Cathedral in London for 25 years, was quoted in Charisma Magazine to the effect that during his years of ministry he counseled thousands, and that his experience was that between 80 and 90 percent of Christians had hidden deep within their hearts some resentment against God! Could that be possible? That Christians could hold resentment against the God whom they love and serve? Yes, during my years of counseling I have found Dr. Kendal's insight to be true, and many other counselors have said the same. (See my chapter titled, OVERCOMING RESENTMENT AGAINST GOD.) These are a few of the reasons for their resentment:

- God did not heal them or a loved one although they prayed earnestly and faithfully.
- God did not protect them from some terrible experience of the past, perhaps in their childhood, such as abuse or abandonment.
- They were not able to conceive a child, although thousands of women become pregnant and throw away their children by abortion.
- They were born with a disability, or their child was born with a disability.
- Their grown child disappointed them, rejected their faith, turned to drugs, went to prison, and the list is endless.

In my own ministry, I have found again and again a connection between stress and worry and cancer, allergies, back problems, skin diseases, and auto immune disorders. Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount that we should not worry, that worry can't add a fraction of inch to our height (or an hour to our life), but that we should trust God as our loving Heavenly Father and learn to rest in His care.

Christianity is a religion of the heart. In my big Nelson's Concordance, the word "heart" has 9 full columns of entries. A few of the entries follow, and of course the emphasis is mine:

- Romans 10:9-10 - *"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your **heart** that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the **heart** one believes unto righteousness....."*
- Matthew 22:37 - Jesus said that the great commandment was *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart**, ...soul...and mind..."*
- Matthew 5:8 - Jesus taught, *"Blessed are the pure in **heart**, for they shall see God."*
- Proverbs 23:7 - *"As a man thinks in his **heart**, so is he."*

We in the west tend to think in mechanistic terms, we think of the brain as a computer that does all of our thinking and of the heart as figuratively representing a person's emotions. But notice that the Proverb says, "As a man thinks in his **heart**, so is he." The biblical definition of "heart" found in Strong's Concordance says that the heart includes the intellect, awareness, mind, inner person, and feelings. In other words, biblically the heart is a person's personality or his soul, it is who the person truly is.

Let me ask you to do something: Close your eyes.....and point to yourself. Now open your eyes. Where are you pointing? Most everyone points to the center of his chest, to his heart, and not to his head or his stomach. Innately we seem to agree with the Bible that my heart is who I truly am. Listen to these fascinating insights as reported in the book, Deadly Emotions:

"In recent years neuroscientists have discovered that the heart has its own independent nervous system. At least forty thousand nerve cells (neurons) exist in a human heart. That's the same amount found in various subcortical (beneath the cerebral cortex) centers of the brain. In other words, the heart is more than a mere biological pump. These abundant nerve cells give it a thinking, feeling capability. The heart's "brain" and the nervous system relay messages back and forth to the brain in the skull, creating a two-way communication between these two organs. In the 1970's physiologists John and Beatrice Lacey of the Fels Research Institute found a flaw in current popular thinking about the brain. The popular approach was to assume that the brain made all of the body's decisions.

"(The Laceys) found that while the brain may send instructions to the heart through the nervous system, the heart does not automatically obey. (The heart seems to "consider") the information that it has received.....The heart seems to have an opinion of its own, which it communicates back to the brain.
.....In effect, heart and brain hold an intelligent dialogue.....The ultimate "real you" is a composite of what your heart tells your brain, your brain tells your heart, and your will decides to believe, say, and do."

Dr. Colbert also reports on an article that appeared in the New York Times of May 28, 2002, that I think is pertinent:

“Author and scientist Paul Pearsall described an incident that occurred when he was speaking to an international group of psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers in Houston, Texas. He was talking about his belief in the central role of the heart in both physical and spiritual life. A physician came up to the microphone to share her story, sobbing as she did so. This is what she told Dr. Pearsall and the others present in that auditorium:

“I have a patient, an eight-year-old little girl who received the heart of a murdered ten-year-old girl. Her mother brought her to me when she started screaming at night about her dreams of the man who had murdered her donor. She said her daughter knows who it was. After several sessions, I just could not deny the reality of what this child was telling me. Her mother and I finally decided to call the police and, using the descriptions from the little girl, they found the murderer. He was easily convicted with the evidence my patient provided. The time, the weapon, the place, the clothes he wore, what the little girl he killed had said to him...everything the little heart transplant recipient reported was completely accurate.”

In my ministry I am not so concerned about people’s outward ungodly actions, the bad fruits, as with the hidden motivations of their hearts that are behind the actions, the bad roots, for the Bible teaches that unless one deals with the bad roots the matter will not be resolved. I ministered to a couple who were new Christians. They had come out of a difficult background, and they were so thrilled with their new relationship with God that they were praying and serving and witnessing almost constantly. They seemed to have a special anointing for healing, and many people that they prayed for were instantly healed. But they confessed that there was a problem in their family. The mother had an explosive temper, and she was verbally and physically abusing their pre-school son. They also had an older daughter, and the mother treated her OK, but she constantly lost her temper with the boy. There wasn’t any point of telling her that this treatment was wrong and sinful, she already knew that and felt guilty but didn’t seem to have the ability to change. The secret was in her heart. Out of the heart come the issues of life. When I ministered to her I learned that her father had always shown love to her brothers but had rejected and physically abused her from the earliest time she could remember. Her heart was deeply wounded and deeply resentful of her father and of her brothers, and she was projecting all of those dark feelings onto her little son. It was not a conscious thing, but it was overpowering. We ministered by having her forgive her father and brothers; by having her repent of her deep judgments against her father and choosing to honor him; by breaking the ungodly soul ties between her and her father; then we cast out all of the dark spirits that had tormented her all of her life. She had a dramatic experience of release and joy. But we also warned her that a lifetime attitude such as this is not easily changed, and we assigned a couple to mentor her family. They would spend time with her and her husband, pray for them, counsel them, and she would be accountable to them.

Let me now share the story of Christian Huygens, a Dutch clock maker who in the 1600’s invented the pendulum clock and who subsequently discovered an amazing principle. One day as he lay in bed staring at his clock collection across the room, he noticed that all of the pendulums were swinging in unison. He knew that he hadn’t started them that way so he got out of bed and restarted the clocks, purposely setting them in a way to break the syncopated rhythm. To his surprise, in a short time the pendulums all began swinging together again. Later, scientists discovered that the largest clock with the strongest rhythm was pulling all of the other clocks into syncopation with itself. They named this phenomenon “entrainment,” and noted that it is apparent throughout nature.

The fact is that the strongest biological oscillator in the body is the heart, and it acts in a way similar to Huygen’s clocks. The heart has the ability to pull every other bodily system into its own rhythm, whatever that may be. When the heart is at peace or filled with love, it communicates harmony to the entire body. Conversely, when toxic emotions cause the heart to beat in an irregular way, to beat harder or faster, the heart communicates the opposite of peace to the entire body. Spiritually speaking, when you experience God’s peace, the heart communicates peace to every fiber of your being. Each and every organ experiences that rest. When a person experiences God’s love and love of other people, his heart communicates that love to his mind and to his entire body. When love fills your heart, your entire body is pulled, is entrained into a healing atmosphere.

One final story having to do with the heart:

“Hope Rising” is the name of a book by Kim Meeder that is a must-read. I heard her one morning being interviewed by Dr. Dobson. Kim and her husband own a small horse ranch in Bend, Oregon, that is devoted to rescuing abused horses and abused kids. At the time of the interview they had rescued over 300 horses, many so badly battered and malnourished that

they could not be touched. They started working with schools, clubs and the social service system several years ago and discovered a magical connection.

In the interview Kim told the story of Jimmy, a young man of 17, who had been in and out of the social justice system his whole life. He had been born to a crack mother, one of his arms and hands was deformed, and he hated everybody including himself. A group of kids, including Jimmy, were brought to the ranch by their social worker and introduced to Kim. She greeted each of them warmly and this apparently took Jimmy by surprise. He pulled his case worker aside and asked her, "Doesn't she know I'm a bad kid?"

Kim took Jimmy and 7 other boys to a corral to get acquainted with a new horse that had just been rescued. She said it was one of the worst cases of neglect they had ever seen. The horse should have weighed 1,000 lbs. but weighed only 400 lbs. and could barely walk. She explained to the boys that they were trying to socialize the little horse, and they must stand very still and not frighten her. She had the boys stand in a circle inside the corral and then brought the mare in. She came in like a little fawn, went around the circle and smelled each boy, then she returned to Jimmy and pressed her head against his chest. Kim said, "Oh, Jimmy, she has chosen you!" Tears ran down Jimmy's face. He stayed with the horse the whole day, grooming and hugging her.

The next day when the boys were back at their detention facility Jimmy asked for a private meeting with his counselor and told her what had happened. He grabbed his shirt and started saying, "My heart, my heart, something happened to my heart! I never knew that I could be loved, but if that little horse could love me, and if the people at that ranch could believe in me, then maybe I can believe in myself." And that was the moment Jimmy decided to change his life.

Time of Reflection

God can use even an abused and wounded horse to touch and heal an abused and wounded heart. The Lord Jesus was rejected, wounded, scourged, and crucified, because of His great love. Can you imagine yourself standing alone, feeling rejected and hopeless. Then imagine Jesus, with the marks of His wounds clearly visible, walking up to you slowly and solemnly and leaning His head against your chest. He has chosen you! Yes, that is the amazing truth! He loves you, and He has chosen you, and He wants to heal your heart. He wants to come and put His arms around you today and tell you that He did it all because He loves you and believes in you. He came to heal the broken-hearted. Let Him heal your heart today.