How Healthy is Your Heart

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Preacher: Dr. Fred Stone

[0:00] Thank you very much. Well, good morning.

You cannot imagine how happy I am to be here today. I'm just sort of nervous about all this.
But when I came in this morning at the first service and saw a lot of people that I know and love, that stress just seemed to just leave me. And I just feel at home here today.
A lot of new faces, and I'm glad to see these new faces. A lot of old faces like mine, and I'm glad to see yours. I've missed you, Lisa and I both.
We see some of you around town, around the area, and we always enjoy that. This has been our home for 25 years, church family for 25 years, and it's just good to be back.
[1:13] But I'm glad to be retired, to be honest with you. Lisa and I enjoy that. It's good. You've got a good friend of mine who's your pastor now, and leave him alone for a month or two.

Let him recover well. But when he left this area several years ago, from time to time, I'd give him a call, shoot him an email, and say, I know of a church in this area that I'd love to recommend you to, and get him back up here.
Most of the time, he did not even say that he would be interested. But I'm glad he waited, because he has now come to the best church he could possibly have come to, to be pastor.
So I'm happy for you. I'm happy I'm retired. One of the things I had to get used to is I go sometimes and preach, fill in here and there for different pastor friends.
And I don't know a soul. But when I walk in, I think, my only responsibility is to preach. I have absolutely no other responsibilities.
[2:29] And so if somebody were to come up to me and say, I'm cold, you know what my response is going to be? I don't care. You know, that's not my problem.

And some of you know, even when I was pastor, if you came up and told me you were cold, I didn't care then, you know?
That's just who I am, and I can't help that. But when serious things are going on, like what has happened to Daniel with a serious heart attack, I get serious, and I have truly, at least I have prayed for him and will continue, and I know you have and will continue, because that is something you don't take lightly.
But ingrown toenails, it's not worth a thought. You know, even if it comes off, it'll grow back. Don't get bent out of shape over things that really do not matter.
I want you to turn, if you would, in your Bible to Mark chapter 7. We're going to get there in just a moment. While I am truly thrilled to be here, I am sorry for the occasion to be filling in for Daniel because of what he's gone through.
[3:52] You know, every time I hear of someone I know especially who is my age or younger, and Daniel's much younger. He may not look it, but he is much younger than me.

I wonder, am I next? You never know. As far as I know, there is nothing wrong with my physical heart.
I've not had any problems. It seems to be healthy. But I cannot say that about my spiritual heart. It's far, far from healthy.
I have a serious spiritual heart problem. I'm going to be honest with you. And so do you. Every single one of us in this room, we have a heart problem.
We have heart disease. Whether you're 12 or whether you're 92, we have serious heart problems.
[4:59] Jesus repeatedly warns us about that. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there are extended passages. And we're looking at one in Mark 7, where Jesus confronts us about our heart.

And tells us to look at what's coming out of our heart in our attitudes, words, and actions. I don't know if you thought about it. But when it comes to our bad attitudes, the hurtful words we say, our

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angry outbursts, our selfish actions, and other, any other bad behaviors, ungodly behaviors.
We have no one else to blame as the root source of it. Now, we don't want to hear that, do we? We don't want to think that way because we have convinced ourselves that our sinful words and actions are caused by the difficult people.
Maybe we have to live with or work with or go to school with. Our sinful words and actions are caused by the unreal expectations, the stressful situations that we find ourselves in.
But we're going to see in Mark 7, how Jesus confronts us with the fact, the reality. That the root cause, the real source of our sinful behavior is our sinful heart.
[6:40] Now, Jesus begins, or Mark actually recording this, Mark 7 begins with some of the Jewish leaders complaining about how Jesus' disciples were not really practicing what we would call ceremonial uncleanness.

They were ceremonially unclean. It doesn't make any sense to us today. But it was a tradition, a Jewish tradition that, for example, if you went to the market and interacted with various kinds of people, you should wash your hands before you ate, not for hygiene purposes, but for religious purity purposes.
And some of these religious leaders who were always out to get Jesus, they were watching His disciples and they saw they didn't wash their hands.
And they were all upset. They were complaining to Jesus. The problem was not, even in their mind, the problem was not Jesus' disciples are disobeying Scripture.
Jesus' disciples were not honoring human traditions. What Jesus called the traditions of the elders in this passage.
[8:10] Well, Jesus rebukes these critics. And He points out that they had really rejected the teaching of Scripture.

And He gives some examples. They had rejected the true meaning of Scripture, the teaching of Scripture, and elevated their own traditions in place of Scripture.
And He condemns them for it. Now, in Mark 7, beginning in verse 14, Jesus now turns His attention to everybody who's been listening to this.
And He's going to tell people, the real problem is not what comes through your body. The real problem that we all have is what comes out of our body.
Because that's coming from our heart, our attitudes, our words, and our actions. And those things, they reveal the real condition of our heart.
[9:08] Let's read Mark 7, beginning in verse 14. And He, that is Jesus, called the people to Him again and said to them, Hear me, all of you, and understand.

There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him. But the things that come out of a person are what defile him. And when He had entered the house and left the people, His disciples asked Him about the parable.
That, what Jesus said was a little parable. And He said to them, Then are you also without understanding? Other translations basically say, Are you so dumb?
Don't you get it by now? Are you so dull? They say. And then Jesus continues.
Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart, but his stomach, and is expelled? It goes into the latrine.
[10:28] There's another way to translate that. Mark now tells us parenthetically, Thus He declared all foods clean. Now verse 20.

And He said, What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness, all these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.
Now before we look at that more closely, we need to be clear about two things. First of all, the meaning of the word heart. The Bible uses the word heart hundreds of times in both the Old and New Testament to talk about the inner core of a person.
In this kind of context, when you read Jesus or another Bible writer using the word heart like this, they're talking about the real you, who you are on the inside.
It includes our mind, our conscience, our will, our desires, our emotions, our motivations, and it is the source of our attitudes, our words, our actions. I want you to understand, because it applies to all of us.

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[11:58] When Jesus talks about what comes out of our heart, he's referring to what comes out of the real you. The words that I say, the things that I actually do, that you might hear and see, the things that I think, and thank God you don't know that.

That comes from me, who I am at the core of my being, and those same things, attitude, words, and actions, that come from you, that you think, that you say, that you do.
That's what is the condition of your inner being, what Jesus and Bible writers call our heart. And so what I'm trying to get us to understand here at the beginning, we can't blame other people for this. Sure, other people provoke us, but then, we let out what's already there. And so right now at the beginning, own how you think.
Own the words that you speak. Own your actions, how you live, what you do and don't do.
[13:29] Now, we also need to be clear about the natural condition of our heart. Everyone is born with a sick heart. Look at how Jeremiah describes this. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick.

A lot of translations say desperately wicked. Who can understand it? What he's describing here is how we all come into the world. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, every human being who's born into this world is born with a sinful nature.
A sinful heart. That's what it's talking about. We see evidence of this. This is the Word of God. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick.
And Jesus is saying all this bad stuff that comes out, it comes from our heart. This is the Word of God. But we can actually see this in practice.
Think about or look at your little children. Your little grandchildren. Those sweet, innocent, not.
[14:46] Little children never have to be taught to lie, do they? Little children never have to be taught to disobey their parents and then lie about what they did or didn't do.

Little children are not taught to be selfish and not share their toys over in the nursery. No. They have this ingrained sinful nature that says, what I've got is mine.
And when another little child comes over to steal it, that, you know, they want to do, they'll smack them upside the head. And that all comes naturally. Some children don't smack them.
Some will just cry and let them take it. But they don't like it. Some children are bite. I had a biter in one of my boys. I won't say who it is. I'm no longer a pastor.
I can't help it. I couldn't help it when my son bit another child. Don't get mad at me. What am I going to do? Pull all his teeth? You know? Things happen like that.
[15:54] And it's because our children are sinners just like we are. Even our grandchildren are little sinners just like we are. That's how we all enter the world.

That's us. That's what Scripture teaches. And that's what our experience sees. Now, let's evaluate the condition of our hearts.
Don't think about your spouse or your child or your parent or your friend. Think about you. Let's evaluate the condition of our heart right now in light of what Jesus said.
Test your heart. What's coming out of your heart? Look at the words of Jesus. And he said, what comes out of a person's heart, what comes out of a person is what defiles them.
For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness.
[17:06] That's obviously not an exhaustive list. What Jesus is doing is describing various attitudes, thoughts, and desires that we have.

He's describing some of the kinds of words we say to other people. He's talking about some of the things that we do.
And it all originates within a person. Now, he's obviously describing sinful behaviors that come from an unbeliever's heart. Everybody knows that.
But these things sometimes come out of our heart as Christians. No Christian is perfect. You know, in the model prayer, what we call the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to pray for forgiveness. Because we sin. We sin every day. We need to be aware of that, admit that, confess that to God and to the people we sin against.
[18:10] We need to learn to ask God for forgiveness, ask other people for forgiveness. We need to own our sin. These kinds of things, some of them, sometimes, are on display in our lives.

So here's what I want you to do. Examine yourself right now. The way you think. The things you truly desire.

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The way you speak. The way you speak to other people or about people. The way you act. You, right now.
Do you see evidence of evil thoughts? Sexual immorality? Theft?
Murder? You know, I've never, that I know of, even been in a room preaching, that when this came, you know, we look at something like this where somebody had actually murdered someone.
[19:14] But in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5, Jesus tells us, murder, before it ever takes place, it begins in a person's heart with anger.

It comes out in angry words before it ever becomes an action. The next one. Adultery. The next one. Adultery. Adultery. Adultery.
In the same Sermon on the Mount, same chapter 5, Jesus says, if you've ever looked at a woman and had lustful thoughts, you've committed adultery with her in your mind, in your heart.
See, these things are more than just the actual physical act. We're talking about what's going on in our mind. Things we say is what we do.
Look at it. Look at it. Look at it. Coveting. That's greed. Wanting what other people have. Never being satisfied or content with what God's given us.
[20:20] Wickedness. Deceit. Deception. Lies. Sensuality. Envy. Slander.

Pride. Foolishness. Examine yourself. Now, listen closely to your words.
Words matter. Jesus says that our words are an overflow of what's in our heart. I want you to look at Luke chapter 6.
Jesus also says this in Matthew. It's recorded in Matthew 12 and Matthew 15. But we're going to look at it in Luke 6. 45. He says the good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good.
And the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.
[21:25] That's convicting. That's talking about you. That's talking about me. And I know very well it's talking about me. One of the reasons that I am preaching this message this morning.

By the way, this is brand new. This is brand spanking new. Two or three years ago, I was reading Paul Tripp's devotional book, New Morning Mercy.
It's a great devotional book. Highly recommend it. He has several daily devotions that confronted me, confront whoever's reading it, about the kind of thing we're talking about.
The problem with my mouth, the problem with my attitude, the problem with things I do, it's not other people or situations. It's me. It's my heart. That's convicting.
And then the occasion I'm here, Daniel had a physical heart attack. I just thought, well, the Lord, it's just given me.
[22:30] I've been wanting to develop a sermon like this. This is the right occasion. I can use his heart attack as a good illustration, as a good opening, you know. Our words are an overflow of what comes out of our hearts.

I am not proud for you that know me to know that. Are you really proud of the overflow that's coming out of your mouth on a daily basis or a weekly basis or even just on a monthly basis?
Paul Tripp, he helps us to think through what Jesus is saying here. He says, words reveal the heart. He says, the heart thinks and our words are the way those thoughts are communicated and transferred to God and others. He's talking about both good and bad words.
The heart desires and our words are the way we communicate what, how, why, when, and where. We want the things that our hearts have come to desire, both good and bad.
[23:49] The heart loves and every day the loves of our heart are intentionally or unintentionally communicated to God and to those near us, both good and bad.

The heart worships and our words reveal what rules our hearts, good and bad. What do your words reveal about the condition of your heart right now?
Be honest. Jesus is telling us that the ultimate source of our sinful attitudes, words and actions is within us.
It's in our heart. But I want to be clear about something. Jesus does not mean this, what we're talking about this morning, does not mean that we are unaffected by what other people have done to us.
By some of the hard situations we've had to go through in life. No. We are affected by what happens to us.

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[25:00] People can hurt us. They can abuse us. Life can just be very difficult. Some of the situations, some of the circumstances that we have to deal with and go through. I want you to understand.

You may have suffered real, personal pain from other people, evil people. You may have suffered tremendously from unfair situations or events outside of you that you had no control over.
Don't ignore those things. And Jesus is not saying you've got to pretend they didn't happen. You don't deny those things.
They are real. And you need to acknowledge them and get help. Ask God to help you to deal with it, to work through it.
Find a Christian friend who will walk with you, help you, encourage you. Find a biblically sound Christian counselor.
[26:16] If they're deep-seated and you really need to spend some time and work on dealing with those things, those outside forces that have hurt you.

But at the same time, don't blame other people or situations, those that have hurt you even, and say that they are the cause of your sinful behavior.
They may present you with occasions to sin. They may cause you to have temptations to sin. They may influence you in a lot of terrible, bad, harmful ways.
But bottom line, they don't make you sin. That's what Jesus is saying. Jesus is making it very clear.
The ultimate cause of our sinful attitudes, words, and actions is within ourselves, our own hearts.
And we've got to own that. And quit blaming everybody and everything for what's wrong with us.
Your wife, she may be a pill to live with.
[27:31] And if I was really going to be a smart aleck this morning, I'd point out some as illustrations, you know. Your husband, it may take the grace of God to stay in that marriage with him.

Your children may be little terrorists. Your parents may be just ungodly influences. And that does make your life difficult.
There is no doubt. But those people, you can't point at and say, that's why I say the things I say and do the things I do.
That's why I do that sinful stuff. No. Jesus won't let us. He's given us a simple test to check the condition of our heart.
All we've got to do is look at our behavior. What comes out? So what does this test reveal about you? Let's turn our attention now to how we can treat this heart problem.
[28:39] There's some good things here. Treat your heart problem. One of the best pictures, places to point to is the life of King David.

King David. King David. When he realized the seriousness of his heart problem, and he had to be confronted about it.
He had committed adultery with Bathsheba. And he had tried to cover it up by having her husband killed. And at first, he seemed to not be bothered by it.
But when Nathan the prophet confronted him over his sin, when Nathan the prophet said some things, gave him a little story that really revealed what he had done, what was in his heart, David was broken.
He cried out to God in confession and repentance and begging God for forgiveness. And he asked God to cleanse his heart.
[29:44] Create a new heart. It's in Psalm 51. After it was all over, after this time period, after he had prayed, David recorded this prayer. It's a great prayer for all of us to read, to use even as our own prayer of confession and repentance.

Here's what I want to ask you. In treating your heart, do you need to ask God to cleanse your heart?
David said in this Psalm, Create in me a clean heart, or a pure heart, some translations say, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
In the first several verses of this Psalm, David confesses his sin wholeheartedly. He seeks God's forgiveness. But here in verse 10, he is demonstrating the sincerity of his confession.
He is really serious about wanting to be clean before God. And so he asks God to purify his heart so he would not fall back into his sin.
Do you need to confess some specific sins this morning, right now, to God? Not publicly, but just you and God. Maybe some sins about your thought life.

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[30:59] Some of the things you think about. You know, I have thought in preaching and teaching, thinking about this. If my thoughts could ever be put on that screen, I'd run away.

No one would ever see me again. I'd be that ashamed if my, some of the things I think sometimes were on the screen. If you're honest, you'd have to say the same thing.
But God knows. You need to confess some of the things that you are playing with in your mind. You need to confess some of the words you, you use, you speak.
I'm not talking about just about maybe using profanity, although that may be something you need to confess. I'm talking about slander, gossip, uncontrolled anger. I'm talking about words that come out that reveal there's a problem in my heart.
Confess that to God. Or things you do, actions, things you don't do that you should do. Don't offer excuses if you're confessing your sin.
[32:11] Don't go to God and say, Lord, I know I'm wrong, but you can't blame other people. You can't excuse yourself before the Lord. Confess your sin to God, ask Him to create within you a new attitude, a new vocabulary, a new way to talk about people or talk to people, new actions.

Sincerely pray. If God's convicting you, sincerely pray David's prayer, creating me a clean heart of God and renew a right spirit within me. Maybe write this down. Put it on the mirror in the bathroom. Put it on the dash of your car. As a reminder, I need this new heart. I need to be renewed day by day. You know, this was originally a prayer of David.
The scripture calls him a man after God's own heart. He's a man of God. It's the prayer that we as Christians need to pray, is what I'm saying. But it could also be a prayer that you could pray if you're not a Christian and God's calling you right now to salvation.
He's convicting you. Confess your sin to God. Be honest with Him about it. Change your mind. Turn from it. That's what repentance is. Trust that when Jesus died on the cross, He actually paid the penalty for your sin.
[33:22] Trust that He died as your substitute. Taking the wrath of God that you deserve, trust that Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sins. Put your faith, your trust, your confidence in Him.

And realize that just as Jesus died on the cross for your sins, He arose triumphantly. God brought Him back from the grave. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords today at the right hand of the Father.
Surrender you to the control of your life to Jesus right now as your Lord. That's what it means to follow Him. You trust Him. You follow Him. You love Him. You obey Him. It may be that you've tested your heart this morning.
And while, yes, there's some things there that shouldn't be, there's some things I need to confess. It could be that as we've gone through this this morning, that God has comforted you. God has given you assurance that you are seeking to live a life that pleases Him.
Not perfectly, but your attitudes as a general rule, your words normally, your actions are those that attempt to please God.
[34:30] And it may be this morning that there's not really a prayer of confession. It may be what you need to do is ask God to protect your heart. Above all else, guard your heart, Scripture says, for everything you do flows from it.

There's a negative and positive way to guard your heart. Negatively, to guard your heart means to protect yourself from sources of evil and temptation. Are there some people in your life, certain places, certain places you go, certain forms of media you use, are there some things in your life that you know is not good, it's not healthy?
It arouses the wrong kinds of desires. It causes you to want to say the wrong kind of words. Are there some things in your life that you know it's not helpful, it's only hurtful?
Well, guard your heart by don't hang around those people. Don't go to those places. Don't expose yourself to that kind of media or that kind of influence.
Ask God to help you. Positively though, guarding our heart means to surround ourselves with things that promote closeness with God and will help us to live a pure and holy life.
[35:46] The place to begin is to be consistent, spending time with God in His Word and in prayer. We're never going to have a close relationship with God if we don't listen to Him as He speaks through His Word.

If we don't talk to Him and listen to Him in prayer, we never will. I want to encourage you to spend time with the Lord every day in meaningful prayer, just talking to Him, listening to Him.

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In Bible studies where you realize this is God, God's Word and He's speaking to me, I'm going to listen to Him, I'm going to agree with Him, I'm going to obey Him. We can't really surround ourselves with things that are going to promote the right kind of thing if we don't hang out with the right kind of people.
We need meaningful relationships with other Christians. Do you have it? You know, there's things going on in this church right now. Small groups that meet on Sunday during the week with Christians who can help you just by being there, being a friend, being an encourager, pray with you, pray for you.
I want to encourage you to get involved in a small group if you're not involved right here in this church. But it may be you can do some things just as an individual. Eat lunch with some people, play golf with some people, go out and do things for some people.
[36:56] And it may be that it's not your nature to call somebody up or just point blank ask somebody to do something, but do it. Do what you know will help you to have, to be surrounded by some healthy, positive Christian influences, people I'm talking about, who can help you guard your heart.

Ask God to surround you with those kind of people, those kind of situations even. Now, finally, we'll wrap it up. How healthy is your heart?
How healthy is your soul? Well, consider your thoughts, your attitudes, your desires, your words, your lifestyle, your actions.
If you want to have a healthy heart, cry out to God to clean it up. Confess your sin. You know, there's a verse of Scripture in 1 John.
John says, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That's one of my favorite verses of Scripture.
[38:18] There's a lot of things I am short coming on. But I'm a good confessor. Confess your sin today.

And the Word of God says that God will forgive you. He'll cleanse you. He'll give you a fresh start. Fresh start in the way you think. A fresh start in the way you speak. A fresh start in the way that you live.
It can happen today. If you make that kind of commitment and you mess up, confess your sin tonight. Confess your sin tomorrow. Confess your sin tomorrow night.
God will continue. If we come to Him honestly, sincerely, creating me a clean heart of God, confessing our sin, God will forgive us. He'll cleanse us. And that's how we walk with Him.
Nobody walks perfectly, no problems, no issues, no stumbles. We all, we all fail. But we can walk with God as the Chuck Swindoll book title says.
[39:19] We can all walk with God and make three steps forward and two steps back. But every time you make three steps forward and just two steps back, you're making progress.

God's not called us. God is not, God knows we're not going to be perfect. But God knows the desire of our heart and God knows when it is truly our heartfelt desire to please Him in spite of our failures.
So, how healthy is your heart? You know. Respond to God in a way that you can walk out of your, with a fresh start because you've got right now a clean heart cleansed by the blood of Jesus, clothed with the righteousness of Jesus.
Let's pray. Father, you know us and Lord, we know ourselves better maybe right now than we did when we came in here.
convict us of our sin, of our diseased heart. Help us to truly repent, turn from it.
[40:47] Help us to truly seek your cleansing, your forgiveness. Help us to experience by your grace a fresh start.

Show every person in this room how to respond this morning. Show every one of us, Father, about how we can have a clean heart. But Lord, also help us this morning to guard our heart, to protect our heart by surrounding ourselves with godly influences.
Your word, prayer, godly people. help us to obey you now, dear God.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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