

November 11, 2018

Proverbs 4:23 (The Message)

2 Corinthians 6:11-13 (Common English Bible)

St. James Logo: "Heart"

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Today, we are focusing on the "heart" section of our logo. I could take the easy route and just remind you that you need to love one another. Yet, I think that would be kind of useless, since you already know that.

Instead, I thought a better way to talk about the heart given where we are as a church and where most of us are spiritually, is to look at what causes "heart disease" and then what we can do to prevent a "heart attack". In other words, today, we will be looking at the warning signs we need to heed and what we can do preventatively, so we can have a healthy heart.

What are the warning signs before a heart attack? You need to look no further than smoke, high blood pressure, and obesity.

Let's go at these one at a time.

Let's begin with smoking. You can get heart disease by both smoking yourself and by being exposed to second hand smoke. What you take in, can impact your heart. It can affect your heart's ability to function fully.

Now, we could get literal here and that would be appropriate if this was merely a chastisement from your doctor. Yet, this is a sermon and I definitely don't have doctor in front of my name.

So, instead, we need to look at smoke metaphorically. What are we taking in or being exposed to because of our close proximity to fire and smoke.

What I am suggesting here is for all of us to look at who we let surround us. Who has the most influence due to the amount of exposure we have to them. Are they putting out positive things or do they just complain, spew anger, or gossip and make disparaging remarks? Are they more negative than they are positive? Let us not be fouled misery loves company. Yet, is this the company we want to keep? I am not suggesting immediate abandonment, rather I am calling for intentionality. What impact does this person or group have on you?

I once read a book about how to have greater peace and be a person that brings peace to others. A leading peacemaker shared his strategy for doing so, and what has proven successful for him. He does not watch TV, especially the news. Interesting, no! Why, it impacts him negatively. It doesn't move him forward, it send him backward and sometimes even paralyzes him. Yes, he reads, so as to remain informed, but he chooses what info. will come to him, as opposed to receiving whatever is being spewed on any given TV station.

So, does your relationships and proximity to them enhance your life or does it move you into a negative place? Does it have repercussions for your heart? How does what they say and do affect your emotions, your will, and your actions (what the Bible calls "heart"). Does being in relationship with them contribute to yours or others heart disease? Let's not wait till the smoke clears. Rather, let's heed the fire alarm and leave the room. Let's take steps toward not having a "heart attack."

Next, let's look at the second warning signal, blood pressure! Here's the quick science of high blood pressure, it has to do

with the narrowing of the arteries, thus impeding blood flow, making it hard for the heart to pump, and then comes your heart attack.

There is not enough room for the flow that leads to life. The heart does not get what it needs. Could it be that we are heading towards a heart attack, because we have not made room for that which gives us life – the matters of the heart. Instead, we fill our calendars with this event, and that activity, and that which we think is a “must do”, essential, and necessary. Yet, if our hearts are to remain healthy, we must be sure not to clog up our arteries, but rather leave open space. Thus, we must choose what we allow to take up room on the way to the heart. We must leave adequate room for that which nourishes our heart and is life giving. So much of what we do is not essential. It may be good, and it may be important, but is it necessary. All of us can keep our hearts healthy, if we make sure to make room for love. Let’s make room for relationships. Let’s take that step, so we don’t wind up having a “heart attack”.

Now, what about obesity! I think when it comes to heart disease, packing on pounds, shoveling things in, and trying to fill ourselves up has to do with what we are trying to bury, push down, and cover up and it also has to do with what void we are trying desperately to fill.

Friends, you don’t want to come to love desperate, at least not when it comes to another human being. Rather, coming desperate to love is best saved for doing that with God. In other words, only God can fill the void. It is best not to get into any relationship severely lacking or feeling empty. Because we then put too much pressure on that person to be more than

they could ever be, we ask them to be only what God can be – our all in all, the 100% giver of 100% unconditional love.

God is the only one who can fill our deep void, for no one knows us as deeply as God, and thus can give us exactly what we need.

Relationships can end because the other person was not what we needed. The best place to go into any relationship is as the giver and not the one counting on being given everything you need. When you come from a generous place of giving, a heart overflowing with love and not from a desperate place of giving, you are sure to receive. Let's take steps to not having a "heart attack."

The Bible tells us to guard our heart, because things want to get under your skin and into your heart, that will do you damage, sometimes near fatal damage to your heart.

We've look at what we need to stop doing if we are to guard against a heart attack. Now, let's look at what we need to do to prevent heart disease from beginning.

Here goes: exercise, eat healthy, and sleep; it is way easier to say, than it is to do. One at a time, here we go!

Your heart stays strong and healthy through exercise. You cannot have a healthy heart without exercising that big muscle. Love long, love often, forgive a lot, be gracious even when someone doesn't deserve it, do random acts of kindness, stand up for those who need justice, be an advocate, and participate in a protest march. In other words, exercise your heart, help it grow stronger!

Next, eat well. Too many of us are taking in things that are not good for us. I remember hearing as a child, when I would come home hurt by what someone said, because I had swallowed it hook, line and sinker – “Consider the source.”

Lauren Daigle has recently released a song “You Say” which has in its lyrics: “In You I find my worth, in You I find my identity. You say I am loved.” We need a steady diet of that which is healthy for us, and refuse to chew on or digest that which makes us feel bad about ourselves and inadequate.

Last, but not least, sleep as a preventative. God knows that rest is a must. If we are going to be creative in the ways we love and love for the long haul, we will need to find times of renewal. Rest is what guards against resentment, burnout, and lack of creativity. Sleeping is not doing nothing. It is taking care of your heart, so you may love well.

Let us pray. Strengthen our hearts for the love you would have us show. Help us to continue to keep our hearts healthy and wide open to a world where love is the only answer. Amen.