



MONDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 2016

SERIES: PROVERBS & THE HEART

Read: Proverbs 1:1-7 & Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Plug In...

Over the next few weeks before we get back into Matthew's Gospel, we'll look at two of the main themes in the Book of Proverbs. Our *heart*, then our *words*. Jesus said the two are connected (Luke 6:45). This week our heart.

The introduction to Proverbs mentions the heart indirectly. The phrase "fear of the Lord" (1:7) is a command which is the heartbeat of Deuteronomy (it can be argued that Deuteronomy is the heartbeat of the Old Testament). The command is to "love the LORD your God with all your heart...and these commandments are to be on your hearts" (Deuteronomy 6:5-6). Deuteronomy shows the heart will be the centre of someone's spiritual condition. Now, the Book of Proverbs will divide human beings into two stark categories: the righteous=wise; and the wicked=foolish. When read in the context of Deuteronomy, Proverbs 1:7 tells us the division between wise and foolish is not fundamentally made at the behavioural level (not that this is not important) but at the level of the heart.

Chew It Over...

We often think of the righteous and wicked along ethical/moral lines. For sure, Proverbs has much to say about ethical behaviour and right living. But more primal and central to ethical actions and behaviours is our heart. 'Righteousness' in the Old Testament (including Proverbs) describes something deeper than 'good-behaviour'. It is talking about your most fundamental commitment.

Look deep within and ask to what commitment do you draw the hope of receiving life to the full? Look into which basket you are dumping all your eggs into.

Prayer Suggestion

Thank God because He is so gracious. Thank Him for circumcising our hearts so that our most fundamental love is now for His Son Jesus Christ. Thank Him that He provides us the standing of perfect *moral* righteousness through the atonement of Jesus even as we fumble; thank God for the heart disposition ('walking in the way of righteousness) that is for Christ and not against him.



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TUESDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2016

SERIES: PROVERBS & THE HEART

Read: Proverbs 2:1 – 3:6 & Matthew 6:13-27

Plug In...

Two paths are set out. A right road and a wrong road. It is clear that the heart is in the driver's seat. Each road lead to a destination (2:13). Leave the right road and the road gets dark and crooked and leads to death (2:18-19). In Proverbs, death is a realm called *Sheol*. Not much is explained about it other than at the point of physical death one enters it and is removed from life and life-to-the-full with God. Chapter 2:13 shows that this realm of the dead (whatever that entails in the future) reaches into current existence now when one steps off the straight path. As someone has put it, there is a far-side of death and a near-side of death. The far-side is entered at the point of physical death (which the Old Testament doesn't go too much further into explaining what happens next). The near-side of death is the experience of sickness, disease, calamity now. Proverbs says that the beginnings of death come now to the person who steps off the straight path. This passage from Proverbs gets the us to look around, notice stuff, notice that death is encroaching. The prompt is to jump-start the heart.

Chew It Over...

Jesus, a greater wisdom teacher than Solomon (Luke 11:31), went into more detail about the far-side of death (see: Mark 9:42-48). Jesus too was jump-starting people's hearts to come to him (Matthew 6:13-27). It sounds morbid, but where have you become numb to the encroachment of death. The very phrase "it sounds morbid" we use to cool-down the negative talk of impending death – are we pretending otherwise? Look deep into your driver's seat. Where is your heart taking you? Look around at the people you love, do their continuing actions reveal a theme? Do they suggest a heart already on a certain path? You may naturally want to talk about these actions, but how can you side-step that for the time being and target the heart. We've got to see the people around us a 'dead-men-walking' and remember that the gospel has not lost any of its power to change the heart.

Prayer Suggestion

Lord Jesus please give us a loving and keen spiritual eye for other people. May we discern where they may be at. Help us to recognise the connect between behaviour and the heart and to speak to the heart with the gospel. Give us gentleness, but truthfulness. May the person that we think of today be re-worked by your Holy Spirit.



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WEDNESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER 2016

SERIES: PROVERBS & THE HEART

Read: Proverbs 4:20-23

Plug In...

The heart is the controlling factor to one's life. Everything done originates in our heart. The father here encourages his son to focus efforts in on the heart. The father advises his son that life-change comes from the wisdom of God absorbed deep into the heart.

Chew It Over...

The heart chooses first, not the mind, not emotions – it's the heart. Jesus gets us to diagnose hearts: *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* (Matthew 6:21).

When talking about life with people we often ask questions like 'what happened?', 'how did it happen?', 'what were you thinking/feeling?' After these conversational questions, try including two further questions which nudge people to consider their real motives:

What did you do in response? (this connects people back into the story they're telling; we're pretty good at blame-shifting; we need to see that our heart did stuff too!)

Why? or What were you hoping to accomplish? (the heart is after something; can we get that treasure out there in order to address the heart).

[Of course we should ask these questions of ourselves too; or be brave enough to let someone ask it of us – guard your heart!].

Prayer Suggestion

Ask the Lord Jesus to, by his Holy Spirit, change and guard your heart. Ask for a heart deeply centred on Jesus and that less and less corrupt, mixed, motives drive your responses to people. Ask the Lord to make you a heart doctor, referring people in the community around you onto the Specialist!



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THURSDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2016

SERIES: PROVERBS & THE HEART

Read: Proverbs 15:13-15

Plug In...

These three proverbs have a connection running through them:

V.13 What goes on in the heart appears outwardly.

V.14 The image is one of eating or grazing (like a cow). So what your heart feeds on influences other things.

V.15 This is cyclical. The heart feeding on the right things never goes hungry.

Chew It Over...

So it's true, "we are what we eat". The Hebrew word for *meditate* is a word that means "chew the cud". Maybe the original word emerged as people observed how a cow will chew a little, then bring it back up, then chew it a bit more.

1 Timothy 4:15 in the NIV says "be diligent". The original verb is "meditate" on these things.

Let us not guarding our heart by hopeful chance. Feast on God's word. Chew on it daily.

Proverbs 4:23 – *Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life.*

Prayer Suggestion

Lord help us to see that a cheerful heart is not grounded in circumstances but grounded in you. Each day bless us through your word that we might know deep within our heart that Jesus is Lord, he is coming back, and he will take us to wedding banquet of the Lamb to live in the presence and peace of God – give us this joy; embedded it in our heart. May our face radiate this even in the midst of trying circumstances.



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FRIDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 2016

SERIES: PROVERBS & THE HEART

Read: Proverbs 21:1

Plug In...

We've been learning from Proverbs that the heart is the centre, the controlling force over a person's life. Here Proverbs says something further by zeroing-in on the most powerful person in the Ancient Near East society – the king! Something more primary to the direction a heart takes than one's own control of it, is the all-powerful, all-controlling God. Even the most powerful human beings are like putty in the hand of the LORD.

Chew It Over...

How does this truth impact you? How does it drive you to fearing God (Proverbs 1:7)? How does it help you understand grace? How does such fear of God mesh with confidence in God? What words does this truth bubble from your heart – what do you want to say back towards God?

Prayer Suggestion

Let your place in God's grace inform your words to Jesus today.



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WEEKEND 24-25 SEPTEMBER 2016

SERIES: PROVERBS & THE HEART

Read: Proverbs 16:23-24

Plug In...

Next week we will focus on proverbs that speak about the power of our words. Here, we see Proverbs state that in God's creation there is a profound connection between what we say and what is going on in our hearts.

Jesus said that what comes out of the mouth originates in the heart (Matthew 15:18).

Chew It Over...

These two proverbs smack the mantra of "sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me" on its head!

Review your language over the past 24 hours. Consider some conversations and ask of yourself what were your words doing?

Prayer Suggestion

Pray that over the next week God will ready you to have your heart changed and therefore your words affected.