



Men and Matters of the Heart Series – Part I

(www.mensgroup.org - “Original Study”)

PRAY: Opening and Closing prayers are suggested for small group members or individuals to invite God into the study to seek Him in His Word. Feel free to add your own words in prayer.

Dear Lord, help us to identify the difference between a heart dedicated to God and one dedicated to self. Help us change our hearts for the better by understanding and accepting the seriousness of our sins and accepting Christ as our Lord and Savior. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

INTRODUCTION:

Dorothy Gale was stranded after a tornado dropped her Kansas home into Munchkinland. She desperately wanted to return home to Uncle Harry and Aunt Em. She discussed her desire with the good witch, Glinda, who appeared at the crash site. Glinda could think of only one person, the Wizard of Oz, who might be able to help Dorothy. She was directed to follow the yellow brick road to the Emerald City. So, with Toto in hand, she skipped off to the chorus of “we’re off to see the wizard, the wonderful Wizard of Oz.”

On her way, she encountered three friends who joined her on the journey to Emerald City. They all desired something special from the Wizard. The lion wanted courage, the scarecrow a brain, and the tin man dreamed of having a heart. When they finally stood before the Wizard, they received tokens that symbolized they already had the qualities they sought. But Dorothy was still without a way home. The Wizard sought to help her, but he ended up floating away in his hot-air balloon without her on board. Glinda came to the rescue helping Dorothy to understand that she too already had in her possession the red slippers that would transport her home at the click of her heels and the wish of her voice.

Men, focus yourself on the desire of the tin man, a heart. Many men are heartless, maybe even called tin men. But most keep their hearts hidden, ignoring its use, and opting instead to rely on their intellect or gut feelings. What is the state of your heart? Is it alive and well or does it need improvement?

The Scriptures mention the physical heart, but primarily identify the heart as the center of the soul and spirit—influenced by the mind, emotion, and will. Dorothy’s three friends illustrated this trinity: a mind for the scarecrow, courage for the lion, and emotion for the tin man.

The heart is the place where moral and spiritual battles are fought. It is the place of regeneration and the abiding place of the Holy Spirit who comes and provides for us a new mind, emotion, and will so that we can connect with God. Additionally, we know that God can see into our hearts. He sees into every corner, and He alone is the One who can provide the best heart we could ever have.

In this study, we will address descriptive words in the Bible that broaden our understanding of our hearts. These words help us recognize our present state, whether lacking or abundant with them, and show us how to continue to develop a heart dedicated to God.

PURPOSE:

Our purpose in this study is to identify the difference between a heart dedicated to God and one dedicated to self. Based on the Word of God, we all start out as sinful. David said:

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. (Psalm 51:5)

Our mind and emotions have great influence over what kind of heart we'll have. The only way we can change our heart is to personally understand and accept the seriousness of our sin and accept Christ as our Lord and Savior. Join me on this journey deep into your heart. I promise you will understand it better and grow it in numerous and very positive ways.

Note: All verses used are from the 2011 New International Version (NIV) of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.

Men and Matters of the Heart Series:

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Lesson 1 – The Heart – The Inner Self

Lesson Focus: This lesson is an overview of what makes up the heart, why it’s important, and what we can learn about it so that we can have a better heart.

“Blessing on you for deciding to look at your heart and consider changes that will make you more Christ-like. Be prepared to learn abundantly.” – C. Marsh Bull.

Starting Prayer: *God, we thank you for our new hearts. You have made us new in Christ and we are grateful for a heart that can hear and respond to you and care for those around us. Help us to be quick to develop a heart that wants to be close to you.*

Opening Questions:

1. If you were to describe your heart, not the physical one but the immaterial one, what words would you use?

2. The heart experiences many emotions both good and bad, what is one emotion you have felt in your heart?

Scripture Passages:

Death and Destruction lie open before the Lord—how much more do human hearts!
(Proverbs 15:11)

As water reflects the face, so one’s life reflects the heart. (Proverbs 27:19)

Phrase Explanation:

We are distinguishing the heart that is at the center of our immaterial being - which is our soul and spirit, and includes the mind, emotion, and will, from the physical heart beating in our chest and the seat of physical life. The word heart means the midst, the innermost or hidden part of anything. It is the birthplace of motives and passions, and from where springs the conscience. This is illustrated by its usage as the heart of the sea, the heart of the fire, the heart of the city, and the heart of the matter.

There are many descriptive words, both positive and negative, attached to the heart in the books of Psalms and Proverbs. There are thirty-one adjectives used in Psalms, sixteen positives and fifteen negatives. In Proverbs there are twenty-eight adjectives used, twelve positives and

sixteen negatives, some of which include, trustful, diligent, perverse, wicked, lustful, deceitful, sorrowful, rebellious, proud, raging, and envious.

In the New Testament, Paul uses the word heart fifteen times to denote personality or inner life, thirteen times as the seat of our emotions, eleven times as the seat of our intellectual activities, and thirteen times as the seat of our volition.

Spurgeon said, “[Man devotes] himself to anything sooner than yield his heart’s love to his Maker, submit his intellect to the great Creator’s teaching, and render all his faculties to the service of the Most High.” He believed that man is prone to idolatry rather than godly worship and other godly spiritual activity.

Jesus chronicled the outflow from the heart:

But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person. (Matthew 15:18-20a)

This statement parallels the last five of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:13-17, which explained our relationships to others.

We like to think of our heart as the softer and more pliable part of us. It’s loving, compassionate, and cares about others first. But Jesus provided an x-ray of a real heart by explaining it as tainted with sin, a wanderer from God, and full of selfishness. God knows the heart better than we do, its motives and secrets, and that we can even be deceived by our own heart.

Solomon expressed the depths of God’s knowledge of the heart, saying:

Death and destruction lie open before the Lord—how much more do human hearts! (Proverbs 15:11)

Solomon also said:

As water reflects the face, so one’s life reflects the heart. (Proverbs 27:19)

Two things are evident: one, every man’s heart is under investigation by the Lord, and two, every heart reflects the man who carries it. There is no separation between the man and his heart.

If God knows the human heart and that heart reflects the real man and our state of sin, this is not good. Is there a way for us to be honest about our own heart’s condition? Yes, we can honestly assess it and make changes that will help us in life.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the difference between the heart in its natural state and the heart renewed by God through salvation?

2. If every heart is tainted with sin as Jesus said, then what does your heart spend the most time thinking about?

3. Tell the group about your spiritual heart operation when you accepted Jesus as your Savior.

Application:

1. How would you know if your heart was healthy and walking in the right direction?

2. What area of your heart needs attention?

3. Can you be a person that presents a façade, and can you be real from the bottom of your heart? Which more often represents you?

Closing Prayer: *God, you have made us, and you desire our hearts be turned toward you because you love us and desire fellowship with us. Help us not to ignore the Holy Spirit's promptings to do some spring cleaning in our hearts.*

Additional Resources:

Similar verses for a more understanding of the heart:
Psalm 28:7; 111: 119:2, 34; Jeremiah 4:14; 24:7; Matthew 15:8-9; Proverbs 26:23-25.

Spurgeon's statement is from his message on January 27, 1867.

Lesson 2 – The Peaceful Heart – Healthy Body, Soul, and Spirit

Lesson Focus: We will discuss the connection between a peaceful heart and a peaceful life.

“Blessing on you for searching after a peaceful heart, one that is not circumstantially evoked but is focused on God’s love and His ways.” – C. Marsh Bull.

Starting Prayer: *Father, we are here to make better choices than we have made before. Help us to understand the peace with God which happens in salvation and the peace of God than can be with us for our lifetime.*

Opening Questions:

1. What does your doctor say to you about having a healthy heart?

2. How did a friend of yours create a health problem for himself by the way he treated his heart?

Scripture Passage:

A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones. (Proverbs 14:30)

Phrase Explanation:

Located in the depths of our soul, our heart can be peaceful, calm, and content, even if life is swirling around you. In this state, it can bring hope and fulfillment to your life.

But a heart that is fearful, full of doubt, and hateful, has only fleeting peace, if any. Even sleep may fail you in your swirling times and a new morning will not guarantee life without pain.

Solomon, King of Israel, a very wise person praised for his wisdom said:

A heart at peace gives life to the body. (Proverbs 14:30a)

He was a busy man who loved the world God placed him in, was trained by his father, David, and was guided by God to great heights of power. He was always making decisions, pressed by the circumstances of Israel, and aware of forces trying to destroy him. It seemed like he would have a heart in turmoil, but this is his proverb on peace which suggests benefits to all his body, soul, and spirit from having peace.

He said that a peaceful heart inside his soul led to health for his whole body, soul, and spirit. A peaceful heart is one “in which all emotions and appetites are in a healthy equilibrium.” “It has an absence of selfishness and rejoices in other’s happiness and honor.”

Solomon goes on to contrast the first phrase in the verse to the second. Read all together it says:

A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones. (Proverbs 14:30)

Envy, a form of jealous idolatry, creates problems beyond the heart, even into the bones. Selfishness wounds the heart and brings irreparable damage not only to the heart but also to the rest of your soul. There can be fretting and disgust over others' joyous successes.

God offers two types of peace. The first is the peace with God expressed by Paul:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1)

We have been adrift on the sea of life and unanchored but when Christ is accepted into our lives, we see the tension between our sin and God eliminated. Peace is brought to our soul and spirit.

The second is the peace of God which relates to our daily life. Paul said:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Anxiousness and peacefulness cannot abide together. God is ready to respond to your needs raised to Him in prayer knowing He is on your side and desires the best for you. You can be at peace even when you don't fully understand it when you allow God's peace to guard your heart and keep you peaceful.

Which heart do you want, the healthy peaceful one or the unhealthy pitiful one? Your decisions will make that determination for you.

Discussion Questions:

1. When have you felt your heart was peaceful?

2. How did you achieve this peace?

3. How long did that peace last?

Application:

- 1. What is going through your mind when you're not peaceful in your heart?

- 2. What are steps you can take in your heart to continue to have peace?

- 3. What would you say to a friend who doesn't have peace in his heart?

Closing Prayer: *God, we thank you for the gift of a peaceful heart. We understand it starts with our relationship with Christ and it continues into eternity. Help us depend on you for our peace and keep us from the distractors that rattle it.*

Suggested Additional Resources:

Similar passages: Php. 4:6-7; Col. 1:20; Col. 3:15

Statement on a "healthy equilibrium" is from *Barnes Notes, Proverbs*, pg. 44.

Statement of "absence of selfishness" is from *Exposition of Proverbs* by Charles Bridges, pg. 190.

Lesson 3 – The Joyful Heart – Expressed in Your Face and Outlook

Lesson Focus: We will discuss how you can have a more joyful life.

“Blessing on you as you delve deeper into your heart. Good things happen when you walk into its rooms and clean out the cobwebs and dirt.” – C. Marsh Bull

Starting Prayer: *Holy Spirit, we know that joy comes from you and that joy can be present in every situation of life. Help us to draw on the Spirit’s strength to have that joy with us throughout the ups and downs of life.*

Opening Questions:

1. What do you think is the difference between happiness and joy?

2. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being very limited and 5 being almost always, how would you rate the amount of joy you have regularly and why?

Scripture Passage:

I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With Him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. (Psalm 16:7-8)

Phrase Explanation:

There is a lot to be said for joyfulness. Synonyms for joyful would include glad, rejoicing, happy, and cheerful. It can change attitudes and actions daily. But what are the steps to get a more regular joyful heart?

Step one is recognizing that it is not circumstances that result in a joyful heart but the careful reflection on WHO is guiding and abiding within us. The psalmist said:

The Lord...counsels me...is always right beside me...I will not be shaken. (Psalm 16:7-8)

He is not guiding from afar and does not forsake, but is closer than a brother to us.

The psalmist continues:

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices. My body also will rest secure. (Proverbs 16:9)

When the heart is glad, the body echoes that gladness by enabling us to rest in all situations, past, present, and future.

Further, the joyful heart authenticates the rightness of the commandments of the Lord. Being obedient to them places us within God’s boundaries and that helps us to deal with the sorrow and sadness from sin. We can trust Him with all our being when we hide His words in our hearts. Examine the Psalmist statements on this in Psalm 19:8; 28:7; 119:11.

This is what we have said is important in step one, and when we make it into an equation, it looks like this:

$$\text{GUIDANCE} + \text{PRESENCE} + \text{SAFETY} + \text{TRUST} = \text{A JOYFUL HEART}$$

That moves us to step two: the outward expression of this joyful heart. Solomon identified it as the result, “a happy heart makes the face cheerful” and “the cheerful heart has a continual feast” (Proverbs 15:13, 15b). A happy face is the outward expression of a joyful heart and with it a positive rather than negative outlook on everything we face during our time on earth.

In all his wisdom, Solomon found that “a cheerful heart is good medicine” (Proverbs 17:22), or better said, “works a good healing.” The joyful heart has an influence on the healing of our life. This is a joyfulness that when happening in proper measure, on proper subjects, at proper times becomes a “legitimate pleasure.”

So, let’s add this to our previous equation:

$$\text{GUIDANCE} + \text{PRESENCE} + \text{SAFETY} + \text{TRUST} = \text{A JOYFUL HEART, A HAPPY FACE, AND A POSITIVE OUTLOOK!}$$

An assurance that the Lord guides and is right beside us leads to having a joyful heart that expresses itself through a happy face and a positive outlook. Now, do the math for yourself, what is this all adding up to for your heart?

Discussion Questions:

1. What’s one of the key ingredients to having a joyful heart?

2. What do you feel is the value of a joyful heart in the process of healing?

3. When have you experienced legitimate pleasure and how did you get there?

Application:

1. In your own words, what does a joyful heart mean to you?

2. If you don't have a joyful heart, what are you missing on the left side of the equation?

3. What would be three steps you can take today to obtain a joyful heart?

Closing Prayer: *Holy Spirit, we ask your help in being obedient to Your promptings and convictions, we want to trust you in whatever circumstance you allow us to undergo and have an inward joyful heart that reflects you on our face.*

Suggested Additional Resources:

Polar opposite verses of the joyful heart:
Proverbs 14:10; Psalm 6:3; Psalm 73:21, Psalm 38:8; 55:4; Lamentations 5:15
“Legitimate pleasure” comes from Charles Bridges, An Exposition of Proverbs, pg. 279.

Lesson 4 – The Wise Heart – The result of Humility and a Desire to Mature

Lesson Focus: We will be investigating the benefits of and blessings to a person who maintains a wise heart.

“Blessing on you for desiring to be wise. May your journey into wisdom be full of knowledge, experience, insight, and be recognized as a gift from God.” – C. Marsh Bull.

Starting Prayer: *Father, you want us to be wise, to live a life that is not broken down but built up. Help us to see the value of wisdom in our daily lives and decisions today.*

Opening Questions:

1. Share several characteristics of the wisest person you have ever known personally.

2. Recently, when have you desired to make a wise decision and why?

Scripture Passage:

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. (James 1:5)

Phrase Explanation:

To be identified as a wise person suggests that your high level of knowledge, depth of experience, and intuition have united with your skills and abilities. Like capabilities and skills acquired in warfare or in the leadership of a business, wise choices at the right moments protect you from missteps and give you confidence as you move forward. There is an even deeper source of wisdom that comes from God, it is His spiritual gift of wisdom.

Solomon, the son of King David and Bathsheba, was thrust into the position of king at a time of crisis brought about because Adonijah, David’s fourth son, had decided to declare himself the new king of Israel. But Bathsheba went to David and reminded him of his vow to make Solomon the next king. Immediately, David’s officials gathered, and Zadok, the priest, anointed Solomon with oil to be Israel’s next king.

When news of this reached Adonijah’s party, the guests quickly dispersed and Adonijah rushed to the sacred tent to take hold of the horns of the altar, to stop anyone from killing him. The story continues in 1 Kings 1 as Solomon’s reign begins.

Only in his teens, Solomon felt the heaviness of responsibility related to being King. One day during his worship and sacrifice at Gibeon, God graciously came to him in a dream and said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you" (1 Kings 3:5b). What a great promise from God. Solomon could seemingly ask of God anything and have Him agree to it.

His reply is notable:

Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king...But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties...[over] a great people, too numerous to count...So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong." (1 Kings 3:7-9)

The Lord was pleased and responded:

Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you nor will there ever be! (1 Kings 3:11-12)

Because of Solomon's love for God and the humility in his request, God blessed him abundantly, and if he obeyed God's decrees and commands, he was promised a long life.

Through his writing of Ecclesiastes, Solomon found a futile end to merely having human wisdom, which was meaningless and worthless (Ecclesiastes 2:9-11). But the rest of the wisdom literature Solomon wrote emphasized that God-given wisdom enables a person to lead a good, true, and satisfying life.

Several more blessings are identified as the benefit of a wise heart. It is tuned to God, receives a reputation for its understanding, its "gracious words promote instruction" (Proverbs 16:21), and it is humble in its willingness to learn, "the wise in heart accept commands..." (Proverbs 10:8a).

A wise heart is deep and wide, and has other elements that are necessary to obtain it. It is given by God to those who are humble, trustworthy, and desire to mature. It is precious, useful, and honoring to have godly wisdom.

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think Solomon's response to God revealed about him?

2. Put in your own words what you think is the difference between human wisdom and God-given wisdom.

3. What struck a chord with you in Solomon's story?

Application:

1. How deep is your desire to have a wise heart? How would it help you?

2. What would be necessary to do if you received it?

3. What would you say to a young man who wanted to have wisdom?

Closing Prayer: *Father, your word has revealed to us the importance of desiring and obtaining wisdom for our lives. Gives us the desire for a wise heart, one that loves You, obeys You, and knows the difference between truth and falsehood.*

Suggested Additional Resources:

Similar or opposite verses: James 3:13-17; Proverbs 2:2-6, 9-11; Proverbs 16:23; Psalm 90:12;
Proverbs 23:15; Proverbs 10:20; Psalm 5:9

Lesson 5 – The Steadfast Heart – Courageous, Resolute, Confident, Persistent, Fearless

Lesson Focus: We will view the difference between a steadfast heart and a failing heart and use several synonyms to expand our understating of “steadfast.”

“Blessing on those who are steadfast when facing issues in their family, their finances, their health, their relationships, and trust in God to carry them through.” – C. Marsh Bull.

Starting Prayer: *Father God, we know that in all things you work out good for those who love you. We know that you are on our side and that your grace is sufficient in our life. Help us to understand and act on what it means to have a steadfast heart.*

Opening Questions:

1. Share about a time when you were very discouraged, and how you dealt with it.

2. How has your life grown because of past hard times?

Scripture Passage:

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. (Psalm 57:7)

Phrase Explanation:

Who have you known that seemed to never be discouraged in a time of great trouble? Winston Churchill was this type of man. He survived many years of failure to finally hold the office of Prime Minister of England during World War II. He had a good stubbornness about him and was firmly determined not to give up. He showed his grit, guts, and courage in the following statements:

- “Never, never, never give up.”
- “If you’re going through hell, keep going.”
- “You have enemies? Good. It means you’ve stood up for something, sometime in your life.”
- “Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak, it’s also what it takes to sit down and listen.”

- “Continuous effort – not strength or intelligence – is the key to unlocking our potential.”
- “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.”

For the believer, courage, resoluteness, and confidence are all evidence of a steadfast heart. It is a heart that is firmly planted in faith and trust in God. It is a heart that exudes confidence and why not, our God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and always by our side. To repurpose words of Marvin Gaye’s song, “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough,” to words of God’s promise to be there for you, “ain’t no mountain high enough, ain’t no valley low enough, ain’t no river wide enough to keep me from getting to you.” There is not a day that God is on vacation, has a hearing problem, or hangs out a do not disturb sign.

The believer rooted in God says:

Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever. They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord.” (Psalm 112:6-7)

Steadfast means they are confident, fearless, firm, persistent, courageous, and resolute.

The opposite of steadfast is revealed in a failing heart. It has given up and given in to the pressures around them. The psalmist found himself in that position when he said:

For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head and my heart fails within me.” (Psalm 40:12)

He is overwhelmed with many troubles, fearful, discouraged, and weak.

He cannot say as the steadfast person says:

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (Psalm 73:25-26)

Being steadfast is a condition of the heart that expresses itself through the daily action of deeply trusting in the God of the universe.

Discussion Questions:

1. In your life, who is your example of a steadfast person?

2. When you read about being steadfast, how much do you see yourself there?

Application:

1. In what specific ways are you steadfast in your life?

2. What needs to be addressed in your life to make you more steadfast?

3. What would be your first step in that direction?

Closing Prayer: *Father God, we are amazed at your word and how it challenges us to a steadfast heart. We know this is a crucial element to living a life dedicated to God. All around us, the world is vying for our attention, but we want to be steadfast in our faith in you.*

Suggested Additional Resources:

Similar or opposite verses about steadfast: Psalm 51:10; 57:7; 108:1; 112:7; Isaiah 26:3; 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Chronicles 27:6.

Lesson 6 – The Upright Heart – Recognizing Sin, Savior, and Salvation

Lesson Focus: Our objective is to compare our desperately wicked heart, which we have from birth, with the actions required to obtain an upright heart.

“Blessing on every man that decides for God. Who kneels to honor the work of Christ to save him and desires to live a life that is upright.” – C. Marsh Bull

Starting Prayer: *Father God, my life is drawn daily to do acts of sin. I want to have a heart that is upright and able to push away evil thoughts and actions. Help me better understand an upright heart so I can live it out.*

Opening Questions:

1. When was the last time someone called you righteous?

2. What were the circumstances around this identification of you?

Scripture Passage:

Lord, do good to those who are good, to those who are upright in heart. (Psalm 125:4)

Phrase Explanation:

We are continually told that there is good in every person. That we have to look for it and believe that man is good at the core. Although that may be the opinion of some, that does not square with God’s word. Jeremiah said under the Spirit’s inspiration:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and beyond cure. Who can understand it?
(Jeremiah 17:9)

We can see how a desperately wicked heart might want to be revealed as other than that. It would want to deceive us about our own nature. Jeremiah continued:

I, the Lord, search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve. (Jeremiah 17:10).

The heart, the internal part of our being including the immaterial part of the mind, emotion, and will, is identified as deceitful (Proverbs 6:14; 26:24), scheming (Proverbs 6:18), evil (Proverbs 26:23), perverse (Proverbs 11:20; 17:20; Psalm 101:4), destructive (Psalm 5:9),

slandorous (Psalm 41:6), and cunning (Psalm 64:6). These words create a powerful picture of the heart within us all. No one is exempt.

Is there concrete proof of these accusations of a wicked and deceitful heart? Yes. After the fall of Adam and Eve, God couldn't allow them to stay in the Garden of Eden, so they were ushered out. Years later Cain, their oldest son, murdered Abel, their second son. In a short period of time darkness entered the heart of Cain.

More time passed and Noah was chosen to build an ark to house animals and eight humans. The rest died in a worldwide flood because "the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence...for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways" (Genesis 6:11-12). No one was left out of that "all" statement. Later after centuries of slavery, Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt and they were given the Ten Commandments. These ten laws laid out their actions toward God, their parents, and their neighbors.

Then Jesus entered the world, lived among us, and died on the cross having done no evil. He is good to the core because He is God to the core and He becomes God's perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of everyone. Jesus provided a way for humankind again to have a pure heart that could be upright, honest, truthful, and God-loving.

This is a pure heart and it aligns with gracious speech and pure hands. It is a heart that thinks carefully before speaking. A pure heart's attitudes and actions lean toward God and not away from Him. The way of these people is bright and joyful. How has this change happened? Christ exchanged His Godly nature for our sinful nature on the cross and brought each believer a new nature so that we can operate out of it.

To be upright is to have a heart that has been cleansed; made new by God. An upright heart's motives and actions are not aligned with evil. Can you say that of your own heart?

Understanding and accepting that we are not upright and need a savior leads us to grasp the price God paid to save us and make that happen.

Thank Him today that you can have a heart that is upright because of Him.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why don't we have an upright heart?

2. What is the nature of our sinful heart?

3. What one memory reminds you of the way your heart used to be?

Application:

1. How is an evil heart turned to an upright heart?

2. When have you felt that upright heart working inside you and how did you know this?

3. What one action could help you to keep your heart upright?

Closing Prayer: *Father God, you have been gracious to me through your Son, Jesus Christ, and I thank you for your patience, love, and plan. Help me to recognize it and commit my new heart to it daily.*

Suggested Additional Resources:

Similar or opposite verses: Psalm 7:10; 11:2; 24:4; 32:11; 36:10; 51:10; 73:1; 94:15; 97:11;
Proverbs 20:9; 22:11.