**A Heart for Christ**

**Sermon**

**Scripture: Matthew 22:36-38**

In May of 2008, I experienced chest pains that led me to the Emergency Room. The technicians ran the necessary tests and procedures, and the doctors concluded that I was OK. However, they admitted me to the hospital.

• The heart is one of the most important organs in the entire human body. It is a pump composed of a muscle that pumps blood throughout the body. The blood then delivers the oxygen and nutrients that every cell needs and removes dangerous wastes. That’s why physicians take complains about the heart seriously, and why they admitted me. They wanted to monitor my heart to ensure that nothing was missed. A person could be looking fine one minute and suffer a heart attack the next.

• According to Dr. Neal Barnard’s blog, “By the time many people reach their 20s, blockages that disrupt the flow of blood already exist within their arteries. When particles of cholesterol, fat, and other cells build up in the arteries they eventually form plaques that obstruct blood flow. These blockages affect the arteries leading to the heart, causing chest pain and often result in heart attack.” (See <http://www.pcrm.org/nbBlog/index.php/the-warning-signs-of-clogged-arteries>.)

• The good news is that we are able to control what we feed our heart in order to keep it healthy. Our hearts must be physically and spiritually well in order for us to live a full life. In Proverbs 4:23, we are admonished to, “Guard our heart above all else, for everything we do flows out of it,” (NIV).

• The following are several guidelines to help maintain a healthy *physical* heart:

* 1. Eat right.
	2. Be active.
	3. Maintain an appropriate body weight.
	4. Quit smoking and stay away from second-hand smoke.
	5. Control your cholesterol.
	6. Avoid alcohol.
	7. Manage stress.

• Now, lt’s talk about some guidelines to help us maintain a healthy *spiritual* heart:

1. *Eat Right*: Feed on the Word of God. Read your Bible daily. Commit to a regular devotional life. Read books and listen to messages that are spiritually uplifting.
2. *Be actively involved in kingdom work*. Use your talents for Christ.
3. *Maintain your weight*. Paul advises us to travel light. Hebrews 12:1 says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,” (NIV). You cannot experience God’s best for you while carry weights and baggage such as unforgiveness, bitterness, hatred, malice, etc).
4. *Avoid bad company*. Instead, surround yourself with those who will encourage you and help you on the journey.
5. *Control your cholesterol*. The Word of God is rich! Don’t just eat spiritual food for use in Bible study or to show off knowledge. Rather, walk in the Word. Live it. Make it life. Work it off!
6. *Avoid all evil*.
7. *Do not worry.* Lack of trust in God causes us to worry, but Matthew 6:31-33, tells us, “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

On our own, we are unable to remain spiritually fit. For those of us who attend church, I honestly believe we try. But too often we experience blockage in our arteries.

The more I interact with people and discuss stewardship, the more I am convinced that stewardship is not about tithes and offerings, talents, or time. I have spoken to people who indicated that they needed more knowledge on tithing. I’ve shared, they began returning only to discontinue a few months later. I’ve met people who are excited about serving in church or doing outreach, only to become discourage and fall by the way side.

• You may be asking, “So, what is stewardship?”

• Stewardship is a heart condition. The condition of our heart determines who or what we worship. As stewards, we understand that God is to occupy first place in our lives. In Jesus’s response to the Pharisees, we are reminded of God’s position in our lives. They were questioning Jesus on foolishness; nothing to do with anything! They questioned Him about who will be whose husband in heaven:

 • Our Scripture reading for today, Matthew 22:36-38:

*“’Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.This is the first and greatest commandment.’”*

In Hebrew thought, heart and mind are often used interchangeable*.* An example is Proverbs 23:7, *“As he thinks in his heart so is he,”*  (NKJV).

 Stewardship is a heart condition. We are to love God with our all. That is stewardship.

I remember this song from morning devotion during my elementary school years.

*I want Jesus in my whole life,*

*I want Jesus in my life In my walking, in my talking, in my sleeping, in my waking,*

*I want Jesus in my life.*

 We sang this song without really understanding what it means to have Jesus in our whole life. When we love God with all our heart, no one has to nag us to do things for Christ. We just *do*, we just *give*.

• Before experiencing a heart attack, minor symptoms are often ignored. If you are not sure about your heart condition, listen as I give some symptoms of spiritual heart disease:

1. Ungratefulness (never satisfied).
2. Constant worry about money.
3. Busyness. Too busy to spend time with God or do anything for others.
4. Constant excuses for not giving.
5. Find reasons for not using talents.

 • Here’Symptoms of a healthy heart – When Christ is Center

1. Expresses an attitude of gratitude.
2. Experiences contentment.
3. Seeks opportunities to give.
4. Uses talents for God’s glory.
5. Spends time with God (devotional time).
6. Shares God’s goodness.
7. Devotes time to serve.
8. Values family.

 • Ellen White tells us in *Counsels on Stewardship*, page 27, “When the perfect love of God is in the heart, wonderful things will be done. Christ will be in the heart of the believer as a well of water springing up into everlasting life. When the heart is cleansed from sin, Christ is placed on the throne that self-indulgence and love of earthly treasure once occupied. The image of Christ is seen in the expression of the countenance. The work of sanctification is carried forward in the soul. Self-righteousness is banished. There is seen the putting on of the new man, which after Christ is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

***When Jesus is center of your life, you will have the three P’s in your heart.***

# • The first P is Purpose: You will be purpose-driven. You will know you are special and you are called.

*“But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light,”* (Peter 2:9, NLT).

How do you show the goodness of God? Use what you have and what you’ve experienced. What is it you have in your hand? Whatever it is, use it. Don’t look at what someone else is using. Use what you have, not to impress but to show others God’s goodness. What has God done for you lately? Tell it. What has God given you? Share it.

• The Second P is **Passion:**

When Jesus is center of your life, His will becomes your desire. You’ll remain focused, despite challenges and temptations. You’ll understand that doing His will and living for Him will allow you to experience God’s best for you.

Psalms 37:4 tells us, *“Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart’s desires”* (NLT).

• The third P is **Purity**: When Christ is center you will keep your mind, and body pure.

*“Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts,”* (2 Timothy 2:22, NLT).

Don’t entertain evil thoughts or engage in premarital sex, which misrepresents God.

I am sure you all will agree with me that the key to faithfulness is to allow Jesus to reside in our hearts. You will then be kingdom-driven. It’s not difficult to tell whether or not you are kingdom-driven. Check out your checking account and/or credit card statements. Your money and your heart are connected.

• Matthew 6:21 – “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” (NIV).

In Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians, he prayed that Christ may dwell in their hearts richly. It is also my prayer for us.

• “When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father,the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen,” (Ephesians 3: 14-21, NLT).

Do you understand what it means for your heart to be Christ’s home? When Christ dwells in your heart, you will experience peace and will serve faithfully regardless of your circumstances. Your circumstances won’t dictate how you relate to God.

So, when the bills are high and the income is low, God will have priority in your finances. The first 10 percent will be His. When there is too much going on in your life, you don’t put Christ and His work on hold. No, you give Him the number one spot.

During my high school years, I was taught by my first pastor that God should always be first. I took him literally. So, during end-of-semester exams in high school we had a crusade. One of my peers said she could not attend because she had to study. The rest of us attended the nightly meetings. The only person from the group that repeated the grade was the one who did not attend the meetings. That was a lesson learned early. It does not mean, however, that you abandon everything and everyone and do church work 24/7. But when God is the center of your life, He directs your path. He will give you wisdom to govern your time.

You will understand that your body does not belong to you. It is God’s temple. He resides there. So rather than yielding to fornication, you will feed your spirit with the things of God. You won’t engage in premarital sex because your body is God’s temple and He dwells within it. Temptation will present itself, but you will remain pure until marriage because you know that is God’s best for you. God will give you the power over temptation and provide a way of escape.

Your will feed your spirit with the things of God. Your will align yourself with God and His people.

When Christ is in your heart, no blockage to obstruct the flow of the blood of Jesus will be present. We look at Bible characters and the wonderful deeds that these sinful men and women were able to do and we feel inadequate. But the same God who worked mightily in them is able to do the same in us!

Jesus wants to make your heart His home. Just as the heart pumps blood throughout the body, delivering oxygen and nutrients that our cells need, and to remove dangerous waste, Christ does the same in us. He supplies strength to the body, soul, and mind. He keeps us in perfect peace, enabling us to stand against the enemy’s attacks and gives us overcoming power over sin (waste).

Do you want the blood of Jesus to flow through your entire body without blockage? Accept Him into your heart.

• *“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends,” (*Revelation 3:20, NLT). Jesus is not going to force His way into your heart. He is pleading:

• **289 – The Savior Is Waiting**
The Savior is waiting to enter your heart
Why don’t you let Him come in?
There’s nothing in this world to keep you apart
What is your answer to Him?

[Refrain]
Time after time
He has waited before
And now He is waiting again
To see if you are willing
To open the door
Oh, how He wants to come in.
If you’ll take one step
Toward the Savior, my friend,
You’ll find His arms open wide.
Receive Him, and all of your darkness will end
Within your heart He’ll abide.

 *SDA Hymnal*, 289