

Heart Breaker

Heart disease is America's No. 1 killer, yet its roots are far more spiritual than most think

Did you know that heart disease kills more Americans each year than all cancers *combined*? In fact, almost 600,000 people in the U.S. die of heart disease each year—that's one in every four deaths.

The risks of heart disease are diverse and well-publicized: diet, exercise, smoking, high blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, genetics, age and gender.

But there's another factor that frequently goes unnoticed. And while its impact is great, it's not likely to come up in conversations with your doctor.

What is this often-overlooked risk factor? The status of your spirit.

The link between one's spiritual and physical condition is irrefutable. Verses such as Proverbs 17:22 bear witness to the connection: "A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones." Scientific research lines up with these biblical truths, as multiple studies confirm a link between the spirit man and the physical man when it comes to health.

In light of this knowledge, our pursuit of fitness—particularly that of a fit heart—must include an assessment of our spiritual fitness.

When it comes to avoiding heart disease, it's not enough to focus solely on a nutritious diet and adequate exercise. It's not enough to stop smoking and avoid foods that would clog our arteries and shoot our cholesterol level sky high. Yes, these are all vitally important steps to take for the care and well-

being of our bodies. But optimal health requires us to become equally diligent in improving ourselves spiritually.

How can the wholeness we long for in the physical man be hindered by infirmity in the spirit man? Let's examine a few of the most potent spiritual heart breakers.

Twisting Scripture and Testing God

Jesus, at the start of His earthly ministry, was tempted three times by Satan while in the wilderness. In the second temptation, the devil took Jesus to a high point on the temple and enticed Him to jump.

He reasoned, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone'" (Matt. 4:6).

Here, Satan twisted a passage in Psalm 91 in his attempt to trap the Lord. He quoted a passage that speaks of *trusting* God but used it to persuade Jesus to *test* God.

Jesus' simple response, however, brought clarity to the matter. He said, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'" (Matt. 4:7). In this response, Jesus secured the victory for Himself, and He demonstrated how to guard against a serious heart breaker: *Don't test God*.

Jesus was tempted to jump from a dangerous height with the expectation God would rescue Him. Though we aren't likely to find ourselves on the ledge of a skyscraper, the essence of the temptation is common: We test God when we yield to our flesh, believing God will supernaturally spare us from its consequences.

How does this error affect our risk for cardiovascular disease? We know diet plays a major role in heart disease. Some foods protect the heart against coronary artery disease,

and some foods increase the risk. Because of this, we know certain foods should be eaten in moderation or avoided entirely.

But over the years, both in my office and other settings, I've encountered Christians who use the Bible to justify their unhealthy eating habits. One favorite passage they quote is Matthew 15:10-11: "Jesus called the crowd to him and said, 'Listen and understand. What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them'" (NIV).

A second favorite passage is Acts 10:13-15: "Then a voice told him, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.' 'Surely not, Lord!' Peter replied. 'I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.' The voice spoke to him a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean' (NIV).

Let's be clear: Neither of these passages make any connection between diet and disease, nor do they give us license to eat in a manner detrimental to our health.

Likewise, the benefits of exercise, specifically with respect to the heart, are irrefutable. Exercise makes the heart stronger. It improves circulation and lowers blood pressure. The benefits of exercise on the body—and specifically the heart—are too numerous to count.

But all too often, I encounter folks who justify a sedentary lifestyle with such passages as 1 Timothy 4:8: "For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (NKJV).

Satan's bag of tricks never changes. Just as he tempted Jesus to test God, he does the same to us. And the method he uses in the 21st century is the same he employed more than 2,000 years ago with our Savior: taking God's Word out of context and twisting the Scriptures to validate error and lead us into

ruin.

Remember, the devil's desire is our destruction. He would have us justify gluttony and laziness to the detriment of our health, rather than exemplify such heart-healthy virtues as discipline, moderation and self-control.

Simmering in Toxic Emotions

Anger, bitterness and wrath are other heart breakers. These toxic emotions are as harmful as poison, and they have the capacity to destroy our well-being. Both our mental health and our physical health is damaged when we allow negative emotions to take root in our souls, and the cardiovascular system is especially vulnerable.

Once again, scientific evidence lines up with the Word of God in this respect. Extensive medical research has examined the connection between personality and heart disease. The results consistently show that people with bitter dispositions and those prone to outbursts of anger are at significantly higher risk for heart disease, especially heart attack.

Ultimately, this is a spiritual issue. God admonishes us to "let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from [us], with all malice" (Eph. 4:31), and these toxic emotions are a reliable indicator of an unwillingness to forgive.

The Lord would have us purge ourselves of these negative emotions, practice forgiveness and be reconciled with our brothers and sisters. This explains why the next verse in the passage says, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."

When you obey God by forgiving others, you release yourself from the harmful bondage of toxic emotions. God blesses your spiritual heart with the joy of reconciliation, and He blesses your physical heart by protecting it from disease.

Believing God Doesn't Care

The false teachers of the early church spread the erroneous message that God was not interested in the physical realm of life, but only the spiritual. Those who believed these lies felt justified committing sins against the body.

Paul countered these false messages with the truth that God is very much concerned about the physical body. In Romans 12:1, he describes our bodies as "living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God."

And in 1 Corinthians, he gives even greater prominence to the body: "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (6:19-20).

In many respects, how we live determines whether our hearts are fit or diseased. But it's not easy to modify our lifestyles, especially if we've been living with certain habits and behaviors for many years. This explains why the vast majority of people are unsuccessful at long-term change.

Here's one secret to success: Agree with God!

This may sound simplistic, but it holds the key to victory. If we agree with God that the body *is* a living sacrifice, then we'll be motivated to achieve wholeness in the physical realm of our lives, just so we can offer Him our best. If we agree with God that the body *is* the place where the Holy Spirit resides, then we will think twice before defiling that temple with foods, beverages and substances that do damage to its structure and cripple its foundation.

When we agree with God in our mind, then our actions will follow suit. But if we believe that God is not concerned with the physical realm, then we will never find the fortitude we

need to stick to a healthy lifestyle.

When you fully agree with God that the physical realm is important, then He will give you all the wisdom and strength you need to edify your body, His temple. Then the physical and spiritual needs of your heart will be kept whole.

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Dr. Kara Davis explains how your weight loss could be contingent upon your spiritual health. Visit to learn more.