

Spiritually Speaking, How Healthy Is Your Heart?

Once a year, I go to the doctor and get a check-up. And every time, one of the things they do is check my heart.

A good thorough exam will reveal if there are any problems that need to be addressed before a heart condition arises.

I believe we need to do the same thing with our own hearts, spiritually speaking. Because the truth is, everyone's heart is in *some* condition. In fact, we have a responsibility to do this as Proverbs 4:23 tells us, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (NIV). Frequent check-ups will enable us to identify and act on those issues quickly—both physically *and* spiritually.

We can so easily get in the habit of doing life, just going through the motions, even when doing "Christian things," and not realize that something unhealthy has crept into our heart. Some of those things not only affect us, but they can hurt or negatively impact others as well. The longer an issue, or heart condition, is left unattended, the deeper its roots go. Then it becomes harder and harder to deal with. But the good news is, we can prevent that with God's help.

Testing and Guarding Your Heart

In order to properly guard your heart, it's important to understand just what that means. When I talk about the condition of your heart, I'm talking about what's inside you ... whatever it is that makes you do what you do.

For instance, how many times have you said or done something you're not very proud of and thought, *I can't believe I did that!* Well, God allows some situations to happen to show us what's in our heart. It's like when I get my annual physical,

the doctor checks my heart by running certain tests. Those tests are designed to discover if anything is wrong or confirm that everything is okay.

In much the same way, God tests us to show us what's in our heart. He doesn't do it to shame or embarrass us. He just wants us to see what's going on so we can face our issues, deal with them with the help of the Holy Spirit and grow stronger in Christ.

Our heart ultimately governs our behavior. So when we say or do something that "surprises" us, if we will get really honest with ourselves (and with God) and think about it, we will discover the root of that action.

God is more interested in our motives—the why behind the what. Matthew 5:8 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (NIV). He is not looking at our outer actions as closely as He is looking at what motivates them. Because what's inside us is the root that produces what comes out of us. God is much more concerned that the things we do come from a pure, Holy Spirit-led heart.

Motives Are Like Leaves

The lesson of the fig tree in Matthew chapter 21 gives us a good depiction of motives. At first, I couldn't understand why Jesus would curse a poor tree just because it only had leaves on it. But then I saw that He knew whenever a fig tree bears leaves, it means there is fruit under them. Jesus was hungry and that fig tree was giving the wrong message!

Sometimes, in the midst of what we're doing, we need to stop and think about *why* we're doing it. Is it to be seen ... to impress somebody ... for the accolades ... or is it because we really care?

Get a Check-up

We need to be sure we are doing what we do as unto the Lord and not for any other purpose. People in this world are spiritually hungry. And as Christians, it's not enough for us to go around displaying our "leaves," things that just make us look like believers. We must bear "fruit" under those leaves. What is our fruit? It's love ... *loving people, helping them, giving*; not only our money, but our time, our efforts and ourselves. People need to see love in action.

Having a heart that's right with God is absolutely the best thing we can do for ourselves. That's why I encourage you to do a spiritual heart "check-up" on a regular basis: have a meeting with yourself and be honest with yourself about your motives. Work with the Holy Spirit and He will help you keep your heart pure and in good condition so you can show others His love in everything you do.

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