

The Heart

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[0:00] I hope you've enjoyed our series on Proverbs. We're going to be in it for a little bit longer. And man, there's been a lot of really good takeaways. Hopefully something has stuck with you and you're kind of thinking about how you live.

I sure have. Today's topic's a little more nebulous, but very important. And so I want to help you help put this, bring some clarity to this issue of the heart.

That's what we're talking about today is our hearts, okay? And here's the questions I want to answer. One, what does the Bible mean when it says the heart? Why is the heart important? And then finally, how do we take care of our hearts?

Okay, how do we take care of our hearts? Now, in modern English, we use the word heart in different ways. Obviously, you know, in a concrete way, it's an organ in our body. Pretty important one.

Pretty important one. I'm no, like, surgeon, but I'll say you probably can, you need it. It's not like some things you can take out. Not that one. It pumps the lifeblood right to our system, right?

[1:00] So this is like the control center to our lifeblood. And the oxygen and everything gets through our body and keeps us alive. We use it as a metaphor as well. We may say, I mean, I love you with all my heart.

Or something bad happens. You lose something or someone. You say, I feel heartbroken. Or I have a heavy heart today. And there's some places in our vocab where it kind of mixes or our experience, right?

Maybe in school and you see that cute girl, that cute guy, and all of a sudden they come across the room to talk to you. And you're like, I felt like my heart was pounding out of my chest or things like that. You're like, well, was it your heart? Well, something happened.

Literally, something's happened in you. But the way you express it is metaphorical. But what's interesting in the ancient Near East or in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word leb, they use it kind of the same way.

Kind of the same way. It can mean your heart, but they also use it in a metaphor. In biblical language, it's the center of the human spirit from which spring emotions, thoughts, motivation, courage, and then grab this, action.

[2:03] Let's look at some verses where this word leb, this Hebrew word heart is used. In Deuteronomy 6, this is the great Shema. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God.

The Lord is one, or Yahweh alone is God. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

And unlike the Greek that kind of divides people, like spirit, body, soul, whatever, like the Hebrew, it was more encompassing when it said heart, mind, soul, body. It wasn't saying like this part of you. It was saying all of you. Like in the Psalms when it says, oh, my soul.

David's like, oh, my soul. It's you. It's all of you. And the heart is meant to encompass that. It's like, hey, all of you. Jeremiah 29. Jeremiah 29. You will seek me and find me, the Lord says, when you seek me with all your heart.

All your passion, all your motivation, everything you have is looking for me. And then Proverbs urges the same thing, right? We've read this already. We see that Proverbs is saying, seek the Lord, but seek wisdom with all your heart.

[3:08] Proverbs chapter 2, and I'm going to read verses 1 and 2. And I'm going to skip on to verse 10. My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commands within you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding.

Skip to verse 10. And then here's what happens out of that. When you do that, for wisdom will come into your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. So this, we see this heart is the place where we store up stuff.

I don't know if you've got special things in your house. You like to hide it in different places. Like you store things, right? It's where I keep my, your mom's keep my chocolate. Like kids can have this. My mom can come on over here. All right, this is where we store that stuff. Everything is stored inside. Wisdom, knowledge, understanding, God's commandments. It's stored up somewhere in us. And the Bible says it's your, it's your heart. Now Jesus affirms this in the Gospels. We'll look at Matthew 12.

And for those of you trying to flip through your Bible, sorry, I'm going kind of fast. Here we go. Matthew 12, 33. Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad. [4:13] For the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers. How can you speak good when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

Woo. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good. And the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you on that, on the day of judgment, people will give account for every careless word they speak.

For by their words, by your words you will be justified. And by your words you will be condemned. So Jesus is saying your words, they don't originate in your mouth actually. They come from somewhere else deep, that wellspring.

So first point here, and there's going to be lots of points. I'd like to tell you it was metaphorical. Like the heart is real non-linear and confused. It's just me. Lots of points. Just me.

It's my brain. Good and evil start in the heart. That's where it all starts. That's why it's so important. Good and evil. It comes from somewhere like it. But that's where the inception, it starts.

[5:12] Even our words, they start in our heart. Our internal health really matters. Our heart dialogue, what we're saying, what's going on in our soul, our mind, there's these seeds.

And Jesus says, yeah, those seeds are eventually going to grow and bear fruit like a tree. I had a discussion with a friend of mine many years ago. And he, I think at the time, would classify himself as maybe agnostic.

I would say maybe just humanist. He was in that place in life where he's like, well, basically, we're just, we created ourselves. And we rule ourselves. Like, we make the rules. Like, I determine what's good or bad.

And we're having this discussion on, like, does it matter what happens in your mind, in your heart, like internally? Or, and he would say, it's funny, he was arguing that, like, it really doesn't matter what happens inside you. Your thoughts, your mind, you're like, even individually.

It's like, anything you do by yourself, fair game. Man, I had to think about that for a while. I was like, does it matter? See, biblical wisdom says it's only a matter of time before what's inside comes out.

[6:19] Always. What's private will become public. Jesus, from the wellspring of your heart, your mouth will speak. What's inside will come outside. Now, let me give you a kind of simple example from my own life.

When my kids were young, we watched a lot of cartoons. Watched a lot of Dora, y'all. A lot of Dora. We had this little chair, you know, the little kid chairs, and I'd sit next to my daughter when she was first born, and, yeah, that swiper would, he's a scary dude.

I'd be like, every time, what is it, fox or rat? What is that thing? I'd see it before Kalea would, and I'd be like, oh my gosh, there's swiper, like, and I'm like, she's two and a half. Like, we're legitimately, like, in fear here. And I'd wait for her.

She's like, swiper, no swiping, you know? I'm like, yeah, you tell him. You tell the swiper, you know? Watched a lot of Dora. Really appreciated Veggie Tales. Veggie Tales. Just the message.

And there's one Veggie Tales episode. It's about Stuff Mart. You know, it's like, Stuff Mart. You know, and they go in this big store. I can't remember. It was Madame Blueberry, I think, who had the issue. Probably should have done more research. I'm sorry.

[7:20] Those of you who are, like, buffs on Veggie Tales. If you've never watched Veggie Tales, I'm so sorry. You're like, what? What is this guy? But there's this episode, and it's Stuff Mart, and this little character just wants everything.

It's like, oh, I need this. And it just characterized this greed, right? And you see, and it's so funny. Like, it's fun to watch and be like, that person, you know, that blueberry or whatever. She's like, and

if you were to ask me, like, are you a greedy person?

Like, are you pretty much, or are you kind of content? I'd be like, no, I'm pretty content. I don't feel like a greed hoarding, you know, greed monger kind of person. But there are these times when I tend to, like, collect things, I'll say.

Collect things. My family would say obsessed a little bit. A few years ago, I rescued a hatchet. There was a house that was being destroyed. It was legit. I didn't steal it. There was a house being destroyed, and I was on a cleanup crew, and they're, like, throwing all the metal away and stuff, and there's this old hatchet, and it was, like, rusty and, like, beat up, and I was like, oh, man, I want to restore that.

I like a little woodworking, so I took it home. I kind of did my whole thing, fixed it up. It's just a good, you know, it's a hobby. It's just a hobby, guys. And it looked really cool.

[8:32] And I like to look in antique stores, because who doesn't like to look at old things that were other people's, and then it could be yours, right? And so I look at these things, and I saw another hatchet, and I was like, oh, that'd be so fun to, like, fix that up.

This is, again, this is a nice hobby. And after about three, my, you know, my family started to be like, Dad, what are you doing there, you know? And then I had to come up with a reason for why I have more than one hatchet. And I'm like, well, you know, I can have a hatchet wall.

Like, maybe we have some log cabin in the mountains someday, and you have, like, a hatchet wall. And they all, their faces were like, and they didn't see it. And I'm like, you know, it'd be really cool. And they're like, Dad, that's like an axe murderer cabin.

Like, you know, and I'm like, right? Now, do I listen? At this point, I'm not a greedy person. Do I double down, or do I just, yeah, I'm like, you're right, you're right. No, no, I double down. Now, you may ask yourself.

That's the problem. I couldn't see it. I couldn't see it yet. Okay, I couldn't see it. Now, you might ask yourself, like, how many hatchets does a man need before he can see it? Eight. The answer is eight. Eight hatchets.

[9:28] Yeah. Yeah, it's funny. Now, I look at my walls in my garage, I'm like, oh, I see it now. I see it now. But they are kind of cool. They're cool. Okay, don't, yeah, don't judge.

Now, some of you, I know you guys are collectors. You got your own thing, right? Don't judge me. But that's how, that's how it works, right? Like, you see something. That's how desires works. Like, no one had to convince me, like, bro, you need eight hatchets.

Like, no. I was just like, that is so cool. I'm like, oh, another one. If one's good, more is better, right? Where does that all start? Like, those desires, like, it's in there, right? That started in my heart. No one convinced me. Then it showed up on my walls. Proverbs is urging us into this life of wisdom, this life of godliness, goodness, understanding. It cautions us against, like, darkness and evil and death.

And, like, where does it all start? It all starts in our heart. That's where it all happens. All right, key passage today. And if you want to turn there in your Bible, Proverbs 4. Proverbs 4 is where we're going to start.

[10:31] And the question is, how do we care for our hearts? Okay, how can I take care of this thing that is so important where everything comes through? And I want you, as we read this, don't miss this.

There's a process and there's progress to both good and evil. Okay, there's a process to good. And it talks about the sun rising. You're like, why is it talking about the sun rising?

Well, you know, you're going to see faint. It's like, is it morning? I don't know. If you get up really early. By midday, it's like, wow, this is glorious. Right? But also there's a process to evil and it's a little more deceptive.

It talks about darkness. Like when you're in it, you can't see it. And it just gets darker and darker. So here we go. Proverbs 4, verses 18 to 27.

And I'm going to read this in the NIV. I just like the way it reads. So it might be a little different than the version you see on the screen, what you have in your Bibles. But here we go. Proverbs 4. The path of the righteous is like the morning sun.

[11:31] Shining ever brighter till the full light of day. But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness. They do not know what makes them stumble. My son, pay attention to what I say.

Turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight. Keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart. For everything you do flows from it. Keep your mouth free from perversity. Keep corrupt talk from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead. Fix your gaze directly before you.

Give careful thought to the paths of your feet. And be steadfast in all your ways. Do not turn to the right or the left. Keep your foot from evil. Here's the goal.

What we're getting at. You find it in verse 23 there, I believe. Guard your heart. We must protect the control center of our lives. This Hebrew word guard can also be translated keep.

[12:32] Maybe some of you says keep your heart. It means to observe. To watch. To protect something valuable. Something possibly being besieged. Guard with vigilance. The ancient Near East metaphor would have been the watchers on top of a city wall.

Watching. To see like are we being attacked or not? Are we going to be besieged or not? I want to protect this. My family's in here. My community. I'm protecting my city. I'm standing on the walls. I'm watching. Why do we need to guard our heart?

Again, it's the control center. Everything you are and everything you do flows out of this. You're not just going to be somebody someday. It's kind of like how you spend your days. It's how you spend your life kind of thing.

It's like how what happens in our heart becomes who we are in our life. Your heart is also constantly being besieged. It's just the world we live in.

We have an enemy. Just like those ancient cities with walls and enemies. There's a battle going on for our heart. So how do I do this? How do I guard my heart? And today, I just want to be honest.

[13:33] We could speak of a lot of different ailments of the heart. We could speak about coveting, greed, insecurities, comparisons. I just want to look at two big general principles, two heart realities this morning.

Because there's just so many things you could talk about, but I don't know where you're at. And only God can see what's in your heart. So as we speak of these things, I want to encourage you to just ask Jesus in your own heart.

Just to say, okay, you know, Jesus, would you show me what's going on in my heart? What's happening in my heart? What do I need to hear today? Because only God can show us what's in our heart. Father, show us what's going on in our hearts.

Okay, first general principle, this heart reality, the enemy of our hearts that we need to guard from. Enemy number one is a hard heart. A hard heart. This word for hardening, the Hebrew is *kazakh*. And listen to what it means, actually. Repair, strengthen, encourage, take hold of, bind, restrain, conquer. It actually doesn't sound so bad, right? If you strengthen something, you harden something.

[14:34] I think that's part of the goal, but also part of the problem. When we submit our heart to our creator and he strengthens, he takes hold of our heart.

He conquers our heart and restores our heart and binds our heart to him. Life comes from that. But when we take hold of our heart, when we bind our own heart, when we conquer our heart for our own will, our own ways, and our stubbornness sets in, and then this result is this negative hardening.

It's not a strengthening, it's a hardening. Self-centeredness, isolation, and eventually spiritually, it's death. Or death-like symptoms, jealousy, hatred, greed, all the things. Proverbs is screaming at us, choose the way of life, choose the right path, choose wisdom, don't be foolish, like don't choose death.

What does that look like? What does a hard heart look like? Well, the biblical example I want to use today, and I realize this is kind of like the low-hanging fruit, because like, oh, that guy.

We're going to talk about Pharaoh, okay? It's so easy. Talking about Pharaoh kind of makes me feel good about myself. I don't know about you, but it's like, he's like the Darth Vader. Darth Vader of the Bible. It's kind of like, who should I compare myself with today?

[15:51] I don't know, Stalin or Mussolini. It's like, okay, I'm not a bad person, right? But he's not a good guy, but nonetheless, we're going to talk about Pharaoh. We're going to look at this process, because I want you to see the process, again, and the progress of what happens in his heart.

Okay, there's a process there. Quick fun fact, that word hardening, that cause, it's actually used first in the story when Moses grabs the snake. There's these miracles, and it's like, you know, they

throw their, what's that called, staff down, and then it turns to a snake, and then he grabs it, and it turns back into a staff and stuff.

And so it's that grabbing, take hold of, right? So it's not all bad. But then we get in Exodus 4. So again, if you want to follow along in your Bible, I'm going to be flipping real quick. I'm going to start in Exodus 4, and we're going to kind of just race through the story of what happens in Pharaoh's heart.

And I want you to watch the progression here. Exodus 4, verse 21 to 23. And the Lord said to Moses, when you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power, and I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.

Then you shall say to Pharaoh, thus says the Lord, Israel, my firstborn son, I say to you, let my son go that he may serve me. If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.

[17:11] So this is God, and basically speaking through Moses to Pharaoh. He's making this sort of deal with him that's like, I'm showing you that I'm actually God, and I'm going to take care of my son. Or you can choose to think you're God, and we'll see what happens to your son.

It's dangerous, because we skip to the final result, right? We said what happens in the heart comes out, and eventually if it's hardening, it leads to death. He just shows you from like 3,000 feet above sea level, this is what's going to happen, Pharaoh. But here's a picture of a stubborn, resistant, hardened, angry man who's against God, and the end is devastation.

Okay, so that's the bookends. Let's watch it progress. Exodus 7, verse 13, and then 22 and 23. And these are the miracles with the staff and the snakes, and then the plagues where the Nile River turns to blood.

Okay, this is all starting here. It said, that all happens, and it says, still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said. But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard.

He would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord said. Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. Wow, even over after those first plagues, there's like this miraculous thing that happens, and there are these plagues that happen, and it says he would not listen.

[18:30] And then there's this dismissiveness. It's like he didn't even take it to heart. He would not listen. Here's the point.

Nope, not yet. What we see here, he's becoming more callous. He was, he did have a hard heart, and it says he still is having a hard heart. So he's becoming more callous, even after the river turns to blood.

Like, if the Neuse River turned to blood, I'd be like, okay. You know, most of us think, but then again, watch what happens. You can't see it. Exodus 8, 15. There's the frogs happen, right?

The frogs happen, and then they go away. God takes it away. It says, but when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the Lord had said. So after he's already relented and said they can go, then he turns, he takes his word back.

He hardens his heart. And listen, it says twice now, he says he would not listen. Here's the point. The first sign of a hard heart is a refusal to listen to others. You're choosing not to listen.

[19:32] It's not that you can't listen, it's that you won't listen. Keep that in mind. He can't hear others. Pharaoh, he can't, and he, or he won't. And this is scary at first, because when others are trying to correct us or help us, like, we resist against it, but eventually they stop.

Why, you resist people long enough to like, okay, I'm not gonna tell that person. Like, I work with that lady, I'm not gonna, or that guy, whatever. And then they pull away, and then what happens, you're in a vacuum with your hard heart.

That's when it gets scary. Have you ever been there? You've been in that place where it's like, oof, people trying to tell me something, I won't listen. My kids, my wife, my husband, my friend, my coworkers, like, start, man, Proverbs 4, remember it says, pay attention to my words.

Turn your ear, listen. Man, wisdom doesn't, it'll scream at you for a while. Like, she's calling out on the streets, it says, right in Proverbs, but then after a while, man, starts getting quiet. Exodus 8, 19, and this is after to the gnats.

Hate gnats. Then the magician said to Pharaoh, this is the finger of God. But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord said.

[20:40] And what's happening here, I just want to make a note of this, like, Yahweh, the God of Israel, is dismantling the gods of Egypt. If you never followed this story, like, see what's happening

here, he's actually attacking, one by one, the gods of Egypt.

The water god, the frog god, the fly god, they actually had these, right? And he's kind of proving and showing, like, I'm God, they're not God. And the officials see it, they're like, man, this is the finger of God, or a God.

But Pharaoh, he won't see it, and then he can't see it. Another point, sign of a hardening heart, is we can't see the truth that others see.

We start to become out of touch with reality. We're not rational. We feel right, but we can't see that we're wrong. Proverbs 4, remember it said, the wicked don't see what makes them stumble.

There's this darkness. Is there anything in your life that others have pointed out more than once, maybe one or two people at first, and then more, but you just can't see it. Maybe you've heard it a few times.

[21 : 44] I worked with a friend a while ago. Oh, man, fun guy. Fun guy. Loved him. Great at what he did. Tech, theater, lights, whatever. We worked in the same kind of ministry setting.

But he also was very controlling. Had to have things his way. I mean, you put controlling, he was also a perfectionist. It's like, you put those two together and it's like, wow, it was a wicked combo. Which again, not the worst thing in the world, but on top of that, he had this anger issue. Like if things couldn't be his way, he would lose his mind. And I remember once some students and I were setting up a ministry area the way we needed it and he came in and he just lost it.

Man, I was like, oh. I mean, everybody was embarrassed. Even kids were like, oh my gosh. It's always weird when an adult yells at kids like, I thought you guys always held it together. Guess not. And so I had to go to him afterwards. I'm like, bro, what was that?

You know? You seem really frustrated. Can you tell me what was happening in your heart? What was going on there? And he was able to explain it. Like there's a way this needs to be set up so it can be done well. And he had a point like he wanted to do things his best to help others.

[22 : 47] But I was like, what about, what about that outburst, man? Like, was that necessary? That seemed a little off, you know? That was hurtful. And he's like, yeah. He said, for many years my wife used to tell me this.

I was controlling. I had to have things my way. And I didn't listen. He goes, then my adult kids started saying it. My adult kids that I'm estranged from had to realize like, oof. They started saying it.

I was like, hmm. Then he started to think about it. And then coworkers started saying it and good friends and everyone's telling him the same thing. And then finally, praise God, he's like, I'm trying, I'm working on it.

You know, very humbly, he's like, man, I'm working on it. Thank you for saying that. For years he couldn't see it. But then he was able to humble his heart.

He was irrational for a while, he couldn't see reality. And that's what happens when we double down on our stubbornness. All right, Exodus 8 continues on. Verses 28, and we're gonna skip 30 to 32.

[23 : 50] There's these flies. So Pharaoh said, I will let you go to sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness, only you must not go very far away.

Look at this. Plead for me. Some versions, pray for me. Look at this guy, man. He's using, hmm. So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord. And the Lord did as Moses asked.

He removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants and from his people. Not one remained. But Pharaoh hardened his heart, this time also and did not let the people go. Now this looks like a change of heart, but what's really happening is he wants relief, right?

He wants relief from his suffering. His pride is hurt. He's looking for a quick escape. He still really wants control. He still wants power. He's choosing his way. He's refusing to listen and he's just doubling down on his stubbornness.

Another point. When our heart is hard, we often seek relief, but we don't want to be truly healed. See, true healing requires vulnerability, humility, some deep inner pain we got to work through.

[24 : 55] And to get to that healing, we must go through that, but pride keeps us from true healing. Now this is heavy, okay? Are you getting tired yet? It's hard to watch Pharaoh, right? It's like watching a guy sink into quicksand.

You're like, listen, it's always frustrating to watch someone else go through a hardened heart. We might even feel a little sense of like this guilty pleasure, like, ooh, I'm glad it's not me, but that's, that's the problem.

It's like, when it's us, we can't see it. Continuing on, we're almost there. Exodus 9, 7. There's the livestock are dying, people have boils, there's hail.

And Pharaoh sent, and behold, not one of the livestock of Israel was dead, but the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go. The NIV says it was unyielding. Okay, wisdom is screaming now.

He's like, do you yield? No. Another point, the longer we allow our hearts to remain hard, the more obstinate we become.

[25 : 53] If, if you've ever been in a fight with someone, kind of an ongoing fight, man, there's a real danger. Maybe like, again, spouses, you know, teenagers, a good friend or something, like at school, co-worker, there's a real danger in the back and forth.

If it's like, yeah, he said, she said, and then this goes on, but I told them, it's like, because once resentment starts to creep in, resentment will give you just enough information for you to believe you're true, you're right.

Just enough information for you to believe you're right. And then this bitterness creeps in, and bitterness, you're going to hear me say this more than once, but this is a crazy animal where it's like, you're drinking the poison and expecting that other person to die, right?

It's like, ooh, I'm going to show them. I'm going to keep, we come back. The longer our hearts remain hard, and then we're, we become more and more obstinate. You see it in Pharaoh, I see it in my own heart. The rabbit hole always goes deeper.

Exodus 9, verse 27 to 28 and 34. Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, this time I've sinned. Wow, look at this guy. The Lord is in the right and I and my people are wrong.

[27 : 03] Plead with the Lord for there's been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go and you shall stay no longer. But when Pharaoh saw the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart.

He and his servants or his officials. Look what's happening now. Now his officials are hardened. Another point, a hard heart always negatively impacts others. Again, I wish I could say like our actions or the things inside our heart, it only affects us, but no, eventually it always comes out, right?

It's not going to just hurt me, it's going to hurt my team. Cynicism, jealousy, man, it's contagious. There's officials, the ones who were trying to correct him before now, they're kind of jumping on the bandwagon. Maybe they're just tired, but maybe they see it, but they're also like, they got hardened for a moment there as well.

Dangerous. Exodus 10, 7, the locusts. Then Pharaoh's servants said to him, how long shall this man be a snare to us? Now they get it, they're so tired of it. Let the men go that they may serve the Lord their God.

Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined? So here Pharaoh's officials are rebuking him. Which is kind of stunning when you think about it because again, he was a God. To them, he was a God and they're like telling him straight to his face, let these people go.

[28 : 15] When we start refusing and heeding the wisdom of others, like especially if it's more than one person saying something to me, to you, no good is going to happen there. Here's what's crazy. Even after his son dies, even after the people of Israel, they go, all of a sudden, again, he won't relent.

And he keeps doubling down and he sends his army out into a watery death. Final point, a hard heart always ends in death.

Always. I wish I could say it wasn't that way. I wish it was like going to the dermatologist, like, hey, you'll be fine, put some cream on it. No, this is like when the surgeon's like, it's not months, it's not weeks.

Proverbs says it this way and it says it twice, two verses the same. This is so important, man. This one got double. Proverbs 14, 12 and also 16, 25. There's a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

Okay, here's the point I want to make and I want to really be careful here because the first thing you learn in Bible school or whatever is this principle called exegesis. Like, you look at scripture and you draw out what's there.

[29 : 23] Okay, eisegesis is like, what do I want it to say and I might try to get this in there, you know what I'm saying? We do that a lot with the Bible, with God. We're like, God, I'd like you to say

this. So I want to be careful how I say this.

Okay, but there's a pattern here. Roughly 11 times Pharaoh's heart is hard or hardened, okay, that we see in this story. And I understand God is sovereign, right? He already told us Pharaoh's going to have a hard heart.

I'm going to show that I'm the true God. That's the point of it. I'm showing that I am Yahweh, the I am, not Pharaoh. There's no rival. There's no contest. I'm showing my people this so their faith can be restored.

But look what happens. The first six times it reads, Pharaoh's heart was hard or Pharaoh hardened his heart. Pharaoh hardened his heart. Pharaoh's heart was hard. Pharaoh's heart was hard. Pharaoh hardened his heart. Pharaoh's heart was hard. Pharaoh hardened his heart. The seventh time, the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. The eighth time, Pharaoh and his officials hardened their hearts.

[30:21] the ninth, the tenth, the eleventh time, the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. And that eleventh time is when he pursues his rights. And you see death happen.

Do you see it? Pharaoh hardened his heart. His heart was hardened. Pharaoh hardened his heart. Pharaoh's heart was hardened. Pharaoh hardened his heart. His heart was hardened. The Lord hardens his heart. Pharaoh and his officials hardened their heart. The Lord hardens his heart. The Lord hardens Pharaoh's heart.

The Lord hardens Pharaoh's heart. I used to think it was unfair. I'm like, wow, Pharaoh was just used. And man, we can debate like free will and sovereignty of God. But like textually, as you watch this unfold, you see this stubborn, unyielding man who is making choices.

He is unyielding. He has a hard heart. And then he's making choices again and again and again to continue hardening his heart. And then finally, you see that ultimately God is accepting that reality.

[31:26] He's confirming what's happening in his heart. Here's the most terrifying heart reality related to like what happens in our lives in our heart. And it's not that God will bring on calamity.

Like a lot of people are like, I'm afraid of God.

God might, whatever. It's like, that's actually not, not the problem. The resistance of God in our lives. You see, even within the plagues, right, there's a mercy there. God is like, has mercy towards his people.

Like it's not gonna happen. But anyone who like followed his ways, it's like, if you put the blood on the door, you do these things, like you'll be okay. And this little sidebar here, I just wanna say this, like we can trust God's calamities.

We can trust his wrath. Man, we can trust the Holy Spirit's conviction. It's painful and it's hurtful when God hits you with something, you're like, ugh. And you feel a little guilty or ashamed or whatever, but like, there's, there's a mercy in that.

There's a mercy when I don't get my way. There's this mysterious love of God over me when he comes in and like shows me something I didn't wanna see. And I just wanna, I wanna affirm some of you. I know some of you are going through some devastating life realities right now.

[32:26] Some of those plagues and you're like, pfff. In the midst of those plagues, the devastation you feel in your life, you're, you're staying faithful.

You're trusting. You're opening your heart. It's remaining soft and vulnerable. Even though you're maybe angry or you're grieving, whatever it is, like you're going through some frustration, you're open to what the Father has for you.

That is, that is an incredible faith and I just wanna commend you and affirm you and say, don't give up. We can trust God's calamities.

But here's the most terrifying heart reality. It's not God's plagues. The most terrifying heart reality in our life is that God will give us exactly what we want.

It's when our heart starts to harden a little bit, he will allow us to stray. I wish I could say like, don't worry, when you start to stray a little, God's gonna come get you right away. He won't let you.

[33:30] Some people argue about free will. I'm like, man, God seems to let us do what we want. That is the scariest reality here. When that stubborn conviction comes in and I start to think I'm right, even though the results start to look death-like, man, I can still run that direction.

What does it look like for you? And we can look at Pharaoh's life and be like, man, look at that dude. What does it look like for you when your heart starts to go dark a little bit? When it starts to become just a little bit hard?

How do you get triggered? What do you say to people and then what do they say to you? Who are the people in your life that are trying to tell you things but you stop listening to them? There's this verse in Psalms and it says this, Psalm 73, it says, when my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant.

I was a brute beast before you. The Psalms is about a guy who's wrestling with evil and he's like, oh, I was so angry. Like, why do evil people succeed? And he has this problem with God and he makes this comment that like, I'm glad I didn't speak when I was angry because I was like a brute beast, you know?

Have you been in that place where man, you're there but you let it out? In my life, I went through a phase of this. When I first moved to the Philippines, I was going to school there, I was going to seminary and it was a lot of different things.

[34 : 44] I think I'd been out of the US for a while at that point but then it's a new country and there's culture shock and I would ride my little motorcycle through Manila. Crazy. Crazy. Yeah, praise Jesus, I'm alive but I'd ride through Manila and I'd go to school and come back and through traffic, there was so, I'd never seen poverty like that.

I'm talking poverty, kids begging at every street corner, mothers walking through traffic with babies begging, like it just, it hit me in the face and I think I was overwhelmed by everything and it's never just one thing.

Like you start getting frustrated or you start, it's never one thing but I started getting angry whenever I'd go to church. We went to this nice big church downtown and it was an international church and it was big, it was, I mean it was beautiful and the people who came had nice cars and I, somehow, my frustration that I was facing with all the things that was going on, whether it was culture shock or just like a shock at the poverty or whatever, plus my own stuff, it came out at the church.

I'd walk in there and be like, I started these judging thoughts and just like, wow, all these rich people, it's so nice in here but like right outside you got this poverty and something happened where that's where I took out my frustration and anger.

So much so that I would drop off my wife, little kids and I'd be like, I'm gonna go park the car and I would go to Starbucks because it's right down the street and I need to get some coffee, right? And I'd wander in like 45 minutes late to church.

[36 : 07] I just felt so much resentment. Again, my heart was going dark. I couldn't see it. Praise God that he moved me through that stage. I think before we even left the Philippines, I saw someone said to me like, man, that church does a lot of good things.

A big church with a lot of people has a lot of resources and I actually saw the ministries they were doing throughout the city and how they were even ministering to my own kids. Like, man, we're in a different country and then go to Sunday school and learn. It was a beautiful thing.

I just, again, I couldn't see it. My heart had gone dark for a while and it affected not just me, my family. Listen, whatever's in your heart, it always comes out. I'm running short on time but I want to get to the reality.

Sorry, the antidote here but I want to talk about one more quick heart reality and I'm not going to take long on this but the second one, one is a hard heart. The second heart reality that's just the enemy of our heart is a distracted heart.

A distracted heart. Proverbs 4 says it this way, right? Let your eyes look straight ahead. Fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths of your feet.

[37 : 08] Be steadfast in all your ways. Do not turn to the right or the left. Keep your foot from evil. There's a real focused intentional way of living life.

There's a wise way to live life and then there's also foolishness that leads to death. We know, we see it, like we read all about it. Elliot hit this last week and it was so good how he said it, like the fear of the Lord will lead to life.

Like anything, the fear of anything else will lead to sin. Love of Yahweh, love of our God with all our hearts leads to life. Love of anything else ultimately will lead to death, to sin.

Again, there's so many things I could talk about. Like I don't have to convince you we live in a distracted world. The world's always been high day shoes but man, we have a lot of access to distractions, right? And whatever your thing is, we all have our things.

I just want to tell a final cautionary tale here and it's the story of King Solomon, the man who wrote our Proverbs. He started his reign humble. He was blessed by God because he asked, God's like, you can have what you want and he asked for wisdom.

[38:09] God's like, that's amazing. So God gives him wisdom and he says, I'm also going to give you this. Prosperity and wealth and all these things. And what we see through Solomon's life and again, it's a long tragic sort of journey.

Not that God didn't do good through him and blessed him but like through his life, he slowly gets, he drifts. His heart is, it actually says, his heart was led astray. He was turned, his heart was turned away from the Lord. He had so many wives and then their gods and so he wanted to, and he started actually worshiping and helping in the aid of worshiping the wives God which is idolatry, right?

First Kings 11, four through six says this. I'm going to read off the screen here. For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God as was the heart of David his father.

For Solomon went after Ashereth and the goddess of the Sidonians and after Malcolim, some versions say, Molech. Terrible. The abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord as David his father had done.

I mean, these are gods that like people sacrificed infants to and stuff. This is like, you're like, how? He had it. That's why it scares me so deeply. He's like, he had his wisdom. He had everything like you could want for like his relationship with God and God gave him all this stuff but they were so distracted.

[39:31] So much wealth. So many wives. So many allegiances in his life. So many alliances and then after his reign, the effects are devastating. Israel is torn apart and never recovers.

There are tribes that we never hear about again after this because of how he chose his life. There's a buddy I have. I was talking to a friend once who's like, there's only seven people in the Bible who's like, start well but like finish well.

Like only seven people finish well. I'm like, what? Come on, man. There's got to be more than that. Like there's apostles. Maybe it's Old Testament. I don't know. I'm like, no, lots of people finish well but then I start looking at the world around me people I know, friends I've had.

It can be discouraging. I'm like, wow, maybe it is hard to finish well. And I'm not judging. Listen, I'm not judging because I feel the tug on my own soul and my own heart, man. So here's what I want to encourage you with.

Here's the antidote and listen carefully. Like as deep as like the anxiety goes or the fear of this, like gosh, evil is like, Proverbs is like, man, walk the path because there's so much out there.

[40:32] As deep as our fear goes, like God's grace is deeper. Man, his rescuing, healing power is so much deeper than all that.

Proverbs 4.23 says this way, above all else, guard your heart. And here's how you do it. I just want to hit this quick. It says, guard your heart. One of the ways you do it is consistently expose our heart to Christ and others. And this thing is counterintuitive.

You're like, wait, am I supposed to expose my heart or guard my heart, right? But there's a way of opening your heart that actually, again, it's protecting your heart by opening it to Christ and others. It's like the sun. You know, like in July, you don't want to stand in 95 degree weather out there, like in the sun for hours.

Like, no, we protect ourselves from the sun. But you know, in like the early, early spring or maybe in the winter you've gone to the beach. There's nobody there and you're out there and it's kind of, the wind's a little cold but then the sun comes out and you're just like, you just, you sit there long enough for it to start to warm your body and your soul and you're like, oh, this is good.

That's what it's like to open your heart to God. And it happens in two ways. One is through Jesus and the Holy Spirit and in prayer. And I want to encourage you, like, live, live really open to Jesus.

[41:35] Let me throw one more point up here. It's just like living without secrets. Like, be fully honest with Jesus. Like, we have to go to the Holy Spirit once a day, once a month, once a year, once, it doesn't matter.

At some point, on a regular basis and be like, okay, what is happening in my heart, Jesus? Then just, I'm going to tell you, just sit, think, pray, let God speak to you, like, expose things, see what comes up.

And we have to be honest with God. Like, some of our prayers, I don't know about you, but sometimes I'm not very honest with God. I'm like, God, thank you for the day. Would you bless my kids? Would you bless the thing? And then we go on. But it's like, we need to be able to say to God,

God, I'm struggling with this.

God, I need, I feel like I need this today. God, I'm afraid of this. I'm so thankful for that. Like, once we expose what's in our hearts to God, then he can work on it. And we need to do that with people as well.

You've got to have brothers and sisters in Christ where you're like, you're opening your heart to them. Like, here's what's happening. Live without secrets. You've got to have people in your life who are like, man, I need to confess this.

[42 : 33] I need to get this out. And then listen, once you say that, it takes away the power, right? When we confess the things in our heart, our sins, all of a sudden you're just like, man, I'm afraid of riding that roller coaster. Once you say it, like, oh, okay.

That's not so bad. I can do this, right? Once you confess it, there's power. And here's the last thing is, talk it out. I know, it seems like, wait, really? Wait for it, wait for it. Talk it out. You've got to be able to say what's on your heart.

Proverbs 25 says this, the purpose, purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out. You need someone in your life you can talk to. Again, the Holy Spirit, when you be honest with Jesus, when you tell God everything, you need someone in your life you can talk to.

You'd be like, all right, give me feedback. I'm going to listen. I'm going to listen. And they're like, bro. And you're like, no, that's not it. And then they're like, okay, I'm going to listen. Let me try again. Hit it with me again.

You know, your kids say stuff, your wife, your husband, whatever, your friend. You start hearing things, you're like, say it again. Draw this out. Person of insight draws it out. Okay. Talk, and then say it, talk it out. What's going on in there?

[43 : 33] As the band comes up, as we move into communion here, there's so much hope. And I know I hit you with a whole lot of devastation and the hope's kind of short at the end here. But let me tell you, our hope is in this wise covenant God who refuses, even though he'll let us stray, he refuses to leave us.

He will come after us. And man, all it takes is a simple, like, we don't have to turn very far. Like, repentance means to turn. Like, we just turn a little bit and God's like, right there. You know, like, come here. Let's hug it out.

Ezekiel talks about this mystery of the Holy Spirit's work. This is Ezekiel, right? This is the hope of what God can do. Only God can do this in our hearts. Here it is. I love this passage.

Ezekiel 36, 24 to 27. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle, listen, God's doing it, right? I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

[44 : 44] And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. Look what God can do for us. There's no heart that God can't heal.

There is no one beyond his reach or his ability. Now he can take stone and turn it to flesh. So as we take communion today, here's just a couple questions I want you to think about as we go get the elements and we're gonna bring it back to our seats, sit there for bed and then we'll take it together. Here's some questions. Is my heart hardened at all? Is there any place I've been doubling down, stubborn, refuse to listen to others? Am I fighting with God on some issue? Again, just ask God these questions. Holy Spirit, speak to me.

And just listen. Just obey. Don't overcomplicate it. If the Spirit brings someone to mind or something to mind, offer that up to him. Ask what that's about. And also, is my heart distracted in some way? Is the world pulling on me? Lord God, is there some discontentment I have? Jesus, am I striving or grasping for something that maybe now's not the time for it? Again, don't overthink it. Just accept what God brings to mind and then confess.

[45 : 47] As you, as we get our elements, just take a moment, just like, hey God, I want to recognize this. I confess this to you. I'll do what you want me to do with this. All right? Let me pray for us as we go into this time.

Lord, as we, as we take these elements, as we have this time of confession, we just ask the Spirit, you would show us if we have a hardened heart or if we're distracted, God, we want to see it. We

want to listen and only you are, are, are the surgeon.

Only you are the physician who can heal us and show us what's going on in here. So would you show us in Jesus' name? Again, amen. Again, go ahead and take, take the elements, bring them back to your seat.

You can sit for a bit and we'll take this together. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.