

Text: Pr 4.23

Proposition: In training ourselves and others, we need to get to the heart, the inner man, with the transforming power of God.

The book of Proverbs mentions “the heart” 64 times. Many texts touch on this theme. Here is the one we will start with:

Pr 4.23 Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it *flow* the springs of life.

We are still working through a review of ideas suggested in the book, *Instructing a Child's Heart* by Tedd & Margy Tripp. Today's message comes from the chapter “Getting to the Heart of Behaviour.”

The Tripp's begin this chapter with a story about their grandchildren.

“Recently, Radio Shack had a sale on matchbox-size remote control cars. ‘What a fun thing for the grandchildren to play with at grandpa's house,’ I thought. The next week they were all at our house for a family meal. I got the car out and the children began playing with it. Six children, one car; what was this grandfather thinking?

“Within a few minutes I observed one of my grandsons following his sister around imploring her, ‘Emily (names changed to protect the guilty), remember that Jesus says we should share. Remember that we are to do to others as we would have them do to us. You should be kind and give me a turn.’

“All of these statements were true. And he didn't bowl her over and run off with the controller. But even the most superficial observer knows that this four-year-old was not motivated by concern for his sister's spiritual growth. He didn't care about whether her behavior was Christ-like. He was pursuing the desires of his heart.”¹

We all understand this. Both children were showing they had perfectly normal, selfish, human hearts. You have a heart like this.

As we grow to adulthood, we learn how to disguise the overt selfishness of our hearts, to one extent or another, but we still have that kind of heart.

¹ Tedd Tripp and Margy Tripp, *Instructing a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2008), 51.

I. Understanding the heart (a brief survey)

A. Heart as the center of being

1. As seen in our text

Pr 4.23 Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it *flow* the springs of life.

- We think of our inner man as “mind, will, and emotions”
- The Bible thinks of the inner man as “our heart”
- Everything about our inner life dominates our outer life

2. Other texts that reinforce the centrality of the heart

Lk 6.45 “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil *man* out of the evil *treasure* brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

Mk 7.21 “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries,

Mt 15.18-19 “But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.¹⁹ “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

B. The fallen heart

- Some of the texts already mentioned clearly show that the effect of the fall perverted the heart of man
- Other texts that reinforce the fallenness of the heart

Pr 12.20 Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, But counselors of peace have joy.

Hos 11.7 So My people are bent on turning from Me. Though they call them to *the One* on high, None at all exalts *Him*.

Pr 20.9 Who can say, “I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin “?

C. The heart shapes the person (1 Sam 16)

1. God sent Samuel to select a new king (1)
2. Samuel thought Jesse's oldest, Eliab, looked worthy (6)
3. The Lord rejected him, for he saw into his heart (7)

1 Sa 16.7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

II. Transforming the heart

A. Ineffective means of heart transformation

1. External restraints

- a. When raising children, the Bible calls parents to restrain bad behaviour
- b. External restraints train behaviour but don't reach the heart

Ken Ham co-wrote a book in 2012 called *Already Gone*, dealing with the many children raised in churches who turn their backs when adults. From the books cover blurb:

- "If you look around in your church today, two-thirds of the young people who are sitting among us have already left in their hearts; soon they will be gone for good."

Parents can't be satisfied with simple "good behaviour."

- c. Adults can join churches, conform to external expectations, yet fail to change their hearts as well – peer pressure is a thing!
- #### 2. Pragmatic motivations (manipulations)
- a. Sometimes parents will attempt to get good behaviour by manipulations
 - 1) Rewards for good behaviour (stickers! prizes!)
 - 2) Trade-offs: earn privileges for good behaviours

b. An appeal to pragmatism

- 1) Life will be much better if you do “x”
- 2) No conflict when you behave (compare the “good kid” and the “bad kid” in the home)

Now, I want to reiterate, good behaviour is good, but gaining good behaviour isn't enough. I am not necessarily against offering rewards, but we can't equate this with reaching the heart.

c. We can offer these kinds of motivations to adults also

I recall talking to a young man who I noticed smoking. I urged him to “quit now, when you are young” — quitting at an older age is much harder.

However, the appeal was pragmatic: he really needed a heart change to really quit.

B. Receiving the grace of the new covenant

1. The new covenant promises heart transformation

Ezek 36.25-26 “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Jer 31.33-34 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

2 Cor 5.17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

a. The transformation includes a new heart that desires new things

b. The transformation includes the Holy Spirit who empowers changed lives, victory over sin

2. Reaching the heart

a. The Scripture saturated life

b. The constant teaching of the true nature of man and the only hope in Christ

The little boy we laughed at in the introduction:

- Exhibited a selfish unchanged heart
- Yet also exhibited a Scripture saturated home where the training occurred
- The heart was not yet fully engaged — but the prospects for it are hopeful

c. The true nature of man includes the deceptive heart

Heb 3.12-13 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

- 1) The natural way of reacting to life's problems is self-deceptive
- 2) We need to teach ourselves and others to take on God's viewpoint so we can address our problems at the heart of the issue

Conclusion:

Proposition: In training ourselves and others, we need to get to the heart, the inner man, with the transforming power of God.