

Proverbs 24-11-06b

Let's continue our study now, and we have seen this emphasis on the heart here, this triplet that four times emphasizes the importance of the heart. We have actually seen, if you go back and look, we have seen the heart from the beginning of Proverbs until now, through chapter 15 to this point, the heart has been mentioned in these Proverbs 22 times. That's the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, 22 times, all the way back in Proverbs 2, verse two, I alluded to chapter two earlier, my son, if you will receive my words and hide my commandments with you, remember that? So that you, verse two, incline your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding.

That's the first mention of the heart in Proverbs, apply your heart to understanding. So as you make a note of these, I would encourage you to note these verses and next to each one, we know what the verse says, but what does it mean? It isn't enough to be exposed to the truth. It isn't enough to agree with the truth or assent to it or affirm it.

Even the demons believe in trouble, that there is a God and that Jesus is his son and that he died on the cross and that there's been atonement and propitiation and all these, the demons understand those. Dr. Criswell had a great sermon one time talking about what a great church member Satan would be because he knows his Bible inside and out. He'll be there every Sunday.

He wants to spend time with other believers and converse with them and try to sway them to his point of view. And he would make a great Baptist, according to Dr. Criswell. It isn't enough to know it and even agree with it.

We have to apply our heart to it. What should I be doing because this is true? I was teasing Elizabeth the other night. You can tell somebody a fact, and if you stop there, it doesn't concern them.

And I said, follow my train of thought here, Elizabeth. There's a bomb under your chair. Now there's an alarm and a desire to get out of the chair, but it has no fuse and it's inert.

Oh, okay. But it has a timer instead of a fuse. Oh, no, but the timer is not ticking.

You see, each additional piece of information can change what you would or would not do. So we need the information, and then we need to know enough to know how we should act. That's what it means to apply your heart to understanding.

There is a tornado watch in my county. Now there is a tornado warning, meaning there's a tornado on the ground. Should I go and seek shelter? Well, the county I live in is huge.

And the fact that there's a tornado on the ground 13 miles away is not cause for me to go and get myself soaked as I go try to get down in a ditch somewhere. So it isn't enough to know that I live in this county and there is a tornado on the ground in this

county. How close is it? What direction is it moving? And so on.

We need knowledge, and we need understanding, and then we need application. Apply our heart to understanding. That's Proverbs 2.2. First mention of heart in Proverbs.

In Proverbs 3, the heart is mentioned three times in the first five verses. Verse one of Proverbs 3, my son, do not forget my law, but let your heart retain, keep, guard my commands. So not only is the heart the place of application, but it is the place of remembering, calling to mind the law and the commands, being able to keep them, being able to apply them means we have to remember them.

This happens in my heart. But do I have a heart that encounters a situation or a circumstance or a decision point? I'm in the middle of a conversation and their attention might be rising. Someone might be asking me a question that could potentially have spiritual implications, could affect my representation of Jesus Christ as his body on this earth.

Does my heart remember who I am and why I'm here? Do I shoot from the hip and say the first thing that comes into my head? Do I just try to get off a zinger and be funny or be interesting? Or do I stop and think how important this could be? The Holy Spirit may be using me to speak the truth to someone in love. What kind of heart do I have that will not forget God's law, but keep those commands, to be ready always to give an answer, to don't let my good be spoken of as evil, to be gentle, to be humble, to not be obstreperous, to not create strife, to have a soft answer that turns away wrath? What kind of heart do I have when I'm interacting with other people? Notice the heart is always the seat of relationship. My relationship toward God is in my heart.

My relationship to those around me is sourced in my heart. So what kind of heart do I have? That's Proverbs 3.1. Proverbs 3.3, let not mercy and truth forsake you. I love this because in Hebrew, those two words, mercy is chesed.

Chesed is loyal love. And it is one of the most frequently assigned attributes of God. And it is a part of God's nature, but we have to be qualified.

We have to meet the condition for that love and mercy to be expressed and to reach its fullness. Let not grace and truth forsake you. Bind them around your neck.

Write them on the tablet of your heart. So grace and truth bound around our neck. This is one of the first things people see when they look at us.

When they look at us, they should see a reflection of God's grace and a reflection of God's truth. Grace and truth. Bind them around your neck.

They should be visible to others. Write them on the tablet of your heart. This now is back in the heart.

This is central to our relationship with God and relationship to one another. God has been gracious and merciful and truthful with us. We should be gracious and merciful and truthful with each other.

So writing it on the tablet, why doesn't it just say, store them in your heart, keep them in your heart, stick them in your heart? Why does it say write them on the tablet? What do you know about a tablet that's been written on? Remember when we saw earlier that this is where our memory is? We call something to mind. If you want to remember something and you don't trust your memory, you write it down and you can come back to it and review it and remember it and get it exactly right. It's written down.

The chronicles of the kings of Judah were a record of what took place from the king's perspective. Remember Xerxes, Ahasuerus, he can't sleep. And so he says, bring the records, read me back the diary of events.

And he finds out that Mordecai had prevented him from being assassinated by two individuals who had plotted against him. Then he said, it was written in tablets and they brought it in and read it to him. And Mordecai comes to the fore and you remember that great story.

But this is a record of past doings and dealings. So if you're writing on the tablet of your heart, grace and truth, mercy and truth, we remember the truth of God. We remember the grace of God that's been expressed in our own lives.

This is a way to strengthen the heart, to encourage the heart, to cultivate a cheerful heart that has all of the benefits we saw in the first session. So when it comes to how to, it's one thing to say, a merry heart doeth good. A merry heart keeps you from having a sorrowful heart that breaks the spirit and dry bones and the rest of it.

Okay, I want a cheerful heart. How do I get it? This is how. Proverbs has been telling us in 21 previous verses, here's how you get a happy heart.

You need to apply it to understanding. You need to invest it in God's truth. You need to not only have those things as an ornament around the neck, but write them on the tablet of your heart.

Notice, I cannot write grace and truth on the tablet of your heart. I can only write it on my own. Each of us has to store this away, has to guard it and keep it and write it down for ourselves.

This is a choice. It's a choice. Then in verse five, one, three and five of Proverbs three.

These are the second, third and fourth mentions of the heart after Proverbs two, two. So Proverbs three, one, three, three, three, five says, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. We want to have wisdom and knowledge.

And with all of that getting, we want to get understanding, not our own understanding, not human wisdom, God's understanding, God's supernatural enlightenment that comes through the Holy Spirit. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. You can't go wrong trusting God.

He's not going to fail. He is the one trustworthy thing in the entire universe. Proverbs three, five.

In Proverbs chapter four, he taught me and said to me, let your heart retain my words, keep my commands and live. Retention of the words. We're back again to writing on the tablet, to guarding and keeping and remembering.

Let your heart retain my words. Do you notice that hearing them is not enough? We have to make a decision. Let your heart retain my words.

That means it's my choice as to whether or not I remember it and whether or not I apply it. Keep my commands. If you do so, look, there's a promise.

Keep my commands and live. This is life. There is life in these words.

There is the power of God in these words. It's not enough to have the bones and the sinew and the flesh. You've got to have the life of God breathed in and this is his promise.

Retain the words, you will live. Take that promise to God. I don't feel very alive.

I don't feel very potent. I don't feel very strong. I don't think I'm bearing fruit like I wish I was, like I think I could.

I don't want to be a nine-fold field or a 11-fold field. I want to be a 30 or a 50 or a 100-fold field. Lord, breathe life into my life.

I have your words. I'm praying your words back to you. I am circulating them through my soul.

I know this is life. You have said so and I believe it. Faith is the substance of what we hope for.

It fleshes out the motivation we have in hope. Proverbs 4.4, Proverbs 4.21, these precepts, these commands, these truths from God, Proverbs 4.21, do not let them depart from your eyes. Keep them in the midst of your heart.

In the midst. There was a tree planted in the midst of the garden. Tells us the garden was a pretty big place and in the middle of it was this tree.

It's sort of a defining tree. You can't think of the Garden of Eden without thinking of the

tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden, right in the middle. That's what makes Eden, Eden.

If you didn't have those two trees, well, it's just a place where stuff grows. It's defining. Keep them in the midst of your heart.

So there can be a lot of stuff in our heart, but this needs to be the central and defining feature and characteristic. That's 4.21. And then two verses later, Proverbs 4.23, these words and these sayings, keep your heart with all diligence for out of it springs the issues of life. This is what Jesus said when they were accusing his disciples of not washing their hands before they ate and defiling themselves by soiling the food in some way.

And Jesus said, it isn't what goes in that defiles a man. It's what comes out because these things are sourced in the heart. It is a biblical truth.

So you've got to keep your heart. You've got to pay attention to your heart. The thing needs to be clean, needs to be purified.

This is Psalm 51. This is 1 John 1.7 and 1 John 1.9. This is letting the blood of Jesus Christ cleanse us so that we guard our heart, we keep it. We don't sluice in evil and human viewpoint and false systems of thought, false solutions, false ideas.

Let no one deceive you. Keep your heart, guard your heart. And it takes diligence.

Remember, bend every effort to present yourself approved to God. Bend every effort to guard your heart. Don't expose it to things that are going to corrupt and corrode and defile.

Keep it, guard it. Anybody that's ever worn a white uniform in the military, you have to be so careful. You are suddenly paranoid.

You don't walk over and sit on a bench in some public place. There could be something on that bench. And once I get something on the seat of my uniform, I'm a disgrace.

You're careful about ladies who you're going to a formal occasion, beautifully dressed, wonderfully, just gorgeous woman comes up. Don't let her cheek touch your jacket or you're going to have makeup. Don't let her lips brush your lapel.

Don't get something on your sleeve. You sit at the table and there's gravy, there's cranberry sauce. When you wear a white uniform, you guard with diligence, contact with anything.

Don't voluntarily go into places that will defile. That will negatively influence the heart. Keep your heart with not just some diligence, not just once in a while, all diligence.

It's your most precious defining feature. Your heart is you. So keep it with all diligence.

Why? Out of it springs everything in life. Any issue you want to name, any relationship, any attitude, any endeavor, any opportunity, any challenge, any test, anything that could separate us from God, anything that could separate us from one another, anything that could confuse and cause strife and division in our relationships or in our witness for Christ, issues out of the heart. So guard it with all diligence.

Guard it like you're wearing your whites. At a dining in and there's gravy everywhere. That's Proverbs 4, 23.

Proverbs 5, 12. You look at this portion of Proverbs. My son, pay attention to my wisdom.

Lend your ear to my understanding. That's how chapter five begins. You get down there, verse seven.

Hear me now, my children. Do not depart from the words of my mouth. Remove your way far from her.

Do not go near the door of her house. This is the immoral woman up in verse three, whose lips drip honey and so on. Do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your honor to others and your years to the cruel.

Lest aliens be filled with your wealth and your labors go to the house of a foreigner and you mourn at the last when your flesh and your body are consumed and say how I hated instruction and my heart despised correction. You see the theme here. It continues forward from chapter four of how important it is to avoid contact with that which will trip us up and defile us and neutralize us.

It's a choice. So you say, I hated instruction and my heart despised correction. We have seen this theme of correction, have we not? In first and second Timothy both, the word of God is profitable for correction.

Paul tells Timothy, you've got to correct those who are in opposition. Do it with humility. Do it gently, but do it firmly.

There've been products in the past and their commercial said firm yet gentle. That's what correction has to be. We're not arrogant.

We're not dominating. We're not abusive. We're not supercilious.

We're not unkind. It should be done with humility, and gentleness, correcting those who are in opposition, hoping that God will be able to grant the blessings that come with repentance. You don't force the issue in such a way that they can't agree.

They can't change their mind. You've made it a point of pride. You've made it an

argument that they can't afford to lose.

You have polarized it to such an extent that to agree with you is beyond the pale. Gently offer the truth, speak it in love, and pray that God will provide insight. And in that gentle spirit, someone can move in the direction of the light and the truth.

If we despise correction, now that's on us. That was my choice. I can't blame the person.

Well, they were too odious. The messenger was too hard to take, and that's why I rejected the message. Don't be the excuse for someone rejecting the message.

I was too egregiously unpalatable. And there's examples all around us of unpalatable messengers and people have to choose, can I get to the message despite the messenger? We don't wanna do that. And we want to be correctable.

My heart despise correction. So what does this tell us about the heart? Not only is it the seat of our application, and we have to remember it to apply it, we have to guard it, and we have to try to avoid pollution and contamination and corruption and defilement in that heart. But if we have something in our heart that shouldn't be there, we've got to be correctable.

Remember, if I regard iniquity, where? In my heart, the Lord will not hear me. If I regard iniquity in my heart, if I don't allow myself to be corrected in my heart, God's not gonna hear my prayers. If I pray for insight, if I pray for wisdom, but I'm regarding iniquity, I'm letting iniquity circulate around, it's besmirching my whites, it's corrupting influence, it's seeping into the cracks and corners, and it's affecting my decisions, my values and my priorities, God's not gonna hear my prayers.

What if I wanna pray for wisdom? If anyone lacks wisdom, let them ask of God. Sorry, you're regarding iniquity in your heart, the Lord's not gonna hear that prayer. This is dangerous, to not eradicate iniquity out of our heart and to be correctable.

I didn't take correction in my heart. That's what verse 12 says here. My heart despised correction.

Can't be that way. Proverbs 6, verse 14. Perversity is in his heart.

He devises evil continually and he sows discord. Who is this? Look in verse 12. It's a worthless person, a wicked man.

He walks with a perverse mouth. He winks with his eyes. He shuffles his feet.

He points with his fingers. Perversity in his heart. These other things are sourced in the heart.

He devises evil. He sows discord. Therefore his calamity shall come suddenly.

Suddenly he will be broken without remedy. There is no medicine that will be multiplied with good. He's gonna be broken.

His spirit's gonna be broken. His sorrow will have no balm, no relief. There will be disaster and it will be permanent and irretrievable loss.

What is it that God hates in this same chapter? Verse 16, 17 through 19. These six things the Lord hates. Seven, an abomination to him.

We reviewed this when we had our abomination doublet in Proverbs 15. These are an abomination. A heart that devises wicked plans.

Notice these things are pretty much on the same level. God hates them all. All of them are an abomination.

These are not ranked in order like this one is less than that one. These are all in the same bucket and it is the abomination bucket. And God's judgment of it is going to be the same.

There's not a lesser judge for devising wicked plans than there is for shedding innocent blood or having a proud look and a lying tongue. All of these are going to result in the very same judgment. But notice that so much of this is pitched in physical terms to represent spiritual and social truths.

So a proud look, this is the eyes. This is the countenance of the eyes. You know, the eyes are said to be so expressive.

You think of the Mona Lisa painting and others, the eyes. Personally, I've always thought the eyes in Van Gogh, Vincent Van Gogh, his self-portrait. You look at the eyes in that portrait, they are haunting.

And they're the windows to the soul. They're so expressive. But this proud look is expressive of an attitude of heart, attitude of soul.

But you notice it's the eyes, then the tongue, then the hands, then the heart, then the feet, swift and running to evil. Then the false witness who speaks lies. You've come back up to the facial witness of using the mouth and the tongue.

But here, it's not just a lying tongue. It is a false witness speaking lies. It's false witness.

This is impugning others. This is getting others in trouble without a cause, falsely. This is to the detriment of another person, false witness, and one who sows discord among brethren, strife and division.

And you see this again, the theme in 1 Timothy and Titus, the pastoral epistles, the harm and the danger and God's frowning is putting it mildly on those who sow discord, strife,

division, contention, striving to no purpose. Arguing, and it's not helpful. It doesn't benefit.

It isn't perhaps a situation where God can grant the blessings that come to repentance. It's self-serving. So this is the heart that devises wicked plans.

And any one of these, you can trace back to the heart. There's a wicked plan. That's why you would lie with your tongue.

That's why you would have a prideful demeanor. That's why you would shed innocent blood or run swiftly to evil or speak lies in witness against others. Sow discord among the brethren.

You've got a contaminated heart and God will judge it. That's Proverbs 6, 18. We're looking at these 22 references to the heart in Proverbs.

You come to Proverbs 7, and we're going to see some reinforcement now, some review and rehearsal of what has already been said. So Proverbs 10, verse eight, the wise in heart will receive commands, but a prating fool will fall. Proverbs, I'm sorry, Proverbs 7, verse three, bind these words on your fingers.

Write them on the tablet of your heart. We've already seen how important it is to engrave these. They're like the seal on a building, on the foundation that we've seen in the New Testament.

Proverbs 7, 7, among the simple, I perceived among the youths, a young man devoid of understanding. Remember Proverbs 7, 7, when it says a young man devoid of understanding, in Hebrew, it is void of heart. He doesn't have the words of God in his heart.

There isn't a tablet with any writing on it. He's not guarding and keeping the commands and the truths. His heart's empty.

It's cleaned and swept and there's nothing there. So what do you think is going to happen to this youth, this simpleton? He's going to be led by the nose. You wonder why half the country can be so out of agreement with the other half? Well, part of this is people who are void of understanding.

In their heart, there's nothing to guide. There's nothing to illuminate the path. There's nothing to define what's right and what's wrong.

There's no foundation on which to build. And that's the tragedy of Proverbs 7, 7. Then you come to 10, 8, the wise in heart receive commands. Those who are prating, notice if you don't consider and spend time cultivating your heart, it's your mouth that does all the work.

It's the fool who speaks words and grazes in the pasture of foolishness. The substitute for consideration and reflection in the heart is to talk a big game. You talk, talk, talk, but your heart's empty.

All hat and no cattle, as we say in Texas. Proverbs 10, verse 20, the tongue of the righteous, unlike the lying tongue that we saw in chapter six, the tongue of the righteous in Proverbs 10, 20 is choice silver. It's a beautiful thing, but the heart of the wicked is worthless.

This is the reverse. We said how important it is to cultivate a heart that retains God's words, God's truth. It's written on the tablet.

A fool, his tongue is just babbling. It's babbling froth. He's grazing in a whole pasture of foolishness.

But now, because the righteous has stored these things in his heart, his tongue is choice silver. But the reason the wicked is worthless and foolish is because his heart's worthless. There's nothing in there to give it any value.

It's Proverbs 10, 20. Then we saw in Proverbs 11, verse 20, those who are of a perverse heart are an abomination to the Lord. If your heart is perverse, if you refuse correction, if you don't write God's law on there, if you don't make it the seat of application and understanding, you're perverse.

And those who are of a perverse heart are an abomination to the Lord. The people themselves become an abomination in his sight. But the blameless in their ways are his delight.

And you can't be blameless in your ways without having a correctable heart, an impressionable heart, a heart that seeks understanding. So this is our choice. Proverbs 12, verse eight, a man will be commended according to his wisdom.

He who is of a perverse heart will be despised. Same thing you saw in 11, 20, you see in 12, eight, perverse heart. Proverbs 12, 20, deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil.

This is the reason they're an abomination. A heart that devises wicked plans is an abomination. Deceit is in the heart.

Counselors of peace have joy. Proverbs 12, 23, a prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims foolishness. What's in the heart comes out the mouth, as we just saw.

We saw in Proverbs 13, 12, more recently, hope deferred makes the heart sick. But when desire comes, it is a tree of life. We explained that in detail.

That takes a little bit of retranslating. You come to Proverbs 14, verse 10. The heart

knows its own bitterness.

Stranger doesn't share its joy. 13, even in laughter, the heart may sorrow. We have so much information here about the heart.

To complete your list there, you have Proverbs 13, 20, you have Proverbs 14, 10, the bitter heart, the relationship to joy or lack thereof. Proverbs 14, 13, even in laughter, there can be sorrow in the heart. The end of mirth may be grief.

Proverbs 14, 30, a sound heart is life to the body. Envy is rottenness to the bones. Then that brings us to our chapter where we've seen the heart in verse seven and verse 13, 14, and 15, our triplet.

Verse seven said the lips of the wise disperse knowledge. The heart of the fool does not do so. The connection between the mouth and the heart, the lips, the tongue, and the heart.

It's inescapable. So what do we conclude here about this emphasis on the heart before we leave this great triplet? We're accountable, we are responsible. It is our choice what kind of heart we have.

That is going to define what comes out of our mouth. And therefore it is going to define our relationships with others, whether we are a blessing or a curse, whether we are usable by God to draw others to himself or whether we are an impediment and a stumbling block that have to be set aside and pushed aside. Are we the joy of God's heart or are we an abomination in his sight? We choose by what we exercise in terms of custodial care of our heart.

Bend every effort, all diligence to guard our heart and prevent defiling, prevent perversity, prevent corruption. Don't let it get soiled. Don't let stuff get in there that's going to mess it up.

It's a choice. This is the choice. This defines whether or not we are going to enjoy the blessings of inheritance, the blessings of the victory that the Lord Jesus accomplished on the cross.

It is all dependent on what we choose. This is why it is so important. Not long ago, we looked at Romans 9 and vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, vessels of honor fitted for every good use.

And we saw that the Bible clearly teaches it's a choice. If a man cleanses himself from defilement, from perversity, from corruption, from the things that God hates, we will be vessels of honor. We will be fitted for every good use.

We choose. What kind of vessel will we be? What kind of a custodian of our heart are

we? That makes the difference. Well, I've been promising for two weeks now, but we will in fact pick up next time after our heart triplet here in verse 16, with the better is doublet, better is.

And then we have another doublet after that of angry and lazy. And we have another one after that of wise and foolish. These are so helpful.

Once we understand the role of the heart, now these are going to tell us detailed guidance on how to be good custodians, how to keep our hearts, how to guard it, how to write things on the tablet that please God and enable us to be used by God for his purposes. We'll see that next time. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the wonderful power that comes into our lives through the Holy Spirit's ministry of these truths. We pray that as we reflect on them, we will become more Christ-like. We will be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

We will understand your good and acceptable and perfect will in every area. It will be reflected in our hearts. It will be around our necks like an ornament of grace, and it will emanate forth from our mouths in useful communication and beneficial relationship with others, all of which will raise awareness and appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ and the opportunity to be related to you through him.

We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.