

2011 Week Seven

Offerings for Quiet Time Study

1. THE HEART OF A DISCIPLE I

It's Valentine's Day today (as I write) and God is leading me to verses that make me examine my heart. Proverbs 4:23: "Above all else, guard your heart..." I know a lot of people who have been Christians a long time but have lost, or are in danger of losing, the heart of a disciple. May this not ever be true of us!

*Did you know that Jesus taught straight from the book of Proverbs? (check out **Proverbs 10:25; 12:7; and Matthew 7:24-27**, for just one example!) Here are some proverbs to help us be sure we have the heart for God that Jesus came to teach us:*

Proverbs 14:4

- Am I feeling frustrated or critical towards people around me (husband, family members, co-workers, flatmates, people at church?), because it seems to me that "the manger is empty?"
- The manger may indeed be empty. How can I cultivate the strength of a spiritual ox? Write down some things I could do to be more spiritual, instead of frustrated or critical. * What verses can I think of, that might inspire me to have the strength of a spiritual ox? (write them down; take one with me today to memorise)
- What might very likely change if I were as strong as an ox, spiritually, in these situations that bother me?

2. THE HEART OF A DISCIPLE II

1 Peter 3

- Write down all the commands you can find in this chapter. Pray: how am I doing with these, Lord? *Please show me what you want me to work on today.*

1 Peter 3:21 talks about the pledge of a good conscience that we should have as we come to be united with Christ in baptism. In the King James Version, it reads, the "appeal" of a good conscience..." This Greek word, translated "pledge" or "appeal," only occurs once in the New Testament and means an enquiry, a question (*please, God, will you grant me a clear conscience?*); a demand (*God, I can't live any longer with all this heavy stuff troubling my conscience! Somehow you have to fix this!*); earnestly seeking (*I want a clear conscience before you, God, more than anything else, it's worth any cost*); craving, an intense desire.¹

- *Please, God, help me have this same heart, passionately desiring to live with a clear conscience before you, as I had when I first made the decision to follow Jesus and confessed him as Lord in baptism!*
- Is there anything on my conscience that I need to bring into the light? Make sure I do it today, allowing God's light of truth to shine in my heart. *I had a minor car accident on Monday. Totally my fault. Pulled out of my driveway, thought I looked carefully, but was badly mistaken as a very surprised little Fiat plowed into my left rear panel. Thank God, no injuries. Every time I told the story this week, I was tempted not to: it's humiliating! But so good for me. I want to honour God with the truth. Psalm 145:14: The Lord upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.*

3. THE HEART OF CAIN I

Genesis 4:1-12

I've been thinking about the example of Cain, lately. I've been amazed today by how much is packed into Genesis 4 when you start thinking deeply about it.

- Write down all the facts you can find in the passage: facts about Cain, facts about Abel, facts about God.

- Why did Cain kill his brother? What could he have done differently? What choice did God give Cain? Whose feelings was Cain most concerned about?
- How would you describe the heart of Cain? Pray for the heart to do what's right at every turn and rest confident in the grace of God and his acceptance

4. THE HEART OF CAIN II

John 3:19-21

- In what way might we say that Cain loved darkness instead of light? *Some of my thoughts: Cain avoids God when he messes up (goes away from the light, into hiding). Doesn't trust God's love for him. Once "rejected," he assumes he's condemned and can never change that. Doesn't seem to hear God offering him a choice, a chance to fix what was wrong. I think he feels hopeless, like a failure. Instead of shedding light on his dark thoughts and deeds, he hides from God (like Adam and Eve). He won't give up control to God. Doesn't entrust himself to God, he's afraid to. Cain is stubborn. He's decided things can never change for him, even though God says, "Not so." Cain trusts his own way of looking at things rather than God's: he says, "My punishment is more than I can bear," but God says 1 Corinthians 10:13. Cain says, "Today you (God) are driving me from the ground," but in fact Cain was the one who committed a murder! – God had done nothing wrong. Cain refuses to take responsibility for the direction his life is taking. First he blames Abel, then he blames God (actually a good progression: at least he's entering into conflict with God, after first raging at humans – but he quits before the final, essential step and never arrives at a place where he takes personal responsibility for himself).*

Genesis 6:5, Mark 7:20-23

- Fill in the blanks: God saw that _____ inclination of man's thoughts was _____ of the time. (NIV translation)
- Where does Jesus say evil thoughts are born?

Our reactions to life's disappointments can be like this example : imagine that living our lives is like being in the driver's seat of a special car, which only we know how to drive. As we travel down the motorway, things happen that hurt us or scare us or frustrate us or make us angry. Some of us in this situation begin to feel overwhelmed, "...so we decide to put the car into cruise control and jump into the back seat. Then we yell at God, our spouse, our children, our parents, or all of the above. 'You take over! I can't drive anymore!'

As the car goes careening down the motorway, "hitting other cars, running over other people, and bouncing off buildings, we sit there in a panic, saying, 'Somebody better get control of this thing!'" Perhaps God is sitting with us in the back seat. But all he can say is, 'I can't help you back here!' And he explains, 'I can't do anything as long as you are sitting in the back seat. I can only help if you are in the driver's seat—' That is, if we accept personal responsibility for driving our car.

Some of us, in contrast to this, are overcontrolling. We do just the opposite. "We never leave the driver's seat. But as we drive along, God, or whoever is close to us, suggests we stop or slow down. But instead we panic and hit the gas pedal, swerving to avoid a collision. Or if we need to turn left, we freeze and our arms become like cement. We can't turn, so we end up hitting the brick wall. "

The only way to drive the car is to retain control of the car, accepting and acknowledging our responsibility as the driver, and trust God, accepting whatever comes our way, in a righteous posture of surrender and submission to God's sovereignty and purity of heart. With this attitude, if someone with us suggests we slow down, we can slow down. If we need to make a turn, we are not only aware of the directions given to us (and we don't resent them), we are happy for the help and partnership in getting us where we want to go and we can make the turn. ² To me, this is the heart of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Humble. Teachable.

5. THERE IS NO WISDOM, NO INSIGHT, NO PLAN THAT CAN SUCCEED AGAINST THE LORD.

Proverbs 21:30

- Commit this verse to memory.
- Is there anything I'm worried about, that emotionally, irrationally, I believe is outside God's control? Am I afraid that God won't care, won't help, can't help, won't protect me or come through for me?
- Acknowledge this before God and to my friends in church.
- Plan to devote some Bible Study time to finding more verses that will strengthen my faith in this area.

*Day 1, The Heart of a Disciple I: *first on my list: slow down; take a deep breath and pray silently; trust God in that moment that He knows what's going on and can/will strengthen me*

¹<http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G1906&t=NASB>

²This car analogy and the citations here are from the book, *You Are What You Think*, by David Stoop, (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1982), pp 18-19.