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THE HEART

Anki Sandvik

The Heart

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THE HEART

The tropical night in northern Thailand was wonderful. Starlit, windless and no indication of bad weather. Some young students from a Bible School were sleeping in their beds in a house nearby. Then suddenly there was a tremendous noise and the youngsters woke up with a start and they noticed that a tall tree had fallen on the house and through the roof. Nobody was injured and all of them ran out in the dark night. It is really not so strange that a tree falls down but now there was no obvious reason for this to happen. The next morning the staff and the students from the Bible School went out to find the reason for the tree trunk having broken down. What they saw was a beautiful tree on the outside with both leaves and fruits, but when they looked closer they noticed that on the inside the tree was completely rotten.

This event is a strong reminder of what is always the most important thing. It is not the beautiful surface and the polished facade but the hidden part, what's on the inside. We human beings are often impressed by the appearance and the charisma, by

giftings and talents, which are great blessings, but throughout the whole Bible, it is very obvious that God is first looking at our inner part, our hearts. The Bible mentions the heart, both God's heart and the human heart, more than 700 times in different contexts. The Hebrew word for the heart, lev, means the most inner and the hidden part. According to the Bible, the heart shows a person's true character and motives. A pure, humble and devoted heart is always pleasing to our heavenly Father.

Samuel, the prophet, was sent by the Lord to Jesse, the Bethlehemite, to anoint one of his eight

sons to be the future king of Israel. Samuel assumed when he saw the oldest son, the handsome Eliab, that he was God's chosen one. Then the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or his physical stature, because I

For the Lord does not see as a man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7).

have refused him." For the Lord does not see as a man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart"(1 Sam 16:7). None of the other present brothers was chosen. The

youngest son, David, was sent for from keeping the sheep and he came before Samuel. Then the Lord spoke to Samuel: "Arise, anoint him, for this is the one!"(1 Sam 16:12). David had a heart after God's own heart, therefore, he was chosen to be the next king of Israel (Acts 13:22).

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life"(Prov. 4:23).

The Word of God is eternal and God's opinion of the heart is never changing. In

this verse there are some important keywords: "all diligence, first priority, the heart, the inner and most important part, life. It will affect our own lives as well as other people's lives.

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life (Prov. 4:23).

One example of the importance of the heart is when Jesus was saying, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Luke 12:34). Our choices and our behavior show what is in our hearts and what is most important to us.

WHAT IS THE HEART?

In the physical body the heart is one of the most central and vital organs. Without a functioning heart you cannot live. In the same second the heart stops beating, life ceases. In the same way the spiritual heart is the most important part and the one God is most interested in. He is more fascinated by a heart which is open to be filled by the Holy Spirit, open to be cultivated and dedicated to Him than by

any outward features. “Do

Do not let your adornment be merely outward-arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel, rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God (1 Peter 3:3-4).

not let your adornment be merely outward-arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel, rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Peter 3:3-4) God is not against

beautiful looks, of course, but the hidden person of the heart is so much more precious in the sight of God.

A human being is spirit, soul and body (1 Thess. 5:23). Our spirit will be born again and filled with the life from God when we receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord. The soul is our will, our emotions and our thoughts. Only the Word of God can separate the spirit from the soul. "For the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow and is the discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

We ourselves have the possibility to affect what is in our hearts. Therefore, the heart cannot only be the spirit, because in a born-again person's spirit, the Spirit of God dwells and He is perfect and full of glory. As we can read in Hebrews 4:12, God's Word is the discerner of our thoughts and intents, i.e. our decisions and actions are molding our hearts. Our souls are not always in harmony with the Spirit of God and the imperfection of the soul will affect our inner part. We are, for instance, making decisions in our hearts. "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly,

or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). Other examples are Moses and Ananias. ” And now when he (Moses) was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel” (Acts 7:23). ..”Why have you (Ananias) conceived this thing in your heart?.. (Acts 5:4)

HOW HAS SALVATION AFFECTED OUR HEARTS?

As a result of salvation, Christ dwells by faith in our hearts (Eph 3:17). The love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy

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Spirit who was given to us (Rom. 5:5). God wants us to fervently love Him as well as our fellowmen with a pure heart (1 Peter 1:22).

It is possible for us to love God and people because God’s agape love is poured into our hearts. The love is in us and can always flow out through us even if our feelings are not always in agreement.

In Phil. 1:7, Paul mentions how he has the Church of Philippi in his heart. In the same way our hearts

can reach out to other people both to our sisters and brothers in the Lord and to those who have not yet received the salvation in Christ.

We have the possibilities to act out of unselfish love but as mentioned our soul has a part in this. The more we have fellowship with our wonderful Savior the easier it is to walk in the spirit and let the love of God flow out of our lives. In the presence of God our hearts are touched and filled with His glory. We can boldly come before His face through the Blood of Jesus whenever we want to.

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the Blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is His flesh and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:19-22).

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What the Lord always wants is that we choose to come with an open and honest heart, because He already knows our inner thoughts and motives. In His presence we can feel His heartbeat and become more and more like Him. God is pleased when we come to Him both in good times as well as in bad times. In John 14:1 we are encouraged not to let our hearts be troubled but believe (trust) in God because He is both willing and able to take care of all our troubles and give us a solution for all our problems. “Let us, therefore, come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrew 4:16).

DIFFERENT KINDS OF HEARTS

The Bible speaks about many different kinds of hearts both in the Old and the New Testament. Some examples of hearts are: a heart filled with faith, a humble heart, a joyful heart, a pure heart, an honest heart and some opposites such as a hard heart and a proud heart.

A HEART FILLED WITH FAITH

Faith pleases God (Hebrew 11:6). Faith means to trust God and also what He has said in His Word. God wants faith in Him to fill our inner being. There is an enormous difference with only having knowledge of God's will in one's mind and getting revelation and faith into one's heart. One example from my own life was when I had some symptoms in my body. In one service during praise and worship when standing before the throne I saw the Cross in my spirit and knew that my sickness was on Jesus' body. It was completely the work of the Holy Spirit. From that second all the symptoms were gone and I was completely healed.

Faith of the heart is an inner assurance of who God is and what He has done for us. The Bible's definition of faith is: Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not yet seen (Hebrews 11:1). That is to trust in the Word of God before you see the promises being fulfilled.

How could we then get faith into our hearts? The Bible has an answer to this. First of all, we

as believers have got faith as a gift according to Romans 12:3. “.. God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. Secondly, we have faith because we are in Christ Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). The third way to get faith is by reading and listening to the Word. ” So then, faith comes by hearing and hearing the Word of God” (Romans 10:17).

A good prayer to pray for other people and oneself is in Ephesians 1:17-19:” that the God of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power”.

Faith is to see the promises of God with the eyes of our hearts. Faith is connected to our mouth. I believe and therefore, I spoke, we also believe and therefore, speak” (2 Cor. 4:13). The faith of the

heart and the confession of the mouth can move mountains (Mark 11:22-24). This means that every circumstance can change when we act upon a promise in the Word of God. When we pray with faith in our hearts we have the answer even if we don't see the results at once. Nothing is impossible with God or with a heart filled with faith!

A SOFT HEART

A soft heart is an open and a broken heart. The opposite is a hard heart. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says; today if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness”

(Hebrews 3:7-8). A hard heart can mean that we close our hearts to the voice and leading of the Holy Spirit. We choose to walk on our own path instead of the one the Lord points at.

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says; today if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness (Hebr 3:8).

In the parable about the sower (Mark 4) Jesus speaks about 4 different soils, which can be compared to

our hearts and the Word sown into them. In the good soil, a soft heart, the Word was growing and producing fruit a hundredfold, but in the other soils the Word could not penetrate and start to grow in order to produce fruit. The soil (heart) becomes soft when we let the Holy Spirit work in us. The Lord has chosen us to bear fruit that remains, which will glorify the Father (John 15:8, 15:16). A soft heart has a great part in this. A broken heart is also affecting our spiritual understanding and our ability to see clearly. The opposite is when Jesus was telling His disciples in Mark 8:17; “Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened”?

A wonderful example of a cry to God for a broken heart is from Wales in the beginning of the 20th century. The revival preacher Evan Roberts was strongly affected in his soul when he visited a service where the pastor’s prayer to God was about getting a broken heart. Robert’s own request for a broken heart resulted in a revelation about God’s love and a dedication to do the will of God. The Lord strongly used Roberts and many other believers and the revival spread throughout Wales

and whole communities were changed by the power of God. It has been told that even the ponies in the mines had to be re-educated because they were used to acting on orders with swear words.

A HUMBLE HEART

In Matthew 11:29 Jesus is saying: Learn from Me for I am gentle and lowly in heart” and He encourages us to have a humble heart.

Learn from Me for I am gentle and lowly in heart (Matthew 11:29).

What does this mean? We can see the answer when looking at Jesus’ life in the gospels. Typical of His walk on earth was that He spent a lot of time in fellowship with His Father and that He always sought to do God’s will in everything He did. Jesus was 100% dependent on His Father and only did what He saw His Father doing (John 5:19). Humbleness is to be in a deep relationship with God. In Christ and led by the Holy Spirit we can do whatever He asks us to do (Phil 4:13). Another example of a humble heart is when Jesus chose to submit to God’s will and to be obedient until death on the cross (Phil 2:7-8).

Jesus decided to do what was the best for humanity instead of choosing a selfish, easy and painless path.

The opposite of humbleness is pride, something

Yes, all of you, be submissive to one another and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5).

that God definitely hates (Proverbs 6:16-19). Pride goes before destruction (Proverbs 16:18), but before honor is humility (Proverbs 15:33). Pride is having the mindset that you can manage on your

own, taking the honor from God and having a superior attitude towards other people. By pride comes nothing but strife (Proverbs 13:10). The Word of God shows us the right kind of attitude: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:3-5). Yes, all of you, be submissive to one another and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud but gives

grace to the humble”(1 Peter 5:5). Humility before one another and before God results in grace from God.

In the Bible there are several examples of both humble and proud people.

Sometimes you can start your Christian walk in a good way, but after a while when God anoints and uses

...as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper (2 Chronicles 26:5)

you in His ministry and you get the credit for it, pride can sneak in.

One tragic example is king Uzziah. He became king when he was 16 years old and at that time his heart was seeking God. ”He sought God in the days of Zechariah who had understanding of the visions of God and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper” (2 Chronicles 26:5). Due to God’s help, he became successful and the rumor about him was spread widely. Then something happened, something that we always need to be careful about in the success. But when he (Uzziah) was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord his God by entering

the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense” (2 Chronicles 26:16). His proud heart made him take the liberty and position he did not have the right to have. When the priests corrected him he became furious, a reaction connected to pride. A proud heart does not want to listen and receive instructions. A humble heart, instead, is broken, listens and obeys.

A good example in the Old Covenant is Moses. “Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3). He was a strong leader who in his heart reached out for God, obeyed the Lord’s Commandments and longed for more of God’s glory.

John the Baptist is another good example. “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven (John 3:27). “He must increase but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Here we clearly can see the qualifications that are typical of a humble heart: in a relationship with God and giving Jesus the honor in and through our lives.

The more humble hearts there are in the Body of Christ and the more true fellowship between believers, the more the world can see Jesus. Humility results in grace from the Lord, a grace that we need both for our salvation and our ministry (1 Cor. 15:10). A humble heart has an impact on the believer in order to step into one's calling and reach the level God wants one to have.

The first sin of mankind was rebellion against God and a wish to be independent. What a tremendous impact it had on humanity! In

the same way, the humility of Jesus had enormous consequences. Salvation is now available for everyone

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8).

who wants to receive it. When we choose, with God's help, to have a humble heart, it will have wonderful consequences, not only for us, but also for those people who live in our neighborhoods and also those to whom God is sending us. God has also given us a promise in Matthew 5:5."Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. There is great blessing connected to a humble heart.

A PURE HEART WITH PURE MOTIVES

God wants us to have pure hearts. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8). "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart from a good conscience and from sincere faith, from which some have strayed, have turned aside to idle talk (1 Timothy 1:5-6). Many different things, for instance misunderstanding, disappointments, wrong treatment and greed can affect us to open our hearts and let spiritual dirt enter in. The wonderful truth is that the Blood of Jesus is always available to cleanse our hearts from everything that doesn't belong to the heart (1 John 1:7-9).

The most important things in our lives are the motives of the heart. "Therefore, judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes; who will bring to light both the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God (1 Cor. 4:5). The Lord wants us to have pure and right motives in everything we do. One day, in the first place, we will not receive our reward for the fruit we are

bearing but for what our motives to serve the Lord and people have been.

Some years ago I asked the Lord what it means to have pure motives and I felt that His answer was the following: First of all, Jesus should always be exalted and honored and secondly that we should rejoice when people are helped and the kingdom of God is spread despite who God uses. Motives are affecting everything we do, we can even preach with unclean motives, something that Paul, the apostle, was not doing (1 Thess. 2:3, Phil. 1:15-16).

The Lord wants us always to have transparent hearts before Him and that we do not have hidden selfish motives. If we experience that the motives are not pure, the best thing to do is to run to the throne of grace to obtain help in the time of need!

Some years ago I had the privilege to meet with a pastor and his wife, both in their 80s. Their bodies were broken after a hard life. For instance, the pastor had been in a prison camp for more than 22 years because of his faith. Despite sickness and

weak bodies their eyes were beaming with God's glory. At this time they were well-known both among Christians from western countries as well as Asian countries and could have enjoyed the fame and attention. But their hearts were primarily filled with one thing, to get the Word of God into their country so that as many as possible would be able to hear the gospel and become disciples of Jesus. Their hearts' motives were to spread the kingdom of God.

A HEART FILLED WITH JOY

Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10). A happy Christian is a

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conqueror in the storms and hardships of life. Our hearts can be filled with joy (John 16:22) and this will affect both our emotions and our

whole body. It is scientifically proven that laughter and joy strengthen the immune system, have a positive impact on the blood pressure, reduce stress, increase creativity, release endorphins which are the body's own pain-killers, and in general joy

gives a better quality of life. “You show me the path of life, in Your presence is fullness of joy, at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

A DEVOTED HEART

The Lord wants us to have devoted hearts both in praising God and serving people. ”For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (2 Chronicles 16:9). A devoted heart is a submitted heart. The gospel was passionately preached by the first Christians and many people became believers, for instance, in Antioch. Due to this, the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to encourage the new believers. His message to the disciples was with purpose of heart to continue to follow the Lord (Acts 11:23). In the same way, Peter encouraged the leadership in the church to be shepherds both willingly and eagerly (1 Peter 5:2). A devoted heart is most important whether someone is a new believer or has matured in their spiritual lives.

The Word of God encourages us to do everything from our hearts. “Bondservants obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not to men” (Col. 3:22-23). Jesus came to

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serve, not to be served (Matt. 20:27-28) and He showed us an example of how we willingly and with a devoted heart can serve in accordance to the human mindset of smaller tasks. Jesus washed the disciples’ dirty and dusty feet (John 13:4-5) and after His resurrection, He also

made breakfast for the disciples who had been out fishing all night (John 21:9-10).

True praise and worship are born in a devoted heart. Sometimes we can honor God with our lips but the heart is far away from God (Matt. 15:9). Praise and worship are not about a beautiful voice, but a heart which is passionate about giving thanks, honoring and exalting the Savior.

HOW TO KNOW WHAT IS IN OUR HEARTS

God knows what is in our hearts even if we ourselves are not aware of it. When God shows us the condition of the heart, it is only to get rid of trash and filth and instead to be filled with His life and glory. We notice what is on the inside especially when we come into hardships and difficult situations. When you press on a citrus fruit, the juice will come out and in the same way we can see what kind of juice will come out from our inner being when the circumstances are pushing and pressing from every side.

God shows the intent of our hearts, for instance, through tests. We can find this both in the Old and the New Covenants. “Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham” (Genesis 22:1). ”But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts”(1

But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts (1 Thess 2:4).

Thess 2:4). Our enemy, Satan, is tempting, while God is testing. The devil's purpose when he tempts is to get us out of God's will. The aim of God's test is that we should become more like Jesus and grow spiritually. God testing us could be compared with having an exam at school. You can usually retake the test if you fail and the teacher is often silent during the exam. In the same way, we can feel that God is far away and silent when we are in the midst of one of His tests. But He has promised us never to leave nor forsake us!

What kind of tests can be given to us? A good example of different tests is found in Joseph's life. During a long period of time he went through several different kinds of tests, from the moment when God gave him dreams until he stepped into his calling and even after that.

a) **A test of humility.** In Genesis 37 Joseph had two dreams in which he was the central person to whom everyone bowed and showed respect. God showed him his calling, but it would take 17 years until it was the right time to step into the position God had shown him. These dreams made

Joseph believe that he was superior to the others. Pride had an opportunity to start growing in his heart. He was eager to tell the other brothers, and perhaps brag, about what God had shown him in his dreams. His brothers became jealous and bitter when they heard what position he was going to have. The first test is about staying humble despite the plans God has in store for us. It would be wise to do like Mary (Luke 2:19, 2:51) and keep what God has shown in our hearts. At the right time people will recognize our calling. Probably there was an amount of pride in Joseph's heart before God gave him the dreams. He was his father's favorite son, which gave him a special position in the family. In chapter 37, verse 2, we can see that Joseph gossiped and had a critical attitude, both of which are typical of a proud heart.

This test continually comes back during our Christian walk. We can pass the test by humbling ourselves before God. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. "Therefore, humble yourselves

Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time (1 Peter 5:5-6).

under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time.” (1 Peter 5:5-6).

b) A test in difficult circumstances. Joseph, the favorite son, lived a comfortable life in many ways; he had gotten fine clothes from his father, he had wonderful visions for the future, he lived in a nice house and had a good life. But in some minutes, everything changed. His brothers, whose hearts were full of envy, decided to kill him, but thanks to his oldest brother, Reuben, Joseph’s life was spared. They threw him into a well and suddenly Joseph was in captivity without any of the privileges he was used to having. There was no water in the well and because this occurred in the desert, his need for water was imminent. We can imagine that Joseph experienced fear. Everything went against the vision God had given him (Genesis 37:18-36).

How do we react when everything goes against what God has said to us when it seems that there is no way out of our situation? It is in that situation we choose whether to look at the circumstances or to trust what the Lord has said to us. The

circumstances can speak defeat and despair, but the promises of God always speak hope and faith and show the next step for us to take. God's timetable and plan are not usually the same as ours. Trusting the Lord means to lift our eyes and look at Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith and also give praise to the Lord because He has everything under control.

c) **A test of faithfulness:** While Joseph was in the well, a caravan with merchants passed by and Joseph was sold to them and taken to Egypt where he was sold as a slave to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. The Lord was with Joseph and he succeeded in everything he did. Joseph found favor in Potiphar's sight and he was given greater and greater responsibility. God blessed Potiphar through Joseph (Genesis 39). Even as a slave, Joseph was faithful in serving Potiphar. "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?" (Luke 16:10,12) God is testing our hearts both in the small things and also serving other

He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own (Luk 16:10,12).

people before entrusting us with more. A faithful heart is precious both before God and the people we serve. Sometimes we consider only the spiritual duty to be important, but faithfulness and being trustworthy in all tasks and services are very important. Faithfulness is very much about the

heart's attitude and not only about being outwardly obedient.

d) A test of purity when being wrongly treated:

Joseph kept his heart pure when Potiphar's wife tempted him to sexual impurity (Genesis 39:6-10). Joseph was falsely accused and despite his right behavior, he was thrown in jail. Indeed, God was with Joseph because a slave's attempt to rape usually resulted in death penalty. It could have been that Potiphar knew both his wife's and Joseph's characters and was aware of what had really happened. But he had to take measures and he chose to spare Joseph's life by throwing

him into the dungeon. This is a test that each of us could end up in – we keep our hearts clean and we try to do what is right, but instead we are accused and have to face the consequences of it. Many would protest loudly, but there is nothing said in the Word that Joseph defended himself. The Lord was with Joseph in the prison and also now he got a position with responsibility. Once again Joseph was wrongly treated. He interpreted two other prisoners' dreams in a correct way. The other prisoner, the chief butler, was given back his position, but forgot his promise to Joseph, who had to remain in jail for the next two years (Genesis 40:16-23).

e) A test when we get a position with authority: God can test our hearts to watch how we treat people when we are promoted to a position of a leader and receive more authority. Pharaoh had two dreams that made him anxious and he called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men to come and interpret the dreams. But nobody was able to do that. Then the chief butler remembered how Joseph had interpreted his dream and mentioned this to Pharaoh. Joseph

was brought from the dungeon and came before Pharaoh and interpreted the dreams. As a result Joseph was promoted to be the second man in the kingdom with responsibility for the agriculture in the country (Genesis 41).

Joseph passed the test to get power and authority and he could save Egypt in a time of need. Now he was coming into the calling God had shown him 17 years earlier. During these years of hardship and bad circumstances, the Lord had been working in his heart and prepared him for the responsible position to help a nation in hard times.

f) A test to forgive when you have a possibility to revenge: One test that Joseph still had to go through was to meet his brothers. If God hadn't had access to his heart in order to change it, there could have been unforgiveness, disappointment and bitterness against his brothers and now he would have the chance to revenge. In Genesis 42:24 and 43:30 we can clearly see the heart of Joseph; he wept, deeply touched by love for his brothers. There is no indication of unforgiveness

or accusation against his brothers when he let them know who he was (Genesis 45:7-8), but instead he saw what had happened as being a part of God's plan. He blessed his brothers.

Besides these tests in Joseph's life we can read in the Word how God tested Abraham to see what was most important in his life, the beloved and much longed-for son, Isaac, or to obey God in everything (Genesis 22). Abraham passed the test, he was willing to have God in the first place in his heart. Even now it is God's will that we are willing to submit to Him 100%. This willingness, produced by the Holy Spirit, gives an enormous freedom in our lives.

We can also know what is in our hearts by listening to our own words, especially in times of trouble. "For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). And, of course, we can ask the Lord to search and reveal to us the condition of our hearts (Revelation 2:23).

WHAT IS AFFECTING OUR HEARTS AND HOW TO PROTECT THE HEART

God has given us authority over our own lives and with authority follows responsibility. In Mark 4:24 Jesus says, "Take heed what you hear". Our eyes and ears are the gates to our hearts. It is only we ourselves who can decide what we receive and what we say no to.

In John 13:2 we can read, "The supper being ended, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot; Simon's son, to betray Him." A thought of this magnitude is not suddenly dropped into the heart, but usually it starts with a little thought, which we can say "no" to. The thought will perhaps come back and we can start to meditate on it. When it has affected our hearts it can lead to action. Judas, who lived in Jesus' presence, could have said, NO to the dangerous thought about betraying his master. The choice was his and he could have gone to Jesus and asked Him to help him with this thought. But there was something in Judas' heart, perhaps greed, which liked the thought and he didn't resist the thought to betray Jesus in order to get some

money. What we can see here is that even if we live close to the Lord we must always protect our hearts.

God has given us several possibilities to get help when we notice that wrong thoughts try to get a foothold in our hearts:

- The Helper, the Holy Spirit, helps in our weaknesses (Romans 8:26-27)
- The peace of God will guard our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:7)
- We can come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16)
- Praise and worship protect the heart (Romans 1:21)
- We can submit to God and resist the devil, who will flee (James 4:7)
- We can pray in the spirit and put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18)

SUMMARY

As we have seen in the Word, the Lord is most interested in our hearts. If you are not yet sure that Jesus lives in your heart, this is how the

Christian life starts: “That you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). When you ask Jesus to become Lord in your life you are transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the beloved Son and God will be your heavenly Father. From this moment a wonderful fellowship with God starts and you will have an exciting life as a child in God’s big family.

A heart that is open to be touched by God is able to touch other people’s hearts with the love and power of God. We can boldly pray that the Lord strengthens us through His grace and that He directs our hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ (2 Thess 3:5) and that He helps us to keep our hearts with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23).

