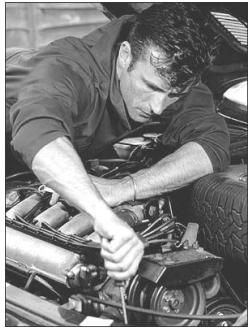


2014 NEW YEAR HEART CHECK *Focused Living*



A mechanic saw a well-known heart surgeon in his garage and shouted, "Hey Doc, just like you I open up the heart of a car, replace the valves, set the timing, clean the pipes and replace the engine so that when I finish it works like new. So how come you get the really big bucks and I don't when we're actually doing the same work?" The surgeon smiled, "Try doing it with the engine running!"

The reason why Jesus gets the *'really big bucks'* is that He patiently works on our hearts (engines) which drive our lives. Our hearts are constantly running away

from Him, often out of timing with His truth, corroded with lies, hardened by anger, rusted by greed, beating irregularly with lust, or just plain broken by sin.

The good news is that God does His best heart surgery on New Years! That's right, Jesus died on the Cross on the Jewish New Year (Exodus 12:2. Easter/Passover. Luke 22:7; Matt 26:2) in order to give us a much needed heart transplant (Ezekiel 11:19-21; 36:26-27). Because of our hardened arteries due to sin, disobedience and rebellion God arranged to exchange our sin for His Son's righteousness at the Cross on the Jewish New Year! The Lord graciously took our sinful hearts of stone and gave us new responsive, soft hearts ready to walk with Him each day. *"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed."* (I Peter 2:24)

Start the New Year with a 3,000 mile check up by getting your heart right with the Lord! Dive into **Mark 4:1-20** applying the truths you discover from each of the 4 heart types which Jesus describes. You will find some of each represented by your heart! *"Watch over your heart with all diligence for from it flow the springs of life."* (Proverbs 4:23)

HARD AND UNRESPONSIVE HEART (15) Here Jesus pictures a dirt road that has become rock hard with constant traffic of pounding oxen hoofs and wagon wheels. Our hearts often turn hard to the Lord through disobedience, a guilty conscience, unconfessed sin, anger, resentment or bitterness. We study the Bible and listen to sermons but there is no real transformation or growth because His truth cannot penetrate our hearts and is literally stolen by satan. The only cure is to do the hard work of breaking up the hard areas of our hearts. *"Plow up hardness of your hearts, otherwise good seed will be wasted."* (Jer 4:3; See also Mark 3:1-6; 8:14-21; Heb 3:7-15)

1. Where has your heart become hard from the pounding of disobedience, anger, greed, lust, resentment, unforgiveness, etc?
2. What specific truth is the Lord trying to grow in your life to which you have become resistant?

3. Will you humble yourself by confessing your sin, asking the Lord to break up the hardness and resistance of your heart?

SHALLOW AND IMMATURE HEART (16-17) Jesus then describes a man who gets all excited about growing in Christ but then falls away, backslides or retreats back into old lifestyles and habits. He grows shallow because he will not do the hard work of growing deep roots of faith. This type of man resorts to a half hearted efforts, lack of commitment, making excuses, cutting corners, or taking the easy way out. When life gets hard, he bails on the Lord and His followers by playing church or skimming by with minimal effort so that he looks good to others but inside is empty and distant from God. The only remedy is to grow your faith deep into God's character, purposing to trust Him every day in every way (John 6:29; Rom 4:20-22; Prov 3:5-6; Luke 17:5-6).

1. What 'rocky' times are you experiencing where you need to trust God's character and promises?
2. Are you prepared to trust Him until He lets you down and is no longer trustworthy?

DISTRACTED AND PREOCCUPIED HEART (18-19) Jesus pictures a heart where there is no identifiable Christ-like fruit because the truth is being choked out of his life by the thorny weeds of fear and worry. This is the man who seems to be growing and doing well with the Lord, then for a variety of reasons, a hunger for God's Word, a deep love for Christ, and a desire to serve is replaced by a host of lesser interests, pursuits and idols. The only sure way to deal with a weed (kudzu!) is to destroy it at the roots.

1. What specific worries, fears, or priorities are choking out your hunger/love for Christ? How did you let this happen?
2. What will you say 'no' to in order to say 'yes' once again to Christ?

DEVOTED AND DEDICATED HEART (20) Lastly, Jesus describes a heart so in tune with His that it produces a 10,000% yield for His glory! This type of heart hungers after the Lord and longs to surrender to Him in order to obey Him every moment in life, not as a **duty** but as a **delight**. Not that he's 'got to', but he 'gets to!' (John 15:1-5)

1. Give an example of how your heart is producing a 'harvest of righteousness' (II Cor 9:10) for His glory and your growth?
2. (II Cor 5:17) God is more interested in you becoming a new man than He is in you celebrating a New Year. Take a few minutes and write out a prayer asking Him to give you a heart even more receptive and committed to growth than last year.