

Part 38: How to Test Your Heart

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Regardless of your outlook of the long term trajectory of our society, you have to admit that we live in a remarkable era of human history. We live in Missoula, Montana, and yet even in the deepest months of winter we can walk into a grocery store and find avocados from Mexico, coffee from Ethiopia, fresh fruit from South America.

We can wake up in our beds, get on an airplane, and go to sleep on the opposite side of our world. Our interconnected world offers unparalleled opportunities for sharing health information, educational resources, and most importantly, the gospel of Jesus Christ in ways, places and means once never dreamed possible.

Yet the downside of our interconnected world is that we often find it hard to be alone. We are a people adverse to silence, anxious when we are bored, uncomfortable when there's not a music stream to distract us, a new show to entertain us, or a digital community to accompany us. Have you ever found yourself waiting in a long line with no phone?

All of this means that we are a people who in pace and in preference wrestle with the stillness of being alone with our own heart. We fear what we might find behind our distractions and so we tend to cover up introspection with adventure, books, social media, family, things which are sometimes good, and things which are sometimes blatant escapes.

But today, as we just heard read, God wants us to prepare to stop for one minute, to pause on this Sunday morning, and to examine our hearts. As we do this you might find things that make you uncomfortable, but there is good news in this text for each and every one of us. That good news is that the Lord knows your hearts, and knows how to refine them through the promise of the gospel.

Our main point this morning is this: **We can only become comfortable with our own hearts when we become comfortable with the work of Jesus.**

We are going to look at this in two ways in four short verses in Proverbs 27. First in Proverbs 27:19 we are going to examine: **The Reality of Our Hearts**. Then in verses 20-22 we are going to see two things, first, **The Exam of Our Hearts**, and secondly **The Hope of Our Hearts**.

I'm going to begin today by reading the whole of our passage and then we will circle back around to the first verse: **Proverbs 27:19-22**.

Solomon loves to use allusions to nature in his writings to show that just as God created nature with certain norms, God's wisdom is a norm. Looking at God's word we see that just as nature works consistently, so too does God's word work consistently. Its truth is inescapable.

The illustration he opens with drives his first point today: **The Reality of Our Hearts**.

Solomon uses a metaphor and says: as in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man.

In other words it is in the nature of water to reflect back what looks into it. You want to know what's adorable? Videos of babies looking themselves in mirrors. You want to know what's creepy? If you were to take a video of your roommate looking in the mirror. Why? Because with babies they are excited at the nuance of their own reflection. To see themselves from an outsider's perspective is new and they don't know what to do with it.

But for the adult, the nuance is gone. They aren't surprised when they see their reflection because they know to look into a puddle and to look into a mirror is to see one's self. Without comment or edit these reflections show back to us not what could be, not what once was, not who you want to be, but who you really are. That's what water was created to do.

But what happens if what we see in that mirror is a reality we don't like? What happens if we don't like what we see in our own reflection?

I discovered a song this week which was hauntingly beautiful and tragic. In it the songwriter pines for what her life would be like if she lived in a world with no mirrors. In other words, what would it be like if you didn't have to encounter an outsider's view of yourself?

She says things like: "I'd be cooler, I'd be smarter. Probably be a better daughter. I would say when I was hungry, Walk out the door and not want to cry. I'd be louder, I'd be honest, probably wouldn't be so self-conscious."

Where the words express a sort of optimism the feel of the song is a tragic one. She knows that we cannot live in a world like this, we cannot escape our own reflection and yet she longingly wonders: "If I lived in a house with no mirrors, where the walls didn't talk back at me--Maybe I'd dream a bit bigger if there was nothing to see, If I lived in a house with no mirrors, where the walls didn't pick me apart, maybe my skin would be thicker if I lived in a house with no mirrors."

As I was struck by the painful longing behind the artist's words, I was reminded that the Bible actually paints a seemingly bleaker picture.

You see you might be able to remove all the mirrors from the world. You could choose to live in a room where water could never collect. And yet you could never escape your own reflection. Why? Because as water reflects face to face, so the heart of man reflects the man.

We could never see ourselves, but we cannot escape ourselves. The problem is not what we see from the outside that burdens us, the problem is that just as nature was designed to reflect what it encounters, so too our heart is designed by God to reflect who we really are. We cannot escape this reality. We love the idea of not seeing who we really are, but not seeing your reflection doesn't change the reality of who you currently are.

When we are constantly distracted by the pace of our life, passing by mirrors because we are too busy to stop. It doesn't mean the reflection isn't there. It just means the reality is unaddressed.

When we slow down to examine what our heart reflects about who we really are, we will find a reflection. The question is, will you like it? What will it look like?

But this is why the gospel is a safe place, a place even safer than a world without mirrors. Look at what Jesus himself said: **Mark 2:16-17**. Jesus came for those who don't like what they see in the mirror of their heart. He came not for the picture perfect Instagram models, he came for those who are often ashamed to look, or self-righteously trying to change what they reflect.

We live out, we magnify, we display the reality of our hearts. We cannot not. But in a world where we can look out see what our waist line, our wardrobe and our self-worth looks like, how can we see what our heart looks like?

Here, Solomon wants to help us. This is where he provides for us two tests. Tests where he doesn't call us to look at what we see, but to examine what we feel. This is our second point today: **The Exam of our Hearts**.

Read with me once more **Proverbs 27:20-21**.

So here we see two tests which show us the reflection of our heart. The first is the *satisfaction of our eyes* and the second is the *substance of our praise*.

Solomon carries the theme of vision from verse nineteen into verse twenty. I went in for my first official eye exam a number of years ago and they do all the things you would expect.

They put in front of you a series of numbers, letters and colors and they ask you to tell them what your eye sees. It turns out that my right eye was a miserable failure at seeing just about anything.

But here, Solomon holds up to the eyes of our heart a myriad of images and says that the problem of the eyes of our heart is not that we see too little, but that we see too much.

He appeals to another natural phenomenon: death. Sheol is the Hebrew word for the grave, and Abaddon is a word which means to perish or be ruined.

He shows us the unfortunate truth that death is never satisfied. A man of higher society might know that even though he loves what's on the dinner table, it would be improper for him to take more. A parent who loves children might reasonably come to a place to say: I feel like I have enough. Even my children at some point are able to say with dessert and sugar, "I shouldn't eat any more."

But death knows no such limits. There's always room for one more. It's not slowing down. It's not stopping, and it shows no sign of having its fill.

So too, says Solomon, are the eyes of man. The first test of our heart is the desire of our eyes. When you look out into the world, what do your eyes hunger for? Solomon himself is mixing metaphors here, he's connecting what we see with our appetite and satisfaction.

If we see in this world an endless buffet of options which might satisfy our hearts and scratch our itches, we have broken eyes.

We have here at the library a door code box we need to use to enter the building. On that pad are twelve buttons, if we enter the right combination of the first five button presses, the door opens and we

get what we want. Which with of those twelve individual keys there are 248,832 possible five digit combinations.

Someone really can sit at that door and logically crack that lock with the right amount of time and effort. So why do we still use those pin pads? Because we know that the effort it would take to actually track and log every combination is too much for someone to accomplish.

But the truth is you have more of a chance of guessing the code to Fort Knox that you do of finding the right combination of worldly pleasures which actually bring you satisfaction.

Our eyes tell us that if we can just get the right combination, we will finally find satisfaction. If it didn't work with a house, a family and a good job, maybe it would work with a mistress and a vacation. If I got my degree and am dissatisfied, maybe I'm just missing sexual intimacy. Maybe if I add a little bit of mountaineering to my work week I'll find the headspace I need to love my family.

How does your heart see the pleasures of this world? Is it endlessly seeking and never satisfied?

One of the three threats to gospel joy according to Jesus are the thorns of eyes that are never satisfied: **Mark 4:18-19**. Consider John's assessment in **1 John 2:16-17**.

What do you see when you look at your desires? What does your wallet show when you look at your spending? What do your bookmarks reflect and your shopping cart say about your appetite?

Desire unrestrained shows a heart reflection which doesn't look good. Something that is unfortunately true about me is that I have yet to find a time where I watched enough football. If there is in my heart a line where I've watched too much of it, I've not yet found that line. With my wife and with Jesus, I'm constantly in need of asking for his help.

It's true that I don't sit down and watch tons of football, but it's also true that my heart is often dissatisfied and anxious with this. Discovering these desires in our heart might not be fun, but the desires are there whether we know it or not.

The second test he gives us is the test of praise. Here in verse 21 we see ***the substance of our praise***.

Look again at **Proverbs 27:21**.

We are warned often of the flatterer in Proverbs and that's because Solomon knows of the danger of praise. He knows that our hearts want so deeply to be made much of. We want others to affirm us and to praise us.

This really is a good desire. We long for the affirmation of others because we were made to be affirmed by God. Now we know our reformed theology here at Sovereign Hope. We know, and believe in total depravity, we know God is infinitely glorious. But the truth is that God really does delight in making much of those whom he saves.

When God created Adam and Eve his goal was to satisfy them. In Zephaniah 3:17 the prophet says that God will rejoice over those he saves with gladness, "he will quiet you by his love, he will exult over you

with loud singing.” When Jesus was on earth the Father spoke to his perfect son saying, “This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.”

We want praise because we were made to be affirmed by our creator. But the only place we can find that affirmation we long for is by putting on the righteousness of Jesus Christ through faith. That’s the promise of God’s favor, that’s where we are finally made much of on account of the beauty of Jesus Christ.

But how easy it is to substitute the opinion of God for the praise of man.

It is a sign of our brokenness that the peace of our day and the health of our mind is often so disrupted by the two simplest words of "good job."

Do you want to become self-conscious? Have someone praise your work. Next time you do it, you begin to wonder, "Did I do it well enough? Why did no one say anything this time? Have I lost it? What's wrong with me?"

Do you want to become self-righteous? Have someone praise your work. Next time you do it you begin to think, "I really am the best at this. If only others would work as hard as I would this company would finally make it. These people should be grateful for what I bring to the table."

Augustine who was successful in his own right, knew this and said this: **"By these temptations we are assailed daily, O Lord; without ceasing we are assailed. Our daily furnace is the tongue of men."**

He went on to say that if he had to choose to be knowingly wrong, but praised by all men, or knowingly right and blamed by all men, he knows what his sinful heart would want. He would want the praise even at cost to the truth.

Doesn't our world not only cater to our desire for praise, but it actually quantifies it. Imagine how many of us would use social media if it didn't show how many people liked, shared, or favorited our posts? It's not a neat bonus that web developers include these metrics, they know that the very heart of their website is based of quantifying the praise of others. It's what keeps you coming back.

In fact some websites actually withhold notifying you of people's "likes" until you've been inactive for a little bit, and they know that they can lure you back by telling you: "Hey, people are praising you."

Praise, and your relationship to it, tests you.

This means that the wise person realizes we ought to be cautious of how we receive praise and how we give praise.

We ought to be people who give praise. Look at what Paul says in **Philippians 4:8**. If we are not a people who praise the genuine good that God does in the lives of others and in our world then we are actually suppressing the truth of God!

Do we spend more time affirming what is great in the world’s eyes but not what is glorious in God’s eyes?

But secondly, when we receive praise, and I pray that those who are following Jesus in our church do receive praise for what God is doing in their life, do you understand that praise in light of the God who stands behind it.

Look at how Paul points this out in **1 Corinthians 1:4-5**. Paul helps the church know that they are doing something praise worthy, and he praises them for it, but he does it in a way that reminds us of God's great mercy in it. When we are praised do we turn praise of us into praise of God!

What you praise and how you receive praise reveals the reflection of your heart.

And as good as these ideals sound, don't we know the burdening effect praise has on our hearts? Don't we know the lust we have to be seen as praiseworthy, or even to be seen as one who doesn't care if they are praised?

If you're one who like myself looks at what our heart feels and doesn't like the reflection it presents, what then is our hope?

This is what I love about these two concluding illustrations Solomon uses. Read with me again **Proverbs 27:21-22**.

Here we see our last point today: **The Hope of Our Heart**.

We need a savior because we all know what it's like to look at our own face in a mirror. And more than that, we know what it's like to stare at the face of our heart. If we are honest with ourselves we know that our heart unknowingly leaks before others. But we know more about the brokenness of our hearts than anyone around us ever could.

So what do we do when our own hearts condemn us? What do we do when the pollen of the world starts the allergic reaction of our hearts?

For the fool there is a bleak picture painted. It's a picture of milling grain. We have examples of what this was like in the Egyptian culture of the day. They would take a large bowl of stone or some sort of hard material, and they would dump grain into it. Then they would take a large pestle, which would be a stick or rod of some sort and they would grind, crush, and mash the grain together until it became a homogenous mixture which was fit to be baked or used for whatever purpose they wanted.

For a fool, the testing of this world and the potential promise of punishment, will not remove the folly from you.

Life is hard, don't we know that? The heart is fickle, don't we feel that? More than our subjective experience we see that one day God will judge the living and the dead and no amount of suffering in this world, no amount of hardships and testing will be able to change your standing before the Lord.

Like the rest of everything around you, this life will only continue to press, crush and grind these patterns and problems deeper and deeper into your heart.

But there is hope, even for the fool. This painful life, the life that singer wrote of, one that feels trapped, stuck, and in danger, doesn't have to be your life.

Look at what Solomon said earlier in **Proverbs 22:15**.

Here is a child who has folly in his heart, but it is driven from him! It is separated! God is not opposed to children who need help, he is opposed to fools who refuse to change.

So what is the solution when we feel the weight of this testing? We can either harden our hearts and refuse to acknowledge God's work in our life, or we can see that behind these tests is the grace of God.

You see where a life lived apart from God crushes and crushes only to make us more hardened, a life lived in wisdom realizes that God wants instead to use the trial of life to separate that which is valuable from that which is not. That is, God desires not simply to make life hard, but to make us holy.

That's the distinction inside the metaphors. The fool is ground up to become more and more like everything else, but the wise man is refined by a master craftsman in order to separate the dross from the gold.

Silver and gold are metals which have impurity all throughout them. In order for them to become pure, they are smelted. That means they are superheated in various way so that the silver and gold can be separated from the minerals of lesser quality.

What is the hope for us as God's children? That when we encounter the painful truths of our heart, when we see a reflection we would rather not see, we can trust that God wants to refine us in the hands of the craftsman. A fool encounters his reflection with no hope for change, but the wise man sees that his sin no longer defines him if the Lord is working in him.

When we look at these two illustrations both share the reality of stress and testing, but only one assumes that we would be better off for it. That is the one applied to us in the grace of Jesus Christ. Look at what Solomon said earlier **Proverbs 17:3**.

The Lord tests our hearts. The Lord knows our hearts. The Lord has sent Jesus to save us because our hearts are wicked.

It is a safe place to encounter what we don't want to be because the promise of Jesus is that he has come not only to save our hearts, but to change them. This process is a bit by bit process right now, but we do have hope that one day the master will be done with us and we will be better off for it.

Look at what Paul says in **1 Peter 1:6-9**.

Here we see the praise and refinement of life is a refinement of all who are willing to praise Jesus in the midst of life's trials. What great hope!

This world will test your heart, but only Jesus promises to refine it. Only Jesus promises to craft you into an image that you no longer flinch when you see. Will you be still enough to examine your hearts and come to the wonderful work of this craftsman?

As a church we have the privilege of helping others who see what they don't like, only to point them to the savior who promises that he's not done with them. So let us look at our hearts, let us repent of what

we see, and let us pray that together we might be prepared for the wonderful glory which is ours in Jesus.