

## **God's Guide to a Good Heart** **Jeremiah 17:5-8**

*<sup>5</sup> This is what the LORD says. Cursed is anyone who trusts in mankind, who seeks his strength from human flesh, and who turns his heart away from the LORD. <sup>6</sup> He will be like a juniper bush in the wasteland. He will not see good things when they come. He lives in a dry place in the wilderness, in a salty land where no one lives. <sup>7</sup> But blessed is anyone who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. <sup>8</sup> He will be like a tree planted by water. It sends out its roots to the stream. It does not fear the heat when it comes. Its leaves will remain green. It is not concerned about a time of drought. It does not stop producing fruit.*

Do you have a healthy heart? Medical science has spent a lot of time and effort, not to mention dollars, doing research to determine the best way to a healthy heart. You know there are certain things you must avoid to keep your heart healthy. There are things you can do to give you a good heart and keep it that way. I once read a pamphlet that said you can burn more calories doing twenty minutes of housework or gardening than you can walking or riding a bike for twenty minutes. I'm not sure how true that is. Certainly we'd agree that it's important to have a healthy heart.

How important is it to you to have a healthy spiritual heart? Through the inspired pen of the prophet Jeremiah, God shows us the way to a good spiritual heart. Just like there are certain things to avoid to keep the muscle in your chest pumping, there are certain things we must avoid to keep our spiritual heart strong. And just like exercise and healthy eating will keep our physical heart healthy, God shows us what to do to keep a spiritual healthy heart. As we study the Scripture before us from Jeremiah 17, may the Holy Spirit lead us to always follow God's guide to a good heart. It first of all involved avoiding the way of unbelief.

In order to to have a good spiritual heart, there are certain things you must avoid. God had his prophet write, "*This is what the LORD says. Cursed is anyone who trusts in mankind, who seeks his strength from human flesh, and who turns his heart away from the LORD.*" God curses you when you trust in people. God isn't warning us to watch out for all the people in our life. We do trust some of them. Whether its our spouse, our parents, our children, and the list goes on. But God says you are cursed when you trust people more than you trust him. God also curses you when you depend on flesh for your strength. "*God is our refuge and strength,*" the Psalmist reminds us (46:1). But how often don't we turn to fleshly things to find our strength? Instead of turning to the Lord we rely too much on the gray matter that takes up the area between our ears. How often we lean too much on our own understanding instead of trusting in the all-knowing One with all our heart. When we do that, we are cursed and lose out on true strength. How often do we turn our hearts away from the Lord. We turn from the One who has the time and strength to help us no matter what situation we are in. By trusting in people or ourselves instead God, then we are following the way of unbelief. And what choice do we leave him but to curse us—not just for time, but for all eternity.

God's guide to a good heart shows us why we need to avoid the way of unbelief. We must avoid it, because it is deadly. God says the man who follows this way "*will be like a juniper*

*bush in the wasteland. He will not see good things when they come. He lives in a dry place in the wilderness, in a salty land where no one lives.*” We certainly want to avoid the way of unbelief. Who wants to go through life like a shrub in a desert wasteland? Who would want to go around blindly to what is truly good in life? That way ends in death. Who would even choose such a path? Sadly, God’s Old Testament people did. Descendants of Judah chose that way. Judah was the son of Jacob, the grandson of Isaac, and the great-grandson of Abraham, the father of all believers. But the nation of Judah at the time of Jeremiah’s ministry chose to trust in men. They made sinful alliances with foreign nations. It was sinful because they wouldn’t trust in God. They looked to flesh for strength. They turned their hearts away from the Lord. These people of Judah did not have good hearts. They failed to avoid the way of unbelief. As a result they earned God’s curse.

Could we make the same mistake? Judge for yourself. Martin Luther showed us how to follow God’s guide to a good heart when he explained the first commandment this way: *We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.* Seems simple enough. Respect God more than anyone or anything in my life. Keep God the dearest one in my heart. Rely on him above everything else. Does that sound easy to do? Consider if you went in for a checkup and your doctor told you that you have a serious heart condition. He told you what you must avoid if you want to stay alive. If you take your doctor at his word, you’ll do exactly as he tell you, right?

Why does it seem we have a difficult time doing the same for our God. Why do we seem to apply some selective hearing when he speaks to us from the pages of holy Scripture. And when he does speak clearly there, we may choose to stay ignorant of what he says. Listen to what the Evangelist Luke tells us when the Apostle Paul shared the saving gospel message with certain people in his second missionary journey. *Now the Bereans...examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true* (Acts 17:11). Could the same be said of the members of St. Michael’s? Maybe that’s too much to expect of God’s people. After all, consider what God’s Old Testament people did. They stood terrified at the foot of Mt. Sinai when God spoke his law to them. They had to be shaking when they promised to do everything the Lord commanded! But it wasn’t much more than month when those people were worshipping a golden calf made by human hands.

Maybe your knees were knocking a little as you stood before the Lord’s altar on your confirmation day. You made a solemn vow to be faithful until death. But I bet it didn’t take any of us 40 days for us to break that promise. How many times since have we turned our hearts away from the Lord. How often have we chosen to place security in people or in ourselves instead of trusting our God. How much have we looked for strength in every place but in the Almighty. Have we forgotten that he is all-powerful, the he has the ability to help in any trouble? That my friends is the way of unbelief. How badly we have clogged our hearts with sin and unbelief!

But just when we were about to go into cardiac arrest, our Lord Jesus came at the nick of time. He performed a procedure that saved our life. He removed every ounce of infection in

our sin-sick hearts. He carried all of that filth and poison with him to a cross. There he suffered and agonized for hours. His act of love left him lifeless. But not for long. By Sunday morning his heart started beating again. His lungs breathed life. He defeated death. For himself and for everyone of us. Now everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

God wants us to have healthy spiritual hearts. That's why he sent his Son to heal us of the deadliest disease. Now that Christ had given us good hearts, we want to keep them that way. That's why we follow God's guide to a good heart. We avoid unbelief by following the way of faith.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God shows us what an advantage we have when we follow his way. *Blessed is anyone who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by water. It sends out its roots to the stream. It does not fear the heat when it comes. Its leaves will remain green. It is not concerned about a time of drought. It does not stop producing fruit.* To trust in the Lord means you are turning on the ultimate security system. When you do that, when you make the Lord your confidence, you are so blessed. When you follow his way, the way of faith, you always have a healthy heart. You are like a tree planted by a stream. You have a constant supply of moisture and nutrients by which to grow. The Psalmist shows us where we find this water supply.

*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the advice of the wicked, who does not stand on the path with sinners, and who does not sit in a meeting with mockers. But his delight is in the teaching of the LORD, and on his teaching he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted beside streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, and its leaves do not wither. Everything he does prospers (Psalm 1:1-3).*

When you meditate day and night on his holy Word, then you'll keep the pathways clear to your heart. That way the Holy Spirit can do his best work there. When you make the Lord your trust and follow the way of faith then you really have a strong heart. You can stand the heat. No matter what life throws at you—trouble or hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword (Romans 8:35). You may have poor health or be deep in debt. You may be forced to sell the home where you lived your whole life. It doesn't really matter. You can handle the heat. You can stand up to anything. You follow the way of faith. You are full of life, even when death comes knocking. You don't worry. You've seen how he cares for birds and flowers. You know how much more important you are to your God. When you follow the way of faith you always produce fruit in your life. That fruit proves you have complete confidence in your Lord. Follow the way of faith. It's the healthy way to go. It's the only way to go that brings you everlasting life.

Do you want to maintain a good heart? If it's the one that pumps blood throughout your body, then follow what your doctor says. Find from him a program and stick to it. The same hold true for your spiritual heart. Stay with the program. Use God's guide to a good heart. Avoid the way of unbelief. Follow the way of faith. You'll have a fruitful life on earth. And an even better one in heaven.