

“LETTING YOUR HEART CATCH UP”

LEAVING YOUR HEART BEHIND

In his book, “The Journey of Desire,” John Eldredge tells a story of the time he “left [his] heart by the side of the road [and headed off in another direction].” This problem of moving on with the things of life and “leaving your heart behind” has been a frequent issue for many people that we have worked with over the years, and unfortunately, it is something with which I, too, frequently struggle.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A CONNECTED HEART

You may be asking “What does it mean to ‘leave your heart behind?’” “How do I know if I’m doing it?” “If I am, why is it such a big deal?” There are almost 600 references in the Bible (NIV) to the “heart.” It is clear that the heart is important to God. In fact, He says that above all else, we are to guard our hearts. Why? Because out of it flows the source of life (Prov. 4:23)! I believe that this concept of “guarding our hearts” doesn’t just (or even primarily) refer to avoiding those things that can negatively affect our hearts. But more importantly, it is about placing such value on the condition of our hearts that we would “guard” it like we would guard a “treasured gemstone,” allowing it to reflect the fullness of its beauty back to its Creator and to others. Jesus said that the greatest thing that we can do is to love Him with all of our heart . . . and then love others in the same manner (Lk. 10:27). We cannot do this if we’ve “left our heart behind.”

THE STATE OF A DISCONNECTED HEART

Unfortunately, we often do not see nor value our hearts in the same way that God does. Sometimes we make a conscious choice to disconnect from our hearts. We would rather not deal with feelings that are associated with staying connected. If we stay connected to our hearts we will have to feel more sorrow, loss, pain, fear, or anger, and some have determined there is no benefit to that. People living from this place have made a decision or “vow” (often not verbally) that a heart disconnected from feelings is a better or easier way to live. Without their heart, they might even find themselves to be more “productive” in the “tasks of life.” Many, however, who have left their heart behind have not done so by making a conscious choice, but have unconsciously and gradually developed such a condition. A heart disconnected in this manner may still be the result of not facing pain, grief, and fears from disappointments and losses—some which have been due to unresolved, early childhood wounding. We stay busy and our busyness keeps our heart at a distance—and we struggle to truly love God and others. We didn’t want to leave our hearts behind . . . it just happened over time.

SYMPTOMS OF A DISCONNECTED HEART

Although everyone is different, there are some common elements to look for when checking for a disconnected heart.. Looking at the first three “fruit of the Spirit”—love, joy and peace—might be a good start. If you are struggling with more irritability, intolerance or anger rather than love; if you sense more sadness or depression rather than joy; or if anxiety and fear are more up front than peace; then

you may have disconnected and left your heart behind. Another important indicator of a disconnected heart is an inability to engage in a fulfilling relationship with God and with others. Having a heart that is engaged with life and has also experienced healing from life's hurts is necessary for the greatest depth of intimacy. Another indicator of leaving your heart behind may be simply an inability to feel. When you have consciously or unconsciously disconnected from your heart you often function from your "head" and are quite numb emotionally. In addition, you avoid opportunities where emotions are more likely and you run to addictive behaviors (i.e. food, alcohol, sex, work, church) or other things that simply distract you from your heart (i.e. television, computers, busyness of all types).

RUNNING FROM THE TRAIN AND THE CONDUCTOR

Running away from your heart is actually very costly—not only in your relationships with God and others—but also to yourself. Leaving your heart behind and not stopping to allow it to catch up will cause you to expend a great deal of energy in the process. You may be so used to being tired and just "surviving" that it has become "normal"—but it's not! Sometimes when I reflect on this process I get an image of a rapidly moving train advancing towards me. I can either stop and allow this train (my heart) and the conductor (God) to catch up with me, or I can try and outrun it. The problem becomes more complicated when one of the issues that keeps me running (i.e. disappointments, losses) has to do with pain in my relationship with Father God. Will I trust Him again with my heart? Will you?

STAYING CONNECTED (OR GETTING RECONNECTED) TO YOUR HEART . . . AND TO LIFE

So what do we do when we become aware that we've left our hearts behind? We must first acknowledge it and let the Lord know that we are sorry for allowing (or choosing) this path. It isn't the Father's best for us. We must receive His forgiveness, forgive ourselves, and ask Him to help us "find our hearts" again. Keep in mind that He is the master at finding lost things—the lost coin, the lost sheep, the lost son (Lk. 15). If we truly are repentant over this condition, then we must, by God's grace, turn and face the very issues and situations that keep us running away from our hearts. We, however, cannot do this in our own strength, but only through the help of God and people who He brings alongside us. We must allow God to reveal why we fill our lives with things and don't stop long enough to rest and allow our hearts to "catch up." Just as the Father waited and longed for the return of His son in the story of the prodigal son (Lk. 15), He waits just as expectantly for us and our hearts to return from a "distant country." It may take some time for our hearts to catch up, but the Father waits patiently. We may need to search for our true heart, and Father will be there to help us find what is lost. If we desire to live—truly live and not just exist or survive—it is the only way.

PRAYER

I invite you to pray with me . . . Father, I believe that I have left my heart behind and am not truly living from a place of being connected. I know that this is not what You want for me and I know that I cannot fully love You or others from this place. Please forgive me, Lord, and help me to turn back to You and to allow You to connect me to my heart once again. I don't fully understand why I left my heart behind, and I am

willing to face those reasons when You feel it is necessary to do so. I am tired. I desire more life with You and with others than I desire to keep things the way they are. Give me the grace to turn and face the things that keep me running from my heart . . . to partner with You and to place myself in situations that allow my heart to catch up to where I am. I want to enter into a "heart rest" with You and with life. Thank you for Your love for me and for forgiving me for leaving my heart behind. I receive Your forgiveness, I forgive myself, and I ask You to please have Your way with me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

From the Father's Heart,

Jerry Basel