

Heart Condition

It is no surprise to anyone that the number one cause of death in the United States is heart disease. According to CDC statistics, heart disease is the leading cause of death for men, women, and people of most racial and ethnic groups. Sadly, one person dies every 33 seconds in the United States from some form of cardiovascular disease. The latest tally of deaths from heart disease was 695,547. Statistics from 2021 show that that is 1 in every 5 deaths. Heart disease cost the U.S. about \$239.9 billion dollars from 2018 to 2019. This is inclusive of health care services, medicines, and lost productivity due to death.

Coronary artery disease is the most common type of heart disease, killing 375,476 people in 2021. Shockingly, about 1 in 20 adults aged twenty and older have coronary artery disease (about 5%). In 2021, about two deaths in every ten from coronary artery disease happen in adults less than 65 years of age.

Each year, someone has a heart attack in the United States every 40 seconds. That totals about 805,000 people in the U.S. alone. Of that number, 605,000 are a first-time heart attack. 200,000 happen to people who have already had at least one. Some heart attacks can go unnoticed, 1 in 5, but the damage is done without the person knowing it.

There are certain medical factors and lifestyle *choices* that can put people at higher risk for heart disease, including:

- Diabetes
- Overweight and obesity
- Unhealthy diet
- Physical inactivity
- Smoking
- Excessive alcohol use

High blood pressure and high blood cholesterol are key risk factors for heart disease. Coronary heart disease may have more than one cause, including plaque buildup within arteries that affect blood flow within the body. Whatever the cause, being aware of our heart's condition and taking proper steps to maintain a healthy heart can prevent risk factors from developing. Making healthy *choices* and taking measures will reduce our chances of getting heart disease. We can even lower our risk of heart attack and improve our overall health and well-being. Understanding the ways in which we can improve our health can keep us from death.

I am confident you knew where this was going at the onset. The physical condition of our heart is critical to our quality of life. How much more important is the

condition of our spiritual heart with respect to eternal life and our relationship with God?

We will look at the condition of our heart, not the physical pump that pushes blood through our bodies, but the innermost part of our character, our emotional and moral nature and what God desires the condition to be.

The prelude to Passover is one of self-reflection and soul searching. We all take a closer and deep look at ourselves to make sure we are walking in alignment with God's will before participating in the Passover. Self-reflection and a sincere examination of our growth and walk since last year is not always a pleasant one. Did we really overcome anything in the past year or are we still playing church? Are we truly developing in our relationship with God and striving to grow in the image and likeness of Jesus Christ our Savior? In all honesty, we may have been persistent in improving our character but are we yielding the visible fruits of the Spirit with the improvements?

Have we truly grown and drawn closer to God? With all the chaos and storms, we have faced, is our relationship with Him stronger or do we still seek human advisors for direction? Is God truly first in our lives? With the turmoil all around us, is there still enough time for reflection and penitence? As we do not know at what hour our Savior will return, we must humble ourselves without fail.

You must be growing weary of hearing about a contrite heart, but as God places immense importance upon having one, it cannot be ignored. Why is it so important to God for us to have a contrite heart?

The Hebrew word for contrite is “*nakeh* (Strong’s #5783). Translated it means; lame, crippled, smitten, broken. Contrite appears in the Bible only three other times, but the meaning is widespread in scripture.

Isaiah 57:15- “For thus says the high and lofty One Who inhabits eternity; Whose name *is* Holy; “I dwell in the high and holy place, even with the one who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones,”

Contrite, meekness and humble, all synonymous with the traits God desires to see in us. All represent a brokenness in spirit. They are interwoven and contrition can lead to humility if a person has been broken in such a way to produce it. All too often, the brokenness can have a reverse affect and the person will blame God rather than submit to a lesson being taught.

Why is this so important to God? What does God see in the contrite heart? What is it He desires to see broken in us? Our pride! It can be such a demanding thing to break as we so often fail to see it in ourselves. We can look at a few examples in scripture of those who had a heart condition and were not of a broken spirit.

Cain was not humble in spirit when he gave his offering to God. Abel brought God his best. God did not regard Cain's offering.

Genesis 4:3-5- "It came to pass that Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground. And Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock *and* of the fat of it. And the LORD had regard unto Abel and his offering, But He did not have regard unto Cain and his offering. And Cain was extremely angry and his countenance fell."

The humble or contrite spirit finds favor with God. No offering without a genuine, sincere, and humble heart is acceptable to God. So many are deceived into believing that their efforts to please God by doing "church work" is pleasing to Him. How many times have we said, "God knows the heart."

Jonah was another who had a heart condition. He fled the presence of God, like that was really possible...but how often do we act in a similar fashion to avoid something God wants us to do?

Jonah 1:3- “But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. And he went down to Joppa. And he found a ship going to Tarshish. And he paid its fare, and went down into it, in order to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.”

We all know, we cannot run nor hide from God when it is His will for us to do something. Jonah was privy to the anatomy of a whale from the inside. Is it possible that God may use a storm not as drastic to get our attention?

A contrite heart is so critical for our spiritual development that someone who may never have had one *may not be ready* for God’s Kingdom. Why would God empower anyone who does not yield to His will and seek Him in all things? The contrite or broken-hearted person finds favor with God. A humble and contrite spirit is certainly a beginning to forgiveness, spiritual healing, and growth.

Psalm 51:17- “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”

Psalm 34:17-18- “The righteous cry, and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are of a contrite spirit.

Psalm 10:17- “LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart, You will cause Your ear to hear,”

Look at what Job had to go through before he had a change of heart.

Job 22:29- “When they cast you down, then you shall say, ‘A lifting up shall come!’ And He shall save the humble person.”

Job 36:6- “He will not preserve the life of the wicked but gives to the poor their right.”

When Job was made to realize God’s sovereignty, he confessed his unworthiness, and sins, was humbled, and repented. The biblical concept of humility and Divine

Providence resulting from trials is a common theme throughout scripture. The tests and trials God permits to bring us to a place of repentance and humility are seldom pleasant as most who need the lessons are hard-headed, not so much hard-hearted. We can read of Ramses, Pharaoh of Egypt at the time of Moses and the exodus. God hardened his heart as he refused to release Moses and the Nation of Israel.

Exodus 7:13-14- “And He hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that he did not hearken to them, as the LORD had said. And the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart *is* hardened. He refuses to let the people go.”

His heart condition proved fatal. Chariots do not float.

Exodus 14:27-28- “And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea. And the sea returned to its strength when the morning appeared. And the Egyptians tried to flee from it. And the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the middle of the sea. And the waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. There did not remain so much as one of them.”

Unlike a hard-hearted person, a broken-hearted person is just the opposite. A broken-hearted person does not appear to be self-made or puffed up. A major difference is the way they react when confronted with their own sins. The contrite person will yield and accept correction whereas the hard-hearted person will, because of inward pride, will refuse correction necessary to bring about the change God desires. A rebuttal or a return criticism will usually be displayed by someone who needs heart health. Being made aware of sins can result in the removal of sin and repentance. Once *pride is stripped*, the opportunity for a tender and contrite heart is made possible.

When we sin, we ignore God's law in our pride. The humble and contrite heart will regret the sin and have penitent sorrow for committing it. Remorse and repentance follow. Many who are caught in sin express sorrow, but it is not a godly sorrow. They are sorry, sorry they got caught but they do not repent and change their heart. The repentant person has a *determination* to change. The broken person repenting responds to the prompting of God's Holy Spirit. Remember Isaiah 57:15 we read earlier, God said, "I dwell in the high and holy place, even with the one who is of a *contrite and humble spirit.*"

Psalm 34:15-19- “The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry. The face of the LORD is *against those who do evil*, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. The righteous cry, and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.”

An example of being sorry or sorrowful is Judas Iscariot.

Matthew 27:3-5- “Now when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He was condemned, he changed his mind *and* returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, “I have sinned and have betrayed innocent blood.” But they said, “What *is that* to us? You see *to it* yourself.” And after throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he went out and hanged himself.”

He was *sorry* he did what he did in betraying Jesus Christ, but he did not repent and committed suicide instead.

Godly sorrow involves *mourning* in our spirit that we have sinned against God. We seek His forgiveness, which is godly sorrow, which leads to repentance. This is the

direction we need for true and permanent change in our lives. Saying we are sorry is not genuine repentance. It takes a complete surrender of ourselves to get to a place of contrition in our hearts. We will desire to have God's will in and for our lives and not just the lip service of playing church. We die to ourselves.

Godly sorrow will produce contrition. Our broken hearts leading to true repentance will result in humility. Pride is gone. Having the personal relationship with God allows us to view sin as He sees it. By His Holy Spirit in us we have more discernment in spiritual matters. He will not pour out His Spirit into anyone unless their heart is right before Him.

Developing a contrite heart requires us to realize that God is completely sovereign. We are totally dependent upon Him. Like so many Protestant churches, individuals try and fit God into their definition of Him, negating His true identity in scripture. Our sorrow is not focused on the penalty of the sin, but that we have committed an offense against our Living God. This godly sorrow is what yields true repentance from a contrite heart.

The Apostle Paul gives an example of why his fellow saints are not always healed of their illnesses. It may be a good reason that hinders our prayers in being answered as well.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10- “But in order that I might not be exalted by the abundance of the revelations, *there* was given to me a thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet me, so that I might not be exalted. I besought the Lord three times for this, that it might depart from me; But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you; for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, most gladly will I boast in my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me. For this reason, I take pleasure in weaknesses, in insults, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Our infirmities have a way of humbling and making us contrite by putting us in a humble state of mind. When things are going great, we tend to forget or get complacent in our relationship with God. This may be a reason we have not won the lottery either. If that is what it takes to bring us to a place of contrition and be in right standing, then that is what God will do. Eternity is at stake.

Psalm 119:71-75- “It is good for me that I have been afflicted, so that I might learn Your statutes. The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver. Your hands have made me and formed me; give me understanding so that I may learn Your commandments. Those who fear You will be glad when they see me because I have hoped in Your word. I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right, and that You have afflicted me in faithfulness.”

Paul too was cured of a “heart condition” on Damascus Road. He spoke from experience.

Acts 9:3-4- “But it came to pass while he was journeying, as he drew near to Damascus, that suddenly a light from heaven shined round about him. And after falling to the ground, he heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?”

Being blinded for three days by The Lord was sufficient for a change of heart.

Walking in wisdom with God is an assurance He is always with us, even during adversity and trials. When we are broken and downtrodden, He will lift us up.

Psalm 147:6- “The LORD lifts up the meek; He casts the wicked down to the ground.”

Matthew 11:28-30- “Come to Me, all you who labor and are *overly* burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy, and My burden is light.”

Matthew 23:12- “ And whoever will exalt himself shall be humbled; and whoever will humble himself shall be exalted.”

James 4:8- “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, you sinners, and purify *your* hearts, you double-minded!”

1 Peter 5:6- “Be humbled therefore under the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt you in due time;”

God assures us that He is near us when our hearts are broken and our spirits are crushed, whether we feel like it or not. This is not a promise with conditions attached to it; it is just a simple and eternal fact.

Isaiah 66:2- “For all these things My hand has made, and these things came to be,” says the LORD. “But to this one I will look, to him who is of a poor and contrite spirit and who trembles at My Word.”

Being of a contrite heart and spirit gives us a unique access to God. We are not blinded by pride that would hinder us in our worship and walk with him.

Proverbs 11:2- “When pride comes, then shame comes; but with the lowly *is* wisdom.”

Proverbs 18:12- “Before destruction, the heart of man is haughty, and before honor *is* humility.”

Proverbs 22:4- “By humility and the fear of the LORD *are* riches and honor and life.”

Proverbs 29:23- “A man’s pride shall bring him low, but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit.”

Jeremiah 44:10-11- “They are not humbled to this day, nor have they feared, nor walked in My law, nor in My statutes which I have set before you and before your fathers.’ Therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Behold, I will set My face against you for evil, and to cut off all Judah.’”

Contrition is most pleasing to God. It should not be any surprise that God despises arrogant pride. What got Satan kicked out of Heaven? It is certain that God does not want any remnant of such in His future family. Again, He will not waste His Spirit on the proud or haughty spirited person.

Our heart health is vital for our spiritual growth, and it is as important as the muscle beating in our chests. A steady intake of Vitamin **Beatitudes** will provide a foundation for developing our contrite and humble heart.

Matthew 5:3-8- “Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed *are* those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed *are* the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed *are* the merciful, for they shall find mercy. Blessed *are* the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Remember, these are sequential, and we build one upon the other. A good solid foundation in God's word and our heart health will draw us even closer in our walk and relationship with Him. Wisdom, understanding, and spiritual discernment will become prevalent if our hearts are in the right condition to receive them. Physical exercise is beneficial to our physical heart, but exercise in godliness is profitable in everything.

1 Timothy 4:6-9- "If you are teaching these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Jesus Christ, being nourished by the words of the faith and of the good doctrines that you have closely followed. But refuse profane and old wives' fables; rather exercise yourself into godliness. For physical exercise is profitable for a short time; but godliness is profitable for everything, having the promise of life—of the life that now is, and of the life that is coming. This saying is faithful and worthy of full acceptance."

It is God's desire to dwell with those of a contrite heart. It is our future for all eternity, do we absolutely want that as well? The perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of eternal life will be of no value

unless we are truly repentant, and we come before God with a contrite and humble heart. Amen.

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