

Exodus 7-10 **Forging the Heart (The Plagues)**

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Promote women's conference and Margaret's visit

St. Patrick's Day (use in illustrations, humor, stories)

Willow Creek Speaker: Chris Wickizer

Introduction

- Video

Have you ever had your heart broken?

Ever met someone with a cold heart? A Big heart? A good heart? Hard heart? Heart less?

In the Wizard of Oz the tin woodsman was looking for a heart

Dr. Suess's Grinch was born with a heart two sizes too small.

The Bible has a great deal to say about "the heart".

1 Samuel 16:7 "The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

How can we have hearts that are healthy before the Lord?

It is from this center of our being that we experience joy and peace and love. It is the condition of our heart that determines the level of our intimacy with God ("Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Matthew 5:8) It is also from this center of our being that we experience shame and anger and bitterness.

I believe that we have a responsibility for the condition of our hearts.

Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life."

I memorized this verse when I first became a Christian but I had no idea what it meant. Today we are going to study this part of the anatomy of the spiritual person – I may need some valves unblocked. I may require some bypass. Perhaps some of us could use a heart transplant.

We are continuing our study of the life of Moses as God calls him to lead the Hebrews into freedom. He has been called by God, empowered by God, and now he is being obedient and is stepping out in faith.

Moses is 80 years old, and he and his 83 year old brother go to Pharaoh and they say, "OK. If you will not listen, here is what the Lord is going to do:"

I. **Plagues – Exodus 7**

- What they were (list)/How they related to the gods of Egypt
 1. Blood
 2. Frogs
 3. Gnats/Mosquitoes

4. Flies
5. Cattle
6. Boils
7. Hail
8. Locust
9. Darkness
10. Firstborn

- Their purpose

A big question that we all have is, “Why God, would you do such a thing?” There are three things to remember.

- Firstly, the people of God were being brutally oppressed and God was answering their prayers for freedom. After decades of oppression and slavery, God is intervening. The injustices that they had suffered far outweigh the suffering that they are about to experience.
- Second, God is demonstrating His power over the gods of Egypt. Every plague is a demonstration of Yahweh’s dominance over those gods – the river god, the god of the harvest, the god of fertility, the sun God, etc. God is making Himself known as the one and only true God.
- Thirdly, the Lord states His purpose:
 - “That the Egyptians would know that I am the Lord” (7:5)
 - “By this you (Pharaoh) will know that I am the Lord” (7:17)

The Lord was doing these things so that Egypt and Pharaoh would know Him!

God cares as much for the Egyptians as He does the Hebrews. Egypt was just as enslaved as the Hebrews were. God is working on them while He is also working on the people of Israel. In several cases, if any Egyptian listened to Moses, they would be shielded from the impact of the plague (9:20-21).

God doesn’t choose sides in any situation. He is always working on the hearts of all who are involved: Whether it is the victim or the perpetrator. Whether it is the aggressor or the one who is weak. Whether it is the AIDS patient, or the Christian who is calling AIDS a curse from God, -- God’s goal is to heal and fill the hearts of all people. (Story of St. Patrick – Scotland, at the age of 16, kidnapped and taken to Ireland. Spent the next 7 years in slavery. Escaped. Returned home, called into ministry, and then called back to Ireland as a missionary. Why? God had a heart for the kidnappers. Patrick now knew the language, and the culture, and he was prepared)

God is always working on us.

- **God’s work is always redemptive (define) for all involved**

Redemption: To buy back a slave, to ransom, to free from bondage through a payment. To buy people back from bondage to sin, into a relationship with God.

God is in the business of restoring relationship with all people. Are you going through a

“plague”? Instead of fighting God, let Him fight for you.

II. **A heart problem causes bigger problems**

How does Pharaoh respond to God?

7:13 “yet Pharaoh’s heart became hard, and he would not listen to them.”

7:14 “Pharaoh’s heart is unyielding...”

7:22 “Pharaoh’s heart became hard.”

7:23 “and did not take even this to heart.”

8:15 “But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart...”

8:19 “But Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not listen.”

8:32 “But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.”

9:7 “Yet his heart was unyielding and would not let the people go.”

9:12 “But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart...”

9:34-35 “...he sinned again: He and his officials hardened their hearts. So Pharaoh’s heart was hard...”

10:20, 27 “...the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart.”

Ten times during the first 5 plagues, it is said that Pharaoh hardens his own heart. After that, God also gets involved in this process.

When we choose sin, we multiply our own suffering: Galatians 6:7-8 “**A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.**”

Today is my mother’s birthday. I am thankful for her and all that she did to teach me about God, life and parenting. She did a good job of teaching us boys to be morally responsible. This is the goal of good parenting. As parents, Heidi and I had the goal of raising children who would be morally responsible. Many children behave out of fear. If that is how they are raised then when you remove the source of the fear, they will act out and cross every line that you have established. But if they understand moral responsibility, it becomes an internal motivation. If our son took something from our daughter there was a consequence. If he talked back to us, he was making a choice to be disciplined. If he disobeyed, his problems would multiply. Eventually, children will think things through. Their behavioral choices weren’t just fear based. They were choices that they made with their own best interest in mind and consideration of how their behaviors affect others.

God works the same way with us. We have the freedom to choose to do wrong. But when we do that, we are hurting ourselves, we hurt others and we damage our relationship with God.

Pharaoh hadn’t learned this.

Pharaoh had a heart problem

III. **The Heart Is...**

- a. **The governing center of who you are as a person**

- b. A composite of one's character, personality, will, mind and emotions

We are not talking about the blood pumping organ inside our chest cavity.

It is the condition of our hearts that God sees and cares about: 1 Samuel 16:7 "People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

IV. ***We are born with diseased hearts.***

The number one cause of death in the United States is heart disease. What is a physical problem is a small reflection of our true spiritual problem.

Jeremiah 17:9 says that "The heart is desperately wicked and is difficult to "know"" "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" "The heart is hopelessly dark and deceitful, a puzzle that no one can figure out." – The Message

The Bible tells us that we are capable of **hardening** our hearts. Hebrews 3:7-14

⁷ So, as the Holy Spirit says:

"Today, if you hear his voice,
⁸ do not harden your hearts
 as you did in the rebellion,
 during the time of testing in the wilderness,
⁹ where your ancestors tested and tried me,
 though for forty years they saw what I did.
¹⁰ That is why I was angry with that generation;
 I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray,
 and they have not known my ways.'
¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger,
 'They shall never enter my rest.' "

¹² See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. ¹⁴ We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.

A hard heart is resistant to God's will. Pharaoh keeps making promises and then breaking them. Each time he does this he steps further away from God. His heart grows harder and harder.

This is common. One lie leads to another. One behavioral choice makes another more

compromising one easier. Slowly what one didn't imagine they'd ever do, they do, because they keep slipping further through the repeated hardening of their heart. One drink becomes five. One visit to the casino becomes a weekly occurrence. One click on the computer becomes one hundred. One inappropriate thought becomes an obsession.

V. **Steps towards having a healthier heart.**

1. **A healthy heart is a new heart** (transplant)

“Create in me a pure/clean heart, O God” – Psalm 51:10

A friend of mine needed a new heart. His was diseased and irreparable. He was experiencing heart failure. He became a candidate for a transplant and was put on a waiting list...he lives because someone else died.

Ezekiel 36:26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 11:19 ¹⁹ I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel 18:31 ³¹ Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit.” Like the tin man in the Wizard of Oz, we come to the Lord needing a heart.

2. **A healthy heart is a soft heart**

Our hearts remain soft through repentance.

- a. A soft heart identifies with the words of Psalm 51
- b. A soft heart recognizes and acknowledges the presence of the sinful nature
- c. A soft heart is like clay in the potter's hand
- d. A broken and contrite heart is the kind that is most pliable and moldable in God's hand. – Psalm 51:17/Isaiah 57:15 – God is drawn towards this condition. *I live in a high and holy place,
but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly
and to revive the heart of the contrite*

3. **A healthy heart is a pure heart**

- a. Requires ongoing confession
- b. Ongoing repentance
- c. Humility
- d. Last weekend a blacksmith spoke to me and said even after an instrument is made well in the fire, it will at points have to return to the fire to be repaired.

4. **A healthy heart is a listening and obedient heart**

- a. Parable of the sower/soils. Luke 8:15 ¹⁵ But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.
- b. Shallow heart, divided heart or a listening heart?

Our hearts require ongoing care.

Like the doctor says, choose healthy food, exercise daily. Eliminate risky and harmful behaviors.

Proverbs 4:23 "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."

Self heart exam:

How is your heart? What is your spiritual pulse?

Is there bitterness, unforgiveness or anger in my heart, towards God or others?

Has lust, jealousy or other sins taken hold of your heart?

Is pride present or am I truly humble, broken and contrite before the Lord?

[Click here for closing video](#)