

“Do You Need Heart Surgery?”

II Samuel 11:14-27

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“For most of history, the human heart has been regarded as a forbidden organ, too delicate to tamper with.” This is the opening line of an article titled, “Cut to the Heart.” This view of the heart changed during WW II when U.S. Army surgeon, Dr. Dwight Harken, operated on wounded soldiers to retrieve shell fragments and bullets lodged in their hearts. Dr. Harken’s primitive and daring procedure opened the door for further heart surgeries that continue to this day. Untold numbers of lives have been improved or saved because of open-heart surgery.

Many more lives could be improved or saved, though, with spiritual heart surgery. Far too many people are carrying emotional shrapnel in their hearts and need to get rid of it. Let me explain what I mean by referring to a story in David’s life when he was king of Israel.

One evening David was walking on the roof of his house when he looked across the way and saw Bathsheba bathing. He was struck by her beauty and inquired about her. He discovered that she was the wife of one of his most outstanding warriors, Uriah. David knew that Uriah was not at home, for he had sent his troops to the battlefield. Therefore, he sent for Bathsheba and had sexual relations with her. When David discovered that she was pregnant, he decided to cover up his sin by summoning Uriah from the battlefield so that he could spend time with his wife.

Uriah came back to Jerusalem but out of respect for his comrades on the battlefield, he refused to spend time alone with his wife. A sense of duty to his country and loyalty to his fighting companions would not allow him to indulge in pleasures that were not available to them. This spoiled David’s plot to cover up his act of adultery, so he devised another plan.

David sent Uriah back to the battlefield with a note from him to Uriah’s commanding officer, Joab. The letter said, **“Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die” II Samuel 11:14.**

Joab complied with David’s command and sent word to David that Uriah was dead. This made it possible for David to marry Bathsheba, which he promptly did. Months later, David and Bathsheba’s son was born but he lived only a short time.

There are many parts of this story that I could focus upon today, especially David’s selfish behavior and need to repent. However, I have chosen to draw our attention to the note that David wrote to Joab that Uriah carried. I am intrigued by the fact that Uriah unknowingly carried his own death sentence to the battlefield. The note David wrote contained detailed instructions for having Uriah killed. This fascinates me and raises some questions.

What are you carrying in your heart and mind that is unhealthy and destructive?

Uriah was carrying his own death sentence. Are you? You are if your heart is filled with anger, hatred, envy, bitterness, guilt, greed, deception, insecurity, low self-esteem or the lust for power. These are lethal attitudes and feelings.

What can these attitudes and feelings do to you? They can make you miserable by robbing your joy, sapping your energy, curtailing your creativity, limiting your potential, damaging your reputation and interfering with relationships. They will bring the worst out in you and cause you to say and do things you never dreamed you would.

What can these feelings and attitudes do to others? They can disillusion them, especially if the confidence they put in you has been shattered by inappropriate and ugly behavior.

The latest public figure to disappoint his followers is William J. Bennett, author and spokesman for ethical behavior. In The Book of Virtues, Bennett wrote, “We know that too much of anything, even a good thing, may prove to be our undoing. We need to set definite boundaries on our appetites.” This advice rang hollow when it was revealed last month that Mr. Bennett has

lost eight million dollars in the last ten years because of his uncontrollable gambling habit. Even his supporters have been dismayed at the discrepancy between his words and actions. This man who has not minced words scolding Americans for not setting and achieving high moral standards has failed miserably at reigning in his own appetites.

What can you do about this? Is there any way you can get rid of these destructive feelings and attitudes that lead to irresponsible behavior and reverse this process? I think so and want to share with you what must be done.

First of all, acknowledge that you are carrying your own death sentence. Evidently, Uriah was a loyal and faithful soldier. He would not open a sealed letter nor would he inquire about its contents. He fulfilled his mission by delivering it without question. Doing so cost him his life.

We need to open our envelope and look inside at the contents. We need to look at what we are carrying in our heart and mind to see if it is healthy or harmful. Ignorance is not bliss and denial can be deadly. So go ahead. Open your envelope. Look in your heart. Discover what you are carrying around day after day.

Secondly, make a decision to get rid of anything that is harmful and replace it with thoughts, feelings and attitudes that are healthy. This is possible. It can be done. You can replace anger with patience, hatred with love, envy with contentment, bitterness with acceptance, guilt with forgiveness, greed with generosity, deception with honesty, insecurity with confidence, low self-esteem with pride and the lust for power with the desire to serve.

Doing this will not be easy. As a matter of fact, you will need assistance, especially God's help. Family, friends and even counselors can encourage you and give you the skills you will need to make changes, but God is the one that can give you the desire and ability. Quite frankly, I cannot imagine anyone making major adjustments in their attitude, relationships and lifestyle without His help.

One of my favorite biblical stories is about Zacchaeus, the corrupt tax collector that Luke wrote about in 19:1-10. He was one of the wealthiest but most despised citizens of Jericho. While passing through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus told Zacchaeus that he wanted to go to his home. This turned out to be a life-changing event for Zacchaeus. We do not know the details of Jesus and Zacchaeus' conversation while Jesus visited with Zacchaeus, but we know the outcome. Zacchaeus had a complete change of heart that resulted in the most radical change of behavior.

"Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" Luke 19:8. Only someone that honestly looked inside his heart and made a decision to get rid of all that was harmful could say these words and mean them.

What changes would people see in you if you examined your heart and replaced those things that are harmful with those that are healthy? What changes would you notice? I have to believe there would be many and they would all be good. Why not ask God to begin heart surgery this morning?