Tonight we are continuing in our 3-part look at the topic of purity. Last week we looked at the importance of using your brain. We need to use our brain and remember to not be a dummy and think that we’re somehow exempt from impurity. We talked about using our brains in remembering to be picky, powerful and proud. Using our brain is a great first step in our journey towards living a life of purity.

Tonight I want us to build on that idea by looking at the importance of our hearts. Here’s what I know: each of us has a heart. Obviously we all have a physical heart, we have a heart that beats and pumps blood to all parts of our body. Without our hearts we would last long…or at all, the heart is important. But in addition to the physical heart that each of us has we also have what I’ll call a spiritual heart or maybe you’ve heard it referred to as a soul. The soul is the spiritual or immaterial part of who we are right, it’s not the physical part.

Moses from the Bible said this about our souls or our hearts. Deuteronomy 4:29 (NLT) says, *“But from there you will search again for the Lord your God. And if you search for him with all your heart and soul, you will find him.”*

Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV) from the Bible says, *“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”*

David says in Psalm 103:1 (NIV), *“Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.”*

Jesus says in Matthew 22:37 (NIV), *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”*

So we get this idea that our hearts are something internal, something that’s not material that can be held in our hands but rather something that’s felt inside, something that while we may have difficulty describing it, is something that we feel deep in our bones.

It’s in your “heart” where you have feelings of sadness or joy or guilt or anger. It’s what Matthew 15:18 (NLT) in the Bible talks about when he says, *“But the words you speak come from the heart…”*

The very first thing we have to understand before we get into talking about the heart is come to an understanding that you and I are made up of more than just cells, arteries, veins, blood, lungs, liver and body parts. You are more than just a physical body. As crazy as this may sound to some of you, you are a spiritual being first and foremost.

It’s only when we realize that we’re more than just a physical body that we can begin to figure out how to take care of our “hearts”. And why that’s important to our discussion on purity is because what’s in our “hearts” plays a pivotal role in deciding how purity plays out in our everyday lives.

Let me suggest that there are a few things we need to do in and to our “hearts” that will greatly simplify our efforts to live a pure life. I said last week that living a pure life is tough but I think sometimes we make it more difficult than it needs to be because we don’t take care of our hearts.

**Number one, protect your heart.** We hit on this idea a little bit last week but it’s the thought that we too quickly allow things into our hearts before we evaluate whether or not it’s good for us. Last week we called this idea “being picky”. You see when we’re not picky we subject our hearts to things that damage it. We allow things into our hearts that aren’t good for it. I was chatting with some of our high school guys last week and we got to talking about some of the stuff that’s often heard in the hallways or locker rooms of our schools. Sometimes our hearts are exposed to some awful things that we are forced into hearing or seeing and sometimes we just want to plug our ears, shut our eyes and run screaming out of the school. I get that. But allow me to challenge you on this idea. I sometimes hear this used as an excuse. I hear things like:

* Well I can’t quit school.
* I have to talk to someone.
* I can’t lock myself up in my house and never come out.

I get it, you’re right. We have to learn how to navigate our culture and yet at the same time protect our hearts. But let’s imagine for a minute that this is all of the impure stuff that you’re exposed to on a weekly basis. This is everything that you can’t avoid in the hallways or the locker room, this is everything you watch on you own, everything you listen to, everything you choose on your own, this is everything. If we’re honest, there’s only a small percentage of that impurity that we absolutely can’t avoid.

If we’re honest we’ll admit that much of the impurity that we expose our hearts to is by choice. We pretend to be forced into it because that’s easier than making the hard decisions of changing our habits. Secretly we long to be able to join in on the conversation about this new song or this new Netflix series so we pretend that protecting our heart is nearly impossible.

Protecting your heart isn’t impossible, it’s just difficult. In the Bible, Matthew 5:30 (NLT) says, *“And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”*

That doesn’t sound impossible but it does sound really difficult. The problem that we have this verse in the Bible is that it doesn’t sound like fun. When we read this verse we know that there are some things in our lives that need to be cut off or cut out but that sounds difficult.

Listen, protecting your heart is tough work but if we’re going to live lives of purity that bring honor to God than we are going to have to make some tough decisions.

* We’re going to have to start making decisions like charging our phones in the kitchen instead of our bedrooms where we’re tempted to look at impure social media feeds.
* We’re going to have to care less about being involved in the latest conversations about impure topics before class starts.
* We’re going to have to make a beeline from class to class and avoid getting caught up in the hallway chatter about who did what with who last week.

Listen, protecting your heart isn’t easy but it’s not impossible. If you are going to have even a slim chance of living a life of purity you have to start with doing whatever is necessary to protect your heart.

**Number two, monitor your heart.** I think you guys are familiar with the concept of a heart monitor. If you’ve ever had a surgery of any sort you know what a heart monitor looks and sounds like. The doctor hooks you up to a heart monitor to ensure that while you’re in the surgery or procedure that your heart remains healthy.

I want us to apply that same idea to our “hearts”. Listen, if you’re not regularly monitoring your heart you are running the risk of having a heart failure. I love this one because compared to protecting your heart, this one is far easier. You have an opportunity every week as we spend time in our connect groups to monitor your heart. That’s what connect groups are all about. Connect groups are an opportunity for you to allow other people to peer inside of you and give you a heart check up. It’s in connect groups that we should be honest about where we really are on the topic of purity or goals or being thankful or any of the other teaching series that we’ve done here. Connect groups are the opportunity for you to check your heart and have other people point out, not in critical way but in a loving way that maybe there are some things in your heart that aren’t quite right.

James 5:16 (NLT) in the Bible says, *“Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.”*

I love this verse but I sometimes think that people miss the meaning. James doesn’t say that confessing your sins to one another brings forgiveness, only God through the sacrifice of Jesus can bring forgiveness. But confessing your sins to one another, opening our hearts and allowing others to do some heart monitoring can bring healing.

If you’re serious about living a life of purity, then have some honest conversation with your connect group and leaders about what it is that you’re not sure you should be watching, listening to or doing. I worry that we only give lip service to really desiring purity in our lives based on the updates I get from some of our connect groups. If the extent of your connect group is talking about something funny that happened at school then I’m not sure how much heart monitoring is going on. Allow me to encourage you to not miss the amazing opportunity you have every week to allow others to help monitor your heart.

**Lastly, we have to strengthen our hearts.** Here’s what I mean by this idea. I think protecting your heart is like level one, that’s the basic responsibility you have to help ensure that you don’t go down a path of impurity. Monitoring your heart is what I would consider level two in that when you begin to practice monitoring your heart you’re communicating, *“Hey I’m pretty serious about this idea of purity.”* I want to make sure that I don’t allow impurity into my heart and I want to allow other people to help me monitor that but this third level is something different.

Strengthening your heart isn’t just about keeping impurity at an arms length. Strengthening your heart is about you intentionally going out and seeking what God has for your life. Strengthening your heart is about you not being on the defensive, it’s about you being on the offensive. It’s about you intentionally putting yourself in environments where you can be challenged spiritually.

* It’s about taking the initiative to get into God’s Word on a daily basis.
* It’s about making prayer a significant part of your day.
* It’s about choosing purity rather than just avoiding impurity.
* It’s about surrounding yourself with people that are going to encourage you in your journey towards purity.

David says in Psalm 27:8 (NLT), *“My heart has heard you say, “Come and talk with me. And my heart responds, “Lord, I am coming.”*

I love that verse. I love the decisiveness of David’s statement. “Lord, I am coming.” Does that describe you? Are you actively trying to strengthen your heart?

Listen, it’s not enough to just avoid impurity. You have to actively pursue the things of God, you have to make the conscious decision to not take impurity into your heart and instead to take in the things of God.

If you don’t protect and monitor and actively strengthen your heart you are running a major risk of your heart giving out.