

ANDY STANLEY



Breaking Free from
the Four Emotions
That Control
You

ENEMIES

of the

HEART

Previously released as *It Came from Within*



**ANDY
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E N E M I E S
of the
H E A R T



MULTNOMAH
BOOKS

PART ONE

WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?

*The heart is deceitful above all
things, and desperately sick;
who can understand it?*

Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

It Came from Within

It came from within. But at first I wasn't sure.

It was a Tuesday night. I was lying in bed, trying to go to sleep, when I felt a thump in my chest that actually shook my whole body.

I sat up and looked over at Sandra to see if perhaps she'd felt it too. No pain. No pressure. Just a larger-than-normal thump in my chest. I lay back down and tried to pretend it hadn't happened. And then it happened again.

This time I said, "Did you feel that?"

No answer.

As I laid there staring at the clock, I put my hand over my heart and tried to listen as well as feel my pulse. About a half minute later I noticed that my heart skipped a beat and then, *THUMP!* This happened over and over. About a minute of normal heartbeat and then nothing. And then the big *thump* that literally coursed through my entire body.

Needless to say, I didn't sleep much that night.

The next day I called my doctor. He sent me to the hospital with a prescription for this nifty device that records what's happening to

your heart while you go about your normal routine. I say *normal*. There are a few “normal” activities I would advise anyone against trying while wearing such a device.

The following day I went back to the hospital and they plugged the device into a computer to see what they could find. An hour later the technician came out and informed me that I had an irregular heartbeat. I was shocked. “Really? An irregular heartbeat? You don’t say. You mean my heart isn’t supposed to miss a beat every minute and then make up for it with increased seismic intensity?”

Of course, I didn’t *say* that. He was about to draw some blood, and I’ve always tried to stay on the good side of anyone who’s about to poke me with a needle.

They ran some tests. A lot of tests. After a couple hours of blood work, an EKG, an ultrasound—I told them there was no way I was pregnant, but they insisted—and a chest X-ray, a doctor came in to see me. He sat down with his clipboard and started asking me all the usual questions. Eventually he came to the “What medications are you taking?” question. Ordinarily that’s an easy one: “Nothing.” But it just so happened that I was taking something for my annual case of poison ivy. I’m never certain how I got it, but I always manage to come down with it every spring. Truth is, I don’t even know what poison ivy looks like—which may be part of my problem.

I tried to pronounce the name of the drug I was taking. After three or four failed attempts, the doctor deciphered what had been prescribed and wrote it down. Then he asked, “They didn’t prescribe a steroid as well?” No, they hadn’t. The reason being, I’d insisted that

my family doctor give me the steroid in the form of a shot. Two shots, actually. When I shared this bit of seemingly insignificant news with the doctor, he put down his pen and smiled. “I think I know what your problem is.”

This was good news. Sandra has been wondering since we were married.

“What?” I asked.

“It’s the steroids. You’re going to be fine. Once it works its way through your system your heart will settle back down.”

And you know what—he was right. The problem took care of itself.

Wonderful...and Confusing

As you’ve probably guessed from this story, I’m not a doctor. And this is not a book about your physical heart. It’s about your other heart.

You know, that invisible part of you that philosophers, poets, and preachers refer to all the time. That thing that got broken in the ninth grade when what’s-her-name said she just wanted to be friends. I’m talking about that part of you that swells up with pride when you see your kids do something great. It’s that thing that gets all nostalgic when you hear an old Journey tune (or whatever music served as the soundtrack for your senior year). It’s that part of me that fills up when Sandra sits down next to me on the front row at church every Sunday morning. Amazing how that still happens after all these years...

And to be fair, the heart I’m talking about is also that part of me

that wanted to wring the coach's neck for keeping my son on the bench throughout an entire all-star game.

The heart I'm speaking of is that mysterious, wonderful, confusing part of you that enables you to love, laugh, fear, and experience life. It's the sphere in which relationship happens. And it's the sphere in which relationships are broken.

Damage Control

Life can be hard on the heart. The world is full of outside influences that have the power to disrupt the rhythm of your heart. Most are subtle. Some may even appear to be necessary as protection from further disruptions. Over time you develop habits that slowly erode your heart's sensitivity. The inevitable pain and disappointment of life have caused you to set up walls around your heart. Much of this is understandable. But at the end of the day, there's no way around the truth: Your heart is out of sync with the rhythm it was created to maintain.

These disrupters that throw your heart out of sync are not like the steroid that eventually worked its way out of my system without any effort on my part. Those things that disrupt the rhythms of the invisible heart linger. If left alone, some will linger for a lifetime. After a while we come to accept these disrupters as part of us, part of our personality. And so we catch ourselves saying, "That's just the way I am." But you weren't always that way. And those closest to you know it.

So let me ask you, how are things with your heart?

Close the book and think for a moment. How are things with

your heart? Not your career, your family, or your finances. Your heart. Chances are, you've never stopped to consider your heart. And why should you? There are meals to fix, calls to return, interviews to prepare for, and bills to pay. If at the end of the day you're all caught up with these things and someone asks, "How are things?" you can smile and sigh and say, "Fine."

But this is a different question.

It's a more important question.

And yes, it's an *awkward* question.

Another Me

Perhaps the major reason we rarely stop to monitor our hearts is that it was never encouraged. As children, we were taught instead to monitor our behavior. In other words, we were taught to *behave*. If we behaved properly, good things happened, regardless of what was going on in our hearts. If we misbehaved, not-so-good things happened. My parents believed in spanking. So the not-so-good things got my attention early. I modified my behavior so as to avoid pain, and I've been doing that ever since. I bet you have too.

Years ago a buddy and I decided to move a road sign. We thought it would be funny to route traffic up an entrance ramp that led to a highway that was under construction and not opened yet. As a result, I spent the good portion of a night in jail. So I modified my behavior. I never moved another road sign.

Pain, embarrassment, fines, and spankings are generally considered

effective ways to focus an individual's attention on his or her behavior. Consequently, you and I have become much better at monitoring our behavior than our hearts.

But it's not just the avoidance of pain that drives us. Good behavior can be rewarding. As a professional Christian—a pastor, by trade—I'm paid to be good. So I've learned to modify my words and behavior so as not to damage my reputation and, thus, my career. You've no doubt done the same thing. Whatever your job, there are some things you just won't do. Not because you don't want to, but because of the professional ramifications. Perhaps there are some words and phrases you won't use, in spite of the fact that they would accurately convey what you're feeling. I'll bet there are some people you pretend to like because it's beneficial to you. And all of that is fine. More than fine, it's necessary. After all, like my buddy Charlie is fond of saying, everybody's got to eat and live indoors.

But all this pretending can be problematic because pretending allows you to ignore the true condition of your heart. As long as you say the right thing and do the right thing, you're tempted to believe that all is well. That's what your childhood experience taught you. But when your public performance becomes too far removed from who you are in your heart, you've been set up for trouble. Eventually your heart—the *real* you—will outpace your attempts to monitor and modify everything you say and do. The unresolved issues stirring around undetected in your heart will eventually work their way to the surface. Specifically, they'll seep into your actions, your character, and your relationships. If your heart continues to go unmonitored,

whatever “thing” is growing in there will worsen to the point that you’re no longer able to contain it with carefully managed words and behaviors.

So let me ask you again: How’s your heart?

Slippage

Maybe you’ve already noticed things starting to slip a bit. Maybe you’ve always been able to contain your anger, but lately there’s an edge in your voice that scares even you. And what about those occasional outbursts that slip through your normally ironclad façade?

You know you ought to be happy for Frank on his promotion, but for some reason you’re not. The truth is, Frank represents that person from your past who bought something or won something or was given something you wanted, and now you find yourself resenting Frank for it.

Ladies, how about your sister-in-law who wears those jeans you know better than to try and fit into. She looks great, but you aren’t about to let her know that. But why? Why does it bother you? You know it shouldn’t. So you behave like everything’s okay. But it’s not.

These are merely symptoms of a deeper struggle. Your heart is under assault, and it could be that you’re losing. Primarily through neglect. After all, nobody ever told us to keep a close check on our hearts.

Evidence of an internal battle are statements like:

“I can’t believe I just said that.”

“I don’t know where that came from.”

“I can’t believe I did that.”

“That’s not like me.”

Heart Exam

Cardiologists use a procedure called an arteriogram to diagnose the health of a patient’s heart. An arteriogram is an X-ray of the arteries taken after a dye is injected into the bloodstream. The dye allows doctors to pinpoint blockage in the arteries that serve as conduits carrying blood from the heart.

If blockage is discovered, a skilled cardiologist is able to insert a stent through an artery in the patient’s leg, navigate it up into the heart, and open up the blood vessels so that blood can again flow freely to blocked or damaged regions. It’s an amazing procedure to watch on video. You can actually see the dye making its way through the arteries and then stopping when it reaches an area that’s blocked. Even an untrained eye can spot the problem area once the dye has been injected—it’s that obvious.

But apart from an arteriogram, a life-threatening heart problem can go undetected for years. An individual who has blockage will experience symptoms, but these symptoms may not seem to be directly associated with the heart. Arterial blockage can manifest itself through back pain, inability to sleep, anxiety, loss of appetite, indigestion, nausea, vision change, even loss of memory.

What were we just talking about? Oh yes.

All of these are symptoms that can be and often are treated as

isolated issues unrelated to the health of the heart. And the right medication can take the edge off most of these symptoms. The problem, of course, is that treating the symptoms masks the real culprit. Worse, it delays treatment of the problem, thus leaving the problem to worsen.

Heart of the Matter

Likewise, we're tempted to treat the ancillary, symptomatic challenges that stem from an unhealthy heart while ignoring the deeper issues. But as is the case with the physical heart, eventually the root problem will become a real problem. And just as a heart attack has the potential to destroy your body, so spiritual heart disease has the potential to destroy you and squeeze the life out of your most valuable relationships.

So for the next couple hundred pages, we're going to do some poking around. I'm going to do my best to expose your heart to the penetrating light of God's truth. Like the dye used in an arteriogram, truth can help us to pinpoint the blockage in our spiritual condition. Once the problem area has been identified, the solutions are usually pretty obvious. Actually, the solutions are quite simple. But first we must familiarize ourselves with the most common blockages, their causes, and their symptoms.

In these pages I'll deal with four primary enemies of the heart—four life-blocking agents that can become lodged there for various reasons. Each has the potential to erode your relationships, your character, and even your faith. We'll spend several chapters looking at each of these in detail. I'll then challenge you to embrace four new habits. I often refer to these as “habits of the heart”—habits that exercise the

heart and allow it to maintain the rhythm for which it was designed. Each of these habits specifically addresses one of four maladies that can infect your heart. Three of the four habits will probably sound familiar; the fourth one may be new to you. When applied consistently, these four disciplines will bring healing and wholeness to your heart, whatever your current condition. There's some evidence to suggest that these habits can positively impact your physical health as well. Personally, I believe these habits have the potential to change everything.

If this all sounds too good to be true, let me remind you of a declaration God made generations ago that's still true and extraordinarily relevant today. He claimed that he could give a man or woman a new heart (see Ezekiel 36:26). The interesting thing is that he said this to a people who already had God's List of Top Ten Behaviors to guide them. But clearly it wasn't enough for them to know *what* to do; they needed to change from the inside out in order to follow through. Each of them needed, as we need, to drop the public persona and become one whole and healthy person.

What we need is a heart that can keep pace with our outward obedience.

Take Two

If you grew up going to the kind of church I grew up in, the notion of God's still needing to do some work in your heart may cause a bit of inner tension. Perhaps you prayed a prayer some time ago inviting Jesus to come into your heart. And like me, you may have assumed

that once he was in, all was well. I mean, Jesus has made himself at home in my heart, so everything's copasetic, right? But somewhere along the way each of us is forced to face the painful truth that all is not well. So we pray the prayer a second or third time for fear that the first one didn't take. And yet we continue to see disturbing signs that our heart isn't entirely new. So what's up?

What's up is this: What God begins at the moment of our salvation is not completed in that same moment. I bet you already knew that about yourself, didn't you? If you didn't know it, I'd bet your best friend does. At the risk of oversimplifying, let me put it this way: Jesus may have moved into your heart, but he may not have been given full access. That's why as happy as you are about being forgiven, you're not always willing to extend forgiveness to others. That's a heart thing. As excited as you are about the success you're experiencing, you aren't always excited about the success someone else is enjoying. That's a heart thing too. Both are evidence that God has not completed in you what he has begun. You're still a work in progress. There's still some heart work to be done.

One last thing before we move on. Your heart didn't arrive at its present condition overnight. It won't become healthy overnight either. You can't overcome in an instant the effects of years of blockage caused by guilt, anger, greed, and jealousy. Adopting new habits of the heart is a process, but it's a process that will yield some immediate results. My hope is that these immediate dividends will encourage and motivate you to continue cultivating these new habits until you arrive at a place where your Creator desires and made you to be.