

Create In Me A Clean Heart

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Psalm 51:10

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Since I was a child, it was instilled in me to not litter; to leave a place cleaner than when I got there, and not more disturbed and dirtier. Throughout my adult life I have been cognizant of debris left around by careless or thoughtless people. Seeing drivers throw cups, cigarette butts, and other litter out the window as they drive has always caused me to raise an eyebrow.

Now certainly, I struggle with being a well organized person: I occasionally have things lying around that are out of place. But it is not litter; they are important things that I have not yet put back in their place. So, there is a difference in my mind between being unclean and being disorderly.

There are many ways to be unclean: unclean of body, mind, soul, circumstance, appearance, clothing, vocabulary, intention, living condition, and our environment, to name a few. The Bible verse refers to being unclean of heart and renewing our spirit. Of all the ways to be unclean, this is probably the most fundamental cause for uncleanness in all the other areas of our lives.

When we have a clean heart, we have a forgiven heart. God forgives our errors of thinking, word, and actions through divine Grace. But we must accept the forgiveness and forgive ourselves

lest we carry around with us a darkness that is not of Spirit, but of our own making.

We begin to forgive ourselves of our ego-centric actions and thoughts by first asking forgiveness of God. God always forgives, but the process requires that we humbly acknowledge our shortcomings and ask for the forgiveness. Our asking does not inspire God to forgive, it inspires us to accept and be open to God's forgiveness.

It is only when we have released our bitterness toward ourselves or others that God can create a clean heart within us. In truth, it is our willingness to let go, forgive, and accept God's blessings that opens us to the renewal of a right spirit within us. God's love is always flowing, always available, and always present. It is through the purging of our self-judgment and self-loathing that lift the shadow and allow the Light of Christ to shine fully again.

It is easy to get dirty on the physical plane of existence. I almost cannot get to church without scuffing or in some way defiling my pants. Just in the natural course of walking to the car I can get grime on my clothing. And so it is with life. If we are not vigilant, during the ordinary course of life we can get grime on ourselves or we can spread the soot of our bad attitude onto others.

Can you believe that some people actually dare to put on a happy face and spread joy even though their hearts are aching, just because they would rather spread joy than despair? These people

would rather put a smile on their face so that others can smile rather than carry a disposition of gloom.

We all know both kinds of people, and honestly who do we gravitate toward? Who would we choose to spend time with?

Part of having a clean heart is being willing to let go of some of our favorite negative obsessions. “But Patrick, I like complaining. I want people to know how I feel about everything. Well, yes ... most of the time it is negative, but golly, isn’t the world just going downhill, turned upside down, and filled with darkness?”

When this is our attitude, we are getting our darkness all over everyone. Our heart is not clean and we are not at peace. There are a few things we can do to help create a clean heart. First, is to change our focus. Instead of looking at all the negative in the world and what we are going through, we change our focus to God. Philippians 4:4 says, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice.” We don’t have to rejoice in what the world is showing us; we just have to rejoice in God. God is in control; God’s plans for us are to bring us our good, prosperity, and joy. The challenge doesn’t bring that; it is what God is doing with that challenge that brings us joy. We are learning and growing through the challenges we face. That is something to rejoice in!

Second, we need to maintain an attitude of joy otherwise our egos will re-engage. One of the best ways to stay focused on God is by serving others; thinking of others instead of ourselves. Philippians 4:5 teaches, “Let your gentleness be known to all men; the Lord is

at hand.” When we share joy, patience, gentleness, and kindness with others, we are focusing on them; and this will distract us enough to not think about ourselves.

Third, when we are alone, the danger is to come back to what is bothering us and dirtying our hearts. Philippians 4:6 says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” The command is to give it all to God; don’t dwell on it, release it. God means for us to tell Him what's disturbing our hearts and give it to Him so we can rest. We have permission to stop thinking about our problems and let Him deal with them. When we do that, He gives us the peace.

Step four is to continue the battle against our egos, which want to set up shop in our hearts as fear, doubt, and despair. As we continue praying, we must also insist that our egos stay out of the way. When the old thoughts want to come back, we force ourselves to think of God. In Philippians 4:8 we are instructed: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things.”

It is a good idea to have a set of positive loving things prepared in advance to think about when our dark thoughts come knocking. To think negatively is a habit, so we must prepare ourselves with seven times more positive things to think about than negative.

And last of all, keep doing the things that we've just done. We continue refocusing onto God; continue serving others ; continue releasing the old negative thought; continue filling our hearts and minds with positive good thoughts. Philippians 4:9 says, "*The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.*" We are also told, in Galatians 6:9 "*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*"

Having a clean heart, a renewed and right spirit is an ever ongoing process. By being aware, we can then prepare and beware. Our human condition and our physical body are parts of who we are, but they are not our most powerful or important parts. Our spiritual nature is who we truly are, and a clean heart is a metaphor for that nature to express. A clean heart is a heart that expresses the Fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness (an inward calm acceptance of God's will), and self-control.

My prayer for all of us is to recognize when our hearts need cleaning, and then humbly ask that God help us to remove the darkness that is blocking the Light of Spirit. Prayer is the Jiffy Lube for our souls. It is this simple act of humility and contrition that allows God to create within us a new and clean heart, as well as renewing and righting our spirit.

I will leave you with some joyful ideas to aid in maintaining a right spirit, and a clean and light heart.

A group of professional people posed this question to a group of 4 to 8 year-olds, 'What does love mean?' The answers given were at times far beyond the ages of these children.

'Love is what makes you smile when you're tired.'
Terri - age 4

'Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is OK.'
Danny - age 7

'Love is when you kiss all the time. Then when you get tired of kissing, you still want to be together and you talk more. My Mommy and Daddy are like that. They look gross when they kiss'
Emily - age 8

'If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend who you hate,'
Nikka - age 6

'Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, then he wears it every day.'
Noelle - age 7

'Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well.'
Tommy - age 6

'During my piano recital, I was on a stage and I was scared. I looked at all the people watching me and saw my daddy waving and smiling. He was the only one doing that. I wasn't scared anymore.'
Cindy - age 8

'My mommy loves me more than anybody. You don't see anyone else kissing me to sleep at night.'

Clare - age 6

'You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget.'

Jessica - age 8

'Love is when Mommy gives Daddy the best piece of chicken.'

Elaine-age 5

'Love is when Mommy sees Daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsomer than Robert Redford.'

Chris - age 7

'Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day.'

Mary Ann - age 4

'I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes and has to go out and buy new ones.'

Lauren - age 4

'When you love somebody, your eyelashes go up and down and little stars come out of you.'

Karen - age 7

'Love is when Mommy sees Daddy on the toilet and she doesn't think it's gross.'

Mark - age 6

'Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.'
Bobby - age 7

And the final one -- Author and lecturer Leo Buscaglia once talked about a contest he was asked to judge. The purpose of the contest was to find the most caring child. The winner was a four year old child whose next door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife.

Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his Mother asked what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, 'Nothing, I just helped him cry.'

Let us move into prayer....