

Impact of Your Heart for God

Michael J. Wilkins

Announcer:

Lord, in our hearts, we exalt you and lift you up. We ask that you will be pleased with all that said and done. May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Be pleased, Lord, as you work and move across this campus to speak to us by Your Holy Spirit through your Word and through your servant. And may we be faithful hearers and doers of your Word, because we love you. In Jesus' strong name. And all God's people said, Amen.

Please be seated.

Congratulations to the men, Eagles, who are now three and one after their victory over San Francisco. (Applause) And we'll ke-, keep you updated on the other athletic events that are happening.

This will be a faculty series. Dr. Mike Wilkins is the lead-off. It would be enough, it would be enough if he were simply a great husband and father which he is, but he's more. Or that he is the, uh, prof of New Testament language and literature or the dean of faculty at Talbot which he is, but there is more. He is a competition surfer, a decorated Marine veteran. And, and a personal friend of mine. And I'm delighted that Dr. Mike Wilkins leads off the faculty series this week. Let's welcome him. (Applause)

Wilkins – Impact of Your Heart for God

Michael J. Wilkins:

We are there? Getting there? Okay. We'll do this. How's that?

You know the Lord is pleased this morning. I know that. When I, when I see my daughters do some things, such as surf big waves or pound volleyball, I can get tears in my eyes. And when the Lord heard you sing this morning, there were tears in His eyes, because you are very very precious in His sight. And that's why it's a privilege for me to get to be with you this morning and for the whole faculty series. Because what we're gonna focus on this week is the impact of Christ; and what you're gonna hear, I think, from the three of us is the way in which the Lord has impacted us; and what our prayer will be more than anything else is that the Lord will impact your lives. Because there is incredible power in this room. And I know that the Lord is gonna do incredible things through your lives to reach this world.

I would like to focus this morning upon the impact of Christ upon your heart. And I want to look at your heart today. I'm a, I'm a bit concerned about your heart. How many of you are dating, right now? That's not enough. It's not enough. We need more dating than that.

How many of you are in love? Oh, more in love than dating. I see. Okay. All right.

How many of you are engaged? Oh, there, there are the excited ones, excited ones. Yeah.

Well, I, I'm, I'm concerned about that. And I love that my, my dear wife would like to be a resident couple of connection for you. She loves to see you get together. So, we're concerned

Wilkins – Impact of Your Heart for God

about your heart whether in love, how all that works out. But we are equally concerned about your heart how it works out, even more than in your love life. I'm concerned about the impact of God's love upon your heart, as much, maybe even more than the impact of that guy or sweet young thing upon your heart.

This is one of the most important times of your life. What you do with your heart in the next few years will set the direction for your entire life. And I, and I've written that is, uh, that has proven itself out over and over again. What you do your years here, what you do in the next two or three years with your heart will set the direction for the rest of your lives.

This last summer, I, I shared a story that I had never told before. I told, for the very first time, about the impact of Jesus' love upon my life, when I was your age. And I want to share some of that with you this morning, as well as some ways in which that will work out by way of implications in each of our lives.

The heart is a fascinating thing. The material heart is the center of our physical life. It keeps our life's blood circulating. It pounds furiously when we're afraid or when we are in love. It beats away millions of times during a lifetime without us ever giving it a thought. But in a moment, when it flutters or when it stops, our whole world is focused on its few inches of matter.

And the immaterial heart is the center of our spiritual and emotional and psychological life as well. It's there where I experience life's joys and sorrows, where I connect deeply with my wife and children, where I ponder my existence, and where I encounter God. Like the material heart,

Wilkins – Impact of Your Heart for God

the immaterial heart can either be healthy or it can be sick. It can function properly or improperly. And it can be alive and warm, or it can be hard and cold.

At this very moment, each of us have a heart condition. What is your immaterial heart like this morning? God's original creation had in mind for each of us to have a physical heart that function properly and an immaterial heart that function properly. But you know, as well as I do, that many of us have experienced things in life that have affected our hearts. We've been hurt or abused. So we have hardened our hearts, so that we will not be hurt again. It protects us. That's not the way a heart is supposed to be. We've chosen a style of life in which stealing or lying or hurting others, gets us ahead. So we've hardened our heart, so that we don't feel conscience or guilt. We pride ourselves on our hard heart. But that's not the way a heart is supposed to be.

Through many of the circumstances of my own early life, I can see now that I had, quite early on, developed a heart that was as cold and as hard as stone. I could lie, and not be bothered a bit. I could hurt people, and not have a twinge of conscience, as long as it got me ahead. I could steal. I could even steal from a church, and laugh at their stupidity for leaving cash in sight. I now know that I had also been hurt by many of life's circumstances. So when my immaturity, I hardened my heart, so that I wouldn't be hurt again. I was protecting myself, but I was also developing a heart that couldn't receive love or affection.

That is not right. That is not the way a heart is supposed to be. I was a person in need, but I didn't even know it. And then I went into the army, not, the marines. And I'm not a competition surfer.

Wilkins – Impact of Your Heart for God

I'm an old man. I went out on Saturday. Anybody get out this weekend? It was r-, a little swell came in, and good waves down at trails. But I realize I'm getting old.

But in those early days, I went into the army. And as you might expect, my heart became even more hardened. Part of training a young person for, for combat does not include how to be sensitive, how to be vulnerable, and open, and caring. My drill sergeants didn't think it helpful to teach me how to listen to my conscience. As I went to Vietnam. I was a very hard young man at that young age of nineteen. I was cocky and arrogant. And I was part of a very cocky combat group, the 173rd Airborne Infantry Brigade. I had been trained to be a war machine. And I did well. I was point man for my squad and platoon, and I was the squad leader, once everyone else ahead of me had either been killed or wounded. The first month that I was in country, I was afraid all of the time. And I was afraid the last month in country, cause I was afraid it wasn't gonna go home. But in those intervening ten months that I was there, I hardened my heart even more, because we knew that we couldn't carry out our job well if we were afraid.

But then my life was forever altered. We were on a typical search and destroy mission one day. That day I wasn't walking point. I was about halfway back in the squad. As we came out of the jungle, we walked into a clearing, where there was a little rice paddy and a small stream running beside it. Walking along the stream, I happened to look down into it, and just then I saw two eyes looking back up at me from the water. At the same instant, I saw the muzzle of a rifle come out of the water and point toward me. It all happened so quickly that I don't remember the rest of the details, until I found myself a few minutes later going into that little river to recover his body and two others. We weren't sure whether they had intended to ambush us, or they were surprised by

us coming out of the jungle and had simply tried to hide from us. That was just one of many days that sort of thing happened. But that day stands out more than others because of its effect upon me. That was the first time that I had looked at a person in the eyes and had killed him.

Yet I carried on, as though I was normal. There was an American reporter from The Associated Press traveling with us at the time. And he took a picture of me with my foot on that dead young soldier's chest with my rifle pointed down at him. I was the cocky, cold-hearted war machine, until that night on guard duty.

We had settled into a defensive perimeter that night somewhere out in the jungle. We had rotating guards throughout the night. My turn came in the early morning hours. It was pitch-black. No moon. But the stars were brilliant. As I sat there listening for an attack from the enemy, I thought back on the events of that day. I thought of that young man, probably no older than me, and probably younger. He probably had a family at home, who is worrying about him also. He probably had a girlfriend waiting at home for their future to begin. He had all the same hopes and dreams I did. Get in one brief second in our lives, I had taken his away.

And then on guard duty that night, I started to cry. The more I thought, the more I cried. During that hour on guard duty, in the jungle of Vietnam, in my nineteenth year of life, God cracked my heart. He gently, but firmly attacked my cold hard heart. A crack occurred in that hard heart, which over the next... Loose it? A crack occurred in that... Let me just go. A crack occurred in my hard heart. Over the next months and years, it widened. So that at the time that was my time,

Wilkins – Impact of Your Heart for God

my heart was open to hear the message about Jesus' love for me. A message that then resulted in me receiving a new heart, really God's heart.

That night when God attacked my heart, the war machine was changed. Now, I'm not commenting on the war. I have strong opinions about it that may surprise some of you. But this young war machine changed. I continue to be effective. I continue to walk point for the next four months. I was made squad leader not long after that. I took my job seriously, and I didn't have a man in my squad killed from that time until I left country.

But I was different. I was more focused on people. I loved my men. And I came to have a passionate love for the Vietnamese people that lasts to this day. In my mind's eye, I can still see their pain-racked, yet open and wonderfully caring faces. Especially the children. Especially the children's smiles and laughter in that hell of war.

I wasn't created by God to have a hard heart. For whatever the cause is, I had hardened my heart, so that I could take advantage of people, so that I could lie and steal, so that I could hate people without having a twinge of conscience. But I had also hardened my heart, so that I was protected from hurt. But that is not the way a heart is supposed to be. God very gently, but intentionally cracked my heart, so that I could become human. That was the turning point that set me on a quest to find what was real in life, what was true. And it resulted in me discovering God's heart through Jesus' love two years later.

That was my turning point. The turning point for the world occurred two thousand years ago. The world then, not very much different than the world today, had a hard heart. It was intent upon its own pleasures. It was racked by war and pain and crime, as people hurt each other and their ego-driven need to dominate their environment for their own advancement. Into that condition of heart, Jesus came with a revolution. Not a revolution of weapons or a politics or an anarchy, but a revolution of the heart. He attacked the hearts of people as He gently but firmly cracked their hearts. And He cracked their hearts by loving them. He went to men and women and their everyday world, and He loved them. Then He called them to follow Him, to learn more of this revolutionary love. And they did join Him in loving others.

Now that wasn't the norm in Israel, in master-disciple relationships. Other things were at the center of discipleship for other people: study, teaching, baptism, religious ceremony. But Jesus initiated a discipleship relationship that was not to be centered in religious externals, but was to be centered in love. In His final night with His disciples, just hours away from His impending betrayal, trial and crucifixion, Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, you also love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

But what is this kind of love? Love in the New Testament is a specific term for a uniquely biblical orientation. This orientation is found in two verses that you and I know well. In fact, we know them too well, because they have lost their impact and meaning in our lives, oftentimes. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave, He gave His only begotten Son, that

whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." And Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

The cure for a hard heart, Jesus declares is love. What does that really mean? I love my wife. I love my daughters. I love my mom. I'm even coming to love my wife's cat. I love my new surfboard. It's a great board. And these are very different kinds of love. What does it mean to say that Jesus loves me and that I'm to love others?

Well, we might start by comparing the world's definitions of love with these definitions that Jesus gives. The world says Love is a strong feeling of affection, a feeling of brotherhood and goodwill, a strong passionate sexual attraction. Listen to the radio, moving from here to there, and you'll hear love described oftentimes in songs as lust. It might mean gaining benefit from somebody else as a plant loves the shade. Or it might be infatuation. Love means never having to say you're sorry. That pathetic of all definitions, love is a self-gratifying relationship, a status symbol.

But what does Scripture say? Love in the way that I would define is this -- an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person, in which one gives himself or herself to bring a relationship to God's intended purpose. Love is an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person, in which Jesus gave himself to bring my relationship with Him to God's intended purpose. Love between you and that spouse that you hope that you will get someday is an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person, in which you will give yourself to bring the relationship to God's intended purpose.

I recently went through a very difficult time, trying to understand a situation in a local church. The pastor announced to his board and to his church that he was divorcing his wife of 25 years. And as he divorced his wife, he wanted to remain as the pastor. He said that his wife is an alcoholic that she was mentally abusive. He said that he was divorcing her because he wanted to be happy with his life, and she was holding down his ministry. He said, "I just don't love her."

I remember my wife talking about the pastor that she was raised under. That pastor and his wife planted the church. It was a wonderful time for them. But then the pastor's wife began to develop mental problems. It got so severe that she was virtually incapacitated, would perform these bizarre scenes, where one day the pastor came home for lunch and she had moved all of the china and kitchen utensils out onto the front lawn, was setting up a massive dinner for all the neighbors. People would often tell the pastor, "Why don't you just leave her? Get a divorce. She's sick. She's just holding down your ministry." His response? "How can I? I have to love her with the same love that Jesus loves me. And He died for me."

I can't be the final judge of the right or wrong of either of these two pastors, but I can say that the first pastor is going by the world's definitions of love. The second pastor is going by the biblical example of love that we see in Jesus, an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person in which I give myself to bring the relationship to God's intended purpose.

Although God broke my heart, broke through to this hard heart nearly twenty five years ago, I still struggle with a hard heart. I can harden my heart today as I allow my own self-centeredness

and pride to rule my life. I can also allow my heart to harden as I protect myself from people who criticize me or who would try to hurt. I can see my heart hardened as I allow anger, my own anger, to dominate my life. And my heart hardens the quickest when I close myself off from people by criticizing them, by being cynical. And then I isolate, isolate myself into my own little world, because I'm really the only one who has it all together.

The overall way in which our hearts hardened is when we say "no" to the Holy Spirit influencing our lives. We want our way instead of God's way. And so our heart hardens against God's leading in our lives. A hardened heart cannot put another person's needs ahead of its own. A hard heart can be masked hidden behind external acts of religion, behind glitzy performances, behind hypocrisy. But a hard heart will always show itself in self-centeredness and pride. A hard heart cannot give God's love and cannot receive God's love.

The impact of Jesus' love a hardened heart... How do we let Jesus' love impact our heart? Let me give you just a couple of things. Four, in particular.

One, let Jesus love you. I'm a very simple person. And that may seem like the most obvious at all. But one of the great dangers of being in a Christian setting is that Jesus is simply a religious figure. He is not alive.

I had a young man come into my office recently. This man, this young man has had "God breaking into a hard heart." He said, "Where do I go from here?" I says, "Where you need to go is you need to go out of here and talk to Jesus." I said, "Do you, do you really know Jesus? Do

you really live with Jesus?" He said, "No, I don't." Said, "I've been a Christian all of my life. I've done all the Christian things. I'm a student here at Bi-, Biola. But Jesus isn't real. It's just a religious life." But if Jesus is real, if He is alive, if He is who He says He is, then He loves you this very day. You and I need to experience that love, from a real Jesus, who is alive.

Secondly, I would suggest that we examine our motives. Why do we do what we do? Are your actions regularly influenced by what you will get out of it? Examining our motives can be a paralyzing exercise, because we are all still influenced by selfishness, this side of heaven. We can see a twinge of selfishness in everything we do. But if self dominates why we do what we do, we are developing a hard heart. Why do you develop the friendships you do? Why do you sit with the person you sit with? For what you can give, or for what you can get. Some of you are looking at next to yourself and say, "I am certainly not getting anything out of this." But why do we do what we do? Be starkly honest with yourself. But don't become paralyzed through an unrealistic view of life, this side of heaven. But allow yourself to enter into a life that gives, instead of being dominated by getting.

Thirdly, develop a pattern of life with Jesus. Develop a regular pattern of life, in which you allow Jesus to walk with you in your everyday world, and ask Him to help you to make decisions, in which His love can spill over from your life to others.

You see, if you allow Jesus to love you, He has an infinite supply of love. He's never gonna lo-, run out of it. He is unconditionally committed to you for the rest of eternity. And He has an

infinite supply of love that will pour over into your life, and that love in turn will be able to pour over into everybody with whom you come into contact. Everybody.

But I have had so many people come to me over the years in a marital context and say, "Pastor, I don't love him anymore. He has hurt me so badly. I have just run out of love." Well, what I usually wanna do is take the guy out back and beat the stuff out of him. And I understand, and I will not allow him to abuse her. But she can come to understand Jesus' love, in a way that can begin to transform a relationship.

Fourthly, allow God to transform your particular heart condition by letting Jesus impact your heart. Your heart condition this morning may be one of hurt. Jesus understands the pain that you have experienced better than anybody else. And as you allow His love into your life, both through His spirit and through His people, His love will protect you. His love will begin to heal you.

Perhaps your heart condition this morning is one of sin, one in which you have allowed a particular sin to dominate your life. The more you say no to the Spirit of God, the more you harden your heart. Harden your heart so that Jesus love cannot impact your life.

And perhaps your heart condition this morning may be one of bitterness. Life isn't fair. Why is this happened to me? Why did things turn out this way? Why did my parents have to go through a divorce? Why has it so messed up their lives that it's messing up mine? When Jesus' love impacts your life, you will see a God who is in control, and who could take whatever

Wilkins – Impact of Your Heart for God

circumstances that have come your way. And He can help you to straighten those circumstances out.

And perhaps cockiness, a heart condition of cockiness. Ohio State was mighty cocky this weekend. And I heard or read an interview of one of the players who said "cockiness does not make up for a defensive line." Cockiness, oftentimes, is an overrated perception of one's abilities. But what cockiness often masks is doubt, doubt about ourselves or else. It masks anger and conceit. This is how Jesus love has impacted my heart.

These are, I, I, I stress again, these are perhaps the most important years of your life in establishing the condition of your heart. And I would say very simply, allow Jesus to love you, to impact your heart, so that you can be human as God has created you to be.

Let's pray together. Father, oftentimes when I get the opportunity to speak in chapel here, I, it really is heavy. It's heavy for me, because I love these students so much. And I wish for them that they would know your love in the deepest part of their heart. Father, I pray that as they go through all the circumstances of their life today, that they would begin a pattern of life that opens himself up to experiencing Jesus' love, the real Jesus who is risen, who is alive, who is exalted; but who humbly asks entrance into our lives.

Give us courage, Father, to be different people in this world that is so hard and so cold. Give us the courage to live with Jesus' love, and so love with Jesus' love. I pray this in the name of the Savior. Amen. You're dismissed. (Applause)