HOMEWORD
WHERE PARENTS GET REAL ANSWERS

Purity Code—Youth Group Curriculum

The Heart: Keeping Your Heart Healthy [Session 06]

Key Verse

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.
Proverbs 4:23

Biblical Basis

Matthew 7:24-27; Ephesians 2:10; Psalm 30:2; Luke 5:31-32; Isaiah 43:25; 1 John 1:9

Big Idea

Guarding our hearts above all else is made easier when we seek to control our emotions, build a healthy self-image, and find forgiveness when we sin.

Leader's Note:
Because of the broad nature of the material to be covered in this final session, it is more lecture-oriented than the others. As such, the ***In the Word*** section has been removed although many Scriptures are mentioned in the content.

Goals of the Session

During this session, you will help your students:
- *Examine* the concept of the importance of keeping our hearts healthy.
- *Discover* how emotions, self-image and forgiveness play roles in keeping our hearts healthy.
- *Take* the Purity Code Pledge.

Supplies

- An animal heart (purchased from the meat counter at a grocery store or a butcher shop), clear zippered sandwich bag, brown lunch bag, Purity Code Pledge Cards (print on card stock or make copies on plain paper), pens.

Warm Up – Heart Object Lesson

The aim of this object lesson is to have your students make the connection between the function and importance of caring for our physical hearts and the need to do the same ("guard your heart") for our spiritual hearts.

Before the session, purchase an animal heart (pig, cow, etc.) from the meat counter at a grocery store or butcher shop. (You might have to ask someone who works at the shop for this, as they might not have one set

out for sale.) Enclose the heart in a zippered lunch bag (or bigger if need be), making sure the heart is well-sealed inside the bag. Then, place this bag inside a brown lunch bag, so that the heart is not visible. (You might want to seal this bag also by stapling the bag shut, so that in the session, your students can't look inside the lunch bag.) If you can't find an animal heart or have ethical or lifestyle issues with using an animal heart, check with a local physician to see if they have a model of a heart that you can borrow.

With your students gathered, give the bag to a student and have him or her feel the heart inside the bag. Don't tell students what is inside the bag. Have this student pass the bag to another student who will do the same. Once everyone has had a chance to feel what's inside the bag, retrieve the bag and ask students to guess what is in the bag.

Remove the heart from the brown lunch bag, and affirm the students (if any) who guessed correctly. If no one guessed correctly, make sure you identify the content as being a heart.

Ask: *What does a heart do?*
Ask: *Why is it important to have a healthy heart?*
Ask: *What are ways that we can keep our hearts in good shape?*
(Make the points that we need to stay healthy by getting lots of exercise and eat healthy foods, so we don't clog up the arteries in our hearts.)
Ask: *If a person has a problem with their heart, what should they do?*
(You will want to be sure to make the point that if a person has a heart problem, they should see a doctor.)

Make the following points: *Doing our best to keep our hearts healthy is important. If we don't have a healthy heart it can have a negative impact on our lives. So, if we know we've got a heart problem, we should see a doctor. If we don't have a heart problem, there are still things we need to do to protect our hearts, such as staying healthy and eating the right kinds of foods.*

But, what about our spiritual hearts? The Bible talks a lot about our hearts. When the Bible says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23), it isn't talking about our physical heart. Rather, it refers to the center of ourselves, the spiritual aspects of our lives. The Bible says that our hearts control the way a person thinks and acts. So, the spiritual condition of our hearts, whether our hearts are healthy or not, is just as important as our physical heart.

When our spiritual hearts are healthy, and we take steps to guard our hearts, we'll live happier, healthier lives and it will be so much easier to live according to the Purity Code. When our spiritual hearts aren't healthy we'll find it much more difficult to live the kind of lives that we want to live and the chance is so much greater that we won't be successful in following the Code.

Going Deeper –Emotions, Self-Image, and Forgiveness

Building on the physical heart concept from the Warm Up object lesson, you will connect the ideas of staying healthy, eating healthy foods and seeking the help of a doctor, to the concepts of emotions, self-image and forgiveness.

Staying Healthy - Emotions

Make the following remark: *There's lots of stress during the teenage years. Along with all the stress, you'll experience big swings of emotions. Anger, worry, frustration, love, excitement, hurt, loneliness, and even depression are all common emotions for teenagers.*

Ask: *How might letting our emotions run away make it difficult for us to live by the Purity Code?*
Give some examples to make the point that not controlling our emotions can make it difficult to live by the *Purity Code:*

- Being angry at a boyfriend or girlfriend who breaks up with a person, can cause them to "rebound" with another boyfriend or girlfriend. A person might want to take revenge on the "ex" by acting out immorally with this new boyfriend or girlfriend.
- When someone gets hurt by another, is lonely, or depressed, he or she might make bad sexual decisions in order to feel loved by another person.
- Feelings of "being in love" can overwhelm a teenager, especially if they happen quickly in a relationship, and cause them to compromise their sexual standards.
- Feeling ignored by family or parents, wanting to be cool or popular, not knowing how to deal with sexual desires can also lead to bad sexual decisions.

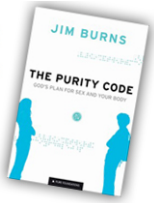
Guarding our hearts means to keep them healthy. One of the best ways to do this is by learning to control and minimize the bad Effects of our emotions.

Ask*: What are some ways that you can learn to keep your emotions in check?*
Make the following remarks: *One of the best ways to keep healthy emotionally is to understand that tough times happen to everyone. Remember, God has wired us with sexual desires, and it's natural to want to be physically intimate, especially when feelings are strong and you care about another person. So begin to prepare for these times in advance. For example think about the answers to these questions:*
(Note: Mention the following questions one at a time and give students some time to think about their answers.)

- *What would I do when someone who I really care about rejects me?*
- *What would I do if someone pressures me to have sex? How will this affect my relationship with that person?*
- *What would I do when I really care about someone and want to express my feeling sexually?*
- *What will I do if all my friends have boyfriends or girlfriends, but I don't? How will I handle the loneliness I might feel?*

Read **Matthew 7:24-27**.
Make the following points: *This Scripture passage reminds us that we'll all experience tough times or storms, in our lives. No one is exempt from tough times. But how you prepare for the storms of life makes all the difference in the world. What you choose for the foundation for your life is your choice.*

If you want to be ready for the emotional storms of life that will surely come your way, you need to start small. It's a lot like getting your physical heart in shape. If you haven't been exercising, you can't run a marathon tomorrow. To get your heart in shape, you'd need to start by taking walks, then jogging short distances, then increasing your distance and starting to run faster, and so on. So emotionally, set some specific goals that will stretch you but are



attainable. (Something like: Today, I will not let my little brother get me so angry that I yell at him. Experience little successes along the way. Even if you don't feel like it, do it anyway. Your feelings will often follow your actions. When we make God the foundation for our lives, we can weather the storms life throws at us! Never forget that God cares about you, believes in you, wants the best for you, and is willing to walk with you through your most difficult times.

Eat Healthy Foods – Self Image

Make the following remarks: *If all we ever eat are fatty foods like hamburgers and pizza, over time, we're likely to clog the arteries of our heart and that means big trouble.*

Similarly, if all we ever do is think negative thoughts about ourselves, and surround ourselves with negative people, it's likely that we are going to end up in big trouble because we'll have an unhealthy self-image.

It's easy to make our hearts sick by having a poor self-image. All you really need to do spend time playing the "Comparison Game." If you spend your time thinking that other people are better looking, smarter and more talented, and have more good "stuff" than you, you're sure to be on your way to a poor self-image! So, don't play the Comparison Game! There will always be other people who have things that you do not. People who have healthy hearts and a good self-image learn to accept, appreciate, and give thanks for the unique and special person God has made them to be! We read in the Bible, "You are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works." (Ephesians 2:10) The word "workmanship" can mean what we think of today when we hear that an piece of artwork is a "masterpiece." Each one of us is God's "masterpiece," His beautiful work of art.

(Note: You might want to flesh out the following items by using *The Purity Code* book as a resource. You can find these items discussed in Chapters 11, *Handling Your Emotions* and 12, *Developing a Healthy Self-Image*.)

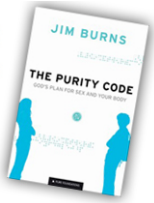
So, it all comes down to your diet! Make sure that you are feeding yourself good emotional food by:

- *Developing meaningful relationships*
- *Surrounding yourself with positive, encouraging friends*
- *Helping others*
- *Being thankful*
- *Putting God first in your life*
- *Living up to your potential*

Ask: *Many people with a poor self-image are easily tempted into sexual activity. Why do you think this might be the case?*

Ask: *How can you not play the comparison game about others who might be smarter, better looking, more talented, or even richer? How can you become more secure with yourself?*

Make the following points: *How you think and feel about yourself will affect every part of your life, including your sexuality! How you think and feel about yourself will determine how you think and feel about life. How you think and feel about life will determine how you relate to your friends, boyfriends or girlfriends, family, and others. How these people respond to you, will affect how you feel about yourself. A person who is stuck in a negative cycle, end up*



with a poor self-image. Because they don't feel good about themselves, they often make compromises sexually to help them feel good about themselves, and don't live by the Purity Code.

The Doctor Is Always In – Forgiveness

Make the following remarks: *We live in the real world, and here in the real world, some of us will have spiritual heart problems too! Some will either choose not to live by the Purity Code, or some of us will try to live by the Code and mess up.*

We mentioned earlier that if someone has a physical heart problem, they should see a doctor because doctors can help diagnose the problem and help to fix it.

Fortunately, we have a spiritual doctor that can help us when we don't live according to the Code! In Psalm 30:2, we read, "O Lord my God, I called to you for help and you healed me." God is the Great Physician when it comes to sick spiritual hearts and we can always go to Him and seek healing and forgiveness. When Jesus was asked why He spent time hanging out with the spiritually sick, he said, "It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5: 31-32) God says to us today: "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more." (Isaiah 43:25)

There's no doubt that God takes our actions seriously. When we don't live by the Purity Code, it is a big deal to God because He wants the best for us. But, even so, God also makes a big deal out of forgiveness. He is always ready and willing to forgive us and offer us healing. In 1 John 1:9 we read, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." This is so important because it means that whenever our hearts are sick, we can find God's healing forgiveness in our lives.

Ask: *How can God's forgiveness actually keep a person from making poor choices?*

Ask: *How can a better relationship with God help a person to keep their hearts healthy?*

Wrapping it Up

Make the following points: *We guard our hearts by keeping them healthy, feeding them with good, and by avoiding the negative stuff the world will try to throw at us. When we successfully guard our hearts, we make following the Purity Code much easier to do.*

There is no better time than right now to make the Purity Code your prayer of commitment to God. I want to challenge you to stand up against all of the negative sexuality in our culture today and the temptations you face, by opening up your heart to all that God has for you by choosing to follow the Purity Code.

Let's review the Purity Code:
In honor of God, my family, and my future spouse, I commit my life to sexual purity. This involves:

- *Honoring God with my body.*
- *Renewing my mind for the good.*
- *Turning my eyes from worthless things.*
- *Guarding my heart above all else.*

Give a copy of the Purity Code Pledge Card to each student in your group. While you certainly want to encourage everyone to commit to the code, be sensitive to those who may not be ready or willing to make this commitment. You'll want to make it clear that signing the pledge card should be done willfully and not from feelings that they are being pressured. Reassure those who don't sign that you aren't judging them. Have those willing sign and date the cards. (They can take it home with them.)

Closing Prayer

Close your study with some form of prayer time (individual, in pairs, in small groups, in the large group, leader-led, silent, or popcorn style.)

This material was written by Jim Liebelt, Senior Editor of Publications, HomeWord.
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