

## An Enlarged Heart

Contributed by Bob Sorge  
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An enlarged heart is a heart that has been expanded by God to carry the concerns of others. It has a passion for reaching beyond the concerns and issues that affect our own personal life, to embrace the needs of others.

We can see Paul's enlarged heart in his statement of 2 Corinthians 7:3, "you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together." The church at Corinth was only one of many churches Paul had planted, but he relates to them in this passage as though they were the most important church in the whole world. Those believers were so much a part of his heart that he felt like his living or dying was inextricably connected to their living or dying. We can be certain that Paul felt that way about all the churches he planted. Truly he had an enlarged heart!

An enlarged heart is a heart for the world. "For God so loved the world." It is a heart that beats with the passions and concerns of God Himself. What's amazing in Paul's case was his passion, not only for the churches he had planted, but also for his nation, the Jews. In Romans 9:1-3 he makes the absolutely sincere claim that he could wish himself cut off from Christ if it would mean the salvation of his fellow countrymen. That kind of big-heartedness is absolutely mind-boggling to me. Paul carried a passion for both the Gentiles and the Jews. Truly he was a "world Christian."

An enlarged heart has been given a greater capacity to channel God's love to others. When Paul said to the Philippians, "For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:8), he was basically saying, "The love Jesus has for you fills my heart and flows through me toward you."

To illustrate this, let me bring up the problem I have with watering my garden. We have a small garden plot in our back yard, and watering it with the sprinkler ought not to be much of a job at all. The problem is, the pipes in our basement are old and corroded on the inside, which reduces the water pressure to my garden hose significantly. To water my garden in the heat of summer should only take about 20 minutes or so, but instead it consumes the better part of an evening. What I need is some new plumbing in our basement, with some pipes that have a greater capacity to conduct the flow of water. In a similar way, our hearts often only give out a little dripping of the love of God. The problem is not with the supply of God's love, but with the constriction of our hearts.

God wants to expand our hearts beyond the limited interests of our own sphere of influence. Is my heart heavy when a nearby gospel-preaching church is suffering a loss of members, even when part of me wants to rejoice that those members are now coming to my local church? An enlarged heart finds its interests much broader than the confines of its own ministry involvements. It freely delights in seeing the blessings of God abound elsewhere, even when that blessing is not presently touching its own immediate sphere. It is free of all jealousy, competition, and comparison.

### How God Enlarges Our Hearts

This article is birthed out of the following premise: God uses trauma and crisis to enlarge our hearts. Our hearts resist God's stretching processes, and usually it takes something very traumatic to work a permanent enlargement of our hearts. David cried out, "The troubles of my heart have enlarged; Bring me out of my distresses!" (Psalm 25:17). David was learning that God enlarges the troubles of our heart -- to enlarge our heart. This is clearly seen in David's life, because although David felt ready to lead the nation after killing Goliath, God knew that he needed several years in "the wilderness" to properly enlarge his heart for the great dynasty God had in store for him.

Even our physical hearts get constricted. This is what causes heart attacks. Veins and arteries around the heart become clogged with cholesterol and plaque, and the flow of blood to the body is restricted. A commonplace surgical procedure in our day for rectifying that is called "angioplasty." A balloon is inserted in an artery somewhere near the hip, and it is directed up to the heart, put in place where the blockage is, and then the balloon is blown up. The clogged artery is stretched open, and proper blood flow can resume. This is a marvelous illustration for how trials, pressures, afflictions, and crises are instruments of "God's angioplasty," to enlarge our hearts with His passions.

I am not suggesting that troubles are the only device God uses to enlarge our hearts. Psalm 119:32 makes it clear that radical obedience also contributes to heart enlargement. But crisis is particularly useful in God's hands for stretching us out of our comfort zones. Once He has we can experience the divine trust, love and faith that will infuse our spirits.