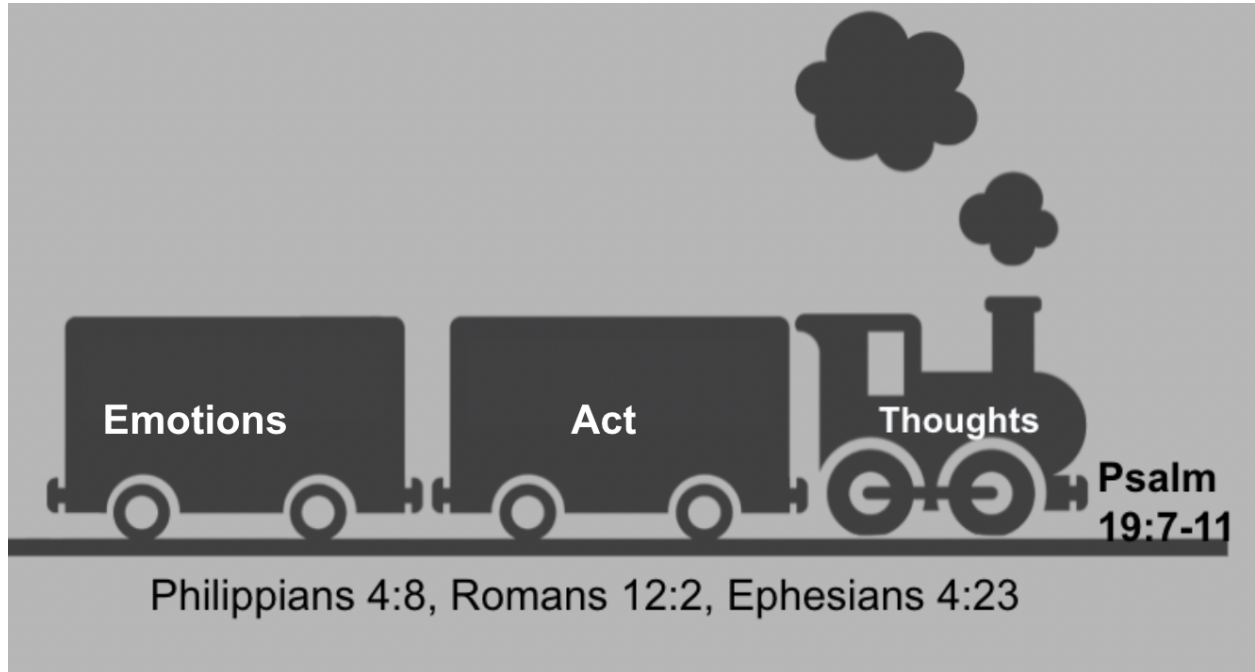


# The Biblical Heart (Part 5)

By Wendy Wood



This is part 5 of a series on the biblical heart. Previously we looked at the components that make up the biblical heart including thoughts, emotions, desires, and the will. This blog will focus specifically on emotions.

The culture that we live in gives us messages about emotions that are contrary to Scripture. We often hear “Follow your heart”. This idea tells us that we should live by our feelings. That is something makes us happy or if we have positive emotions about something, we should pursue it and if something feels negative because it is difficult or something we don’t want, we should avoid it. But the Bible tells us in Jeremiah 17:9 that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. We should not follow our hearts! Rather, we need to guard our hearts as Proverbs 4:23 says.

Our emotions are strong and quick to respond to our circumstances, however, we cannot trust our emotions. **Our emotions do not accurately reflect truth because our emotions are affected by our sin nature and our sinful desires. Our emotions reflect our judgment on a situation or circumstance. But our judgment may or may not be right.** Instead of responding to our emotions, we need to go to God’s Word and see what His Truth says about the situation.

We have emotions because we are made in God's image. When God created humans in Genesis 1:26 and said "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" part of that design was for us to experience emotions. Some of our emotions we experience as positive feelings - like happiness and excitement. And some of our emotions we experience as negative feelings - like sadness, fear, or anger. All of our emotions can be helpful and good - because they are from God and God declared His creation good. But, our emotions are affected by the fall into sin. Every aspect of our lives is impacted and changed by sin and emotions are definitely one aspect of that.

Let's go to some scripture to see emotions. We will start with Jesus's emotions.

**In Luke 10:21** we see Jesus happy

**"In that same hour He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to little children"**

Jesus is happy over the Father revealing himself to those who are open to Him. He is rejoicing in the will of His Father so His emotions are holy and right.

**In John 11:33-35** we see Jesus sad

**" When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept."**

First we see Jesus sad. When He sees Mary's tears and feels the loss of his good friend, Lazarus, He is sad. He weeps with his friends because He sees how hurt they are. His sadness is in response to his compassion for others and this is a good and right response.

**In Mark 3:5** we see Jesus angry at the sin in the hearts of man

**"And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man "stretch out your hand. He stretched it out and his hand was restored."**

Jesus is angry at the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and their lack of compassion for a crippled man. His anger moves him to act in a way that benefits others - he heals the

man.

**Mark 14:34** we see Jesus sorrowful and sad

**“My soul is very sorrowful, even to death”**

Jesus was sorrowful to the point of death. He did not want to suffer. In fact, He asked His Father to remove the suffering from Him 3 times. But, he did not “obey” his feelings or He would have run away and hid so that He could not be found. He submitted to God and God’s will and went to the cross.

We learn from Jesus that emotions are good. Jesus felt the array of emotions that we feel but those emotions were always rooted in truth and upholding God’s glory. Emotions are not sinful. They are part of the attributes of God. The problem is that our emotions can lead us to sin if we do not stop and think truth.

Let’s look at an example from scripture.

We know the disciple Peter was an emotional guy and he responded quickly to how he was feeling.

**Matthew 16:21-23**

**“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”**

**But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”**

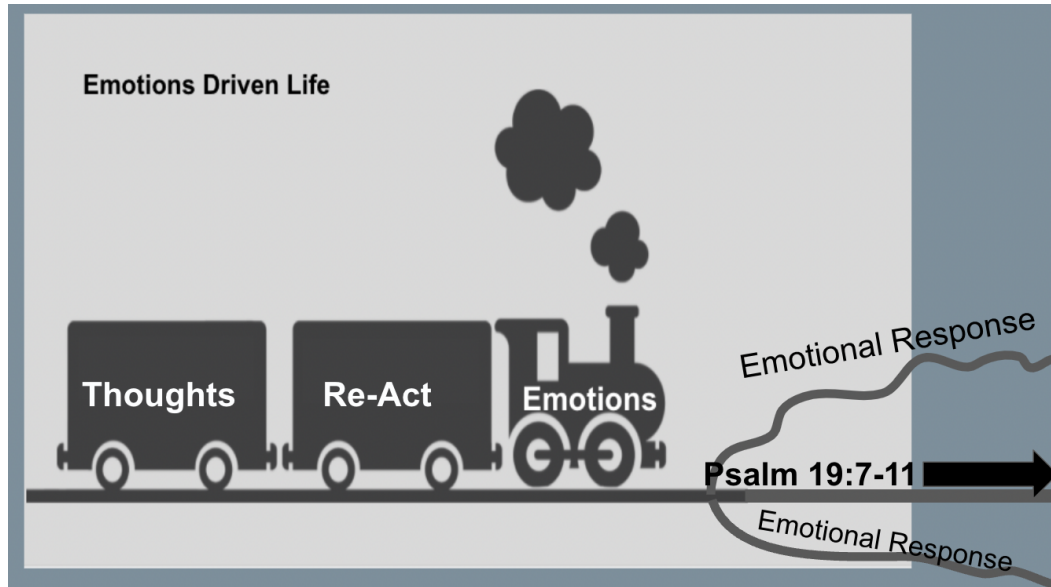
Peter is fearful, angry, and sad at the thought of Jesus dying. Peter immediately judges this situation to be bad and wrong. He doesn’t want his friend, Jesus, to suffer so his interpretation of the event is extremely negative. But, Peter does not know the whole situation. His emotions are based on his fear of being alone, his fear of Jesus suffering, his fear of losing his leader. Instead of looking to Jesus for truth and understanding, He reacts out of his fear, anger, and sadness and sins. He responds with his negative

judgment of the situation and sinfully wants his will to be done over God's will. Jesus calls him "Satan" meaning that Peter's plan would deny God and His plan of redemption for saving people from sin.

## **Just because you have a strong emotion does not mean you have to obey it.**

We need to stop and think truth before responding. It may be helpful to think about your emotions as a warning light on the dashboard of your car. When the "check engine" light comes on, you do not want to just keep driving and ignore it. That warning light tells you something is wrong deep inside your car. You need to stop, check the manual, and call a mechanic to help you figure out the truth of what is wrong with your car. We should respond to strong emotions like a warning light. Stop and evaluate what is going on in your heart based on the truth of God's Word. Ask God to search your heart and help you understand where your emotions are out of line with His will. Call on God to help you respond to the situation in a way that honors and glorifies Him.

Another way to think about emotions is to think of a train. In this first example, the emotion car is the engine and is the driving force. This is a person who is living and responding based on their emotions. Like Peter in the example, when this person experiences an emotion, they quickly react to the situation without examining their desires and thinking based on God's word. These actions are usually sinful responses because they are based on feeling not truth. This person wants to feel good and acts in a way that will alleviate a negative emotion or perpetuate a positive emotion. Their interpretation of the event is about personal comfort and about what they want. The thoughts going through their head are "after-thoughts". They haven't checked to see if they are speaking truth to themselves from God's word. We are always thinking but not often aware of our thoughts. Thoughts about doubting God's care and provision lead to anxiety. Thoughts about doubting God's sovereignty lead to fear. Allowing our thoughts to trail behind neglects God's command to "meditate on His word day and night" and to "hide His word in our hearts." Throughout any given day, you may experience sadness, fear, anxiety and anger and your life is going in different directions throughout the day.



If you are quick to respond out of those emotions, like Peter, you will react sinfully and your train, or life, will veer off track from God's word. It may feel like a roller coaster ride or a train derailment. You will experience conflict and troubled relationships. You may explode with anger or clam up in anger and remain silent. Both responses are sinful. You may feel happy about something that makes you feel good, but it may be something sinful that you are pursuing for pleasure. You may experience anxiety and sinfully respond to others or allow your thoughts to be consumed with "what if" scenarios rather than going to God in prayer and trusting Him. If you are reacting to emotions, your life will be constantly swinging from one emotion to the next. This is an exhausting way to live.

However, if your life is driven by thinking truth - of going to scripture to evaluate your circumstances through the lens of absolute truth, your life (or train) will be on a straight path.

**Isaiah 40:8 "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our Lord will stand forever."**

**Psalm 19 says "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple, the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart."**

We can trust God's word to always keep us on track. His Word is perfect, sure and right.

When we experience an emotion, we need to stop and think about what God's word says is true and go to God in prayer and dependence on Him to help us respond well. Your emotions are reflecting your perspective on a situation. There are times to be sad and angry in a fallen world affected by sin and evil. There are times to be happy and celebrate life on this earth. Emotions are not a reliable indicator of whether we are right in our thinking.

God's word encourages us to think specifically about Him.

We are commanded to take our thoughts captive to Christ in **2 Corinthians 10:3-5**.

We are commanded to think about things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and praiseworthy in **Philippians 4:8**.

**Colossians 3** tell us to set our minds on things above.

When our lives, or trains, are driven by thinking the truth about God, we will not react, but we will more likely choose to act in a way that honors God. We willfully choose to act on God's word as we think rightly about God, His attributes, His promises, and what He has done for us in Christ.

When we have acted obediently to God, we experience the joy of honoring God. There may be mixed emotions, as people may respond badly to our right action, but living to please God is always joyful and restful for our souls.

Let's look at some people from scripture who chose to respond in a godly way when their circumstances surely brought strong emotions that could have led to a sinful response.

**Genesis 22:1-2** "After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am". He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

We can imagine how Abraham felt being told to kill the son he had waited years and years to be born. He must have been distressed. We can imagine the fear and confusion and anger he felt at the idea of killing his son. Yet, we see obedience to God.

**Genesis 22:3** says "So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac."

Abraham chose to think about God and who He is. Abraham could have reacted with

anger or fear and run away. But he took his thoughts captive to absolute truth and acted in a way that pleased God.

**Hebrews 11:19 tells us “He (Abraham) considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”**

Abraham “considered”. He didn’t listen to his emotions. He stopped and thought deeply about God and His character and promises. And then acted in response to that truth.

Job is another example of someone in the bible who easily could have responded with strong emotions and sinned against God and others.

**Job 1:13 - 22**

**13 Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, 14 and there came a messenger to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, 15 and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.” 16 While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you.” 17 While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, “The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.” 18 While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, 19 and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”**

**20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”**

**22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.**

We can see how Job would be judging these circumstances as extremely negative. He must have been angry, fearful, sorrowful, and distressed beyond imagination. He did not know how or why any of this was happening. Surely he was confused. Yet, he chooses to set his mind on God. He reminds himself that God is the giver of all things and can also allow those things to be taken away. Job worships the God he loves and does not sin in his response.

When you judge your circumstances as negative and feel angry or anxious, sad or confused, worried or distressed, it is time to think truth about God's character and His faithfulness to His promises. You may need to find some scriptures that specifically encourage you regarding your situation.

When your boss is critical and angry, you may need to stop and think about:

**Romans 8:28-29 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.**

Setting your mind on the truth that God wants to use your boss in your life to transform you more into the likeness of Christ can encourage you to respond with gentleness and humility.

When your toddler or teenager is being difficult and you are tempted to respond in anger, you may need to stop and think about **Job 42:2. "I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted"**.

Your child is not thwarting or messing up God's plan. You can trust God to use this situation to grow your dependence on Him as you go to Him in prayer and go to His word to seek wisdom. Loving a sovereign God can help you respond in a way that pleases Him even to a difficult situation knowing that this is God's plan for you - to learn how to act like Christ in this circumstance.

When you lose your job or become ill, you may need to stop and think about

**Philippians 4:4-7 "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."** You can have peace knowing that God hears your prayers, that His peace will fill you when you think about God's love and grace and salvation. You can have peace as you look to



scriptures that remind you of God's care and provision in your life.

When you are single and waiting for a spouse, when you are stuck in a job you don't like and want something different, you may need to stop and think about

**Romans 8:31-32 "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"** The truth is God loved you so much He planned for Jesus to suffer horribly for you. Will he stop you from getting what you need? Allow the truth that God gives us what we need to accomplish His work in our lives, even if we don't get what we want, guide your responses.

In the heat of emotion, we need to stop and remember truth and then **choose to act** in obedience. As we act rightly, as we choose to please God, our emotions come in line with the peace and rest of having honored and glorified God.

This was a lot of information. I encourage you to read it over again and get very familiar with the ways that the heart interacts with circumstances. Examine your own life. Where do you tend to have strong emotions? When you react sinfully, what is the desire of your heart? What were you thinking in the moment you chose to sin?

The next blog we will discuss desires in depth.

We do what we do because we think what we think. We think what we think because we want what we want.

We must understand our own desires and be able to help our counselees understand their desires as well.