

The Biblical Heart (8 Parts)

By Wendy Wood

The following 8 part series on the heart was the basis for the videos on “The Biblical Heart”. Either the videos or the articles could be used by counselors or counselees to gain understanding of the heart and transformational change that happens through repentance and change of desires which God works in us and we pursue holiness through the means of grace given to us by God.

What the Bible Says About the Heart - Part 1



The heart is a main theme in scripture. The ESV bible mentions the heart 707 times and the NKJV has 771 references to the heart. From these large numbers of references we know that God cares about the heart.

This series of blogs will help the counselor understand the key issues of the heart and why it matters in counseling. Biblical counseling must help the counselee address the issues of the heart, or true transformational change has not occurred.

Definition: The heart is the immaterial part of every human. It includes the soul, mind, conscience, thoughts, beliefs, motives, desires, intentions. This part makes you an eternal being (unlike an animal).

The heart is the “well-spring” of life (Proverbs 4:23) That means that everything in our lives flows from our hearts, including our attitudes, our goals, our intentions, what we think, say, and do. The heart is the control center. Our motives, desires, intentions, beliefs, and thoughts lead us to do what we do.

An easy way to remember the importance of the heart is to think about this sentence. **“We do what we do because we want what we want!”** Our thoughts, emotions, and desires all play a role in the decisions we make. What we think about will be feeding our desires. To think “I need to have some “me time” today to relax and de-stress” will feed the desire to have that quiet time before the end of the day. As you continue to think about that relaxing drink with a good book, or a sports game on tv, or a long, candlelit bath, your desire grows throughout the day. You want that quiet time! But when you get home and your evening is looking busy and hectic, your emotions will turn negative if you really want that “me time’. When what you want most is threatened, your emotions are strong.

Over the next few blogs, we will examine what Scripture says about all of this.

God created us this way because He made us worshippers. Every single person on earth is a worshiper. It is not a matter of “if” you worship something, it is a matter of “what” you are worshiping. Your words, actions, and attitudes reveal what the object of worship is. This is will be explained throughout this blog series.

We worship our way into sin and we worship our way out of sin. Transformation is a change of what you worship from loving worldly, selfish pleasures to loving God with your whole heart.

First Samuel 16:7 - God looks at the heart. It's tempting to put a lot of effort into our outward appearance because that is what man sees, including ourselves. But God is looking at our heart! He cares about our thoughts, desires, intentions, and motivations.

Behavior modification will never be pleasing to God because he cares about the control center and why we do what we do. Only transformation of the heart will please God. Only a change in our desires, thoughts, motives, and attitudes will honor and glorify God. That must be our aim!

As we look to scripture to understand what is important to God, Hebrews 11:6 states clearly that the only way to please God is with faith.

“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

Faith is the key to pleasing God. Faith draws near to God in a way that believes God. Not believe “in” God, but faith believes God in who He declares Himself to be and what He says is best. When our responses to our situations are pleasing to God, we are trusting that God will keep His promise to reward those who seek Him, even if that reward only comes in eternal life. The heart, the control center, is where faith is rooted within our thoughts, emotions, desires, will, intentions.

Matthew 22:37-39 is another key passage about our hearts. God commands us what we are to desire and treasure most.

“And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

When God tells us to love Him with our whole heart, God is telling us that our thoughts, emotions, desires, intentions, and will must be oriented toward loving Him. Our love for God is demonstrated by our outward behavior and words, but it begins with what we are treasuring and trusting in.

God looks at the heart at all times. It is not just when we set aside time to worship or to study His word that matters. All of life is to lived our of a heart that loves God most and is seeking to make much of God's gospel work in our lives.

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”

1 Corinthians 10:31

The heart is determining whether we eat or drink to the glory of God. This may seem like a strange way to think about glorifying God, but this is the depth of our heart's intention that God is discerning. Here's an example that might help clarify what it means to glorify God. Let's say a woman named Mary goes to bible study every week. Her attendance is almost perfect, only missing when she is extremely sick or out of town. Each week she has her lesson completely filled out, has done extra study in Scripture so she is fully understanding the lesson and implications. She shares what she has learned with eloquence and prays with compassion and confidence. Is Mary doing bible study to the glory of God? Maybe, but maybe not. It depends on what is in her heart. Is Mary wanting others to see her hard work on the bible study and think she is organized and knowledgeable? Is Mary wanting others to be impressed with the extra study and think she is a mature believer who should be looked up to? Is Mary wanting others to think she has a close relationship with God and praise her for her godly prayers? We don't know what Mary's desire is within her. Maybe Mary truly loves God and loves His word and praises Him as she learns more about Him. Maybe Mary goes to bible study focused on pleasing God and prays before she speaks that God would receive praise for what He has shown her. Maybe as Mary prays, she is speaking with faith and a grateful heart. We don't know for sure what Mary's heart is oriented toward. But this example shows that we can do even good things for right or wrong reasons.

Scripture makes it clear that we don't know each other's hearts perfectly, but we also are deceived about our own hearts.

Jeremiah 17:9-10

“The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;
who can understand it?

“I the Lord search the heart

and test the mind,
to give every man according to his ways,
according to the fruit of his deeds.”

Psalm 139:23-24

“Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!”

Our hearts are deceitful. Even as new creations in Christ, our sin nature continues to affect the thoughts, emotions, desires, intentions, and will within our hearts. We can be blind to our sinful desires and deceive ourselves into thinking we are doing something for God-honoring reasons when in fact, we are doing it for our own glory. We may do things out of desire for control, comfort, reputation, approval, or pleasure. We will act in ways that get us what we want most. Both Jeremiah 17 and Psalm 139 shows us that we need God’s help to see our heart’s motivations clearly. We need God to open our eyes and reveal where we are acting out of self-centered desires rather than seeking to honor Him.

We can only please God when we have faith in Him. Faith is a gift from Him. When we trust in Christ and God justifies us by His atonement on the cross, God gives us a new heart. Prior to being justified, we are unable to please God at all. We are stuck in our sinful ways and sinful desires (Ephesians 2:1-3) and are enslaved to our sinful desires and actions (Romans 6:17). Once we are saved by grace by the gift of God, we are set free from the penalty and power of sin over our lives and can live obediently to the Lord and please Him (Romans 6:18-19). We still sin, which is why our hearts continue to need to be transformed, but we now have the opportunity to please God.

Ezekiel 36:26 “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

Through faith, God gives us a new heart that can please Him. We now are able to volitionally choose to honor God on a moment to moment basis of decision making. Prior to faith we cannot please God.

This is the introduction to what Scripture says about the heart. The next blog will examine more Bible verses related to the heart so that we can have a good understanding of why the heart matters so much in biblical counseling.

The Biblical Heart (Part 2)



In this second blog about the biblical heart, the goal is to show the wide range of ways the bible describes the heart and demonstrate that the heart is a central theme of scripture. Biblical counseling is about genuine heart change because the heart is the control center of the soul. The heart is the thoughts, emotions, desires and the volitional will to act. By having a broad understanding of the heart, we will see how the heart is comprehensive in determining the way of life.

Why is it so important to understand the heart as God describes it? The answer is because God looks at the heart of every single person. God's greatest command is about the human heart.

“But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

1 Samuel 16:7

Deuteronomy 6:5 commands “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” And Jesus added to this in Matthew 22:38 that this is the first and greatest command.

To be able to love God wholeheartedly we must understand what that means. And as biblical counselors, we must know how to address and disciple the heart as well.

First, our hearts are at the root of our sin. Our hearts are deceived by false teaching and our hearts are lured away from honoring God by the lustful desires of the heart. Our hearts are responsible for our sinful thoughts, sinful desires, and even our emotions can be sinful as they are not always aligned with God’s desires.

Our hearts are deceived into believing lies about God and his word.

Deuteronomy 11:16 says, “Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them.” In this scripture we see that we can be deceived into believing that idols and false gods will give us the comfort, control, approval, or love that we are seeking. Our thoughts and desires chase after sinful things because we easily believe the lies that sin will make us happy. Another scripture that shows our deceitful hearts is **Psalm 12:2 which says, “Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.”** A double heart is one that deceives itself and others. Flattery seeks personal gain by using words that we hope will entice others to do as we want. This deception originates in our hearts as we chase after our sinful desire rather than seeking to love God. We do what we do because we want what we want. A heart that has a sinful desire will often sin to get that desire. The deception of believing it’s worth it to sin against God begins in our hearts. We deceive even ourselves thinking the sin will be worth it, and sin never delivers long-term what we are looking for.

Our hearts plot sinful actions. **Psalm 36:1-4 says, “Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart, there is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and**

hated. The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit; he has ceased to act wisely and do good. He plots trouble while on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not reject evil.” Transgression, the breaking of God’s commands, starts in the heart. People have a tendency to blame someone else or their circumstances for their sin, but scripture is clear that sin begins within. People convince themselves that sin will stay secret and in following the transgression of their heart, they stop following God’s wisdom and stop doing good. The heart is what leads a person astray from God.

Second Corinthians 11:3 confirms that deceitful thoughts start in the heart. **“But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”** The serpent tempted Eve by offering wisdom and autonomy, and Eve sinned because that was the desire of her heart. Our thoughts of “I want to be in control” or “I deserve comfort” will lead us astray from the truth of Christ, also.

Scripture talks about attitudes within the heart. An unbeliever has a hard heart. **Ephesians 4:18** says, **“They (unbelievers) are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.”** Without God giving a person a new heart in the new covenant, an unbeliever’s heart remains hard and blind to the goodness and truth of who God is and what he has done for believers in Christ. The heart can be arrogant. **“Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not endure” (Psalm 101:5).** An arrogant heart is one that has elevated self above others and looks down on people God has made. An arrogant heart has thoughts that are **“raised against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:3-4)** and rejects the need to humbly submit before God.

In **Romans 9:2** Paul talks about having **“unceasing anguish in (his) heart”**. He is broken by the thought that some of his fellow Jews are not trusting in Christ and the idea that they are cut off from Christ makes his heart sick. David also talks about his heart being in anguish. **Psalm 55:4** says, **“My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me”**. David is surrounded by enemies and feels oppressed by wicked men. It is his soul, or heart, that responds with thoughts and feelings of severe suffering.

Foolishness is another trait that comes from the heart. **Romans 1:21** talks about foolish hearts being darkened by not acknowledging who God is and giving thanks to God. Futile thinking leads to a foolish heart. **“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.”** A foolish heart refuses to recognize God as God. A foolish heart doesn’t regard God as worthy of worship and honor. **Proverbs 22:15** tells us that people start out foolish. **“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.”** The natural state of our hearts is foolish, and we need help and discipline to change. Our hearts are deeply and innately flawed by the curse of sin. A heart of folly wants its own way. It is only through discipline and God putting a new heart in a believer that changes the heart.

We’ve seen some of the ways the bible describes the heart. The bible also shows that it is from the heart that all of our thoughts, words, and actions come. It is tempting for us sinners to blame our circumstances or other people for our words and actions, but God’s word is clear that all of our responses come from within our own hearts. No one else can make us sin. No one else is responsible for our sin. **Romans 2:6** says, **“He will render to each one according to his works”**. **Second Corinthians 5:10** says, **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”** God is clear that each person is responsible for their own deeds in the body. God holds each person responsible for their own reactions. Therefore, we must understand how the heart works.

The heart is the overflow of life. Consider these passages:

Matthew 15:19 **“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”** In one sentence, Jesus sums up that our thoughts, our actions, and our words come from our heart. No one else causes those behaviors or thoughts, they come from within.

James 4:1-3 **“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and**

quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” Don't miss the significance of this passage. We get angry and respond to people in ways that cause fights and quarrels because we are not getting what we want. The desires within our heart drive our behavior. When we don't get what we want, and are willing to be angry, say harsh things, or manipulate to get our way, we know that desire is too big! In this passage, James is warning about inordinate desires, desires that have grown to an idolatrous status in our hearts. If we are willing to sin to get our desire fulfilled, or willing to sin if we think we are about to lose what we desire, that desire has become an idol. Our responses come from the heart that wants what it wants.

Luke 6:43-45 “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” Again, we see from deep within, come the fruit of our lives, our thoughts, words and actions. Our angry words, our discontented feelings, our disapproving look, our lustful thoughts, all come from the heart. The heart is the root system that grows the tree and produces the fruit. Whatever the heart is loving and treasuring, that is the fruit that will be produced.

There are certainly times when we may fool other people about the condition of our hearts. The tree, or life, that seems to be producing “good fruit” may in fact be rotten to the core. For example, a person who gives money to the poor may look to other people as a God loving, generous person, but in reality that person may be giving the money out of a heart of pride and wanting others to think highly of himself. Or a person who always has the best bible study answers may not have a “good” heart that loves the Lord and is sharing knowledge to help others. This person may desire the reputation of being a “good Christian” or for another prideful reason. Over time, the genuine fruit is revealed and people tend to be found out. However, God always knows the true heart.

Hebrews 4:12-13 says, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the

heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” God’s word is designed to convict and discern the motives and intentions of the heart. Every aspect of our hearts is known by God. He is not fooled by our false pretenses or hidden desires. Everything is exposed, seen, and judged perfectly by God.

Romans 8:27 tells us that God knows the heart of humans. **“And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”** And **Psalm 139:1-4** tells us that God knows our thoughts and words before we even have them! **“O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.”** God knows our thoughts. God is not deceived when we try to hide our sinful thoughts or actions from others. Every aspect of our hearts and lives are known fully by God. This is a sobering thought and should lead us to carefully consider the sins that we consider “private”. God sees it all!

Scripture has much to say about the heart. Always keep in mind what Samuel said to David in

1 Samuel 16:7 **“But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”** God does not evaluate people as other people do. God sees the innermost depths of a person’s soul and judges perfectly!

In the next blog we’ll continue to consider the significance of the heart in scripture and how God changes the hearts of believers.

The Biblical Heart Part 3



We have seen that the heart is a major theme in scripture and that the thoughts, words, and actions of a person come from within their own heart. This is vital to understand because Scripture says that we are to love God with our whole heart. Scripture says that God will give us a new heart when we believe and trust him. This blog post will demonstrate these important aspects of the heart.

First, God is the One who opens a person's heart to the knowledge and understanding of who he is. Salvation begins with God as he shines his light into our dark hearts and we see our need for him. On our own, we are darkened in understanding and in no way seek out God. Only God can make a heart willing and open to him.

We see in **2 Corinthians 4:6** that God initiates a relationship with us by opening up our hearts. **“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”** God gives the light of knowledge. Romans 3 is clear that no one seeks after God. A saving relationship with God is initiated by him when he makes knowledge of himself beautiful to us and we see our need for him.

Another way that Scripture talks about God's work in the heart is to say he opens the eyes of the blind. As 2 Corinthians 4 and Ephesians 2 says, we are darkened in understanding before the Lord opens our eyes. The darkness represents a total lack of understanding who God is and a total lack of seeking God. **Psalm 146:8** tells us "**God opens the eyes of the blind**". God gives sight to see him as loving, gracious, merciful, just, holy, and good. Without God giving sight to see, humans would remain in darkness.

After opening a person's spiritual eyes to see God for who he is, God gives a new believer a new heart. Scripture talks about a believer being a "new creation" and the essential part of that is having a new heart that desires God and the things of God. In **Ezekiel 36:26**, God prophesied what the new covenant would entail. "**And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.**" The heart of stone in an unbeliever is a hard heart that is focused on self. When God gives us a new heart of flesh, it is one that he will shape and change to love him and his statutes. The new heart will be convicted of sin and desire to love what God loves.

Psalm 51:10 adds that God gives a clean heart and a new spirit within a person. "**And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.**" A believer receives a clean heart when sin is forgiven through the blood of Christ. The new spirit is one that, again, wants to honor and please God in thought, words, and actions. Only God can give us this new heart.

Hebrews 10:16 explains the new heart further. "**This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds.**" We as sinners, need God to change our hearts. We have the hope of pleasing God and putting off sin to become more like Christ because God has put his law in a believer's mind and heart.

This change is a life-long process. We are told in **2 Corinthians 3:18** that we are changed "**from one degree of glory to the next**". We are not made instantly perfect at the point when God gives us a new heart. He chooses to leave our sinful nature which continually makes us humble and dependent on him. As we

behold the glory of the Lord, as we read, study, and meditate on Christ in scripture, the Holy Spirit is changing our hearts and making us more Christlike.

This new heart has many beautiful characteristics. **Ephesians 1:18** tells us that our **hearts are enlightened**. We see God for the majestic, glorious One that he is!

Psalm 34:18 tells us that **“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”** The new heart is sensitive to sin and is also sensitive to hardship and suffering. The heart that is broken over sin and struggling is close to God. **Psalm 51:17** affirms these same truths. **“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”** God delights when we experience grief and sadness over our sin. It shows our need for a Savior. God gives the heart he desires! What an amazing gift that God provides the heart he loves. We certainly need to continue to be humble and teachable about our sin, but a new heart has the capacity for these on-going changes.

Once God puts this new heart in us, we are able to obey his commands. **Psalm 119:112** says **“I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.”** **Romans 6:18** tells us that believers have become slaves to righteousness. No longer is the believer’s heart a slave to sin and unable to please God, the new heart is set free from the power and penalty of sin to be righteous before God and to do righteous works!

The new heart longs for God. The new heart desires to know more of God and to love God more and more. **“So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”** (2 Peter 2:1-3). To say that we long for spiritual milk to to say that we want to read God’s word and learn more of him. David says in **Psalm 42** **“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”** God gives us a heart that desires him!

With our new believer’s heart, we can be pure and holy before God. As we grow in our love for God and others, it stems from the new heart God has given us. 1

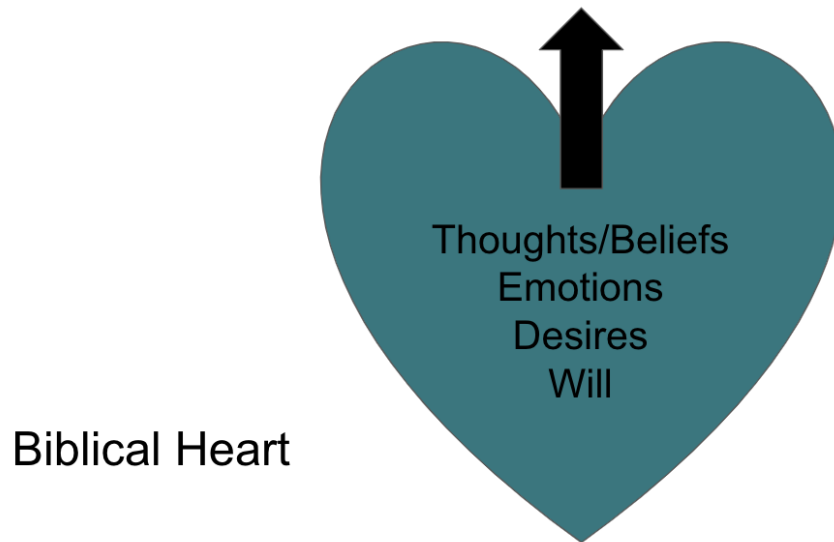
Timothy 1:5 says, “**The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.**” God makes our hearts pure at the point of justification. Before that, our hearts are darkened and cannot and will not love God. Out of a pure heart, we can please God with our faith and maintain a good conscience knowing that he forgives his children.

The believer loves God. This is the key! Jesus tells us that the first and most important command is to “**love the Lord your God with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength**” (**Matthew 22:37**). We can only love God because God loved us first. **1 John 4:19** says, “**We love because he first loved us**”. And **John 14:15** says the evidence of our love for God is in our obedience. “**If you love me you will obey my commands.**” Our obedience must flow from a desire to love and please God for it to be honoring him. God loves us first, and our obedience is evidence that he has set his covenantal love on us.

God initiates the relationship with us. He opens our blind eyes. He puts the new heart in us. He continues to change our hearts in the sanctification process. He makes us sensitive to sin. He gives us a desire to please him and sets our hearts free from bondage to sin. God loves us first!

Scripture has so much to say about the heart. Where man looks at the outward appearance, God looks at the heart (**1 Samuel 16:7**). That is why it is essential that biblical counselors deal with the heart.

The Biblical Heart (Part 4)



So far in this blog series we have seen that the heart is the immaterial part of a person. The heart is the control center from which every thought, intention, emotion, desire, motivation comes from and it is out of the heart that a person takes action.

Even for believers, the heart is deceitful and we can be fooled and blinded by our own sinful desires and motivations.

This video will take an indepth look at how the heart functions as a person deals with situations and circumstances each day.

The heart basically consists of the **thoughts**, **emotions**, and **desires** of a person and then the **will** is the drive to act on those three components.

Let's look at a couple of examples from scripture that will help you understand how the emotions, thoughts, desires and will work together in all decisions and actions that we take. We will compare Eve's heart and Jesus' heart from two different passages in scripture.

Genesis 3:6 “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make

one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her.”

Let's start with Eve's **emotions**. She is delighted by what she sees. The fruit looks good to eat and Satan has promised her that she will gain special knowledge through eating it. This produces the positive emotion of delight.

We see Eve's **desires**. She wants to be wise like God. She desires to get what she wants - to be wise like God and to rule herself.

Eve's **thoughts** are revealed by her emotions and desires. She doesn't stop to think about what she knows to be true of God - that He created her, that He loves her and is always with her, that He provides everything she needs. Instead, she is led by her emotions and she chooses to think God is withholding from her. She thinks God is preventing her from having something that would be good for her. Her emotions lead her to think lies about God and His character.

Part of her heart is her **will**. The will is what moves us to action. God has granted us a will so that we decide how we will respond to our circumstances. We have choices to make. We do what we do because we want what we want.

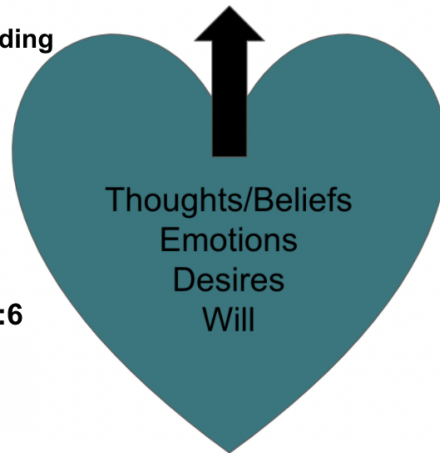
When Eve decides to sin - to take the fruit and eat it - she shows her **ruling desire** is to get what she wants. She loves herself more than she loves God at this moment because she wants what she wants - wisdom and self-rule, over what God wants - to be in perfect relationship with her and protect her from knowing evil. She allows her thinking to go wrong and her emotions regarding her sinful desire for autonomy to rule her as she chooses to sin.

Emotions: Delight

Desire: Be wise like God

Thoughts: God is withholding

Will: Eats fruit and sins



Eve's Heart: Genesis 3:6

Let's compare that to Jesus' response to His circumstance in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Mark 14:32-26 And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

First - we see Jesus' **emotions**. He is sorrowful, even to death. He is troubled. Jesus is distressed. He knows he is facing a horrible death of suffering. He knows he is about to experience the sin of the world on him as he dies on the cross. He is understandably emotionally upset.

We also see Jesus' **desire**. His desire is that God remove the cup of suffering from him. Jesus knows the suffering will be great, and he has a desire to not suffer. No one wants to suffer!

Jesus' **thoughts** are that God is all powerful, and God can do anything. Jesus is

thinking the truth. He knows God could remove the suffering from him.

And we also see His **ruling desire**. “Not what I will, but what you will”. Jesus’ ruling desire is to obey God because of His love for His Father. Jesus loves God whole-heartedly and submits his desire to God’s will.

Jesus’ **will** leads him to obedience. He goes to the cross and takes all the pain and suffering of sin on himself.

Hebrews 12:2 tells us “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Jesus’ emotions lead Him to God. He goes to God in prayer when He experiences strong emotion and submits Himself to God’s will. He recounts the truths about God. He knows God is all powerful and can do anything - even take away the suffering on the cross, But, He submits his emotions to truth, and submits His desire to God’s better plan. He then acts obediently and ultimately experiences the “Joy set before Him” when He pleases His Father.

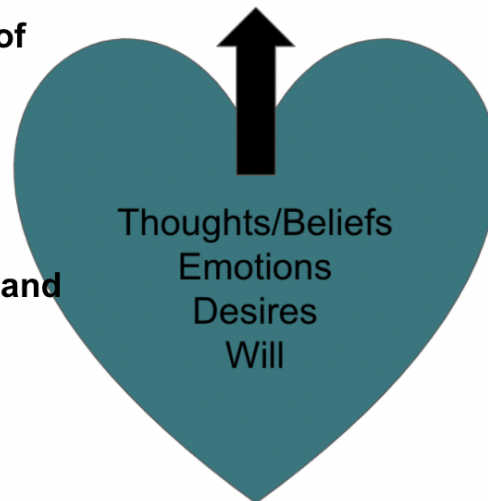
**Emotions: sorrowful,
troubled**

**Desire: Remove cup of
wrath**

**Thoughts: Nothing
impossible for God**

**Will: Submits to God and
obeys**

Jesus’ Heart:
Matthew 26:36-39
Mark 14:34-36



Let’s look at our hearts and how we respond to our situations.

Remember, the Heart is made up of our emotions, desires, thoughts and will.

We saw from Eve and Jesus that their responses to their circumstances revealed what they loved the most.

Every response to temptation is an act of worship.

Every choice that we make will either show we are worshiping God or worshiping self. And it all comes from our heart.

Let's review some specific scriptures that show all our words and actions come from the heart.

Matthew 15:18-19 “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness and slander.”

This verse tells us that our thoughts, our actions and our words all come from within us.

Luke 6:43-45 is a similar teaching. “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”

Our words and actions reveal what we are worshiping. We either produce good fruit or bad fruit depending on what we love the most.

We are often tempted to blame others for our sin. We say things like “He made me so mad” or “I had to yell because that is the only way she listens.” No one can make us sin. Our sin comes from inside of us and our sin is always the result of worshiping ourselves rather than God.

Proverbs 4:23 “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the

springs of life.”

This verse again says that all of our responses flow from the heart, but adds the importance of guarding our hearts. The world tells us to follow our hearts and to listen to our hearts. God tells us to guard our hearts because our hearts are deceitful, as we saw with Eve. We can easily deceive ourselves with our emotions and wrong thinking so we need to guard our hearts by always going back to God’s word for Truth.

We have decision making abilities. God has given us the ability to think and has provided us with Scripture and His Son so that we can respond in a way that pleases Him.

We make many decisions every day. The decisions that we make, the responses we give to temptations, reveal what is in our heart. We are either loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength. Or, we are loving ourselves.

God has created us with a purpose.

2 Corinthians 5:9 says, “So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him”.

Isaiah 43:7 says, “Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made”.

We are alive and here on earth to please God and to glorify Him. To glorify God means to give Him the worship and honor that He is due. We are to live our lives in a way that shows the value and worth of God for who He is and what He has done for us in Christ. Our goal should be to live in such a way, to respond to every temptation, by making decisions that please God and display His goodness.

Every day we make many responses to temptations. Temptations to sin will always be around us while we are here on earth. When we get to the point where we need to make a decision, we need to think about Luke 9:23

Luke 9:23 tells us “And He said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let

him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”.

We have **wills** that allow us to decide how we will respond. We have formed habits in our responses, but at the point of justification, when we repent and surrender to Christ for the first time, we are given the Holy Spirit and His power within us to choose to please God. We are set free from being slaves to sin and through the power of the Holy Spirit, are able to please God and become slaves to righteousness.

So let's look at Luke 9:23 again. Jesus says twice, “if you want to come after me, or if you want to follow me” we must #1, deny ourselves and #2 take up our cross daily.

So what does it mean to “deny ourselves”? We have “two selves” when we become believers. We have the “old self” that we are to “put off” and we have the “new self” to “put on” that is made in the image of Christ in righteousness and holiness. To deny ourselves is to have the “new self” deny the “old self”. Since we have the Holy Spirit within us, we can choose to please God through depending on God to help us form new habits in our responses. The new self can willfully choose to say “no” to selfish desires and say yes to God's desires. That is how we deny ourselves.

The second part is to take up our cross daily. The cross was for the worst criminals in society. The cross was for those who were guilty. Taking up our cross daily means that we see ourselves as standing before the judgment of God and we are guilty of breaking His moral law. We agree with God's assessment that we are guilty and know that we need God on a daily basis. We turn to Christ in repentance and faith and no longer rely on ourselves but on Christ.

The cross involves dying. It means we choose to die to our sinful nature. We must die to our selfish desires and live every day for Christ and His glory.

The cross involves suffering. We must endure trials and hurts in this world but we can trust God that He is good and has a good plan for us to become more like Christ through the trials and hardships.

Denying ourselves and taking up our cross daily type responses show an eternal

perspective. Choosing to please God is trusting that we have a God who rewards those who seek Him. An eternal perspective keeps in mind that life on earth is short, we are just passing through life here on this earth until we die, and then real life begins where we will spend eternity in the presence of God. Denying yourself and taking up your cross daily involves trusting that God is who He says He is and all His promises are true. This is principle oriented living. Instead of being ruled by emotions, we choose to think about God's sacrifice for us in sending Jesus and out of love and gratitude, we want to live by God's principles.

If we deny ourselves and take up our cross daily, we will ultimately please God.

This is HARD at first. Denying ourselves and not responding as we are in the habit of doing, is hard. However, as we continually work at this, as we depend on God's Spirit, as we pursue holiness and pleasing God, it becomes easier because we are transforming into being more like Christ.

The blessing of choosing this path is seen in Matthew 11:28-30

Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Life becomes more peaceful and restful and joyful when we are pleasing God in our responses because that is how God created us and designed us to be. When we choose to please God, we are showing that our Ruling Desire is to do God's will above our own. We are loving God from the heart.

However, we often do not deny ourselves when the decision point comes. Our old selves, the deceitful desires within our hearts, lead us to sin. This is the easy way to go. It is our sinful nature and the way we are in the habit of responding. When a temptation comes, we quickly respond based on our emotions, our wrong thinking, and our desires and choose to act selfishly. We want what we want, and are willing to sin to get it. We love ourselves more than we love God. This is a temporal way of thinking and responding. We get so caught up in our rights, our desires, our way, our needs, that we emphasize getting what we want

right now. We are focused on the present, and don't give thought to the promises God has made for us in eternity. This is a feeling oriented, short-sighted way to live.

Although this is the easy way to go, as we continue down that selfish path, we get further and further from God.

Proverbs 13:15 says “Good sense wins favor, but the way of the treacherous is their ruin” Simply put, our sin, our treachery, makes life hard. We “ruin” life when we choose to worship ourselves. We end up with broken relationships, anger, anxiety, depression, frustration and other “bad fruit” when we love ourselves more than God.

A few verses later in **Proverbs 13:21 it says, “Disaster pursues sinners, but the righteous are rewarded with good.”**

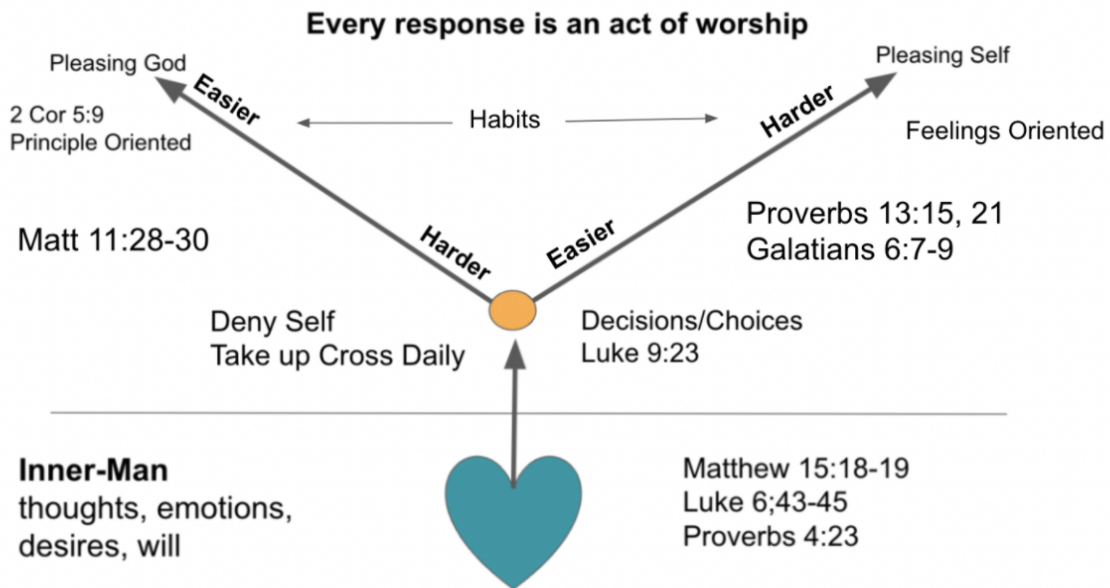
God clearly shows us that choosing to sin is choosing to have a hard life. We are not ever guaranteed easy circumstances, but if we choose to please God in our response, we have the peace and rest that comes from knowing we have honored God and our souls find rest in that.

Galatians 6:7-9 sums up this idea. “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”

Choosing to please God leads to eternal life.

Choosing to please self leads to corruption and self destruction.

We have a will to choose how we respond. You are not stuck in your old life if you are a believer and have surrendered your life to Christ. You are a new creation and can choose to please God, whatever your circumstances may be.



This diagram was first created

by Mark Dutton

Let's look at some specific examples of a typical day.

Let's say you are driving to work and another driver cuts you off in traffic. You are tempted to sin at this point.

You immediately feel the emotion of anger or frustration. You think about how no one should do that to you. You either forget about God or choose to think He is not interested in this situation. Your desire is to be respected by other drivers, to have others put you ahead of themselves. And as you honk your horn, think rude thoughts about the other driver, maybe even yell at them (even though they can't hear you) - you worship yourself. Your love for yourself becomes evident as you sin in response to this temptation. Your selfish desire is your ruling desire and God's will has been forgotten.

Or, if you are choosing to please God, you still feel the temptation to be angry and frustrated. But you stop and think - "God loves me and cares about me. He has promised to always be with me so He is here even now as I drive to work. He is all powerful and sovereign. He has chosen this commute for me and I can respond in a way that honors Him." You still desire for other drivers to be patient

and respectful, but your ruling desire is to please God. You tap your brakes and leave room for the other driver. You set your mind on God and how He is patient with you and don't let the negative thoughts fester in your head. The choice to please God gives you peace in your soul and you can get to work and focus on more important things than a bad driver.

Here's another example. You arrive home and your spouse's first words are complaining and grumbling about something you forgot to do.

If you are pleasing yourself, you immediately give in to feeling hurt and angry. You start thinking about all the times your spouse has failed to do what you asked. God's goodness and love and patience with you never enters your mind. You desire a spouse who loves you and respects you and you set your mind to make that happen. Your response is to complain right back. You match your spouse's tone of voice and an argument has begun. You excuse your sin, blame your spouse, and spend the rest of the evening grumpy. Your selfish desire has ruled you and you have not pleased God.

Or, you could choose to please God. You still feel the tug to be angry and hurt. But you stop and think Truth. "I am a sinner but I have an even greater Savior. God wants me to continually become more holy like His Son. I can trust that God will use even this situation for my good to conform me to the image of Christ if I am humble and willing to trust Him." So you say, "You're right. I did forget to do that. That must be very frustrating to you. Will you please forgive me? I'll do that job right now." Or, it might be, "I don't remember promising to do that job. Did we talk about that? I'm happy to do it, but could you please speak to me kindly and respectfully even if I forget to do something." Your desire to be loved and respected is in submission to God's desire that we be gentle and kind, and you please God as you give a soft answer and turn away wrath.

Every response to temptation is an act of worship.

Every choice that we make will either show we are worshiping God or worshiping self. And it all comes from our heart - our emotions, our desires, our thoughts, and our will.

Our hearts are deceitful as we see in Jeremiah 17:9-10. But God sees our

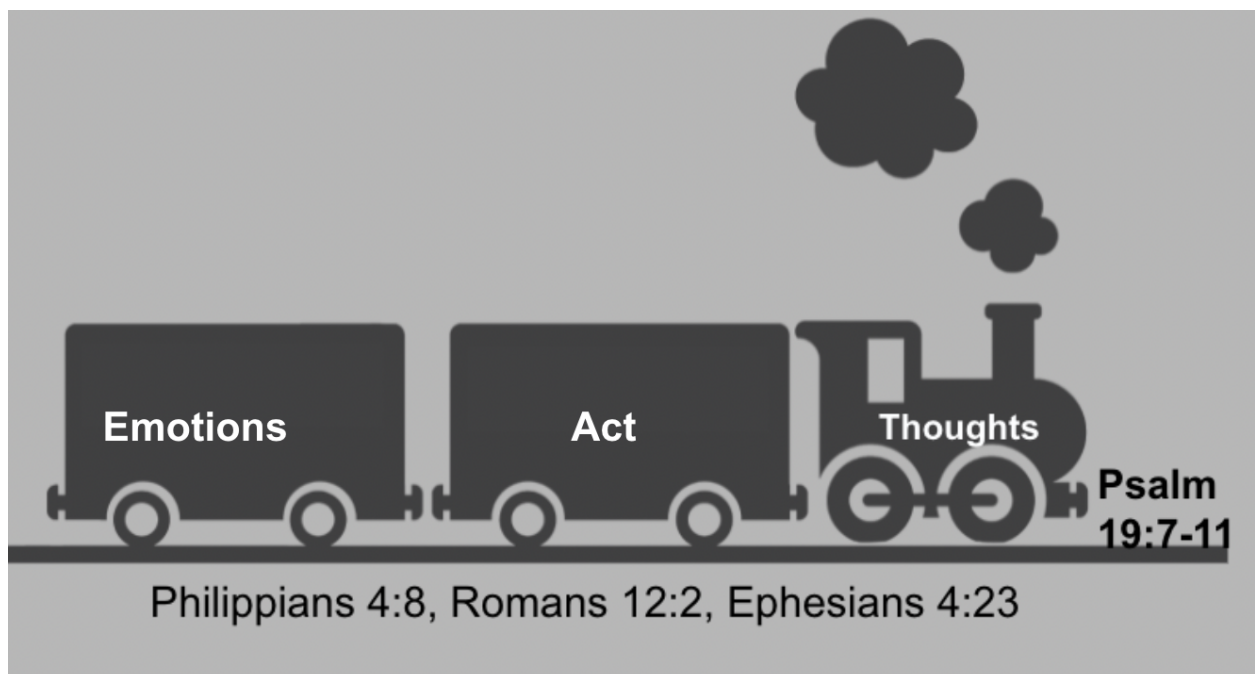
hearts perfectly. God encourages us to pray and ask Him to help us see where our hearts need changing. Psalm 139:23-24 says,

“Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!

The Biblical Heart (Part 5)



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.”

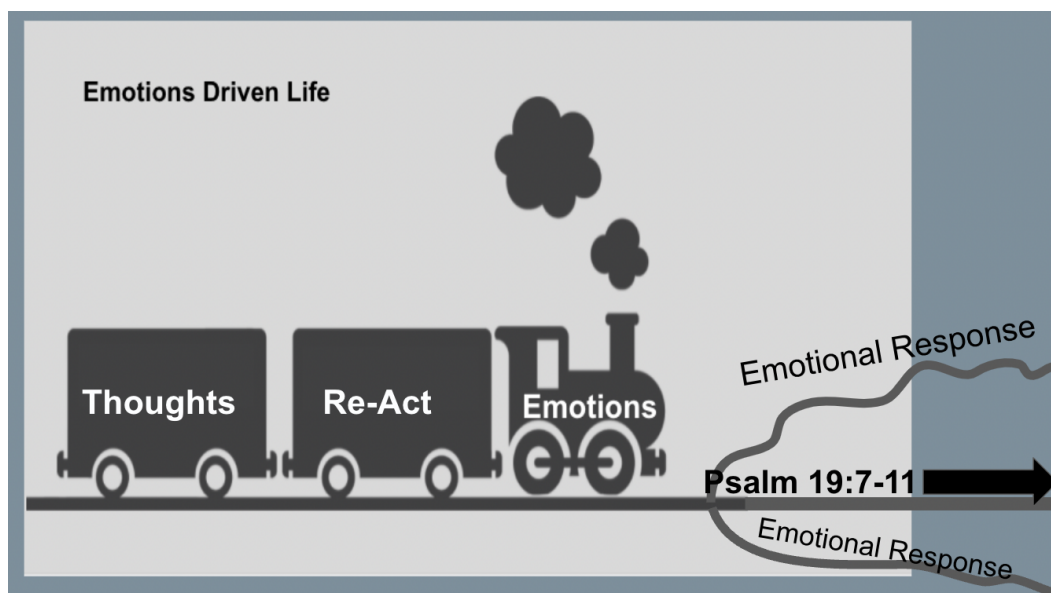
But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

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.

The Biblical Heart (Part 6)



We all have things we want. We all have desires. These desires reflect what we love and treasure.

We saw in the previous blogs how our desires lead us to act. What we want or treasure most, is what we pursue in our words and actions. We want what we want. These desires become idols when we are willing to sin to get them, or if we sin when we do not get them. When we are willing to yell, or pout, or lie, or stew in sinful thoughts over not getting our desire met, we are wanting that idol more than we want to honor God at that moment. Any time we sin, we are wanting something more than to respond in a way that glorifies God.

Matthew 6:21 puts it this way, **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”**.

We set our hearts on our treasures and then live life in pursuit of that treasure (or desire).

James 4:1-3 tells us that we are often willing to fight and quarrel for our desires. **“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because**

you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”

Our passions are the desires of our heart. When we don't get what we want, we are willing to fight and sin to get it.

A desire is not necessarily sinful. It's good to desire a spouse. It's good to desire respectful children. It's good to desire health. But these good desires turn idolatrous when we want them more than we want to honor God. Whenever we are willing to sin to get our desire, or sin when we might lose our desire, we have made our desire an idol.

When I am willing to sin to get what I want, that thing, that desire, is what is controlling me. I **MUST** have my desire.

Romans 6:16 says, **“Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness.”**

A ruling desire is your master. You are enslaved to your desires. If those desires are anything other than loving God, you are worshiping an idol.

Proverbs 29:25 refers to being in a trap when fear of man rules your heart. The idea is the same. You are trapped into a habit of responding sinfully to get what your heart desires. You are enslaved to wanting people's praise, attention, admiration, or respect in the case of fear of man.

Brad Bigney says “An idol is anything or anyone that begins to capture our hearts and minds and affections more than God.”

An idol typically follows a progression in your heart.

It may start as a desire or want. Think of it as “It would be nice to have _____”. It would be nice to have a quiet evening at home without interruption. It would be nice to have a traffic free commute to work. Those desires are fine. As long as they stay in the realm of not sinning to get them.

From a desire, a want can become a **need or demand**. Now you are no longer

just wanting something, you must have it. You have moved into being convinced you need this desire and life will not be good without it. If you demand a quiet evening, you are willing to snap at your children if they are loud or interrupt you. If you demand an easy commute, you will honk your horn and use hand gestures to the drivers around you. You are willing to sin to get what you want.

A demand then becomes an **expectation**. I should have what I want all the time, you think! People should be catering to my wishes. At this point, you experience more intense emotions. You get angry and anxious frequently when you may not get what you want.

When your expectation is not met, you are **disappointed** and will **punish** those who are in your way. You are using people as a means to get what you want. Anyone who makes life difficult or stands in your way will suffer the consequences of your sin.

To find an idol ask yourself these questions:

What makes me angry or anxious?

Am I willing to sin to get it?

Am I willing to sin if I might lose it?

Do I run to it for refuge instead of going to God?

Ezekiel 14:1-8

“Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. And the word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them? Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols.

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your

abominations. For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to consult me through him, I the Lord will answer him myself. And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

First, notice that God’s word says “idols are taken into the heart”. God is talking about what we love and treasure. The Israelites were worshiping Baal and carved idols, yet God says the idols were in their heart. An idol is anything that replaces God in our hearts, minds, and affections.

Second, God’s word says that these idols are stumbling blocks of iniquity before their faces. Iniquity is moral impurity. Paul Tripp says “Iniquity is not just sinful behavior. Iniquity is a sin condition, an escapable state of being that causes us to rebel against God’s authority and break His law.” Our hearts will continually turn to idols because we are sinners. Sin is part of our very nature. A stumbling block means that the idol was affecting their vision or perception of life. It’s like wearing a pair of glasses that have words all over the lenses. The idol affected every interaction they had because they were so intent on getting the idol.

Third, God’s word says that our idols keep us separated from God. We cannot enjoy close fellowship with our heavenly Father when we are enslaved to our sinful desires.

Fourth, God promises to lay hold of His children’s hearts and have them turn away from their idols and repent.

John Calvin said, “the human heart is an idol factory”. We must be diligent to examine our hearts and constantly kill and destroy the idols made in the heart.

Whenever we want something so much, we are willing to sin to get it or keep it, we have an idol in our heart.

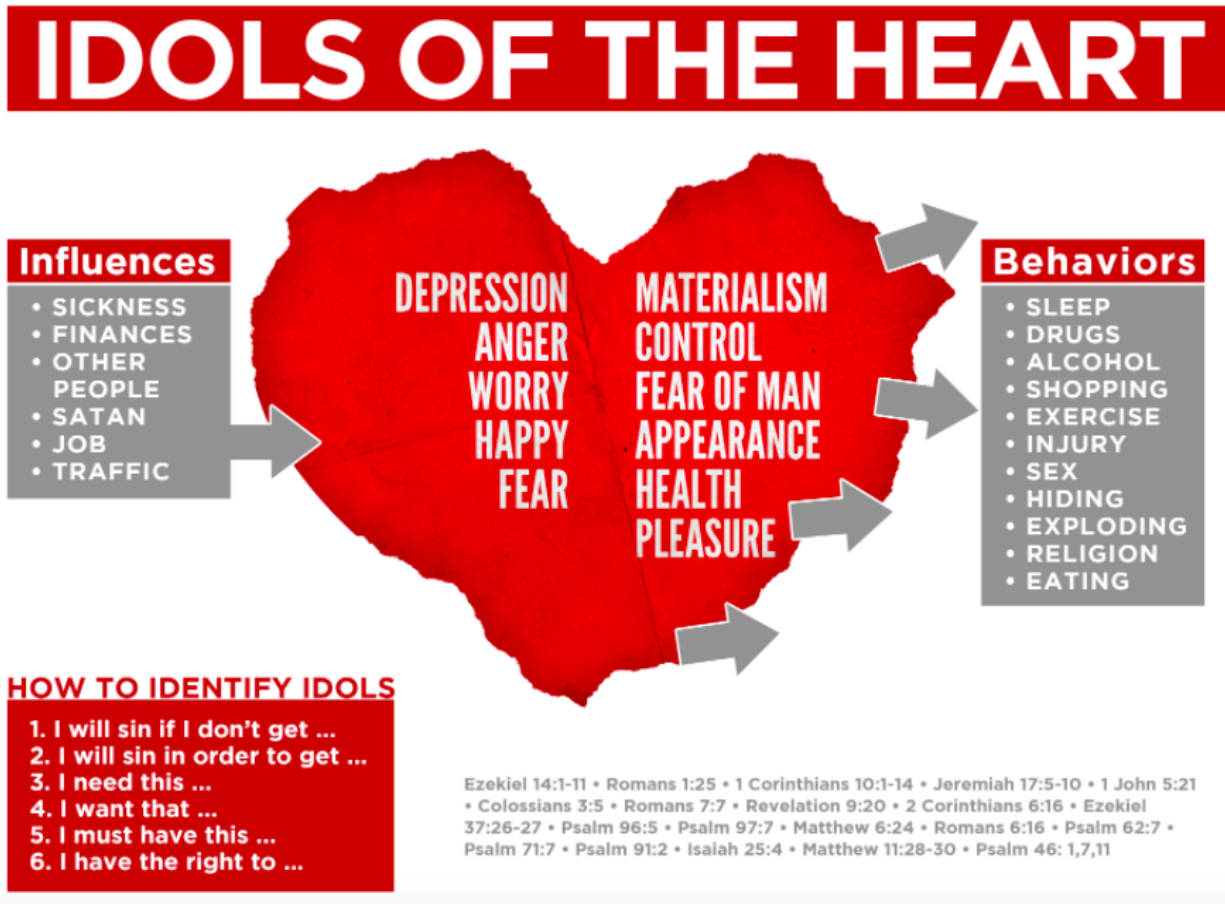
At the beginning of this blog, there were four questions posed that help identify idols.

1. What makes me angry or anxious?
2. Am I willing to sin to get it?

3. Am I willing to sin if I might lose it?
4. Do I run to it for refuge instead of going to God?

1 John 5:21 says, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols".

We must understand what our idols are to fight them and mortify the sinful desire.



Influences - spouse, children, traffic, finances, traffic, health, weather

Emotions - anger, anxiety, fear, happiness, sadness

Idols - Comfort, Approval, Control, Power

Behaviors - yelling, escaping (to food, social media, room), stewing in mind, "churching"

So let's look at how this plays out in real life scenarios.

We tend to be aware of our emotions first. Anger, anxiety, fear, sadness, happiness, and excitement are experienced in our whole person. Our emotions are part of our soul or heart, the immaterial part of our being, but often they affect the physical body, too. For example, when you get angry, your heart rate increases, blood flow increases in your face and extremities, and you feel a surge of energy. God designed our bodies to have these responses because anger should drive us to act - to the glory of God. Unfortunately, we sinners tend to act for our own glory! Another example of emotions impacting our physical bodies is anxiety. Often intense anxiety can cause an increased heart rate, an upset stomach as acid increases, and even dizziness or sweating.

So looking at the diagram above, in life, there are influences that impact our daily lives. It could be your spouse, your children, your boss, your commute, your bills or finances, your dog, your health, your friends, the weather, a local news story, a world event, or anything else that you come into contact with during your day. As you take in the influence, what is already in your heart, is revealed. You will be aware of your emotions first. When your spouse says something to you, you react emotionally based on what you desire. If your spouse says something that you agree with or something that seems beneficial to you, your emotions will be positive. If your spouse says something that you don't like, maybe a criticism of you or a change of your plans, you will experience a negative emotion because it is not what you wanted.

Emotions are revealing what we want. If I think I **must have respect**, I will feel angry when I perceive someone has been disrespectful. But if I am shown honor, I will feel good. My feelings go along with whether I am getting what I want.

If I must have comfort, I will be upset when my quiet time is interrupted by someone needing me to do a chore or something I don't want to do. If I get my comfort time, I will feel good about the day.

In the above examples, I am using idolatry language. When I believe "I must have" respect and am willing to sin to get respect, respect has become an idol in my heart. When I believe I deserve to have comfort time and am willing to sin (whether yelling, giving the silent treatment, stopping off in a huff, rolling my eyes, or grumbling), comfort is an idol in my heart. If I believe that my ideas are best and that my plan for my time is the best plan, I will get upset when my schedule is changed or people fail to follow through on our time together. My belief that I should be in control of my time is revealed as an idol when I sinfully respond to

my plans not working out.

Emotions alert me to the fact that there is a desire in my heart. And I need to check with scripture and pray for God to help me understand and to act in a way that honors him.

Our most common idols are comfort, control, approval/respect/love (which scripture calls fear of man) and power. Sometimes it is easier to identify a secondary idol, such as marriage or a specific car. However, as we examine why we want to be married or why we want a specific car, we will find that those things give us control, comfort, reputation, or power. A person who idolizes being married may really idolize being loved and accepted, or it may be that having a spouse is a comfort in not having to go places alone. A fancy sports car may provide desired respect for one person but may be a way to control other people for another person.

Idols can be met in different ways for different people so we must be careful to get to the root of what people want. A person who is always on their cell phone may appear to have a cell phone as their idol. They fixate on their phone, they must have the newest model the week it comes out, and they spend hours every day on their phone. But, underneath that desire for the newest, best phone, is a desire for comfort for one person and control for another. The comfort may be that the phone provides an escape from a difficult situation when the phone user can scroll through social media and watch tik-tok videos. Another phone user may find comfort in pornography on their phone. But yet another phone user may use games as a way to feel control. Since they get immediate results from a game, a feeling of "I can control the outcome and restart if I want different results", can bring a good feeling of being in control. Another phone user may experience positive feelings from being able to be in control of work by constantly checking emails and responding immediately to any problems that come up regarding their work.

Idolatry is blinding. It is hard to understand our hearts. The wise, patient counselor will ask many questions that probe and dig through the layers of desires to find the root idol.

Emotions and behaviors are easy to identify as sinful at times. Most people would agree that their anger is sinful and that the resulting yelling or throwing objects needs to be repented of. But those are just the fruit of not getting the idol

that is desired. It is not enough to repent of the outward action or the sinful thinking and feeling. The desire of the heart needs to be repented of. Any desire that is greater than loving God and honoring Him in the response to our situation, is an idol. How to lead counselees to repent at the idol level will be coming in another blog.

The questions below, often referred to as the Struggle Journal, is a good tool to help counselees begin to understand their heart. As situations happen throughout the week, have your counselee answer these 5 questions at least 14 times a week and have them keep the journal for several weeks. This will help you identify patterns in their emotions, thoughts, and desires.

Struggle Journal Questions:

What happened?

What were you thinking and feeling?

What did you do?

What did you want? What was your desired situation?

What was the result?

Here are some examples:

Struggle Journal Questions				
What was the situation? What happened?	What were you thinking and feeling?	What did you do?	What were you wanting? What did you desire to have happen?	What was the outcome?
My teenager was disrespectful to me	Angry "Here we go again. Why can't he just listen?!"	I took away his phone for a day.	I just wanted to come home from work and relax.	We were both angry and didn't speak the rest of the night.
Got home from work and was asked to fix the sink.	I was irritated. We just got the sink and it should be working.	I complained. Got my tool box, spent an hour and a half trying to stop the leak.	I wanted the sink to work the way it should.	I called a plumber the next day

The next blog will continue to show you how to understand these journals further and how to lead a counselee to repent of their idols.

The Biblical Heart (Part 7)



In part seven of understanding the biblical heart, we will examine how to help a counselee repent of their heart idols. It is important that the counselee (and the counselor!) repent not only of the actions and words that come as a result of sinning to get the idol, but the actual idol itself.

Jonah 2:8 says, “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs”

We are blind to those idols. We must pray, and we must have our counselees pray,

Psalms 139:23-24 “Search me O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts; and see if there is any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.”

The struggle journal questions are extremely helpful in determining idols in both

your heart and in your counselee's heart. (See part 6 for these questions).

As you gather data over several weeks, you will see themes under the heading "what were you wanting?" The repetition of "I just wanted a relaxing evening" or "I just wanted things to go as planned" or "I want my ideas to matter" are revealing the heart.

"I just want a relaxing evening" reveals an idol of comfort.

"I just want things to go my way" reveals an idol of control.

"I just want my ideas to matter" reveals an idol of respect or fear of man.

In order to address the root issues of the heart, we need to see the idols that consistently drive our behavior.

This is the core of biblical counseling. For genuine heart change and life transformation to happen, we must help our counselees identify and repent of their idols.

The love of comfort, control, power, or approval must be replaced with a greater love for God and His purposes in life.

There are secondary idols that we think of more commonly but they are often rooted in the primary idols.

For example,

For some, the idolatrous desire to be married or be in a relationship may be rooted in the desire of fear of man. The desire to be loved and cherished falls into this category. But for another person, the idolatrous desire to be married or in a relationship could be a status symbol of feeling important because they have a significant other. Yet another person may have an idolatrous desire to be married or in a relationship because it is a comfort to not have to go places alone. These different desire of love, respect, status, and comfort may all manifested by desiring marriage.

For some people, a material thing like a car, a house, or clothes might be rooted in success or achievement. They may feel in control of their life when they have enough money to buy what they desire. For another person, it might be fear of man and wanting to be respected or admired for having the right thing.

For some people, recreation like video games, phone usage, fishing, or reading is probably rooted in comfort. They may like the escape from dealing with work or family and they turn to a hobby for a time of distraction and ease. For another person, recreation may be a way to control something when the rest of life seems out of control. When playing a video game, the person who desires control can restart their game and see immediate results in winning or improving.

We worship our way into sin, by loving our sin. And we worship our way out of sin by loving God and desiring to bring him glory in the way we live.

After using the Struggle Journal and weeks of data gathering, you should have a good idea of what your counslee's idols are.

Ephesians 4:22-24 shows us how God has ordained transformational change to happen in the lives of His children. Throughout the rest of counseling, you are prayerfully helping them see the futility of continuing to live for their idol, helping them repent and turn from their idol to loving God and wanting to glorify Him more than they want to get their idol. This involves renewing the mind and thinking differently. The transformation is complete when they are consistently living out denying their sinful desire to please God.

“to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”

Here are some steps to work through with your counslee as you address all three stages of change.

Step 1 is putting off old self.

Step 2 is being renewed in the spirit of your mind

Step 3 is putting on Christlike attitude and actions

We worship our way into sin and we worship our way out of sin. Transformation is a change of what you worship from loving worldly, selfish pleasures to loving God with your whole heart.

To begin this transformational change, as early as week one of counseling, begin the mind renewal process. The mind renewal process is thinking rightly about who God is and what He has done. You are working to build a high, accurate view of God Himself.

1. Have your counselee study the attributes of God. Use a book or study that guides your counselee to learn about the very nature of God. Have your counselee meditate on scriptures that describe God's attributes and ponder and consider what implications these truths have on daily life.

For example, as your counselee studies God's wisdom and maybe meditates on **Romans 11:33**, have your counselee journal what God's unsearchable ways and judgments have on how your counselee views the circumstances of their own life. How does God being infinitely and holy wise change the way we should think about our circumstances? Work through 15 or so different attributes of God where your counselee is seeing how awesome and worthy of worship and love God is.

2. Have your counselee study passages of scripture that paint a clear picture of God and His nature and work. Passages like:
 - a. **Romans 8**
 - b. **Ephesians 1, 2, and 3**
 - c. **Isaiah 40**
 - d. **Psalms 139**

Have your counselee read one of these chapters every day for a week. Have them meditate on one verse each day. As they meditate on the truth about God revealed in that verse, have them examine what that means to how they think about God and their circumstances.

For example, your counselee reads **Isaiah 40** six times during the week. On one of those days, your counselee chooses verse 12 to study.

“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?” (Isaiah 40:12)

Have your counselee journal what attributes they see about God. He is immense! He measures all the waters with ease and is so gigantic compared to

the universe the heavens are measured between a figurative thumb and pinky span. He is all-powerful and could pick up the mountains to “weigh” them. As your counselee considers God in this way, how does this change their thinking about God, or remind them how awesome God is. Maybe your counselee has been so consumed with their own problems, God has shrunk down in their thinking to be smaller than the problem! Use scripture to reveal God to your counsees and to correct the wrong, small thinking they have fallen into.

3. Have your counsees look at what God has accomplished for them in Christ. Preach the gospel to your counselee. Remind your counselee of what it means to be justified with God. Use scripture to reaffirm that your counselee was
 - a. Chosen by God before the foundation of the world
 - b. Reconciled to God
 - c. Adopted as a child of God
 - d. Set from being a slave to sin
 - e. God’s wrath has been removed from them

Allow your counselee to be amazed at all God has done for them in Christ by His free gift of grace! Daily have them study what it means to a recipient of God’s grace and mercy and the on-going work of God’s grace in their lives to train them to say no to ungodliness and to say yes to holiness and purity.

4. You may assign sermons or additional reading to grow your counselee’s love for God by using material that teaches God’s attributes and works.

We should never stop studying God. We can always grow in being awed and amazed by who God is. This is not a concept that will be completed in counseling in a few weeks and then move on. This is a life-long journey of learning to love God more and you study and learn more about him.

Transformational change involves putting off the old self. This putting off is part of the repentance process. We want our counsees to see their sin first and foremost against God. **Jeremiah 2:11-13**

Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods?

But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit.

Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the Lord, for my people have committed two evils:

(#1) they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and

(#2) hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

We want our counselees to see that before they clung to their idol of comfort, control or approval, they first had to forsake God. **The first step was essentially telling God, “you are not enough”.** We want them to understand how offensive that is to God. As they have studied the Most High God, to forsake God and turn away from His Lordship is grievous sin. Give your counselee time to contemplate their sin before God.

Here is an overview of the process that will help your counselee repent of their sin. I'll briefly give the steps of this process and then discuss the steps in more detail in the next blog.

- 1. What is the sin?**
- 2. Bible references:**
- 3. What do you learn from the scriptures?**
- 4. How have I failed to live as God commands? Or how has this sin showed up in my life?**
- 5. What needs to change in my thinking and believing about God and myself?**
- 6. What specific changes do I need to make? (Being specific is key to really being able to implement change.)**

The next blog will continue the process of repentance and change.

The Biblical Heart Part 8



If you haven't read [The Biblical Heart Part 7](#), please go back and do that now. This blog is a continuation of the repentance process started in the previous blog.

In the process of repentance and change, only genuine heart change at the level of desires has eternal value. We aren't after just behavior change. If the change of behavior isn't coming from a change in what is loved most, the change is temporary and has no eternal value. Only a greater love and fear of God brings genuine, God-glorifying change.

The first step of repentance is contemplation:

How has a holy, holy, holy God thought about their sin?

What attributes of God have been dismissed or disregarded as your counselee has pursued sin?

What lies have they believed about God in pursuing their sin?

Contemplate:

How has my idol forsaken God?

How has my idol been a broken cistern in my life?

For example, someone who seeks pleasure in pornography or excessive eating, is saying “God’s comfort is not enough, I have to get comfort somewhere else”. This person may be doubting God’s goodness in the circumstances of their life or doubting God’s wisdom as he withholds something that they want.

Someone who sinfully desires control is telling God his sovereignty and plan for the universe isn’t as good as their own plan is! They are doubting God’s power, goodness, faithfulness, wisdom, and love at the very least.

As our counselees think about what their sin really is revealing about their beliefs about God and how much they distrust Him. This leads to a more complete repentance and a hating of sin.

Then Jeremiah 2 tells us that next our counselees made idols for themselves. They were leaky, insufficient, unsatisfying and unlasting idols, but that is what they did. They looked to earthly comforts of social media, food, alcohol, shopping, or even church activities to make them feel good. They turned to yelling and being harsh in an attempt to gain a false sense of control rather than trust in the God who is sovereign. We want our counselees to ponder and consider how their idols have been sin against God Himself.

Hopefully after spending time renewing their minds about God, they are seeing more clearly the foolishness of treasuring, desiring, and worshiping anything other than God. They need to spend time with God confessing their idolatry and asking God for forgiveness and cleansing.

Repentance also needs to include contemplating the thoughts, words, and actions that were sinfully used to try to get their idol.

Contemplate your sin against others:

What thoughts, words and actions have been sinful as I have sought my idol?

Maybe your counselee has yelled at their family when interrupted from a comfortable evening. Your counselee needs to see the connection between desiring comfort and being willing to sin against family members to obtain that idol.

The counselee needs to contemplate how that sin has impacted each family member.

So maybe on their Ephesians 4:22-24 worksheet that first section looks like this:

What is my idol?

I have loved comfort more than God.

How has this manifested in my life?

I have yelled at my children when they interrupt me.

I have selfishly sat and done my hobbies rather than engage my family.

I have wasted time that I could have served my friends and family

I have wasted money on food, clothing, games to increase my comfort.

As they have thought through their sin, now they look at their wrong thinking. In order to “renew their minds”, they need to identify what thoughts they have that don’t line up with Biblical thinking. What are the lies they tell themselves that lead to sinful desires.

Wrong thinking/believing:

I deserve a break when I get home from work. I should have time to relax and enjoy myself.

I should not have to repeat myself. My children should just obey!

God has withheld what I need. This isn’t fair.

Once they have their wrong thinking identified, they can begin to renew their mind in truth. You will want to choose scriptures that encourage a high view of God and verses that deal directly with the idol and sin involved.

It may be helpful at this point to have your counselee renew their mind about specific commands and promises of God also.

If their idol has been **approval**, it may be helpful to study **Proverbs 29:25** and **Galatians 1:10** or read about biblical characters who struggled with fear of man and the consequences suffered for their idol.

It may be helpful to study how God calls us to speak truth in love to others even if the other person becomes upset with us.

If the idol has been control, it may be helpful for your counselee to study scriptures about trusting God and the practical implications of faith.

You want them to have “renewed thinking” about God and how He calls them to live out practically the truth He is God and there is None like Him.

Scriptures to Renew Mind:

Assign scriptures that address the idol and specific areas of sin your counselee struggles with.

Psalms 139:16

Job 42:2

Proverbs 6:6-11

2 Corinthians 1:3-5

John 3:30

1 Corinthians 10:31

Matthew 22:37-39

Philippians 2:3-4

Philippians 4:19

Counselees should have a list of 6-10 verses to meditate on. Meditation is its own full teaching so please check out our website for homework assignments and articles on "Thoughts".

Our counselees should consider what the verses say about God, themselves and their sin.

We want to guide counselees to grow in their love and fear of God.
We want them to consider how they have failed to live up to God's standard,
And what specifically they need to change in their lives.

Then they are ready to work on New Thoughts.

I want them to quote what new thoughts they will rehearse in their minds based on the scriptures studied.

They should also commit a few verses to memory.

New thinking (Quote new thoughts)

God does not promise me an easy, comfortable life. I am called to shepherd my family, even when it's not convenient.

Conflict in my home is a window into my heart. I will examine my desires when I am tempted to yell at my children.

God's plan for my life is perfect in his wisdom and timing.

I am called to serve others as Christ humbled himself to serve sinners.

At this point, we want our counselees to plan to act on their growing love for God

and the new, biblical thinking they have.

Change won't happen if it's not specific. The idea to "be kinder to my family" will not produce much change. The more specific the action can be, the better. This is preparing our counselees for the moment of temptation that will come. It is in that moment that they need to stop and pray, and ask God for help to obey Him and honor Him in their response.

After sin has been contemplated. The sin must be confessed, first to God and then to people who have been sinned against. The offender should be clear about what their sin was, how it was offensive to God and how it affected other people. It is helpful to include how the offender is committing to acting in the future. Confession should end with "will you please forgive me?" Forgiveness is transactional. One person asks for forgiveness, and the other must extend forgiveness.

Let's use the prodigal son as an example of this change process. He is off in a foreign land working on a pig farm.

The Prodigal son contemplates first. He realizes he has blown all his money. He thinks about how he is feeding pigs and would be better off if he could eat the food himself. Scripture says, "when he came to himself". He has thought through his sin and is ready to go make a confession of his sin.

The prodigal goes home to confess. He starts with admitting he has sinned against God, then he sinned against his father.

In the prodigal son example, the Prodigal says "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

Confession will lead to restitution.

Restitution is making things right in ways you have been wrong before.

The prodigal makes restitution by saying, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son." "Treat me as one of your hired servants"

He is saying, "I accept the consequences for my sin. I am willing to pay a price for how I have sinned against you, taken your money, and dishonored you. I will accept the consequences for my sin"

Repentance must include contemplation, confession and change.

Contemplation should bring remorse and godly sorrow over sin. Confession should lead to restitution and making things right with the people who have been

sinned against. The goal is reconciliation as change becomes evident in the life of our counselees. Repentance should be not only the fruit of words and behavior, but of the very heart idol that led to the sinful behavior.

The final step of transformational change is putting on Christlikeness.

New Actions:

I will recite 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 each day and pray that I will trust God's comfort and I will recite Job 42:2 when tempted to get comfort my own way.

I will not pick up my phone when I walk through the door until my kids go to bed.

I will spend time each day asking my wife and children questions about their day and how they are doing.

I will not buy comfort items impulsively. I will stop and pray about my heart and motive.

I will speak words of encouragement to my children and wife each day.

I will pray with my wife and kids before bed each night.

We want our counselees to be prepared with practical ways to apply God's word and the truths about God they have learned in counseling. We want them to spend several weeks in counseling putting these action plans into place. We are helping them form new habits of responding in ways that honor God and their love for God grows.

The goal of repentance is reconciliation. Just as our contemplation of sin and confession to God results in His forgiveness and a reconciled relationship with Him, we want human relationships to be reconciled as well.

The prodigal son goes home and reconciles with his father. The relationship is restored and reconciled as they celebrate a feast together.

Repenting of idols and sinful behavior will lead to reconciliation with God, both initially and on-going fellowship with God. And, it should lead to on-going Godly relationships with others. We cannot guarantee that human reconciliation will be complete. The older brother in the story of the prodigal son does not welcome his brother home or offer forgiveness. The story ends with the older brother refusing to go into the party and celebrate. Our counselees may ask for forgiveness from

those they have sinned against and they may not receive the human forgiveness they are seeking. But our counselees can take comfort in honoring God in their own hearts by repenting and obeying God's commands.

Some counselees will need to work through several action plans for different idols or patterns of sin in their lives. They will be ready to graduate when they are consistently making choices to honor God, are quick to repent and seek forgiveness when they stumble back into old ways, and are continuing to pursue a greater love for God on their own and in community with fellow believers.

Our counselees have worshiped their way into their idol and need to worship their way out of their idol.

Only a greater love for God will replace the love of an idol.