

What the Bible Says About the Heart

By Wendy Wood



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 worshipping. 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 out 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."

Psalms 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.