

# HEART ISSUES

## Introduction

1. What does the Bible mean by the word “heart”?
2. Why is it important to understand the meaning, especially when counseling people? And how does this differ from how the culture uses and understands this term?
3. How is the heart designed to function?
4. How does sin corrupt the heart’s functions?
5. How does the gospel restore the heart to function rightly?

### A. Functions of the human heart

*Jer.24:7, “I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.”*

The bible uses the word “heart” over 1,000 times. Strong’s concordance uses the word for heart, “kardia”, from which we get English word cardiac. It denotes the center of all physical and spiritual life.

It includes faculties such as the soul or mind, thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavors, and the will. It is the “real you” on the inside.

It is the control center for all you think and do. It is the bible’s comprehensive term for the “inner man.”

Proverbs 4:23, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life.”

Prov.23:7, “For as he **thinks** in his heart, so is he.” (Note it does not say “as a man feels in his heart so is he.”)

Luke 6:43, “for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”

Matt.15:18, “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.”

God designed the heart to respond dynamically. It is always responding, energetic, changing, thinking, interpreting, making judgments and forming beliefs. It is always busy and never stops its activity.

Quoting from Jeremy Pierre's book, "The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life", Human experience is 3 dimensional.

- "The human heart responds cognitively, through rational processes based on knowledge and beliefs.
- It also responds affectively, through a framework of desires and emotions.
- It also responds volitionally, through a series of choices reflecting the willful commitments of the heart. These 3 aspects of the hearts' responses are all part of how people were designed to worship God."

Within these main categories are subtle dynamics as reasoning, interpreting, believing, desiring, treasuring, loving, choosing, deciding. All these words can be found in scripture verses, and are referring to the heart. For example,

*Isa.1:18 says, "Come now let us reason together says the Lord; though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow."*

*Matt.6:21, Jesus said "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

*Rom.10:10 "For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."*

## B. How sin corrupts the heart

1. Gen.3. A close look at how Satan deceived Eve: Through the disguise of the serpent, satan appealed to her ability to think. He said "Did God really say....?" Then he contradicted what God said and told her lies about God and the benefit of taking the fruit. This was new information that elicited a desire to be independent from God and then the subtle suggestion that God was not enough to be happy, you need something more. The desire moved her will and she chose to disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit.

Then Adam listened to his wife, and ate also. It says their eyes were opened and they felt very uncomfortable emotions that they never had before: fear, shame, guilt, wanting to hide from God. All the consequences of their sin fall down to each human being and people are born with a sinful nature, a heart corrupted by sin.

## 2. Sin corrupts the cognition faculty of the heart:

Rom.1:21-22 says, “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. Claiming to be wise they became fools.

People tend to **think** more highly of themselves and are more important than they really are. Also, believe others should serve them.

Eph.4:17-19 says, “Now I say this and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds. They 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. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

3. **The desires of the heart morph into lusts** that are not in line with what God wants us to desire. People crave approval and admiration from others rather than from God. Whatever desire is strongest at any given moment is what inclines the will to choose. In Jonathon Edwards book “Religious Affections” he said, “All the inclinations of the will are either in approving and liking or disapproving and rejecting.”

Help the person understand the concept of idols of the heart. Pastor Brad Bigney wrote a helpful book called, “Gospel Treason, Betraying the Gospel with Hidden Idols”. **He said “an idol is anything or anyone that begins to capture your heart, mind and affections more than God.”** He uses the words heart, mind and affections; these all refer to the entirety of the inner man, not separate compartments of the heart.

*In James4:1-3 “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.*

How do these normal desires of daily living take control of the heart?

There is a downward process: (Taken from CCEF resource; “Helping Others Change”

1. **Desire**: I want. Nothing wrong yet.
2. **Demand**: “I must” The desire is for something I crave for myself.
3. **Need**: “I will”. Something I want is seen as essential. I’m convinced I cannot live without it.
4. **Expectation**: “You should”. Now relationships are affected as it seems right to expect that you will meet my need if you really love me.
5. **Disappointment**: “You didn’t!” Here the anger breaks out; you are standing in the way of what rules my heart.
6. **Punishment**: “Because you didn’t I will... respond to you in anger, silent treatment, hurtful words, vengeance, violence.

4. **This unbelief corrupts the commitments of the heart** and people **choose** what is contrary to God’s commands. We have a worship disorder; a failure to believe, trust in, depend on God and His Word. This results in a choice to trust in our own strength and wisdom, and going “our own way”.

**Unbelief** in the heart is the root cause of dysfunctional behavior. The question is who or what are we worshipping? What are we putting our hope in for life to have meaning and fulfillment?

**Proverbs 20:5 says, “The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep water, but the man of understanding will draw it out.”**

The word “deep” means mysterious, unsearchable.

The man of understanding is one who knows what God says about the human heart; how it was designed by God to operate. Most people don’t understand why they respond to life circumstances the way they do. It almost feels automatic and instinctive, like they can’t help it.

In times of crisis, we respond emotionally but the emotions are directly a result of what we are thinking. God designed the heart to function this way. So if the presenting problem is associated with strong negative emotions, like anger, rage, fear, hatred, anxiety; we have to trace the emotion back to the thought life.

We have answers from God himself who knows exactly what is wrong with us because he created us. He tells us specifically in his Word, the Bible, what our problem is and what can be done about it. This requires faith. Our Hearts have been severely corrupted by sin; we don’t think right, desire what God

desires, and our will is incapable of choosing what pleases God until he reorients the heart back to himself.

These are God's words describing the unregenerate heart:

Gen.6:5, *"The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."*

Jer.17:9 *"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick, who can understand it?"*

Matt.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, slander."*

In Lu.6:43-46 Jesus used a powerful metaphor to explain the relationship of heart to outward behavior.

*"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good 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 treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*

Ask questions that get to the heart dynamics; for example

1. What happened when you became angry? What were you thinking?
2. What did you want or expect? What do you feel entitled to? Deserve? Need?
3. What do you pray for?
4. What did you say when you became angry? do then?

More questions to consider on the handout "Soul Care questions."

### **C. How does the gospel restore the heart to right functioning?**

**Faith** is the means by which the gospel is received; thus faith is at the center of heart transformation for initial conversion as well as continued

sanctification, so people can reflect his character and be in fellowship with him.

Sin has corrupted people's hearts; they are unable to believe God's words on their own. Only the Holy Spirit can give the gift of faith, and the power to change; and He does this through the Word of God.

The Bible is essential for the change process because faith comes through hearing and hearing through the Word of God. Rom.10:17

"If people are born as thinking, wanting, choosing beings then they need to be reborn as thinking, wanting, choosing beings."

A working definition of faith is: **Faith is believing the Word of God and acting on it, no matter how you feel because God promises a good result."**

Hearts are complex. The change process can be explained in a straightforward way but change is not simple.

Without a knowledge of Christ and a love for him, people will not submit and obey him with a whole heart.

First, we must be convinced of God's love and continuous work on our behalf to finish what he started when we got saved. His promises preserve our faith in Christ. He indwells the believer and is committed to changing us. He will not leave us on our own. He wants us to trust him "in the struggle". The struggle is in believing his love is all that really matters.

*Phil.1:6 "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."*

*Phil. 2:13, "for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure."*

*Heb.4:15-16, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*

*1Cor. 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”*

As we meditate on God’s Word, the Holy Spirit exposes the sin in the heart that has disoriented the heart’s ability to function right. His work is specific and direct and pinpoints our sin down to its true motives.

### **1. Thinking must change:**

*Rom. 12:1-2. I appeal to you therefore brothers, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

*Eph. 4:22-24, “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.”*

*Col. 3:2, “Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.*

The former manner of life is the way you lived before you were saved. There were ingrained habits of thinking and believing. Now through his Word, the Holy Spirit puts into your mind true thoughts which become new beliefs.

### **2. Desires must change:**

Ask God to change your desires to those that please him. As we remember and inform our hearts of truth, the Holy Spirit helps us comply to that truth. The thinking, affections and will affect the course of our lives. As it says in Prov. 23:7 “As a man thinks in his heart so is he.”

*2Cor. 5:9 “So whether we are at home or away we make it our aim to please him.”*

*1Cor. 10:31 “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God.”*

*Phil. 1:21, “For to me to live is Christ and to die as gain.”*



*1Peter 2:2 “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation*

### **3.Behavior must change**

*Rom.6:19 “For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.*

Similar to the Eph.4 passage, Paul teaches us in Col.3 specific behaviors and attitudes that need to be “put off” and replaced with godly behaviors or “put on”.

*Col.3:9-10 “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”*

So the counselee must learn the concept of replacing old sinful habits of thinking and behavior with the new biblical habits, so that in time she is transformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ. The desire of her heart should grow overwhelmingly to be “I want to glorify God in everything I do.”