

Getting at the Heart of the Problem

Week 5

Purpose of the Lesson - To help people understand that the heart is the source of all behavior, worship, and emotion, and to show that true and lasting change comes only through the transforming grace of God in the heart and not through mere outward behavior modification.

Proverbs 4:23 – “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”

I. The Heart is the Source of Our _____

- A. **Proverbs 4:23** – *Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.*
- B. Our culture reduces the ‘heart’ to feelings, but in Scripture the heart is the inner control center, our thoughts, desires, affections, and will, driving what we choose and how we live.
- C. There are over 750 references to the heart in the Bible, and it speaks of the heart as the place that conceals, discerns, instructs, meditates, muses, perceives, plans, plots, ponders, thinks, weighs, etc.

II. The heart is the Source of Our _____

- A. The heart loves God, prays to God, rejoices in God, turns to God and trusts in God. Notice the focus our Lord puts on our hearts in the following verses; worshipping God in life is a heart issue.
- B. **God’s focus has been the heart of man (Deuteronomy 5:29, 6:5, 10:12)**
 - 1. **Deuteronomy 5:29** – *“O that there were such an _____ in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!”*
 - 2. **Deuteronomy 6:5** – *“And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine _____, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” (Deut. 10:12)*
 - 3. **Matthew 22:37** – *Jesus said to him, “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’*
 - 4. **Proverbs 3:5–6** – *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.*
 - 5. **(Moses to the people) Deuteronomy 32:46** – *and he said to them: “Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law.*
 - 6. **(Joshua to the people) Joshua 22:5** – *But take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.”*
 - 7. **What did David say kept his steps from sliding? Psalm 37:31** – *The law of his God is in his heart; None of his steps shall slide.*
 - 8. **Why did David delight to do God’s will? Psalm 40:8** – *I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart.”*

III. The Heart is the Source of Our _____ Activities

- A. The heart can ache, cherish, desire, despair, be grieved, despise, hate, fear, be burdened, lust, rage, resent, tremble, etc.
- B. God tells us that when the New Covenant came, what would He transform inside of man according to Ezekiel 11:19-20?
 - **Ezekiel 11:19–20** – *Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.*

IV. The Heart is What Makes Us _____ We Are

- A. In 1 Samuel 16, the prophet Samuel goes to Jesse’s house to anoint the next king of Israel. All he knew was God told him it was one of Jesse’s sons. When Samuel saw Jesse’s oldest son, “Eliab”, how did he respond?
 - **1 Samuel 16:6** – *So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is before Him!”*
- B. **What was Samuel basing his ideas upon?** _____
- C. **How did God respond to Samuel?**
 - **1 Samuel 16:7** – *But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the **heart**.”*
- D. Often, people focus on fixing the outward problems that people are dealing with, but the real problem is not external, it is _____.
- E. People will never interpret life correctly until they understand that it is the heart that directs all of life.
- F. Here are some of the adjectives the Bible uses to describe the condition of man’s heart. It is described as adulterous, anguished, arrogant, astray, bitter, blameless, blighted, broken, calloused, circumcised, contrite, crushed, darkened, deadened, deceitful, deluded, devoted, disloyal, envious, evil, faint, faithful, far off, fearful, grateful, happy, hard, haughty, proud, humble, mad, malicious, obstinate, sick, sincere, sinful, steadfast, troubled, unfeeling, upright, weary, wicked, wise, etc. No wonder the Bible tells us that from the heart the mouth speaketh and that from out of the heart are the “*issues of life*” (Proverbs 4:23).

V. _____ Emphasized the Heart

- A. **Who does Jesus say will be the ones who see God?**
 - **Matthew 5:8** – *Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.*
- B. **What does Jesus teach concerning murder, was it more than simply an outward act?**
 - **Matthew 5:22** – *But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.*
- C. **What does Jesus teach concerning adultery, was it only an outward external action?**
 - **Matthew 5:28** – *But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*
- D. **What did Jesus say will expose where a person’s heart is?**
 - **Matthew 6:21** – *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

- E. **The Pharisee’s accuse Jesus’ disciples of defiling themselves by eating with ceremonially unclean hands as they were so focused on external acts; how does Jesus respond to them? What do you learn from this passage?**
- **Matthew 15:8–9** – *‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ”*
- F. **Where does Jesus teach sins originate from according to Mark 7:21-23? _____**
- **Mark 7:21–23** – *For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”*
- G. **It is critical that people understand that the heart is the issue when it comes to behavior and life. They must realize all sin is a heart problem, that the bad or good that comes on the outside is a result of what is inside their heart.**
- H. **Tripp** – *“If my heart is the source of my sin problem, then lasting change must always travel through the pathway of my heart. It is not enough to alter my behavior or to change my circumstances. Christ transforms people by radically changing their hearts.”¹*

VI. The Right Way to Deal with Man’s Heart

- A. **Luke 6:43–45** – *“For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*
- B. **Key truths from the tree analogy:**
1. Jesus connects the heart with man’s actions; the root and fruit. People and circumstances do not ultimately determine how we behave; they simply provide the opportunity to reveal what is in our hearts.
 2. To change the fruit of our lives, we must deal with the root in our life. Heart change must precede life change. Any counseling that does not focus on the inward man is only washing the outside of the cup (Matt. 23:25-27). Lasting change always takes place through the pathway of the heart.
 3. When the heart is transformed, lasting change will result in the life of a person.
- C. **The following is a great illustration of what we attempt to do with people if we focus on behavior and lose sight of the attitudes of the heart that are behind their behaviors.**
1. **Tripp:** *“Let’s say I have an apple tree in my backyard. Each year its apples are dry, wrinkled, brown, and pulpy. After several seasons my wife says, “It doesn’t make any sense to have this huge tree and never be able to eat any apples. Can’t you do something?” One day my wife looks out the window to see me in the yard, carrying branch cutters, an industrial grade staple gun, a ladder, and two bushels of apples. I climb the ladder, cut off all the pulpy apples, and staple shiny, red apples onto every branch of the tree. From a distance our tree looks like it is full of a beautiful harvest. But if you were my wife, what would you be thinking of me at this moment? If a tree produces bad apples year after year, there is something drastically wrong with its system, down to its very roots. I won’t solve the problem by stapling new apples onto*

¹ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*, Resources for Changing Lives (P&R Publishing Company, 2002), 62.

the branches. They also will rot because they are not attached to a life-giving root system. And next spring, I will have the same problem again. I will not see a new crop of healthy apples because my solution has not gone to the heart of the problem. If the tree's roots remain unchanged, it will never produce good apples."²

D. What are some “apples” people may try to staple onto their lives without addressing the heart (root) problems?

1. **Church Attendance** – “I’m doing better... I’ve been at church every week.”
But the heart still loves self more than God.
2. **Serving in Ministry:** People serve to look spiritual while still being proud, angry, or bitter inside.
3. **Cleaning Up Speech:** Stopping cussing, but still full of gossip, sarcasm, criticism, and contempt.
4. **Better Habits:** They staple on morning devotionals, journaling, prayer lists, church attendance, but they still love self more than God and trust themselves over God.
5. **External Modesty / Appearance** – Look more “spiritual” by their dress, hair, and appearance, but their heart is still filled with lust, greed, worry, anxiety, and fear of man.
6. **Sobriety Without Repentance** – Quitting alcohol, drugs, or porn, but replace them with gluttony, human approval, and control.
7. **Marriage Improvements:** Doing date nights, giving gifts, going to counseling, yet still being selfish, holding on to unforgiveness, and putting selfish demands on the marriage.
8. **Apologies Without Humility:** Saying “sorry” just to end conflict, but not actually owning sin or dying to pride.
9. **Giving Money:** Giving tithes/offerings to relieve guilt, while still being greedy or materialistic.
10. **Social Media Christianity:** Posting Bible verses, church selfies, Christian slogans... while privately being cold, lustful, bitter, or dishonest.
11. **Bible Knowledge Without Obedience:** Learning doctrine, winning biblical arguments, and quoting verses; but filled with pride, anger, and impatience.

E. Examples of addressing actions without addressing the heart.

1. The Angry Husband / Bitter Wife

- a. Imagine a husband and wife who argue constantly. He’s harsh, defensive, and snaps quickly. She’s cold, critical, and keeps score. One day they come to church and hear a sermon on marriage. They decide, *“We’ve got to fix this.”*
- b. So they start stapling apples.
 - i. They start saying “I love you” more. They start holding hands in public. They start posting happy pictures on Facebook. They start doing date nights. They start going to marriage counseling.
 - ii. And those are all good things... *but here’s the problem:* The real heart issue hasn’t been addressed. He is still full of pride and wants to be right. She is still full of bitterness and wants to punish him emotionally.
Both are still full of selfishness, wanting the other person to serve them.
- c. **So outwardly, it looks like the marriage is improving.**

² Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 63.

- i. But under pressure...
 - a) the same rage returns
 - b) the same manipulation returns
 - c) the same silent treatment returns
 - d) the same resentment returns
- ii. They didn't deal with the root; they just stapled new apples onto rotten branches.

F. Example of addressing the actions of kids but not dealing with their hearts.

1. Imagine your kids fighting over a toy; you hear the fight and come to fix the problem.
 - a. You ask, *"Who had it first?"*, but is that even the right question? Is it okay to reward one child while both are being selfish and unkind to one another?
 - b. We can possibly stop a fight with that question, but it doesn't address the deeper root problem of the heart.
2. Or you might bribe your children with something if they are kind or threaten them with punishment if they don't stop fighting. These are all attempts to control behavior without addressing the heart of the child. The child may return the toy in great frustration and anger and the other with prideful glee grab the toy back. We may get their actions right but the heart is still filled with sin.

G. How does Jesus feel about this according to Matthew 23:25, 27?

1. **Matthew 23:25, 27** — *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. 27; "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.*
2. **Between these two verses (v.26), what incredible truth does Jesus tell them?**
3. **Matthew 23:26** — *Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.*

H. People must see beyond their actions to what is motivating and driving that sinful action. They must move beyond the surface problem and see the sin in their heart. The problem may be revealed as "bad apples" of behavior, but the problem is what is the root source feeding that behavior.

I. The great majority of teaching is about "behavioral modification"; it's all about techniques to get people to act right. But these do not deal with the motivating factor behind those actions, which is the heart. Those behaviors may be modified due to the benefits or consequences enforced, but what happens when the individual isn't under those "rules" anymore?

VII. Understanding the Heart's _____.

- A. Think of behavior as having a "when", a "what", and a "why". The "when" of behavior is the circumstance of the behavior. The "what" of behavior is the things said or done. The "why" of behavior is the motive.
- B. The Bible gives many terms to capture the motives of the heart. Children need to see that ungodly behavior begins with ungodly attitudes of the heart; but godly behavior begins with godly attitudes of the heart. Here is a sample list from the Bible:

Ungodly Action	Ungodly Attitudes (Heart Root)	What the Heart is Really Wanting	Godly Attitudes (Gospel Replacement)
Seeking to be in control in challenging situations	Pride, self-reliance	Security apart from God	Trusting in God's sovereignty (Prov. 3:5-6; Ps. 103:19; Isa. 55:8-9)
Not sharing	Being selfish and covetous	Possession and comfort	Being selfless and generous (Phil. 2:3-4; 2 Cor. 9:7)
Speaking/focusing on self	Being prideful	Recognition and glory	Being humble (1 Pet. 5:5-6; John 13:1-5)
Slander of others	Jealousy & insecurity	Elevating self by lowering others	Loving others and putting them before yourself (James 4:11, 1 Cor. 13:4)
Holding a grudge	Being bitter and angry	Justice on my terms	Forgiveness rooted in Christ (Eph. 4:31-32)
Compromising convictions to fit in	Fear of man	Seeking approval of others	Living for God's approval (Gal. 1:10; 2 Tim. 2:15)
Being rebellious and disrespectful to authority	Pride, autonomy	Self-rule	Submission as unto the Lord (Eph. 5:21; Heb. 13:17)
Complaining, murmuring,	Fear and ingratitude	Seeking comfort and ease	Peace & contentment (Phil. 2:14-15; 4:6-7; 1 Tim. 6:6-8)
Gossip	Pride, insecurity	Importance, belonging, or control	Love that protects and guards others' reputations (Eph. 4:29; Prov. 11:13)
Lust	Discontentment, selfishness	Pleasure without covenant	Purity & honoring others (Matt. 5:28; 1 Thess. 4:3-4)
Workaholism	Identity in achievement	Worth through performance	Resting in identity in Christ (Matt. 11:28-30)
Laziness	Love of ease	Comfort over conviction	Diligence for the glory of God (Col. 3:23)
Overreacting to Conflict	Self-protection & pride	Being right	Gentleness & Teachability (James 1:19-20)
People Pleasing	Fear of rejection	Human affirmation	Fear of the Lord over the fear of man (Prov. 29:25)
Anxiety	Distrust	Control of the future	Casting care on the Lord (1 Peter 5:7; Matt. 6:33-34)
Envy	Comparing self with others	Desiring someone else's life	Contentment and gratitude in God's plan for you (Jam. 3:16; Psa. 16:5-6)
Harshness in parenting	Control & impatience	Immediate compliance	Shepherding the heart (Eph. 6:4; Deut. 6:4-9)
Hypocrisy	Self-image	Reputation & recognition	Integrity before God (Matt. 6:1-6)

C. These are just a few of the heart attitudes that produce either good or bad fruit in our children's lives. Often we focus on the actions, but the real problem is the _____ driving the action.

- 1. Question:** What are you more grieved over, the wrong actions or the heart that produced those actions?
- 2.** If we only speak to people about their "actions" and not the "heart attitudes," they will see everything as external and superficial. Christianity to them will also be external and superficial.

VIII. Man Needs a Change of Heart that only comes from God's _____

- A. Because the problem of sin is deeper than what is said and done, we need grace to solve this sin problem. Only grace can transform a heart of sin.
- B. What did God say He would give the people that would cause them to see real change in the following passages? (Underline the answer)
1. **Ezekiel 36:25–26** — *Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26; I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*
 2. **Hebrews 8:10** — *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*
 3. **Hebrews 10:16** — *“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,”*
- C. **The Key to Real and Lasting Transformation is the Gospel.** A new heart comes through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- D. “God grants a new heart through the Gospel, producing repentance and faith, and those new desires lead to new fruit.
1. “Stapling apples says: *“I can fix myself.”*; Repentance says: **“Lord, I am the problem. My heart is the problem.”**
 2. **Proverbs 28:13** — *He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.*
- E. **A new heart produces godly humility and dependence upon Christ and His Holy Spirit.**
1. **Dependence upon _____**
 - a. **John 15:5 — 5**; *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*
 - b. **Colossians 2:6–7** — *As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7; rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.*
 2. **Dependence upon the _____**
 - a. **Ezekiel 36:27** — *I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.*
 - b. **Galatians 5:16–17** — *I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17; For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.*
 - c. **Ephesians 5:18** — *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,*
- F. Note: The more people know the sinfulness of the heart the more they will see their need for God’s transforming grace in their heart.

IX. The Heart’s Need for _____.

- A. **Hebrews 3:12–13** — *Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13; but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*
1. What will cause a person to depart from God? _____
 2. What will harden our hearts to God? _____

3. What are we to do for one another? _____
 4. How long will we need to encourage one another? _____
- B. Galatians 6:1–2 — 1; Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2; Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**
1. How does this verse apply to our role as believers?
 2. What is the goal of intervening in the lives of others when they sin? _____
 3. With what kind of spirit do we need to instruct others with? _____
 4. Why do you think Paul says, “considering yourself, lest you also be tempted”?

Conclusion:

- Outward behavior is fruit; the heart is the root.
We can staple new apples onto our lives, but unless the heart is changed, the fruit will not last. Jesus made it clear that sin flows from within, and God alone can give a new heart through the Gospel.
- Lasting transformation does not come from controlling behavior, but from repentance, faith in Christ, dependence on the Holy Spirit, and daily encouragement within the body of Christ.

Bibliography

Tripp, Paul David. *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*. Resources for Changing Lives. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002.