



## THE HEART IS THE TARGET

My Heart, Your Heart...

The heart rules all we say and do.

Have you ever wondered why people do and say the things they do?

Have you ever wondered why people respond differently to the same situation?

The Bible answers these questions with two words....*The heart*.

**Concept:** The heart is active. It shapes and controls our behavior.

**Personalized:** I must identify what effectively and functionally rules my heart.

**Related to others:** I must be committed to help others with heart changes in their life.

- A Word Picture: [Luke 6:43-46, NIV](#)

A Tree and Its Fruit No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briers. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

The Wise and Foolish Builders [Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?](#)

We understand the physical point he is making in the scriptural word picture but let's look at the spiritual.

Fruit = Behavior. He says our words are literally the heart overflowing. People don't make us say what we say. Situations don't make us say what we say. Fruit is what the tree produces just as our behavior is what our heart produces. To put it plainly, we speak the way we do and we act the way we do because of what is in our heart.

What does this have to do with discipleship and discipling others?

Example: Pretend you see an apple tree in my backyard that is producing apples that wither, dry and wrinkle immediately. I decide it's silly to have an apple tree that has bad fruit and so I try to "fix" the tree.

One day you see me with cutters, a ladder, a basket of apples, and a staple gun. You say to me "What in the world are you doing?" as I cut off the bad apples, and staple the new red apples I bought, to the branches of the tree. I say, "I have fixed my tree!" What would you think of me at this point?



It is clear that we have a root problem, or a tree problem, and stapling apples won't fix it. Most of the ways we try to fix ourselves or help others fix themselves is "fruit stapling" behavior modification. Fruit stapling is "That sin is bad so don't do it" kind of statement instead of examining the heart.

Change that does not reach the heart, rarely lasts; it is temporary and cosmetic.

- There is a root and fruit relationship between our heart and our behavior. That is the heart controls everything we do.
  - Lasting change always takes place through the pathway of the heart.
  - Therefore, in personal growth and ministry, heart change is always our goal.
  - Discipleship exists for the purpose of heart transformation.
- Maybe you're thinking "I get the Heart controlling our behavior concept, but I don't know what I'm looking for as I examine the heart."

Let's look at... **Ezekiel 14:1-5, NIV** Some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat down in front of me. Then the word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all? Therefore speak to them and tell them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: When any Israelite set up idols in his heart and put a wicked stumbling block before his face and then go to a prophet, I the Lord will answer him myself in keeping with his great idolatry. I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for their idols.'

These men have come to the prophet because they have questions for God, but God recognizes that something is wrong with them. What is wrong with these men? Idolatry. There are idols and idols of the heart. An idol of the heart is deeper than a cultural figure. An idol of the heart is anything that rules us other than God.

*"Anything you put before God, is your god."* Tim Keller

What is God's response? "I the Lord will answer them myself in keeping with their great idolatry". Have you ever thought that the only thing God wants to talk with us about is our idolatry. Why would he answer them in this way? Verse 3 from Ezekiel...."idols in their hearts and put up wicked stumbling blocks before their faces". Example: Put your hand before your face so that you are looking through your fingers. Your vision is obstructed. The only way for your vision to be clear is for your hand to be removed. We must see the idols in our life to deal with them.

Idol of the heart - *leads to a* - stumbling block before the face.

The principle of "inescapable influence" - Whatever rules the heart will exercise inescapable influence over a person's life and behavior.



How does this work in discipling others? Let's say you are trying to help a very controlling man who has damaged many relationships in his quest for power. You will not solve this problem by giving him good biblical instruction in communication and conflict resolution. Why? Because as long as the desire for control rules his heart, he will pursue whatever principles and skills he learns to establish even greater control over the people around him.

Here are some principles to look at in light of this passage:

- Our hearts are always being ruled by someone or something.
  - The most important question to ask when examining the heart is "What is effectively and functionally ruling this person's heart in this situation?"
  - Whatever controls my heart will control my reactions and responses to the people and situations in my life.
  - The way God changes us is to recapture our hearts to serve Him alone.
  - The deepest issue of the human struggle is not with pain and suffering. The deepest issue is the issue of worship (what really rules my heart) because what rules our hearts will control the way we respond to both suffering and blessing.
- Let's consider two more passages:

**Romans 1:25, NIV** They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Paul calls idolatry the great exchange. We all tend to exchange worship and service of the creator for worship and service of the creation. What a simple way to explain idolatry. This is what sin is all about. The root of sin in the heart is that we want and love the creation more than the creator. What rules our heart is not a love for God but a craving for some other thing. This exchange (Creator for creation) can take place in any situation or relationship in life. When it does, we will not do what God has called us to do (disobedience).

The second passage to consider is ... **Matthew 6:19-24, NIV** "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."



Here Christ uses the word *treasure* to describe what rules our hearts. A treasure is something valuable to us. We all live to gain, maintain and enjoy our treasures. There are three treasure principles in this passage. The first is assumed, and the others are delineated quite clearly.

1. Everyone lives for some kind of treasure.
2. Whatever you treasure will control your heart. (Where your treasure is there your heart will be also)
3. Whatever controls your heart will control your behavior. (No one can serve two masters)

## The Bible and the Heart

One final consideration is necessary. Maybe you are thinking "I know that heart change is the goal, but it seems impossible to know the heart. I can only see a person's behavior. I can't look into the heart." Does it seem as if we are discussing the impossible?

**Hebrews 4:12-13, NIV** For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

This passage is about how God uses His word to expose and do heart surgery in us. God's great scalpel. It is able to cut through the layers of who we are and what we are doing to expose our hearts. What you and I do is always shaped by the thoughts and motives of our hearts. They control what we do with relationships and everyday situations.

The final encouragement of this passage: you cannot see a person's heart but scripture can expose it to you. The bible by its very nature is heart revealing. So, scripture must be the central tool in personal growth and ministry. It alone can expose and analyze where change needs to take place in our hearts. Remember, heart change must take place if we really want changes in our behavior to last. Otherwise we are "fruit-stapling".

## Concepts

- The heart is active. It controls our behavior.
- Whatever rules the heart, exercises inescapable influence over life and behavior. Your heart is always ruled by something.
- God's word alone is able to expose and judge the heart.



## Personalized

- If I am committed to personal change and growth, I must be committed to a biblical examination of the heart.
- In the situations and relationships of my everyday life I must constantly ask, "What is ruling my heart?"
- I must always study God's word with an eye toward my own heart, always asking what the passage reveals about my thoughts and motives. (What is really ruling me?)

## Related to Others

- As I minister to others, I want to be an instrument of heart change.
- Heart change is always the result of the careful ministry of God's Word to a particular person in a specific situation.
- I must not attempt to manipulate or control the behavior of others. I must leave room for God to work lasting change in their hearts.

## Questions

- How will the truths of this lesson shape your prayers about discipling opportunities?
- Give some examples of your heart (good/bad) overflowing in your own words and deeds. What kind of fruit stapling have you tried? When have you seen real change?
- What are some idols and treasures that challenge the Lord for control of your heart? How have they shaped your interpretations of certain events and relationships in your life?
- How can God use the things He has taught you in this lesson to enable you to help someone else?
- Write your best definition of what it means to function as one of God's instruments of change in the life of another.

## Works Cited

This teaching is adapted from Tripp, Paul David. *Instruments in the Redeemers Hand*. N.p.: P&R, 2002