

Stewardship of the Heart

Day 1

Proverbs 4:23 *Watch over your heart with all diligence,
for from it flow the springs of life.*

Consider what would happen if God gave you the “key” to human behavior – that key piece of information that enables you to understand why people do the things they do. What could you do with that kind of knowledge?

Over the next few lessons, we are going to develop biblically the key to human behavior. Understanding this concept will help you discern why you do the things you do and helps you walk more consistently in Christ-likeness. You will be able to help others as well. Now, below is an illustration about how different people respond in different ways to the same set of circumstances. Ask yourself the following questions “what is the ‘key’ to their behavior?” “Why are these individuals responding the way they are?”

One January day, a family wakes up at 6:00 a.m. As the alarm clocks start going off, individuals of this family start pulling themselves out of the bed and notice the 4-7 inches of white snow on the ground. The Husband sees the snow and immediately turns the radio on and hears about the traffic delays already beginning. He becomes anxious and worried. The wife looks out the window and just sits a few moments in her bay window beholding the beauty of the snow. As she looks she smiles and reflects on the pleasure and the beauty of this event. The two school-aged children get up knowing that last night there was a predicted snowstorm. They leap out of bed and fling open the drapes excited about how deep the snow is. As Dad makes his way outside to his car and begins scraping off his car he notices his neighbor shoveling and mumbling obscenities under his breath about the snow.

Why do you think each individual in the previous story responded the way they did to the same circumstance?

Biblical Keys to Human Behavior

A. **Jas. 4:1-2** *What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.*

What does this passage say is the source of our behavior?

B. **Mt. 15:19** *For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. “These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.”*

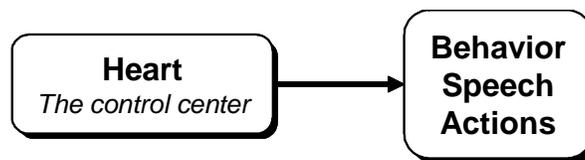
What does this passage say is the source of our behavior?

As we compare Mt. 15:19 with Jas. 4:1-2 we notice that the “pleasures” within that James refers to are actually within the heart. Thus the heart is our “control center” that contains our desires that motivate us to do what we do. Jas. 4:2 even speaks of these desires or pleasures as “lusts”. A lust is simply a strongly held desire for something good or bad.

C. **Heb. 4:12** *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

How does Heb. 4:12 provide additional insight about what things make up the “heart”?

The Biblical concept of the “heart” is what motivates our behavior. At every moment in time, you are acting upon your desires/intentions in your heart. Now, here is what we have said up to this point: what’s in our heart leads to our behavior in speech and actions.



Mt. 15:18-19
Jas. 4:1-2

D. What should be in the heart? What should be the utmost desire(s) and value(s) of the heart according to 2 Cor. 5:9?

E. Our heart’s desire should be to “please God”. Many times our desires are not this at all! Think about times when you were behaving sinfully, anxiously, angrily, despairingly, fearfully, etc. What did you want during those times (i.e., what was your heart’s desire)?

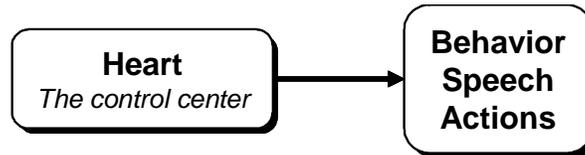
F. List several desires/lusts that motivate sinful behavior.

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Day 2

Proverbs 4:23 *Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.*

Below is the diagram from yesterday's study.



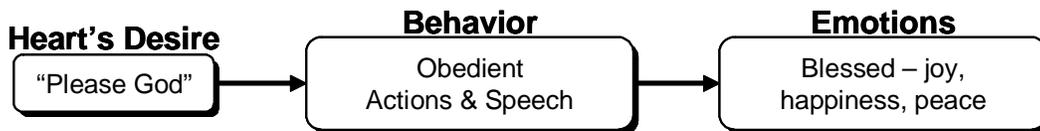
Mt. 15:18-19
Jas. 4:1-2

Today we are going to add another aspect to this model of human behavior. According to the following verses, what does God do when we have as our goal in our heart to please Him and our speech and actions are obedient as well?

Jn. 13:17: _____

Phil. 4:9: _____

So we can see that when our heart's goal is right and it is reflected in our outward behavior of obedience, God brings about a state of blessedness which means joy, satisfaction, peace, or happiness. Some may call these "feelings" or "emotions."



Now, let's look what happens when our heart's desire is not to "please God." On yesterday's lesson under letter "F" you listed several desires/lusts that motivate sinful behavior and produce feelings that are anxious, angry, depressed, frustrated, etc. Maybe some of them were as shown below.



Now, as you observe some of these desires that we commonly want, we need to ask the question, “Are these desires wrong?” Or, “Is it okay for me to want these things?” The answer to this is “No” they are not wrong, unless these desires become too important to us. But how do we know when a legitimate desire has become wrong, sinful, or a “lust”?

Two criteria that help us to see when a legitimate desire becomes wrong are . . .

- 1) Am I willing to sin in order to get what I want?
- 2) Do I respond sinfully when I don’t get what I want?

How does Jas. 4:2 illustrate the above two criteria?

Jas. 4:2 *You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.*

So it is not that we want things ... it’s that we want them too much! Then they become lusts or “idols” of the heart. Ezek. 14:3 states, “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity.” When we have “idols” or “lusts of the heart”, it is as if that desire is the only thing we focus on. We have put it right before “our face” and when something is close to your face (consuming your view) you see nothing else! Not God! Not Others! Nothing but our selfish desire!

Why do you think we use the term “idol” of the heart to describe these desires/lusts? (cf. Ex. 20:3, Mk. 12:29-30; Mt. 6:33)

Finally, let’s ask this question: “What are the results of having idols of the heart and consequently behaving sinfully?” If having a heart that pleases God and behavior that is obedient to Him results in a “blessed” state, then what kind of state results from having idols of the heart and subsequent behavior that is sinful according to the following verses?

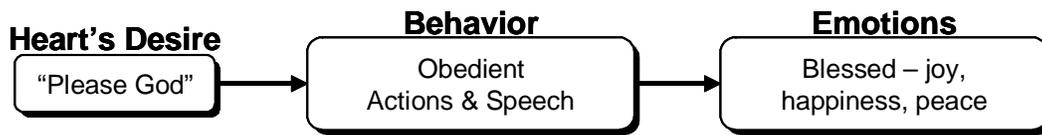
Ps. 32:10 *Many are the sorrows of the wicked ...*

Jas. 3:16 *For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.*

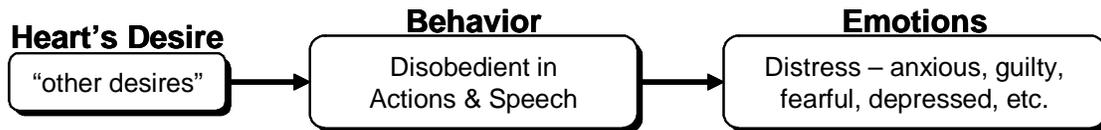
Ro. 2:9 *There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek*

Ps. 32:3,4,8 3 *There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger,
Nor any health in my bones because of my sin.*
4 *For my iniquities have gone over my head;
Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me ...*
8 *I am feeble and severely broken;
I groan because of the turmoil of my heart.*

Summary: So, we can see that when our heart’s goal is right and is reflected in our outward behavior, God brings about a state of blessedness, joy, satisfaction, peace, happiness.



When our heart’s goal is not right and is focused on other desires that we want too much resulting in sinful acts and/or responses, then God allows us to experience not a state of blessedness but a state of “distress”.



Now if you understand these keys to human behavior, try to answer the following question: When I am distressed, anxious, guilty, fearful, depressed, what is that telling me?

(Something potentially is going wrong in the heart –You want something more than pleasing God and you need to repent and put on the desire to please God regardless of how you feel!)

Are you beginning to understand more about what’s going on in your heart?

Stewardship of the Heart

Day 3

Proverbs 4:23 *Watch over your heart with all diligence,
for from it flow the springs of life.*

Consider the following scenario:

You are an advertising specialist and you are going to make an advertising pitch to a major client. If the client likes your proposal, you will get a multimillion-dollar contract – the biggest one of your life. Of course, this also means an incredible boost in your income. If the client doesn't like it you will lose a multi-million dollar contract. You want this contract really bad. However, the meeting is scheduled at Noon ... it's now 10 till noon and you are still 20 miles away and haven't moved in traffic for 20 minutes. You respond something like this ...

(Agitated, constantly looking at watch, incessantly punching radio buttons, throwing hands up in the air, etc.) "I can't believe this is happening, just when I'm about to make the biggest sale of my life. Look! Will you look at that? You construction workers are just standing around! If you're gonna bottleneck two lanes of traffic into one, could you at least look like your doing it for a reason? Stupid department of transportation! Maybe I'll call and tell my clients I'm stuck in traffic ..." (Pull out cell phone and realize the battery is dead.) Can you believe this!!!!?? (Throw cell phone across the car.)

(Car passes by in median and tries to pull in front of you.) NO YOU DON'T MAN! YOU'RE NOT GETTING IN FRONT OF ME!!! (Honking horn, pulling closely behind the car in front of you to close off the gap, etc.)

Below is a series of questions designed to help us deal Biblically with our heart based upon the truths we have been talking about for the past two days. Walk through these questions considering the above scenario. You may want to remember these questions and review them frequently to help you.

1. **What is your situation?** God puts us in all kinds of situations every day. In any given situation you will react/respond biblically or sinfully. But we first need to stop and take a reality check ... ask, "What is my situation?"

Summarize the salesman's situation.

2. **How are you reacting?** This question probes your emotions and your behavior. Are you joyful, happy, peaceful, angry, distressed, quarreling, arguing, etc.?

Summarize how the salesman is responding.

Anxiety, fighting, quarreling, despair, outbursts of anger, etc. are the birth product of lust (strong desires). These "works of the flesh" come from the "lusts of our flesh" like we have studied the past two days. They come from what we want or desire. Our manner of life comes from the heart, and that leads us to question 3 ...

3. **What rules you? What do you expect, want, or desire?** This question gets at the heart. “What do I want that has become so important to me that I am willing to sin to get it or respond sinfully when I don’t get it?”

Summarize what you think has become the salesman’s utmost desire(s) or “idol(s) of the heart”.

4. **What has God revealed in His Word relevant to your situation and yourself?** This question brings God into the situation. Ultimately we are asking, “What TRUTH from GOD do we know about the situation and about my response to the situation?”

What has God revealed in the Bible about the salesman’s situation? What truth is relevant to the salesman at a time like this?

(cf. Ro. 8:28-29a; Phil. 4:19; Ps. 49:7-20)

What has God revealed in the Bible about the salesman’ response?

(cf. Eph. 4:29-32; Gal. 5:19-20; Pro. 14:29)

Why is it important to KNOW specific truths from Scripture in order for you to handle life?

Why do we feel anxious, fearful, distressed in various situations including a simple traffic jam? We live many times as if we are functional atheists. We forget truths, or more likely, chose not to believe/trust truths like “The God of the universe is with me ... He is in control and he is up to something good.” This is a matter of Christianity that is functional as opposed to professed. We profess to know the God who controls all things to his Glory, a God with whom there are no accidents, a God who holds atoms together, who spins galaxy in his hands, etc. We profess that this is not an accidental world, and He is not a God who is remote like some galaxy, but is actively, intimately and purposely involved in this world and up to something good. But then we fear, curse, and get angry in various situations. This question “What has God revealed about you and your situation?” helps draw us back to God and His Word. Then we need to ask ...

5. **What desires should rule you?** Again, what should our desires be in *every* circumstance according to the following verses?

1 Cor. 10:31 *Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

Col. 3:23 *Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men*

2 Cor. 5:9 *Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.*

Once we then reflect back on our goal and how our current response is not consistent with that goal, then we need to ask this question ...

6. What should you do now? What kinds of thinking and actions should the salesman do next? (If you need some help on this one consider 1 Jn. 1:9, Eph. 4:22-24, and Phil. 2:4 in regard to the other people in traffic.)

So how do we deal with idols of the heart? Take yourself through the following questions and then respond as specified in the last question.

1. What is my situation?
2. How am I responding?
3. What am I wanting?
4. What has God revealed about my situation?
5. What should I be wanting?
6. What should I do now? (Then do it!)

Record a personal application which you can do today or tomorrow. A good suggestion would be to keep an upset journal for a day. That is, whenever you feel anxious, fearful, angry, depressed, etc. record answers on a piece of paper to the six questions above.

Stewardship of the Heart

Day 4

Scripture Memory:

Philippians 4:8 *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.*

As we continue our topic on “Renewing the Mind” it is helpful to know what kinds of thoughts we need to be thinking on a regular basis. If we are to be growing in Godliness then proper thinking is fundamental. Notice what Paul says in Col. 3:1-2: “If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” Charles Swindoll has said, “Everyone I know who models a high level of excellence has won the battle of the mind and has taken the right thoughts captive.”

According to the Scripture Memory Verse above, what kinds of thoughts do we need to think?

Over the next three days, we are going to study and apply each of these thinking patterns prescribed (commanded!) by God.

TRUE THINKING: “True” thinking simply has the meaning of whatever is real as opposed to whatever is fake, and whatever is truth as opposed to whatever is false. We may often live in a fantasy world. We worry about things that are unreal and we anticipated events that might not happen. This unreal, fantasy thinking causes us to get nervous and tense and thus fail to trust in God’s sovereignty. Consider the “expert worrier” who imagines all kinds of future consequences and scenarios to today’s situations.

For example, how might a worrier respond to his/her child being expected home at 10:00 pm and it is now 10:15 pm?

How would thinking upon true (real or reality-based) thoughts and “truth” from the Bible help the expert worrier above?

How does Mt. 6:34 help us deal in the “reality” of today and not the “fantasy” of tomorrow?

Describe a situation where you were worried. Did what you fear might happen?
Describe how you could have responded differently by thinking TRUE thoughts.

HONORABLE THINKING: In John Vandegriff's book *In the Arena of the Mind*, he defines this term as "that which inspires awe, majesty, seriousness" and he summarizes the meaning by the word "important" as opposed to that which is "trivial".

What kinds of things are important to God?

What are some trivial things on which you can fret your time away?

List two values that are important to you. How will you demonstrate that these are important?

What are some things you worry about? What are some true thoughts to help you with these fears?

List some trivial things you tend to complain about. What important things would God have you focus on instead?

Stewardship of the Heart

Day 5

Scripture Memory:

Philippians 4:8 *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.*

Today we continue studying and applying the list of thinking patterns on which Phil. 4:8 commands us to have our minds dwell.

RIGHT THINKING: The word translated “right” simply means *the correct way of action*. So this means considering, contemplating, or planning the correct (Biblical) response or action to any and all of life’s circumstances. According to Heb. 5:11-14 (listed below), what is the only way to know what the “right” thing to do is?

Heb. 5:11-14 *Concerning Him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of **practice** have their senses **trained** to discern good and evil.*

Sometimes when we are hurt, we have a tendency to think vengeful and hurtful thoughts against another person. How would thinking on “right” thoughts help a person overcome hurtful thoughts? Can you give any Scriptural examples? (cf. Ro. 12:18-21)

Sometimes when we encounter a problem we tend to worry about it instead of acting to solve it. How would “right” thinking help a person who tends to worry about problems?

PURE THINKING: This thinking pattern is simply thoughts which are undefiled or without stain or not mixed with sin.

How can we keep our thinking pure according to Ps. 119:9-11?

What does Titus 1:15 add to the concept of pure thinking?

This is an amazing verse! “To the pure all things are pure.” How can ALL things be pure? Well it basically depends on whether or not we think God’s thoughts about all things. For example, a person who beholds an immodestly dressed individual can remain pure if he comes to the conclusion in his mind – “That is immodest and not pleasing to God ... I will turn my eyes away”. That person has remained pure showing forth that he is pure. However, the person who sees an immodestly dressed person walking down the street and thinks, “I like that ... I wish I could see more” has thought impure thoughts and reveals his impurity.

This is a real test of purity in an individual. When you come across suggestive, immodest, or sensual people, events, or media, do you come to the same conclusions that God would about those things?

How can you improve in pure thinking?

LOVELY THINKING: Most of the time when we think of “lovely” we think of beautiful, or pleasant items. However this is not the primary sense of the word in this verse. Again, we turn to John Vandegriff:

The Greek word is PROSPHILE. It is made up of a word PROS which means “toward” or “in the direction of” and PHILE, a word which describes a mutual love. The result when applied to thinking is a thought which is toward love – planning or concentration which will bring about a loving act.

Would you define Love as primarily an action or a good feeling according to the following verses? Why? (Jn. 3:16; Eph. 5:25; 1 Jn. 3:18)

How would thinking “lovely” thoughts that concentrate on bringing about loving acts help a person struggling with ...

... self pity (focusing on how bad things are for myself)?

... hurtful thoughts (focusing on getting even with someone)?

... fearful thoughts (focusing on what harm or consequences may coming to me)?

What are some right, pure, and lovely thoughts you can think today?

Stewardship of the Heart

Day 6

Scripture Memory:

Philippians 4:8 *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.*

Today we continue studying and applying the list of thinking patterns on which Phil. 4:8 commands us to have our minds dwell.

GOOD REPUTE: The sixth word in our thinking list means the kind of thinking that searches for the good in others or in circumstances rather than the bad. It is the opposite of fault-finding.

Think of the last person about whom you significantly occupied your mind and thoughts. Were you thinking good thoughts about that person or were you engaging in an aggressive campaign of fault-finding?

Why is it that we tend to engage in fault finding regularly? How might pride be involved?

On a scale of 1-5, evaluate your thinking and speech (1 being regularly finding fault, 5 being regularly thinking on things of good repute):

- _____ Thinking and speech toward children
- _____ Thinking and speech toward spouse
- _____ Thinking and speech toward individuals at church
- _____ Thinking and speech toward individuals at work

What should you do to improve in thinking thoughts of “Good Repute”? (One suggestion would be to make a list of the good qualities with those you tend to criticize and find fault)

EXCELLENCE: This pattern of thinking means exactly what it says. We are to be thinking on how we can do things with excellence – doing our best for our Lord Jesus Christ. Read Mal. 1:6-9 and record below why God was not pleased with the individuals in this text.

There are two very common hindrances to excellence. One is a lack of adequate preparation. How are you doing at spending the necessary time to do things with excellence by having adequate preparation? List areas below where you are struggling with excellence and discuss how this may or may not be related to adequate preparation.

A second hindrance to excellence is being spread too thin or “dilutedness”. In our culture, it is easy to find hundreds of things to occupy our time and spread our resources to a breaking point. Read the account of the apostles in Acts 6:1-4 and describe below why they didn’t just take on one more “thing “.

Discuss potential ways you may need to refocus and begin doing things with excellence.

PRAISEWORTHY: A difference between “good repute” and “praiseworthy” is the object of our thinking. The latter finds its object of thinking on God and the former finds goods in others. John Piper states,

“People are starving for the greatness of God. But most of them would not give this diagnosis of their troubled lives. The majesty of God is an unknown cure. There are far more popular prescriptions on the market, but the benefit of any other remedy is brief and shallow. “

What is the focus of self-pity in contrast to the focus of praise?

Read Job 40-42. How did the “revelation of God’s” praiseworthiness affect Job? How would thinking upon God’s greatness help you on a daily basis?

How can you today think thoughts of good repute, excellence, and praise?
