

Appendix 8: Understanding Our Heart, Idols, and Our “Sin-Beneath-the-Sin”

It's so important to remember the goal is not people who simply do better with more external obedience. God didn't want people to simply try to obey better. Nor did God want people to simply learn a lot about him, knowing their theology and doctrine. God wants our hearts. God wants people who know they can never be good enough, who fall so short of his glory, and therefore feel in their heart a desperate need for a Savior. God wants people to fully embrace and enjoy the work of Jesus' life, death and resurrection on our behalf. He wants us to allow that gospel to go deeper and deeper into our heart so that it produces a love for God, love for others, and desire for our heart and life to look more and more like the heart and life of Jesus.

Discipleship shouldn't aim first for what Paul Tripp calls “apple stapling” (in his book, *Instruments in the Redeemers Hands*). If you have an apple tree in the back yard that doesn't bear good fruit, the solution is not to go out and buy some shiny apples, grab your staple gun, and go staple them on all the branches. Oh sure it'd look good for a while from a distance, almost like the real thing, but eventually it will be seen for what it is. You can't fix a bad tree with a bad root by stapling on good fruit. You must get to the root cause of the problem.

Jesus said our words and behavior (Luke 6:45) comes from what's in our heart. What we say and do comes out of what we love. What we love, or treasure, is where our heart is.

What's this have to do with leading a Life Group?

Tripp applies this truth to ministry saying, “Every human being is a worshiper, in active pursuit of the thing that rules his heart. This worship shapes everything we do and say, who we are, and how we live. This is why the heart is always our target in personal ministry.” *Instruments in the Redeemers Hands*, Tripp, p. 73

Tim Keller said it this way. “Whatever captures the heart's trust and love also controls the feelings and behavior. What the heart most wants the mind finds reasonable, the emotions find valuable, and the will finds doable...What makes people into what they are is the order of their loves—what they love most, more, less, and least. That is more fundamental to who you are than even the beliefs to which you mentally subscribe. Your loves show what you actually believe in, not what you say and do. People, therefore, change not by merely changing their thinking but by changing what they love most. Such a shift requires nothing less than changing your thinking, but it entails much more.” *Preaching*, Keller, p. 159.

In leading a Life Group, we must always aim to get to the heart. Our primary aim in growing spiritually is to see our own heart increasingly honest about our bad fruit and running to the gospel root. So much of helping others grow spiritually is simply inviting others into our own struggle to increasingly see our sin and to cling to our Savior. It's inviting them to join us in our own pursuit of enjoying God, feasting on his grace, and walking by his Spirit.

This is why it's so important for us to be honest and vulnerable about our own sin and struggles. It's why we must not only include teaching, but also equipping and accountability to help massage the truths of the gospel into the heart. It's why we need “life-on-life” time outside of group time so this can be caught and not just taught.

We want our hearts to be captured by the beauty of God's love for and delight in us in Christ. We want to experience wholeness and fullness of life as we abide in Christ. We want our hearts value and enjoy God more than anything else so that love for God and love for others naturally flow out of us in all of life.

Helping others grow spiritually is inviting others to join us in that glorious pursuit.

General Deepest Desires:

- To be loved and accepted
- Purpose, to be part of something larger, transcendence;
- Relationship: valued, to pursue and to be pursued, to be in community or family;
- Impact, significance;
- Honor, respect valued, understood, virtuous;
- To protect and provide, to be protected and provided for, security;
- To come through: duty, honor, to hear "Well done!"
- Beauty and creativity; transcendence
- Justice, truth, and freedom;
- Peace, wholeness, completion, home, belong

"Our wants and longings and desires are at the core of our identity, the wellspring from which our actions and behavior flow."

"Discipleship, we might say, is a way to curate your heart, to be attentive to and intentional about what you love."

Common Idols of the Heart:

Life has meaning for me or I have self worth:

- Power Idolatry – ...if I have power and influence over others.
- Approval Idolatry – ...if I am loved and respected by others.
- Comfort Idolatry – ...if I have a particular standard or quality of life.
- Image Idolatry – ...if I have a particular look or body image.
- Control Idolatry – ...if I get mastery over my life in particular areas.
- Helping Idolatry – ...if people are dependent on me and need me.
- Dependence Idolatry – ...if someone is there to protect me.
- Independence Idolatry – ...if I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to care for others.
- Work Idolatry – ...if I am highly productive by getting a lot accomplished. Achievement Idolatry – ...if I am being recognized for my accomplishments and excelling in life pursuits.
- Materialism Idolatry – ...if I have a certain level of wealth and nice things.
- Family Idolatry – ...if my kids and spouse are happy and especially happy with me.
- Relationship Idolatry – ...if Mr. or Miss Right is in love with me.
- Suffering Idolatry – ...I can only be happy in times when all is going well and I'm not suffering
- Pleasure Addiction – ...if I have something fun and entertaining to look forward to in the future. Religious Performance – ...if I am adhering to my religious moral codes.

"Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your god."

— Martin Luther

Where to Go Looking for Idols in the Heart:

- **Daydreams** - What do I most care about?
- **Desires** - What do I most want in life?
- **Emotions** - What causes my emotions to spin out of control?
- **Anxiety** - What causes me the most anxiety?
- **Fears** - What do I most fear losing?
- **Anger** - What makes me most mad?
- **Prayers** - What do I most ask for from God?
- **Imagination** - Where do my thoughts go in solitude?
- **Spending** - What do I most spend money on?
- **Sundays** - What do I worship on the weekends?

If you seek	Your greatest nightmare	People around you often feel	Your problem emotion
POWER (Success, winning, influence)	Humiliation	Used	Anger
APPROVAL (Affirmation, love, relationships)	Rejection	Smothered	Cowardice
COMFORT (Privacy, lack of stress, freedom)	Stress, demands	Neglected	Boredom
CONTROL (Self-discipline, certainty, standards)	Uncertainty	Condemned	Worry

Now that you've answered the questions above, look for common themes. What things tend to be too important to you? What are your idols?

Confront Your Idols::

1. Name your idol(s) out loud.
2. Confess your hearts dependence on your idol(s) to God and someone else.
3. Repent, or turn away from, the idol(s) in your life.
4. Rejoice, or take joy in, the absolute certainty of Jesus' mastery of your life.
5. Replace your idol(s) with a renewed passion for the gospel of Jesus Christ.