

# The Question WHY and the Biblical Teaching on the HEART!

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Few questions are asked more often during times of frustration, despair, or repeated failure than the question “Why?” **Why** do I get so angry when my wife forgets to clean the dishes? **Why** do the opinions of my peers devastate or exhilarate me? **Why** do words of hatred, passion, or malice come to my lips before I evaluate them? These are questions that are often considered to be the special domain of a psychologist. These are, however, questions that the Bible addresses very directly, clearly, and powerfully.

When the Bible answers the “why” question, it does so by teaching about the heart. In Scripture the heart is used in two ways. First, for the organ that pumps blood through your body. Second, as the source of man’s thoughts, feelings, and actions. The heart is the place to begin to understand and change thoughts, behaviors, and emotions.

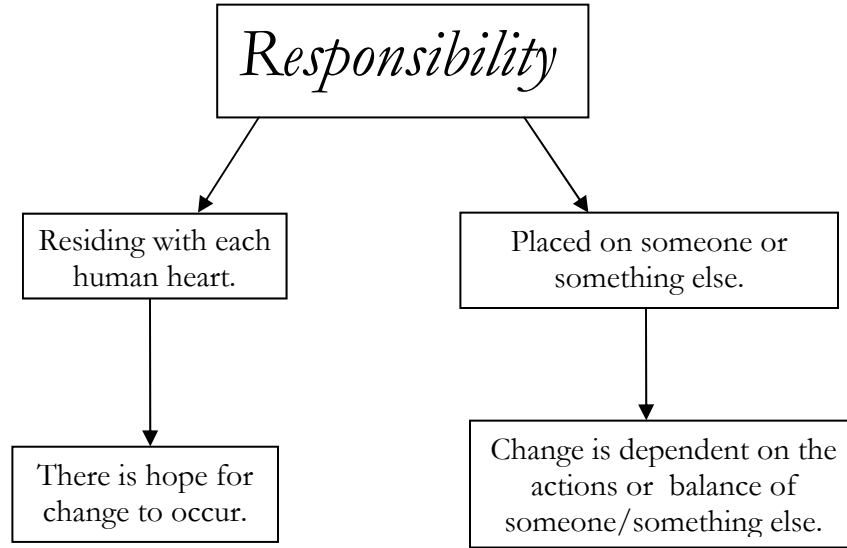
This is a bold claim: that the Bible sufficiently covers the plaguing “why” question with a single principle. The claim clearly stands when we examine the functions the Bible attributes to the heart. Look up the following verses and match what function it attributes to the heart.

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|----------------------|-------|--|
| A. Philippians 4:6-7 | _____ | Our choice of words.   |
| B. Romans 6:17       | _____ | The source of lust.  |
| C. Mark 7:20-23      | _____ | Attitude towards money.                                      |
| D. Matthew 7:21      | _____ | Evil thoughts, coveting, deceit, envy, pride, & foolishness. |
| E. Matthew 6:28      | _____ | Who/what we obey.  |
| F. Matthew 12:34     | _____ | Anxiety or peace.  |

How should this understanding of the heart impact the way we live, interact with others, or try to change? It actually does something radically counter-cultural; it places the responsibility for our thoughts, intentions, emotions, and actions squarely upon *our* shoulders. No longer can we say that our parents, spouse, peers, environment, or even the devil *made me do it*. That may not sound like encouraging news, but it is one of the most liberating truths in all the Bible.

Most counseling today is established on assigning responsibility to someone or something else. People are said to be “disordered,” not “living disorderly.” This does provide temporary relief. “At least its not *my* fault,” people think.

The problem is that with responsibility comes the power to affect change. If someone else can *make* me angry (set off my trigger, push my buttons), then I am powerless to stop getting angry. If, however, anger is a response of my heart to that person’s actions, then I can be free from anger. The diagram at the top of the next page illustrates this truth for us.



**Diagram 1. Responsibility and Hope for Change**

But what about when I am sinned against? Or when bad things happen to good people? Does the biblical concept of the heart address these areas also? These are important questions.

The heart is still active even when we are sinned against or face difficult situations. We are not responsible for the sins of others (Ezekiel 18:1-4). We are, however, responsible for our response to being sinned against. God promises His comfort, presence, and justice during these times. In Matthew 5:38-48 and 18:15-17, God gives us instruction on how this matter should be handled. Read those verses and write your understanding of God’s instructions in the space provided.

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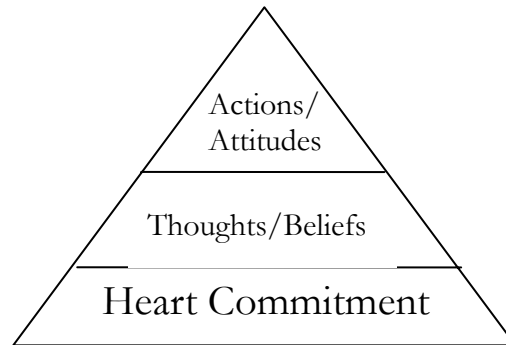
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Let’s examine a brief case study. Mike gets angry at John for stealing \$50.00. Whether Mike resorts to aggression, slander, or retaliation depends directly upon how his heart values relationships, money, and the responsibility to honor God’s Word in all situations.

The pyramid on the next page illustrates how actions and attitudes emerge through thoughts and beliefs from the heart. Mike’s value of money (heart commitment) will determine the severity of his evaluation of John’s actions (thoughts/ beliefs) which will determine his actions and attitude in the situation.



**Diagram 2. The Pyramid of Human Motivation**

To summarize, we act to get what we most want. James 1:14-15 says that temptation emerges from our own desires, which is synonymous for “heart commitment.” The biblical concept of the heart makes all of life about worship, because we are constantly revealing what we *most value*. This means that sin is what we do when we are not satisfied with God and His ways. As our heart desires things outside the will of God, problematic emotions (e.g., anxiety, depression), sinful thoughts (e.g., coveting, grumbling), and actions (e.g., slander, theft) emerge.

If Mike examines what his actions say about his beliefs and heart commitments, then he has the possibility for great spiritual growth. This will enable him to focus on his responsibilities.

This is the beauty of focusing on the heart. You identify things you CAN change!

## THE ASSIGNMENT

**Part One.** The following thirteen questions are designed to reveal your heart commitments. Take some time to carefully answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper.

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|--|--|
| 1. What do you love?   | 9. What do you fear?                   |
| 2. What do you hate?   | 10. What do you reward yourself with?  |
| 3. What do you crave or wish for?  | 11. What do you daydream about?        |
| 4. Where do you find refuge, comfort, security?  | 12. Whose opinion matters most to you? |
| 5. Who do you strive the hardest to please?  | 13. Where do you find your identity?   |
| 6. How do you define success?  |  |
| 7. How do you define failure?  |  |
| 8. List three things in which you say “If only...”?<br>(i.e., “If only I had more money, then I would...”) |  |

**Part Two.** Only begin working on this section after you have successfully completed *Part One of The Assignment*. Take your answers to each of the previous questions and ask yourself this follow-up question: “How can I change/reprioritize my desires in order to change my actions?” Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

## GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL ASSIGNMENT)

Hopefully, you have identified some things that need changing. That is the trademark of a genuine believer (Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 10:14). In order to go deeper and make authentic application of this change you will need to develop concrete steps that will enable you to accomplish this. Over the next several days begin to implement the following suggestions as you make your plan for how to have victory over your troubling behaviors, thoughts, or emotions.

1. Begin with repentance. Acknowledge your responsibility for your actions to God and ask His forgiveness. Also, you may need to seek forgiveness from those you sinned against.
2. Consider a fast from whatever your heart is idolizing. This is the first step in training yourself to be able to say “no” to your desires. As with any fast, you should refrain from indulging the thoughts, behaviors, or emotions. You will not be able to accomplish this without prayerful dependence upon Jesus Christ.
3. Use a concordance to do a word study on “heart” to gain a fuller understanding of what your heart is and does. Look up each verse in the Bible that references the word “heart.” Then write out what the basic teaching of that verse is. Complete this study by writing a two (2) page reflection paper of what the Bible teaches on the heart.
4. Memorize one passage of Scripture each week on your particular idolatry. This will serve to change your “thoughts/beliefs” (Romans 12:1-2).
5. Pick a mature Christian of your same gender who can hold you accountable for a minimum period of twelve (12) months. Ask that individual if they will help you in the area of accountability, advice, and counsel as you walk through this area of your life.
6. Consider how your history contributes to this idolatry (i.e., verbal abuse contributing to depression). As you identify specific individuals ask the Lord to help you forgive those who sinned against you (Matthew 6:14-15). If necessary, write that person a letter stating how they sinned against you and that you are forgiving them for it. This will help you as you grow in your acceptance of God’s sovereignty over your life circumstances (Psalm 139; Philippians 4:11-13).
7. Examine where this idolatry might be affecting other areas of your life. Do not be satisfied by merely becoming “more functional.” Meaning, you may need to write out the specific areas that have been affected and make intentional efforts to remove the presence of idolatry from your life.
8. Make Psalm 51:10 a daily prayer. “Create in me a clean HEART, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

Once you biblically understand “why” you act the way you do, it becomes possible to really change. Even then, change is not easy. Change is what the believer is to be about until we meet our Lord Jesus Christ. Engage the battle with all your HEART, soul, mind, and strength as an act of worship (Mark 12:30).