

A Heart for God

SINKING DEEP



A Heart for God

Overview

Did you know the human heart begins to beat at 5-6 weeks of pregnancy? This means that perhaps before you even had a name, you had a heartbeat. A healthy heart is crucial to the body in both the physical and spiritual sense. The Bible has a lot to say about our hearts. King Solomon writes, “Guard your heart above all else, for everything you do flows from it” (Prov. 4:23). Jeremiah warns, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?...” Samuel proclaims, “The LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). Ezekiel prophesied, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” (Eze.36:26-27). Jesus, the long awaited messiah, fulfilled this prophecy, allowing those who believe in him to be reborn with a new heart. He explains, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God” (John 3:3). This new heart is ushered in by God’s Holy Spirit and allows us to do what we could not do before: love God. And how do we love God? Well, Jesus makes it clear: “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching...Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching” (John 14:23-24). In this study we will unpack what it looks like to have a heart that is fully devoted to God and loves him well. We will soon discover (if we haven’t already) the more we get to know God, the more his Holy Spirit will deepen our love for Him thus strengthening our resolve to joyfully obey his will wholeheartedly.

Note: All referenced scriptures in this study are NIV unless stated otherwise.

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Seek his will

Devotional: “This, then, is how you should pray: “Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6: 9-10). Human will is contrary to the will of God; in the beginning God created man and woman to live in perfect, intimate fellowship with him, yet Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation to follow their *own* desires and forge their *own* paths. As they hid in shame after partaking of the forbidden fruit, God asked them, “Where are you?” This is an interesting question because God knew exactly where they were. The underlying question was and still is: *Where are we in relation to God?* Throughout history all of humanity is born with a natural inclination to war against our Creator and resist his will. Even as faithful followers of Jesus Christ, we often put our own personal desires first and choose instant gratification, like Eve biting into the fruit believing the lie that it would make her wise like God.

How can we possibly live according to God's will if we naturally reject it? As Paul writes there is a battle within us, "For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out" (Rom. 7:18). He goes on to further diagnose his dilemma but then offers the remedy: "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:24-25a). To live in a manner worthy of the Lord begins with being redeemed by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus's death on the cross. This brings new life and a regenerated mind, enabling us to truly understand his Word, apply it, and delight in the freedom that comes when we obey his commands. We entrust ourselves to the indwelling Holy Spirit and to Jesus Christ who intercedes on our behalf and can then pray like King David did, "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground" (Psalm 143:10).

Meditation thoughts and insights

Scriptures: John 4:31-34, 1 John 2:15-17, Philippians 2:12-13

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Meditate on his word

Devotional: “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to divide soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). Reading and meditating on God’s word is how our hearts become calibrated to God’s will. First and foremost, the word of God is a Christian’s primary spiritually offensive weapon: their sword! (Eph. 6:17). When Jesus was being tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Satan tried to use God’s word by twisting and contorting scripture, but Jesus, knowing it well, was able to counter the misuse of God’s Word and disable Satan’s attack. As believers, it is crucial to continually be in the word of God, meditating on it and applying it daily so that we will not be deceived by Satan’s attempts to accuse us, confuse us, or lead us astray.

Additionally, scripture draws us into a closer relationship with God. Psalm 116 describes God as bending low to hear our prayers and leaning in as if listening to a whisper. Prayer is not a one-sided conversation; God reveals His will to us when we lean into the intimate words of Scripture. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Spending time in the word of God is like spending time training- it prepares us for the battles we will face in our lives; it is key to the transformative work God is doing within us. C.S. Lewis writes, “God became man to turn creatures into sons; not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man.” God is doing a good work inside of each of us and if we are still breathing, he is not done with us yet! Absorbing scripture allows the Holy Spirit to work in us, changing our hearts and sanctifying us so that we can be more like Jesus.

Meditation thoughts and insights

Scriptures: Psalm 119: 97-112, Psalm 19:7-14

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Pray without ceasing

Devotional: “Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong” (Eph. 3:17). Prayer is the place where our knowledge about God turns into an experience of the heart. Our relationship with our Father grows stronger as we acknowledge our total dependence on him and continuously receive his sustaining grace. Throughout redemptive history, followers of Jesus Christ are offered the privilege of bringing their requests before The One True God who hears and responds to those who call out to him by name. Our Sovereign God is always available and desires for us to draw near to him, yet it is our choice to seek this fellowship with Him.

Prayer can and should be our immediate response to our circumstances. Daniel was a man who demonstrated this lifestyle, “But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God” (Dan. 6:10). Daniel made the intentional decision to continue to pray and was not deterred by a law that threatened his life for doing so. Likewise, Jesus tells a parable about a persistent widow who remains steadfast in her requests for justice. “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1). As a believer, prayer is our lifeline because it is our direct access to God. Prayer aligns our hearts with God and allows us to abide in intimate fellowship with our Savior.

Meditation thoughts and insights

Scriptures: Matthew 6:9-14, Philippians 4:6

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Cultivate gratitude

Devotional: “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22-23). The author of the book of Lamentations primarily concentrates on the suffering and heartbreak that was felt over the devastation of Jerusalem, yet he also includes this beloved and well known expression of praise. It’s natural when times are hard to doubt God and sadly the temptation to blame God and harbor anger toward him has caused many people to walk away from their faith altogether. Conversely, when things are going well, pride has a way of sneaking into our hearts and we can begin to take for granted the countless blessings God has given us from his abundant kindness, thinking we somehow are entitled to them. God warned his people numerous times about this sinful tendency before they entered the promised land. “When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day” (Deut. 8:10-11). When we hold tight to the kindness God has shown us, it propels us to show kindness to one another.

We live in a world rife with sin, suffering, and death. We NEED the ultimate joy of our salvation in Christ and the hope of heaven. Hebrews 12:2 says, “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the Faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” When we praise God for what he has done, it takes our eyes off our own circumstances and fixes them back on Jesus. This primes our hearts to submit to a posture of gratitude and contentment, allowing us to recognize the continual kindness God displays all around us, day after day.

Meditation thoughts and insights

Scriptures: Psalm 100

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Love your neighbor

Devotional: “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:18). The love we receive from God is not meant to be hoarded and kept to ourselves, but rather to flow through us and into others. Like a flowing spring of water in a dry land, we are to continually receive and give love, thus reflecting God’s glory to the world. The easy part is that we do not NEED to go out of our way to find people to love, because God has already placed them in our lives and along our paths. It begins with the people in our lives closest to us: our family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and oftentimes will extend to a stranger we come across, such as in the story of the good samaritan.

As we order our lives in response to the gift of salvation we will respond more readily to the needs of others. Jesus tells a parable which highlights this: “For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison and you visited me” (Matt. 25: 35-36). When we love the people God has divinely placed in our lives, we are in turn loving God. On the contrary, Jesus makes it clear later in this parable that neglecting the needs of our fellow neighbors leads to condemnation. Loving others well involves being generous with our God given time, talents, and resources as we invest in others rather than ourselves.

Meditation thoughts and insights

Scriptures: 1 John 4:7-21

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Turn from sin

Devotional: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matt. 4:17). God brought heaven to earth when in the fullness of time, Jesus the Word made flesh, was born and then began his ministry. After he defeated Satan's temptation in the wilderness, Jesus began to preach a message of repentance. Repentance is the only path that leads directly to a heart fully devoted to God because repentance involves turning away from sin and turning toward God. This should be a daily practice for believers who are called to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12b-13). This process is called “sanctification” which, simply put, is a lifetime process of a person conforming more and more into the likeness of Christ. Whether we are currently aware of the sin we are in or not, we are exhorted to examine the disposition of our hearts in prayer because God sees our motives and blind spots. The Holy Spirit, who lives inside those who have put their faith in Christ, is our helper who speaks to us and convicts us of our hidden sins so that we can repent and turn back to God.

Hebrews 3:15 reminds us “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled.” NLT As Christians, we must not become like the older brother in the story of the Prodigal Son (the Pharisee) whose heart was hard. How tragic that he missed out on the big party, the joy of salvation, and chose to sit alone outside. Let us be the children that listen to the Holy Spirit, repent from sin, draw near to our Father, and experience the joy of His salvation.

Meditation thoughts and insights

Scriptures: Psalm 51

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Choose humility

Devotional: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (ESV Phil. 2:3). There is something inside of every human heart that wrestles with the concept of humility and honoring another person above oneself- it’s called pride. We do not need to look far to witness the widespread consequences of our society’s fixation of elevating and celebrating “self” above all else. Pride permeates the world around us, and the enemy will tempt us, using our own prideful tendencies, seeking to destroy us and turn us away from God.

When Jesus was speaking to the crowds he warned them about the Pharisees and teachers of the law holding themselves in lofty positions. He concluded with the reminder, “For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Matt 23:12). Jesus lived his own life as the ultimate example of a humble and submissive servant of God. Imagine how vibrant and set apart from the world the Church could be if, as followers of Jesus Christ, we would all humble our hearts before God and honor our spouses, children, parents, siblings, friends, neighbors, and coworkers more than we honor ourselves.

Meditation thoughts and insights

Scriptures: Proverbs 18:12, 1 Peter 5:5-6, Philippians 2:3-11

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Share the gospel

Devotional: “All authority in heaven and earth have been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28: 18-20). The “Great Commission” was Jesus’s last words of instruction to his disciples. As followers of Jesus, this is still our calling today. We don’t need to have an abundance of knowledge or to take a course in apologetics to talk to someone about God. We just need to share the love of Jesus Christ with others, starting with those he’s placed closest to us. In Luke 10:2 Jesus tells his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.” The world is full of broken, hurting people who need Jesus and our personal day to day interactions present us with countless opportunities to share the Gospel with them through our words and actions. We can trust the Holy Spirit to give us the wisdom to discern these moments and then by faith take courage and act on them.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God made a way for humanity to be saved and invited into eternity with him. The gospel is the joyful good news that “he who knew no sin, took on sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Our response, out of love for our Savior, is to then share this good news of Christ with those that God places in our lives.

Meditation thoughts and insights

Scriptures: John 1:35-51, Revelation 22:17

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Take thoughts captive

Devotional: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil. 4:8). Have you ever started doing one thing, and then that one thing led to another thing, and before you knew it you found yourself standing there thinking, *what was I supposed to be doing?* It’s easy to become distracted and as women we can become masters at juggling the unrelenting demands of life. Most days we can forget that we are actually living in the midst of a spiritual war. In fact, this is one of the devil’s most effective tactics to pull us away from God: distraction. Taking full advantage of our weaknesses the devil supernaturally appeals to our emotions and desires in attempts to lead us away from God. He knows quite well that our thought life affects our heart’s disposition. “These desires grow into sinful thoughts that give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death” (John 1:14-15). But Jesus came to give us life. In John 10:10 he tells us, “I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.”

This is why Paul reminds his readers to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). This means EVERY thought. Before we exercise sinful words or actions, they begin as sinful thoughts and because our hearts are deceitful, (see Jer. 17:9) we cannot trust our emotions or desires to drive our thought life. It is only through the word of God that we can know the truth and that our minds can be renewed in Christ.

Meditation thoughts and insights

Scriptures: Luke 6:45, Romans 12:1-2

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