

Practical Theology for Men

Session 1

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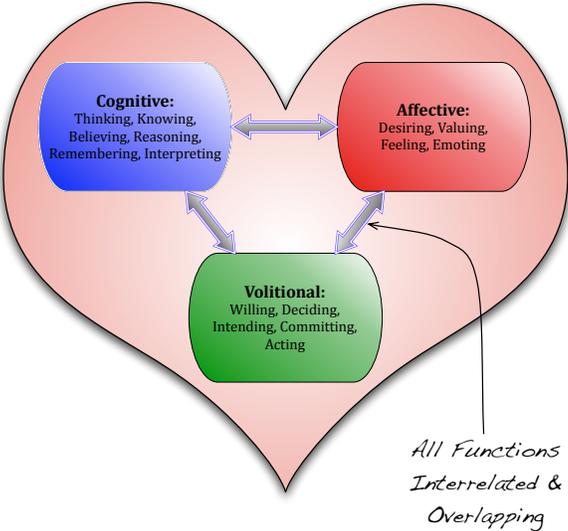
Introduction

Philippians 4:4-7

Surface Way

Theological Way

**The Dynamic Heart:
Functions**



1. Cognitive – Thoughts, Beliefs, Memories, Internal Dialogue, Reason
 - The heart contains knowledge: “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6); “having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you” (Eph 1:18); “that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ” (Col 2:2); as well as the lack of knowledge: “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart” (Eph 4:18).

2. Affective – Feelings, Desires, Preferences, Values
 - Paul describes the heart as the containing lust and desire (Rom 1:24). He also references his own heart as experiencing pain and sorrow over those who are not saved (Rom 9:2) and desiring for them to be so (10:1). His heart is tearfully anguished over concern for the wellbeing of others (2 Cor 2:4; 3:2; 6:11). Affection for others is expressed as their being *in the heart* (2 Cor 7:3; 8:16; Phil 1:7; 1 Thess 2:17). Subjective feelings of peace are experienced in the heart (Phil 4:7, Col 3:15-16). In the heart a person loves God in Christ (2 Thess 3:5).

3. Volitional – Dedications, Decisions, Loyalties, Determinations, Intentions
 - The heart can be willful against God: “But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed” (Rom 2:5). Paul says that “the purposes of the heart” are reasons for being condemned or commended (1 Cor 4:5). He also attributes the act of making a decision to the heart: “But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well” (1 Cor 7:37). Similarly, he references the heart as where one can make a decision free of compulsion: “Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion” (1 Cor 9:7).

Thinking – What does my fear show I’m believing about this situation that threatens me?

- What do I believe is threatening about this situation? What do I perceive I’ll lose? Why do I believe that object is so important?
- How often do I think about it? What triggers me to think about it?
- What do I believe about God regarding this object?

Desires / Feelings – What does my fear show I’m wanting from this situation that threatens me?

- What object of desire am I scared of losing?
- How do I think that object will benefit me?
- How often, and how strong, are my feelings?
- How is my hope misplaced?

Choices – What do my actions show about my willingness to give this object up?

- How do I act when feeling threatened, in both attitude and action?
- How do my actions reinforce the fear or anxiety?

Applied

1. Rejoicing in the Lord = acknowledging his love for you as more valuable than what you are scared to lose.
 - a. Rejoicing is NOT a simplistic, singular action, but a new quality of function that comes even amidst worry.
 - b. It is NOT just a feeling, but a CHOICE and a BELIEF.
2. Reasonableness = a quieted heart. The DIRECT CAUSE: the Lord is near.
 - a. Your heart was designed to desire the nearness of God MORE than any other object.
 - b. Including the object you fear losing.
 - c. This is why it’s so important to identify what your feelings of fear are indicating about your desires. What are you clinging to that, if you lost it, you would refuse to acknowledge God as good?
 - i. Until you can face the possibility of losing it and still be confident that the Lord is wise and good, you will not escape your fear.
3. Anxiety is contrasted with prayer because you were designed to express your heart to God in order to manage your desires before him.
 - a. Prayer is the necessary vehicle of submitting the desires that want to take over our hearts to God’s wisdom.

- b. Anxiety is the opposite of prayer because it is the attempt to desperately cling inwardly to the object you don't want to lose.
 - c. Thanksgiving is the acknowledgement that what God gives is the wisest and best course of action. It is resting in his preferences above your own, and beginning to interpret your life in light of it.
4. The peace of God bypasses your former understanding of a situation. The Holy Spirit changes your perceptions to align with his.
- a. And he personally guards your heart, which as we've seen for Paul, means your thoughts, your desires, and your choices.

Practical Theology and the Problem of Lust

Session 2

The Experience of Illicit Sexual Desire

Understanding Sexual Desire Theologically

1. **People are not owners, but merely stewards of their affections, including sexual desire.**
 - a. You are not the rightful owner of your affections; God is.
 - b. You have some level of managerial power over your affections.

2. **A Problem with Lust is Rarely Merely Sexual. It involves other motivating desires.**
 - **Self-indulgence of Bodily Appetites in general**

 - **Power**

 - **Affirmation**

 - **Fulfillment**

 - **Ease**

 - **Safe, Longlasting, a Deeply Satisfying Pleasure**

3. **Sexual desire may seem like it is master, but a person can and must have mastery over their desires with Christ's power.**

4. Godly Desires Are an Aspect of Faith

Strategy for Addressing Sexual Lust

1. In a gospel culture of forthrightness about sin and confidence in Christ's willingness to forgive, remind strugglers of the basic truths about their affections:
 - a. Their affections are NOT their own.
 - b. Their affections are NOT pre-determined and unalterable.
 - c. Acting upon sexual lust shapes expectations of sex in a crippling way.
 - d. Their sexual desires are linked to other motivating desires, and identifying those desires is a powerful help for undermining illicit sexual desire.

2. Assure strugglers that faith in Christ changes desire—even sexual desire—to line up with his design.
 - a. Acting upon godly desires reorients expectations of sex.
 - b. Directing your affections is an important, and often missing, motivation in the spiritual disciplines.

3. Coordinate a realistic, consistent strategy for putting off sexual desire and putting on godliness.
 - a. Repentance: At the level of behavior and desire
 - b. Radical Amputation: While the avoidance of temptation entirely is not possible, the avoidance of the strongest temptations often is.
 - i. Schedule
 - ii. Access
 - c. Regular Accountability: Not necessarily a weekly meeting, but the expectation that this topic will be regularly broached.
 - i. Increasing "Bar of Success"
 - ii. Strictness is the necessary context of grace.
 1. Confrontation vs. Clarity of Standards
 2. Moral Laxity vs. Grace
 - d. Faith Fueling: Intake of the Word and Prayer
 - i. Not as payment to God for help, but as a means of seeking the sources of grace & power.
 - e. Failure Plan: Immediate Contact/Confession, Removal from Situation