

## Idols of the Heart

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?

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Understanding this concept helps an individual discern why he does the things he does and helps him walk more consistently in **Christlikeness**. He will be able to help others as well. 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?" and "Why are these individuals responding the way they are?"

One January day, a family wakes up at six o'clock in the morning. 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 **whit** snow on the ground. The husband sees the snow and immediately turns the radio on and hears about the traffic tie-ups already beginning. He becomes anxious and worried. The wife gets **up** 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, grumbling, am mumbling under his breath obscenities about the snow.

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

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## Biblical Keys to Human Behavior

A. *James 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?

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B. *Matthew 15:19-20* "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?

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As we compare Matthew 15:19 with James 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, motivating us to do what we do. James 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. Hebrews 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 Hebrews 4:12 provide additional insight about what things make up the "heart"?

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The Biblical concept of the "heart" is what motivates our behavior. At any and every given moment of time, you are acting upon your desires, your 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.



Matthew 15:18-19  
James 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 Corinthians 5:9?

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E. Our heart's desire should be to "please God". Many times our desires are not this all! Think about some 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)?

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## Idols of the Heart

Proverbs 4:23 " Watch over your heart with all diligence. For from it flow the springs of life."

Below is the diagram we learned about.



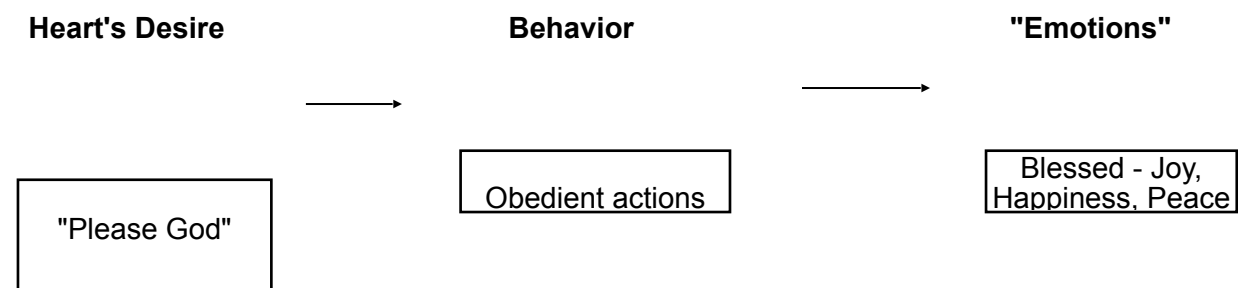
Matthew 15:18-19  
James 4:1 -2

Now we are going to add another aspect to this model of human behavior. When we have as our goal in our heart to please God and our speech and actions are obedient to God what does God do as a result according to the following verses?

John 13:17

Philippians 4:9

So, we can see that when our heart's goal is right and that 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 at what happens when our heart's desire is not to "please God." On your lesson under letter 'E' you listed several desires/lusts that caused you to behave sinfully and be either 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, unless these desires become too important to us. But how do we know when a legitimate desire has become wrong, sinful or a "lust"?

The two criteria that help us see when a legitimate desire becomes wrong are ...

- 1) Am I willing to sin in order to get what I want? and
- 2) Do I respond sinfully when I do get what I want?

How does James 4:2 illustrate the above two criteria?

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

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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. **Ezekiel 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. Exodus 20:3, Mark 12:29-30; Matthew 6:33)

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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?

Psalms 32:10 "Many are the **sorrows** of the wicked..."

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

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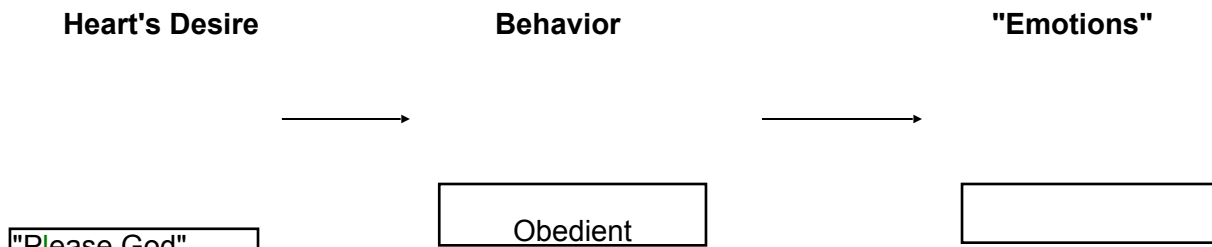
Romans 2:9 " There will be **tribulation and distress** for every soul of man who doe! evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek"

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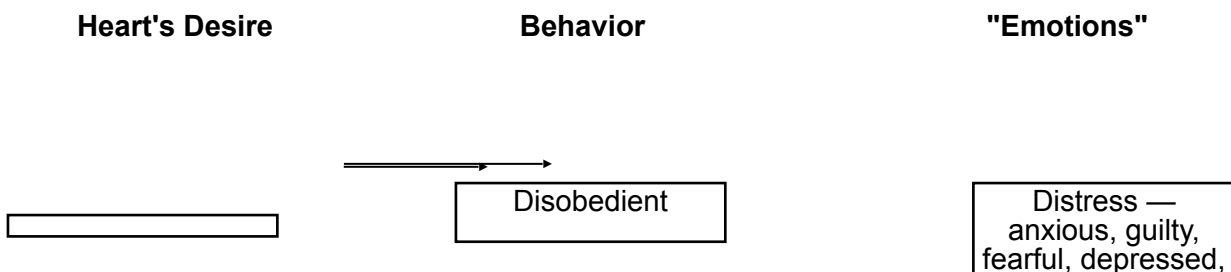
Psalm 32:3,4, & 8 "There is **no soundness** in my flesh because of thine indignation; There is **no health** in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities are gone over my head; As a **heavy burden** they weigh too much for me....I am **benumbed and badly crushed**; I groan because of the **agitation of my heat.**"

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*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, and happiness.



When our heart's goal is not right and is focused on other desires that we want too much and hence in our behavior are willing to commit sin or respond sinfully, then God allows us to experience not a state of blessedness but a state of "distress".



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

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Something potentially is going wrong in the heart -You are wanting 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 what's going on in your heart? Good!

## Idols of the Heart

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 major client. If the client likes your proposal, this will mean that you will get **multimillion-dollar** project - the biggest one of your life. And, this will mean an **incredible** boost in your income. If the client doesn't like it you will lose a multi-million **dollar** project. . .You want this project 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 minutes. You respond something like this. . . (looking at watch constantly, **punching** radio buttons incessantly, throwing hands up in air constantly...)

"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! Those construction workers are just standing **around** At least if you going to funnel two lanes of traffic into one, could you look like you doing it for a reason? Those stupid department of transportation workers. Maybe I'll to call and tell my clients I'm stuck in traffic..." (pulls out cell phone and realizes **battery** is dead) "Can you believe this.!!!???" (throws cell phone across the car, as some **one** indicates they want in front of you) "Look at that guy, he's trying to squeeze in front my car. NO YOU DON'T MAN, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO GET IN FRONT OF ME I'LL SHOW YOU, I'LL GET AS CLOSE AS I CAN TO THE CAR IN FRONT OF ME!!!!

Below is a series of questions designed to help us deal biblically with our heart based upon the truths we have **learned**. We will walk through these questions considering **the** above scenario. You may want to remember these questions and review them frequently to help you as well.

**1. What is your situation?** God puts us in all kinds of various situations every day. In

any given situation you will react /respond biblically or sinfully. But we first need to **just stop** and take a reality check and ask, "What is my situation?"

Summarize the situation for the salesman.

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

Summarize how the salesman is responding.

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Anxiety, fighting, quarreling, despair, and outbursts of anger are the birth product of **lust** (strong desires). These works of the flesh come from the lust of our flesh that we have talked about. They **come** from what I want/desire. My manner of life comes from the heart and that leads us to question three.

**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".

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**4. What does 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?

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(some references could be Romans 8:28-29, **Philippians** 4:19, Psalm 49:7-20)

What has God revealed in the Bible about the salesman's response?

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(cf. **Ephesians** 4:29-32, **Galatians** 5:19-20, Proverbs 14:29)

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

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Why do we feel anxious, fearful, or distressed in various situations including a simple traffic jam? Practically speaking we live many times as if we are functionally atheists. We forget truths, or more likely, choose not to believe 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 functional Christianity as opposed to professed Christianity. 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. We profess that this is not an accidental world, and He is not a God Who is as remote as 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. The 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 be our desires in every circumstance according to the following verses?

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

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Colossians 3:23 *"Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than men;"*

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

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Once we 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 now? (if you need some help on this one consider 1 John 1:9, Ephesians 4:22-24, Philippians 2:4 in regard to the other people in traffic.)

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

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