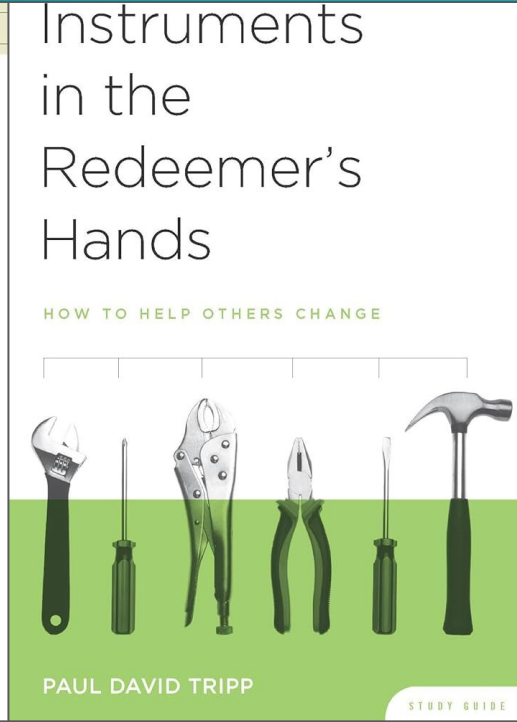
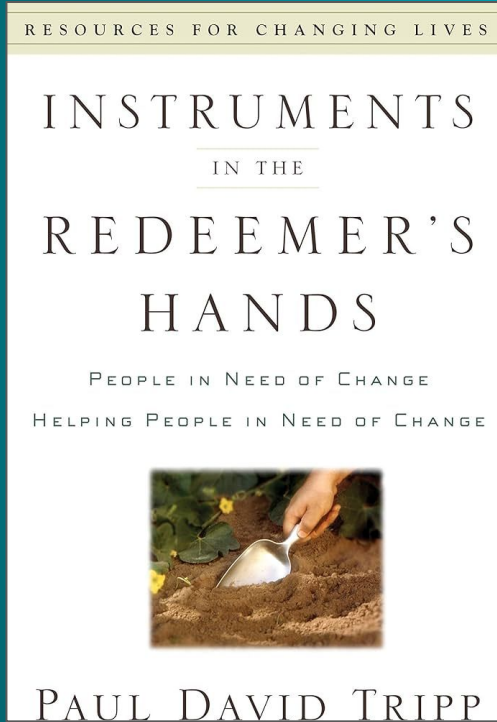


The Heart is the Target

Understanding Your Heart Struggle

Source Material & Key Disclaimer



Lesson Content Additional Influential Resources:

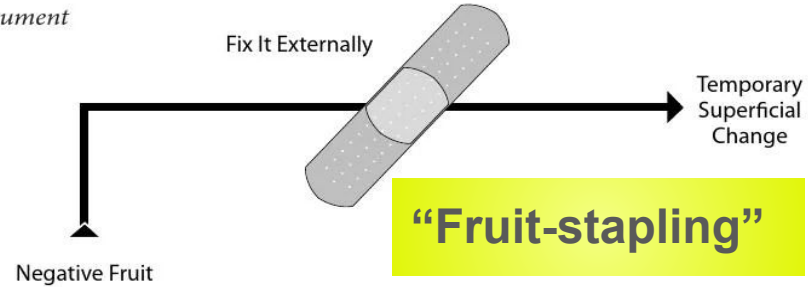
- *When I Don't Desire God: A Personalized Related to Others*
- *How to Fight for Joy*, by John Piper

Big Question *The Power of a New Affection*, by Thomas Haller

Make it Real

What is your **BIGGEST** problem?

Figure 4-1.
*Serving as an Instrument
of Change*



Matthew 12:43-45

External efforts are **only effective temporarily** and **often result in worse outcomes later in life.**

Amos 5:18-19

Parallel passages:
Is 24:18 & Jer 48:44

External efforts are unable to avoid the short and long-term consequences of a just God because they are unable to make one right with God.

Ezekiel 14:1-5

Heart idolatry puts wicked stumbling blocks before our faces. Until the idol is removed, it will distort and obscure everything else in a person's life. This is the principle of **inescapable influence**. Whatever rules the heart will exercise inescapable influence over the person's life and behavior.

What is your **BIGGEST** problem?

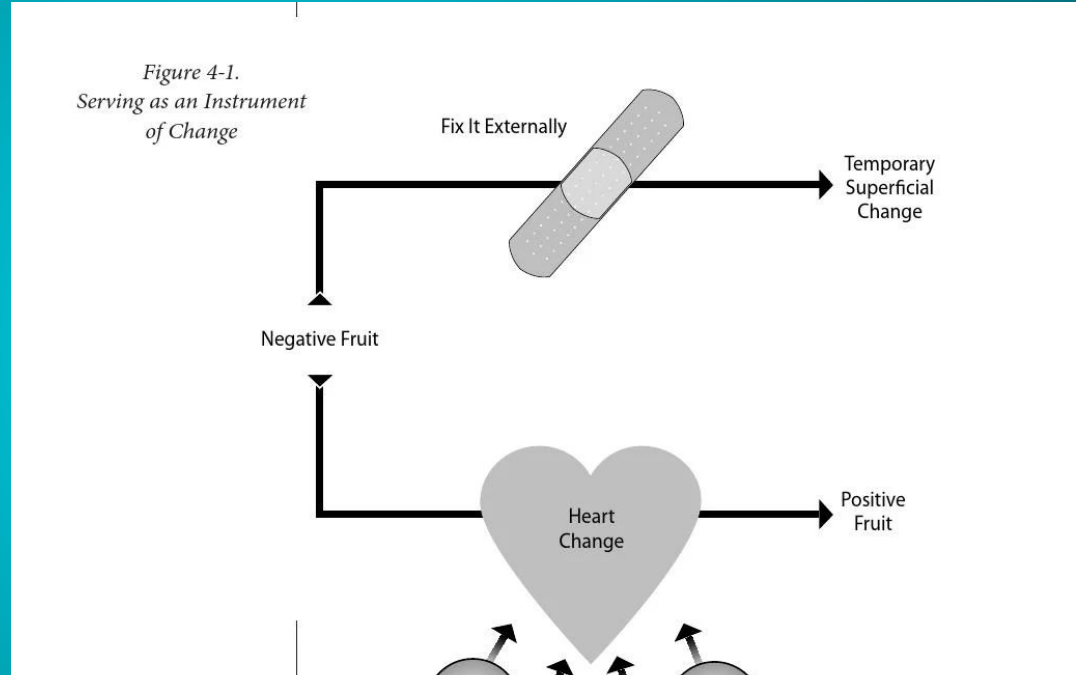
Matthew 12:33-37

Matthew 23:25-26

Proverbs 9:8

People and situations do
not determine our
behavior...

They provide the occasion
where **our behavior**
reveals our hearts.



Part 1 CPR

- External efforts and DIY projects to address our greatest needs and problems DO NOT produce:
 - **Sustained** change
 - **Surpassing** benefits
 - Ultimate **Solutions**.
- There is an undeniable root and fruit connection between our heart and our behavior.
 - Whatever rules the heart exercises **inescapable influence** over life and behavior.
Your heart is always ruled by something.
 - Lasting change always takes place through the pathway of the heart. Fruit change is the result of root change. Any agenda for change must focus on the **thoughts and desires of the heart**.
- Therefore, the heart is our target in personal growth and ministry. Our prayer is that God will work heart change in us and use us to produce heart change in others that results in new words, choices, and actions.

Discussion Questions:

Give some examples (good or bad) of your heart overflowing in your words and deeds.

What kind of “fruit stapling” have you tried?

When has a change of heart produced significant, lasting fruit in your life?

Examples of Heart-Revealing Questions

How do I choose to spend my leisure time?

How do I choose to spend my discretionary money?

What do I fear? What makes me happy? What makes me upset?

In what way have I been recently convicted to repent or encouraged to grow at the heart level through God's Word?

Do I frequently ask God for a pure heart? What idolatrous heart desires am I currently asking God to remove?

Do I attempt to manipulate or control the behavior of others? Do I ask for patience, leaving room for God to work lasting change in their hearts?

Part 2: Understanding Your Heart Struggle (**James 4:1-10**)

Where does conflict originate?

What aspect of our heart does James draw our attention to?

Desire makes you work with discipline to get one thing done, and run as hard as you can to avoid another.

Note that James does not say it is *wrong* to desire. God is a God of purpose and desire, and desire is one way our design mirrors God. Here we are much closer to him than we are to the rest of creation, which either functions by instinct or by biochemical processes...Notice also that James does not place the word “evil” before the word “desire.”

Our sin nature causes what to constantly happen in our heart?

Our Heart: the **BATTLEGROUND** of **Competing Desires**

We rarely do anything with one simple motive. Most of the time there is a battle between competing desires within (good vs bad, Creator vs creation).

Wars are conflicts for **control**. Desires wage war between one another in order to control our heart. Different desires win at different times and different situations, but whatever controls our heart will exercise inescapable influence over our lives and behavior.

For example: I've been at work for ten hours. Half the time I was outside monitoring, coaching, playing with students. Now I'm in the car, heading home. What are examples of legitimate desires that might battle within my heart on the way home?

How are our hearts captured by (mostly) good desires?

The **CAPTURE** of our Heart: How Desires Take Control

Phase/Language/Brief Description

1. Desire: “I want.” Nothing necessarily wrong here.
2. Demand: “I must (/not) have...” The internal value assessment where my heart chooses to demand this thing of God and/or doubt His goodness.
3. Need: “I will.” A **devastating, self-destructive step** in the process. Now seen as essential; therefore, it is necessary to act upon when possible.
4. Expectation: “You should.” This is where **my relationships begin to be affected**. If this is a need, then it seems right to expect that you will meet my need if you really love me.
5. Disappointment: “You didn’t!” Here the **anger breaks out** and becomes personal. You are standing in the way of what rules my heart.
6. Punishment: “Because you didn’t, I will...” I respond to you in anger (**silent treatment, hurtful words, vengeance or violence**, etc.).

The **CAPTURE** of our Heart: Return to the Example

Assume: My desire for rest and comfort has reached phase 3, is fighting for phase 4 and occasionally scrimmaging for phases 5-6. I tend to look for rest and comfort through: food, quiet, reading and watching soccer or news videos. What is likely to occur either on my way home or that evening after I arrive?

How do I ...

Avoid these fruits ...

By resisting at a heart level ...

In a God honoring way that produces lasting change?

Part 3: **Trusting & Obeying God** in the Struggle for our Heart

Vital, gospel truths from James 4:

- God is a **jealous God** who competes for (and will win) controlling influence over the hearts of His people.
- God calls us to submissive, mourning (aka heart-level) **repentance**.
- **God promises to draw near and give more grace** to humble, repentant sinners.
- God calls us to both **external** (cleanse your hands) and **internal** (purify your hearts) **obedience**.

What does the word “purity” mean?

Galatians 5:13-26

One of two **foundational lifestyles WILL** shape our life: **EITHER** indulging the sinful nature **OR** self-sacrificing love.

What does it mean to “not indulge the sinful nature”?

- Fight it! Stop feeding it.
- Doubt its claims and examine them in light of the scripture. Do not accept its assertions and offers.
- Provide no safe spaces for it
- Fight with gutsy guilt = “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” Be killing it.

Three Reminders & an Exciting Opportunity in Sanctification

1. One application from the **Unity of the Trinity** teaches us that ALL THREE PERSONS of God are equally committed to the redemptive plan (chose, called, justified, and glorified).
2. **The desires of the Spirit are AGAINST the flesh.** Because Christ sends His Helper to His People, we have God's very Spirit IN US, AT WAR with our greatest enemy.
3. The success of the Spirit is certain. In **pride** we can **overlook** the Spirit, and in **weakness** we can **underestimate** the Spirit, but the fact is that for every Christian the Spirit is in us and WILL succeed!

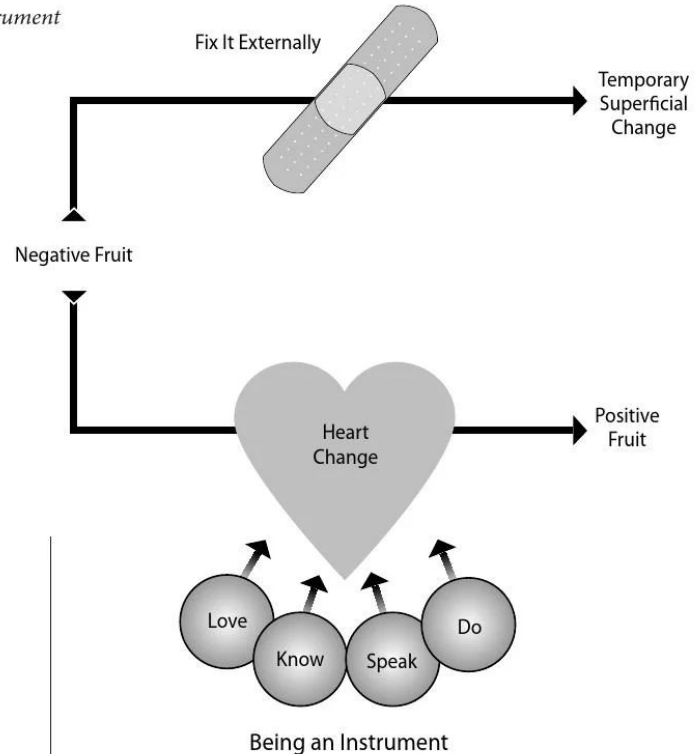
Unlike earlier phases of our salvation, which we contribute nothing but sin to, God designed sanctification to include our walking with Him as He completes the good work He began. **Keep in step with the Spirit!**

Reflection Questions

Are the relationships in my life **marked by demands or service**?

Do I **rest** upon my identity in Christ, **rely** on the indwelling Holy Spirit, and **remind** others of these same truths as we wrestle at the heart level to not indulge the sinful nature?

Figure 4-1.
Serving as an Instrument
of Change



Concluding Gospel Reminders

Being a sinner, having a heart struggle does not incapacitate you for *practical, spiritually significant service*.

- Examine your heart. Are you fighting the battle (with faith in Christ and the help of the Spirit) to live a foundational lifestyle of self-sacrificing love?
- If not, humbly submit and confess. Draw near to God for grace. Trust His promises.
- If so, then remember the subtitle: *People in need of change helping people in need of change*. God sovereignly chose that the only sinless human to help us would be Jesus Christ. All of our other human help comes through sinner-saints (and even sinners). We're called to depend upon Him for our own help while pointing others to Him as well.

Remind yourself (frequently) of the **Unity of the Trinity** and the golden chain of salvation (Romans 8:29-30).

Concluding Discussion

What are other heart diagnosing questions that you ask yourself or have asked others?

What has been a key passage(s) in your fight for faith and heart-level obedience?

Oh Great God

Oh Great God of highest heaven	I was blinded by my sin	Help me now to live a life
Occupy my lowly heart	Had no ears to hear Your voice	That's dependent on Your grace
Own it all and reign supreme	Did not know Your love within	Keep my heart and guard my soul
Conquer every rebel part	Had no taste for heaven's joys	From the evils that I face
Let no vice or sin remain	Then Your Spirit gave me life	You are worthy to be praised
That resists Your holy war	Opened up Your Word to me	With my every thought and deed
You have loved and purchased me	Through the Gospel of Your Son	Oh Great God of highest heaven
Make me Yours forevermore.	Gave me endless hope and peace!	Glorify Your name through me!