

HEART WORK

Some of the harshest words that Jesus ever had for people were when correcting religious hypocrisy. He labored hard to help us understand that the gospel was not aimed at behavior, but it was aimed at hearts. When our relationship with Jesus is only focused on behavior, we can fall into the hypocrisy of appearing to have things together on the outside, but having hearts filled with unrighteousness on the inside. When we are discipling others, we want to make sure we are not focusing only on their behavior. We need to be trying to do the hard work of helping them learn to assess what is going on in their hearts and lean on the power of the Gospel to change.

Read Mark 7:14-23

Jesus says that the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. So it does us no good to focus on modifying people's behaviors with restrictions and rules.

Read Colossians 2:20-23

External pressures have no effect on the indulgence of the flesh

Read Mark 10:17-22

When asked about external commands, the rich young ruler "thought" he was righteous. But when asked to give up all he possessed, the true allegiance of his heart was exposed.

Discuss: Would you consider yourself to be a "deep" or "surface level" person? Why

Our aim

Sin is like an iceberg. There is only about 10% that you are able to see, the majority of its mass is buried beneath the surface. Our aim in helping people overcome sin cannot be surface level and it cannot be a quick fix.

We have to be willing to

1. Walk through messy situations with them.
2. Help them think about the real issues.

One of the first questions we should learn to ask is, "What is it that you are believing this action will give you apart from God and His word?" Things like control, comfort, significance, and pleasure are at the root of what we are desiring to find in our sin. We are choosing to believe that these things satisfy more than God. (Romans 1:25)

As you have identified where the root issues are, find specific scripture where God shows how His design, not our desires, is better for us. Allow God's word to replace the lie we believe with the truth we should want. (John 8:31-32) (John 17:17)

Example - if a brother or sister is struggling with gossip, we may need to help them see their problem of significance. For in a desire to be great, they put others down with their words, to lift themselves up. Or if they struggle with anger and speak negatively about others, they may need to see that they have a problem with not being in control of each and every situation.

Discuss: Can you think of other examples of this?

Our power

The same gospel that saves us also transforms and shapes us into the image of Jesus. We never graduate from our need of

the gospel. As we allow the gospel to work into our hearts, those root issues are replaced with new desires leading to new actions.

Read Ez. 36:26-27, 2 Cor. 3:12-18

The gospel reminds us that God's character and design is perfect. That we are weak and miss His design, yet by His grace and the sacrifice of His Son, we are accepted. The gospel also reminds us that through repenting and trusting in the presence and power of His resurrection life we can be healed.

Remind your disciples to confront their wrong desires with the perspective of the gospel.

We can give people some questions to learn to preach the gospel to themselves. Not only should they remind themselves of these gospel truths, but they should exhort themselves to believe them.

1. What is true about God and His design for this issue?
2. Can I admit that my desires are wrong and fall short of God's design?
3. Am I accepted, loved, and healed by the blood of Jesus?
4. How will I apply God's grace, and change?

Our weapons

Since doing heart work is a supernatural work, we must realize that only the Holy Spirit of God can change someone's heart. This means that our weapons cannot be of the flesh, but divinely powerful. (2 Cor. 10:3-6)

The Scriptures

As mentioned before, we need to replace the lie we are believing with truth from God's word. When helping someone through heart issues, always give them scriptures to confront wrong desires and emotions with truth.

Read the scriptures and meditate on the core truths of the gospel. We should learn to read scripture and meditate on truth every day. (Meditation can be a series of questions from the passage you are reading, "*What does this teach me about God, myself/sin, Jesus, and how I should respond in the world?*")

Prayer

Only by passionately pleading with God to open our disciple's hearts to believe the truth, will they ever be changed by what we say to them. (Matthew 26:41)

We must pray fervently for this person, also stressing to them the importance of praying for their own deliverance.

Discuss: What are the barriers to focusing on the heart in Christian living?

Can you describe a time in your life when you focused more on behavioral change only to continually struggle?

What changes would you need to make in your own life and ministering to others to aim at heart issues?

Pray

Ask God to give us power over our strongholds by changing our hearts through the word and prayer.