

GTC – Directing the Heart with Routine – NOTES

The connection between heart/feelings and ritual/routine

- It is commonly overlooked that the words of the prophets or Jesus did not criticize ritual or routine, but rather when those activities are done with an empty/no heart behind them

Often the most endangering part of discipleship (more than bad doctrine or theological errors) is a misunderstanding of how the heart works...

1. Western thinking (enlightenment influenced), especially, believes there is a source of truth or clarity deep within heart that needs to be found
OR
2. Conversely, most Christians believe the heart is only deceptively wicked (.)

It is true that the heart is not a good leader and is prone to lead you astray. However, the common Christian response is lacking full truth because if the human heart is only wicked, then God created humans faulty.

- Adam & Eve had emotions in the Garden
- Emotions have an ability to do something in your favor, even in favor of eternal life, that nothing else has/can play that role in you
 - To have encouragement or endurance are emotional heart responses where your heart can count the cost and you feel the strength and motivation to do something
 - It is not automatic that your heart feels strengthen or encouraged to do something no matter how much you value what you want to do
 - Heart is like a car.... Can get you where you want to go, if you know how to direct/steer/use it. However, if you cannot harness the power of a car, it will go in a ditch. Like your emotions, if you can harness them, they will help to guide you in a particular direction

How does the bible indicate that our actions should actually direct our emotions rather than our feelings?

[James 3:2-6 NASB] 2 For we all stumble in many [ways.] If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. 3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. 4 Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. 5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and [yet] it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, the [very] world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of [our] life, and is set on fire by hell.

- The tongue can become the steering agent that moves or strengthens your heart in a particular direction....
 - Negatively: slander, outbursts of wrath (anger), self-pity
 - Positive: prayer, corporate worship, sharing Gospel

While it is important to understand and acknowledge we don't make decisions based on what/how we feel, it is also short-sighted to think that endurance and perseverance (long-term consistency) in doing what is right is possible without our hearts and emotions getting involved.

Therefore, the main question is: HOW DO WE STEER OUR HEARTS TO LOVE WHAT IS GOOD?

[Psalm 1:1-2 NASB] 1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

- The word translated for “love” usually has connotations of commitment/action
- “delight” however is referring to sense of enjoyment
 - v1 – what a blessed man does not do
 - v2 – how does he accomplish v1? By meditation day and night on God's Torah which produces delight (action/routine produces emotion of delight – which is not a normal human emotion to delight in God's instruction)

[Jer 16:11 NASB] 11 "Then you are to say to them, '[It is] because your forefathers have forsaken Me,' declares the LORD, 'and have followed other gods and served them and bowed down to them; but Me they have forsaken and have not kept My law.

- Talmudic conversation regarding 1.) abandoning YHWH, and 2.) abandoning Torah
 - “For if they had abandoned me and yet kept the Torah, then the starter dough that is in it [the Torah] would have brought them back to me eventually”
 - Thought was that the ritual of obedience would have brought them back to God even if they had abandoned him in their heart
 - Speaks to the value of ritual/routine – even when absent of heart
 - Personal thought: This seems to reflect some of Paul's line of thought here [Gal 3:24 NET] 24 Thus the law had become our guardian until Christ, so that we could be declared righteous by faith.

“Emotion or love can actually be generated, but not directly. It is generated through the regular reflection on the story of the relationship of God and Israel and the continual recitation and ritualized remembering of the words of His revelation in the context of a social group who are explicitly committed to those activities. For as it is well known among social psychologists, behaviors can generate and define emotion – and behaviors, good and bad, are to a significant degree learned in the social culture in which we find ourselves” – Jon D. Levenson

- This illustrates [in part] how the Jewish people/faith (via God's instruction/torah) in one form or another been maintained and sustained since Abraham

- How? via expert systematizing of rituals that have kept whole families that had no access of the Torah for thousands of years. Those rituals eventually generate love for the things God loves
- Ritual/routine seems analogous to common notion that ritual is dead in favor of relationship to God. However, they can [and should] work together
 - Ritual/routine helps bridge the gap between the volatility of life's ups and downs.
 - We generally plan for the ups and panic during the downs – but consistent routine can mitigate the downs while also steering our emotions in to affectionate relationship with God as we take hold of the Grace of God
- To the degree of our participation in a community that consistently strengthens and encourages Godly routines that have been proven to sustain the heart, we can actually neutralize or minimize those valley/spiritually dry seasons and lay hold of God's grace within them

What are some positive routines generally engender love for God and the Gospel over time?

1. Regular fasting (to humble yourself before God to submit your will to His)
2. Jewish Prayers / Regularly praying (liturgical and charismatic)
3. Corporate worship (especially immersed in the Hope of age to come)

Summary: You don't have to allow your emotions to dictate how or if you behave. Yet your emotions are not a mistake and they can be harnessed to bring much needed encouragement and strength along the way

Three Potential areas of resistance to routines directing the heart

1. We often grow up being resistant to doing things that we don't feeling like doing (not to be confused with not doing things that we shouldn't do)
 - a. Generally we lack strength to do what is right, rather than not doing what is wrong
 - b. Like a seed (when God initially gives you strength for repentance), it needs to be cultivated or that seed will not bear fruit/die – especially in the wintertime
 - i. Must be convinced that the cultivating is beneficial
 - ii. Cotton candy – that which brings you immediate happiness can't be sustained long term
 - iii. Settle on what is good, beneficial, profitable for sustaining strength in godliness and be resolute in follow through (with heart to humble yourself before God)

[1Ti 4:8 NASB] 8 for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and [also] for the [life] to come.

2. Lack of vision to persevere through difficult trials/times
 - a. Rare in our culture to encounter pain and injustice where we have to endure through it and deal with it
 - b. Not "being a better Christian," but rather being PREPARED
3. Inability to disengage (or repent) from patterns or habits that steer our heart negatively (even not inherently sinful patterns)

- a. Isolation, seclusion, easily angered, diet, etc. (eg. Living according to the flesh)
- b. Sermon on the Mount
 - i. Positive: pray for enemies, generosity, absorbing persecution
 - ii. Negative: bitterness, retaliation, lashing out in anger, lust, greed
 - 1. Inadvertent cultivation of hard-heartedness and self centeredness that is incompatible with the Kingdom of God will lead to exclusion

[Mat 7:22-23 NASB] 22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'