

Holy Love

Jesus' Legacy, Our Destiny



VINEYARD
Church of Elgin

I don't think God thinks much about what we think about love. We have done a fine job of distorting the purity, commitment and endurance that he initially built into "love." Since God is love, and since we are made in his image, our destiny is also to become love just like him. But, where is this Holy Love? I don't see it. I don't feel it.

Jesus taught us, "The Kingdom of God is near..." and so is his Holy Love. In fact, Holy Love is the currency of his kingdom; it is what makes good things happen. As we will discover, to find Holy Love is to become Holy Love. Yet, finding and becoming Holy Love is a grace, not an achievement. It happens in us only by surrender to and cooperation with the miracle of "Christ in you." And, once received, it will last only as long as we give it away, like a photon of light that exists only if it is moving.

Let's get rich together in Holy Love. All other investments will fail. Let's set our hearts to find and become lighthouses of Holy Love—what we are divinely destined to be.

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Introduction

Love is the most beautiful, most powerful and most misunderstood entity on earth. Christian literature and tradition attach descriptors to God's love such as "unconditional" or even *agape* (the Greek word for God's love). Though helpful, these traditional descriptors have fallen short in my personal quest of exploring the unfathomable love of God for me. Perhaps it is just me, and I am ashamed to admit this, but "unconditional" and *agape* have failed to bring me to my knees in adoration and gratitude to the King of the Universe for his over-the-top unfailing love. Maybe they are just too familiar. Whatever. They don't carry the full weight of God's love for me.

Webster calls love an "intense affection." But love, real love, abiding love, sacrificial love, is so much more than an emotion, even a strong one. Pure love is Holy. Just as the piercing power of a laser light has no comparison to natural light, so the purity of Holy Love has no comparison in the realm of human affection. By introducing the idea of Holy Love,¹ we are separating the many lesser uses of the word "love" from the unique and expansive love that comes to us from God alone.

We can love ice cream. We can love our new car. We can even love our family. But, none of these "loves" comes close to the kind of love we receive from a holy and glorious God. In fact, the use of the word "love" in any of these contexts is deeply anemic (even blasphemous) when compared to the sacred love of

¹ I am indebted to John Wesley for coining the term "Holy Love" as a way of differentiating divine love from all other.

God. So, my hope here is to discover what does work: a description of love that will connect my heart with the King of the Universe. Let's try to bring definition to Holy Love. It is way too priceless and compelling to miss.

This booklet is about the pursuit of Holy Love: not just to experience it from the hand of God for yourself (which of course is where we must begin), but also the infusion of it into your very being such that you supernaturally exude the same love for others that God continuously extends to you.

*"... and forceful men lay hold of it."*² Transformation from earthly love to Holy Love will never be found by the timid. The humble, yes; the timid, no. That is how the Kingdom of God works—here, now, in this life, taking it in and passing it forward. Like breathing in and breathing out. Stop breathing and you stop living. Stop the flow of Holy Love and life itself will stop.

One final comment before we begin: I am not the expert on Holy Love. In truth, it is somewhat presumptuous of me to take this topic on. I would not have made this attempt except that these thoughts have been burning in my bones for the past several years. What am I to do with them? What follows is really a window into my own soul as God's Spirit has been working in me. He has placed in my heart a glistening vision of why he created us in the first place, how dearly loved we are and how we can still fulfill our divine destiny in spite of our frail and flawed nature. Please read these notes as from a fellow pilgrim and not from someone who has already arrived. Like Paul said,

²Note: All quoted scriptures are NIV unless otherwise noted.
Jn. 11:12b

“I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be.”³

Part 1: Finding Holy Love

1. Holy Love

What Is It Like?

Holy Love is powerful and intimate:

“...as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench [Holy]love; rivers cannot wash it away.”⁴ “It is intimate like the relationship of those who are betrothed. God betroths us in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion.”⁵

Holy Love is compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient.⁶

Holy Love is intensely relational and reciprocal:

- *“We love because he first loved us.”⁷*
- Holy Love fills us with joy and eternal pleasures while in the presence of our lover.⁸

³ Phil 3:12 NLT

⁴ Song of Sol. 8:6-7

⁵ Hos 2:19

⁶ Col. 3:12

⁷ 1 Jn. 4:19

⁸ Ps. 16:11

- Separation brings deep yearning to the soul.⁹ This is why God promised to never leave us nor forsake us,¹⁰ and why Jesus promised to be with us always¹¹... not just because he knows the anxiety, pain and weakness we would experience if he withdrew his Holy Love from us, but because his own Spirit deeply longs for us as well!

Holy Love originates in, and flows from, the heart of God:

- *“It is patient and kind; does not envy or boast; is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. [Holy]Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”*¹²
- It is a joyful love.

*“The Lord will take delight in you ... as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.”*¹³ *“He will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.”*¹⁴

Holy Love goes the second mile¹⁵ without being asked.

Holy Love cares and prays for those who are unkind to them.¹⁶

⁹ Isa 26:9

¹⁰ Deut 31:8

¹¹ Matt. 28:20

¹² 1 Cor. 13:4-7

¹³ Is. 62:4-5

¹⁴ Zeph 3:17

¹⁵ Matt. 5:41

¹⁶ Matt. 5:44

Holy Love is transformational. Only Holy Love can pray this prayer that comes from the Jesuit Prayer Book.

“O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, Hear me.

From the desire of being praised, Deliver me, O Jesus.

From the desire of being preferred to others...

From the desire of being consulted...

From the desire of being approved, Deliver me O Jesus.

From the fear of being forgotten ...

From the fear of being ridiculed ...

From the fear of being wronged ...

From the fear of being suspected, Deliver me, O Jesus.

That others may be loved more than I,

Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

That others may be esteemed more than I ...

That, in the opinion of the world, others may increase and

I may decrease, Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

That others may be chosen and I set aside ...

That others may be praised and I go unnoticed ...

That others may become holier than I, provided that I

may become as holy as I should,

Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.”

Holy Love is so much more than “intense affection.” If the above descriptions weren’t in Scripture, coming from the heart of our Father, I could only conclude that this Holy Love is theory or

fiction, too good to be true. But it is true! It is truer than all the lies the enemy plants in our hearts that cause us to doubt the goodness of the One who loves us perfectly and passionately.

What Is It Not?

Regardless of the best of intentions, man can never produce the kind of love for another that God has demonstrated to us.¹⁷ At best, the world's kind of love is a trade: "I will love you as long as you don't disappoint me." It is conditional on our performance. At some point in time the disappointment comes, the expectation of entitlement is breached, and the fragile flame of human love flickers, threatening to extinguish.¹⁸ We see this tragedy happen way too often between friends and in marriages.

Unconditional?

Holy Love is unforced, unearned and unconditional.

*"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*¹⁹

"Unconditional" means that God's love is available to us in whatever state of disrepair it finds us, no strings attached. It is ours to receive ... or not, based only on his goodness, not ours. "Unconditional" does not mean that we receive the benefits of

¹⁷ 1 Jn 4:7-10

¹⁸ This may help explain why materialism is so prevalent in our culture. As our attachments to people disappoint our expectations, we unconsciously shift our attachments to things. Things ultimately disappoint as well, but generally not as spectacularly as people whose love for us turns out to be fickle.

¹⁹ Rom. 5:8

God's Holy Love while rejecting his person. God and his love are inseparable; "*God is love.*"²⁰

So Holy Love, though unconditional in its offering, actually does have conditions for receiving its benefits. For example, no love (holy or otherwise) can survive without trust. Scripture states that, "*without faith [trust] it is impossible to please God.*"²¹ Trust is not optional in any love relationship.

Love is an attachment: the ultimate attachment. The impurity of distrust dissolves the glue of this attachment. That is why forgiveness between people who love each other and the faithful honoring of each other is so important. Love (the agent of unity) cannot survive persistent distrust or dishonor.

Holy Love is also conditional on us "*remaining in his love.*"²² Jesus said,

*"... apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."*²³

So, here is the conditional nature of Holy Love: we can choose to remain in his Holy Love, or we can choose to detach and fall away. He has promised to NEVER detach from us, but we do have the option through our free will to detach from him. By its very nature, Holy Love is voluntary and unforced.

²⁰ 1 Jn. 4:16

²¹ Heb. 11:6

²² Jn. 15:9

²³ Jn. 15:5-6

Relational and Reciprocal

Holy Love is relational, requiring community; it cannot exist alone. Even God himself is Trinity. It takes two or more willing participants to practice and experience Holy Love.

That is why Holy Love must also be reciprocal, two-way. Ponder what Paul taught:

“Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness.”²⁴ (emphasis mine)

Bottom line: Holy Love flows to us and through us only to the extent that we *“remain in his love.”*²⁵ We must be active, reciprocating participants for his Holy Love to remain in us. There is no such thing as a passive recipient of Holy Love. We can embrace it, infusing it into our very soul, forming and feeding our new nature. Or we can ignore it through disbelief and pride. In this case, our old dead nature remains with no hope of life.

“This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life....”²⁶

²⁴ Rom. 11:22

²⁵ Jn. 15:9

²⁶ Deut. 30:19-20

To Be Passed Forward

There is no stronger word, force or person in our universe than Holy Love. This love is not offered to us as a massive dose of grace from our Father to be hoarded for our own blessing and benefit alone. If we actually receive it in the spirit in which it is offered, our hearts will be transformed into clear and powerful lighthouses, beaming this life-giving light to everyone within our spheres of influence.

In fact, light provides a really good analogy for Holy Love. The basic unit of light is a photon. Photons are tiny “particles” that have no mass. They were the first and most fundamental element of creation spoken into existence by God. There is much that could be said about these mysterious bits of energy that streak across the universe, informing us of faraway places. But the characteristic of the photon that I want to highlight is that it cannot sit still. You cannot place a photon in a test tube for examination. If it isn’t traveling at the speed of light, it ceases to exist. The same is true of Holy Love. If you receive it for yourself and try to hoard it, it will cease being Holy Love. By its nature, it must be passed forward or it is no longer Holy Love.

Like a holy virus, we become transmitters of grace, truth and Holy Love. This virus actually alters our spiritual DNA (new creation) in ways that cause us to respond to pain, suffering and loss way differently than before. It changes our desires so they align with the desires of God’s heart. It changes our natural reflexes (responses that come instantly, without thought) so that we readily exhibit God’s character and kingdom in all

circumstances. John (the disciple Jesus loved) has a lot to say about God's Holy Love in us.

“Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love has been brought to full expression through us. And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us ... God is love and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect.... We love each other as a result of his loving us first.”²⁷

There it is. “*God lives in us, and his (Holy) Love has been brought to full expression through us.*” Because of God's over-the-top grace, you and I are in a position to actually complete the marvelous expression of his Holy Love in this life, in this world. We get to pass it forward! And, in passing it along, it grows to completion! No one could make this stuff up. As C.S. Lewis said (I paraphrase): This gospel is either lunacy or it is true. But no one can just sit back and say, “Oh, that's nice; good words from a good teacher.”

How Do I Get There?

Any and every thinking person is challenged to decide their personal response to the veracity of this message. If you have made it this far in this narrative, the next question you may have is, “How on earth do I get there (that is, becoming a brilliant and

²⁷ 1 Jn. 4:11-13, 16b-17a, 19 (NLT)

faithful lighthouse of Holy Love) from where I am right now? I want it, but I have no clue what next step to take.”

As we will see, it all begins and ends with our heart. But first we need to understand something about our nature: the “script” that we follow as everyday events impact the flow of our lives. And then we’ll be able to better understand the part our heart plays.

2. Our Nature: The Script We Follow

It Was Good

In the beginning, we were created in goodness (God said that it was good),²⁸ we were given the capacity to commune with God (through our spirit), and we were given the ability to receive, reciprocate and pass on his Holy Love. Our nature was like a micro-facet of God’s nature; we were created in his very image. Our nature was a beautiful extension of his. That is why he could entrust us with managing his brand-new world, swarming with life and beauty.²⁹ However, free will was a necessary (yet risky) aspect of the unforced Holy Love that bathed our early existence.

Then It Wasn’t

We all know the story: before long, our free will chose poorly, and we (both mankind and God) have paid a heavy price ever since. By choosing to place self-advancement above honoring him, we broke the unity of love that cemented our hearts to his. For the first time we saw ourselves as something separate from (and in competition with) Creator God. Our eyes shifted from

²⁸ Gen. 1:31

²⁹ Gen. 2:15-20

him and his agenda of life to our self and our agenda of death. The part of us created to commune with him (our spirit) is what shriveled and died that day. But our spirit isn't the only thing that took a direct hit. As our spirit goes, so goes our nature; dead spirit, dead nature.

So, what does a dead nature look like?

“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.... Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.... Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.”³⁰

So, all this nastiness is what God was trying to save us from experiencing by giving us the “fruit rule” in the garden. Yet I’m not so sure that, had we known the deadly details of this all along, we wouldn’t have made the same fatal choice as did our first father and mother. Paul ends this lurid list by stating,

³⁰ Rom 1:21-22,24,28-31

“Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.”³¹

Culture Of Death

Sure sounds like a culture of death. No wonder Jeremiah declared,

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”³²

Death has become our new normal. We have traded life for the knowledge of evil. This kind of “knowledge” is not just knowing about evil. It is knowing evil as in living in its grip, both in our own souls as well as in our surrounding society. Our dead natures have traded the garden of life for a desert of death.

This would be a great point in our story to launch into the beauty of the gospel message and its liberating power. But our purpose here is to understand something about our human “nature.” I’m trying to make the point that as offspring of Adam and Eve, we each start life with a spirit that is dead. Even our darling children display the rotten fruit of a shriveled spirit. That most powerful word, “NO!” is quickly learned and freely wielded by these little people in a desperate attempt to be in charge ... just like Adam and Eve. Just like you and me in our weak or unguarded moments.

³¹ Rom 1:32

³² Jer. 17:9

Managing Sin

Here's what happens in our culture-of-death world. As we each grow up, we soon learn that we seldom get the outcomes we are looking for by fighting authority with our resounding "NO!" Instead, we learn to manipulate, flatter, please or maybe even lie in order to get what we want. Our "NO!" is still there, but just a bit more sophisticated. We still work hard to get what we want, but we learn to do it in a more civil, socially acceptable manner. We may even "evolve" to the point of exchanging favors with another—a form of business transaction where we negotiate skillfully for what we want, giving away only what is absolutely required in the process. It has always been and continues to be all about me, whether I admit it or not.

Even as Christians, we swim in these murky cultural waters of give-and-take compromise. And as Christians we often fool ourselves into thinking that by behaving well (most of the time) we are demonstrating our maturity and our "Christ-likeness" to a watching world. Yet, too often, we slip up and something gets under our skin or catches us by surprise. When that happens, something less attractive comes out of us that we had no intention of releasing: hurtful words, hateful or obscene behavior or worse. Where does this ugly stuff come from that sabotages our carefully manicured persona? And why can't we control it better? Let's look at our cranial "command and control" center that manifests the person that we are.

3. Our Double-Minded Brain

Brain science has made great progress in the past several decades in understanding the functioning of this mysterious organ. This understanding is not just about what things happen in what areas of the brain, but also how different areas of the brain interact to provide the complex output we recognize as the person—their speech, their mannerisms, their behavior, their personality and their nature.

In no way am I trying to position myself as an expert on brain science or even human behavioral or psychological issues. There are brilliant people who have dedicated their lives to faithfully studying these complex areas of human life. My objective here is only to observe and reflect on bits of what they have discovered.

³³ Some of these discoveries are highly helpful in our understanding of our own selves as we struggle forward and upward in our individual faith journeys. Bear with me a bit as we divert into the mechanics of our brain. The value of this rabbit trail will be evident as we emerge out of the other end of this gray, convoluted tunnel.

Two Brains

The human brain is extremely complex, no doubt. Multiple areas in the brain—not just one—get involved in most mental processing activities, yet, there is normally a center of activity that coordinates this broader processing. It is this center of activity that I will be referring to as we proceed to track brain

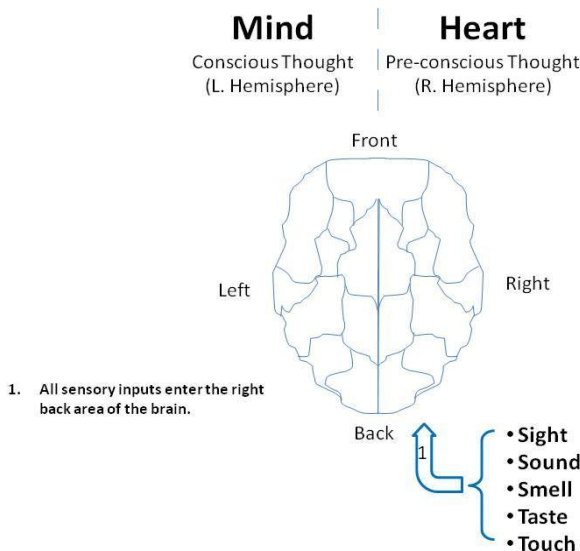
³³ James Wilder has co-authored several helpful books applying brain science to the Christian life: *Living From The Heart Jesus Gave You* (Shepherd's House Inc, 2004), *Joy Starts Here* (Life Model Works, 2013), *The Other Half of Church* (Moody Publishers, 2020)

processes that develop and impact what we think of as our “nature.” For example, we have known for some time that the left hemisphere of our brain is largely responsible for logical thinking and reasoning. The right hemisphere is largely responsible for intuitive and creative work. We are often quick to categorize individuals as either “left brain” or “right brain” people.

However, for most brain processes to be successful, the whole brain must get involved, especially when it comes to behavior and character development. So, let’s move beyond categories and understand something more about our own process of change and growth.

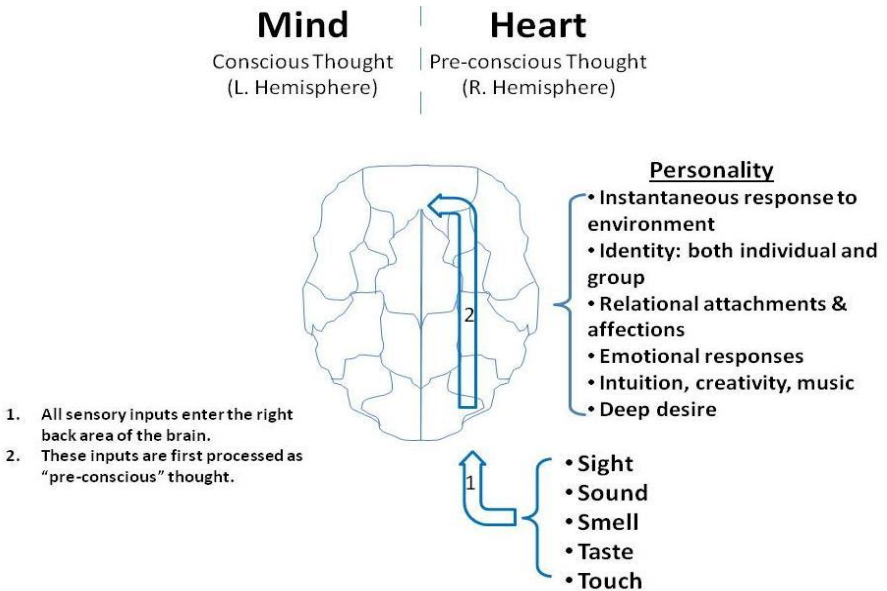
Unconscious Brain

Here is a top-view diagram of the brain. What is interesting is that all sensory input from our eyes, ears, etc., enter the brain stem at the rear of the brain, and processing of these signals begins in the right rear sector.



The entire right side of the brain processes things pre-consciously (unconsciously). Scientists estimate that 90–95% of our brain processing is unconscious! That means that we are unaware of most of our processing.

Now, the fact that all of our sensory input begins processing in this subconscious area means that our minds can draw conclusions or take action on sensory input before we are even aware of that perception. For example, reflexive action from touching a hot stove is really handy for self-preservation. Or, hearing a loud noise can get us moving even before we have a clue about what it is or where it came from. Sometimes the response of jumping or jerking away is embarrassing once we find that the noise or sensation was from something harmless.



Source: "The Other Half of Church," Jim Wilder, Michel Hendricks, Moody Publishers, 2020 (unless noted otherwise)

Yet, there it is. We call this response “reflex.” These pre-conscious reflexes come from the right hemisphere of the brain.

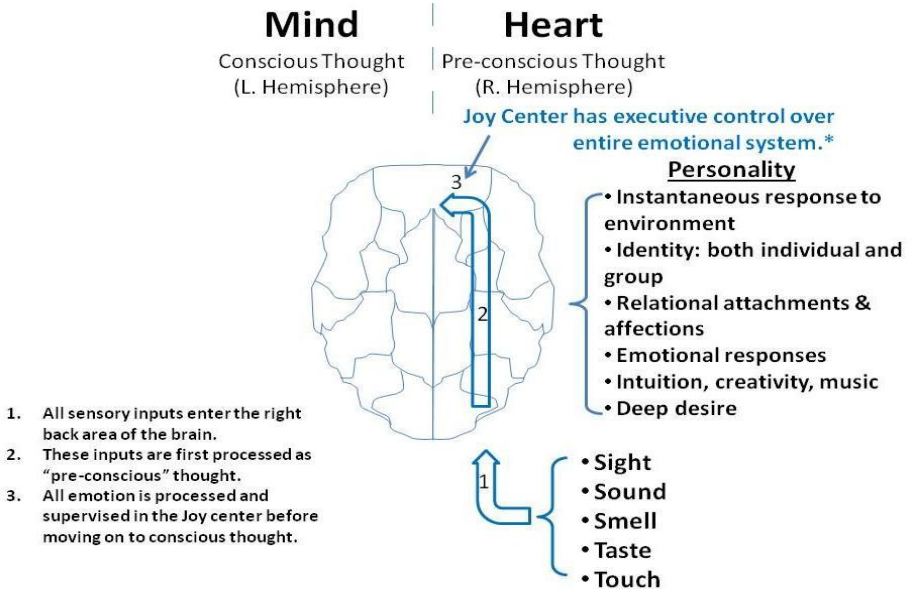
As the sensory input passes through the right hemisphere, other mental processes may begin working on the input. Notice that in addition to intuition and creativity, this right side processes music, identity, relational attachments, affections, emotional responses and deep desires. Disciplines that draw upon a highly developed right hemisphere are employed by musicians, artists and designers of various types who naturally think “out of box.”

All these processes happen before we are consciously aware of any of it. Intuition, for example, provides a sense of knowing without the benefit of rational or reasoned thinking. Maybe it is an innate sense of direction. Or maybe it is a sense that something is just not right. A seasoned peace officer may have a highly developed instinct for sensing dangerous situations, a “sixth sense.” Wisdom learns to trust it. And, though it must be carefully and prayerfully cultivated, this same facility is where we hear God’s “still, small voice.” Hmm, that might be worth developing a bit more ... but not here.

Joy Center

As the sensory inputs reach the frontal lobe of our brain and make a left turn, they pass through the “Joy Center.” Joy is designed to be our default mode of emotional operation. This center is intended to have supervisory control over all other emotional functions of the brain. This means that when we experience heavy negative emotions like sadness, anger, fear, shame, disgust or despair, we are designed to move through these

emotions as we process them and ultimately return to joy. That is what a healthy brain will do. We do not want to get stuck in one of these negative places, or we end up perpetually sad (depressed) or angry (bitter) or fearful (anxious).



Source: "The Other Half of Church," Jim Wilder, Michel Hendricks, Moody Publishers, 2020 (unless noted otherwise)
 * "Living From The Heart Jesus Gave You," Friesen, Wilder, Bierling, Koepcke, Poole, Rev. 2000, Shepherd's House, Inc, p.23

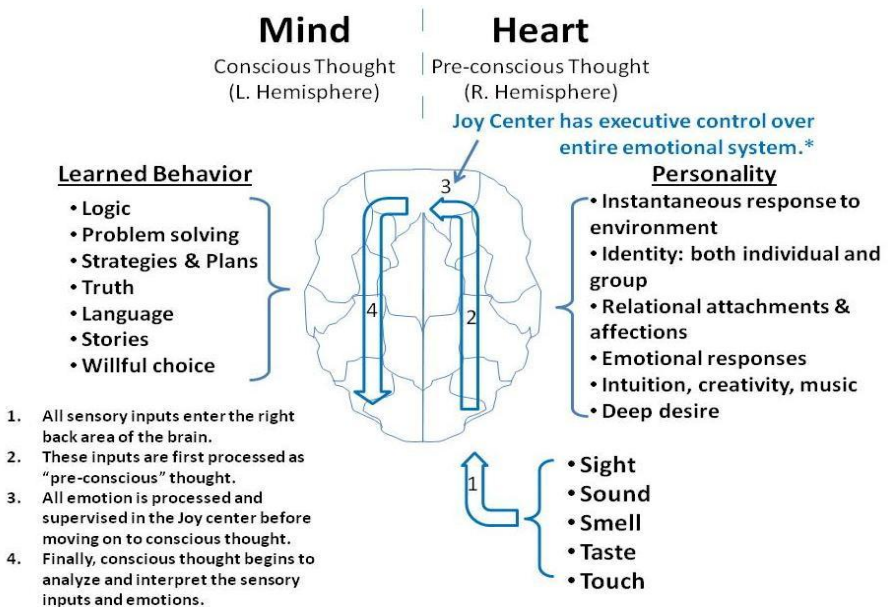
People who have not been taught as a child to return to joy from emotional traumas are highly vulnerable to addictions as a source of false joy. The good news is that the Joy Center never loses its ability to develop and grow. We can learn to return to joy at any age!

Conscious Brain

Turning the corner again and heading into the left hemisphere brings our sensory inputs into the realm of conscious thought, analysis and expression.

This is where logic, problem solving, strategies, truth, language, stories and willful choice occur. Disciplines like science, accounting and linguistics generally specialize in left brain development and activity.

Of course, the goal is not to be heavily weighted to either the left or the right hemisphere. The most versatile brain is the one which utilizes both sides fully in accomplishing its various tasks.



Source: "The Other Half of Church," Jim Wilder, Michel Hendricks, Moody Publishers, 2020 (unless noted otherwise)

* "Living From The Heart Jesus Gave You," Friesen, Wilder, Bierling, Koepcke, Poole, Rev. 2000, Shepherd's House, Inc, p.23

For example, a scientist (having well developed left brain knowledge) who can think out of the box (using right brain

creativity) is much more likely to be inventive, applying scientific understanding to new, creative solutions, whether in medicine, engineering or space exploration.

Mind vs. Heart

There is one more distinction I want to point out regarding the two brain hemispheres. The subconscious right side handles inputs at 6 cycles/sec. The conscious left side handles inputs at 5 cycles/sec. What was God's purpose in making the right side basically 20% more powerful? Why does the pre-conscious processing need greater horsepower than the conscious processing?

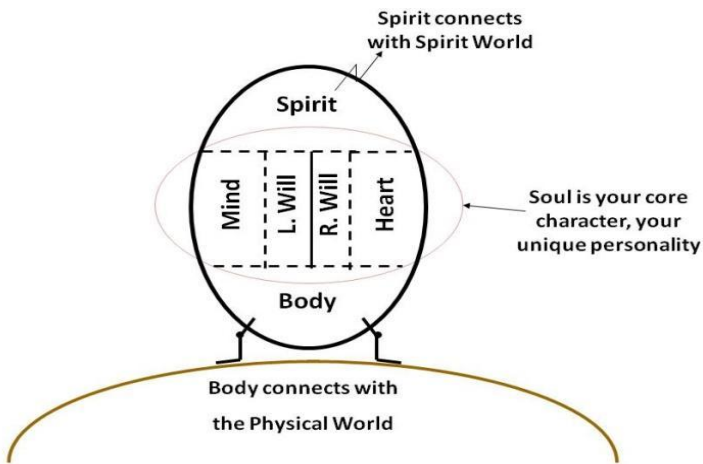
At the risk of oversimplifying the incredible facility of our brain, I can't help but see the two sides of our brain in light of our soul. Our soul is comprised of our mind (thinking), heart (feeling) and will (choosing). In looking at the above brain diagram, the left half seems to fit nicely into the mind function of our soul. And the right half seems to fit nicely into the heart function of our soul. Remember, the heart has the greater horsepower. The mind and heart do the heavy lifting of processing every sensory input we receive from our surroundings. Yet, the will is what decides what we are going to do about whatever the situation is in front of us. So what is this will? How does it work?

Tale Of Two Wills

As a normal function of the left hemisphere, the logic and problem solving center will naturally come to some conclusion as to how best to respond to any given situation. As we grow and survive various life experiences, we will learn to modify our responses to improve the likelihood of achieving the desired

outcome. For example, as a child we may have displayed a quick temper in the face of unwanted opposition to our goal: a treat from the ice cream truck. However, as we grew older and matured, we realized that our temper usually got us into trouble, while our sweet dream was left unfulfilled. So we learned to adapt our behavior, in spite of our internal frustration, so that our temper would not sabotage our goal. This is an example of learned behavior. Learned behavior enhances the image of you that you want the world to see and appreciate. Learned behavior is a carefully scripted version of you that may not be entirely true, but it gets results. This is the traditional will that displays our learned behaviors; call it our “left will.”

However, there is a totally different process happening in the other side of the brain that could display an entirely different will output. For example, let’s say you had successfully found some coins in Mama’s purse, stopped the musical ice cream truck and were just ready to buy the tasty treasure. Then Mama finds you, and all hope is crushed.



The surprise sensory input passing through the right hemisphere (heart part) may well trigger an instantaneous response—a reflex—that displays as a burst of anger. This can happen before your more mellow learned response on the left side has time to kick in. The more polished reaction might have guided the situation in the diplomatic direction you would prefer. Think of a stubbed toe, or being cut off in traffic where you have to break hard to avoid a collision. What comes out is NOT the image of you that you want the world to see. However, this right will, which is the reflexive you, is way more true to your actual heart than you may want to admit. In an instant it can blow the cover off the learned behavior of your conscious left will's output.

So, why go into all this description? Because it appears that our “free will” actually has two outlets: one conscious and managed (left will), and one subconscious and involuntary (right will). The managed one is driven by the image we want to project to others. The involuntary one is driven by the practices and habits left behind from our old nature. When these old ways of thinking and responding sneak out unexpectedly, we typically feel embarrassment or even shame. We don't want our carefully crafted image to be smudged by any closet demons, so we are quick to cover up our reaction or justify it in some way. We might mumble an apology like “excuse my French” to whoever is around, and even a quick “sorry, Lord” prayer. Then we try to move on, doubling down on our learned behavior (left will) to try to ensure that this little reflex demon (right will) doesn't pop up again next time ... which of course it will. These two wills, when

not aligned, create the “*double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*”³⁴ Do you know that feeling? I sure do, and I hate it!

Let’s pause for a moment to recap. The learned behavior side of our free will operates from our left brain, that region that produces a decision based on a reasoned approach for handling issues. This is the mind part of the brain that receives sensory inputs last and that operates slower. The reflexive right side of the brain is the heart part. It betrays what is inside because it has no thought filters to mask the truth. What comes out is an honest picture of what is actually going on in there. Ugh.

Heart Trouble

Jesus had some interesting things to say about this heart part. He had just had words with some Pharisees about not washing hands before eating according to Jewish custom. His disciples didn’t really understand his response to the Jewish leaders, and they asked Jesus about it later. Here is how Jesus explained it to them:

"Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him unclean. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"³⁵ (emphasis mine)

³⁴ James 1:8

³⁵ Mk 7:18-23

It seems that our heart cannot be taught to do right; it appears to have a mind of its own. Is it even possible to change our reflexive response under stress? Or are we slaves for life, working constantly to minimize the collateral damage this unruly right will causes? Is there any hope for us to change and fully reflect the character of Christ? Isn't that our goal? Isn't that his goal?

Many of us have lived for decades trying to match the left will (learned response) to the character of Christ by study, maybe even counseling, and forever trying harder to behave like that perfect image of Christ. We may even have worn a WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) bracelet to help remind us how to behave. We keep attending conferences, listening to motivational sermons and promising all along to surrender to Christ that temper or that addiction or whatever wrong response we seem stuck with. But nothing changes—not really, not reflexively. We find ourselves frustrated, feeling like a hypocrite, convinced we are just a bad person, somehow deeply and irreparably flawed. Some hard-core folks just keep trying harder all the way to the grave. Others give up and settle for a half-hearted walk with Christ, feeling perpetually guilty and defeated. And yet others give up altogether, leaving the faith that never really worked for them.

The problem is in the heart part, not in the mind part. The mind is important because it nourishes and protects the heart. Yet, it can never correct a heart that remains untransformed. That is where we want to focus next: getting in touch with God's Spirit and allowing him to renovate our broken heart. God promised to:

“...take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”³⁶

That is the only way it can happen. Trying harder might slowly affect our learned behavior from our mind. But trying harder will never correct wrong reflexes from the heart. Only “Christ in you” can do that.

“... you have clothed yourselves with a brand-new nature that is continually being renewed as you learn more and more about Christ, who created this new nature within you.... Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.”

³⁷

Confusion

Okay, this is really confusing. Paul just seemed to say that we, as Christians, are already “clothed with a brand-new nature.” He makes it sound as if it is a done-deal, that we are supposed to be transformed the minute Christ moves into our soul. If this is true, 1) What happened to the old nature? 2) How does this new nature happen? 3) Why doesn’t this new nature look or feel any different from the old one? I have the same struggles and temptations I had before, and slip into the same old traps again and again. Neither I nor anyone else around me can see much change.

1) What happened to the old nature?

Peter tells us clearly what happened:

³⁶ Ezek. 11:19

³⁷ Col. 3:10-11(NLT)

*“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness...”*³⁸

The old sin nature has been nailed, with Christ, to the cross. The reality in the spirit realm (where time is no constraint) is that we (our old nature) were actually crucified with Christ. In him, with him, and through him, we literally died to our old sin-nature. His death was not just some kind of symbol or token. It was a literal death to sin for all who trust in him. This death was not just for acts of sin (like lying, stealing, etc.). It was putting to death the entire sin nature in all who look to him, trust in him, and invite him to “be their life.”

Paul says it this way:

*“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God...”*³⁹

*“Our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin.... So you should consider yourselves dead to sin and able to live for the glory of God through Christ Jesus.”*⁴⁰

When Christ became sin for us and allowed himself to be put to death, we joined him in his death. Our old sin-nature in us is what died that day. Jesus declared, “It is finished!”

³⁸ 1 Pet. 2:24

³⁹ Gal. 2:20

⁴⁰ Rom. 6:6-11 (NLT)

2) **How does this new nature happen?**

Just as we were joined with Christ in his death, we were also raised with him to new life and a new nature.

“Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised as he was.”⁴¹

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead....”⁴²

When our old natures were in place, we were slaves to sin and under its power. We had no real option other than to sin. Oh, we could “behave” for a season (with left brain willpower), but our inner person was ultimately obligated to selfishness and pride. How hopeless! But, with our new-life nature in place, that obligation is cancelled. We are set free. Now, we can actually choose to live free and holy in Christ.

“So, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation whatsoever to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you keep on following it, you will perish. But if through the power of the Holy Spirit you turn from it and its evil deeds, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.”⁴³

⁴¹ Rom 6:5

⁴² 1 Pet. 1:3-6

⁴³ Rom. 8:12-14

3) Why doesn't this new nature look or feel any different from the old one?

Once we are dead to sin and risen with Christ, he literally moves into our soul. His Spirit makes his home in us. He cancelled our old sin-nature and brought his own holy nature with him when he moved in. We get all of him, not just bits and pieces of his holiness. Along with this new nature comes new desires. While sin was your master, you didn't really even desire holiness. It seemed stupid and weak. But, when you died to your sin nature, the grace of Christ actually made you desire righteousness. You developed an internal tension, a battle, between right and wrong, good and bad that was not there before. So, with your new nature in place and your old nature gone, what aspect of the old was left behind to create this holy tension within your soul? Why the continued attraction to and struggle against wrong attitudes and actions?

What remained behind in your soul after your sin nature was removed was old habits and old ways of thinking. These old patterns have been burned into your subconscious heart and mind. The scars go deep. The unconscious, reflexive, right-will responses don't un-learn overnight what they were trained for a lifetime to do. This retraining of the soul is the work of sanctification. This is why our hearts and minds must be renewed.

“Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you

to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.”⁴⁴

“...throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception. Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God's likeness — righteous, holy, and true.”⁴⁵

Renewing our mind is about nurturing it with healthy and holy spiritual foods while at the same time starving it from the rotten stuff we used to take in. The good news is that, as we do this, our appetites will change and we will actually become disgusted with the rot we used to feed on and will crave the rich banquet available for the asking from Father's table.

⁴⁴ Rom. 12:2 (NLT)

⁴⁵ Eph. 4:22-24 (NLT)

4. Our Wellspring Of Life

Heart Is Key

Although our sin nature has been put to death with Christ and we are no longer obligated to sin, the Tempter knows our weakness and knows just what buttons to push to entice us to dishonor our Lord. For years he has been programming us to respond to certain struggles in a particular (and likely sinful) way. But now, we have Jesus within us; the one who has been tempted in all ways as we have.⁴⁶ He is our strength. He is our way out. But, the moment we look away from Jesus and consider the temptation (whatever it is) we have lost the battle. Fixing our eyes on Jesus is our only hope... and is the only hope we need.

Determine to live from your new nature with Christ in you. Remember, it doesn't take a sin nature to sin. Adam and Eve started out without a sin nature. Their temptation was real and they fell for it. Jesus started out without a sin nature too. His temptation was also real, but he didn't fall for it. Now, that same victor over sin, Jesus, lives inside of you and me. We are empowered to be victorious over all sin by keeping our eyes, our affections, our hearts attached to him. His strength will work mightily within us to keep us free and holy.

So, let's focus now on matters of the heart where our nature lives. We're no longer interested in just upgrading our behavior. The beauty of receiving a new nature (right will) is that behavior (left will) changes automatically without us even trying, as our new nature takes over. With Christ freely living and moving in us, we

⁴⁶ Heb. 2:18, 4:15

will respond to stress with Holy Love in all circumstances. This is how we become single-minded. This has been Father's good way for us to live from the beginning.

Guarding Your Heart

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”⁴⁷

In his many proverbs, Solomon says a lot, covering a broad array of topics and areas of life such as seeking wisdom, fearing God, being a diligent worker, remaining true to your spouse and avoiding the company of fools. After wading through a river of wise things to pursue or foolish things to avoid, my mind gets a bit glazed over. But then Solomon declares, *“Above all else.”* Okay, now he has my attention. *“Above all else ...”* helps me prioritize and attend to one thing at a time. Jesus, in coaching Martha concerning her frenetic meal preparations, echoes the same idea: *“only one thing is needed.”⁴⁸* That one thing above all else that Solomon points to is our heart. *“Above all else, guard your heart....”* In fact, as we will see, if we carefully attend to this one thing we will at the same time be attending to all else that is important.

This man of wisdom is recommending we build a solid wall around our heart, set a guard at the gate, and position archers on the wall. Immediately we get the sense that:

- The contents of the heart are of extremely high value.

⁴⁷ Prov. 4:23

⁴⁸ Lk. 10:42

- There is a real and present danger that would desecrate or steal the heart, given the opportunity.
- Your heart is the key to “*all else.*” That is, without your heart intact, nothing else matters.

God created us having three major parts: body, soul and spirit, where:

- **Body** is our tangible self that walks this earth,
- **Soul** is our personality and character that make us uniquely who we are (having mind, will and heart), and
- **Spirit** is the breath of God, his image within us, that gives us the capacity to connect with the more durable and eternal world of the Spirit.

Scripture uses these terms in many ways, sometimes interchangeably. As we have seen, the heart sometimes refers to the seat of our emotions and affections; sometimes it refers to our entire soul, which includes mind, will and emotions. In either case, the seat of our emotions and affections is effectively the “heart of our heart,” the core from which we live.

So, if our heart is the core out of which we live, how is our heart nurtured and developed so as to ensure a holy life in the midst of a broken world? How does our mind guard and protect our heart from corruption?

Remember Jesus’ statement about our hearts noted earlier?

“What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts come evil

thoughts.... All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"⁴⁹

So, how do we account for the content of the heart? If a heart is "unclean," how did it get that way? What happened to defile it? Can it be made clean? If so, how does that happen? And once clean, how can we keep it clean?

Jesus told a story⁵⁰ that helps us with these questions.

"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.

"This is the meaning of the parable:

- *The seed is the word of God.*
- *Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. [They choose to cling to comfortable lies rather than accept liberating truth.]*
- *Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of*

⁴⁹ Mark 7:20-23

⁵⁰ Lk. 8:5-15

testing they fall away. [They accept truth but remain shallow.]

- *The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.* [They accept truth but are distracted, missing any meaningful relationship with God.]
- *But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.*” [They are intentional about nurturing Christ in themselves.]

A Noble Heart

In this story, Jesus likens a “*noble and good heart*” to “*good soil*.” Good soil is able to receive seed from the farmer⁵¹ and multiply it into an abundant harvest. Notice that, although there are outside forces that can sabotage a developing crop, the primary difference between crop failure or success is the condition of the soil. Good soil protects the seed from the birds, absorbs the rain, gives root anchorage for the tender plant, provides critical nutrients and helps the leaves make use of the sun’s energy to create food. Like the human heart, the soil is the below-the-surface yet critical element that enables growth and highly valued fruit to emerge from our lives.

So, what makes for such a “*good and noble heart?*” This is a particularly important question, given that every one of us starts

⁵¹ The farmer is the Father, who is also identified as the gardener in Jn. 15:1. This is the same farmer who loves good fruit in Jn. 15:8.

out life with a sick and ignoble heart. As we will discover, this process of developing a virtuous heart is a shared work between us and God. We speak of and admire the innocence of children, yet we all know that the same rebellion that was exposed in Eden lurks under the surface of every “innocent” little child. Any parent can attest to the difference in the cry of an infant who is in need vs. the cry of an infant who is just plain mad. And as that angry infant becomes a reasoning and speaking child, the words they level at any dissenting adult give further evidence of the defiant nature lurking in their tender soul.

What Fills Your Heart?

Like any other living organism, our core condition depends, at least in part, upon what we feed it. So, what nourishes the heart? How do we intake the right mix of nutrients that will provide the qualities of a “*good and noble heart?*”

Jesus addresses this question with another farmer story. He said:

*“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*⁵²

So, how does this work? What does “remaining” or “abiding” mean? According to Jesus, it is an all-or-nothing proposition. Either we are abiding in him and growing, or we are not . . . in which case we accomplish nothing. Our lives are barren, with nothing lasting to show for a lifetime of struggle.

⁵² Jn. 15:5

I think we are now finally at the core of the issue regarding our unruly hearts. We have learned that our heart health is dependent upon good heart-soil, and we see now that good heart-soil is dependent upon remaining in Christ. In fact, Jesus said that remaining attached to himself is the only way to get the life-giving energy we need to truly live. But, what does that look like in practical terms? We are not literal branches growing from a literal vine.

Attach Well

We do have attachments in the same way live branches are attached. Jesus is saying that if our attachment is to anything other than himself, we are no longer attached to life. In fact, he said:

“If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”⁵³

Do you remember the rich young ruler, a basically good and righteous man, who asked Jesus how to obtain eternal life?⁵⁴ Jesus told him to sell all he had for the benefit of the poor, and follow him. He would have treasure in heaven. The young man couldn't do it. He was too attached to his wealth, and Jesus wanted to detach him from what—for him—was bondage. Jesus' message is clear: if we want life, there is no other option but to release our attachments to this world and remain attached to

⁵³ Jn. 15:6

⁵⁴ Lk. 18:18

Jesus. So then, how do we remain attached to Jesus, the True Vine?

Certainly there must be something we can do to affect whether we are attached to life in Jesus or detached from life and in a position to end up torched. God knew we would need some help here and has given us some valuable instruction. Ultimately, his advice is to vet carefully everything that enters our hearts and minds.

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”⁵⁵

Consider the clamor of the world around us as it seeks to capture our minds’ and hearts’ attention and affection. It works tirelessly to align and attach us to whatever they are selling: goods, services, political agendas, lifestyles, even spiritual agendas. And these things bombard us from every conceivable direction; especially relentless is the Internet.

In 2020, Google estimated the average person viewed between 4,000 and 10,000 ads every day! How can the human brain even function with this volume of debris slamming into it? Vetting out this constant jabber while making space to think about worthy things (above) is a HUGE challenge.

⁵⁵ Col. 3:1-3

If we step back for a moment to view what is really happening, it appears that the enemy of our souls is trying to drown out the life-giving message of heaven by saturating our modest three-pound brains with a blistering blast from below. To the extent we remain unaware of his strategy and the cumulative toxins our minds and hearts absorb from these messages, we will ultimately fall prey to his devices—especially us Christians.

You know the often quoted wisdom, “The battle is in the mind.” Have you ever considered what territory the battle is striving to conquer? The battle in your mind is for the territory of your heart. Your mind is the guard of your heart. It is the watchman on the wall. Is your mind on duty and alert? Is it equipped and willing to defend your heart?

No way can we hope to drink from the holy chalice of heaven while facing a fire hose of the world’s fetid water. To cleanse and rebuild the soil of our hearts, we must first turn off the flow of pollution. Only then can we detox from the world and finally attach securely to Jesus. Only then can we imbibe deeply from the Holy Love that is flowing through him.

5. Finding Holy Love

Seek Wholeheartedly

Face the fact: we have become addicted to the fake love of this world. Our hearts are divided because our minds and our affections are almost entirely absorbed by the cares and fantasies of this world. We say we want more of God, but the way we actually spend our time betrays our true priorities.

Clearly we will not find Holy Love in the filthy flow from below. The only way we can hope to find Holy Love is by shutting out the incessant and anesthetizing sludge-flood of this world that continually washes over us. We must instead practice looking heavenward. Our resistance to the world's messages must be intentional and persistent. We will probably appear countercultural and maybe even antisocial to friends and family who are not on this same pilgrimage of Holy Love.

Holy Love is everywhere; the earth is filled with God's presence,⁵⁶ and his presence is Holy Love. If we don't sense or see or experience God's love, it is not because it is hiding or missing, but because we are missing it.

“If you seek me with all your heart you will find me.”⁵⁷

We have a key responsibility in all of this; no seek, no find!

⁵⁶ Num. 14:21

⁵⁷ Jer. 29:13

Road Less Traveled

Our birthright in Christ is to find and become Holy Love.⁵⁸ Getting there is often a confusing and difficult journey through discontent, brokenness and surrender. It is definitely the path less traveled. We are talking about trading in everything that can be seen for a treasure that is unseen. We are trading what we know, the perception of comfort and control, for what is unknown. And yet, this “unknown” is actually knowable to us. If we are paying attention, Father’s Spirit testifies to our spirit.⁵⁹ The unseen is actually a greater and more durable reality than the finite realm of this physical universe.

Completing our pilgrimage will never happen if it is taken up as a hobby or if we just “try it out” like we might test drive a car. Only perseverance born out of desperation will move us beyond our tidy little comfort zone along the shore into the vast ocean of Father’s Holy Love. This kind of desperation and perseverance is available only as a gift of grace from Father.

Count The Cost

Are you willing to ask for this grace? Are you willing to seek and submit to discontent and desperation? Are you willing to knock so that his storehouse of Holy Love will be opened to you? Count the cost; it will require all you think you have just like the pearl of great price. How badly do you want it?

⁵⁸ 1 Jn. 4:7-11

⁵⁹ Rom. 8:6

What would this pilgrimage look like? How do people get started? What if I am stuck? How do I get moving again? Is there a road map left by others who have gone before?

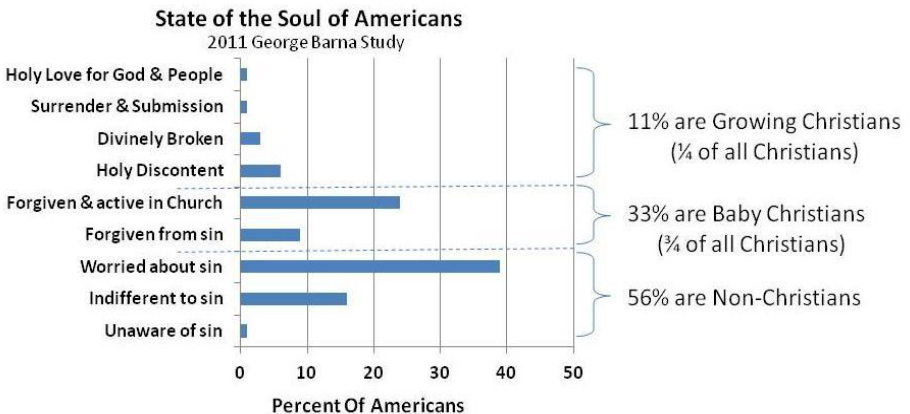
Keep seeking, keep pondering, keep your eyes on Jesus ... and keep reading and increase your praying. Even some fasting may be needed to help you release attachments of bondage. Our hope is in the Lord, not in our own willpower.

Part 2: Becoming Holy Love

6. The Heart Of The Church

Weedy Soil

In 2011, George Barna concluded a study in which he essentially took the spiritual temperature of America. (Seedbed created a brief chalk-talk summary of the study.⁶⁰) In this study, 15,000 Americans were interviewed over a six-year period, and the results are fascinating. A 30,000-foot view of the outcome of the study shows that 56% of Americans were not “saved.” Most of these (not all) were aware of sin, and some were even concerned about sin but had done nothing to seek reconciliation with God. The other 44% of Americans professed to be Christians who had asked for and received forgiveness from God.



⁶⁰ <https://www.seedbed.com/seedbeds-raison-detre/>

Of these Christians, three-quarters were content to be “forgiven” but could not profess to have any kind of relationship with God. They were content to attend church and perhaps even volunteer in some way to support the work of the church. The last 25% of the Christians (11% of all Americans) had moved beyond just doing church. They had experienced a Holy Discontent, and possibly even a divine brokenness. Only 1% had experienced surrender, and another 1% had come to a deep love of God and people. Above is a graphic depicting these results.

Distracted Believers

Considering the massive daily dose of the world’s messaging we must fend off, and based on the evidence Barna has exposed, I would say that the enemy’s tactic of bombardment and distraction has proven to be highly effective. People, even Christians, are enticed to look away from their Maker and are obsessed instead with what he has made. The world’s toxins are subtle yet powerful. It seems pretty safe to say that for someone to choose to resist the enemy’s distract-and-destroy tactic, they would have to be highly intentional about living a counter-cultural lifestyle focused purely on Holy Love. Any attempt to compromise by having it both ways (world and God) would be a sure formula for frustration and defeat. Jesus was clear: we cannot love both God (the glory of heaven) and money (the glory of this world). In fact, it would appear that this very compromise is what three-quarters of church-goers are trying to achieve. They have not yet experienced a Holy Discontent in their lives due to their compromise. Could these be the folks Jesus was talking about when he said,

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"⁶¹?

Jesus isn't just playing Church. He is serious about us knowing him and being known. The consequences of remaining attached to the Jesus-Vine (or not) and growing good kingdom fruit (or not) are enormous. It is a matter of life and death for us as well as for others. How do we do this? What posture of our souls will help keep us attached to Jesus and thriving in this kingdom garden? How do we develop and maintain a spiritually heart-healthy diet?

⁶¹ Matt. 7:21-23

7. Waking Up

Where We Gaze Is Where We Go

Jesus was clear: our souls live or die according to the spiritual light we let in (or not).

“Your eye is a lamp for your body. A pure eye lets sunshine into your soul. But an evil eye shuts out the light and plunges you into darkness. Make sure that the light you think you have is not really darkness. If you are filled with light, with no dark corners, then your whole life will be radiant, as though a floodlight is shining on you.”⁶²

Here are a few other samples throughout Scripture talking about where we look:

“Fix your eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.”⁶³

“But my eyes are fixed on you, O Sovereign LORD: in you I take refuge....”⁶⁴

“Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.”⁶⁵

“Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me life through your word.”⁶⁶

⁶² Lk. 11:34-36 (NLT)

⁶³ 2 Cor. 4:18

⁶⁴ Ps. 141:8

⁶⁵ Ps. 105:4

⁶⁶ Ps. 119:37

“Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you.... Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.”⁶⁷

The master statement for managing our gaze is:

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”⁶⁸

There is no substitute for “*fixing our eyes on Jesus.*” Where we look is where we go. Gazing on him is how we “*remain*” and “*abide*” in him and stay in the flow of his life-giving Holy Love.

To be clear, we are actually speaking about spiritual eyes being fixed on Jesus. Jesus stated many times after teaching a spiritual lesson: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”⁶⁹ When the disciples asked the meaning of the seed and the soil parable, he told them;

“The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.”⁷⁰

This startling statement from Jesus to his disciples reveals at least two important things;

⁶⁷ Prov. 4:25,27

⁶⁸ Heb. 12:2

⁶⁹ Lk. 8:8

⁷⁰ Lk. 8:10

1. Jesus (and his Holy Spirit) reveal the secrets of the kingdom of God only to those who are open and receptive to heaven's Truth. He will not "*throw (his) pearls to pigs.*"⁷¹
2. The secrets of the kingdom of God are received by both our eyes and ears ... essentially all of our senses, including our God-given intuition. Our physical senses are instrumental in alerting our spiritual senses to heaven's Truth.

So, what are some of these ways that our physical senses operate as gateways to our soul? What are the means for us staying in touch with and attached to the Vine of Life?

Definitely, where our physical eyes (and ears) dwell, so go our affections and our hearts. Think of what we call entertainment. Think of social media. How about endless online shopping? What about some of the baser Internet attractions? It may not happen in an instant, but continued exposure will take its toll.

Advertising manipulates our sense of identity, creating dissatisfaction and envy. This is the principle on which all advertising rests.

- Engaging the affection of our heart bypasses the logic and reasoning of our common-sense mind. How else does a successful marketing strategy get people to buy stuff they don't need with money they don't have to impress people who don't really care? The subconscious will of the heart (right will) overrides the reasoned will of the mind.

⁷¹ Matt. 7:6

- Or, if our eyes become focused on some idol, our heart will become ensnared, and soon we will be unable to flee the temptation. That is how Solomon derailed: his 1000 wives and concubines and their attachment to other gods drew him away from his first love of God.
- Or, if our physical eyes are fixated on some problem at hand, we cannot be free to look to and trust the Father for our deliverance. We end up frenetically working the issue in our own strength and wisdom. We may toss up a prayer of “help” to Father, but then we return to our drawing board, looking for natural answers. Without eyes on Jesus, we will miss his provision.

If we open our physical eyes and ears to receiving God’s Word—his whole Word—our hearts will become saturated with his thoughts and his ways. Then, when we seek him for direction, we will not only be familiar with his agenda, but we will have the proper criteria already fixed in our hearts and minds for rightly vetting the various alternatives available to us. We will also have a faith history of trust already built up in our souls from vicariously experiencing the many examples of his faithfulness and power exhibited in his Word. There is no substitute for marinating in God’s Word to flavor ourselves with the taste of heaven.

“Pray Continually”⁷²

While we are still in these bodies, we need to accomplish God’s purpose for our being here. To do this, we must live in constant communion with God, remaining connected to the Vine. In order

⁷² 1 Thes.5:17, Rom. 12:12

to sustain this connection, our concept of what constitutes prayer may need to expand. True prayer has many forms and variations, but at core, prayer is simply keeping our hearts open to God.

- A heart open to God = eyes fixed on Jesus = attached to the Vine. When our spiritual eyes and ears are focused on Jesus, our heart is already open to God, and all that we consider, ponder, speak, view, hear and touch will be influenced by his holy presence, his Holy Love within.
- What does this look like in practice? It is inviting Jesus into every situation, into every conversation, into every confrontation, into every expectation ... even into our relaxation and entertainment. It is being so linked to Jesus, moment by moment, that “...*(he) is my life....*”⁷³
- It becomes our lifestyle in the same way listening and abiding with his Father was Jesus’ lifestyle on earth:

*“...I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me....”*⁷⁴

Gratitude: Big Medicine

As we focus our minds and hearts on Jesus, our understanding will grow clearer regarding the way things really are in this broken world. A huge part of this clarification is that we get a truer and truer picture of the fractured quality of our own heart, just how deeply broken we are. The justifications we conjure up for our own selfish motivations and actions will be revealed to us. Our hearts can then be finally broken by the weight of our own self-deception. I am not talking about a false humility that

⁷³ Col. 3:4

⁷⁴ Jn. 8:28-29

seeks to demean one's self in an attempt to become the most humble person in the room. Only by looking to Jesus (and not self) can we come to a place of true brokenness that leads to total, unqualified and liberating surrender.

Remember the story where Jesus was at dinner with a Pharisee? A woman with a poor reputation came in and started washing Jesus' feet with a blend of perfume and tears and then wiping them with her hair. Jesus knew that his host was criticizing her in his heart. So, Jesus addressed the host with this comment:

"...I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love."⁷⁵

I can't imagine for a moment that this Pharisee's "actual" sin burden was any less than that of the woman of poor reputation. He just wasn't aware of the depravity of his own heart in the same way she was. Blinded by his own self-righteousness, he was not really interested in Truth. However, when we become aware of our own great debt and of Jesus' great gift of forgiveness, gratitude moves us to deep praise and high worship. And a heart of praise is what leads us into the presence of the Father.⁷⁶

Gratitude is not only our motivation for pressing into God; it is also the fruit of pressing into him. The closer we reside to the Father's heart, the clearer we see his grandeur and the less we even look at ourselves. In time, we will become totally absorbed by the majesty and beauty of God. Gratitude for being in his

⁷⁵ Lk. 7:47 (NLT)

⁷⁶ Ps. 100:4

presence will overwhelm all other distractions we encounter, “... and the things of earth will grow strangely dim.”⁷⁷

Many other activities and practices can also help us focus on Jesus—practices that are just a natural part of body life in the Church. These include things like fellowship and sharing meals with other Christians, communal worship and prayer, meditating throughout the day on his Word, and even just contemplatively resting in his presence. The goal is to continually grow in awareness of his presence, his active love and the goodness of his ways regardless of apparent outcomes in our lives. To do this, we must make space for these relationships to grow, both with spiritual siblings and with God.

Cutting out time-wasters is not optional; it is essential. Even good things about which we can honestly say, “there is nothing wrong with this,” must be sacrificed in order to make room for what is best, what is lasting, what enriches the soil of our hearts to produce good kingdom fruit in our lives.

⁷⁷ Helen H. Lemmel, 1919

8. Faith Journey Of The Heart

We have been discussing spiritual disciplines such as gratitude, continual prayer and fixing our eyes on Jesus. These practices prepare the soil of our hearts to receive and grow the seed of life planted by the Father. By remaining attached to the Jesus-Vine, it is his joy and our fulfillment to produce kingdom fruit through our lives. Yet, there must be some kind of general process or sequence between the seed being planted and the fruit ready for harvest. What is the maturing process we actually go through once we accept God's gift of life through Jesus' work on the cross? What actually happens as we remain attached to the source of life? And how does our new nature replace our old habits to produce the kind of gracious right brain reflexes that Jesus had?

Milestones

Let's go back to the elements of spiritual development found in the Barna study referenced earlier. The study identifies a sequence of milestones that mark the journey stages of essentially every believer as they/we move from infant to child to adolescent to adult and to elder in the Body of Christ.

What is so shocking is that we are now talking about only 25% of all Christians. The other 75% have settled for being "forgiven," like it is some kind of fire insurance policy. Building relationship and developing intimacy with Trinity is nowhere on their radar. For them, life looks pretty much just like it did before the "forgiveness" incident. People not in their church circle would probably be surprised to learn they were "Christian."

Their souls are stuck in neutral and are in danger of rolling backward. Their “faith” is all in their minds; they give only intellectual assent to the gospel. Either they don’t know or they don’t care to make the pilgrimage from left brain to right brain in order to introduce the God of Holy Love to their hearts.

“Knowing” in their mind (left side, facts) and “knowing” in their heart (right side, relationship) are two very different things. One becomes a fine Pharisee, while the other becomes Holy Love.

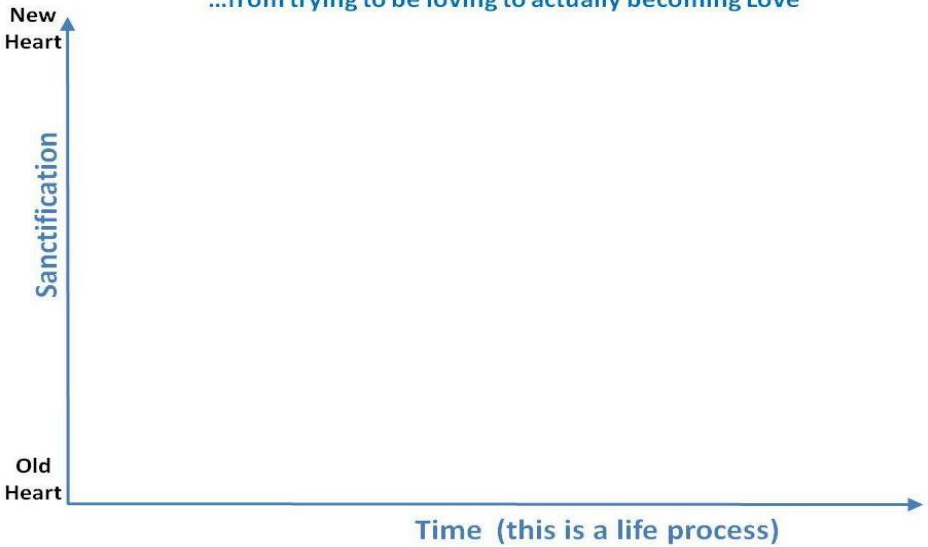
However, the 25% of Christians who are on a true faith journey are represented in Jesus’ blessing:

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they will be filled.”⁷⁸

Their hearts are noble and good.

Faith Journey Of The Heart

...from trying to be loving to actually becoming Love



⁷⁸ Matt. 5:6

Above is a framework for the faith journey of these Christians who are on a journey to becoming Holy Love.

Progression along the sanctification path on the graph is indicated by the vertical axis. No matter how long we have been stuck with our old habits (even as a Christian), we can position ourselves to release Jesus' heart that now lives in us. He promised,

*"I will take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."*⁷⁹

That heart of flesh will look amazingly like God's own compassionate heart. And that is what we are claiming as we set our hearts to seek him because he also promised,

*"If you seek me with all your heart you will find me."*⁸⁰

We will now proceed through a sequence of stages that are typical of Christians making their way toward becoming Holy Love. This progression is not necessarily the same for all of us on this journey. It is only representative of what many who have gone before us have experienced. Please take what follows as representative, not prescriptive.

Holy Discontent

Stage 1 is characterized by a Holy Discontent. This happens to the Christian who, by the grace of God, is given a glimpse of the

⁷⁹ Ezek. 11:19

⁸⁰ Jer. 29:13

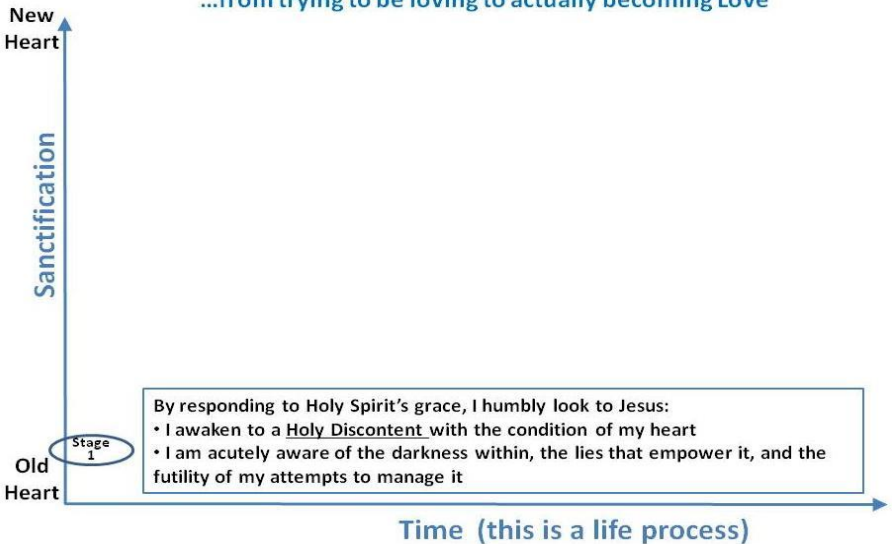
true and dreadful condition of his own heart. Let's name him/her "Pilgrim."⁸¹

At the point of conviction by the Holy Spirit, Pilgrim has the choice to either ignore the invitation to follow Christ as too costly to pursue or to accept the truth with a humble and grateful heart. The truth is that Pilgrim's heart, though forgiven, is still filled with darkness; the old habits are still firmly in place. All attempts to push out the darkness have failed because Pilgrim is attempting to do so in his own strength. He thinks that if he just goes to one more religious seminar or goes forward for prayer again or works just a bit harder to control his secret sin, he will get better.

Until Pilgrim becomes truly desperate for freedom from old ways of thinking, he will not learn how to call on the strength of the Holy Spirit to renew his mind.⁸² He must become sick and tired of living in failure and deeply frustrated from perhaps years of

Faith Journey Of The Heart

...from trying to be loving to actually becoming Love



trying harder to get it right. He must desire breakthrough above all else. He must finally be fully honest with himself and with God about his failing heart condition.

This desperation must be a desperation of the heart in seeking its creator. It is not the same as the desperation found in a “foxhole conversion.” Once the foxhole is history, so is the desperation and the promises made while in it. But a deeply broken and contrite heart is a sweet sacrifice to its creator and will always elicit his gracious and saving compassion. Gratitude and devotion are the true responses of a salvaged heart, not just relief that the desperate ordeal is over.

This sense of desperation is what we see in Nicodemus, the religious leader who came to Jesus secretly at night with burning questions in his searching heart. Three years later we see that Nicodemus had grown bold enough in his love for Christ that he risked all he had, especially his reputation, to help bury the crucified Christ—in daylight. Desperation for truth will do that to a man with an honest, seeking heart. Nicodemus is one of my heavenly heroes. He became a free Pharisee.

Grace is what brings Pilgrim to this point of desperation. Awakening to his current plight comes as a result of looking to Jesus, even briefly. He sees the contrast between his own sorry soul and the vision for holy and free living that Jesus painted in his convicting Sermon on the Mount. Eyes on Jesus reveal both the reality and the desperation of his bondage. At the same time, eyes on Jesus give him hope that freedom is possible. Paul expressed this conundrum well:

“It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong.... Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord....”

“Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace. ... You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. [Remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them are not Christians at all.] ... The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you ...

“So, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation whatsoever to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you keep on following it, you will perish. But if through the power of the Holy Spirit you turn from it and its evil deeds, you will live.”⁸³ (emphasis mine)

So, Jesus paved the way for us to live in freedom. At the moment of our salvation, he opened our prison cell door and invited us out. Our job is to follow Jesus out of our dark cell into the light. Light is our new nature, but we must be willing to step out of the darkness into the light. Paul instructs us,

⁸³ Rom 7:21-8:14 (NLT)

*“If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep step with the Spirit.”*⁸⁴

Living by the Spirit of Christ requires a moment-by-moment, step-by-step attention to what the Spirit is doing. How can we possibly keep in step with the Spirit of Christ if we aren't looking at him ... continually?

Have you ever noticed how a well-trained dog follows his master when obeying the “heel” command? The dog is constantly looking up to his master to see if he is going forward, turning right or left, stopped, or even going backward. The dog has eyes fixed on the master so every move is noted and his own movements are then perfectly synchronized with his master's. King David gave a similar example of this:

*“I lift my eyes to you, O God, enthroned in heaven. We look to the LORD our God for his mercy, just as servants keep their eyes on their master, as a slave girl watches her mistress for the slightest signal.”*⁸⁵

These are the musings of a man whose heart was in tune with God's own heart. And this is also where we are heading.

We move ahead on this journey only by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the initiator and completer of our faith. From start to finish, our attention must remain 24/7 on him.

⁸⁴ Gal. 5:25

⁸⁵ Ps. 123:1-2

Divinely Broken

Stage 2 is a place of deep brokenness by God. I know this doesn't sound like much fun, but then the fight for freedom has never been about fun. *"Give me liberty or give me death!"*⁸⁶ The reason we may not have walked out of our prison cells on our own by now is that we have been blinded by the lies of the enemy. His deceitful message is,

"You'll never be free. You are a failure. You'll never be good enough. Look at all the 'dirt' you have done in your life—you don't deserve to be free.

A big difference between being broken by Satan and being broken by God is that Satan gives no hope. His message is total condemnation. "Try harder" is his only suggestion, which is delivered with a chuckle since he knows how that will go. God always gives hope. Not only does he give hope, but he himself provides the strength for all the heavy lifting from within!

*"For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him."*⁸⁷

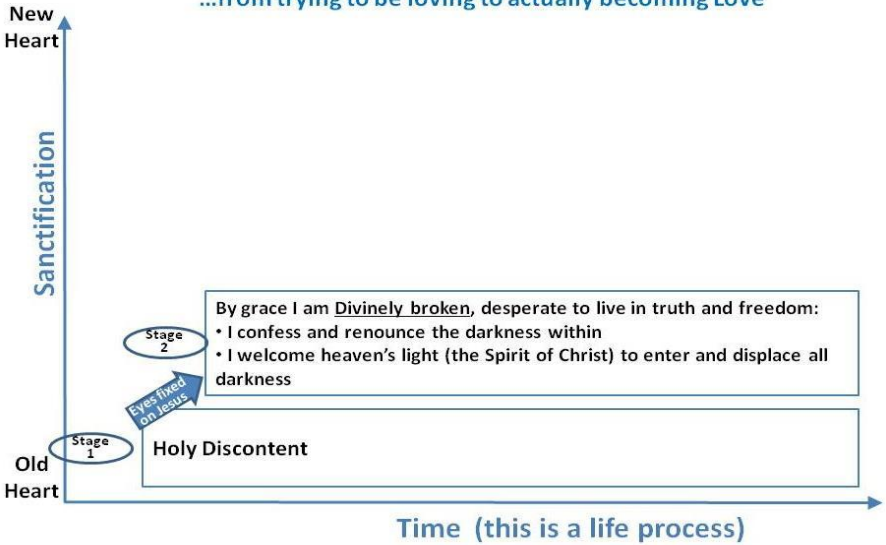
⁸⁶ Patrick Henry

⁸⁷ Phil 2:13

His grace is what brings the Holy Discontent and hunger for Holy Love that prompts us to invite him to take increasing

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...from trying to be loving to actually becoming Love



territory in our souls.

There is another important difference between being divinely broken and being broken by Satan. When we are broken by God, we see what is true. The deception that got us in trouble in the first place is revealed for the lie that it is. And our hearts are humbled and grateful for this clarity as we turn our eyes from ourselves toward the beauty and sovereignty and purity of Jesus.

When we are broken by Satan, it is our pride that has been wounded, yet it is still very much alive. We have been beaten down and humiliated. We are hopping mad and are looking for our first opportunity for revenge. Our eyes are squarely on ourselves, and God's sovereignty and beauty are completely

irrelevant to the situation. Being humbled and being humiliated can be two very different responses to a setback. Don't mistake being humiliated for a virtue if your pride is still alive.

Humiliation without a broken and contrite spirit is just pride headed to the ER for a shot of steroids so it can reemerge even stronger (like Germany after WW1).

By again fixing our eyes on Jesus and with his grace, we can see and acknowledge the truth and come to trust that Christ is actually living in us and that he alone has the power to draw us into the light. By calling on his power that already resides in us, we renounce the darkness, the lies, and all the "dirt" we have continued to do even after receiving forgiveness and salvation some time ago. Receiving salvation previously didn't automatically release us from our old habits. That old thinking needs to be recognized for what it is and renounced, right along with the sin that it keeps spawning in our lives.

So, the process of divine brokenness is:

- I confess to the reality of "what is" in my life: I'm helpless to fix this dark and broken mind-set that keeps sabotaging the life I want to live in God.
- I renounce the old way of thinking that keeps me in bondage to "dirt." I hand it over to Jesus, dropping it at the foot of the cross like a backpack full of dead rats. (Isaiah called this self-righteous baggage "filthy rags."⁸⁸) I despise it and want desperately to be rid of its stench. If I have at any time in the past given Satan a license to access my soul, I now renounce that permission and

⁸⁸ Isa. 64:6

revoke his license. Through Christ I am dead to sin and its power, and I have been given the authority to evict Satan.

- I welcome the full dose of heaven's light to expose, cleanse and push out all darkness in my soul. And I agree to cooperate with the Spirit's house-cleaning work in me. He is my new interior decorator; whatever he doesn't like, goes!
- I choose to keep my eyes on Jesus day in and day out. I will pay attention so I can keep in step with his pure and powerful Spirit. Now, the designs of the enemy to compromise my freedom will fail spectacularly because I am no longer under his power or authority.

Let's be clear; none of these steps are possible in our own strength or willpower. Don't attempt any of this without first approaching God in humility, asking for his grace and his strength to fully and completely accomplish each step. If HE does it in you, it will be done right, and it will be done for good.

Don't be surprised if this process feels a bit like what you may have gone through when you were first saved. At the time of our salvation, we released to Jesus everything we knew to give. But, life goes on, and we encounter new life-issues and temptations. The depth of our sinful thinking and habits is often greater than we can initially know. That is what 1 John 1:9 accomplishes in us.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”⁸⁹

By keeping short records with our Lord, we don't become enslaved again by sin. By keeping short records with the Holy Spirit, sin can never again put a death grip on our soul; we are truly free from the power of sin.

Remember when Peter denied knowing Jesus at the time of his greatest trial? How did Jesus handle that huge breach of trust when they were together afterward? He gave Peter opportunity to reinstate his loyalty for each of his three offenses. That is what Holy Love does. Jesus did not drive home the point of how much Peter's denials hurt him (Jesus) when he (Jesus) was already suffering. No, Holy Love is too beautiful and too humble to seek revenge. Instead, reconciliation is its objective and its fruit.

We move ahead on this journey only by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the initiator and completer of our faith. From start to finish, our attention must remain 24/7 on him.

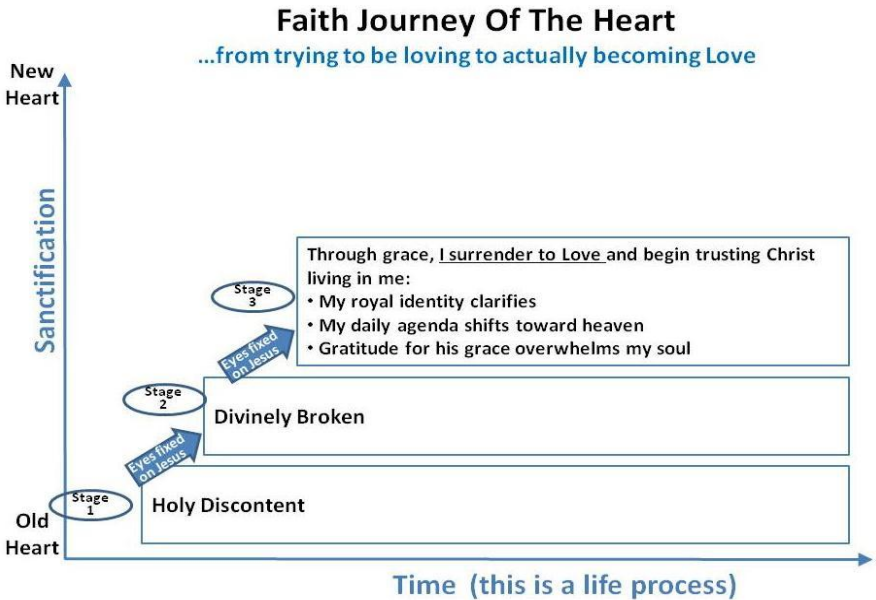
Surrender To Love

Stage 3 is yet another grace. When we were first created at the beginning of time, we were crafted to host the very image of God. We were made as living containers having the capacity to carry his Spirit within us. We all know the story about the “fall” in the garden. The death we experienced at that moment of

⁸⁹ 1 Jn. 1:9

rebellion was not only to our bodies, but also to our souls and spirits.

As living containers, we don't do well with a vacuum. When God's Spirit was removed, something else came in to fill the void. That void filled with a nature of rebellion from Satan—what we now call our “old nature.” We exchanged our destiny of hosting Holy Love with separation from God, which is death.



But the cross changed everything. Once we get rid of our back pack of dead rats at the foot of the cross, we look up at Jesus and see the love in his face that motivated him to accomplish the unthinkable for us. Love, Holy Love, is the most powerful force in the universe.

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”⁹⁰

“And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”⁹¹

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”⁹²

So once again, as living containers, we don't do vacuums. When we dump our rats, we have space once again to receive and host Holy Love. This becomes our willing and eager act of surrendering to Love.

- We are now truly trusting in the pure goodness of God, that all he says and does is good.
- We stop second-guessing God and his ways. We stop dictating to him how things should turn out and instead rest in the wisdom of his ways.
- We trust that *“all things [will] work together for good”*⁹³ in our lives because we are now walking in a right relationship with our Father (and his Spirit).
- We realize that the sovereignty and power of God is so immense that *“... all things serve you.”*⁹⁴ His purposes will be accomplished regardless of the strategies of evil around us. There is no contest.
- We rejoice in him and in all he does. We praise his mighty works and worship his glorious person.

⁹⁰ 1 Pet. 4:8

⁹¹ Col. 3:14

⁹² 1 Cor. 13:13

⁹³ Rom. 8:28 (KJV)

⁹⁴ Ps. 119:91

- And all the while, we remain attached to the Jesus-Vine as we “... *fix [our] eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of [our] faith.*”⁹⁵

Because we finally realize and acknowledge just how nasty our smelly sack of rats was that Jesus took, and because we are loving the fresh air and light that replace our bondage and darkness, we can't help but overflow with gratitude and joy. Thanksgiving is our new language, and we just can't stop it from spilling out. Our thoughts become prayers, with nothing too insignificant for us to share with him. Even our identity shifts from a sense of self and “taking care of me” to a sense of being his child and caring about our growing intimacy with him. He will take care of me better than I possibly can.

This is what happened to Naomi and me. In the late '90s, I had been in the engineering world for nearly three decades and was experiencing a Holy Discontent with the status quo of pursuing the “American dream.” I needed to leave the security of corporate America and trust God. With kids still in college, we needed an income. Through a series of trials and errors, God led us into the inner city of Chicago to recycle abandoned homes into quality, affordable housing for neighborhood families.

In the process of developing this unlikely change of career, God gave us a heart for the inner city families, especially for the men returning from prison having no marketable skills or legitimate work history. He gave me his compassion for these people. We hired and trained these men in the art of home rehab, discipling them in the process. For us, it was an act of “surrendering to

⁹⁵ Heb. 12:2

love.” We gave up the security of an assured income. We gave up the comfort of suburban living (we moved into their neighborhood to further identify with our new friends). We gave up health insurance (maybe this was not very smart, but God was faithful and merciful). We mortgaged our home that we had previously worked hard to pay off, in obedience to the passion God had placed in our hearts. In short, we traded in the American dream for God’s dream. We surrendered to Love: to what Love is and to what Love does.

In all this releasing, we learned living by faith. We learned to trust God’s wisdom, provision and protection in the high-risk world of inner city living. This is just one couple’s story of surrendering to Love. God has a unique story for each of us. Some stories may seem more dramatic than others, but every one of our stories is transformational; that is the point.

About this time in our awakening process, we may encounter another surprise: the desire to pray. We actually begin enjoying it. We no longer think of prayer as asking God for things he probably won’t give us anyway. We begin to realize what a relationship with Father God looks like; it thrives on a continual exchange between us. Sometimes we are thanking him. Sometimes we are worshiping him for his goodness. Sometimes we are seeking for answers or direction. Sometimes we are just still, quietly sharing “space” with him, enjoying the sweetness of his presence, having a heart of expectancy without expectation.

And, something else: we learn to listen. Father speaks in many different ways. This narrative is not the place to unpack all the ways he speaks, but speak he does. Jesus, in John 1:1, is called

“The Word.” What an interesting name for the Son of God. We discussed the heart part of our brain that processes intuition and imagination. These are the preconscious processes through which we hear that “still, small voice of God.” An indispensable skill that we must give regular time to practice and learn is to *“be still and know that I am God.”*⁹⁶ St. John of the Cross said, “Silence is God’s first language.” Unless we become silent, intentionally blocking out all the chatter of this world, we will miss his silent voice. Just like the miracle of new life that forms in the silence of the womb, so Father brings new life and healing to our battered souls in the silence of our quiet communion with him. Whatever we offer to God from a heart open to him, even silence, is prayer.

We move ahead on this journey only by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the initiator and completer of our faith. From start to finish, our attention must remain 24/7 on him.

Attachments Shift

Stage 4 is a deepening of surrender. Because of the power of Holy Love that is now penetrating our soul, the attachments to both things and people that have controlled our life choices begin to loosen.

There was a time when things and relationships that were in competition with our love for God (idols) were difficult to identify as idols. We could rationalize any inordinate appetite or attachment by asking, “What’s wrong with it?” or declaring, “I just can’t live without it.” These attachments were idols in the truest sense of the term.

⁹⁶ Ps. 46:10

However, as we experience increasing freedom from some of our unhealthy habits and attitudes, we begin to realize that all such attachments, no matter how seemingly reasonable or justifiable, have the potential for becoming idols. These attachments interfere with our growing intimacy and communion with Father God that we both are beginning to enjoy.

This realization brings on a grand internal pivot. Instead of justifying and clinging to distracting attachments, we begin looking around for them, giving Holy Spirit permission to change our attitudes about them and to remove them as they come to light. Finally, we give Holy Spirit permission to identify any such idols we could not see on our own.

David understood this process well:

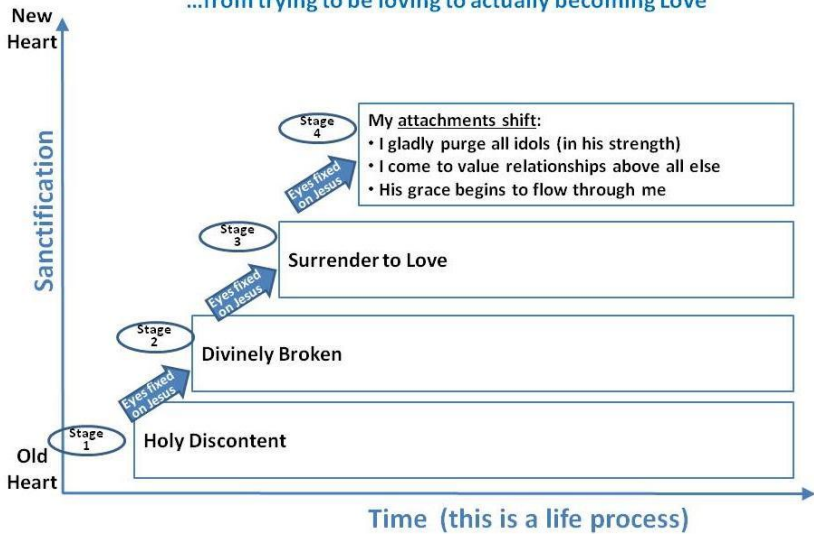
“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.”⁹⁷

Freedom feels so good that we don’t want to miss one inch of it by having unholy attachments interfering like spiritual bloodsuckers. That is why we no longer wilt when Holy Spirit points out another idol. We rejoice because now there is one less distraction in our heart.

⁹⁷ Ps. 139:23-24 (NLT)

Faith Journey Of The Heart

...from trying to be loving to actually becoming Love



When Naomi and I were living God’s dream in the inner city, the freedom we felt in releasing the many things we “couldn’t live without” was very liberating. For me in particular, living with the uncertainty of income and the daily risk of life in the “hood” helped keep my eyes fixed on Jesus in a deliberate and practical way I had never before experienced. I would have never chosen to do such a thing on my own, but with the guidance of God’s Spirit we could do it ... with joyful and expectant hearts.

Realize that all this attachment purging is absolutely impossible without God’s amazing grace. Ask and trust him for strength to permit “*Christ in me*” the freedom to do what only he can do. Ask anyone trying to get on top of a destructive habit, addiction or attitude. It’s like we have lost the ability to choose in that particular area; some other (evil) power has usurped our will, and we are hostage to its malevolent purposes.

But when the Spirit of Christ comes in to take up residence in us, he brings all his gifts and power of holiness, godliness and righteousness along with him. He moves in with a whole treasure chest packed full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Notice that in addition to all the other saintly character virtues comes self-control. What do you suppose self-control is good for? Well, among other things, it is the perfect tool for declaring “NO!” to the temptations that inevitably will come. These will be temptations to try some new evil or, more likely, to repeat some old evil at which we are well practiced. Self-control by the Spirit of Christ in us is our mace in the face for running off the tempter. Just look to Jesus’ presence in you, trust in his strength, and cooperate with the Spirit of Christ to say “NO!” Replace the temptation with some appropriate promise from Father, just like Jesus did when he was tempted. For example, you can pray,

“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”⁹⁸

Look for that way out! There it is! Don’t debate it, just do it!⁹⁹

Jesus seemed to have a really good handle on self-control. If we are trying to mimic his behavior, we are in for (more) disappointment. We can no more copycat Jesus than we can

⁹⁸ 1 Cor. 10:13

⁹⁹ Debating the deceiver is a guaranteed failure. Flee him by immediately turning your back on him and follow the Spirit instead.

swim like a seal. Only the “*Christ in me*” can function as Christ did. So when that temptation comes back around, instead of looking at the temptation, we need to shift our focus onto Jesus, giving him permission to speak and act through us against temptation. Our job is to relax and let him have his way, cooperating with the strength of his Spirit within us. This is freedom! This is victory! Paul declares:

*“For in him we live and move and have our being.”*¹⁰⁰

We have got to understand that Jesus is not just a resource for us to call on in order to make our life better. “*He is our life.*”¹⁰¹ There is no in-between. And because we are now allowing him to do the heavy lifting (since we can’t do it anyway), we realize how true it is when he say to us,

*“... my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*¹⁰²

Along with this shift in attachments, we begin to honor relationships in a new way. We begin to see people through the eyes of our compassionate Father. Because of the beautiful and holy virtues Jesus brought along when he moved into our sad soul, we now have available to us qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control that were previously impossible for us to consistently display. They are there for God’s glory, others’ blessing and our enjoyment. Ask the Spirit of Christ for the grace to displace old reactions with these new, holy ones.

¹⁰⁰ Acts 17:28

¹⁰¹ Col. 3:4

¹⁰² Matt. 11:30

Don't be confused! These character qualities are not "learned behavior" like all the self-improvement lessons we sporadically practiced for years. Behavior modification is only as good as our conscious awareness and self-discipline to implement them. They do nothing to upgrade our old nature. The qualities Jesus displays in us, on the other hand, come up from deep within our subconscious, the region where our actual nature resides. Jesus is, under the surface, performing a gut-rehab on our interior because we have come to a place where we honor our relationship with him and his Father above all else. It is now unthinkable for us to disrespect or disregard them or their holy names. Our hearts have come to a place of total joyful surrender to their love. We value and cherish their love and companionship above all else, and we delight in delighting them. Our goal is no longer to just appear holy. Now all we want is to honor the holiness and reputation of Christ in us. And that alone makes us holy.

The gallons of grace that God has showered on us begin to overflow. Our grace tank is full, and it just keeps filling. His grace spills out onto those around us, without conscious sacrifice on our part. This is grace with no strings attached! Where we were previously quick to judge or hold an offense, we are now able to smile and just turn it over to the One with infinitely broad shoulders. This kind of unconditional, no-strings grace is the stuff of Holy Love. We are beginning to become Holy Love; his sacred character is renewing our mind. His nature within us is beginning to show! Our emotional reflexes in the face of stress

no longer betray a selfish and broken nature. The old nature truly is dead; the old me is literally crucified with Christ.

“I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”¹⁰³

Remember Zacchaeus?¹⁰⁴ He was the short, rich tax collector who climbed a tree so he could see Jesus. Jesus saw him and invited himself to dinner at Zacchaeus’ house. The powerful presence and message of Jesus were enough to soften Zacchaeus’ heart to full surrender. He ended up giving half his wealth to the poor and making generous restitution for cheating others. We don’t know what else his surrender may have cost him . . . perhaps even his prestigious job as chief tax collector. But it didn’t matter to him. He had found the “pearl of great price” in Jesus and was not about to let it go. He had instantly released old attachments and made a new Holy attachment to the Spirit of Christ.

We move ahead on this journey only by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the initiator and completer of our faith. From start to finish, our attention must remain 24/7 on him.

Host Holy Love

Stage 5 is living in the Spirit and keeping in step with the Spirit as we host Holy Love. Hosting Holy Love is about living in the moment, fully aware of and responsive to “Christ in you.” It is about remaining attached to the Jesus-vine, drawing life, love

¹⁰³ Gal. 2:20 (NLT)

¹⁰⁴ Lk. 19:2-8

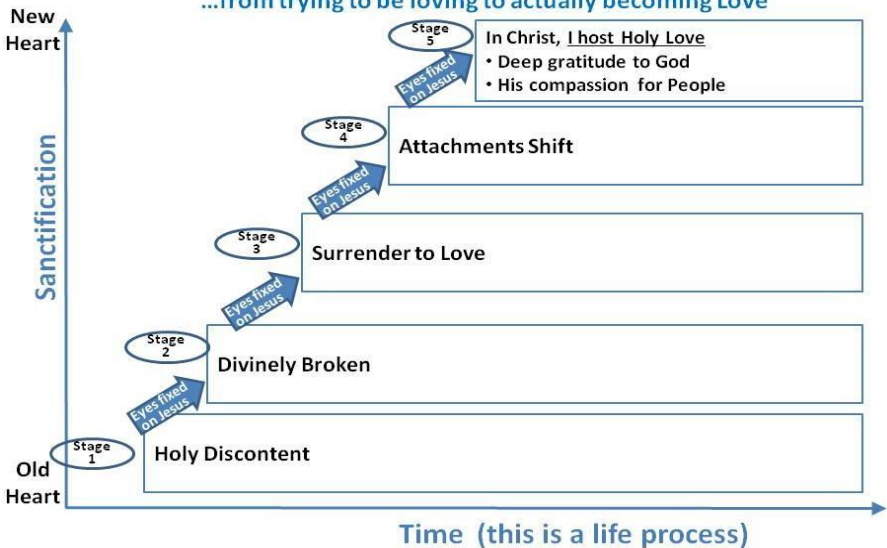
and joy from the source of all that is good. It is about being infused with Jesus’ own heart so that he is your life. At this stage, we have grown fully aware of just how much we have been forgiven, from how much bondage we have been released, of how many lies we have lived under and believed to be true about who we are and how loved we are. We live daily and moment by moment in the clarity of his light, dispelling all shadows of doubt and disbelief. We have a hotline to heaven open to us 24/7, and we’re on it continually.

Our first reflex in trouble is to lift it (along with our eyes) up to Father. We trust him, knowing that “*all things work together for good*”¹⁰⁵ because we are his children. When circumstances look like evil is getting the upper hand, we lift our eyes toward heaven, confident that “*all things serve you.*”¹⁰⁶

Though Naomi and I are now released from the inner city life and back in suburbia, we remain significantly detached from the comforts and perceived securities of this world. We are now able

Faith Journey Of The Heart

...from trying to be loving to actually becoming Love



to hold loosely what is currently entrusted to us, knowing who really owns it all and where our security really lies. We feel so rich in relationships and so richly cared for by our Father.

Because our vision is clear to see what truly is (in the spirit realm) and recognize the death trap from which we have been saved, our gratitude is on high alert. Rejoicing and thanksgiving are constantly in our hearts and often on our lips.

The beauty of living in Holy Love is that it has now become our lifestyle; we have received our new hearts. We no longer have to trust our unreliable “learned behavior” (left brain) to make us appear holy or righteous. That awful feeling of looking like a hypocrite and the fear of being found out as an imposter is gone. With our new nature, the unrestrained nature of “*Christ in me*” automatically does what we struggled for years to teach our behavioral response (left brain) to do. The subconscious heart-part (right brain) is now “*robed in his righteousness.*”¹⁰⁷ Praise God! It is Christ in us that now lives and breathes and displays the glory of God.

¹⁰⁷ Isa 61:10

9. Journey Realities

The description I have suggested here appears to be a smooth, linear progression from Stage 1 through Stage 5. But, we all know from personal experience that life does not work in a nice “up and to the right” manner. We move forward in fits and starts. Many times, we stall out temporarily at one level, not clear about just how to negotiate the next step up. Perhaps we aren’t ready yet for that next level. We may have some life lessons to learn right where we are.

Rather than stages, our growth process may seem more like our spirits are becoming more expansive, like we are walking in more authority, like our hearts are more aware of God’s presence and we are more attuned to his heart in the moment. This may be so in one area of our lives while another area still struggles.

The Holy Spirit is our guide for this faith journey of the heart. We don’t want to rush him (nor will he let us) any more than we want to drag our feet when he is actually trying to prompt us forward. That is why Paul said, *“If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”*¹⁰⁸ Let him set the pace. Keep looking to him.

Not Happening...

You may be asking, “What if I am not experiencing the changes of these different stages? Am I doing something wrong?” I suppose one place to start is to ask yourself if you are in fact experiencing and walking in Holy Love. How well do your heart and life align with the descriptions in chapter 1? If Holy Love

¹⁰⁸ Gal. 5:25

flows freely from the Father through you and on to bless others, you can forget about all the rest of this discussion and bask in the life-giving atmosphere of grace in which you are living.

However, if your life is not currently characterized this way, then prayerfully go backward down the progression until you find the stage where you may have stalled out. Ask Father for the grace and strength to pick up the journey from that point, fix your eyes on Jesus and remain attuned to his heart 24/7. Remember, being anywhere on this sanctification path is 100% grace. We can neither put ourselves on this graph nor make ourselves move “up and to the right” toward Holy Love. Every day we journey, and every stage along the path is a grace from the heart of our Father. From start to finish, we must seek him first. Start with his promise: “*If you seek me with your whole heart, you will find me.*” Commit to spend time with him. He knows we are busy and easily distracted.

Look at what God instructed Israel’s kings to do when they first took office:

“When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left.”¹⁰⁹ (Emphasis mine)

¹⁰⁹ Deut. 17:18-20

They had to copy the Scripture by their own hand, keep it with them and read it daily for the rest of their lives. Not a bad way to “seek him with your whole heart.” What would that practice look like for you?

Inertia

One of the physical laws of this world is inertia. The first part of the law of inertia as expressed by Newton is, “A body at rest tends to remain at rest.” If something is not moving, it won’t start moving all by itself; some outside force has to act on the resting object to get it to move. Our human experience seems to prove out that same law in our lives. We tend to stay put, wherever we are in life, unless some outside force pushes us off our perch.

Being our designer and builder, Jesus knows all about our spiritual inertia characteristic. Staying stuck in one place is frustratingly natural to us. He knows we need a nudge from outside ourselves to move us along in the direction we need to go. The inertial resistance we inevitably feel at those nudges has a lot to do with what we call our “comfort zone.” That is why the first stage of our heart’s faith journey begins with a Holy Discontent—a discomfort in staying stuck in our comfort zone that exceeds our comfort in remaining there. It is the same principle an addict experiences in his healing process; he must come to hate his addiction (and its consequences) more than he loves it (for he certainly does love it). In fact, until this discontent upgrades to desperation, most of us will remain stuck.

Just as Jesus is the initiator and finisher of our faith, so he is the initiator and finisher of the faith journey of our heart. As we move from one stage to the next, it is our eyes fixed on Jesus,

abiding in him, that will move us through the turbulence and discomfort that are inevitable in the face of change. It is our eyes fixed on Jesus that puts our hearts in a constantly open attitude of prayer. It is our eyes fixed on Jesus that empowers our will to trust him for the outcome, even if the outcome seems “wrong.” This is the kind of faith that pleases Father and releases his power to do the impossible in and through our lives. Fixing our eyes on Jesus gives our hearts the boldness to look straight into the storm and command, “Peace, be still!” Then, the peace that is beyond understanding floods our soul. With each such encounter our faith builds in strength, preparing our hearts to persevere in the next challenge. And all the while, we are producing the kind of fruit through our lives that Father loves!

Build Your Own Story

Each of us is unique; God is that creative. Even identical twins aren’t identical. Not only did God create each of us to be different and special, but he has a unique story and destiny for each to live out with him. Think of it as developing your own history with God. We each come to him in our own way and time. We each experience his Holy Spirit uniquely. There are no formulas. Don’t try to copy anyone else’s history; it won’t work. And yet, there is only one way to the Father, and that is through Jesus. Look to Jesus, whose Spirit will coach you, correct you, comfort you and ultimately lead you into Father’s presence. Fix your eyes on Jesus.

Pay Attention

Know that you are on a journey about which the enemy of your soul is not pleased. As long as you were content to warm a pew

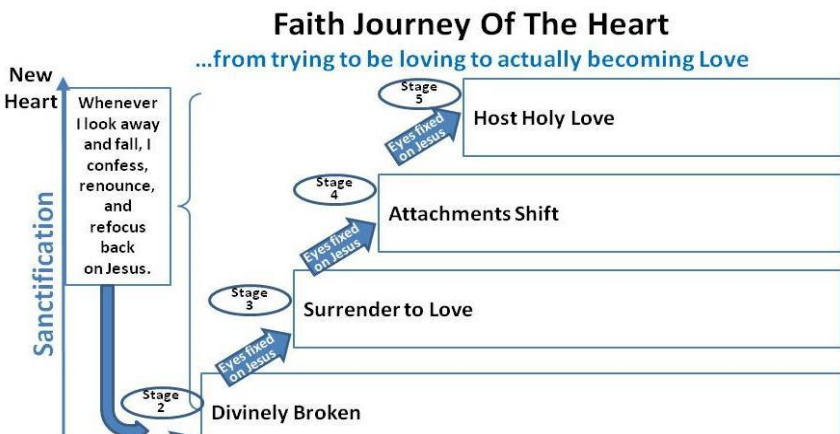
while singing happy songs, you were no threat to his dark kingdom. But now you are awake, aware and participating more and more in the kingdom of light, and you undoubtedly will influence others for freedom and righteousness—others whom Satan is determined to keep in bondage. You have now become a threat that he wants to neutralize. Be alert, stay awake, know that not only temptation but also persecution is your lot. Jesus said,

“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”¹⁰

So, there it is again. The “over-comer” (Christ) dwells within us. If we can trust him with our salvation, we can certainly trust him in the midst of a tempest. Fix your eyes on Jesus. The wind and waves still know his name.

Stumble Happens

What happens if (when) we lose focus, look away and fall like Peter did in his brief water-walking career? Though we never (hopefully) plan to fall, it will happen. Just like falling off a horse, we dust ourselves off by confessing and renouncing our failure,¹¹ make restitution where possible, refocus back on Jesus, and climb back onto the horse. There is no need nor room to beat oneself up or make endless penance. The Cross is sufficient; it



covered it all. Learn the lesson that is there to learn and move on with a pure, victorious heart.

Hosting Holy Love is what we were built for. At the very beginning, God breathed into us his breath of life ... not just breathing and walking-around life, but life in our spirit that can not only commune with his Spirit, but actually host his Spirit. The Spirit of God and all the virtues he embodies are ours. We get to house them, display them and utilize them according to the nature of the One they came from. When we come to this place of hosting Holy Love from our Father, we will ever so naturally and enthusiastically love his people. Just as “*God so loved the world...*,”¹¹² Christ in us will also love the world. We will not have to try harder to love our neighbor; we will naturally and joyfully love our neighbor. It is “*Christ in you*” that will love your neighbor, not you. Just get out of the way and let his love flow freely toward that brother or sister who is so hard to love.

¹¹² Jn. 3:16

10. Be Holy

Recap

Holy Love is what we were designed for. It is a key part of being made in God's image, since he is Holy Love. God envisioned before the foundation of the world that we would be a joyful family together. We were created with one mind and one will that was perfectly synchronized with his. But this story has a villain. The strategy of the enemy of our souls was to kidnap us from Father's family by making us just like the enemy: proud individuals, seeking our own glory, and so disqualifying us from pure fellowship with our father and each other. It's not that Satan hates us personally. But, if he can desecrate the King's kids, then he has indirectly wounded the Father who kicked him out of Glory in the first place. That is where the feud began.

Satan engineered our fall so that our core nature would be compromised. Jeremiah declared, "*The heart is deceitful above all things....*"¹¹³ Adam and Eve must have experienced a huge emotional shock when, for the first time, their natural response to God and each other was one of shame and blame. Their newly acquired nature at that sad moment is what we now know as our old nature.

Now, they had to contend with a double mind. One side of their brain (mind) was sure to desire that relationships be restored to what they had originally been: love, joy peace, patience.... On the other side of their brain (heart), they were saddled with a nature that was in opposition to God. Even if they wanted to be

¹¹³ Jer. 17:9

loving or patient, they found they had a short fuse that would inevitably blow up their best intentions. What a miserable turn of events for our first parents to have to adapt to. And, how awful to watch the same deadly nature manifest in their kids. It didn't take long for the first jealous murderer to emerge.

What our short-sighted enemy didn't understand is: 1) the depth of God's love for us; 2) that Christ could and would personally ransom us from death, and 3) that he would actually take up residence within us. He (Satan) has no power over our freedom in Christ. The only tools left in his arsenal now are distraction, destruction and deception, all specialties of his.

So, that is what he does. He attacks our heart—our “*wellspring of life*.” If he can distract us from fully receiving the freedom and life Christ is offering us, he has succeeded in tarnishing the body of Christ. By cheapening Holy Love to what the world now thinks of as love (selfish affection, lust, manipulation), he has desecrated the sacred nature of God in us. And, according to Barna, three-quarters of the church in America is stuck in the numbing and distracting soup of our self-focused culture. Our attachments and affections are directed to cultural idols rather than to God, and we don't even realize it! We are in Satan's induced coma.

Prayer For Holiness

Lord, in your mercy, wake us up. Give us a clear vision of the Holy Love we were designed to carry. With your grace, we will turn our eyes away from the fetid flow of this fallen world and fix them instead on Jesus. Set us on the holy road less traveled. Instill in us a Holy Discontent with the culture and trajectory of

this world. Holy Spirit, come and break our resistant hearts. Prepare us for complete and continual surrender to your Holy Love. Give us the grace to detach from the idols of this world and firmly attach us to your “Vine of Life.” We want to produce delicious fruit for Father’s table. Because you are Holy Love, I permit you to replace my heart of stone with your own heart of Holy Love. Thank you for supernaturally restoring me to the person you knew me to be before the fall, even before time began. Thank you that I am both the fruit of your Holy Love and the steward of it in your kingdom today. I will keep my eyes on Jesus, the initiator and completer of my faith journey into your heart. Thank you that, even in troubled waters, you will make all things work for the best “... *because all things serve you.*”¹¹⁴

Not Optional

By becoming Holy Love, we now have the capacity to love, not from our own bankrupt store of love, but from Christ’s unlimited store of divine love within. “*Christ in me*” is the game-changer. Living with heroic virtue is no longer hyperbole. In fact, not only is it possible, it is expected. Our Father directs us to “*Be holy, for I am holy.*”¹¹⁵ Fixing our eyes on Jesus and abiding in him is all we need to build up the quality of the soil of our hearts that will bear the kind of fruit in our lives that Father loves. But remember, this is not a formula. It is a grace. All the while we are asking, seeking, knocking, we must trust, rest, anticipate and expect that God will accomplish in us what he has promised—a new heart. Christ is the donor. His heart stopped beating so that

¹¹⁴ Ps. 119:91b

¹¹⁵ 1 Pet. 1:16

yours could start—a transplant using a perfect heart from the perfect match.

A Lighthouse On A Hill

As you become Holy Love, don't be surprised when you actually begin looking for opportunities to bless people. Loving your neighbor will actually become a joy and a passion, especially if they are unable to bless you back in-kind. Becoming Holy Love is nothing more or less than becoming fully transparent to the pure and brilliant light of Christ that dwells in your innermost being.

“Live clean, innocent lives as children, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.”¹¹⁶

Becoming Holy Love empowers you to,

“...let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”¹¹⁷

Closing Story of Holy Love¹¹⁸

“Smith Wigglesworth believed that a Christian should not be governed by his temperament. Many people are slaves to their anger. Wigglesworth himself had at one time been victim of a foul temper. To correct his problem, he got alone with God, shutting himself away until he had complete victory over his emotions. He became the very opposite of what he had been. Instead of violently reacting to circumstances, he was possessed of a great calm, no matter what the circumstance. He never

¹¹⁶ Phil 2:15

¹¹⁷ Matt. 5:16

¹¹⁸ Smith Wigglesworth, *The Secret Of His Power*, Albert Hibbert, Harrison House Publishers, 2009, pp.24-27

reacted in anger, even in the face of criticism or persecution—and he had his share of both....

“Wigglesworth was holy because he had his priorities in the proper order. I once asked him if he ever read a newspaper. He replied, ‘Beyond a glance at the headlines, no.’ I asked him why not. Did he not believe in reading newspapers? He answered that this was not the reason but that he simply did not have the time to read them. Besides, he said, why should he waste the time reading the paper which would give him the partial truth when, by reading the Word of God, he would be assured of getting the whole truth?

“Wigglesworth believed in total surrender to God. ‘Very often,’ he observed, ‘we try to tame the old man, and we can’t do it. But God can, if we are totally surrendered to him.’

“Smith Wigglesworth had no formal education. He was sent to work in the mill at the age of seven. Working twelve to fourteen hours a day, he had no opportunity to go to school. It was not until his twenty-sixth year that Wigglesworth learned to read and write; his wife taught him.

“When he and his wife started the Bowland Street Mission in Bradford, his wife was the preacher. Wigglesworth did the menial tasks, but after he was baptized with the Holy Ghost, he was transformed. He preached one night and his wife cried out, ‘That’s not my Smith!’ The old Smith Wigglesworth was seen no more. Henceforth, for him, to live was Christ.

“On New Year’s Day, 1913, his beloved wife Mary Jane, whom he affectionately called ‘Polly,’ set off to fulfill a preaching

engagement. During the trip she died suddenly. The body was taken back to her home. At Brother Wigglesworth's instructions, the lifeless form of his beloved was carried to her room and laid on the bed. When the men who had brought her body had left, Smith closed the door. In the name of Jesus Christ, he rebuked death and ordered it to give her up. His wife opened her eyes and looked straight at him.

‘Why have you done this, Smith?’ she asked.

‘Polly, I need you,’ he said.

‘Smith, my work is finished,’ she answered. ‘God wants me.’

“They talked for quite some time; then Wigglesworth said, ‘All right, I will let you go.’ She lay back upon the pillow and went with the Lord. In such a matter so important to his happiness, Wigglesworth willingly bowed to the will of God.

“Purity is vital to faith. When you throw your whole heart and life into the plan of God, when you long to be holy, when you long to be pure, then and only then will the law of the Spirit of life make you free from the law of sin and death.”

For The Joy Of It

This sharing of Holy Love is the joy set before Jesus that compelled him along the Via Dolorosa. With Christ in you, the only thing blocking Holy Love from beaming out from our lives would be a stony heart still holding residual rebellion within us.

Exchange the heart of the rebel for the real thing: Jesus' heart of Holy Love.

- Holy Love is our only hope.
- Holy Love is our fulfillment.
- Holy Love in us brings great pleasure to Father's heart.
- Holy Love is Jesus' legacy to us from his life on earth.
- Holy Love is our destiny in him.

Fix your eyes on Jesus and abide in him so that Christ, who is already in you, is free to live out his Holy Love through you. There is no higher calling or ambition ... or joy! And in Christ, *"It is finished!"*¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Jn. 19:30

Roadmap For The Journey

Stage	Focus
Holy Discontent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be honest with yourself and God; <i>“I do the very thing I hate.”</i>¹²⁰ ● Wake up to the warfare of disinformation from the enemy; his ambition is to <i>steal, kill and destroy</i>¹²¹ ● Shut off the fire hose of toxic messaging from the world; <i>“Be still and know that I am God.”</i>¹²²
Divinely Broken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be fully crucified with Christ. Put to death the old habits; it no longer has any legal power over you because of the work of the cross. ● Become aware of, and draw upon the reality, power, and virtuous gift-set that comes with <i>“Christ in you.”</i>
Surrendered To Love	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Abide in Jesus, commune with Father: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meditate on Him ○ Release attachments ○ Listen, respond, obey ● Pray continually: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ On scripture, with an open heart ○ Root out idols, learn to discern

¹²⁰ Rom. 7:15 (NLT)

¹²¹ Jn. 10:10

¹²² Ps. 46:10

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Awaken gratitude and let it have full and continual expression.
Attachment s Shift	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Set your mind and heart on things above ● Aggressively root out the remaining idols ● Value and honor relationships above all else ● Let grace flow through you onto others
Host Holy Love	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>“Walk in the Spirit and keep step with the Spirit”</i>¹²³ ● Put on Jesus’ <i>“robes of righteousness”</i>¹²⁴ ● <i>“Put on Love”</i>¹²⁵ ● <i>“He who realizes he has been forgiven much, loves much.”</i>¹²⁶ Let gratitude flow freely.

¹²³ Gal. 5:25

¹²⁴ Is. 61:10

¹²⁵ Col. 3:14

¹²⁶ Lk. 7:47