

Mar. 1: The Dynamic Heart (pt3)

What do you genuinely delight in?

Not what you believe in. Not what you agree with. But what actually brings you joy, shapes your choices, and captures your attention.

Over the past two weeks we've answered the question, why is the heart such a big deal to God? Because the heart governs the whole person. The heart is decisive and directional. This is a refresher and the point of this series. If I set my heart towards something, or away from something, that's where I will move with all my being. If I set my heart towards the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that's the direction I will move. If I set my heart towards sinful enticements, I will move towards sin again and again and again.

So the question becomes, where is my heart set? And how does the gospel, at the heart level, change my trajectory? Applying this at the deepest level requires understanding what Scripture means when it says heart. When Jesus summarized the greatest commandment as loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind, He made this a comprehensive target of what makes you, you. Loving God means you have been captivated and captured by God's awesomeness in all control areas. This is what it means to delight in the Lord. So how do we hit this target? Well, we need to be sure we know what we are aiming at and the tools at our disposal.

Over the last two weeks, we have established two foundational truths:

The heart is the control center of life.

The heart is constantly interpreting reality through belief.

The heart is always interpreting, assessing, and defining reality. Much of what we have covered in this worldview class has centered on the various lens we use to make sense of the world around us. How we interpret, meaning what we think, is not neutral: it reflects trust, worship, and allegiance. Spiritual growth requires identifying and renewing the beliefs that shape our experience.

Here is something foundational we covered last week: You do not respond directly to events. You respond to what you believe about events. And we do not merely record events like cameras. We select details. We assign meaning. We infer motive. We fill in gaps. And once we assign meaning, our emotions and responses follow naturally. We answer most of these questions in a split second. Almost like they are automatic. And that's a problem when they are misaligned, misinterpreted, or just plain missing the real issue. Over time patterns emerge until they are eventually deep ruts that feel more like prisons. These interpretations shape everything that follows, which means how we see, interpret, and ultimately respond to the world and life circumstances needs to be examined regularly in order to ensure Christlikeness.

This morning we turn to the second dynamic function of the heart: the affective heart — the desiring and longing dimension of who you are. If the cognitive heart asks, “What is true?” and “What do I believe?” and attempts to answer these questions with interpretations, then the affective heart asks, “What do I want?” Or even more deeply: “What possesses my deepest longing?” Every moment of every day, your heart is pulled by desire.

We were not created to be merely thinking beings. We were created to be worshipping beings. That means your heart is never neutral. It is never empty. It is never simply observing life. It is always moving toward something. Always attaching itself to something. Always assigning worth, value, and importance. Even when you are not aware of it or doing it intentionally, your heart is desiring and longing. And whatever captures your longing will shape your life and direct your trajectory.

What you long for will direct your decisions. What you delight in will govern your emotions. What you fear losing will quietly control you. No one ever drifts toward godly obedience; they drift toward what they find beautiful, what satisfies their deepest longing. You don't cling to Christ merely because He is logically defensible; you cling to Him because your heart is convinced He is worth having. That is why Scripture does not merely command us to know God and believe. It commands us to love Him. Because love is the engine of the soul. The question is not whether your heart worships. The question is what it worships. And that is why the affective heart matters so deeply. We worship God with right belief, like we covered last week, but we also worship God because we desire Him.

Jesus makes this unmistakably clear in Matthew 6:19-21:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The heart follows treasure. The heart moves toward what it values. We covered this two weeks ago from:

Matthew 13:44-46

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.⁴⁵ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls,⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

So let me pause for a second and ask a diagnostic question: What do you treasure? Or perhaps a better way of asking this question is: Who or what could you not bear to lose? I ask this question with a tremendous amount of compassion and grace because I am and have constantly been confronted by the reality that men and women leave the church and

turn their backs on God in droves because of something or someone they lost, and instead of turning to God they blame God, revealing a heart that longed for something above Him.

I vividly remember a season early in my fatherhood where I imagined the total devastation I would feel if either Cora or Aaron were taken from me. I set my heart towards total destruction if that ever happened. I could not, with confidence, tell you that I would have responded by turning to God rather than away from Him. Over the years, the Holy Spirit has chiseled away at this defect in my affections, revealing the hard reality that I didn't love God as much as I thought I did. That I loved my kids more than God and couldn't bear the thought of losing them. They had become my treasure, and that's where my treasure was being stored. Loving your kids is a good thing, but they cannot be the ultimate thing.

Jesus summed up the Law describing a comprehensive love for God. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart..." The greatest commandment is not merely to think rightly or act rightly — it is to desire rightly. Scripture consistently portrays the heart as the seat of affection and desire:

Psalm 37:4 — "Delight yourself in the Lord..."

Psalm 73:25 — "Whom have I in heaven but you?"

Proverbs 4:23 — From the heart flow the springs of life.

The affective heart is not optional. It is central, just like the cognitive heart. The serpent attacked Eve's interpretation, as we covered last week. But sin is also described in terms of desire.

James 1:14 says:

Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Temptation does not begin with behavior. It begins with interpretation, and it also begins with affection. The problem in our lives is not that we desire too much. It's that we desire too little of what truly satisfies. C.S. Lewis famously argued that we are not too strong in desire but too weak — satisfied with lesser things when infinite joy is offered. He describes us as children content to play with mudpies in the slums because we cannot comprehend a vacation by the beach even though the beach is offered and available. The affective heart is a worship engine:

- It attaches value
- It assigns worth
- It treasures

And whatever it treasures most will shape everything else. Desires, like all emotions, are not random eruptions. They are indicators of what we value, what we long for, and what we crave.

When you feel:

Fear — something you value feels threatened.
Anger — something you treasure feels violated.
Sadness — something you cherish feels lost.
Joy — something you long for feels gained.

Emotions expose affection. Consider Jonah in Jonah 4. He is furious when Nineveh is spared. Why? Because his love for national vindication was stronger than his love for God's mercy. Or consider the rich young ruler in Mark 10. When Jesus calls him to sell everything and follow Him, he walks away sorrowful. Why sorrowful? Because his treasure was exposed. Jesus did not simply confront behavior. He exposed affection. Your emotional life is diagnostic; it reveals your worship.

Now, let's clarify something important. Emotions themselves are not sinful. God created them. Jesus wept. Jesus rejoiced. Jesus experienced anguish in Gethsemane. But emotions become disordered when they are tethered to disordered desires and longings. The issue is not whether we feel deeply. The issue is what our feelings are anchored to, just like our beliefs and interpretations. It's impossible to overstate the impact sin has upon our world, our thoughts, and our desires because sin distorts the affective heart.

2 Timothy 4:3

The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions...

Teachers that will affirm their desires and longings. Teachers that will affirm the direction sin is pulling their hearts towards. Sin radically impacts our affective hearts.

We mentioned last week Romans 1:25 says humanity "exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator." The exchange is not merely intellectual. It is worshipful. We take good gifts and elevate them to ultimate status. Marriage becomes ultimate identity. Children become ultimate meaning. Success becomes ultimate validation. Comfort becomes ultimate security. The problem is not that these things are bad. The problem is that they are not God.

Augustine described sin as "disordered loves." Loving good things in the wrong order. When lesser loves become ultimate loves, fear, anger, and discontent increases. Why? Because anything that can be lost will create fear. Anything that defines you can enslave you. The affective heart, when misdirected, produces idolatry, addiction, control, envy, despair.

Not because desire is wrong — but because it is misplaced and becomes controlling desires. Just like the cognitive heart contains controlling beliefs, both good and bad, the affective heart possesses controlling desires. And when those desires are misaligned, conflict follows. For instance:

The husband walks in from work exhausted, sets his bag down quietly, and heads toward the kitchen. His wife greets him: “Hey, can you help with dinner and homework? It’s been a little crazy.” He exhales and says, “Can I just have a few minutes?” That’s the moment. No harsh tone. No argument. Just an ordinary exchange at the end of a long day. But underneath that simple interaction, two hearts are desiring and longing for something.

All day the wife has been carrying responsibility. What she has wanted most isn’t efficiency. It isn’t even help in a technical sense. She has wanted partnership. She has wanted connection. She has wanted to feel like she is not alone in the weight of the day. Those are her controlling desires. When her husband exhales and asks for a few minutes, something deeper than irritation rises. What she longs for feels threatened. Her heart says:

- “I want to feel supported.”
- “I want to feel seen.”
- “I want to feel like we’re in this together.”

When that desire feels unmet, emotion follows:

- Hurt
- Disappointment
- Loneliness

Her quieter tone during dinner and subtle retreat isn’t mainly about the five-minute delay. It’s about a longing for closeness that suddenly feels fragile.

The husband walked into the kitchen carrying a different longing. He wanted relief. He wanted quiet. He wanted to feel capable after a draining day. Those are his controlling desires. When she immediately asks for help, his heart tightens — not because he doesn’t love her, but because what he most wants in that moment feels interrupted. His internal desire sounds like:

- “I just need a moment to breathe.”
- “I don’t want to fail tonight.”
- “I want peace.”

When he senses her tone cool, another longing surfaces — the desire to feel respected, not inadequate. When that desire feels threatened, emotion follows:

- Defensiveness
- Discouragement
- Withdrawal

His retreat isn’t primarily anger. It’s protection around a vulnerable longing.

This is not first a failure of communication. It is a collision of conflicting loves.

- She deeply wants connection.
- He deeply wants peace.

Neither desire is sinful in itself. But in that moment, each heart treats its desire as urgent and central. Each heart quietly says: “This is what I need most right now.” And when that longing feels blocked, emotion intensifies.

Tension escalates when good desires become controlling desires. If her deepest treasure becomes: “I must feel supported in this exact way right now.” Then disappointment deepens into resentment. If his deepest treasure becomes: “I must have uninterrupted peace.” Then withdrawal feels justified. The issue isn’t that they desire connection or rest. The issue is when those desires become non-negotiable — when they quietly rise above love for Christ and love for one another. Anything we treat as ultimate will begin to rule and control our emotional life.

Now imagine the same moment governed by a greater love. If the wife’s deepest desire is: “I want Christ more than immediate reassurance.” She may still feel tired — but not devastated. If his deepest desire is: “I want to love my wife as Christ loves me.” He may still feel exhausted — but not controlled by it. When love for Christ outranks love for comfort or validation, emotional intensity softens. The moment becomes an opportunity to serve rather than a battleground for unmet longing.

So how does change happen at the level of desire? You cannot simply command your heart to feel differently. You cannot shame your affections into holiness. God reshapes desire, and He does it through three primary means:

1. The Revelation of Greater Beauty

Psalm 27:4:

One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

Folks, David isn’t talking about heaven or eternity. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord, that I may dwell in His presence all the days of this life, that I may gaze upon His beauty with every moment of my being here and now! David had tasted and seen that the Lord is good and He kept coming back for more! He dedicated his life to pursuing more of this delight, desire, and satisfaction. The ONE thing he asks, his ONE desire, was God’s presence. The heart changes when it sees something more beautiful, more compelling, more glorious. And this is only possible for a heart that receives, for a heart that is open, for a heart that will actually turn his or her gaze in the right direction, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. The most audacious request any human has ever made of God comes from Moses in Exodus 33:18 when he asks the Great I Am,

“Please show me your glory.”

And the Lord God Almighty responds:

“I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will

show mercy. ²⁰ But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.”
²¹ And the Lord said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock,
²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with
my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back,
but my face shall not be seen.”

Even this glimmer of God’s glory left Moses’s face glowing, to the point he wore a Covid mask so the Israelites wouldn’t freak out. But Paul says there’s a greater glory, brought about through the ministry of righteousness paid for by Christ, a glory that far exceeds and surpasses and is permanent, a glory not found through obeying the Law but found in gazing upon Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:12

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, ¹³ not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

We do not overcome lesser desires by suppressing them, but by glazing upon ultimate desire. The gospel reveals Christ’s sufficiency, Christ’s worth, and Christ’s sacrificial love. When the heart sees Christ clearly, when we gaze and behold the glory of the Lord, when we turn to the Lord like in verse 16 we just read, we are transformed from one degree of glory to another. When we delight in Jesus, our affections begin to reorder. If we miss this, we miss everything.

How else does change happen at the level of desire? By

2. Rehearsing Truth to Realign Affection

Psalms 42 shows this process vividly.

Psalms 42:5-11

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation ⁶ and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. ⁷ Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. ⁸ By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. ⁹ I say to God, my rock: “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” ¹⁰ As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your

God?"¹¹ Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

"Why are you cast down, O my soul?" The psalmist does not deny his emotion. He speaks truth into them. He rehearses, in his cognitive heart, a reality shaped by God's Word and character. Truth recalibrates desire. It has a direct cause and effect relationship for how we respond to our circumstances. "Hope in God," the psalmist declares, anchoring the reality of his pain with the reality of God's presence.

Psalm 46:1-3

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.² Therefore we will not fear though the earth give way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,³ though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

As you "Set your minds on things above" as Paul states in Colossians, as you renew the cognitive heart, the affective heart follows. Desire is shaped by meditation. What we repeatedly dwell on grows in value. Consider the truth of that for a moment. If you dwell on your comfort, if in your spare moments you daydream about ease or pleasure, those things grow in value within your affective heart. You will long for them, which is exactly what daydreaming is. If you dwell on your pain, and again, don't hear this as me or God's Word asking you to diminish pain, but rather refocus it. If you dwell on your pain, the things you have lost, the heartache of your sin and being sinned against, concerns about God's provision for tomorrow, if that's where you live within your cognitive heart, then your pain grows more valuable than the cross in your affective heart.

Rehearsing truths realigns affections. That's not self-help pop psychology garbage because God is the one that realigns, not you doing or saying the things. You don't rehearse in order to convince yourself. You rehearse because you are already convinced in your cognitive heart and need to be reminded in your affective heart. God forbid, you begin your day by looking into a mirror and telling yourself how awesome you are, how strong you are, how capable you are, how beautiful you are. I promise you, those "truths" will keep you imprisoned. Rehearsing truth can only realign affections when we are rehearsing biblical truths rightly, meaning within context. Doing all things through Christ who strengthens you has nothing to do with you being awesome or "struggling through this life" and everything to do with contentment and persevering in the midst of suffering by His strength. God provides, but we play a part, and if we neglect or avoid or dismiss our part, if we neglect to cling to and speak truth into our circumstances, then we will remain stuck. In a very real sense, the cognitive heart shepherds the affective heart.

A third and final way God reshapes desires we will cover today is by:

3. Our Worshiping Through Obedience

If rehearsing biblical truths is how the cognitive heart shapes and influences the affective heart, then worshiping through obedience is how the volitional heart, the choosing willful heart, shapes and influences our desires. Quite often obedience precedes emotion.

One of the most common misunderstandings about desire is this: “I’ll obey once I feel like it.” But Scripture consistently shows that obedience is not merely the result of reordered love — it is one of the means God uses to reorder love. Sometimes obedience flows from delight; sometimes obedience trains delight.

Jesus says in John 14:15:
If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

We often hear that verse as diagnostic — that obedience proves love. But that’s only half of the story. Six verses later in John 14:21, Jesus adds something profound:

John 14:21
“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

Obedience does not just demonstrate love — it deepens relational experience. As we obey, Christ reveals Himself more and more. As we obey, we encounter Christ more fully. As we encounter Him more fully, affection grows. Love is not merely proven by obedience. Love is cultivated and strengthened through the practice of obedience.

And Hebrews 5:14 speaks of mature believers possessing the power of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Trained by constant practice. The Christian life is not passive. The heart is shaped by repeated patterns. Similarly,

Hebrews 12:11 says:
For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Training implies repetition. It implies deliberate engagement. It implies movement before feeling. Our culture assumes desire is fixed — “This is just how I feel.” Scripture declares that desire is moldable. The heart is not static. It is formed. When we act against sinful desire in faith, we are not merely suppressing behavior — we are starving a competing love.

James 4:7–8 gives us a sequence:
Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

Submission comes first. Drawing near is the final result. When you practice generosity, you weaken greed. When you practice forgiveness, you weaken bitterness. When you practice gratitude, you weaken entitlement. Obedience clarifies mastery; it clarifies allegiance. It

forces the heart to choose which love will rule. You cannot simultaneously indulge envy and cultivate contentment. One will shrink as the other grows. There will be seasons when the heart feels cold. In those moments, waiting for emotional warmth before obeying only entrenches disordered love. Instead, we step forward in trust. And often, as we obey: clarity increases, gratitude grows, joy returns. The action does not manufacture love — but it clears space for it.

And our ultimate example of this is Christ Himself when He prayed in the garden in Gethsemane, “Not my will, but yours, be done.” His obedience did not emerge from ease. It emerged from submission. This is how reordered love works. We obey because Christ is better — even when immediate emotion resists. God is not satisfied with reluctant obedience because He invites us into delight. The Christian life is not primarily the suppression of desire. It is the redirection of desire. The Spirit works not only to inform your mind, but to warm your heart.

You are always loving something. The question is not whether you desire — it is what you desire most. The affective heart is powerful. It can enslave you to lesser treasures. Or it can anchor you in eternal satisfaction here and now. The gospel does not merely forgive disordered loves. It gives you a new object of love.

Next week we will explore the volitional heart — how belief and desire become decision and direction. But this morning, consider:

What does your emotional life reveal about what your heart treasures most?
And where might Christ be inviting you to see Him as more beautiful than what currently captivates you?