

Equipping Hour: Mar. 8

Mar. 8: The Dynamic Heart (pt4)

Learning Opportunity: Biblical Counseling Training

Over the past three weeks, we have been constructing a biblical understanding of the human heart — not sentimentally, but functionally. Not psychologically, but theologically. Our goal, the target we are trying to hit, is delighting in the Lord, and this requires examining not just our hearts but also how our hearts work. In Week One, we established that the heart is the immaterial control center of life. It is not merely emotion. It is not merely thought. It is the core of the person — the fountainhead from which life flows.

Proverbs 4:23 commanded us:

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Everything downstream — words, habits, reactions, relationships — originates upstream in the heart. Jesus affirmed this in:

Mark 7:20–23

“What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Remember that the heart is decisive and directional.

Then in Week Two, we slowed down and examined the cognitive heart — the believing, thinking, and interpreting dimension of the heart. We saw that:

- We do not respond to events; we respond to what we believe about events.
- Belief is not neutral; it is relational and directional.
- Even unbelief is not absence — it is redirected trust.

The heart thinks. The heart interprets. The heart assigns meaning. We talked about controlling beliefs during that lesson as well. Controlling beliefs are the interpretive conclusions we hold that function as ruling assumptions about God, ourselves, and the world. They are not fleeting thoughts. They are the “this is just the way it is” convictions that quietly steer our reactions, relationships, and emotional patterns. They are settled judgments, and they can be biblical aligned or misaligned, which is why they need examination.

Controlling beliefs answer questions like:

- What must I have in order to be okay?
- What can I not afford to lose?
- What does this situation really mean?
- Who or what ultimately determines my safety and worth?

These beliefs sit beneath surface emotions. If a controlling belief says, “I must be respected to be secure,” then criticism will feel catastrophic. If it says, “God is distant when I fail,” then sin will lead to hiding rather than repentance. If it says, “I am on my own,” then fear will dominate every uncertain circumstance. If it says, “God is good, sovereign, and wise, and He is enough,” then His presence provides assurance and emotional peace. In each case, the emotional reaction makes sense—given the belief underneath it.

This is why renewing the cognitive heart is so essential. Behavior modification cannot reach controlling beliefs. Emotional regulation techniques alone cannot uproot them. They must be exposed, examined, and replaced with truth through an act of submission.

Last week we slowed down and looked carefully at the affective heart — the desiring and longing dimension of the heart. We saw that Scripture does not treat us merely as thinking beings but as desiring beings. The heart is always attaching itself to something it believes will satisfy. Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:21 guided us: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Our emotions are not random interruptions; they are indicators. They reveal

- what we value,
- what we fear losing,
- what we crave,
- and what we believe we must have in order to be okay.

Just as in Week Two when we identified controlling beliefs — those deep, interpretive convictions that shape how we see everything — in Week Three we identified controlling desires. These are not surface preferences but ruling loves.

A controlling desire says:

- “I must have this.”
- “I cannot lose this.”
- “If this is threatened, I unravel.”

It might be approval, comfort, control, security, respect, success, or relational harmony. These desires often operate quietly beneath the surface, but when they are obstructed, our reactions expose them. Anger reveals blocked desire. Fear reveals threatened desire. Bitterness reveals disappointed desire.

We saw that the problem is not desire itself. God made us to desire. The problem is when good things become ultimate things — when gifts replace the Giver as the object of our deepest affection. Disordered love leads to disordered living. And transformation at the affective level does not happen by suppressing desire but by reordering it — by seeing Christ as more beautiful, more sufficient, and more worthy than the rival loves that compete for our hearts.

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Now today we come to the third dynamic function of the heart: the volitional heart. If the cognitive heart asks: “What is true?” And the affective heart asks: “What do I long for or desire?” The volitional heart asks: “What will I do?” Or perhaps even more searching: “What have I committed myself to?” The volitional heart is where belief and desire become movement. It is where allegiance becomes embodied. It is where worship becomes visible. And we must understand this clearly:

You are always choosing:

- Even when you feel passive. Doing nothing is still a choice.
- Even when you feel reactive. Even a split second response is a choice,
- Even when you feel overwhelmed.

The volitional heart is always at work, just like the cognitive heart. Just like the affective heart. Modern culture treats the “will” as sovereign. We speak of “free will” as though it were detached from belief and desire. As though at any moment we could simply override our inner world through sheer determination. Scripture does not speak that way.

Proverbs 16:9 says:

The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

Planning is volitional language. Direction is volitional language. And Proverbs says that planning arises from the heart. The will does not float above the heart. The will flows from the heart. Romans 6 gives us one of the clearest descriptions of the volitional heart in the New Testament.

Paul writes in Romans 6:16:

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Notice the word “present.” It means to yield, to offer, to give yourself over. This is volitional action. Then in verse 17 and 18:

But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

Not coerced obedience. Not superficial compliance. Obedient from the heart. Your volitional heart expresses submissive allegiance to the message of the gospel that has been committed to you by God’s grace, making you a slave to righteousness rather than sin. This is a willful act of receiving.

Jesus echoes this in Luke 9:23:

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“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

Deny. Take up. Follow. These are volitional verbs. The Christian life is not merely a feeling. It is not merely a belief system. It is a chosen path, and NOT blindly. Notice this stark line-in-the-sand statement by Jesus in Luke 14:27-32:

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Again, The Christian life is not merely a feeling. It is not merely a belief system. It is a chosen path, and NOT blindly. It’s all three dynamic functions of the heart. When we talk about belief, desire, and choice, we must be careful not to present the heart as though it operates like a factory assembly line — first a thought is produced, then a feeling is generated, then a decision is executed. Scripture does not describe the heart in that segmented way. The heart is not divided into departments that take turns functioning. It is a living, unified center of response before God. It is always oriented somewhere. It is always leaning toward or away from Him. Belief, affection, and volition are not stages in a process; they are dimensions of one dynamic posture.

Psalms 95 helps us see this clearly. The psalm begins with exuberant worship: “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!” But midway through, the tone shifts into warning: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness.” The psalm does not analyze Israel’s failure into psychological components. It does not say, “First they doubted, then they desired wrongly, then they chose rebellion.” It says, “Do not harden your hearts.” Hardening is not the final stage of a sequence. It is a posture. It is a dynamic resistance of the whole inner person.

When Israel hardened their hearts in the wilderness, what was happening? They were hearing God’s voice. They had seen His mighty works in Egypt. They had walked through the Red Sea. They were receiving daily provision of manna. Yet in that same lived reality, they were testing Him. Back to Psalm 95:

“Your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.”

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Their complaint in Exodus 17 — “Is the Lord among us or not?” — that was a cognitive complaint, a belief complaint. Their fear and resentment were affective. Their refusal to trust and follow was volitional. But Scripture does not dissect those into isolated stages. It calls the whole movement “hardening the heart.” Their beliefs about God’s presence, their desires for security, and their decision to grumble and test Him were intertwined in a single, unified turning away.

Hebrews 3 takes up Psalm 95 and applies it directly to the church:

Hebrews 3:12

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

Then the author encourages:

¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Notice how the language continues to treat the heart as unified. An unbelieving heart leads to falling away. Hardening happens through sin’s deceit. Falling away, turning away is not portrayed as a single dramatic leap off a cliff. It is drift. It is gradual reorientation. Belief shifts. Affection cools. Allegiance loosens. But Scripture does not isolate these as separate mechanical stages. It describes a whole-heart turning away from God.

The Bible often uses directional language to describe this dynamic. Proverbs 4:23 commands vigilance because the heart is always moving. Psalm 119 repeatedly asks God to “incline my heart to your testimonies.” Inclination is posture language. It is directional language. When the heart inclines toward God’s testimonies, obedience flows naturally. When it inclines toward selfish gain, compromise follows. But again, this is not a neat sequence; it is unified orientation.

Jesus reinforces this unity in:

Luke 6:45

“The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”

He does not speak of a final stage of the heart. He speaks of overflow. Speech and action erupt from whatever presently fills and orients the inner person. In Mark 7, when Jesus says that evil thoughts, adultery, pride, and folly come from within, He does not categorize them into separate internal compartments. He roots them all in one source: the heart. The whole inner person is involved in every outward act.

James 1:14, which is often quoted in linear terms — desire conceives and gives birth to sin — is actually using organic imagery. Conception and birth are not mechanical processes; they are living processes. They describe growth, nurturing, development. The heart is not checking boxes in sequence. It is leaning, nurturing, moving toward what it perceives as good. The will does not detach from belief and desire and then act independently. The will is the heart in action.

We see this dynamic vividly in the life of Peter. On the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter boldly insists that he will never deny his Lord. His confession is strong. It is sincere. Yet within hours he denies Christ three times. If we tried to reduce Peter's failure to a simple sequence — first he believed wrongly, then he desired wrongly, then he chose wrongly — we would flatten the story. The Gospels show us a heart under pressure. Jesus warns the disciples to watch and pray, "for the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." There is tension within Peter. He falls asleep instead of praying. He follows Jesus at a distance. He warms himself by the enemy's fire. Each of these movements reveals orientation. Fear is rising. Self-preservation is asserting itself. Loyalty is under strain. When the servant girl confronts him, the denial erupts. It is not an isolated decision detached from the rest of his inner life. It is the visible expression of a heart momentarily overwhelmed by fear.

And then comes restoration. In John 21, the risen Christ asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Jesus does not dissect Peter's failure into analytical components. He goes to the center. Peter affirms his love, and Jesus commands him, "Feed my sheep." Love is reaffirmed. Allegiance is restored. Direction is reestablished. Later, in Acts, Peter stands before the authorities and declares, "We must obey God rather than men." The same man who denied Christ now boldly proclaims Him. What changed? His heart was reoriented by grace. His belief in the risen Christ, his love for the Lord, AND his allegiance were all strengthened together. The will expressed that renewed orientation in courageous obedience.

The epistles continue to describe this dynamic unity. James warns against being "double-minded, unstable in all his ways." A divided heart produces unstable direction. The instability is not compartmentalized. It affects "all his ways." Later James calls believers to "purify your hearts, you double-minded." Purification is about unified allegiance, just like Jesus taught about trying to serve both God and money.

Paul speaks similarly in Colossians 3: "Set your minds on things that are above." "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you." "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, compassionate hearts." These commands are not aimed at separate compartments of the inner life. They address the whole person. Setting the mind, putting to death, putting on — these are unified movements of orientation. When Paul says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts," he uses governance language. Something rules. The heart is always under some authority.

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Romans 8 contrasts living according to the flesh with living according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the flesh “set their minds” on the things of the flesh. But this setting of the mind is not merely intellectual. It is eternal orientation. It leads to death. Conversely, to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. Paul then says, “If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” Putting to death is volitional action empowered by the Spirit. But it flows from a Spirit-oriented heart. Again, not a sequence — an orientation.

Galatians 5 reinforces this with the command to “walk by the Spirit.” Walking is sustained, step-by-step movement. The flesh and the Spirit are opposed to each other, creating internal conflict. Yet the believer is not passive in that conflict. The heart is being oriented, and the will expresses that orientation in concrete steps. The fruit of the Spirit is not bolted-on behavior. It is the visible outgrowth of a heart inclined toward the Spirit’s rule.

Returning to Psalm 95 and Hebrews 3, we see that hardening is not just wrong thinking or misdirected feeling. It is whole-heart resistance. “They always go astray in their heart,” God says. Going astray is directional language. It describes wandering from a path. Hardening is posture. Conversely, Psalm 57 declares, “My heart is steadfast, O God.” Steadfastness is stability of orientation. It is belief, affection, and volition unified toward God.

All of this confirms the same truth: the heart is dynamic and unified. It is always oriented somewhere. The volitional heart is not the last link in a chain reaction; it is the heart in motion. It is what your believing and loving heart does. When Israel hardened their hearts, they were not completing a third stage in a sequence. They were resisting the living God as whole persons. When Peter denied Christ, his entire inner world was under pressure. When he was restored, his entire inner world was renewed. When a believer obeys in a difficult moment, that obedience is the eruption of a heart presently inclined toward Christ.

Scripture’s preferred language is not segmentation but direction: walk, turn, incline, harden, follow, drift, stand firm, endure. The question is never whether it is active. The question is toward whom it is inclined. The volitional heart reveals that inclination in visible action.

Let’s return to the ordinary moment in the kitchen we’ve revisited over the past two weeks. A husband walks in exhausted. His wife asks for help. He exhales and says, “Can I just have a few minutes?” Cognitively, interpretations form. Affectively, desires surface. Now comes the volitional moment. The wife stands at a crossroads. She can:

Withdraw emotionally.

Respond sharply.

Express her need calmly.

Choose patience.

The husband stands at his own crossroads. He can:

Retreat into silence.

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Defend himself.

Engage immediately.

Communicate clearly and re-engage.

What determines the path? If her allegiance in that moment is: "I must protect myself from feeling unsupported," She may choose distance. If her allegiance is: "I belong to Christ, and I want to love sacrificially," She may choose clarity and grace.

If his allegiance is: "I must preserve comfort," He may withdraw. If his allegiance is: "I want to reflect Christ's love," He may choose engagement even in fatigue.

The moment pivots on the point of choice, and this pivot is so incredibly important. This is why we covered the gift of choice so exhaustively in this class, both last Spring and recently with decision-making. And here is the crucial truth:

- Repeated choices become patterns.
- Patterns become habits.
- Habits shape character.
- Character shapes the home.

Why? Because the volitional heart sets trajectory. And there are only two options: towards God, or rebellion against God. One of the most subtle dangers in the Christian life is not active rebellion but passive neglect, which is its own kind of rebellion.

James 4:17

Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

The will can sin by omission. The rich young ruler believed certain truths. He felt sorrow. But he did not follow. Emotion is not obedience. Conviction is not obedience. Agreement is not obedience. The will must move. Why? Because hardening happens gradually. Through repeated refusal. Through repeated postponement. The volitional heart is strengthened or weakened by use. And the preeminent biblical use of the volitional human heart is worship.

When we say that every choice is worship, we are not using poetic exaggeration. We are stating a biblical reality. Scripture does not present worship as confined to singing, gathered services, or explicitly religious activity. Worship is allegiance expressed through choice. Consider that definition for a moment. Your choices reveal the object of your worship. Am I worshipping the creation? Or am I willfully offering myself to the One who is ultimate.

Romans 12:1

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

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The language of presenting is volitional. It is offering. It is yielding. Worship is not merely what happens in a sanctuary; it is what happens when the will bends in allegiance and submission. That last section, “which is your spiritual worship,” is best understood as saying, “This is the way you ought to worship God in your hearts.” “Spiritual worship” means this is your whole-heart response to the mercies of God.

Like we mentioned earlier in Romans 6, the will is framed in terms of presentation: “If you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey.” The act of presenting is worshipful allegiance. You become what you consistently yield to. You serve what you obey. And obedience is not religious ritual; it is directional surrender. This means that in the smallest decisions of the day, worship is occurring.

When you are criticized or slandered and you choose restraint rather than retaliation, worship is occurring. In that moment, you are declaring that Christ’s honor matters more than your immediate vindication. You are saying, “My identity is not secured by winning this exchange but by belonging to Him.” That choice is not merely self-control; it is allegiance.

When you are exhausted and someone asks for help, and you choose to serve rather than withdraw into self-protection, worship is occurring. You are declaring that Christ’s pattern of selfless, sacrificial love governs you. You are saying that your comfort is not your ultimate master. That is worship.

When fear rises about finances, the future, or your children, and you deliberately entrust your concerns to the Lord in prayer instead of spiraling into panic, worship is occurring. Philippians 4 tells us to bring our cares and concerns to God. In that moment, you are declaring that God is trustworthy. Your act of entrusting is worship.

When you are tempted to compromise ethically at work for advancement or security, and you choose integrity instead, worship is occurring. You are declaring that Christ’s approval outweighs career advancement. Colossians 3:23 says, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.” That perspective transforms ordinary labor into worshipful allegiance.

When no one is watching and you choose purity instead of indulgence, worship is occurring. You are presenting your body not to desire but to Christ. You are saying with your actions that He is worth obedience even when there is no applause. That is worship.

When you forgive someone who has wronged you, worship is occurring. Ephesians 4:32 commands, “Forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” In forgiving, you are declaring that Christ’s mercy toward you governs your posture toward others. You are aligning your will with His mercy. That is worship.

Suffering is by far the greatest opportunity for worship. When hardship comes and you choose to remain faithful rather than grow embittered, you are making a declaration about

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God's worth. Job's confession — "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" — is not mere resignation. It is worship under pressure. It is allegiance expressed through endurance.

This reality needs to reframe how we think about the Christian life. We often imagine worship as something we attend. Scripture presents worship as something we embody. The volitional heart makes visible what we treasure most. The volitional heart makes visible who we trust most.

This also means that sin is never merely rule-breaking. Sin is rival worship. When Israel hardened their hearts in the wilderness, they were not merely complaining about water. They were questioning whether God was trustworthy. Their grumbling revealed misplaced allegiance. When Peter denied Christ, he was not merely uttering false words; he was, in that moment, aligning his will with fear rather than loyalty. And when he later stood boldly before the authorities and declared, "We must obey God rather than men," that courage was not personality development. It was worship. It was allegiance to Christ made visible. The same dynamic operates in us.

When you linger in Scripture instead of scrolling endlessly through distraction, you are declaring that Christ's voice matters more than escaping for far longer than you realize. When you confess sin instead of defending yourself, you are declaring that Christ's cleansing matters more than your pride. When you give generously instead of hoarding, you are declaring that Christ is your security.

These are not isolated religious moments. They are worship. The volitional heart reveals the governing treasure of the inner person. It is possible to sing loudly in a service and yet present your will to self-rule all week. It is also possible to perform unnoticed acts of obedience that resound far more loudly in God's ears than inauthentic singing on Sunday. Worship is not measured by volume but by volitional allegiance.

This understanding guards us from reducing the will to mere willpower. We are not talking about grim determination detached from affection. We are talking about presenting ourselves — consciously, intentionally — to Christ as Lord. It is the daily reaffirmation that, "Jesus, You are my master. You are my treasure. You are worthy of obedience."

Some may wonder: If God is sovereign, what role does my will play? That's a good question.

Philippians 2:12–13 answers beautifully:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

God works in you. Even to will. But you still work out. Grace does not eliminate volition. Grace empowers it. Ezekiel 36:26–27 God declares: "I will give you a new heart... and cause

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you to walk in my statutes.” God causes the changed, the growth. Just like God reveals. But you still have to move. You still have to walk. You still have to stand firm. That’s your responsibility as you “work out” your faith.

We must end where Scripture consistently points — to Christ. In Gethsemane, Luke 22:42: “Not my will, but yours, be done.” This is the volitional heart at its purest. He feels anguish. He knows suffering. He chooses obedience. Hebrews 12:2: “For the joy that was set before him endured the cross...” His obedience flowed from belief and desire. He chose the cross. And because He chose obedience, we are redeemed. Our volitional growth rests on His finished obedience.

Our decisions declares a master. Our action either reinforces allegiance to Christ or subtly strengthens allegiance to self. The question is not whether you are worshiping. The question is who or what are you choosing to worship.

And this is both sobering and hopeful. It is sobering because neutrality is an illusion. But it is hopeful because small, quiet, Spirit-enabled acts of obedience matter profoundly. The parent who patiently disciplines instead of exploding. The employee who refuses to cut corners. The teenager who chooses honesty over image. The retiree who prays faithfully for the church. These are not minor gestures. They are willful worshipful declarations shaping the heart.

The volitional heart makes visible what the cognitive heart believes and what the affective heart loves. It does not wait for grand moments. It reveals allegiance in ordinary ones. Choices are worshipful because they presents the heart to someone. And by the grace of God, strengthened by the Spirit and the Word, those choices can increasingly declare, in your life, that Christ is Lord.