



HELPING PEOPLE FOLLOW JESUS IN CRISIS

If we are going to make disciples, we must be equipped to walk with people through the pain and suffering that comes in this broken world. We must not believe the lie that only *trained professionals* can care for people with problems. After all, every follower of Christ is called to:

Matthew 28:18-20 — *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

Galatians 6:1-2 — *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

Matthew 18:15-17 — *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*

Hebrews 3:12-13 — *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 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.*

Clearly — the process of making disciples necessitates walking alongside others when it’s messy, when it’s broken, when it’s uncomfortable. This walking alongside however is not just for the sake of sympathy and empathy. We must be more than *shoulders to cry on*. This walking alongside must be full of *grace & truth* (John 1:14). It must be committed to gentle, clear restoration on God’s terms. It must have wisdom — knowing when to stay silent and when to speak, when to affirm and when to rebuke. All of this must be done with open Bible’s and an ability to apply the gospel to the heart.

GOAL: That every follower of Jesus would be equipped to care for those in crisis — helping them discern their hearts and then begin working out their hearts by faith.

THE HEART IS EXPOSED BY CRISIS

The God of the Bible is always, without exception, after the heart. Biblically speaking, the heart can be defined a few ways:



The heart is the control center for all of life.

The heart is the immaterial part of man — that thing that dictates all human affections and desires.

The heart is where every thought and action comes from.

The heart is what you cannot see but what produces everything that you can see.

However, the heart is not easily discernible.

Proverbs 20:5 — *The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.*

Maybe you've experienced this — the inability to discern your heart, your desires, your affections, your actions? It's rather common because the heart is like a deep well — a well that is hard to get to the bottom of at times. It is actually impossible to understand our hearts without God's help (i.e. His Word, His Spirit, and His people). All throughout the Bible, we see faithful saints asking God to help them get to their hearts.

Psalms 139:23-24 — *Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*

Due to the difficulty of getting to the heart — we tend to focus on behaviors vs. motivations. It is natural (in the flesh) to look at externals. It is natural to modify behavior. It is natural to enforce rules and laws (societally and religiously). And yet, it is God's desire to get to, expose, unpack, and transform all people at the level of their hearts.

If we are being honest though — heart work is *much* harder than behavior modification. Not only does heart work take God's wisdom carefully applied, heart work is humbling. After all, when God exposes our **desires**, **affections**, and **motivations** — we are confronted with hard & humbling truths. We see our need for heart-level repentance, confession, and renewal. And yet — when we begin to do heart work, we begin to experience gospel power (Titus 2:11-14; Titus 3:4-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Due to the significance of the heart in God's eyes, heart language is all over the Bible (truly — once you see it, you can't not see it). Even in a book known for wisdom principles and brief commands — God is after the heart:

Proverbs 4:23 — *Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.*

TABLE QUESTION: If God is always after the heart and if we must keep our hearts — how does God expose and reveal our hearts?



THE HEART & CRISIS: God exposes our hearts through pain and then conforms us to Christ if we are willing to walk by faith.

GOD'S WORLD: All real, lasting change comes through various forms of suffering. Whether the growth is professionally, academically, or physically — suffering is the means by which growth takes place. Apart from suffering, we will continue through life with an over-inflated view of our own abilities and maturities. It is only through the school of suffering that our inadequacies and immaturities are exposed and then we have the opportunity to mature.

The same is true when it comes to matters of faith — walking with God from a heart that desires to please God comes through suffering. Suffering causes us to see ourselves accurately and then gives us the opportunity to repent and walk with God by faith. For it is truly in the furnace of affliction that God exposes our hearts and then refines our hearts.

THE TEA BAG: Your heart is like a tea bag. You are constantly putting flavors in your tea bag. All your passions, desires, affections, habits, motivations, hobbies, friendships, occupation, and entertainment are flavoring your tea bag. Day by day, month by month, year by year — *the tea bag of your heart is taking on flavor*. Then God comes along and pours hot water on your tea bag — that hot water comes in the form of crisis (i.e. suffering & pain). When the hot water hits your tea bag, whatever flavor is already in your tea bag comes out. The funny thing is, when we see the flavor of our tea bag, we blame the hot water. But God is simply exposing the flavor that has been in our tea bag all along. The question then is — will you cooperate with God — take a good, long look at the flavor of your tea bag? Then, will you do some business with God and respond humbly to Him by faith to change the flavor of your tea bag?

TABLE DISCUSSION: When have you blamed the hot water in your life instead of looking at the flavor of your tea bag?

THE FORMS OF SUFFERING THAT GOD USES

#1: CRISIS CAUSED BY A BROKEN WORLD

JOB: In the book of Job we find a man who experienced the pain and suffering caused by living in a broken world. From Job's vantage point, he's simply a man who is walking with God (Job 1:1) when tragedy strikes that is outside of his control:

Loss of Wealth: In Job 1:13-17, all of Job's earthly possessions (i.e. wealth) were taken away by natural disaster and robbery.

Loss of Family: In Job 1:18-19, all of Job's children die in a natural disaster.

Loss of Health: In Job 2:7-8, Job's physical health is taken from him and for a long season he is living in chronic pain.

RESPONSE: The flavor of both Job's & his wife's tea bag is revealed by the hot water.



Job's Wife: *Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die (Job 2:9).*

Job: *Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong (Job 1:20-22).*

Job: *But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips (Job 2:10) .*

TRUTH: When crisis hit Job's family, it revealed the affections and desires of their hearts (for both Job and Mrs Job). One worshipped and wept and the other did not. One was broken but confident in God and one was bitter and angry at God. Both endured the same crisis but their hearts were not in the same place (which was not caused by the trial but rather revealed by the trial).

TABLE DISCUSSION: How has broken world suffering exposed your heart in your Christian experience?

#2: CRISIS CAUSED BY BEING SINNED AGAINST

JOSEPH: Joseph's life is marked by being sinned against in significant ways. Not only was Joseph sinned against, but the sin of others had massive consequences on his life for the rest of his life.

The Brothers: *They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him (Genesis 37:18)...Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt (Genesis 37:27-28).*

Potiphar's Wife: *As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison (Genesis 39:19-20).*

RESPONSE: Joseph was in real distress, real pain, real suffering on account of other peoples sin (Genesis 42:21), but he continued to walk with God and God was with him.

God is with Joseph: *The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands (Genesis 39:2-3)*



Joseph Trust's in God: *So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt (Genesis 45:4-8).*

TRUTH: Even though Joseph is severely sinned against (by those closest to him; by those who should have protected him; not once but multiple times over many years; — with life-long consequence), Joseph walks with God. Joseph walked with God and God was with Joseph. In this, the flavor of Joseph's tea bag is revealed through suffering and pain.

TABLE DISCUSSION: How has being sinned against exposed your heart?

#3: CRISIS CAUSED BY MY OWN SIN

DAVID: A man who is chosen by God to establish the kingly line of Jesus. A man used by God to establish Israel as a nation politically. A man who walks with God by faith. A man who went his own way and suffered the consequences for his sinful choices.

The Sin: It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant" (2 Samuel 11:2-5).

The Sin: In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die." And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men (2 Samuel 11:15-16).

RESPONSE: David tried to hide his sin, but God graciously exposed David (2 Samuel 11:14-17). David wept over his sin and its consequences (2 Samuel 11:16-23). God used this sin and its consequence to expose David's heart so that David could learn to walk with God from a heart that was committed to pleasing Him:

Psalms 51:3-4 — *For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.*



Psalm 51:10 — *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

Psalm 51:17 — *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

Psalm 32:5 — *I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.*

Psalm 32:10-11 — *Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!*

TRUTH: Even though David's sin was egregious — when God exposed David's sin, he did not run, cover, or hide. He dealt with his sin and his heart before God. He confessed and forsook his sin. He repented and ran to the mercy of God. He learned to walk with God from his heart (again).

TABLE DISCUSSION: How has the guilt and consequence of your own sin exposed your heart in your Christian experience?



I. SEEING CRISIS RIGHTLY

What the Bible Doesn't Say About Crisis – Scripture never uses "crisis" the way the world does – as a destabilizing emotional emergency that primarily needs to be managed or stabilized. This statement is helpful, but it sets the bar too low. The goal is not to return to equilibrium, and to manage the crisis. *The Bible offers hope and reveals our hearts as we walk with God and others in the midst of crisis.*

1. **Crisis reveals the heart** – The biblical pattern is that moments of acute pressure *reveal* what is already in the heart – they do not create it. Joseph's brothers in famine, Peter at the charcoal fire, Job on the ash heap – the crisis exposed what was there all along. This is why James calls trials "*the testing of your faith*" (James 1:3) – *the test reveals the substance, it doesn't manufacture it.*
2. **Crisis is providential** – No crisis in Scripture is accidental or outside God's sovereign hand. The same God who numbered the hairs of your head (Matt. 10:30) ordains the circumstances that unravel your sense of control. This doesn't minimize pain – but it eliminates the category of *meaningless suffering*. Even the cross – the supreme crisis – was "*delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God*" (Acts 2:23). *Because of this we can be assured that all of our suffering comes through the hands of a Good God who is for our good (if we are willing to listen-up).*
3. **Crisis is the context for God's nearness** – Surprisingly at times, Scripture consistently locates God's most intimate presence *within* the crisis, not outside it. "*The LORD is near to the brokenhearted*" (Ps. 34:18). "*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you*" (Isa. 43:2). The three men in the furnace encountered Jesus *in the fire*, not after it (Dan. 3:25). Crisis is not God's absence – it is often the occasion of His most tangible nearness.
4. **Crisis is an opportunity for repentance** – Every biblical crisis carries within it an implicit call: *turn*. The prodigal's famine-crisis produced the decisive moment – "*he came to himself*" (Luke 15:17) – which is the Bible's way of describing a crisis that accomplished its purpose. Repentance literally means to turn, crisis is the pressure that makes turning possible. This is not automatic – the same pressure hardens Pharaoh and softens the prodigal. The difference is the heart's response.

A Working Biblical Definition – A crisis is a providentially appointed trial of acute pressure in which the hidden allegiances of the heart are exposed, the insufficiency of every false refuge is felt. At this point, the person is brought to a decisive point of either deeper trust in God or continues to run farther from Him.

***What Does This Mean For Us?***

This means that when someone comes to you *in* a crisis, the worst thing you can do is only help them get *out* of it as quickly as possible. The crisis may be the most spiritually significant moment in that person's recent life. Our task – is to ask: ***What is God exposing right now? What idol is losing its power to deliver? What gospel truth does this person desperately need to see?***

The goal is not crisis *relief or resolution* – it is crisis *redemption*.

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28) – the word all includes the crisis.

II. SEEING PEOPLE RIGHTLY

Before we can care for people well, we must learn to see them rightly. Most of us – even experienced Christians – tend to see people through one of two distorting lenses:

1. **The Moralist Lens** – *"This person is making bad choices. They need to try harder and obey more."* The moralist misses suffering, this way of seeing people leads them on a path of moralism or legalism, giving rules to obey and not a Savior to follow. Creating a good moralist might clean them up and get them out of a crisis but it fails to lead them through a process of heart transformation. The end result in helping someone become a good moralist is that they are now ready to help others become good moralists too.
2. **The Therapeutic Lens** – *"This person has been wounded or has a disorder. They need healing and understanding."* The Secular Therapist misses sin, this way of seeing people gives them reasons to blame their context without calling them to be responsible for their own hearts. They may take on the identity of their situation and not the identity they have in Christ.
3. **The Biblical Lens** – *"We are image-bearers with disordered hearts, loved by a God who specializes in heart transformation."* David Powlison (Seeing with New Eyes) gives us a great definition to see people rightly, the way God sees us. As followers of Jesus we want to walk with people in crisis and understand their suffering and their sin so that we can walk with them in the midst of crisis and lead them to a Savior who can give them the care they need.



III. SEEING THE HEART & IDOLS RIGHTLY

When entering into someone's crisis - remember, the heart is always key to understanding their situation and seeing it the way God sees it.

- The **seat of desire and longing** – what we want, crave, treasure (Matt. 6:21 – *"where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"*)
- The **seat of belief and trust** – what we actually rely on vs. what we say we believe (Prov. 3:5 – *"trust in the LORD with all your heart"*)
- The **seat of fear** – what we dread losing, what we feel we cannot live without (Isa. 8:12-13)
- The **seat of allegiance** – whom or what we actually serve and worship (Matt. 6:24; Josh. 24:15)
- The **seat of all of life** – everything that we think, say or do comes from our heart (Prov. 4:23)

So - The heart is defined by what we worship - every struggle, every anxious thought, our anger, addiction, depression and relational conflict will be unlocked by asking: *What is my heart worshipping right now?*

Heart Idol – A Heart Idol is any good thing that has become a ruling thing – a functional god that competes with The LORD for your heart's allegiance.

Ezekiel 14:3-6

3 "Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them?

4 Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the LORD will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols,

5 that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols.

6 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations.

When we understand the heart and heart idols rightly it fundamentally changes how we address people and the problems they face:



1. The problem is not primarily out there – bad people, hard circumstances, broken systems.
2. The problem is not merely behavioral – bad habits, sinful actions.
3. The problem is structural and spiritual – there is something in the heart that has taken the place of God.

Common Categories for Heart Idols:

1. Approval/Love: "I must be loved and accepted or I cannot function"
2. Control/Safety: "I must have certainty and security or I cannot function"
3. Power/Achievement: "I must succeed and be respected or I cannot function"
4. Comfort/Pleasure: "I must have relief from pain or I cannot function"

Questions That Get to The Heart:

1. What do you want, desire, or wish for? (Exposes ruling desires)
2. What do you fear? What do you worry about? (Exposes what you're trusting instead of God)
3. Where do you find refuge, comfort, or escape? (Exposes functional saviors)
4. What would make you feel complete, satisfied, or fulfilled? (Exposes where you're looking for what only God provides)
5. What do you feel you deserve? (Exposes entitlement and a works-based inner economy)
6. When this particular thing is threatened or taken away, what happens in your heart? (The idol reveals itself most clearly in its removal)

Heart level questions are intended to move below the surface level sin (fruit) and presenting problems (crisis) and unearth the ruling sin (root) and the heart idol that drives it. Helping a friend in crisis and only addressing surface level sin is like cutting weeds at the top. They return because the root remains. Heart level work asks: *"What does this person's anger/fear/lust etc... reveal about what their heart is worshipping/desiring?"*

Example: A man struggling with explosive anger at home. The presenting problem (crisis) is anger. But the diagnostic questions reveal - he feels profoundly disrespected in his home. He feels the need to be respected, to the point that he demands respect. His anger explodes when that ruling desire & demand is threatened. The idol is Approval/Respect, motivated from a heart that is proud. The



anger is its fruit. The gospel must speak to the idol, not just the anger. So that the heart can be changed by gospel power.

IV. SEEING JESUS RIGHTLY

Response: This man is genuinely hurting. Because he is being sinned against. However, he is responding to being sinned against by sinning against others. He is both a sinner and sufferer and the gospel calls us to respond to this man with compassion and gracious confrontation simultaneously. One sided counsel says "Your suffering doesn't matter, deal with your sin!" Or - "Your sin doesn't matter, because you've been hurt by others!"

Biblical counsel calls the man to lay it all down at the feet of Jesus - "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt 11:28)

For each ruling desire of the heart, the gospel has a specific, targeted word, this is not an exhaustive list, but meant to get us started in this worthy work:

Heart Idol	The Lie It Believes	The Gospel's Answer
Approval	<i>"I am only worth what others think of me"</i>	<i>"You are loved with an everlasting love"</i> (Jer. 31:3; Rom. 8:1)
Control	<i>"I must secure my own future"</i>	<i>"My times are in your hands"</i> (Ps. 31:15; Matt. 6:25-34)
Achievement	<i>"My worth depends on my performance"</i>	<i>"It is finished"</i> (John 19:30)
Comfort	<i>"I cannot endure this pain"</i>	<i>"My grace is sufficient for you"</i> (2 Cor. 12:9; Rom. 8:18)
Revenge/ Justice	<i>"They owe me"</i>	<i>"Vengeance is mine, I will repay"</i> (Rom. 12:19; Col. 3:13)

Application For Us: *The gospel does not speak one generic word – it speaks a precise word into each heart situation. Biblical care learns to aim the gospel at the specific heart idol in the midst of crisis.*

Lastly let's put this all together in 1 real life example by using a diagram that helps us get to the heart.



Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. What is your natural response when crisis shows up in a relationship? How does the biblical emphasis on the heart being exposed in crisis re-shape your natural responses.
2. When crisis comes – are you more of a therapist or a moralist? How should a biblical understanding of the heart speak into your response?
3. When the flavor of your tea bag is exposed by the hot water of suffering – what is God after and how do you get there?