

Contents

Acknowledgments11

Introduction15

PART 1 KNOWING

1 The Mind of Your Heart25
Knowing

2 The Sins of Your Heart's Mind37
Knowing Better

3 The Prophet of Your Heart's Mind51
Better Knowing

PART 2 LOVING

4 The Desires of Your Heart67
Loving

5 The Iniquities of Your Heart's Desires81
Perverted Love

6 The Priest of Your Heart's Desires95
Purified Love

PART 3 CHOOSING

7 The Will of Your Heart 111
Choosing

8	The Transgressions of Your Heart's Will	125
	<i>Rebellious Choices</i>	
9	The King of Your Heart's Will	135
	<i>Obedient Choices</i>	

PART 4 KEEPING

10	The Keeping of Your Heart	153
	<i>Preserve and Protect</i>	
11	The Gatekeepers of Your Heart	165
	<i>Eyes and Ears</i>	
12	The Ambassador of Your Heart	179
	<i>The Mouth</i>	
13	The Keeper of Your Heart	189
	<i>Preserver and Protector</i>	
	General Index	197
	Scripture Index	199

Acknowledgments

Thanks go to my new friends at Crossway for their patience with an amateur. Al Fisher is to “blame” for his initial suggestion to bring this book into existence, and his wife Diane Fisher has supplied steady inspiration along the way. Lane and Ebeth Dennis have been so hospitable and supportive since I first met them. Dave DeWit’s gentle words allayed my fears when I finally submitted the manuscript, while David Barshinger’s careful editing has elevated the text by spotting omissions and by offering excellent recommendations.

Joel and Anna Carini, Charles Williams, Dr. Mark Talbot, and Dr. James R. Peters read some or even all this manuscript and contributed many helpful comments. Former Bethel member Miss Amanda Cizek chased down several references in the Puritans, and former intern Andy Smith double-checked every one of them.

Calvary Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Glenside, PA) and Bethel Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Wheaton, IL)—the two congregations I have pastored—have heard sermons and lessons on the heart but not in this crafted form. God has seen your forbearance. Several congregations, presbytery retreats, and conferences have heard variations of this material. Not to acknowledge them at all would be inconsiderate. To list them all seems boastful.

Much of this book is due to the love and prayers of my family, especially my parents. The marriage of my mother, Deanna Troxel, and my deceased father, Sterling Troxel, was a model of strength,

integrity, and enduring beauty. My siblings and their spouses—Scott and Lori Troxel, Candy and Jay Huston, and Dawn and Chad Meyer—have followed in their footsteps. It has been easy to admire and to adore you. My mother-in-law, Gail, and my deceased father-in-law, Ferman Lex, embraced and supported me as a son, and I have eagerly loved them in kind. Their two daughters and their husbands—Terry and Tim Sager and Linda and Scott Wright—have followed suit by accepting me, even as my affection for them continues to grow.

My loving children, along with their spouses, Lauren and Nick, John, Phil and Laura, Tommy, and Maggie, have consistently supported the old guy and made me so proud. You are the joy of your father's heart and thankfully the reflection of your mother's loveliness.

In August 1987 in Gordon-Conwell's chapel, the gorgeous smile of a young lady sitting slightly behind me and to my left caught my eye. To her credit and to my joy, thirty years of marriage have not removed that smile. She who knows me best—better than I would wish—still loves me. Her wisdom and laugh provide what I enjoy most in life, along with her patient listening, gentle corrections, and unbelievable forbearance with someone who is less than her in every conceivable way. What would I be without the “heart of my heart”?

Last of all, I acknowledge my heart's creed lest any reader misplace honor. If this book should happen to garner any praise, may it be for him who died my death, suffered my condemnation, and was raised so that I might live forgiven and accepted by his grace and might walk by his Spirit. All that I am and all that I have is a gift from him. And as grateful as I am for what I perceive are signs of grace in my heart, I have not found its “sweetest frame” to provide reliable footing. My confidence continues to be grounded in the incomparable grace that was ordained, accomplished, and applied by God the Father, Son, and Spirit. Such certainty comes from his faithful word. Thus, to him for whom no word is too

wonderful to speak or to fulfill, to him who sees what I am yet loves me, to him I offer my heart sincerely—as meager as it is. I am no expert on the heart, least of all my own. Indeed, I came to know my heart more and more as I wrote these pages. It was not a journey I would describe as pleasant. Nevertheless, it has put me, repeatedly, back on the path that leads to the abounding grace of God in Christ—the only sure road for one’s heart.

For those who seek, may you find,
As I point to Christ—your strength and mine.
For those who find, may you see,
The joy of hearts—your Savior and mine.

A. Craig Troxel
November 1, 2019

Introduction

Everyone knows what you mean when you use the word *heart*. If you have a change of heart, you think differently now. If you say, “She gave me her heart!” she’s in love with you. If you say, “She broke my heart,” then she no longer is. If your heart was in the right place, you messed up but meant well. When our friends speak from the bottom of their hearts, they’re telling the truth. When our children say, “I cross my heart,” they might be telling the truth (this time). Sometimes we do not have the heart to tell someone the truth. If we take it to heart, we’re listening well. If we know it by heart, we’re remembering well. If you have a heart of gold, you are kind. If you have no heart, you are mean. If your team lost heart, they gave up. If they showed heart, they rallied. When you wear your heart on your sleeves, you are transparent. When you put your heart into it, your passion is obvious. The lionhearted are courageous, while the chickenhearted are spineless. Sometimes we are coldhearted, and other times lighthearted. We work halfheartedly on Monday and wholeheartedly before a deadline. We can be callously hardhearted or cowardly fainthearted. Everyone important to you is dear to your heart. Everything important about you is secured in your heart of hearts.

So does the word *heart* really need defining? It regularly appears in our conversations, we paste it as our philosophy of life on a bumper sticker (“I ♥ Fishing”), and we hold our hand over

our heart when we sing the national anthem. Legends and stories from every culture regale listeners with the heart's symbolism, and every religion on earth sees the heart as the defining organ of one's inner life. When Dee Brown writes, "Bury my heart at wounded knee," we know what he means.¹ When the black clot is torn from the infant Muhammad's chest and washed clean, we know what it means.² When Egyptian antiquity says that the heart is weighed after death by Anubis, we know what it means.³ When primeval peoples ate the heart of a slain brave enemy or animal, we kind of know what it means.⁴ So transculturally, we all seem to be speaking the same language when we talk about the heart. Do we really need a book to explain it?

When Christ was asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" his answer showed where true spirituality begins: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart" (Matt. 22:37–40; Mark 12:28–33; Luke 10:25–28; cf. Deut. 6:5). If this is as important as he says it is—and it is beyond what we could ever imagine—then we need clarity about what he meant, so that we will have greater clarity in how to obey. The heart is central to the Christian faith, as it is for other religions, but that is where the similarities end. The Bible reveals subtlety, range, and depth in its distinctive message about the heart—one that diverges sharply from ancient Greek philosophy, as well as from modern and postmodern philosophies. These differences should not be ignored—as they often are in Christian literature—in favor of the colloquial and anti-intellectual ways that Western popular culture speaks of the heart. The heart merits the careful study of Scripture. In fact, I hope to persuade you that the word "heart" is the most important word in the Bible to describe who you are

1. Stephen Vincent Benét, "American Names," in *Selected Works of Stephen Vincent Benét*, vol. 1, *Poetry* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942), 367.

2. Gail Godwin, *Heart: A Personal Journey through Its Myths and Meanings* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 90.

3. Godwin, *Heart*, 27.

4. Godwin, *Heart*, 15.

within. There are three reasons why we should study the heart in Scripture.

Heart Is the Most Used Word

Appearing just under 1,000 times, the word “heart” is used in the Bible more than any other for the inner self.⁵ The Old Testament uses the Hebrew terms לֵב (*leb*) 598 times and לֵבָב (*lebab*) 252 times, and the New Testament’s Greek word καρδία (*kardia*) appears 156 times.⁶ Something that occurs that often in the Bible certainly merits a study worthy of its dignity. Think of the fact that the word “holy” is used to describe God more than any other term. Is this significant? Of course it is. In the same way, the frequent occurrences of the word “heart” in Scripture deserve to be taken seriously. The spotlight is often placed on the heart for its crucial role in what you treasure and say (Matt. 6:21; Luke 6:45) and in your inner beauty (1 Pet. 3:4), repentance (Deut. 30:2, 10; 1 Sam. 7:3; 1 Kings 8:48; Jer. 24:7), faith (Prov. 3:5–6), service (Deut. 10:12; 1 Chron. 28:9), obedience (Ps. 119:34), covenant faithfulness (1 Kings 2:4), worship (Ps. 86:12; Zeph. 3:14), love (Deut. 10:12; Matt. 22:37), daily walk (Isa. 38:3), and seeking of the Lord (Deut. 4:29; 2 Chron. 15:12; Jer. 29:13)—most of which you are to perform “with all your heart” (Matt. 22:37). To draw near to God “without our heart is to pretend devotion,” since God will not accept anything from us if it is not given from the heart.⁷

5. Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*, with Charles Yu (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 225.

6. Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 40; Alex Luc, “לֵב,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 749; Theo Sorg, “Heart,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 2:182; Abraham Evan-Shoshan, ed., *A New Concordance of the Bible* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1989), 582–88.

7. Thomas Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, ed. Joel Beeke (1810; repr., Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 108; John Owen, *Spiritual-Mindedness*, ed. R. J. K. Law (1681; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 133.

Heart Is the Most Misused Word

Os Guinness contends that the biblical understanding of the heart and our modern understanding of the heart are almost opposite. Today *heart* is understood to refer to a person's emotions. Biblically, the heart refers to the whole person, including our capacity to think.⁸ Many modern readers probably have the (false) impression that a believer is determined more by feeling than by reason.⁹ Greek philosophy has already infected Western culture with too great of a divide between the heart and thinking. The anti-intellectualism of pop culture has also spread to the evangelical church. Many Christians align the heart with the warm and emotional side of spirituality in opposition to the supposed coldness of theology. Some Christians will say they're "speaking from the heart" in order to defend their genuineness (not to be confused with innocence). Some say things like "How can I deny what I feel? How can I deny my own heart? I must be true to who I am!" Think of all the adolescent nonsense that pop culture has taught us to justify with the inviolable maxim "Follow your heart."¹⁰ Such statements are not just common. They have become moral principles etched in cultural granite and are routinely used to excuse all sorts of laziness, disobedience, antinomianism, adulterous mischief, and self-indulgence that freely destroys other people's relationships and lives. Not much can stand in its wake. Yet the Bible does not approve. And we need its clarity.

Heart Is the Most Appropriate Word

God gave words like *soul*, *spirit*, and *conscience* to reveal who we are as God's image bearers. These words generally communicate one idea or one aspect of our inner nature. The word *heart* differs. In Scripture, its meaning shows more diversity. And yet

8. Os Guinness, *Doubt: Faith in Two Minds* (Herts, UK: Lion, 1976), 124.

9. Wolff, *Anthropology*, 40, 47.

10. A. O. Scott, "Once a Prom Queen, Still a Spoiled Princess," *New York Times*, Dec. 8, 2011, <http://movies.nytimes.com/2011/12/09/movies/charlize-theron-in-young-adult-review.html?src=dayp>.

it does this without clouding the unity of our interior self. Inner human nature is both coherent and complex. It is similar to how English-speaking peoples use only one word, *snow*, to describe what falls from the winter sky—no matter its texture (flaky or crusted, thin or deep, fine or wet, soft or heavy). In contrast, the tribal Yup'ik people in northern Alaska and Canada employ multiple lexemes to describe these different types and textures of snow.¹¹ The word “heart” in Scripture does both. It reflects our singular core and yet it has a variety of nuanced meanings. “Heart” is the Bible’s inclusive term to communicate our unified and rich nature within.¹²

Unity

Whenever we read the word “heart” in Scripture, we should first understand it as a comprehensive term that captures the totality and unity of our inner nature. For John Owen, the heart indicated all the faculties of man’s spiritual life and the one principle of our moral operations.¹³ Here is the source “of motives; the seat of passions; the center of the thought processes; the spring of conscience.”¹⁴ It’s like a “hidden control-center” in every person.¹⁵ Everything we think, desire, choose, and live out is generated from this one “controlling source” and is governed from this one point.¹⁶ Abraham Kuyper said that the heart is “that point in our consciousness in which our life is still undivided

11. Steven A. Jacobsen, ed., *Yup'ik Eskimo Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska, Fairbanks, 2012).

12. Andrew Bowling, “Heart,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:466.

13. John Owen, *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Reminders of Indwelling Sin in Believers*, in *Temptation and Sin*, vol. 6 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), 170.

14. O. R. Brandon, “Heart,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter E. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 499.

15. John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 42. Cf. Peter Hubbard, *Love into Light: The Gospel, the Homosexual and the Church* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2013), 32; C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (1942; repr., New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 28.

16. John Flavel, *Keeping the Heart: How to Maintain Your Love for God* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012), 8. Cf. Murray Capill, *The Heart Is the Target: Preaching Practical Application from Every Text* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2014), 97; Herman

and lies comprehended in its unity, . . . the common source from which the different streams of our human life spring.”¹⁷ From the heart “flow the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23). What the physical heart is to the body for health, the spiritual heart is to the soul for holiness. As goes the heart, so goes the man. It is the helm of the ship.¹⁸

Complexity

The Scripture presents the heart not just as a unity but also as a trinity of spiritual functions: the mind, the desires, and the will.¹⁹ To put it another way, the heart includes what we *know* (our knowledge, thoughts, intentions, ideas, meditation, memory, imagination), what we *love* (what we want, seek, feel, yearn for), and what we *choose* (whether we will resist or submit, whether we will be weak or strong, whether we will say yes or no).²⁰ No other word “combines the complex interplay of intellect, sensibility, and will.”²¹

This threefold scheme of the heart (mind, desires, will) that provides the structure to this book is by no means original. It is the lifeblood of Puritan theology. The Puritans understood, perhaps better than most, the importance of aiming for the heart.²² Their spiritual descendants and popularizers have taken up the

Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 120.

17. Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1943), 20.

18. Owen, *Spiritual-Mindedness*, 134.

19. Sorg, “Heart,” 2:181; Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 225; Owen, *Temptation and Sin*, 169–76; Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, 25th anniversary ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2003). Plato and Sigmund Freud articulated a complex triune inner self but with models that are largely hierarchical trinities of tension and strife, devoid of a unifying center. Patrick Downey, *Desperately Wicked: Philosophy, Christianity and the Human Heart* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 14.

20. Gen. 6:5; Pss. 19:14; 49:3; 77:6; 139:23; Prov. 15:14, 28; Matt. 5:19; Luke 2:19; 6:45; Rom. 10:9; Eph. 1:18; 4:18; Heb. 4:12; 8:10.

21. Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 225.

22. E.g., Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (1746; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986), 24–25; Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 134–36; Richard Sibbes, *Bruised Reed* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2005), 89; Westminster Larger Catechism (hereafter, WLC) 99; Stephen Charnock, “Sermon XIX,” in *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689* (1674; repr., Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 2:387–88.

same scheme.²³ This paradigm has withstood the test of time and has been assumed by much of contemporary biblical scholarship as well.²⁴ So for the purposes of this book, we will operate with the following definition: *The heart is the governing center of a person. When used simply, it reflects the unity of our inner being, and when used comprehensively, it describes the complexity of our inner being—as composed of mind (what we know), desires (what we love), and will (what we choose).*

If it is true that the “heart” in Scripture is simple enough to reflect our inner unity and comprehensive enough to capture our threefold complexity, then this should be reflected in the heart’s sin and its redemption (see table on next page). We should expect Scripture to reflect the same wealth and nuance when it touches on sin’s effect on the heart and Christ’s redeeming work in the heart. This is the case. Scripture speaks of sin in its unity and continuity. Sin contains layers of knowingly doing what is wrong, perverting what is pure, and rebelling against what is good, and Scripture uses a cluster of terms to address these.²⁵ We see the same in the work of Christ. His three offices of prophet, priest, and king form one united ministry. As a threefold ministry, it complements the complex operations of our heart but without compromising its unified integrity. Which reminds us once again that there is nothing in our heart

23. E.g., A. A. Hodge, *The Westminster Confession: A Commentary* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 174; Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, n.d.), 1:295; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 233; C. R. Vaughan, ed., *Discussions of Robert L. Dabney*, vol. 3, *Philosophical* (1892; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1996), 281; Bridges, *Pursuit of Holiness*; Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart: Learning to Long for God Alone* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 93–98; Kris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within: Straight Talk about the Power and Defeat of Sin* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998), 38.

24. Brandon, “Heart,” 499; Sorg, “Heart,” 2:181; B. O. Banwell, “Heart,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1982), 465; Bowling, “Heart,” 1:466; Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 183. See the text note on Eccles. 1:13 regarding “heart” in the English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).

25. Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 14, 130; Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 13–14.

that the Lord of our heart cannot make right.²⁶ By the end of this book, I hope you will be able to embrace that comforting thought with all your heart.

The Heart, Its Sin, and Its Redemption

Heart	Sin	Lord
Mind <i>what you know</i>	“Sin” <i>to fall short (of what you know)</i>	Prophet <i>teaches and assures</i>
Desires <i>what you love</i>	“Iniquity” <i>to twist, pervert</i>	Priest <i>redeems and renews</i>
Will <i>what you choose</i>	“Transgression” <i>to rebel</i>	King <i>subdues and strengthens</i>

26. J. C. Ryle, *Old Paths* (1878; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 355.

Part 1



KNOWING

The Mind of Your Heart

Knowing



Tin Man: “But, after all, brains are not the best things in the world.”

“Have you any?” inquired the Scarecrow.

“No, my head is quite empty,” answered the Tin Man.

“But once I had brains, and a heart also; so, having tried them both, I should much rather have a heart.”

—L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*

If your heart principally does one thing, it thinks. Admit it: that statement surprises you. We tend to side with the Tin Man and associate the heart with feeling, not thinking. As a result, we promote the heart at the expense of knowledge. It is not unusual to hear a Christian say something like “Having love for God in your heart is more important than having knowledge of God in your head.” Some Christians may even assume that thoughtful,