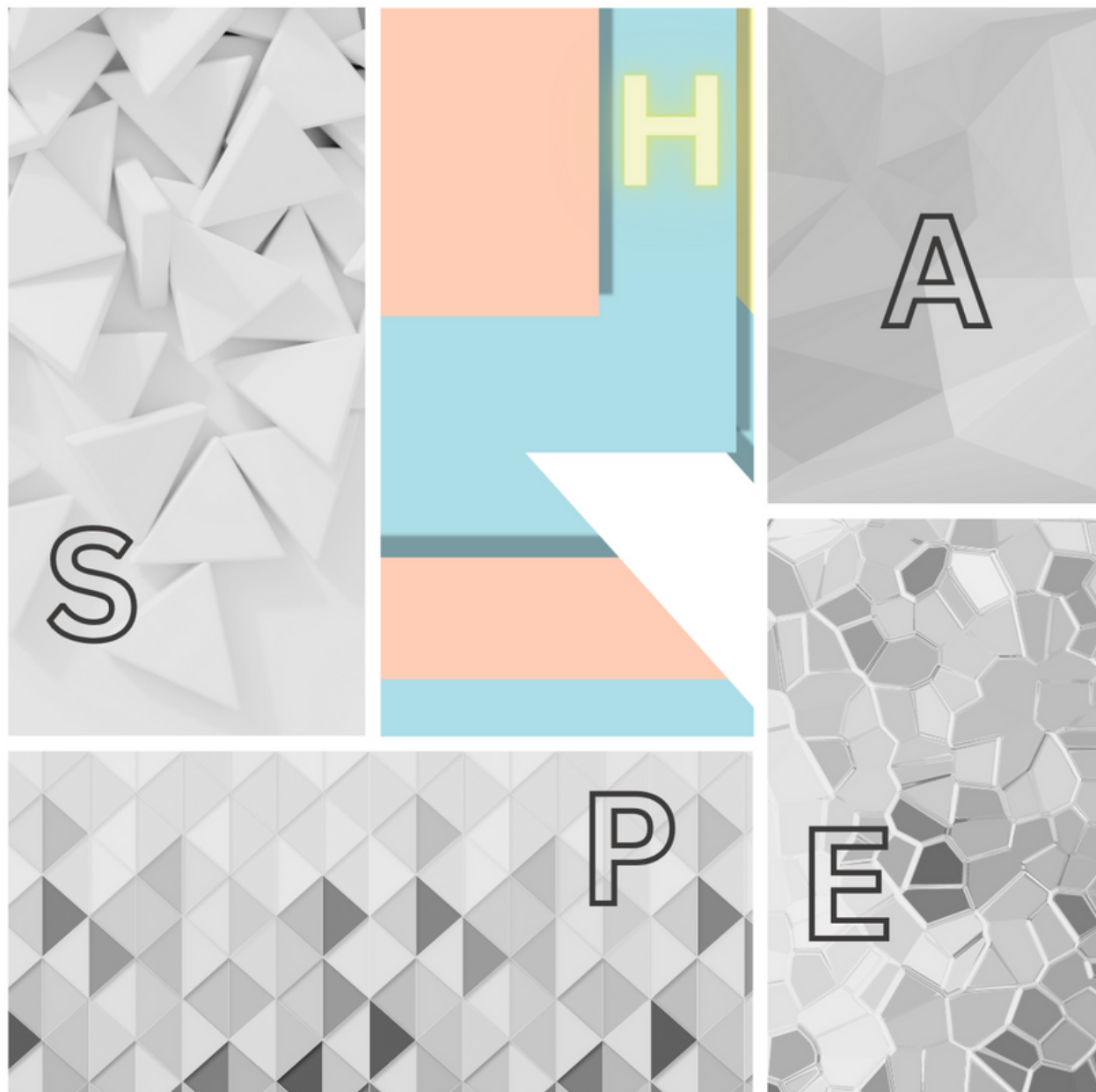


# SHAPE

your gifts for God's good purposes



PART THREE

**PUT YOUR HEART BACK IN IT**





## Part Three: Put Your Heart Back In It

By Pastor Ricky Stephen

In English we have the idiom that someone's 'heart wasn't in it'. It's a shorthand way of saying that, while they may have everything right on the outside to perform a task, their internal desires keep them from doing it well.

The greatest commandment begins with "Love the Lord your God *with all your heart*". (Deuteronomy 6:4/Matthew 22:35-40). God wants our wholehearted devotion; He wants our heart to be 'in it'.

Rick Warren in *The Purpose Driven Life* defines the Biblical idea of our 'heart' this way:

"The Bible uses the term heart to describe the bundle of desires, hopes, interests, ambitions, dreams and affections you have. Your heart represents the source of all your motivations—what you love to do and what you care about the most."<sup>[1]</sup>

God offers us a life of service where we get to serve Him with our desires, dreams, and ambitions.

### 1. What Do You Want?

Most of our depictions of God the Father are a bit severe—go look at the roof of the Sistine Chapel. He doesn't look like someone who cares what we want.

Yet, scripture is filled with stories of God breaking into the things people were hoping and waiting for—babies being born and slavery ending.

The desires, dreams and ambitions of people seem to very much be God's business.

Why?

Remember where we started the series, in Psalm 139:13-16 we learn that God created our inmost being. The upshot of this is that He created our unique desires, dreams, and ambitions. He meets us where our hearts are longing for something because He put that longing there.

We often make Jesus just as serious as the Father. But look closely at His life: He wanted to keep His position a secret, yet He constantly healed people He knew would rat Him out (Mark 7:36). He gets so caught up in ministering He forgets to eat (Mark 3:30). Even in His angry moment clearing the temple, the word used to describe Him is *zeal* (John 2:17).

Jesus looked like He was passionate, zealous, and caught up in what He was doing. He *wanted* to be doing it.

[1] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, pg. 237.

Parker Palmer writes:

“Vocation at its deepest level is, 'This is something I can't not do, for reasons I'm unable to explain to anyone else and don't fully understand myself but that are nonetheless compelling.'”<sup>[2]</sup>

Jesus promises us this kind of ‘heart in it’ life, He tells His disciples:

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you (John 15:7)

## 2. Suffering: Standing in the Gap

Of course, we may object to this idea of God ‘giving us what we want’. Jesus tells us we are to ‘carry our cross’ (Luke 9:23-25).

While this does promise that suffering is part of our calling, it doesn't mean Jesus wants us to be masochists. We don't take pleasure in suffering for sufferings sake.

Indeed, the Bible uses an incredible phrase to describe how and why Jesus carried His cross, one I'd expect would apply to us as well. In Hebrews 12 we read:

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, **2** fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **3** Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

- Hebrews 12:1b-3

He went to the cross for the joy set before Him. Jesus could go to the cross because He could see beyond the cross. He could see what His suffering was going to do for the world, for me and for you. He chose it. Even though it was difficult it was what He wanted to do. His heart was in it.

And when you come to really examine your heart, come to really examine what it is you're made for, what you dream and desire. You'll find that you will need to suffer for it—not for suffering's sake. Because all good things that enter a broken world must struggle and fight to break through.

A wholehearted life, a life where our heart is in it, will mean suffering for the things we desire.

## 3. Depravity: The Ballad of the Bent Ones

Coming out of passages like Titus 1:15 or Romans 3:23, John Calvin and many others before him started to notice something that would be called ‘total depravity’. Now, rightfully understood, this is sound biblical doctrine. As Darrell Johnson summarizes, depravity means there is no part of my life untouched by sin.

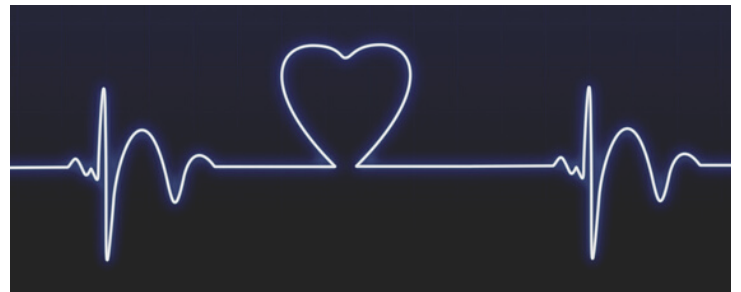
But there's a popular approach to this idea, a distortion of it, and it takes things to the extreme of saying ‘there is nothing good in me, not at all’. All of me is totally sinful so none of me is worth my attention.

Jeremiah 17:9 says:

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

Passages and ideas like this seem to point us in the opposite direction, they tell us not to pay attention to our hearts.

Which might be an incomplete way to think of and deal with sin.



<sup>[2]</sup> Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, pg. 25.

Augustine, a pastor from the fourth century, says that humans are ‘*incurvatus in se*’—curved in on themselves.

The story of human desire is a ballad for the bent ones.

Sin is not just evil. Sin is missing the mark, reaching for something but failing to reach it. The thing we are reaching for could just be what is good.

Sin is a worship issue. The first commandment sits at the top for a reason, it categorizes all the other failures and brokenness as a worship issue. As it says:

“You shall have no other god before me.”  
- Exodus 20:3

Which means every sin is an idolatry. Idolatry is seeking to fulfill our legitimate needs in broken ways.

So then, our sins are information we should pay attention to. Because hidden in those sins is probably a legitimate need. We cheapen intimacy with lust. We cheapen our worth in God with pride. We cheapen God’s provision with greed.

But not just that, we should question the good we do as well. Charity can be about pride as much as boasting.

The heart is what counts.

Later, Jeremiah will say that the rescue mission God is on will have a central theme. In Jeremiah 33:31 he writes about Yahweh giving us a ‘new heart’, what Dallas Willard calls a ‘Renovated Heart’.

So, God doesn’t just give us what we want, He *changes* and *clarifies* what we want by renovating our hearts.

This makes sense of the popular passage on our heart’s desire, Psalm 37:3-4:

Trust in the Lord and do good;  
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

4 Take delight in the Lord,  
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

It is only when we *trust* in the Lord and when we *delight* in Him that we find our desires fulfilled.

The wholehearted life Jesus offers, a life with our hearts in it, requires the renovation of our hearts.

#### 4. Examen: Find What You Want, What You Really Really, Want

Frederick Buechner said of our vocation:

“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”<sup>[3]</sup>

But often our ‘deep gladness’ is not what we want on the surface. To find our calling we need to learn what we want, what we really, really want.

And to do that requires two things:

Reflection and God’s Spirit.

As Proverbs 27:19 says:

As water reflects the face, so one’s life reflects the heart.

Our lives are the best information we have on what we really want. They show us what we desire.



<sup>[3]</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking, A Seeker's ABC*

But we can't read them alone. Our hearts are deceitful as Jeremiah said, but the second half of his saying goes like this:

**10** "I the Lord search the heart  
and examine the mind,  
to reward each person according to their conduct,  
according to what their deeds deserve."

The Lord knows hearts better than we do. If we want to learn from our lives we must invite Him to show us.

For centuries, this has been the goal of the evening prayers of the Jesuits. Ignatius of Loyola invented a simple prayer called the 'Examen'. There are a hundred different ways to do it, but the most basic form is four steps:

- I. Pray Psalm 139:23-24: Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.
- II. Reflect on the good of the day. Perhaps where you felt energized, passionate, alive or noticed the Father's presence.
- III. Reflect on the bad of the day. Perhaps where you felt depleted, listless, dead or far from the Father.
- IV. Ask the Father to help you tomorrow to stay more in category II than in category III.

As the name implies, the goal of this prayer is what Socrates called 'the examined life'. It's reading our lives by the light of God's Spirit.

And, by the way, all of this is prayer. Theophan the Recluse once wrote:

"For what is prayer? Prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God... The essence of prayer, then, is the mental ascent to God from the heart. The mind stands in the heart consciously before God and filled with proper and necessary reverence, it begins to pour out its heart before him. This is the prayer of the heart! And this should be all true prayer."<sup>[4]</sup>

This is how we love the Lord our God with all our heart, by honoring our hearts and listening to them by the light of God's Spirit.

### **5. Put Your Heart into It, He Doesn't Forget**

Maybe our objections to the Father 'giving us the desires of our hearts' are intellectual. But, I've found, they rarely are. No, we fall back on those intellectual arguments because we've been disappointed.

The God who made your heart is the Father who knows what you need before you ask for it. Whatever desires, dreams, and ambitions He has given you, even if they have left you so disappointed you've forgotten them, He doesn't forget.

Let the Spirit reawaken the dreams He's put in your renovated heart. He doesn't forget what He's made you for, even if you've been long waiting for it.

So, get up, don't quit, put your heart back into it.



<sup>[4]</sup> Theophan the Recluse, *The Duty Also of Those Living in the World*, found in *Philokalia: The Eastern Christian Spiritual Texts Selections Annotated & Explained* pg 32.

# DISCUSSION

## Open up

1. If you were asked when you were ten, what did you want to be when you grew up? What desires, dreams, or ambitions from that time are still there for you?

## Dig In

Read **Psalm 139:13-16**

1. What is the Psalmist recounting this truth for? What feeling are they searching for?
2. What feeling do you feel when you read these words?
3. If the two primary things that keep us from listening to our hearts are the idea that we should 'suffer for the gospel' or that we are 'full of only evil', which are you more prone to? Why?
4. If vocation is things you 'can't not do for reasons you can't explain', what are the things you 'can't not do for reasons you can't explain'?

## Prayer

A couple of options here.

1. If there is enough connection in your group, it may be powerful to share some of the things you are dreaming about and hoping for. Pray for those things for each other.
2. If you are a quieter and more contemplative group, consider leading an examen as outlined in section 4 above.