

# Heart MATTERS



Teaching the Bible with  
***Purity*** and ***Purpose***

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Presbyterian Church in America

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Throughout the book, pronouns referring to the Deity are capitalized for clarity except when using a quotation from the ESV (or other translation) or published text. In those cases, the capitalization of the Bible translation or published text is retained.

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PREPARING  
TO TEACH  
THE BIBLE



# Chapter 1

## The Condition of Our Hearts

*“What does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD . . . for your good?”*

– Deuteronomy 10:12-13

Perhaps you just received an email, text, or phone call asking if you would be willing to teach the women’s Bible study at your church. The woman asking is confident in your ability to teach and thinks you’d be wonderful. The pastors of your church are also encouraging and supportive of your taking this role, as is your husband, if you are married. But a storm of emotions surges through you. On the one hand, you feel excited. On the other hand, you feel anxious or even afraid. Part of you wants to say yes. Another part of you wants to say no. Some reasons come to your mind that agree with the woman asking you to teach as well as the pastors encouraging you. It’s true that you’ve had training and experience. You’ve been active and involved in the church. You enjoy studying the Bible and ministering to women. But several other thoughts come across your mind that cause you to doubt this is a good idea: *What if I fail at this? What if others don’t approve of the way I teach? What if I end up not having enough time and I’m poorly prepared? What about the things they don’t know that I have said or done—would they still ask me if they knew those things?* In the midst of all our doubts and questions, or even our joy and eagerness, it’s important to slow down before we accept a teaching position and ask, “What’s going on inside my heart, including my emotions, mind, and will?”

## SOBERING NEWS

Although we all likely have been tempted at times to discount how sinful we are, or our loved ones are, the Lord says, “The intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21) and “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? I the LORD search the hearts and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds” (Jer. 17:9-10). The psalmist, David, concurs, “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps. 51:5). Adam represented all of us when he sinned. “By the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners” (Rom. 5:19). The condition of our hearts from conception is evil, hardened, proud, wicked, adulterous, idolatrous, foolish, deceitful, calloused, and stubborn. “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Eph. 2:1-3).

## GOOD NEWS

Thankfully, such sobering news is not the end of the story. “As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men” (Rom. 5:18). Those who repent of their sins and trust in Christ alone for their salvation receive new hearts: “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you, And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Ezek. 36:26-27).

When we became daughters of God, He “sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal. 4:6). By the Spirit of Christ, we are able to “put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”

(Eph. 4:22-24). The author of Hebrews exhorts us, in light of our salvation, to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22).

## NOT YET PERFECT

It is very good news that you and I receive a new heart upon conversion, but we must remember that this new heart is not yet perfect and won't be until glory. This fact is important to recall, especially as teachers who may struggle with perfectionism. No matter how much we strive for holiness by God's grace, we will never teach with a perfect heart. On this side of glory, all of our teaching will be tainted in one way or another with sin. Therefore, the condition of our hearts will always reveal that there is need for confession and repentance and growth in godliness. The process of sanctification is just as real for the teacher as for the listener, a truth both need to honestly and humbly recognize. Even so, teachers should “be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine” and “are to teach what is good” (Titus 2:3).

I can recall several times throughout my years in ministry being distraught because things at home didn't feel harmonious and peaceful when I had to teach. For example, if my husband and I had recently argued, one of my children was upset with me, or a child was exhibiting unruly behavior, I felt shame. On different occasions I have sought a pastor's counsel and learned that even pastors argue with their wives or have difficult situations arise with their children. The important thing is that repentance and restoration have occurred, or at least that “If possible, so far as it depends on you, [we have striven to] live peaceably with all” (Rom. 12:18). The feeling of guilt and shame, when it leads us to repentance and reconciliation, is a good thing. But when we wallow in our guilt and shame, or when we feel guilt and shame when we're doing all that we can to live in harmony with others, it becomes problematic. Wallowing in guilt and shame is rooted in self-righteousness. Being critical and judgmental—even of ourselves—is always rooted in self-righteousness. Oftentimes what I am really struggling with is falling

short of my own standards to be a godly Bible teacher, and this keeps me from resting in God's forgiveness and grace. As Bible teachers, we want to strive to set an example in our attitude, speech, and conduct, but we won't be perfect. We must learn to repent when we sin, rest in the grace of God, strive for holiness, and continue using our gifts.

As you evaluate whether or not you should accept a teaching opportunity, it's good to examine your heart to see if you're growing in godliness. Are you quick to repent of sins of the tongue? Do you strive to have words seasoned with grace? Does your conduct increasingly reflect your confession of faith? When you look back over this past year, have you grown in love for God and love for others, beginning with your own family? Can you say that you are growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ? Would others consider you a woman of purity, and are you striving for purity in your attitude and actions?

## THE LORD SET HIS HEART IN LOVE ON YOU

The book of Deuteronomy mentions the heart often. Perhaps most striking is the truth that "to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on . . . you" (Deut. 10:14-15). Ponder that for a moment. We are "a people holy to the LORD . . . his treasured possession" (Deut. 7:6). Such status is not because of anything good in us, but "because the LORD loves you" and is "the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments" (Deut. 7:8-9).

This status with God will be an important truth for us to hold on to as we teach others, not only for ourselves, but also to share with them. There will be times when we'll be tempted to fall into the performance trap. We may think we have to be perfect to be approved, either by God or by others. We may be tempted to envy another teacher's degree, expertise, or opportunities. We might compete with or compare ourselves to other women in our church. So, it will do our hearts good to return often to the truth that the Lord set His love upon us, even when we were His enemies (Rom. 5:10; Eph. 2:4-5). Even if we do not



measure up to our own expectations—and we seldom do—or even the expectations of our listeners, the Lord is faithful to love us.

## CIRCUMCISE YOUR HEART

How do we respond to such love? What should our hearts be like in light of such a great salvation? What is required of the redeemed? The Lord answers, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn” (Deut. 10:16). Such a command is covenantal. The sign that the Lord gave to Abraham when He made a covenant with him was that of circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14). But here in Deuteronomy, it is not circumcision of the male reproductive organ that is required, but circumcision of the heart, whether male or female. All God’s people are to circumcise their hearts. The surrounding context helps us understand what this circumcision means. To circumcise our hearts means to fear the Lord our God, walk in all His ways, love Him, serve Him wholeheartedly, keep His commandments, love our neighbor, hold fast to Him, praise Him, and acknowledge Him as our God (Deut. 10:12-13, 19–21).

Before we begin teaching others and as we continue to teach others, we need to continually examine our hearts to see if we’re neglecting any of these important areas. It can be easy to rush through this list and say a glib yes, but it’s crucial we slow down and ask the Lord to reveal to us if we are withholding any of our heart from Him.

Are you holding fast to Him, even when your mind, will, or emotions tempt you not to? Does praising God come easily and often for you? Do you acknowledge Him as your God, even in the midst of unbelieving coworkers and neighbors who might ridicule you?

As you answer these questions and evaluate your heart, ask God to help you offer your whole self to Him, “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:1-2).

## A DEEPER DIVE

Let's continue to think about what it means to circumcise our hearts by reflecting more deeply on the text of Deuteronomy 10:12-21.

### *Fear the LORD Your God* (v. 12)

To fear the Lord is to place Him at the very center of our lives, recognizing His sovereign authority over all things and humbly seeking Him for direction in all of life, knowing that He alone can give us knowledge, wisdom, and instruction (Prov. 1:7). In what ways does your life reveal that you are God-centered? Do you recognize that He is sovereign over all things, including the details of your life? When you're in need of knowledge, wisdom, and instruction, do you first turn to Him before seeking counsel from other godly people?

### *Walk in All His Ways* (v. 12)

On this side of glory, we will not walk in all of the Lord's ways perfectly. However, our lives should be characterized by walking in true beauty, compassion, holiness, light, love, peace, righteousness, and wisdom. The strength and power to walk in God's ways comes from Him. As we look to Him for more grace, He supplies it (James 4:6). In times of temptation, He provides a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). In times of weakness, He gives strength (2 Cor. 12:9). In times of weariness, He gives power (Isa. 40:30-31). In what ways do you need to grow in obedience and trust in the Lord?

### *Love Him* (v. 12)

To love God is the opposite of loving the world. To love the world is to derive our satisfaction, security, and significance from "the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life" (1 John 2:16). But to love God means to find our satisfaction, security, and significance in Him alone. It is to cry with the psalmist,

*O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you... So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me (Ps. 63:1-8).*

How do you earnestly seek the Lord in His Word and in prayer? Can you say with the psalmist that you have beheld His power and glory and that His love is better than life? Are you satisfied with the Giver instead of seeking His gifts? In what ways do you take refuge in Him and sing of His joy?

#### *Serve Him Wholeheartedly (v. 12)*

Too often we serve the Lord halfheartedly, failing to recognize that God wants our entire selves as an offering, “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1). Because Christ’s final and perfect sacrifice has secured our salvation, we no longer seek the things of this world, but “the city that is to come” and are called to “continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Heb. 13:14-16). How has your attitude been in serving God lately—are you happy to offer yourself to Him, both body and soul, or do you find yourself bitter, resentful, or burned out?

*Obey Him* (v. 13)

Obedience to God's commandments flows from a heart that loves God. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Thankfully, the Holy Spirit, who is our "Helper" (v. 16) and "the Spirit of truth" (v. 17), dwells with us and is in us, giving us the strength and power to obey God's commands. Although we will fail to obey God's commands perfectly, we should be able to say, and others should be able to say about us, that we truly strive to obey God's commands as summarized in the Ten Commandments (see Ex. 20:1-17). How are you growing in obedience to God's commands by worshiping Him alone, honoring His name and special day, respecting your authorities, being life-givers, striving for purity, refusing to steal and lie, and refraining from coveting?



Any number of things may be running through your mind as you finish this chapter. You might be thinking you're the last person who should have been asked to teach the Bible. Or you might have honestly evaluated your heart and think that, although you're not perfect, you're truly seeking the Lord in His Word and in prayer. Perhaps you still have some anxiety and fear about such a commitment, but you're starting to feel excited. Let me encourage you to keep evaluating your heart. Whether you're completely new to teaching the Bible or whether you've been teaching the Bible for decades, all of us have heart work to do. The good news is that the Lord is not done with any of us yet. He uses the weak in order to show He is strong. If He has given you the gift of teaching, He will equip you and empower you to use it. Give Him your heart and trust Him to use you in the opportunities He puts before you.

A growing sense of identity as a citizen of heaven changes how you see yourself now. Truly taking in the love relationship we're going to enjoy forever warms our hearts toward Christ now.

– Nancy Guthrie, *Even Better than Eden: Nine Ways the Bible's Story Changes Everything about Your Story* (Crossway, 2018), 13.

## TIME TO REFLECT

1. In the midst of your doubts and questions, or even of your joy and eagerness, it's important to slow down before you teach and ask, "What's going on inside my heart?" So, what is going on inside your heart as you think about teaching the Bible?



4. How have you recognized that God is sovereign over all things, including the details of your life? What evidence is there that when you're in need of knowledge, wisdom, and instruction, you first turn to Him before seeking counsel from other godly people?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. In what ways do you need to grow in trusting and obeying the Lord?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. How do you earnestly seek the Lord in His Word and prayer? In what ways have you beheld His power and glory and experienced that His love is better than life? What evidence is there that you are satisfied with the Giver instead of seeking His gifts? How do you take refuge in Him and sing of His joy?

