

What is a “gospel-driven” champion of life?

The heart of the matter.

It is a timeless truth that our mouths and hands are driven by our hearts.¹ For example, a heart full of fear drives us to cower and hide in the face of danger. In contrast, a heart full of courage and trust in God is driven to engage danger. A heart of pride drives us to boast before others. But a heart of humility drives us to think of ourselves with appropriate lowliness. Yes, whether good or bad, whether we like it or not, our heart drives us.

So, to have God-honoring words and actions, we quite literally must get to the heart of the matter. More precisely, we need to let Jesus graciously reveal the heart of the matter so He can redeem our hearts. That is what this article is about. It is about exposing our hearts to Jesus and letting Him transform us from our hearts outward into *gospel-driven* champions of life.

First, the bad news.

Before we get into what a gospel-driven heart looks like, let’s look at a few corrupted types of hearts and the words and actions they tend to produce. The descriptions have been applied specifically to the life arena. As you read, let God search *your* heart to reveal if any of these things can be found there.²

1. *The Fire and Brimstone Heart* - This heart is dominated by an *imbalanced* affection for God’s justice and law, and is therefore driven to see others (like abortionists, pro-choice people, and the like) judged. It typically has no sense of its own guilt before God’s law, so it drives the lips and fingertips to flare bitter condemnation, harsh judgment, self-righteousness, pride, and the like.
2. *The Atonement Heart* – This heart is ravaged by personal guilt and an insatiable desire to relieve it. It has not been transformed by God’s free grace, so it drives the lips and fingertips to serve God in hopes of relief. This heart says, “I must earn God’s favor to relieve my guilt.” Those who have had an abortion or a promiscuous past and who have not been gripped by God’s opulent forgiveness in Christ often display this heart. This heart drives the life-affirming person on, but often under a cloud of despair, fear, and/or depression.
3. *The Approval or Validation Heart* – This heart is immensely insecure and craves affirmation. It has not found its rest in Christ, the only place where true security and significance lies. So, this heart drives a person to champion life in hopes of receiving compliments from others, or perhaps earning a compliment from God Himself. It makes a person always look over his shoulder, hoping someone saw its good deeds, waiting for some affirming word that might temporarily relieve its insecurity.
4. *The Nike (Just Do it!) Heart* – This heart has an over-inflated sense of duty and is often devoid of desire or joy. It drives a person to strong commitment, but because

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of the lack of joy, warmth, or relationship, often leads to burnout. The lips and fingertips driven by this heart are dedicated, but cold.

5. *The Masochistic Heart* – This heart is horribly deformed, perhaps due to past abuse or by some unchristian teaching about the sufferings of Christ. It actually wants and enjoys pain. It likes conflict and likes to be yelled at and persecuted in the “battle for life” at the “gates of hell.” So, it leads the lips and fingertips to do things that might provoke such a response and then proudly pins any negative reactions to its chest as emblems of honor. In life-affirming circles, the masochistic heart reveals itself in gleeful conversations about how many angry reactions were provoked.

OK. Time for a deep breath. If you are convicted by any of these descriptions, welcome to the club. And rejoice, for Jesus came to redeem hearts just like these and fit them for honorable service in the life arena.³ Read on and let Him transform your heart and remake you into a gospel-driven champion of life.

In Christ, we get a heart transplant.

Maybe your first reaction to discovering some ugly motives in your heart is a resolution to try harder to behave better. Here is why that response, while it may sound good on the surface, will never work. A Story:

Suppose a farmer took his best-fed pig and washed him, spritzed him with cologne, trimmed his snout-hairs, and dressed him up with a fine ribbon and cape. Proudly, the farmer led his pig down the road to the country fair, sure to win first prize. Everything was going well until his aromatic friend spied a big ‘ole mud hole along the road. Before he could say “back bacon,” his would-be prize winner was chin deep in mud - happy as a pig could be.

That silly story illustrates a profound truth about our resolutions toward behavior modification: no amount of willpower, resolve, or personal amendment can change us. We need a change of heart that produces a radical change in our nature. A pig is a pig is a pig – unless he is transformed on the inside. In the same way, a fire and brimstone, atonement, validation, Nike-driven, masochistic heart is a fire and brimstone, atonement, validation, Nike-driven, masochistic heart. No amount of cologne, hair-trimming, or self-discipline can change it. For real, lasting, outward change, we need a new nature borne of a new heart. We need a heart transplant.

The gospel tells us that through trust in Christ, God replaces our pig-like, mud-loving hearts with a heart like His. Consequently, we are in a very real sense no longer pigs, even though we have an occasional taste for mud. Through faith, Christian champions of life are no longer fire and brimstone (and the like) driven people, even though we still may have an occasional taste for such things. The way Jesus set things up is that our new hearts look and act like His. They beat with His. In fact, in a mysterious way, our new heart *is* His since by faith Jesus lives in us.⁴ Let’s explore what that means.

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Anatomy of the believer’s gospel-driven heart.

A gospel-driven heart is first of all a gift. It is not earned or deserved. It can’t be bought with any amount of good works, life-affirming ministry, or moral performance. Jesus gives this heart freely to all who come to Him in faith admitting their sins and embracing His forgiveness.⁵ Grabbing hold of the fact that our new heart is a gift contributes to its power to change us. Imagine the difference, for example, between working and saving for 25 years to buy your dream home compared to being given your dream home by a rich, extremely generous benefactor. The gift-ed-ness of the home would exponentially increase your joy. That is a bit like God *giving* a new heart to us free and clear. The heart itself is stupendous! The fact that *it is a gift* makes it even more so!

A gospel-driven heart is fascinated with its Giver, Jesus. Like a flower responds to the sunshine, so too the gospel-driven heart opens up and rejoices in the nearness of the Son of God. In fact, nothing enlivens this heart more than an intimate, daily love relationship with its Giver. A main trait, then, of this new heart is that it will drive us to joyfully desire Christ. Those who are gospel-driven love Jesus. They want to be with Him.

A gospel-driven heart naturally radiates all sorts of Christ-like virtues. The so-called “fruit of the Spirit” wafts freely from this heart: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.⁶ It overflows with gratitude.⁷ It gushes sincere love for others, kindness toward enemies, affection for The Truth, and a humble passion to share that truth in love.

A gospel-driven heart is not wimpy. We must be careful when talking about traits like love and gentleness to avoid mistaking them for gullibility or softness. This heart may beat quietly, but it beats powerfully. It is, after all, the same heart that beat in Jesus’ chest – the heart that drove Him to set His face like flint and endure the cross.⁸ It does not cower in the face of danger, nor does it approach with a desire to recklessly crush opposition, but engages with humble courage and trust in Christ. Those fired by a gospel-driven heart are tender warriors, tenaciously gentle, and fiercely loving and kind.

Can you now see the glaring differences between a gospel-driven heart and the corrupted hearts listed at the beginning of this article? There are many! Doesn’t the gospel-driven heart look gorgeous? It should! It is a reflection of Christ! O, how the life arena needs gospel-driven champions of life. O, how Christ longs for you to grow as such a champion. The rest of this article explains two movements in the main exercise Jesus has given us for keeping our new heart healthy and for growing as gospel-driven people.

Movement #1: We have been rescued!

The gospel is a story of rescue. To be Christian means, at a most basic level, that we embrace our place in that story – our place as the helpless ones in peril who were sought and rescued by the powerful Rescuer, Jesus. The gospel reminds us that our Rescuer rescued us not while we were “sleeping beauties,” but while we were sinners. It reminds us as well that the rescue cost The Rescuer His life. His death was not a quick one,

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either. It was the darkest of deaths; a torturous, wrath-incurring, excruciating, substitutionary death. To become a Christian means we embrace all these facts as true, receive Jesus’ mercy and forgiveness, and entrust our lives to Him.

Once we realize we have been rescued by Christ, we are changed. We do not change ourselves. *We are changed.* We are given a new heart as a gift – a heart that bears the traits described above. And, our new heart lives on the radical power and presence of Christ’s extravagant love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness revealed in His rescue. That amazing rescue is the lifeblood of our new heart. Through faith, we take it in and pump it out and all through our person. It is very important that we understand this.

A person whose heart is “pumping” God’s extravagant rescue story will quite naturally radiate the Anatomy described in the section above: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, overflowing gratitude, sincere love for others, kindness toward enemies, affection for The Truth, and a humble passion to share that truth in love. Imagine those traits marking those who minister in the life arena!

Here are a few questions to help you practice movement #1:

1. Can you remember a time when you confessed your sins to Jesus and embraced His lavish, free forgiveness? If not, do that right now. Jesus wants to give you the free gift of forgiveness no matter what sins you have committed. He died to rescue you.
2. If you have already embraced Christ, describe when that first happened. Try and express the feelings you felt throughout that process. Write out your story for later reference.
3. How could you spend some time each day remembering and marveling over the story of Jesus’ rescue that you just described?
4. Do the feelings and actions that result(ed) from your being rescued find their way into your life-affirming work? If not, why not? How could they? How should they?
5. How might you ask God to re-captivate you daily with the glorious truth of His rescuing you?

Movement #2: We are rescuers.

Spontaneous feelings of gratitude and joy are not the only hallmarks of one captivated by The Rescuer. Scripture clearly demonstrates that those maturing in their being-rescued live as joyful rescuers themselves. In fact, if the gospel reveals God’s heart for rescue, and if He puts His heart in those He rescues⁴, then it follows that He desires to live a lifestyle of rescue through those He’s rescued. To put it more simply, when God rescues us, He increasingly transforms us into rescue-ers like Him. This does not mean that we can save anybody in an eternal, spiritual sense. It means that we can be willing vessels through which God pours His eternally rescuing love on others. It also means – and this is directly applicable to the life arena – that He delights to rescue people from *temporal, physical* perils through us as well. Deuteronomy 24:17-22 makes His desire abundantly clear:

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¹⁷You shall not pervert the justice due an alien or an orphan, nor take a widow's garment in pledge. ¹⁸But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing. ¹⁹When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ²⁰When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. ²¹When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. ²²And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.

Clearly, God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. Verses 18 and 22 make that obvious. Those verses also reveal that it is Israel's remembrance of that fact – the dramatic story of their own being-rescued – that is the reason why they must live lives as rescue-ers. The word “therefore” makes that connection. Moving on from there, who does The Rescuer desire His rescued people to rescue? Verses 17, 19, 20, and 21 provide the answer: the alien, orphan, and the widow. What do these three groups have in common? They are all helpless people in temporal, physical peril like Israel was while in Egypt. In essence, God is saying, “I rescued you, Israel. I want you to revel in that fact “pump” it like blood through your veins. Then, invigorated by the reality of your being-rescued (Movement #1), I want you to reveal My heart to the world by waking with me rescue others (Movement #2). I want you to live as ‘rescued rescuers.’”

The truths in this passage clearly resonate in the New Testament. For example, look at James 1:27, “This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” In context, we realize that through James the Holy Spirit is telling us the outward effects of person enlivened by a rescued heart. He's saying that such a heart is driven to care for, perhaps even rescue, the most imperiled: orphans and widows *in their distress*. This language nearly duplicates that in Deuteronomy 24. Joyfully living out our being-rescued by rescuing others has always been God's plan. In other words, being a gospel-driven champion of life is explicitly Scriptural! As Christians, we are by definition “rescued rescuers.”

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We are ready now to connect the two Movements to make one complete exercise for our nourishment as gospel-driven champion of life. The first Movement is reconnecting with our being-rescued. It means that we live in moment-by-moment awareness that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us⁹. The second Movement is our response to our being-rescued embodied in living as joyful, grateful, humble rescue-ers. It includes our vigilantly seeking those in peril, and with joyful, humble courage, seeking their welfare.

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Connecting these two Movements is like joining the systolic and diastolic beats of the human heart into one life-giving heart beat. On they go, “lub-dub, lub-dub, lub-dub,” pumping the blood which sustains us. In a spiritual sense, God intends for our spiritual hearts to pound with the constant, invigorating rhythm, “rescued-rescuer, rescued-rescuer, rescued-rescuer.” That beat not only produces naturally joyful champions of life, but it is also music to our Rescuer’s ears! In this magnificent light, it should be clear that life-affirming ministry characterized by fire and brimstone and the like is a corrupted. Though a rescued, gospel-driven heart may still struggle at times with sin and corruption, its primary beat is the beautiful, joyful sound, “rescued rescuer.”

Living as a rescued rescuer is “magnificent monotony.”¹⁰

Experts tell us that the human heart beats about 100,000 times per day.¹¹ Day in, day out, that muscle pumps, keeping us alive. Sounds monotonous, doesn’t it? Maybe so. But at least it’s *magnificent* monotony!

This is the same magnificent monotony characterized by living daily as a rescued rescuer. Colossians 2:6 says, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.” This invitation means that our Rescuer desires every day of our Christian lives to look basically the same as the first days of our Christian lives. Jesus is saying, “Remember day number one with Me, the day you first enjoyed My rescue, and let every day thereafter look similar.” Applied to the life arena, it means there is an element of magnificent monotony in living as gospel-driven rescued rescuers.

But don’t let the monotony of Jesus’ design dull you to its magnificence! If we let that happen, very soon our hearts may become overcome by lesser motives like fire and brimstone. Take care to daily walk with Christ. Remember, the heart He’s given you wants to be with Him. Take care to remember your being-rescued. Enjoy Jesus and let His heart beat in and through you as you look to the welfare of all those encompassed within the life arena: human embryos, unborn babies, orphans, those at the end of life, and anyone else who is imperiled and unable to defend themselves. This is the Christian life. It is also what it means to be a gospel-driven champion of life.

¹ Matt. 12:34, Lk. 6:45

² Ps. 139:23-24

³ Isa. 6:1-7, Zech. 3, Mar. 2:17, Rom. 5:8

⁴ Ez. 11:19, 36:26, Jn. 14:23, Acts 17:28, Col. 2:6, 1 Jn. 2:6, 3:24, 4:13,

⁵ Jn. 3:16, Rom. 3:23-24, 6:23, 10:8-10, Eph. 2:9

⁶ Gal. 5:22-23

⁷ Col. 2:6-7

⁸ Isa. 50:7, Lk. 9:51

⁹ Rom. 5:8

¹⁰ This term is borrowed from *The Ragamuffin Gospel* by Brennan Manning.

¹¹ http://wiki.answers.com/Q/How_many_heart_beats_per_day