

Message: “Inside-Out”

Jill writes a blog called “If you really knew me.” She lists 31 things we can know about her. Jill says, “If you really knew me, you would know that: I struggle with trusting myself, caring for and loving myself, and I have a bad habit of trying to please and take care of everyone else even if it means I am being hurt or suffering. Jill goes on ...

I act tough but I am incredibly sensitive.

I seem like an extrovert but am really an introvert who’s curious, who wants approval and appreciation.

I suffer from poverty mentality, don’t think I am enough, or believe there will be enough for me.

I have surface-level issues, blockages that cause me so much suffering, but *underneath, I am wise, compassionate and powerful.*

I love big, a love unbound, a love which breaks my heart wide open.

I hold a grudge, am judgmental and critical, but I would never hurt anyone intentionally.

I’m glad dogs can’t talk because if they could, I might find out they don’t love me as much as I think they do, and I couldn’t bear it.”¹

These are a few items from Jill’s list. I find it interesting to see how the list reflects who she is and where her journey is leading. There are struggles - areas in Jill’s life where she doesn’t know what to do, while there are other areas where she is less anxious with a better sense of healthy living.

If you are willing, maybe we can do this brief exercise together to see where we are. Here’s a sentence: “If you really knew me, you’d know that” Please fill in the blank. Don’t worry, I’m not going to ask you to share what you’re thinking out loud. Now, if you’re like most people, negative thoughts or emotions may have crossed your mind.

Guess what? I’ll bet your friends, family and co-workers know more about you than you think. You have more “tells” than you know.

¹ <https://thousandshadesofgray.com/2012/03/16/if-you-really-knew-me-a-list-of-31-things/>

We're often surprised how our private, inner being makes itself known in a public, external way. We've become pretty good at compartmentalizing our lives, and then putting on different masks to be different things to different people at different times. But no matter whether we say anything or not, or try to hide or not, we communicate our inner state in our attitude, what and how we speak, in the decisions we make and the actions we take.

To put it succinctly, our behavior mirrors our heart. During our time together, we're going to look at what the heart is, what Jesus teaches us and where hope is. Let's start with our heart. We talk about "inviting Jesus into our heart" and "heart-felt" worship and prayer.

But do we really know what the heart is? Dallas Willard, in his book *The Renovation of the Heart*, offers a definition. He writes:

"... heart, spirit and will (or similar terms) are words referring to one and the same thing, the same fundamental part of a person. But they do so in different ways. 'Will' refers to the power to initiate, create and bring about what did not exist before. 'Spirit' refers to its nature as distinct and independent from physical reality. And 'heart' refers to its position in a human being, as the center or core to which every other part of the self owes its proper function. But it's the same aspect of a human being which has all these features."²

The heart is the center of human life. It seems clear. Our lives flow out of the reality of our heart. No matter how we may try to hide it, what we present on the outside reveals who we are inside. This lies at the core of the disagreement between Jesus and the Pharisees in Matthew 15:10-20.

This inside-out way of seeing ourselves reverses common thinking, then and now. Some people say our external actions change our inner being. Jesus says our external actions don't change us inside, they are the evidence of the state of our inner being. We don't live outside-in.

We live inside-out. A good example is a small child. When you're around children, what you experience is who they are. They'll tell you what they think or ask for what they want, no matter where you may be

² Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ*, NavPress, 2002

or what you may be doing. For example, years ago I was at a college graduation ceremony for a friend. I was sitting with her Mom and three year old daughter, Alexis. During the commencement address, the Dean asked the graduates, “What do you need for the future?” Alexis spoke up, loudly and clearly, “I need my diaper changed.” You can imagine the laughter that ensued.

Children live authentically. They don’t know any other way to life. What they think and feel inside is reflected in who they are outside. There’s no deception or falseness. Jesus welcomed children as examples of authentic living saying, *“I assure you whoever doesn’t welcome God’s kingdom like a child will never enter it”* (Luke 18:17). We usually think of this from the perspective of the innocence and openness of children. I think the authenticity of children is just as important.

Now, of course, we do grow up. And the world is a harsh place. We can’t afford to be naive. So I invite you to consider Paul’s words, *“When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, reason like a child, think like a child. But now that I have become [mature], I’ve put an end to childish things. Now we see a reflection in a mirror; then we will see face-to-face. Now I know partially, but then I will know completely in the same way I have been completely known”* (1 Corinthians 13:11-12).

Jesus invites us to embrace a powerful new image of life, a healthier way to live, free from deceit and lies. Our selfish desires don’t have to rule over us anymore. We can resist the temptations we encounter by trusting God and inviting God’s Spirit to help us. Our reflections on Romans 7 & 8 last month spoke to this aspect of our spiritual journey, particularly how the Spirit helps us in our struggles to do the right thing. We can accept our limits, love them and then turn them over to God.

What happens when we live God’s way? Paul tells us, *“God brings gifts into our lives, much the same way fruit appears in an orchard - things like affection for people, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to gather and direct our energies wisely.”* (Galatians 5:22-23, MSG).

What's the alternative? Paul taught the Galatian church a lesson which sounds familiar today: *“It's obvious what kind of life comes out of trying to get your own way: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking build-up of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; ... uncontrollable addictions; and ugly parodies of community”* (vv19-21). The choice seems clear to me. Turn to Jesus and become who you were meant to be.

The Pharisees came to Jesus from Jerusalem. I'm sure he was looking forward to meeting with them for the first time. But instead of building bridges, all the Pharisees focused on were details, the outside. Rather than seeing Jesus and his disciples for who they might be, their heart, the Pharisees only saw Jesus' unorthodox theology, his claim he could forgive sins, and his seemingly cavalier attitude towards the intricate Levitical laws, saying precisely how people should live to be holy and undefiled. They were disturbed by the company Jesus kept; people who in their mind were clearly unholy sinners. They complained about the lack of kosher practices. Sadly, Jesus knew people would listen to the Pharisees, follow them and be lost, trapped in a prison of their own making.

What hope do we have 2,000 years later? We have hope in Jesus. Paul wrote, *“The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom. All of us are looking with unveiled faces at the glory of the Lord as if we were looking in a mirror. We are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to the next degree of glory. This comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit”* (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

When we turn and face God as Moses did, God removes barriers and there we are, face-to-face! We recognize God is a living, personal presence, not remote, distant or uncaring. And when God, a living Spirit, is personally present, the old, constricting rules are obsolete. We're free, all of us! Nothing stands between us and God. And our lives can then gradually become brighter and more beautiful as God enters them and

we become like Jesus. Become who you are to be without shame, for God has a plan for you and all of us, for good.

Thanks be to God!

Let us pray ...

Matthew 15:10-20 (CEB)

Jesus called the crowd near and said to them, “Listen and understand. It’s not what goes into the mouth that contaminates a person in God’s sight. It’s what comes out of the mouth that contaminates the person.”

Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended by what you just said?”

Jesus replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father didn’t plant will be pulled up. Leave the Pharisees alone. They are blind people who are guides to blind people. But if a blind person leads another blind person, they will both fall into a ditch.”

Then Peter spoke up, “Explain this riddle to us.”

Jesus said, “Don’t you understand yet? Don’t you know that everything that goes into the mouth enters the stomach and goes out into the sewer? But what goes out of the mouth comes from the heart. And that’s what contaminates a person in God’s sight. Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adultery, sexual sins, thefts, false testimonies, and insults. These contaminate a person in God’s sight. But eating without washing hands doesn’t contaminate in God’s sight.”