

His Own Heart



One of the most powerful stories on the nature of the human heart is told by author and social commentator Malcolm Muggeridge.

Working as a journalist in India, he left his residence one evening to go to a nearby river for a swim. As he entered the water, across the river he saw the silhouette form of an Indian woman who had come for her evening bath. Muggeridge impulsively felt the allurement of the moment, and temptation stormed his mind. He had lived with this kind of struggle for years but had somehow fought it off in honour of his commitment to his wife, Kitty. On this occasion, however, he wondered if he could cross the line of marital fidelity. He struggled just for a moment and then swam furiously toward the woman, literally trying to outdistance his conscience. His mind fed him the fantasy that stolen waters would be sweet, and he swam the harder for it. Now he was just a metre from her, and as he emerged from the water, any emotion that may have gripped him paled into insignificance when compared with the devastation that shattered him as he looked at her.

"She was old and hideous . . . and her skin was wrinkled and, worst of all, she was a leper. . . .This creature grinned at me, showing a toothless mask," he recalled. The experience left Muggeridge trembling and muttering under his breath, "What a dirty, lecherous woman!"

But then the rude shock of it dawned upon him—it wasn't the woman who was lecherous; it was his own heart.

Can Man Live Without God? (Word Publishing, Dallas: 1994, pp. 136, 137)

A ONCE-PERFECT WORLD

God's original plan for us was to live in perfect harmony with Him as our creator, in a perfect world He had designed. He created the first humans, Adam and Eve, with the ability to think, to reason and to love.

Q1	Who is God and what is His relationship with humanity?
	□ Revelation 4:11, John 1:12
8	□ 1 Samuel 12:24 □ Psalm 111:10 □ Proverbs 1:7; 9:10 □ Job 28:28 □ Deuteronomy 4:5, 6

Sadly the perfection God had intended was not to last. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, their mental and moral abilities were corrupted because of their disobedient action. Perfect love was replaced by selfishness. Their characters and morality were critically weakened and fatally undermined as a result of sin.

Because of their sin, under their own strength, it was impossible for them to resist the power of sin and resulting wickedness. They had fallen under the influence of Satan, the source of all sin. It would have remained this way if God had not made a plan to rescue them.

Satan, God's adversary, desired to bring an end to the perfect world God had created. Satan filled the world with emptiness, grief and suffering. He didn't want people to feel joy, hope or fulfilment. Instead, Satan wanted people to look at all the suffering, darkness and evil he had caused and blame God.

God's mercy is bigger than any of your mistakes.

Lamentations 3:22-23



SINNERS IN NEED OF JESUS

Until we ask God to renew us, our lives are no longer in tune with His will and purpose. We need God to recreate our hearts and help us see the world the way He sees it. Unselfish love rules in heaven.

Heaven is a place of perfect love—not the type of love we are used to here on this earth, which is conditional and imperfect, but one that know no limit.

Without God giving us new hearts, we are not able to comprehend, understand or even respond to this kind of love.

Our thoughts, interests and motivations would be completely opposite to the perfection of heaven, and like Adam and Eve, we too would flee from God, desiring to be anywhere but in the presence of God.

Likewise, people who have not accepted Jesus as Saviour would not be happy in God's presence. God doesn't shut sinners out of heaven; sinners demonstrate by their own choices that they do not wish to live in the presence of God.

Until our hearts are made new, heaven would be of little interest to us because such perfection and holiness would be so foreign, and we being sinful, could not live in the presence of God.

God's greatest wish for everyone is to be saved and to live with Him in heaven one day. However, because God created us with freewill, the choice is ours: Do we accept or reject God's offer to be saved?

Q3	What is the true condition of our heart?
	□ Jeremiah 17:9
	□ Job 14:4 □ Romans 5:12 □ Psalm 51:1-5 □ Matthew 15:19

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

So, as humans, sin has damaged our hearts, separating us from God. Since the time of Adam and Eve, this has been the condition we've each been born into, and no matter how hard we might try, by our own efforts there's nothing we can do to change that. It's simply the way we are.

Even if you were the most disciplined person with the strongest willpower and the most determination, you could not change your heart. Willpower and determination are certainly powerful forces, however this is not something we can ever overcome.

We can attempt it—we can act a certain way, make an effort to do the right thing—and if we look solely at our actions, it may even appear that we are succeeding in living a good life. However, beneath the surface, the truth is, our thoughts and motivations are still underpinned by selfishness. Sin is still in our hearts, in fact, tangled so deep and instinctual it's not something we can remove, no matter how hard we try, because it's coded into our deepest core.

This is why Jesus talks about giving us a "new heart"—because the old one is broken. We don't need a repair, we need a replacement.

"I received Christ into my heart and my life began to change. But it was a gradual change. And I didn't see any flashing bulbs. I didn't hear any thunder. There was no great emotional experience. It was just saying: Yes, Lord Jesus, I want you to be the lord of my life."

— Billy Graham

A NEW HEART

Q4	What change needs to take place for us to enter God's kingdom?
	🗆 John 3:3, 16, 17
	□ Acts 2:38 □ 1 Peter 1:18–23

• "It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which are sunken. Our hearts are evil and we cannot change them.... There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before we can be changed from sin to holiness. That power is Christ." *Ellen G. White*

The power to change our heart is not possible by your own efforts; it comes from Jesus working in us. This is how you are transformed from your sinful state to being born again in Christ. Only Jesus has the power to give you a new heart, and by His grace, bring you to a oneness with God. In this state of oneness, we respond to His love and appreciate His holiness the way we were originally designed to as His creations.

Jesus tells us that unless we are ready to receive the new heart, we won't even be able to see the kingdom of God—because we wouldn't be able to comprehend it.

(I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, [they] cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)

SEEING WITH NEW EYES

Q5	How can we see the world through God's eyes?
	□ 1 Corinthians 2:10
Ð	□ 1 Corinthians 2:14 □ 1 John 2:27 □ Romans 8:5-7 □ Matthew 16:17

The only way to understand spiritual matters is to see the world the way God does—which we can do when we accept this gift of a new heart. The Holy Spirit guides our understanding convicts us of our sin and His truth and righteousness.

In 1 Corinthians 2:14, the apostle Paul writes: "The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit."

Imagine trying to read a book written in a language you don't know. You wouldn't be able to understand it—the lines on the page would look completely meaningless. You would see it but not understand a word.

In the same way, with your naturally sinful heart, you are unable to understand spiritual matters clearly. However, once you accept the gift of a new heart, you will begin to understand the life God has prepared for you.

The disciple John describes Jesus as the light of the world (John 8:12) who came to bring us out of the darkness we were born into, so that we can walk with Him and see things clearly.



"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to [us] by which we must be saved."

— Acts 4:12

STRUGGLING WITH SIN

Q6 Why do we still struggle with sin?

Romans 7:14–17

Isaiah 50:1; 59:2
 Romans 5:12-14; 8-22
 Jeremiah 17:9; 13:23

It's not enough just to understand God's kindness and love. It's not enough to notice that He is wise and just. Knowledge alone does not bring holiness. We can appreciate that God's law is good, holy and just, however that doesn't mean we will always be able to follow it. *The idea that it is necessary only to develop the good that exists in man by nature, is a fatal deception. . . . It is not enough to perceive the loving-kindness of God. . . . It is not enough to discern the wisdom and justice of His law, to see that it is founded upon the eternal principle of love. We must behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and be formed again in his likeness." *Ellen G. White*

Once we are aware of God's perfect law of love, we will equally become aware of how sinful we truly are.

Paul writes in Romans 7:21–24, "So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?"

Who will rescue us? There is only One who can: Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," (John 1:29).

Jesus is the only one who can save you from your sins. "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25).

JESUS MAKES A WAY

Q7	Who can restore our relationship with God?
	□ 1 Timothy 2:5
=	□ Hebrews 9:15 □ Romans 5:1, 2 □ John 17:3 □ 1 Corinthians 8:6

The Holy Spirit reveals in many different ways how God's salvation can free us from the guilt we carry. One example of this is in the story of Jacob, found in the Bible. Jacob, feeling guilty about deceiving his brother Esau, ran away from his home. He was lonely, separated from everything he valued and everyone close to him. His mind was very troubled, and the thought that worried him the most was the fear that his sin had cut him off from God and that God had abandoned him.

(It is not the absence of sin, but the grieving over it which distinguishes the child of God from empty professors." *A. W. Pink*

Exhausted and filled with sadness, he lay down to rest under the stars of the night sky. As he was sleeping, a strange light came into view. From where he lay, he could see a huge stairway seeming to lead up to heaven. He could see God's angels climbing up and down these stairs, and he heard a heavenly voice speak from above with a message of comfort and hope. Jacob was longing for a saviour and the promise of heaven and that is what he found in the midst of his despair. Jacob was filled with joy at being shown how he, a sinner, could still be accepted by God. The stair he saw in his dream represented Jesus, the means of communication between us and God.



From the moment Adam and Eve sinned, humans were cut off from heaven, separated from God. It was such a vast distance that it seemed there would be no possibility of communication—the distance was simply too great, and there was no way of bridging it. However because of Jesus, we can once again be connected with God in heaven.

Jesus lived a perfect life and bridging the gap sin had caused. The good news is, we no longer need to be separated from God. Even though we are weak and helpless, Jesus' sacrifice stands in place for us giving direct connection to God through this wonderful gift.



No matter how much we dream of being good people, or how much we earnestly desire to improve ourselves and the world around us, these dreams will never be realised unless Jesus is the foundation of our faith. Jesus is the only true source of help and hope for us as sinners. "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.

"That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic . . . or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice.

"Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon or you can fall at His feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher.

"He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." *C.S. Lewis*



GOD'S PLAN FOR US

"Every good gift and every perfect gift" is from God (James 1:17). There is no true excellence of character apart from Jesus: the only way to God is through Jesus.

Q10	What is God's plan to save us?
	□ Hebrews 9:26
=	□ Hebrews 9:12; 7:27 □ 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18 □ John 10:11

God loves us more than anything. He created us giving us life, and even when we sinned, He still gave us the greatest and most costly gift of all—Jesus, His only Son. All of heaven is represented in this one gift. Jesus came to earth to live and die in order that we might be rescued from a world of sin. Heaven's angels look out for us, the Holy Spirit works in us, and God is ready to accept us as soon as we accept His gift of salvation.

Solution of the sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

What an amazing sacrifice has been made for you, in order that you might be saved!

The Bible reveals the good things that will come to those who follow God: the joy of heaven, the closeness and love of God and His Son and experiencing true wisdom and perfect peace. This is the joy for those receive Jesus as Saviour and serve God, our Creator and Redeemer. In contrast, the Bible warns that those who keep sinning and refuse God's salvation will never be free from sin. Their sin will ensnare them and ultimately ensure a permanent death. The Bible makes it clear we are all doomed by sin and sentenced to death, unless we make the choice to accept God's rescue plan.

God has loved us with an amazing love. Even while we were lost in sin and separated from God, He offered us a second chance through Jesus to restore us to Him.

If you follow God's plan and accept His mercy, you have the certain promise of being transformed into the same image to be like Him.

(In the Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: 'Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with loving-kindness I have drawn you.' " (Jeremiah 31:3)

REFLECTION

I understand how sin destroyed the perfect life that God intended for us. Because of our sinful natures, without God we are unable to resist evil through our own efforts.

YES

I realise that my sin has separated me from God, and that the only way back to God is through Jesus.

YES

I know I am unable to save myself by my own efforts and that I need Jesus as my Saviour.

YES

I am thankful for God's love and His plan to redeem me. I want to accept the salvation that He has freely offered to me.

YES

UNDECIDED

UNDECIDED

UNDECIDED

UNDECIDED

The scripture does not say "Ye must be improved," but, "Ye must be born again."





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CONTINUE YOUR JOURNEY IN PART 3: REPENTANCE

Once we have recognised our need to be saved, what are the next steps? How do we come before Jesus, admit what we've done wrong. and be forgiven? Our hearts are sinful, but there is hope, because Jesus has promised to transform our lives by giving us a new heart.

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