



# TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS



A publication of **DISCIPLE**, the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

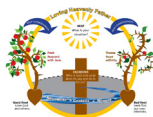
**Talk** together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11  
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Triangle Community Church aims to be a "transforming church". We exist to be used by God as He transforms ordinary people into extraordinary followers of Jesus Christ. TCC believes not only that life-change is possible—but that it is to be expected. Growth is God's will for his people. But transformation does not happen by accident. It requires intentional, intelligent action. 1 Timothy 4:7 instructs you to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." Since "Talking Points, Walking Points" is intended both for individual reflection and for group discussion, questions vary in degree of vulnerability required. Generally it is best to begin group discussions with questions which involve less personal disclosure—but don't linger there. Be sure to "dive deep" too! The questions which require the greatest openness and honesty,

## Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- We've all heard news reports of atrocities. A neighbor of the perpetrator always says in shocked disbelief: **"Bob was such a quiet, polite fellow. I never thought he'd be capable of such a thing as this!"** What does that comment tell us about the neighbor's understanding of the human heart?

What is the biblical understanding of the human heart? What passages support that view?



- The **"Three Trees Diagram"** is a pictorial representation of Jeremiah 17:5-10.

Take a moment now as a group to review the text of Jeremiah 17 as it is laid out graphically on the back page of these Talking Points, Walking Points. Discuss with each other the meaning and significance of the various elements of the diagram. Then...

Do you find this passage encouraging or discouraging—**and why?**


Does your Christian life feel more like the one described in v. 6 or in v. 8? **Why** do you say that?

- Now take a moment to look over the **"Three Trees Journal"**—the tool which puts the concepts found in Jeremiah 17:5-10 into a "question format" (see the blank Journal, and two completed sample Journals included in these Talking Points, Walking Points) helping us, above all else, to "guard our hearts".

What do you find **shocking** about this process? What do you find **encouraging** about it?

Have you ever tried to examine your own heart in this way? Would you tell us a little about it?

## Jeremiah 17:5-10

<sup>5</sup> Thus says the LORD, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose **heart**  **turns away** from the LORD.

<sup>6</sup> For he will be **like a bush in the desert**  and will not see when prosperity comes, but will live in **stony wastes in the wilderness**,  **a land of salt without inhabitant.**

<sup>7</sup> Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD.



<sup>8</sup> For he will be like **a tree planted by the water**,

that **extends its roots by a stream** and **will not fear** when the **heat** comes;



but **its leaves will be green**,

and it **will not be anxious in a year of drought**  **nor cease to yield fruit.**



<sup>9</sup> The **heart** is **more deceitful than all else** and is **desperately sick**; who can understand it?

<sup>10</sup> **I, the LORD,**

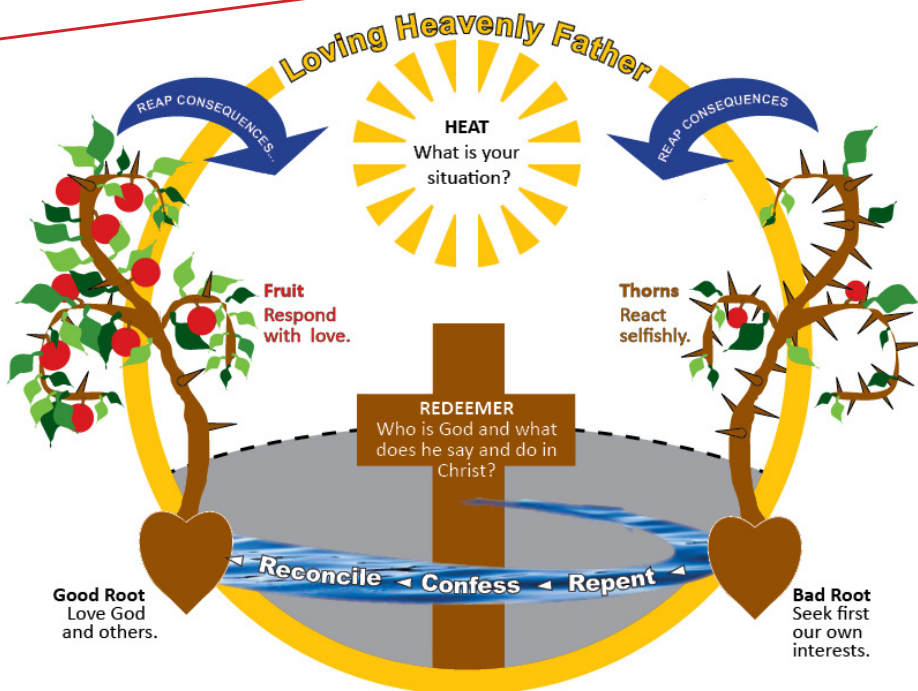
**search** the heart,

**I test** the mind.



### Proverbs 4:23

Above all else guard your heart,  
for it determines everything you do.



# Sermon Summary

Last week we began a two-part mini-series entitled “Being Like God.” Mankind is unique among all creation, being created “in God’s image”. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve, seeking to be more than they ought, through disobedience became less than they ought. We cannot be what God intends us to be unless we live in submission to God. God still intends to use us as his image-bearers. Jesus, the great God-Man, is our model (Colossians 1:15 & Hebrews 1:3). He purchased us at the price of his blood so that he could re-make us into the untainted image of God (2 Corinthians 3:18). Galatians 5:22-23 is a list of virtues that God produces in us. But how exactly do we grow this fruit into an abundant crop?

The first and non-negotiable step is that we must be born again (Romans 8:8 & John 3:3). When we do have the new birth we gain the missing ingredient for change: the new birth not only washes away our sins, but also implants a new heart within us. In biblical thought, the “heart” is the control center of a person (Mark 7:20-23; Luke 6:43-45). The new heart God gives us is oriented toward pleasing him. It all starts with the heart! Now, “guarding our hearts” is our primary responsibility (Proverbs 4:23). Guarding the heart involves using constant diligence to preserve your soul from sin and to maintain sweet, constant fellowship with God.

Think of your heart as a city under siege—enemies surrounding it, battering rams in action, city gates splintering. We have an enemy of our soul. But our threat is not only external—there also is the threat of a traitor within. There’s an “inside man” cooperating with the foreign army, actively working to overthrow his own city (Jeremiah 17:9). What chance do we have with formidable foes attacking from without and wicked, tricky traitors assisting them from within? Every chance, for God assists us (Jeremiah 17:10). If you are born again, then you have a new, good heart. “Guarding your heart” is the process by which we carefully protect our hearts from sin so that we can maintain a God-centered “heart-set” which results in us becoming like God.

Jeremiah—a master teacher along the lines of Jesus—used a simple story from everyday life to teach this profound truth (Jeremiah 17:5-10). In v. 5-6 he describes the person who turns his heart away from God, trusts in his own wisdom and strength to live life, and the shriveled, fruitless, lonely lives which result. Then he paints the contrasting picture—the person who trusts God is fruitful and blessed (v. 7-8). It is important to notice that Jeremiah makes clear that “heat” comes to the blessed, fruitful person’s life as well. The difference is that this person is resilient, even in difficulties.

Two trees, two heart orientations, two outcomes. The root issue is the heart. Simple enough; just orient your heart toward God—right? Not so fast—remember v. 9! “The heart is more deceitful than all else, and is desperately sick—who can understand it?” Our situation would be hopeless without v. 10—“I, the Lord, search the heart. I test the mind...” God says: “You can’t understand your heart—but I do. I understand it just fine!” The “Three Trees Diagram” illustrates Jeremiah 17:5-10, and is helpful in accomplishing our primary task of “guarding our hearts”.

Jeremiah mentions “heat” in both types of life. Everybody has “heat” in their lives. It could be little, it could be big. A difficult spouse or boss is “heat”, as is an up-coming exam at school or sharing a room with a sibling! Arthritis is “heat”. Sometimes even blessings bring “heat”—just ask the mom of a newborn! What’s the “heat” in your life right now? Your loving Heavenly Father could have kept you from experiencing that “heat”, but it’s his curriculum for conforming us to the image of Christ.

But growth is not automatic—notice the thorns on the stunted, dry, fruitless shrub (v. 5-6). It has “thorny responses” such as rudeness, impatience or cutting speech. Any of the opposites of the fruit of the Spirit are “thorns”. We like to think that thorns are the result of the heat, but God says, “No, it all comes from our hearts”. Jesus—who is the uncorrupted image of God—bore sweet, loving fruit under more heat than you or I ever will experience.

Notice the grey area at the bottom of the diagram. It represents the fact that, just as roots are invisible underground, so our hearts are hidden and hard to figure out, so we often overlook them. But that’s a big mistake. That’s why, as an act of kindness, God “turns up the heat” to help us discover what lurks down there! Our hearts are full of “wants”—and we want them so badly we usually call them “needs”—but Jesus shows us that the only thing we really need is to honor and obey the Father (Luke 22:42).

Although Jeremiah speaks explicitly only of two trees, we desperately need a third tree—the “tree” of Calvary (Galatians 3:13). Calvary’s tree reminds us to bring God and his limitless resources in the picture (see the attached list of “Gospel Truths for Heart Change”). Just as Jeremiah 17 says that the fruitful tree sends down its roots into streams in the desert, in the same way a refreshing stream flows from the cross, bringing confession, repentance, reconciliation and real change to our hearts. Fruitful responses then result—even under the same “heat” that once produced “thorny” ones (Luke 23:34).



1. **"Heat"**: What was a situation that upset me?



Why would a loving heavenly Father allow this situation to touch my life?

2. **"Thorns"**: How did I react? What did I think, feel, say, and do?



What further consequences (to myself, others, the situation) resulted from my initial words or actions?

3. **"Heart"**: What did I **want** that I wasn't getting? or What was I afraid that I might **lose**?  
Phrase this in categories rather than in terms of the specifics of this event  
(for example, "*respect*", rather than "*Billy to not talk back*").



Whatever I want more than pleasing God is called an "\_\_\_\_\_". My idol here was \_\_\_\_\_.

4. **"Cross"**: What truths about God's character and His salvation/redemption relate to this incident?

**Specifically:**

- How do God's (1) **power**, (2) **wisdom**, (3) **love**, and (4) **grace** relate to this incident?
- When did Christ experience similar "heat"? How did he respond? Can he understand me?
- What resources has Christ given me to respond as he did?
- What "Gospel Truths for Heart Change" (see reverse) relate to this incident?



In light of Christ's suffering and forgiveness for me, I will now respond:

- by asking forgiveness of the person hurt by my thorns.
- by asking God's forgiveness for my idolatry.

5. **"Heart"**: What would a heart be attached to if it truly believed these gospel realities?  
What godly "desires" will contrast with those of the "thorn-tree heart"?



"I agree that I want a Christ-centered heart." ☐ Y ☐ N

6. **"Fruit"**: What godly beliefs and behaviors—in contrast to the "thorns" above—would flow from this heart?  
What must I now "put on"? (Ephesians 4:22-32; Colossians 3:12-17)



## Some Gospel Truths for Heart Change

I am united to Christ forever with an unbreakable bond.	(Romans 6:1-7)
I am married to Christ; all of His assets (resources) are available to help me.	(2 Peter 1:3-4)
Because I'm married to Christ, the core of my life is spiritual purity.	(Romans 3:22)
God began a good work in me, and He will complete it.	(Philippians 1:6)
Soon I will be with Christ and my struggle to obey will be over.	(1 John 3:1-2)
I have the Holy Spirit in me to help me: I do not have to sin.	(Romans 6)
My life on earth is preparation for heaven.	(1 Corinthians 3:10-15)
Jesus has justified me: in God's eyes I'm not guilty.	(1 John 2:1)
Jesus gives me wisdom in my foolishness and blindness.	(1 Corinthians 2:15-16)
I'm powerless and enslaved apart from Christ: He liberates and empowers me.	(Philippians 4:13)
I'm crucified with Christ; He lives through me.	(Galatians 2:20)
Jesus loved me and gave Himself for me.	(Romans 5:8; Ephesians 5:2)
My heart is new because Christ lives there.	(Ezekiel 36:25-27)
My old heart of stone has been replaced by a moldable heart: I can change.	(Ezekiel 11:19-20)
The cross bought me access to God: I can cry out to Him for help in my struggle.	(Hebrews 4:16)
Jesus faced every temptation and struggle I am facing: He understands.	(Hebrews 2:18, 4:15)
Jesus never sinned in His responses to temptation and struggle: I have a model.	(1 Peter 2:21-25)
Jesus fills me with His Spirit; I have power to respond as He did to challenges.	(Galatians 5:16-25)
Jesus forgives me when I fail to respond as He wants me to.	(1 John 1:5-10)
Someday I will be perfectly like Him.	(Romans 8:30)
Jesus asked for different circumstances, but affirmed God's will over His own—He did this for me, and calls me to do it for others. He died so that I would live for Him, not for myself.	(Luke 22:42; John 13:13-17; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15)
I've been forgiven freely, generously, lavishly—this is how I'm to forgive others.	(Ephesians 1; 4:32)
My life is not my own: He bought it and it belongs to Him.	(Romans 14:8)
My goal is to please Him, and I can learn how to do that.	(2 Corinthians 5:9; Ephesians 5:10)





1. **"Heat"**: What was a situation that upset or bothered me?

*My CPAP mask (for sleep apnea) had left an irritated, red spot on my forehead. I was embarrassed by it. A friend at church asked me what happened to my forehead. Why would a loving heavenly Father allow this situation to touch my life? So that I could see what was in my heart, via my response to it.*

2. **"Thorns"**: How did I react? What did I think, feel, say, and do? *I got embarrassed, covered up the truth, told a lie, and deflected attention away from me to her by sarcastically joking: "The thought of having to face you this morning caused me to beat my head against a wall! It left a mark." I lied and used sarcasm (a form of "abusive speech"; Colossians 3:1-10).*

What further consequences (to myself, others, the situation) resulted from my initial words or actions? *Others heard my "joke" and chuckled—at my friend's expense. I knew what I'd done, and I immediately felt bad from a guilty conscience—but rather than telling the truth and asking her forgiveness, I just said something like, "No, no, that wasn't it." and went on.*

3. **"Heart"**: What did I **want**—I might even have called it a **"need"**—that I wasn't getting? Phrase this in categories rather than in terms of the specifics of this event (for example, "respect", rather than "Billy to not talk back").

*I want to be respected by others. Not only having this blemish on my forehead, but also I think that having to use a CPAP diminishes me in others' eyes. My CPAP strap also leaves a mark on my cheek that often does not dissipate for an hour or more. I don't like this, because I care about others' estimation of me.*

Whatever I want more than pleasing God is called an "idol". My idol here was respect / praise.

4. **"Cross"**: What truths about God's character and His salvation/redemption relate to this incident? **Specifically:**

- How do God's (1) **power**, (2) **wisdom**, (3) **love**, and (4) **grace** relate to this incident?
- When did Christ experience similar "heat"? How did he respond? Can he understand me?
- What resources has Christ given me to respond as he did?
- What "Gospel Truths for Heart Change" (see reverse) relate to this incident?

*The Bible's word for wanting others' respect is "fear of man" (Proverbs 29:25), and it is sin (John 12:42-43). Jesus came to forgive sinners—I need Him. Christ was always being challenged by others, but he responded in love, because he feared God, not men. Jesus knows the temptation to fear man (so he sympathizes with me), yet he shows me how to go through it without sinning (Hebrews 4:14-16). Some day I will be just like him (Romans 8:28-30).*

In light of Christ's suffering and forgiveness for me, I will now respond:

- by asking forgiveness of the person hurt by my thorns. *I've done both of these things, but I've not yet asked forgiveness of those who over-heard me say those unkind things. I'll do it this week.*
- by asking God's forgiveness for my idolatry.

5. **"Heart"**: What would a heart be attached to if it truly believed these gospel realities?

What godly "wants" and "needs" will contrast with the "thorn-tree heart"?

*I would want to please God above all else (2 Corinthians 5:9, 15). I would want to build others up (1 Thessalonians 5:11) and point them to my wonderful Savior (1 Peter 2:9-11).*

"I agree that I want a Christ-centered heart." ☒ **Y** ☐ **N**

6. **"Fruit"**: What godly beliefs and behaviors—in contrast to the "thorns" above—would flow from this heart?

What must I now "put on"?

(Ephesians 4:22-32; Colossians 3:12-17)

*Humility and truth-telling over pride and lying. Considering others more important than myself. Being willing to be known as an overweight snorer. And now, being willing to be known as a pastor who preferred to be rude to a friend than to admit he uses a CPAP!*



1. **"Heat"**: What was a situation that upset or bothered me?



*Having to wait for an appointment longer than I thought I should.*

Why would a loving heavenly Father allow this situation to touch my life?

*God wanted to expose what's in my heart so He can make me more like Christ. Romans 8:28-29*

2. **"Thorns"**: How did I react? What did I think, feel, say, and do?



*Anger, self-righteous thoughts. Rude rebuke of the banker when I finally saw him.*

What further consequences (to myself, others, the situation) resulted from my initial words or actions?

*Damaged the reputation of Christ (he knew I'm a pastor's wife from the refinance docs). Probably created stress for the banker. My guilt feelings all day.*

3. **"Heart"**: What did I **want**—I might even have called it a **"need"**—that I wasn't getting?

Phrase this in categories rather than in terms of the specifics of this event (for example, "respect", rather than "Billy to not talk back").



*Convenience  
Ease  
Respect*

Whatever I want more than pleasing God is called an "idol". My idol here was pleasure & respect

4. **"Cross"**: What truths about God's character and His salvation/redemption relate to this incident?

**Specifically:**

- How do God's (1) **power**, (2) **wisdom**, (3) **love**, and (4) **grace** relate to this incident?
- When did Christ experience similar "heat"? How did he respond? Can he understand me?
- What resources has Christ given me to respond as he did?
- What "Gospel Truths for Heart Change" (see reverse) relate to this incident?



*Christ was inconvenienced by living in a body. He was never given the honor he should have. His life was hard, for my sake. His death was agonizing, for my sake. Although he was never honored fully, he was always patient and loving, looking toward his reward in heaven. He paid the price for my rudeness. He empowers me to love others more than myself.*

In light of Christ's suffering and forgiveness for me, I will now respond: *Yes, I went back the next day and*

- by asking forgiveness of the person hurt by my thorns. *asked forgiveness of the banker. It was hard*
- by asking God's forgiveness for my idolatry. *and awkward. Also asked God's forgiveness for wanting my own easy life more than wanting to please Him.*

5. **"Heart"**: What would a heart be attached to if it truly believed these gospel realities?

What godly "wants" and "needs" will contrast with the "thorn-tree heart"?



*My heart was softened and wants to please the Lord.*

"I agree that I want a Christ-centered heart." ☒ Y ☐ N

6. **"Fruit"**: What godly beliefs and behaviors—in contrast to the "thorns" above—would flow from this heart?

What must I now "put on"?

(Ephesians 4:22-32; Colossians 3:12-17)



*Under similar heat, I will put on patience, compassion, love, thinking about the other person rather than myself. Consequences: I won't damage my testimony; I'll have joy in pleasing the Lord and will honor him. I might even have opportunity to talk with someone about the Lord.*