

RENEW



heart • soul • mind • strength



RENEW: Heart

Large Group Talk 1

*Don't forget to start with the intro found in the speaker outlines.

Objective: Your students may be really involved in ministry, serving others and attending Bible studies. But as tasks, service projects, and events add up, do you ever challenge them to think about why they do these things? Even the right thing done for the wrong reason can be harmful. It all starts with the heart. What does it mean to love God with the whole heart? How does God transform us from the inside out, starting with our basic motives and desires? What does that renewal look like for your students?

Transition to RENEW Your Heart Sermon

Ask: Why did you come here today? Imagine your best friend asked you why you were here—what would you tell him or her?

Say Something Like:

Maybe you're here because you want to learn about God. Perhaps your parents pushed you to come. Or maybe you came because your friends are here. But when you think about it, these aren't really the most basic reasons you're here. Dig deeper into your gut. If you want to learn about God, is it because you love him deeply, or is it because that's what you're supposed to do and you're a rule-follower at heart? If your parents made you come, what is the deeper reason you obey your parents? If you're here to hang out with your friends, why do you want to spend time with them? When you think about it deeply, you'll discover that the things we do and the decisions we make start with the motivations of our hearts. The passage we are going to look at today explains that, no matter how we act, our hearts show where our true allegiance lies.

Read Romans 6:15-18:

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

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Say Something Like: *We spend a lot of our time, money, and actions loving things other than God. There are so many things that distract us and pull our affections in different directions that don't ultimately end up in good places. But things won't change if we just try to avoid bad things. We have to get to the bottom of it and figure out WHY we do those things. Is our heart following Christ, or is it focused on the world, our stuff, or our relationships. The good news is, because of Jesus, we don't have to be slaves to sin—God can actually renew our hearts.*

Teaching: Heart

1. The Heart of the Matter

Say Something Like: *Jesus tells an interesting story about two brothers (Luke 15). Each of them represents a way our hearts rebel against God. The first brother's rebellion is obvious. He tells his father, "You are dead to me. I want to leave you, take your money, and party." His heart is drawn to a wild and carefree lifestyle. The older brother's rebellion is subtler. He doesn't outright leave his father to party, but he only stays so he can benefit from what his father will give him. Just like the younger son, he does not love his father. He only obeys to get a reward. His heart is just as selfish as his younger brother's.*

Discuss: *Is it possible to obey God but not truly love him? What would that look like?*

Say Something Like: *The point of Jesus' story is to show that there really isn't a middle ground. We are either slaves of sin or servants of God. It doesn't matter if we do everything perfectly or if we're "good people." If our hearts don't love God, the good things we do are just a lie. That's why it's so important that Jesus purchased new life for us by dying on the cross for our sins. He tosses out our old, corrupted hearts and replaces them with new ones that love the Lord. We can't earn them, and we certainly don't deserve them. They're a free gift, given out of love.*

Some early Christians living in Rome heard this good news and thought to themselves, "If our hearts are all that matter, then it must be okay to keep on sinning after we've gotten new hearts from Jesus." But Paul tells them that's crazy! A heart that's truly been transformed to love God wouldn't want to continue doing things that break God's heart. That kind of person would still be a prisoner to sin.

Discuss: *We just talked about how it might look to obey God but not truly love him. On the other hand, do you think it's possible to love God but not always obey him?*

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2. What's Fueling Your Heart?

Discuss: *Think of all the different things that try and win the affection of your heart. What are some things that try to get our hearts to love them?*

If students are having a hard time coming up with anything, here are a few possible answers:

- Commercials are always trying to convince us that we will be miserable and unfilled until we have what only they can offer. That is definitely a play for our hearts.
- Websites will try to reel us in with enticing titles (people call these titles “clickbait”): “This guy thought he was buying a normal Chalupa at Taco Bell. You’ll never guess what he accidentally ate!” I actually want to click on that! Even though I just made up that sentence, I totally want to know what happens!
- Even phrases like “hanging with my besties” or “my bff” are staking a claim on our hearts’ loyalties. You feel compelled to do something with a person who thinks you are his or her best friend.

Say Something Like: *Our hearts are built to worship and follow. Picture your heart as an engine. A car can't run without an engine, and it needs gasoline to make it go. Unfortunately, we have been filling our engines (our hearts) with a lot of crud. Instead of high-quality gasoline, we cram sawdust, dirt, and sand in our engines. We fill our lives with celebrities, addictions, and love of ourselves. Our hearts were built to serve and worship God. By fueling our hearts with junk, we will never get them to do what they were made to do.*

Think about the distractions you're filling your own heart with. Do you let them keep your heart from focusing on God? It is important for us to evaluate why we do the things that we do. Selfish motivations and distractions can creep into our hearts at any time.

3. Return Your Heart to the Lord

Say Something Like: *Jesus said this about a group of people whose hearts were not in the right place:*

“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules” (Mark 15:8-9).

Discuss: *Is this true at all for you? In what ways is your praise of God only an outward thing and not something that is really happening on the inside? How can you change?*

Say Something Like: *Whatever your heart loves, your mind tends to think about, and whatever your mind continually thinks about, your strength will want to do. So how can you start fueling your heart to create the domino effect that will lead to a change of mind and*

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strength? Replace the junk fuel we talked about earlier with these better fuels: Sit down with Jesus and spend time with him. Read the letter God wrote to you: the Bible. Think about (even make a list of) everything God has done in your life and thank him for it. Invest in friendships that don't pull your heart away from God. Remember, doing these things won't change your heart by themselves—only God can do that. But they can fuel your renewed heart to help your thoughts and actions line up with what God wants. That starts with walking away from certain things, but it also requires walking into a life of fellowship with God.

Putting It All Together:

Say Something Like: *We discovered that, first, our actions may not reveal what our hearts actually care about. We need a heart transplant from God, based on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Next, even when we have a new heart, if we fuel it with the wrong things or get distracted from God's direction, we can end up living as if we were never freed from the prison of sin. Finally, we learned that spending time with God can fuel our hearts to help us start making the gradual turn from a lifestyle of sin into a lifestyle the lines up with our new hearts.*

[Speaker Note: The following questions will be discussed in the following Small Group Lesson.]

Question 1: Can you think of a time when your heart drifted from God (maybe even now)? How did that happen? What are some other things your heart has been drawn to instead of God?

Question 2: Why does God care more about our hearts than our outside appearances?

Looking Forward: Let students know that the heart is just the first part of how God renews us. It is a good place to start, but next they will be looking at how God transforms their minds. All parts of their lives need to be touched by God. Make sure to give them any instructions they might need to go from here.

**LeaderTreks recommends watching all video clips and visiting all websites in this lesson before sharing them with students. These links are optional and not required in order to lead an effective large group talk. Websites often change, and links may not always have the same result. LeaderTreks will do its best to keep them updated and fresh; however, in the event that they do not function properly, we cannot retain responsibility.*

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