

Figuring Out What You Want

Getting to the Core

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Well, for most, if not all of us, we can't fathom having to make this particular decision, but some parents in some countries are faced with either staying where they live and having very little food or clothing or education for their children, because there is simply no work or where one of the parents actually has to find a job in another country and being allowed to emigrate and then sending money back to support the other members of the family.

And, again, for most, if not all of us, thankfully, we can't even imagine having to face that kind of a choice. But I have actually been in several foreign countries where that dynamic was at work in a powerful way. It was just necessary for survival. Somebody had to leave.

This is Imelda Famadula. She is from the Philippines. Both she and her husband were completely unable to find work there and so they both began trying to find work outside of their country and they found one job for her in Hong Kong as a domestic worker, but the child that she is holding is one of the two children that she actually cares for as part of her job in Hong Kong. That is not one of her natural children. She then takes the money that she earns, practically all of it, because her room and board is provided for her as a domestic worker and she sends all of her wages back to her family in the Philippines.

It is interesting to hear the way she... or the way her story is explained by the media.

"Imelda loves Sunday. She can meet friends in the city's financial Central district, where bankers and office workers make way for domestic helpers. Imelda also goes to church, but most importantly, she is free to meet her family via the internet."

Now I am not asking you if you agree with her choice. But I hope all of us would be impacted by her sacrifice. The media report went on to say this.

"Every month she sends nearly all of her salary back to the Philippines for her family. Only once every two years does she manage to save enough to travel back to her hometown. 'I may not go back this year, second year in a row, as my kid needs more

money while studying in the university,' she said, still smiling. Internet is her lifeline, connecting her soul with those she feeds thousands of miles away.”

The reporter who wrote this particular story decided to travel back to the Philippines and interview Imelda’s family members. He took several powerful pictures including this one of Imelda and her husband’s son. The caption reads like this.

“While Imelda raises her employer’s children, her own children can only see her through photos or read about her through letters. As she cooks, irons and cleans in her employer’s house abroad, her children grow up doing it for themselves.”

But the investment is paying off. Her husband has been able to purchase some electrical equipment and started a sound equipment rental business so Imelda can eventually return home. Her eldest son is a graduate computer technician now and is beginning to support himself and one daughter is in her second year of college and their youngest is still in high school. And the account concluded by saying this.

“Imelda may have missed a lot of birthdays and Christmases, but it’s a price she and other female overseas Filipino workers have made to provide for the welfare of their families and to offer their children a better future.”

Again, I am not saying that most of us could possibly understand being in this position and you may not fully agree with every aspect of it, but one principle we could all agree on is the beauty and significance of a mother’s sacrifice. And couldn’t practically all of us tell stories of the sacrificial lifestyles of our mothers and of our grandmothers and of our wives? And the words sacrifice and mother are practically synonymous.

Now here is my question for you this morning. How does a mom get to the place where she is willing to sacrifice like that? What has to be true of her at the very core? I am sure there is a lot of answers to that, but here is one of them. At some point along the line she had to figure out what she wanted the most.

With that you might open your Bible to James chapter one this morning. That is on page 177 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. So James chapter one on page 177, the New Testament of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

We are beginning now to land the plane on this series we have been doing for the last several weeks entitled, “Getting to the Core: Six Weeks to Focus on Things that Matter the Most.” And we started just by talking about figuring out what you believe. It has to start there. What is your source of truth, especially with the things that matter most? Then figuring out why you are here and next figuring out who you are. Last week, figuring out who you love. This morning we want to talk about figuring out what you want. And then, Lord willing, next week we want to conclude this series by figuring out where you are going.

Now for our purposes this morning, I would like to actually read just a short passage of Scripture, at least by the standards that I use typically when I start a message like this and we are going to do some more exegesis in this particular passage along with bringing in a number of parallel passages as well, but James chapter one beginning in verse 12.\

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But [here is our key concept] each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.¹

We are talking this morning about figuring out what you want. And with the time we have remaining, let's think about three steps to using your desires to help you become what God intends. And what can we learn from the Word of God about this matter of our desires?

It starts right here. You have to understand the crucial role of this topic. God's Word gives us a comprehensive understanding of the issue of our designers. And what we read in the Scripture is both rich, it is robust and it is also very, very practical this morning. If you want to think about a concept where there is going to be a ton of takeaways for the choices you would make this week, this is one of them for sure. And it really starts by understanding if you think about this crucial role of your desires, it starts by understanding God has made us as desiring beings. There is a fundamental aspect of what it means to be a person. Every individual in this room, you are here because of a cluster of desires. They may be good. They may be bad. They are probably a mixture of both. But what we are talking about right now it is inherent that to what it actually means to be human. And the takeaway, honestly is this. Find out what you are wanting in a given situation and you have found out an awful lot about you. Just think back to some of the memorable events from this past week for you, some of the ones that stand out as being especially good or stand out as being especially bad and think about that question. Find out what you want and you have found out an awful lot about you. More on that in a moment.

And that is why this subject of desire or of lust appears in so many of the seminal texts in the Word of God about how to change and grow. Like this one. If you have been around this church for any period of time you know this one, Ephesians 4:22-24.

¹ James 1:12-18.

“...that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit.”²

And note that in your mind. We are going to come back to that.

...and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.³

And, again, we are going to come back there in a minute, but the point right now is in what is arguably one of the top 10 passages in the Bible on the topic of sanctification, on the topic of how you change and grow, right in the center of it is this issue of your desires, your lusts.

Now add this to the discussion. Your desires could be good or bad. Very important to understand that. This word that was translated lust in James 1:14 is the Greek word επιθυμια (ep-ee-thoo-mee'-ah) and it simply means strong desire. And that is crucial to this issue of figuring out what you want. It is understanding that the goal here is not to deaden all of your desires, not at all. There are some desires in your heart that actually ought to be intensified over time. They are good.

Here is a great example, at least from my perspective of how God has created us to be desiring beings and your desires can actually be a very important part of what it means for you to be what God wants you to be. It is 1 Timothy 3:1 which is speaking about pastors.

“It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.”⁴

Now that word in 1 Timothy 3:1 is the exact same word in James 1:14 that is translated with lust. It, again, it is the Greek word επιθυμια (ep-ee-thoo-mee'-ah). And anybody who is involved in pastoral work understands the importance of this issue. If you don't really want to be a pastor like don't. Go bag groceries down at Meyer, but do not become a pastor if God has not given you a deep desire. If you could be happy doing anything else, go do something else. And frankly—and I am not trying to whine here this morning—but I just in the sovereignty of God have had a week where that particular principle was put to the test. Do you really want to be a pastor? Then get happy about all that comes with that particular office. And that is the bottom line. And you just have to have a desire. It is something that God places in your heart and you can even say it like this. I lust after that.

² Ephesians 4:22.

³ Ephesians 4:23-24.

⁴ 1 Timothy 3:1.

I am sitting here washing our worship. I love our worship team, absolutely love them. And, you understand, I get to do this four times. Do you realize that? I get to be in the church house four times on Sunday morning. What could be bad with blue grass music? What could possibly... is this heaven or what? And honestly, I am sitting here saying, "What an incredible privilege to be able to follow them and deliver the Word of God to this marvelous church family?" I mean, what could be better than that way? God has allowed me to live out my dream. And this particular question actually came up in intro. It doesn't usually, but it came up in our current intro to faith class Wednesday before last where somebody in the class asked me the question: Why in the world did you become a pastor? Tell us about that process. And I don't think about that a whole lot, but the short answer is this. When I was a senior in high school I was really doubting my salvation. I had been in church for the gospel, no question about that. But I was really doubting my salvation and a group from another church was going to go on a basketball jamboree over Christmas time. They were going to go down and play in this basketball tournament in Chattanooga, Tennessee. And at that last minute one of their players broke his foot which meant they needed another guy. He didn't have to be a good guy and he didn't have to be good at basketball. He had to have his appendages. That was the qualification. And I barely qualified, but they took me down to this basketball tournament. I had a great time playing.

But also part of this jamboree was they had a number of chapel services and there was a gentleman there who was teaching the Word of God and for whatever reason the Holy Spirit was especially active in my heart and life during those messages and right after one of those messages I went right to the platform of Highland Park Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee and I talked to the pastoral staff member who was there. That has been a long time ago now, 1977. But the bottom line... I still remember. Ab Thomas. And here is what I remember about Ab Thomas. Ab Thomas' Bible, it was dog eared. That is what I remember. That guy knew the Bible. And every time I asked a question he didn't give me his own wisdom. He took me to a place in the Word of God. And those answers were just searing my heart. And then I would ask him another question and he would go to another place in the Word of God and he would just show me what Scripture... and it seared my heart. And the Holy Spirit was taking his Word and just bringing it to life in my heart and that night right there on the platform of Highland Park Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, I trusted Christ as my Savior and Lord. And not long after that God began putting a desire in my heart to be just like that.

That is what I thought. What a great way to spend your life. I want to be a pastor. I want to be in a position where I am going to have the privilege when people have question to turn their direction, not to the ever changing wisdom of man, but to the sufficient Word of my God.

As I submitted myself to my local church at that time and they began then the whole process of evaluations, not entirely subjective, but it starts with a subjective desire in your heart. And the bottom line is if you don't have that, you are not going to make it. You are just not going to make it.

Now it is interesting. When I got off to Bible college, one of our professors said to us, “No, look. You are going to get into the pastorate. You are going to have some rough days, blah, blah, blah.” Yeah, really, you work one day a week and you take half a day of that off. But anyway, you are going to have some rough days, he said.

So he recommended that we would start a rainy day file and what that meant was any time you got an encouraging card or some sort of a note or whatever, he would encourage you to put it in the rainy day file and on the day that you were going to quit, he said, or go to the rainy day file first and kind of get a little bit of perspective. Are you really sure you want to quit? Well, I took him up on that. So when I came here 25 years ago, I actually started, honestly, in my file cabinet, a rainy day file. People would send me kind notes and all that sort of thing, people from the church, all kinds of people from the community sent them all the time, not exactly. But anyway, any time I got one of those cards I would put it in that file and then it grew and I actually had to get a bigger file and eventually I got a box. It is in my office to this day. It is in one of my big file cabinets. It is a box. It says right on the top, “Rainy Day File.” And every time I get something, I put it in that box.

In 25 years there has never been one day that I have opened that box because I was afraid I was going to quit. The only time I ever have opened that box was to put something else in it. That is how much I love doing what I am doing. That is how much I am thankful for the privilege of being a pastor and especially thankful for the privilege of doing it right here. It is true. And that is what I told the intro to faith. I am living my dream. I mean, it is just incredible. But that is a desire that God gives. And so don’t ever let anybody tell you Christianity is all about deadening your... oh, no. There is some of your desires that is the way God made you. Some of your desires ought to be intensified. It is part of the way that God made you in order to become everything that he wants you to be.

Now, let’s keep going. What else can we learn from this passage in James. Well, the other side of what I have been talking about so far is wrong desires surely are the beginning of the sin process.

But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.⁵

Why is that passage in the Bible? Think about that. In its entirety, why is this passage in the Bible? And the answer is to give you the process of sin. Sin starts here and it develops into that and it develops into that. Why? To find out where it starts and stop it right there.

And the takeaway is this. Find out in given situations what is it that you are wanting so badly that you are actually willing to sin.

⁵ James 1:14-15.

Now I realize you might listen to this and say, “You know, the more I hear you talk, the more discouraged I am getting, because now I am getting the understanding that it is not just a matter of me being responsible for behavioral choices that displease God. I am also responsible for the choices and the desires inside of my heart? Boy, if I put on overhead screen right now all the desires,” you might say, “that I have had this past... Oh, my, I am responsible for that, too?”

Well, think about this. You choose what you want. And the reason I point that out is I am not talking about this in a way that would discourage you this morning. I am really talking to you about this from Scripture in order to give us hope. It is possible to the change at the level of one’s desire. Did you hear me on that? Because that is so different than our world. It is possible to change what you want.

This is from one of the standard theological dictionaries. You woke up this morning hoping your pastor would quote from a standard theological dictionary. Is that right? Absolutely. Happy Mother’s Day to you, too, pastor Viars, but here you go. This is from Kittle which is a standard theological dictionary for Bible students and it says this. “The essential point in ἐπιθυμία (ep-ee-thoo-mee’-ah), hear this, is that it is desire as impulse, as a motion of the will.”

Now I realize for some of you when I said I was going to read from a theological dictionary you totally turned me off and started thinking about lunch. Now I am going to read it again and I want to ask you to really listen, because this is important, because this is so contrary to what our world thinks about this. The ... are you ready for it? To listen now? I am not talking to you, but the person sitting next to you was yawning.

“The essential point in ἐπιθυμία (ep-ee-thoo-mee’-ah) is that, here it is, it is a desire as impulse. It is a motion of the will.”

You say, “What does that mean?”

Well, in simple terms what we are talking about. You choose what you want. That is why Paul would say:

“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”⁶

And don’t worry about the persecuted part right now. That is not what I am talking about. I am talking about the possibility of choosing.

“Indeed, all who desire [choose that way] to live godly in Christ Jesus...”⁷

Now here is another observation we have got to throw on the table. Uncontested desires are often deceptive.

⁶ 2 Timothy 3:12.

⁷ Ibid.

See, how is what I am talking to you about this morning different than what our world would often say about the subject? The world often says, “Well, just do what comes natural. Act on all your desires to do otherwise would be to deny the essence of who you are.”

I have had people say to me in counseling. This is just who I am. It is the essence of my identity. I have to act on what I feel. I have to do what comes naturally. That is the last message we ought to believe and that is the last message we ought to be teaching our kids. There are all sorts of desires that might originate in our sin cursed hearts that should be anything but acted upon. In fact, they ought to be crucified. Do we all get that? They ought to be put to death. Why? Because they potentially are deceptive. That is why.

We saw a minute ago Ephesians 4:22:

“...that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit.”⁸

And the bottom line is: Some of the things you and I may want and we may want it badly. Think about your desires right now. Think about what has been ruling your heart this week. Think about what drives you. We are at the essence of motivation right now and the bottom line is some of the things that you or I may really want badly, it is like spiritual poison.

Now if you are trying to track with me, I think your next question logically would be: Well, how would I know? I mean, how would I know, especially if I really want some thing badly, what is the answer? How would I know if one of my desires is right, true, honoring to God or whether it is deceptive and taking me down the wrong path? The answer that has to be tested by the sufficient Word of God. That has to be our filter. Just because you want something and you want something really badly, doesn't mean that is what God wants for you. They have to be tested by the Word of God.

By the way, that issue of deception, it comes up in a way the Scripture describes the false teachers in our world. False teaches will appeal to your innate desires and deceive you. This is from Jude 16.

“These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts.”⁹

And then two verses later.

“...that they were saying to you, ‘In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.’”¹⁰

⁸ Ephesians 4:22.

⁹ Jude 16.

¹⁰ Jude 18.

That is talking about false teachers who are telling people what they want to hear instead of telling people what they need to hear.

Frankly, as a pastor, if I am not upsetting you from time to time either you are perfectly sanctified or I am not doing my job. There ought to be times when what I am teaching you from the Word of God ought to challenge some of the desires of your heart because that particular desire that you have conjured up as a motion of your will is deceiving you and taking you the wrong way. And you need a pastor who irritates you from time to time.

How am I doing?

I mean, you need.... that is just all there is to it. And I understand we live in a world that doesn't want teachers who are going to teach from the Scripture challenging what we might innately desire. I understand that. In fact, here is what the average church many times wants to be anymore. Right? Just tickle my ears. Tell me exactly everything {?} church.

Is anybody in here... you are not responding like I would have expected. You are... is anybody here old enough to remember those people? I guess not people. That is Elmo, tickle me Elmo. And some church members are just like that. I want to have my ears tickled and there is plenty of false teaches who will be happy to tell you whatever it is that you want to hear going along with your innate desires, many times which are deceptive. That is why the Word is such an important part of this process.

Now one more piece under this heading of the crucial role that desires play in our lives and that is this. Uncontested desires are enslaving. There is a habitual component to all of this. If we don't contest our desires with biblical truth it becomes like a rut in the road. It just starts to feel automatic, so much a part of us. We can't even imagine discarding that. I have had people say to me in counseling. You are asking me to relinquish an essential part of me. It is like a cancer patient saying, "I am not sure I want to get rid of this tumor. It has become a really good friend."

But what do we have on the table so far? God has made us desiring beings. Your desires can be good or bad. Wrong desires are the beginning of the sin process. You choose what you want. Uncontested desires are often deceptive and uncontested desires are often enslaving.

Now I hope you are saying about now, "I get why this particular topic had to be part of a series on getting to the core," because God's Word places heavy emphasis on this for sure. Well, what do we do? What do we do with what we are studying from Scripture?

I think you could summarize it like this. Seek to get your desires in sync with the Lord's. If you could choose what you want, then you want to get your desires in synch with God's, right? Just like you can sync your iPhone with your iPad, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, getting them on the same page, doing the same thing, using the same information

and direction. That is what you want to do with your desires. You want to get them in synch with the desires of God.

Now I realize some of you might say, “That illustration meant nothing to me. I wouldn’t know a smart phone from a smart aleck.”

Ok, that is fine. Then let me give you an illustration that might work for you. Let’s go back a few years to the great technological advancement known as an overhead projector. Anybody here old enough to remember an overhead projector? Yeah? We used to have one right here. I used to teach from that thing all the time. All those {?}. You have got that brightly light that shines the thing back there. You put on a piece of transparency film.

Well, think about this. Let’s say that we were able to take the five most significant desires that reside in your heart, the things that drive you, the things that rule you, the things that you dream about and think about, et cetera, the things that are important to you, the five most important desires that reside in your heart and we wrote them down on a piece of transparency film. And then let’s say we took the five most important desires in the heart of God, the things that drive him, then, the things that are important to him, his greatest desires. Thy kingdom come. What does that look like? And then let’s say we turned on the light. We put yours down and then we put God’s down on top of them and compared the two. And ideally what would we see? That they were significantly in sync, right? But for many of us the fact of the matter is our desires are substantially out of sync with the desires of our God.

Now you may say, “Wait, wait, wait. Are you telling me that God has desires?”

Good question. What is the answer to that? Does God ... would you even buy what I am saying theologically this morning? Does God have desires, yes or no? Absolutely. Thank you very much. God has desires, too. And we can prove that. I mean, that is like shooting fish in a barrel. But here is a few examples of that.

Psalm 40:6.

“Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired...”¹¹

There is a lot of things in the Bible God didn’t want. God does not want that.

Here is an example from the life of Christ.

“And He said to them, ‘I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover.’”¹²

So he is very, very open with his disciples about the nature of his desires.

¹¹ Psalm 40:6.

¹² Luke 22:15.

Or this, 1 Timothy 2:3-4.

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.¹³

By the way, that passage can take us down some really interesting rabbit trails this morning, but we are not going to be able to do that. But the point is: God clearly has desires.

Now you might say, “Ok, pastor. You have been reading my mail. I mean, there is no question about the fact that my desires, I mean, that illustration ... that transparency film thing, that my desire are out of sync with God’s. No question about it. I surrender.”

Well, here is some great news. In Christ you can change what you want. Do you believe that? You have got desires that are powerfully motivating you at the level of your heart. It doesn't have to be that way. Do you believe that? Seriously, now, is Jesus powerful enough to change your desire?

1 Peter 1:14.

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts.”¹⁴

The great word in that verse is former. It doesn't always have to be that way.

Galatians 5:16-17.

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”¹⁵

And I would just say to you if there has never been a definite time in your life where you have trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, you will never be able to control your desires without him. It is impossible. They are too powerful. They will draw you away and entice you, as James said. You need Christ. And if you have never trusted him, do you want some great news? You can trust him today. Seriously, today, right now. And you can say, “I surrender. I know there is no way I am going to be able to handle this aspect of my life on my own and I want to place my faith and trust in Christ as my Savior, the one who will pay for my sin and also as my Lord, the one who will take charge of my life and give me the ability and the strength to be what he wants me to be.”

Now lock on to this one, really important here. Make your highest desire a growing intimacy with him. That goes along with the song that Jenny was singing to us right before the message. See, this isn't just simply focused on the negative, stop wanting things that are bad. It is equally positive. God created us with this capacity so that we can passionately want what is good.

¹³ 1 Timothy 2:3-4.

¹⁴ 1 Peter 1:14.

¹⁵ Galatians 5:16.

And one of the powerful metaphors that is used in the Bible to describe that is Psalm 42:1.

“As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God.”¹⁶

Here is what I want. I want growing intimacy with my Lord. So I would encourage you. Develop the habit of asking yourself in this particular situation. Do I really want what God wants most of all? That is it. And we are talking about being introspective this morning. I understand. These are not the kind of thoughts you are going to have standing in line at a fast food restaurant. This takes work. You might even have to turn off your television. You might even have to put down your dumb phone. You might actually have to walk away from that.

In fact, it would be interesting to see how far... how far you could get away from that thing for how long before you started sweating or trembling. It is going to take some introspection to ask yourself, you know, in those situations when I characteristically become sinfully angry, what is it that I am wanting so much that I head down that trail? When I find myself sinfully worrying, what am I wanting so much that heads me down that trail? Develop the habit of asking yourself in this situation, do I really want what God wants most of all?

Remember this. God already knows. Think about this in light of your desires. Lord, all my desire is before you. Am I the only one who says that verse is good and that verse is convicting all at the same time? My desire is before you.

We have been talking a lot about moms today and trying to honor moms in our service. The bottom line is the moms who are godly over the long haul have learned how to develop this habit. Do I really want what God wants most of all?

I would even say this to you. Let his concept affect the way you pray.

You say, “Pray, what has that got to do with it?”

Do you realize? One of the times when our desires can be the worst is when we are praying. Is that a fact? Because we can just be presenting this laundry list to God, demanding that he do what I already want instead of asking him to help me conform to his will even if what he is about to give me is not what I want. True?

That would be have been a really good {?}, at least... yeah, here you go. James 4:3.

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives.”¹⁷

Or in our instruction to pray.

¹⁶ Psalm 42:1.

¹⁷ James 4:3.

“Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.’”¹⁸

And many times when we pray it essentially is placing our desires, slash lusts, slash demands to God and asking God, demanding that God would make our kingdom come. And even our own prayer can take us away from desired intimacy with God.

I also want to remind you of this. The nature of your desires say a lot about the kind of person you really are. That is why this is a poor issue. That is why I love the story of Caleb in the Old Testament. I want that mountain. I love that guy. I want to do something that is going to bring honor and glory to God. That is a part of who I am.

Our David, a fundamental desire of his heart that, by the way, God did not give that. I want to build you a house. Understand that the nature of your desire says a lot about the kind of person you are. And I know this is a haunting concept. It really is. But I want to urge everybody here. Address this issue while you have the opportunity to do so. You have this terrible verse about Esau in the book of Hebrews.

“For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.”¹⁹

And if God is working in your heart right now in this matter of desires and changing, repent while you have the opportunity to do so.

I would just ask you this morning. Are your desires in sync with God’s? And what would it take for that to be more true?

Now, better land this plane. I better go to work in another part of this campus. Let your godly desires help you make significant progress. It is true what we are talking about takes effort. This morning I get... there is a huge series of paybacks for this kind of a life. One is a life of confidence. It is funny. I have been spending a lot of time over at the city council here recently and they are good folks. God bless them. I want to honor them publicly. But on Monday, I was about to go before them and this was part of my devotions, that verse, planned by God. And there it is, the story of David and Goliath. The battle is the Lord’s and you don’t have to speak in a threatening way and you don’t have to worry and blah, blah, blah. Because if you have tried to make your desires in synch with God’s, that is going to give you a life of confidence. I don’t have to worry about how all this is going to come out, because the battle is the Lord’s. And {?} right now. He is really good at battling, really good at battling. It is also a life of peace making.

Later in James we read:

¹⁸ Matthew 6:9-10.

¹⁹ Hebrews 12:17.

“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?”²⁰

The reason that there is so much discord in some families, maybe even in some represented here, is that we are talking about people who have never controlled their lusts. They are little idol worshippers running around worshipping their own desires outside of what God wants for that particular situation. And they are not getting their idol met, so they are mad and they are not getting their idol met and they are mad and what God’s people need to do is put down their idols and get on in sync with the plan and program of God. And when you do that, the other side of that is:

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.²¹

The bottom line is when you get everybody in a family is submitting their desires to the desires of our God, that is a family that can head the right direction in peace.

The last thing. I want to be careful how I say this, but it is a clear emphasis in Scripture. It is also a life of blessing. Listen to this. When your desires are right, he will fulfill the desire of those who hear him.

Proverbs 10:24.

“What the wicked fears will come upon him, But the desire of the righteous will be granted.”²²

And I would say this morning that if you are one of those moms who has been honoring God, thank you for that. It is obvious you have let Christ help you conform your desire to bring them in sync with the Lord’s. For the rest of us, I would encourage us to look for opportunities this week to do some introspection. Put the phone down. Turn the TV off and do some introspection and be sure that you are bringing your desires in sync with your Lord’s.

Dustin, would you come and lead these dear folks and pray in prayer while I... well, you know.

²⁰ James 4:1.

²¹ James 3:17-18.

²² Proverbs 10:24.

05/13/12

Getting to the Core #5 - Figuring Out What You Want

- For most if not all of us, we can't fathom having to make this decision...but some parents live in countries where they are faced with staying where they live and having no food, clothing, and education for their children because there is simply no work – or where one of the parents finds a job in another country, is allowed to emigrate, and then sends money back to support the other members of the family...
 - again, for many of us—thankfully—we can't even imagine having to face that choice...
 - but I've been in several foreign countries where that dynamic was at work in a powerful way...it was just necessary for survival
- **[pic #1]** - this is Imelda Famadula – she is from the Philippines but both she and her husband were completely able to find work...
 - eventually one job became available...for her...in Hong Kong as a domestic worker...
 - the child she is holding is one of two children she cares for as part of her job in Hong Kong...
- **[pic #2]**
 - she then takes the money she earns – practically all of it since her room and board is provided by her job – and she sends her wages back to her family in the Philippines...
- It's interesting to read the way the media explains her lifestyle...
 - **Imelda loves Sunday. She can meet friends in the city's financial Central district, where bankers and office workers make way for domestic helpers. Imelda also goes to church, but most importantly, she is free to meet her family – via the Internet.**
- **[pic #3]**
- now I'm not asking you if you agree with her choice – but I hope all of us would be impacted by this kind of sacrifice...
 - the media report went on to say this...
 - **Every month she sends nearly all of her salary back to the Philippines for her family. Only once every two years does she manage to save enough to travel back to her hometown. "I may not go back this year, second year in a row, as my kid needs more money while studying in the university", she said, still smiling. Internet is her lifeline, connecting her soul with those she feeds thousands of miles away.**
- **[pic #4]**
- the reporter who wrote this story decided to travel to the Philippines and interview the family...
 - he took several powerful pictures including this one...**[pic #5]**
 - the caption read -- **While Susan raises her employer's children, her own children can only see her through photos or read about her through letters. As she cooks, irons and cleans in her employer's house abroad, her children grow up doing it for themselves.**
- but the investment is paying off...
- **[pic #6]** - her husband has been able to purchase some electrical equipment to start a sound system rental business so Imelda can return home...
- their oldest son is a graduate computer technician and beginning to support himself...

- [pic #7] – one daughter is in her second year of college and their youngest is still in high school...
- the account concluded by saying -- **Susan may have missed a lot of birthdays and Christmases, but it's a price she and other female overseas Filipino workers have made to provide for the welfare of their families and to offer their children a better future.**
- again, I'm not saying that most of us could possibly understand being in that position and we may not agree with every aspect of it...
 - but one principle we could all agree on is the beauty and significance of a mother's sacrifice...
- and couldn't practically all of us tell stories of the sacrificial lifestyles of our mothers and our grandmothers and our wives?...
 - the words "sacrifice" and "mother" are practically synonymous...
- here's my question for you this – how does a mom get to the place where she is willing to live this way?...what has to be true of her at the very core?...
 - and I'm sure there are many answers – but here's one of them...
 - she had to figure out what she wants the most...
- with that in mind, let me invite you to open your Bible to James chapter 1...page 177 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- we're beginning to land the plane on a series we've been doing for the last several weeks entitled...
- **Getting to the Core -- Six Weeks to Focus on Things That Matter Most...**
 - we started by focusing on - **Figuring Out What You Believe**
 - then, **Figuring Out Why You're Here**
 - then **Figuring Out Who You Are**
 - and last week ... **Figuring Out Who You Love**
 - today we'd like to think about **Figuring Out What You Want...**
 - which will leave for our final week...**Figuring Out Where You're Going...**
- now, for our purposes this morning, let's begin by reading a relatively brief portion of Scripture, and then we'll bring in some other verses as we move along...
- read James 1:12-18...
- so we're talking about **Figuring Out What You Want...**and with the time we have remaining, let's think about **3 steps to using your desires to help you become what God intends.**

I. Understand the Crucial Role of Your Desires

- God's Word gives us a comprehensive understanding of this subject...
- and what we read in Scripture is both rich and intensely practical...
- and it starts by understanding...
- A. God has made us "desiring beings"**
 - this is a fundamental aspect of what it means to be a person...
 - every individual in this room is here because of a cluster of desires...you, me, all God's children...
 - they may be good, they may be bad...they're probably a mixture of a little of each...
 - but what we're talking about right now is inherent to what it means to be human...
- and the takeaway is – find out what you're wanting in a given situation – and you've found out a lot about you...more on that in a moment...

- that's why the subject of "lust" or "desire" appears in so many of the seminal texts in the Word of God about how to grow and change...
- for example, this one...
 - **Ephesians 4:22-24** - that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*
- we're going to be back to this text in a little bit – but the point here is – in what is arguably one of the top ten passages in the Bible on the subject of sanctification—or how to change – right in the center of it is the center of it is the issue of your desires, your lusts...now, let's add this...

B. Your desires can be good or bad.

- the word translated "**lust**" in James 1:14 is the Greek word "**epithumia**"...
- and it simply means "strong desire"...
- that's crucial to this issue of figuring out "what you want"--understanding that the goal here isn't to deaden all of your desires...not at all...
- because we ought to everything in our power to actually intensify some of them...
- here's a great example I think of how a person's desires can be a very positive and powerful aspect of his life...
- **1 Timothy 3:1** - **It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.**
- the English word **desire** in this passage is the Greek word **epithumia** – the same one that is translated as lust in James 1:14...
- and anybody who is involved in pastoral work understands the importance of that...
- now, what else can we learn from our passage in James 1?...

C. Wrong desires are the beginning of the sin process.

- **James 1:14** - **But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.**
- why is this passage in the Bible?
- how would you summarize it to a 10 year old?...
- one of our problems is that we try to stop sin far too late in the process...
- now, please notice this as well – what does this passage say will happen if we don't control what we want with biblical truth?...
- now you might say – the more I think about the way this works, the more discouraged I get...because it's not just some of my behavior that displease God – there's also the more comprehensive issue of the desires that fuel that behavior...
- well, that's one way of looking at it...but we can also say this...

D. You choose what you want.

- this principle isn't here to discourage us – it's to give us hope...
- it is possible to change at the level of one's desire...
- one standard theological dictionary says it this way...

The essential point in ἐπιθυμία is that it is desire as impulse, as a motion of the will.

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.) p. 170-171

- you say – what does that mean?...in simple terms – the way we worded this point...
- you choose what you want...that's why Paul would say...

- 2 Timothy 3:12 - Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

- let's not worry about the persecuted part right now...but think about the first half – all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus...
- in Christ you can choose that...here's another observation we need to make...

E. Uncontested desires are often deceptive.

- see, our world's message is – just do what comes natural...act on all your desires...to do otherwise would be to deny the essence of who you are...
 - that's the last message we ought to believe...
 - there are all sorts of desires that might originate in our sin-cursed heart that should be anything but acted upon...
 - they ought to be crucified...they ought to be put to death...
 - in part, because they are deceptive...
 - that's why we saw a moment ago...- **Ephesians 4:22-24 - that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,**
 - the bottom line is – some of the things you or I may want are like spiritual poison...
 - and I realize the immediate question is – well, how can I know...especially if I want something really badly?...
 - the answer is – we have to test all of our desires by the Word of God...that has to be our filter...
 - by the way – this issue of deception comes up in the way Scripture describes false teachers...they appeal to our innate desires and therefore strengthen the deception in our hearts...
 - **Jude 16 - These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of *gaining an* advantage.**
 - **Jude 18 - that they were saying to you, "In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts."**
 - as a pastor, if I'm not upsetting you from time to time – either you're perfectly sanctified, or I'm not doing my job...
 - and there are all sorts of people who simply want a pastor to tickle their ears...like a congregation full of Tickle Me Elmos...
- now, there's one more piece under this heading of the crucial role desires place in our lives, and that is this...

F. Uncontested desires are enslaving.

- there is a habitual component to all of this...
- if we don't contest our desires with biblical truth...it just becomes like a rut in the road...it starts to feel so automatic...so much a part of us that we can't imagine even discarding it...
- I've had people say to me...you're asking me to relinquish a part of me...
 - that's like a cancer patient saying – I'm not sure I want to get rid of this tumor...it's become a really good friend...

- so what do we have on the table so far?...
 - God has made us desiring beings...
 - Your desires can be good or bad...
 - wrong desires are the beginning of the sin process...
 - you choose what you want
 - uncontested desires are often deceptive
 - uncontested desires are enslaving...
- now I hope you're saying about now – I surely understand why this topic needed to be in a series on getting to the core...God's Word places heavy emphasis on this for sure...
- so what do we do with this?...

II. Seek to Get Your Desires in Sync with the Lords.

- just like you can sync your smart phone and you I-pad...getting them on the same page doing the same thing using the same information and direction...that's what you want to do with your desires...
- you might say – I wouldn't know a smart phone from a smart aleck...
- OK – here's one for you – remember the great technological advancement known as the overhead projector
- now you might say – wait a minute – are we saying that God has desires?...

A. God has desires too.

- and this part of the story is much larger than the time we have right now...
 1. **Psalm 40:6 - Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired; my ears You have opened; burnt offering and sin offering You have not required.**
 - there are sorts of things in the Bible God does not want...including half-hearted offerings...
 2. **Luke 22:15 - And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer;**
 - Jesus had no trouble talking about the things He desired...
 3. **1 Timothy 2:3-4 - This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**
 - which is a passage that could us down all sorts of interesting rabbit trails...but the point here is – God clearly has desires...
 - now you might say – but I know might and His are significantly out of sync...

B. In Christ, you can change what you want.

- **1 Peter 1:14 - As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance,**
 - what's one of the most beautiful words in that verse?...former...
- **Galatians 5:16-17 - But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.**

- now, please lock onto this one carefully...

C. Make your highest desire a growing intimacy with Him.

- this message isn't simply focused on the negative – stop wanting things that are bad...

- it's equally positive – God created us with this capacity so that we can passionately want what is good...
- one way the Lord communicates that truth is through powerful metaphors...like this one...
- **Psalm 42:1 - As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God.**

D. In this situation, do I really want what God wants most of all?

- we're talking about taking the time to be introspective...
- to slow down and ask – in those times when I'm angry, or worried, or depressed...
- what am I really wanting?...

- and please always remember this...God already knows...

- **Psalm 38:9 - Lord, all my desire is before You; And my sighing is not hidden from You.**

E. Let this concept even affect the way you pray.

- do you realize it's possible to have wrong desires even when we're praying?...
- prayer can be an exercise of insisting that God give us what we want whether it draws us closer to Him or not...

- **James 4:3 - You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.**

- **Matthew 6:9-10 – Pray, then, in this way: Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...**

F. Understand that the nature of your desires says a lot about the kind of person you really are.

- cf. **Caleb – I want that mountain, David – I want to build you a house...**

G. Address this issue while you have the opportunity to do so.

- here's a haunting verse...(Enoch, who despised his birthright and sold it for a meal)
- **Hebrews 12:17 - For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.**

III. Let Godly Desires Help You Make Significant Progress.

- it's true that what we're talking about today takes effort...figuring out what you want...
- but the payback is tremendous...

A. A life of confidence.

- when you take steps to try to bring your desires in sync with the Lord's, then the battle belongs to Him...[David and Goliath]...

- **1 Samuel 17:47 - and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD's and He will give you into our hands."**

B. A life of peacemaking

- later in James we read...

- **James 4:1-2 - What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.**

- but what's the opposite of that?

- **James 1:17-18 - Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.**

- now, there one more piece of this – and it can easily be misunderstood – but I would be remiss if I didn't bring it into the discussion...

C. A life of blessing.

- **Psalm 145:19 - He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them.**

- **Proverbs 10:24 - What the wicked fears will come upon him, but the desire of the righteous will be granted.**