

My Heart's Desire

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.

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Forward

If your desire is to have the qualities listed in Galatians 5:22-23, then you know that the Holy Spirit is leading you.

At the same time, be careful not to confuse your subjective feelings with the Spirit's leading.

Being led by the Holy Spirit involves the desire to hear, the readiness to obey God's Word, and the sensitivity to discern between your feelings and his promptings.

Live each day controlled and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Then the words of Christ will be in your mind, the love of Christ will be behind your actions, and the power of Christ will help you control your selfish desires.

Throughout this study, you will see those who followed their own desires with many errors and regrets.

You will also see those who followed the desires of the Lord, and the blessings they were able to achieve.

God knows our every desire of the heart. Sow good seed and reap a bountiful harvest of eternal reward.

Chapter 1



The burning desire for possessions

Genesis 14:12

They also captured Lot—Abram's nephew who lived in Sodom—and took everything he owned.

Lot's greedy desire for the best of everything led him into sinful surroundings. His burning desire for possessions and success cost him his freedom and enjoyment.

As a captive to Kedorlaomer, he faced torture, slavery, or death.

In much the same way, we can be enticed into doing things or going places we shouldn't. The prosperity we long for is captivating; it can both entice us and enslave us if our motives are not in line with God's desires.

These incidents portray two of Abram's characteristics:

- (1) He had courage that came from God. Facing a powerful foe, he attacked.
- (2) He was prepared. He had taken time to train his men for a potential conflict. We never know when we will be called upon to complete difficult tasks.

Like Abram, we should prepare for those times and take courage from God when they come.

When Abram learned that Lot was a prisoner, he immediately tried to rescue his nephew.

It is easier and safer not to become involved. But with Lot in serious trouble, Abram acted at once.

Sometimes we must get involved in a messy or painful situation in order to help others. We should be willing to act immediately when others need our help.

Immediate desires versus long-range desires.

Genesis 25:32-33

"Look, I'm dying of starvation!" said Esau. "What good is my birthright to me now?"

So Jacob insisted, "Well then, swear to me right now that it is mine." So Esau swore an oath, thereby selling all his rights as the firstborn to his younger brother.

Esau traded the lasting benefits of his birthright for the immediate pleasure of food.

He acted on impulse, satisfying his immediate desires without pausing to consider the long-range consequences of what he was about to do.

We can fall into the same trap. When we see something we want, our first impulse is to get it.

At first we feel intensely satisfied and sometimes even powerful because we have obtained what we set out to get. But immediate pleasure often loses sight of the future.

We can avoid making Esau's mistake by comparing the short-term satisfaction with its long-range consequences before we act.

Esau exaggerated his hunger. "I am about to die," he said. This thought made his choice much easier because if he was starving, what good was an inheritance anyway?

The pressure of the moment distorted his perspective and made his decision seem urgent. We often experience similar pressures.

For example, when we feel sexual pressure, a marriage vow may seem unimportant. We might feel such great pressure in one area that nothing else seems to matter and we lose our perspective.

Getting through that short, pressure-filled moment is often the most difficult part of overcoming a temptation.

Some desires are worth waiting for.

Genesis 29:20-28

So Jacob spent the next seven years working to pay for Rachel. But his love for her was so strong that it seemed to him but a few days. Finally, the time came for him to marry her. "I have fulfilled my contract," Jacob said to Laban. "Now give me my wife so we can be married."

So Laban invited everyone in the neighborhood to celebrate with Jacob at a wedding feast. That night, when it was dark, Laban took Leah to Jacob, and he slept with her. And Laban gave Leah a servant, Zilpah, to be her maid.

But when Jacob woke up in the morning—it was Leah! "What sort of trick is this?" Jacob raged at Laban. "I worked seven years for Rachel. What do you mean by this trickery?"

"It's not our custom to marry off a younger daughter ahead of the firstborn," Laban replied. "Wait until the bridal week is over, and you can have Rachel, too—that is, if you promise to work another seven years for me."

So Jacob agreed to work seven more years. A week after Jacob had married Leah, Laban gave him Rachel, too.

People often wonder if working a long time for something they desire is worth it.

Jacob worked seven years to marry Rachel. After being tricked, he agreed to work seven more years for her (although he did get to marry Rachel shortly after he married Leah)!

The most important goals and desires are worth working and waiting for.

Don't be trapped into thinking the same is true in real life. Patience is hardest when we need it the most, but it is the key to achieving our goals.

Jacob was enraged when he learned that Laban had tricked him. The deceiver of Esau was now deceived himself. How natural it is for us to become upset at an injustice done to us while closing our eyes to the injustices we do to others. Sin has a way of coming back to haunt us.

Although Laban tricked Jacob, he kept his part of the bargain.

There was more at stake than just Jacob's hurt. There was Rachel to think about, as well as God's plan for his life.

When others trick us, keeping our part of the bargain may still be wise. Nursing our wounds or plotting revenge makes us unable to see from God's perspective.

Don't let unfulfilled desires obsess you.

Numbers 11:4-6

Then the foreign rabble that were traveling with the Israelites began to crave the good things of Egypt, and the people of Israel also began to complain. "Oh, for some meat!" they exclaimed.

"We remember all the fish we used to eat for free in Egypt. And we had all the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic that we wanted. But now our appetites are gone, and day after day we have nothing to eat but this manna!"

Dissatisfaction comes when our attention shifts from what we have to what we don't have.

The people of Israel didn't seem to notice what God was doing for them—setting them free, making them a nation, giving them a new land—because they were so wrapped up in what God wasn't doing for them.

They could think of nothing but the delicious Egyptian food they had left behind. Somehow they forgot that the brutal whip of Egyptian slavery was the cost of eating that food.

Before we judge the Israelites too harshly, it's helpful to think about what occupies our attention most of the time.

Are we grateful for what God has given us, or are we always thinking about what we would like to have? We should not allow our unfulfilled desires to cause us to forget God's gifts of life, food, health, work, and friends.

Every morning the Israelites drew back their tent doors and witnessed a miracle. Covering the ground was white, fluffy manna—food from heaven.

But soon that wasn't enough. Feeling it was their right to have more, they forgot what they already had. They didn't ask God to fill their need; instead they demanded meat, and they stopped trusting God to care for them.

“If only we had meat to eat!” they complained to Moses as they reminisced about the good food they had in Egypt. God gave them what they asked for, but they paid dearly for it when a plague struck the camp (see Numbers 11:18-20, 31-34).

When you ask God for something, he may grant your request. But if you approach him with a sinful attitude, getting what you want may prove costly.

Wanting to love God versus feeling obligated to serve God.

Deut. 5:29

Oh, that they would always have hearts like this, that they might fear me and obey all my commands! If they did, they and their descendants would prosper forever.

God told Moses that he wanted the people to incline their hearts to fear him—to *want* to respect and obey him.

There is a difference between doing something because it is required and doing something because we want to. God is not interested in forced religious exercises and rule keeping.

He wants our hearts and lives completely dedicated to him. If we love him, obedience will follow.

Chapter 2



Selfish and Unselfish desires

Judges 9:2

Israel's king was to be the Lord and not a man. But Abimelech wanted to usurp the position reserved for God alone. In his selfish quest, he killed all but one of his 70 half brothers.

People with selfish desires often seek to fulfill them in ruthless ways.

Examine your ambitions to see if they are self-centered or God-centered. Be sure you always fulfill your desires in ways that God would approve.

Politics played a major part in pagan religions such as the worship of Baal-Berith.

Governments often went so far as to hire temple prostitutes to bring in additional money. In many cases a religious system was set up and supported by the government so the offerings could fund community projects.

Religion became a profit-making business. In Israel's religion, this was strictly forbidden. God's system of religion was designed to come from an attitude of the heart, not from calculated plans and business opportunities.

It was also designed to serve people and help those in need, not to oppress the needy.

Is your faith genuine and sincere, or is it based on convenience, comfort, and availability?

Satisfying right desires in wrong ways.

1 Chron. 15:13

Because you Levites did not carry the Ark the first time, the anger of the Lord our God burst out against us. We failed to ask God how to move it in the proper way."

If David had been allowed to handle the ark of God carelessly, what would that have said to the people about their faith?

We are never free to disobey God just because we don't understand.

There attempt to move the ark failed (1 Chron. 13:8-14), he learned an important lesson.

We may not fully understand the reasons behind God's instructions, but we do know that his wisdom ark (gives specific instructions, it is wise to follow them precisely.

This time David saw to it that the Levites carried it complete and his judgment infallible.

The way to know God's instructions is to know his Word.

But just as children do not understand the reasons for all their parents' instructions until they are older, we too may not understand all of God's reasons in this life. Yet, It is far better to know and follow God's directions.

David refers to the incident recorded in 1 Chron. 3:8-11 and 2 Samuel 6:1-11. As the ark was being brought back to Israel on an oxcart, the oxen stumbled.

Uzzah, trying to steady the ark with his hand, was killed instantly for touching it.

The mistake was not in David's desire to move the ark, but in his method for its return.

David either ignored or was unaware of the specific instructions in God's law about how the ark was to be moved.

Obviously he had discovered his mistake and was now preparing to correct it. This incident was a divine object lesson to all Israel that God governed

Placing our desires in proper perspective

1 Chron. 17:1

Now when David was settled in his palace, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am living in this beautiful cedar palace, but the Ark of the Lord's covenant is out in a tent!"

David felt disturbed that the ark, the symbol of God's presence, sat in a tent while he lived in a beautiful palace. David's desire was right, but his timing was wrong. God told David *not* to build a temple (1 Chron. 7:3-4), and David was willing to abide by God's timing.

You live in comparative luxury while God's work, house, or ministers go lacking, perhaps God wants you to change the situation. Like David, take action to correct the imbalance, but be willing to move according to God's timing.

Matthew 4:3-4

Then the Devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, change these stones into loaves of bread."

But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People need more than bread for their life; they must feed on every word of God.' "

Jesus was hungry and weak after fasting for 40 days, but he chose not to use his divine power to satisfy his natural desire for food.

Food, hunger, and eating are good, but the timing was wrong. Jesus was in the desert to fast, not to eat. And because Jesus had given up the unlimited, independent use of his divine power in order to experience humanity fully, he wouldn't use his power to change the stones to bread.

We also may be tempted to satisfy a perfectly normal desire in a wrong way or at the wrong time.

If we indulge in sex before marriage or if we steal to get food, we are trying to satisfy God-given desires in wrong ways.

Remember, many of your desires are normal and good, but God wants you to satisfy them in the right way and at the right time.

Jesus was able to resist all of the devil's temptations because he not only knew Scripture, but he also obeyed it. Ephes. 6:17 says that God's Word is a sword to use in spiritual combat.

Knowing Bible verses is an important step in helping us resist the devil's attacks, but we must also obey the Bible.

Note that Satan had memorized Scripture, but he failed to obey it. Knowing and obeying the Bible helps us follow God's desires rather than the devils.

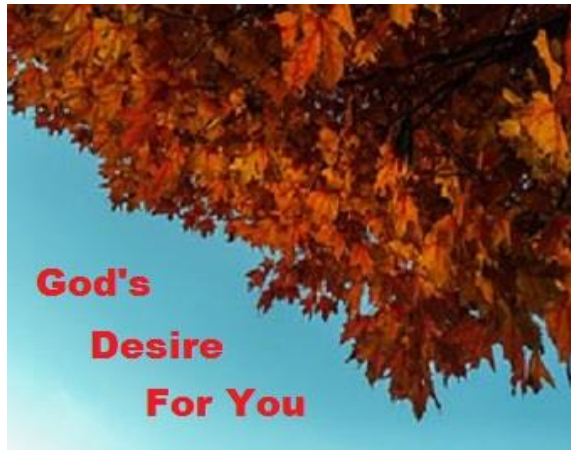
How to do what God wants.

1 Chron. 29:19

Give my son Solomon the wholehearted desire to obey all your commands, decrees, and principles, and to build this Temple, for which I have made all these preparations."

“Wholehearted devotion” means to be entirely dedicated to God. This is what David wished for Solomon—that he would desire, above all else, to serve God.

Chapter 3



Aligning your desires with God's desire.

Psalm 97:10

You, who love the Lord, hate evil! He protects the lives of his godly people and rescues them from the power of the wicked.

A sincere desire to please God will result in an alignment of your desires with God's desires.

You will love what God loves and hate what God hates. If you love the Lord, you will hate evil. If you do not despise the actions of people who take advantage of others, if you admire people who only look out for them, or if you envy those who get ahead using any means to accomplish their ends, then your primary desire in life is not to please God.

Learn to love God's ways and hate evil in every form—not only the obvious sins but also the socially acceptable ones.

Psalm 106:13-15

Yet how quickly they forgot what he had done!

They wouldn't wait for his counsel! In the wilderness, their desires ran wild, testing God's patience in that dry land.

So he gave them what they asked for, but he sent a plague along with it.

In the desert, Israel was so intent on getting the food and water *they* wanted that they became blind to what God wanted.

They were more concerned about immediate physical gratification than lasting spiritual satisfaction.

They did not want what was best for them, and they refused to trust in God's care and provision (Numbers 11:18-33).

If you complain enough, God may give you what you ask for, even if it is not the best for you. If you're not getting what you want, perhaps God knows it is not in your best interest. Trust in his care and provision.

Evil acts begin with evil desires.

Psalm 141:4

Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties.

James wrote “the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts” (James 3:5). On the average, a person opens his or her mouth approximately 700 times a day to speak.

David wisely asked God to help keep him from speaking evil—sometimes even as he underwent persecution. Jesus himself was silent before his accusers (Matthew 26:63).

Knowing the power of the tongue, we would do well to ask God to guard what we say so that our words will bring honor to his name.

David asked God to guard his heart. Evil acts begin with evil desires. It isn't enough to ask God to keep you away from temptation, make you stronger, or change your circumstances. You must ask him to change you on the inside—at the level of your desires.

Our desires control how we live.

Proverbs 4:23-27

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee.

Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn neither to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.

Our heart—our feelings of love and desire—dictates to a great extent how we live because we always find time to do what we enjoy. Solomon tells us to guard our heart above all else, making sure we concentrate on those desires that will keep us on the right path. Make sure your affections push you in the right direction. Put boundaries on your desires: don't go after everything you see. Look straight ahead, keep your eyes fixed on your goal, and don't get sidetracked on detours that lead to sin.

Wrong desires blind your judgment.

Proverbs 13:19

The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but it is abomination to fools to depart from evil.

Whether a “longing fulfilled” is good or bad depends on the nature of the desire. It is “sweet to the soul” to achieve worthwhile goals, but not all goals are worth pursuing.

When you set your heart on something, you may lose your ability to assess it objectively. With your desire blinding your judgment, you may proceed with an unwise relationship, a wasteful purchase, or a poorly conceived plan. Faithfulness is a virtue, but stubbornness is not.

Chapter 4



Using the Bible to support wrong desires.

Matthew 4:6

And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

God is not our magician in the sky ready to perform on request. In response to Satan's temptations, Jesus said not to put God to a test (Deut. 6:16).

You may want to ask God to do something to prove his existence or his love for you. Jesus once taught through a parable that people who don't believe what is written in the Bible won't believe even if someone were to come back from the dead to warn them (Luke 16:31)!

God wants us to live by faith, not by magic. Don't try to manipulate God by asking for signs.

The devil used Scripture to try to convince Jesus to sin!

Sometimes friends or associates will present attractive and convincing reasons why you should try something you know is wrong.

They may even find Bible verses that *seem* to support their viewpoint.

Study the Bible carefully, especially the broader contexts of specific verses, so that you understand God's principles for living and what he wants for your life.

Only if you really understand what the *whole* Bible says will you be able to recognize errors of interpretation when people take verses out of context and twist them to say what they want them to say.

Desire to do wrong is like doing wrong.

Matthew 5:27-28

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: [28] But I say unto you, that whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

The Old Testament law said that it is wrong for a person to have sex with someone other than his or her spouse (Exodus 20:14).

But Jesus said that the *desire* to have sex with someone other than your spouse is mental adultery and thus sin. Jesus emphasized that if the *act* is wrong, then so is the *intention*. To be faithful to your spouse with your body but not your mind is to break the trust so vital to a strong marriage.

Jesus is not condemning natural interest in the opposite sex or even healthy sexual desire, but the deliberate and repeated filling of one's mind with fantasies that would be evil if acted out.

Some think that if lustful thoughts are sin, why shouldn't a person go ahead and do the lustful actions too?

Acting out sinful desires is harmful in several ways:

- (1) it causes people to excuse sin rather than to stop sinning;
- (2) it destroys marriages and families;
- (3) it is deliberate rebellion against God's Word;
- (4) it always hurts someone else in addition to the sinner.

Sinful action is more dangerous than sinful desire, and that is why desires should not be acted out. Nevertheless, sinful desire is just as damaging to righteousness.

Left unchecked, wrong desires will result in wrong actions and turn people away from God.

Prayer involves God's desires not ours.

Mark 11:24

Therefore I say unto you, what things so ever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

Jesus, our example for prayer, prayed, “Everything is possible for you. . . Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36).

Our own interests and desires often motivate our prayers. We like to hear that we can have anything. But Jesus prayed with *God’s* interests in mind. When we pray, we should express our desires, but want his will above ours.

Check yourself to see if your prayers focus on your interests or God’s.

When desires conflict with obedience.

John 12:27

Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.

Jesus knew his crucifixion lay ahead, and because he was human he dreaded it. He knew he would have to take the sins of the world on himself, and he knew this would separate him from his Father.

He wanted to be delivered from this horrible death, but he knew that God sent him into the world to die for our sins, in our place. Jesus said no to his human desires in order to obey his Father and glorify him.

Although we will never have to face such a difficult and awesome task, we are still called to obedience. Whatever the Father asks, we should do his will and bring glory to his name.

Chapter 5



Making desire for God top priority

Acts 21:13-14

But he said, "Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! For I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but also to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus."

When it was clear that we couldn't persuade him, we gave up and said, "The will of the Lord be done."

Paul knew he would be imprisoned in Jerusalem. Although his friends pleaded with him to not go there, he knew that he had to because God wanted him to.

No one enjoys pain, but a faithful disciple wants above all else to please God. Our desire to please God should overshadow our desire to avoid hardship and suffering.

When we really want to do God's will, we must accept all that comes with it—even the pain. Then we can say with Paul, “The Lord's will be done.”

Lessons Paul learned about sinful desires.

Romans 7:15

I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate.

Paul shares three lessons that he learned in trying to deal with his old sinful desires.

- (1) Knowledge is not the answer (Romans 7:9). Paul felt fine as long as he did not understand what the law demanded. When he learned the truth, he knew he was doomed.
- (2) Self-determination (struggling in one's own strength) doesn't succeed (Romans 7:15). Paul found himself sinning in ways that weren't even attractive to him.
- (3) Becoming a Christian does not stamp out all sin and temptation from a person's life (Romans 7:22-25).

Being born again takes a moment of faith, but becoming like Christ is a lifelong process.

Paul compares Christian growth to a strenuous race or fight (1 Cor. 9:24-27; 2 Tim. 4:7).

Thus, as Paul has been emphasizing since the beginning of this letter, *no one* in the world is innocent; no one deserves to be saved—not the pagan who doesn't know God's laws, not the Christian or Jew who knows them and tries to keep them.

All of us must depend totally on the work of Christ for our salvation. We cannot earn it by our good behavior.

This is more than the cry of one desperate man—it describes the experience of any Christian struggling against sin or trying to please God by keeping rules and laws without the Spirit's help.

We must never underestimate the power of sin. We must never attempt to fight it in our own strength. Satan is a crafty tempter, and we have an amazing ability to make excuses.

Instead of trying to overcome sin with human willpower, we must take hold of the tremendous power of Christ that is available to us.

This is God's provision for victory over sin—he sends the Holy Spirit to live in us and give us power. And when we fall, he lovingly reaches out to help us up.

Dealing with our natural evil desires.

Galatians 5:17

The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants.

And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict.

Paul describes the two forces conflicting within us—the Holy Spirit and the sinful nature (our evil desires or inclinations that stem from our bodies; see also Galatians 5:16, 19, 24).

Paul is not saying that these forces are equal—the Holy Spirit is infinitely stronger.

But if we rely on our own wisdom, we will make wrong choices. If we try to follow the Spirit by our own human effort, we will fail.

Our only way to freedom from our evil desires is through the empowering of the Holy Spirit (see Romans 8:9; Ephes. 4:23-24; Col. 3:3-8).

Please pray this Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

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Additional comments and charts are taken from:

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