

# Prayer and Desires

## Discerning God's Will—part 4

June 25, 2017

### **DAY 1: What about my desires?**

1. We start the Christian life assuming prayer is primarily, if not solely “twisting God’s arm” to get Him to do what we think best.

2. After time, we realize that prayer, as it relates to God’s will plays some critical roles! Prayer helps us:

- a. Lay our concerns and requests at God’s feet,
- b. Ask God for the wisdom we need in difficult situations and relationships, (James 1:5)
- c. Come to a place where we are willing to do whatever God wants us to do, (John 7:17)
- d. Wrestle with our desires that wage war against what God wants us to do! (1 Peter 2:11)

3. As a young Christian, I remember reading Psalm 37:4-5 and thought I had discovered gold! The golden key to my desires was mailed to my home, or so I thought...

*Psalms 37:4 (RSV) Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.  
5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.*

4. What I assumed was that I merely needed to make sure I was taking delight in God, first, and THEN, I would get the desires of my heart!!!

5. What I neglected to do was read the context of Psalm 37. Here’s how it starts:

*Psalms 37:1 Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong;  
2 for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.  
3 Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.*

6. What is the context for Psalm 37:4? Put it in your own words.

7. Now read the verses that follow Psalm 37:4-5...

*Psalm 37:6 He will bring forth your vindication as the light, and your right as the noonday.  
7 Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over him who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!  
8 Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.*

8. How does the context clarify the “golden promise” (as I thought) of Psalm 37:4?

## DAY 2: The confusion of desires

1. While, as God's children, we certainly have good desires, holy desires, righteous desires, we are still plagued by an assortment of desires that are certainly NOT holy! Therein lies our problem and confusion.

*Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*

2. If we only knew this generalization about the human heart, that would be enough to give us pause, to throw ourselves at the mercy of God for wisdom!

3. But the scriptures shed more specific light on our hearts!

Under each verse below, write out what the author says about our desires...

*1 Peter 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.*

*Colossians 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

*<sup>6</sup> Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.*

*Ephesians 4:22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;*

*Psalms 119:29 Keep me from deceitful ways; be gracious to me through your law.*

*Ecclesiastes 6:9 Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. (wandering desires)  
This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.*

4. Which of today's verses struck you, personally? Why?

5. Finish today's devotional, asking God for protection against the wrong kinds of desires that can still push you in wrong directions!

### **DAY 3: The sin of presumption**

1. When Joshua and the Hebrews conquered the Promised Land they were commanded to utterly defeat every tribe in the land. For centuries, the rebellious tribes of that part of the world sunk into lower and lower depravity, their culture practicing the vilest of wickedness.

2. For centuries God had withheld judgment, giving them time to repent. They never did. To draw a historical perspective, read about what ISIS is doing to the people in Syria and Iraq.

3. The time for judgment had come. Meanwhile, one of the tribes, the Gibeonites, had seen how the other tribes were utterly defeated, each of these tribes having no survivors. The Gibeonites hatched a plot, pretending to be travelers from a land far away.

*Joshua 9:9 (The Gibeonites) said to Joshua, "From a very distant country your servants have come, because of the name of the Lord your God. For we have heard a report of him, and all that he did in Egypt,*

*<sup>10</sup> and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon the king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth.*

*<sup>11</sup> So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country said to us, 'Take provisions in your hand for the journey and go to meet them and say to them, "We are your servants. Come now, make a covenant with us." '*

*<sup>12</sup> Here is our bread. It was still warm when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey on the day we set out to come to you, but now, behold, it is dry and crumbly.*

*<sup>13</sup> These wineskins were new when we filled them, and behold, they have burst. And these garments and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey."*

*Joshua 9:14 So the men took some of their provisions, **but did not ask counsel from the Lord.***

*<sup>15</sup> And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them.*

4. Three days later the deception was uncovered. Because of the covenant Joshua made with the Gibeonites, their lives were spared.

5. However, the Gibeonites proved to be a thorn in the side of the Hebrew nation for hundreds of years.

6. Joshua lays the blame for this disaster at his own feet. They did not lay the matter before God in prayer, for counsel or direction. They just did what came naturally, what they wanted to do. The consequences were paid out over hundreds of years.

7. It is folly to just assume your desires match up with God's will. This is where prayer is vital! Do you find yourself living on presumption, that you "know what to do?"

8. Humbly ask God's protection over you, making you alert to the sin of presumption.

## DAY 4: Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, part 1

1. Let's look at how Jesus dealt with the most difficult decision and trial of His life. This occurred on the night He would be arrested, ending in His crucifixion the following day.

*Mark 14:32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray."*

<sup>33</sup> *He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. <sup>34</sup> "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."*

2. Go back and underline the three words or phrases that describe the desperate situation in His heart.

3. What situation comes to mind where you felt something of a similar gut-wrenching predicament looming in front of you?

4. How would you describe the tone or tenor of your prayers, in facing that trial?

*Mark 14:35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.*

3. This is certainly how any of us would have prayed. We have certainly prayed for less!

4. Read Mark 14:35 again. Notice the words, "if possible." What is the difference in this prayer if Jesus had NOT included that phrase?

*Mark 14:36 "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."*

5. This is the stunning culmination of His prayer. What strikes you most from Jesus, in v. 36?

6. We learn some very important principles:

a. He prayed for His desire, "Take this cup (trial; the cross) from me."

b. But this request was subordinate to God's will!

c. "Yet" reminds us to pray for our desires that appear godly, while at the same time committing ourselves to God's will no matter the cost or how God answers our prayer!

7. What is your biggest takeaway from this episode?

## **DAY 5: Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, part 2**

*Mark 14:37 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?"*

*<sup>38</sup> Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."*

*<sup>39</sup> Once more he went away and prayed the same thing.*

*<sup>40</sup> When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.*

*<sup>41</sup> Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.*

*<sup>42</sup> Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"*

1. Sometimes, our trials are exacerbated by the responses of people around us.
2. Jesus had taken Peter, James and John with Him to pray that night at Gethsemane. Ostensibly, He hoped they would be praying for Him.
3. After Jesus prayed by Himself (yesterday's verses), He walked back to where His three "core" disciples were. What did He find when He walked up to them? (v. 37)
4. While they should have been praying, they were sleeping!
5. Jesus gives them a warning in v. 38. Write the warning in your own words, below:
6. This episode is repeated several times!
7. The admonition to "watch and pray" is ever needed!
  - a. We are to be on the "watch" against temptation! In this case, the temptation was to give in to the desire to avoid the cross!
  - b. We are to pray for power to say "no" to temptation and say "yes" to whatever God has for us!
8. As we finish this week's devotions regarding prayer and desires, what has stuck with you?