

BLESS YOUR HEART

Title: Part 2 – “When Your Heart Speaks, Listen”

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While everyone is saying “Hi” here in the house, welcome if you are joining us online or on our app! Thanks for spending some time with us. We want you to know we are FOR you! If there's anything we can pray for or any way we can serve you, let us know. AND if this message blesses you, consider sharing it with some friends.

Before we get started, I need to tell you about something I saw on the news this week. A woman in North Carolina was following her GPS, and it told her to turn right. So, she did. The problem? There was no road there. Just a boat ramp. She drove her brand-new car straight into a lake. When the reporter asked her why she did it, she said, “Well, the GPS told me to turn right, so I just trusted it and turned right!”

Come on, what would you say to that woman if you grew up in the South? [Well, bless your heart...] Right!

We're in week two of a collection of messages called just that, “Bless Your Heart,” and if you were here last week I cannot encourage you enough to go back and watch or listen because we talked about a fundamental shift we all need to make.

Maybe you've heard that as Christ-Followers we should not follow our hearts because our hearts are evil and wicked. They can't be trusted. Has anyone ever heard that before? Well, last week we talked about this amazing thing that God does that so many Christians miss. A heart transplant! God doesn't just forgive your evil, wicked heart, He **REPLACES** it with a good heart!

Ezekiel 36:26 says God removes your heart of stone and gives you a heart of flesh. Then the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that you're a new creation—the old is gone, the new has come.

Why does that matter? Because as a follower of Jesus, you're not a sinner trying really hard to be good. No, what you actually are is a saint learning to live from who you already are!

It matters because, and here's where it gets tricky, if you have a good and noble heart now—Jesus words—then what do you do with all those desires inside you? Because some of us have been taught that our desires are dangerous. Our wants are selfish. Our longings are probably from the devil and leading us away from God.

SO, we spend our lives trying NOT to want things. Trying to kill our desires. Trying to become some emotionless robot who only does “spiritual” things. BUT what if we've got it backwards? What if your desires aren't the problem—they're actually clues to the solution?

Let me read three passages that are going to shape our conversation today. First, Psalm 37, verse 4:

⁴ Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's **DESIRE**.

That's what the Psalmist says. Now Paul again, Philippians 2, verse 13:

¹³ For God is working in you, giving you the **DESIRE** and the power to do what pleases him.

And finally, John 7, verses 37-38. Jesus is speaking:

³⁷ On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from **WITHIN** them.”

We're going to unpack what all this means. Today I want to preach a message I'm calling:

When Your Heart Speaks, Listen

In Southern culture, when someone tells you about their dreams or desires, and you respond with “Well bless your heart...” that's NOT encouragement, is it? It's code for: “You actually think that's a good idea? How cute. How naive. Bless your little heart, you don't know any better.” OR it's: “Look at what you want! That's so selfish. That's so worldly. That's so... YOU. And we all know YOU can't be trusted.”

But what if when God looks at your deepest desires, He doesn't shake His head in disappointment? What if He says, “Bless your heart—that's EXACTLY what I put there! That desire you've been apologizing for? That passion you've been suppressing? That dream you've been hiding? I gave you that! It's a clue to your calling!”

Over the next few minutes, I want to convince you of something that might sound crazy: **Your desires aren't your enemy. They're your compass.**

Now, before you freak out on me, I'm not talking about your surface cravings—we'll talk about the difference. But your soul-level longings? Those are from God, not against God.

AND when you learn to trust the desires of your heart, your good heart, you discover the life you were made for.

If you are taking notes today, let's start here. Let's start with the elephant in the room. Because most of us are terrified of our desires. And we have good reasons. SO:

1. WHY WE'RE AFRAID OF OUR DESIRES

▷ We've been burned before.

Let's be honest. All of us have followed—what we thought was—our heart before only to have it end up in disaster. You followed your heart into a relationship that destroyed you. You followed your desires into an addiction that almost killed you. You followed your passions into debt, or failure, or humiliation. And now you think: “See! My heart can't be trusted. My desires are dangerous. I need to lock them up and throw away the key.”

But here's the question: Was that really your HEART? Or was that your WOUNDS?

See there's a huge difference between desires that come from a healed, whole heart and cravings that come from a broken, bleeding wound. A wound doesn't say, “I want connection.” A wound says, “I need someone—ANYONE—to make me feel valuable.” A wound doesn't say, “I want adventure.” A wound says, “I need to escape this pain by any means necessary.” A wound doesn't say, “I want significance.” A wound says, “I need to prove I'm not worthless by accomplishing something impressive.” Do you see the difference?

When you follow wounds, you get hurt. But when you follow your true heart—your good heart, your healed heart—those desires lead you toward life. Here's another one:

▷ We've been taught to distrust ourselves.

Because it's not just our past failures that make us afraid. We've also been taught—implicitly or explicitly in the church—that our desires are fundamentally selfish or evil. How many of you have heard things like this?

“The heart wants what the heart wants, and that's the problem.” OR: “Follow your heart? That's terrible advice! The heart is deceitful above all things!” OR: “If it feels good, it's probably a sin.” OR: “What YOU want doesn't matter. What GOD wants is all that matters.” How many of you have heard anything like that before?

And I want to be clear here. I get the heart behind some of that teaching. We do need to submit our will to God's will. We can't just do whatever we want without any regard for Scripture or wisdom or consequences. BUT here's what we've missed for so long: What if God's will and your true desires aren't OPPOSED to each other? What if they're actually more ALIGNED than we think? What if God created you with certain desires specifically so you would want what He wants for you?

Think about it: If God knew us before we were born and knit us together in our mother's womb. If we are made in His image. Then our longings for beauty, for justice, for connection, for creativity, for purpose, for adventure. Those desires aren't accidents. They're not mistakes. They're not temptations to resist. They're actually clues to your calling... one more:

▷ We think wanting anything is selfish.

We think any desire that's about us, that makes us happy or fulfilled, must be selfish. Like, if you want it really bad, then it can't be God's will. God's will is always supposed to be hard and unpleasant and something you don't want, right? We have this idea that following God means doing everything you hate and denying everything you love. We think holiness equals misery.

But that's not what Jesus said! Jesus said famously in John 10:10 that:

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Jesus didn't come to make you miserable. He came to make you fully alive! AND being fully alive means engaging your desires, not denying them.

Frederick Buechner said it this way:

“The place God calls you to is the place where your DEEP GLADNESS and the world's deep hunger meet.”

Did you catch that? Your DEEP GLADNESS. Not your deep drudgery. Not your deep obligation. Your deep gladness. Meaning that God's calling for your life isn't something you grit your teeth and force yourself to do. It's something that makes you come alive.

Let me tell you about something I read in a book recently that perfectly paints a picture of why disowning our desires is so devastating. It was about a young woman named Jenny who went on a mission trip to Ecuador and fell in love.

This young woman was totally focused on ministry. If anything, she was maybe TOO focused—like, intense focused. The kind of person who schedules every minute and doesn't have time for distractions.

And love? Romance? That wasn't even on her radar. In fact, as you later learn, Jenny had been hurt before. Betrayed, actually. So, she'd made a conscious decision that a lot of us make: "I'm just not going there anymore. I'm going to live for ministry and forget about all this relationship stuff."

So, she's in Ecuador, doing amazing work, serving people, sharing the Gospel, when she meets this guy on her team. He's charming, intelligent, passionate about the same things she is. They're working together, having great conversations, sharing laughter... you know how it goes.

And Jenny feels something. For the first time in YEARS, she feels something. There's just one problem: He's married! Nothing happens, but this young woman let her heart go further than it should have. And when she came back, she was devastated. Embarrassed. Humiliated.

AND she came to the wrong conclusion in this story. A conclusion the church has long jumped to: "Desire gets me into trouble; I must avoid it at all costs."

BUT Jenny's problem wasn't that she had desires. Her problem was that she'd been IGNORING her desires for so long that when they finally surfaced, she couldn't tell the difference between the real thing and a cheap counterfeit.

She'd spent years saying, "I don't want love. I don't need intimacy. I'm fine on my own." But that didn't make the desire go away! It just went underground. And when it finally came up... it came up in the wrong place, at the wrong time, with the wrong person.

That's what happens when we disown our desires instead of discerning them. You can't just pretend you don't want things. You can't lock your heart in a cage and throw away the key. Because one day that cage is going to break open, and you won't be ready!

The danger isn't HAVING desires. The danger is DISOWNING desires.

This is the story behind 95% of all affairs. The pastor lives out of duty for years, trying to deny his thirst, pretending he doesn't need affirmation or intimacy or adventure. And then one day the young intern smiles at him, sees him, pays attention to him—and it's over. Why? Because he's been so out of touch with his desires for so long that when they surface, they're overwhelming and he can't distinguish real life from a cheap imitation.

Or the wife who's been going through the motions, denying that she's lonely, pretending she doesn't need romance anymore. And then she connects with someone online who makes her feel alive again, and suddenly she's in an emotional affair wondering how she got there.

This is what happens when we treat our desires like the enemy instead of learning to steward them wisely. We don't need to kill our desires. We need to understand them. Discern them. Direct them toward the real thing instead of the impostor.

BUT I'm getting ahead of myself. So, let's keep going with this:

2. WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT DESIRES

Alright, so we're afraid of our desires. But what does the Bible actually say about them? Because if we're going to trust our hearts, we better make sure it's Biblical. So, first thing:

▷ God places desires in your heart.

Where do our desires come from, well look at Psalm 37:4 again. Most of us read this verse one way:

⁴ Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's **DESIRE**.

We sometimes read that like if I just love God enough, then He'll give me the stuff I really want. Right? Be a good Christian, and God becomes our cosmic vending machine. BUT that's not what the verse is saying.

The Hebrew here is talking about God giving YOU desires—not giving you what you desire but actually placing desires in your heart. It's like God says, "You delight in Me, and I'm going to put My desires into you. I'm going to shape what you want. I'm going to give you a heart that wants what I created you to want."

And here's what's wild: When God gives you His heart, you start wanting what He wants. Not because you're forcing yourself, but because it's genuinely who you are now.

This is what Philippians 2:13 is talking about. Look at it again:

¹³ For God is working in you, giving you the **DESIRE** and the power to do what pleases him.

God is working in you to will, to want, to desire. Meaning that your wanting is part of God's working. That was a nugget. Your wanting is part of God's working! Touch your neighbor and tell them, "Your wanting is a part of God working."

That means when you have a desire that aligns with God's character, that won't go away no matter how hard you try to suppress it, that makes you come alive—there's a good chance God put that there! AND... not only that but:

▷ Jesus invites our thirst.

Now look at John 7. Jesus stands up in the middle of a crowd and says in verse 37:

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from **WITHIN** them."

Jesus doesn't shame thirst. He doesn't say, "You shouldn't be thirsty! What's wrong with you that you have needs and desires?" NO! He invites it. He says, "You're thirsty? Good! Come to Me. I'll satisfy that thirst."

AND then He says something even more incredible: "Whoever believes in Me will have rivers of living water flowing from within them." This is talking about the Holy Spirit living inside you as a follower of Jesus. But notice what it does. It creates rivers that flow from WITHIN. Not rivers that you have to manufacture. Not rivers that you force. Rivers that flow from who you are.

When God's Spirit is in you, living water flows FROM you. Desires flow FROM you. Passion flows FROM you. AND Jesus doesn't say, "Suppress those rivers! Dam them up! Don't trust them!" He says, "Let them flow. That's what I came to do!"

One more thing we need to know Biblically:

▷ Your desires are breadcrumbs.

Your deepest desires—not your surface cravings, not your wounded heart, but your soul-level longings—those are breadcrumbs God leaves to lead you to your purpose. Paul says, when writing to the Ephesian church:

¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Paul says God PREPARED good works IN ADVANCE for us to do. That means before you were born, God had specific things in mind that only you could do. SO, here's the question: How do you find those prepared works?

One way is through your desires. God doesn't prepare works for you that you're completely uninterested in. The desire is often the clue to the calling. Your passion to help people? That's a breadcrumb. Your love for creating beauty? That's a breadcrumb. Your obsession with getting healthy, that might be God saying, "This way. Keep going."

And when you follow those desires—when you lean into what makes you come alive instead of away from it—you often discover that's exactly where God wants you to be. Your desires aren't random. They're not accidents. They're clues.

Which leads us to this, well then how do we know, right?

3. UNDERSTANDING OUR DESIRES

We have to understand our desires because not all desires are created equal. Because what I am NOT, what I am not saying is, "Do whatever you feel like doing." I want to be super clear on that because not all desires are created equal. There's a hierarchy. And we need wisdom to know the difference.

SO, let me give you a quick framework (sorry if this feels like drinking from a fire hydrant today):

▷ Surface desires (immediate gratification).

These are cravings. Quick fixes. Impulses. Escapes. Things like:

- "I want to veg out on my phone for three hours."
- "I want to eat an entire pizza by myself."
- "I want to look at porn."
- "I want to blow all my money on something I can't afford because it feels good."

These aren't your true heart. These are often our wounds crying out for relief. Or the flesh looking for comfort. Or just plain old temptation. We don't need to trust these. We need to recognize them for what they are. Next, going deeper are:

Soul desires (deep longings).

These are the desires underneath the surface desires.

- Underneath “I want to veg out on my phone” might be: “I’m exhausted and I long for rest.”
- Underneath “I want to eat the whole pizza” might be: “I’m lonely and I long for comfort.”
- Underneath “I want porn” might be: “I long for intimacy and connection.”
- Underneath “I want to spend money” might be: “I long to feel significant or valuable.”

Are you with me? The surface desire is destructive. But the soul desire beneath it is actually good. You DO need rest. You DO need comfort. You DO need intimacy. You DO need to feel valuable. The question is: Where are you going to get those things met?

But then the deepest desires in us as followers of Jesus, what is most true of us, are our:

▷ Spirit desires (God-given calling).

These are the desires God placed in you at creation and the Holy Spirit wills within you. Your unique glory. Your fingerprint on the world. This is the deep, persistent longing that won't go away.

- It's not just “I want to be rich.” It's “I want to create financial freedom for others who are trapped.”
- It's not just “I want attention.” It's “I want to use my voice to speak for those who can't speak for themselves.”
- It's not just “I want to be successful.” It's “I want to build something beautiful that serves people and honors God.”
- It's not just “I want a cabin in the mountains.” It's “I want to build a retreat for pastors where they can refresh and recharge for free.” (Just sayin')

These desires align with God's character. They make you MORE like Jesus, not less. They draw you TOWARD people, not away from them. AND these are the desires you can trust.

It looks something like this:

4. FOUR TESTS OF A TRUE DESIRE

How do you know if a desire is from your good heart or from your flesh/wounds? Here are four tests:

▷ **Does it make you more alive or just numb?**

True desires energize you. They make you feel more like yourself. The lust of the flesh (the imposters) might give you a quick high, but it leaves you numb or empty afterward.

▷ **Does it draw you toward community or away from it?**

True desires increase connection, community, and service to others. Flesh isolates you, makes you secretive, creates distance.

▷ **Does it require courage or just comfort?**

True desires usually scare you a little because they're worth something. While the flesh just wants the path of least resistance. One more, is this helpful for anyone?

▷ **Does it reflect God's character?**

Does it express creativity, justice, beauty, mercy, truth, love, hope? Or does it express pride, selfishness, cruelty, deception, destruction?

Hear me church, if your desire passes these tests, there's a good chance it's from God and not against Him! God is not playing games with you! He's not dangling desires in front of you just to see if you'll be "spiritual enough" to deny them! That's not a Father—that's a sadist! Your Father gave you those desires because He loves you and wants you to pursue them in Him!

When God looks at those desires, He doesn't say, "Bless your heart, you poor thing, you don't know any better." NO! He says, "Bless your heart—that's what I PUT there! That's what I made you for! Stop trying to kill it and start living it!" Amen!

SO, let's bring all this full circle. What does it actually look like to trust the desires of your blessed heart? As I wrestled with this a couple of years ago with a counselor it really was about asking the right questions. Different questions. He encouraged me like this:

Stop asking: "Is this desire wrong" and start asking: "Is this desire from my good heart or from my wounds/flesh?" Right? Stop asking: "Will this make me happy?" Start asking: "Will this make me more alive?" Stop asking: "What do other people think I should do?"

Start asking: "What did God make me to do?" Stop asking: "Is it safe?" Start asking: "Is it worth it?"

Because here's what I've learned: Your calling will almost never feel safe. It will almost always require courage. And it will definitely cost you something. BUT when you're doing what God made you to do, when you're living from your good heart, when you're following the desires God placed in you—you'll feel more like yourself than you've ever felt.

AND what we miss is this isn't instant! You don't figure out your true desires overnight. Because some of you, you've spent so long suppressing your desires that you don't even know what they are anymore. This was me! Someone asks, "What do you want?" And you freeze. "I... I don't know. What do you want me to want?"

So, start with small questions: What made you come alive as a kid? What do you do that makes you lose track of time? What injustice makes you the angriest? What would you do if failure wasn't possible? If you had unlimited time and money, what would you create or fix or build?

And then pay attention to your answers. Don't dismiss them. Don't spiritualize them. Don't apologize for them. God is speaking to you through your desires. He's leaving you breadcrumbs to find your calling.

Let me build on this **as we close** because I really want you to get this. Some of you have been living your entire Christian life trying to kill your desires. Trying to become some emotionless spiritual robot because somehow we equate that with holiness. With maturity. Or being "sold out for Jesus."

But that's not what Jesus wants! Jesus wants you FULLY ALIVE!

He didn't die on a cross so you could spend the rest of your life in miserable obligation, going through the spiritual motions, serving in ways that drain you, pretending you don't want anything more! NO! He died so you could be FREE! Free to be who He made you! Free to want what He wants! Free to DESIRE and DREAM and CREATE and BUILD!

Your desires aren't a distraction from God's plan—they're a CLUE to God's plan!

- That thing you're passionate about? God PUT that there!
- That dream you've been hiding? God GAVE you that dream!
- That longing that won't go away no matter how hard you try to suppress it? That's God SPEAKING to you!

And when you finally stop fighting your heart and start trusting your good and noble heart—when you stop apologizing for your desires and start following them—that's when you discover the life Jesus came to give you! That's when your soul starts to wake up! That's when you feel alive maybe for the first time! That's when you look back and realize, "Oh... THIS is what I was made for!"

SO, let me give you three practical steps you could take one day with a journal and 30-minutes of alone time:

5. PRACTICAL STEPS

▷ Name your desires / longings.

This week, I want you to actually write down what you want. Not what you should want. Not what your parents wanted for you. Not what would be safe or responsible. What do you want? The things that you can't shake. The things that make you come alive. AND don't censor yourself. Just write. Then...

▷ Ask "why" three times.

For each desire, ask "why" three times to get beneath the surface. For example, "I want a new job." WHY? Because I hate my current job. WHY? Because it doesn't use my gifts. WHY? Because I long to create something meaningful with my life. There it is. The third "why" gets you beneath the surface desires. Ask "why" three times, and then, most important:

▷ Bring it to God.

Don't run from God with your desires. Run to Him! Say, "God, is this from You? Did You put this in me? Show me how to pursue this in a way that honors You." And then actually LISTEN!

Because here is the biggest truth of all today. God put those desires in you to lead you back to Him! That's ultimately where every true desire points. It finds its fulfillment in God. It was Augustine that said, "Our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee."

Some of you are here and you've never experienced what we're talking about. You've never had your heart made new because Jesus has not been invited to come into your heart. Here's what you need to know: right now, your desires are untrustworthy. Not because you're a bad person, but because you're separated from God. You have a heart of stone, not flesh. AND no amount of behavior modification can fix that. No amount of trying harder or being better can give you a good heart.

You need a heart transplant. And only Jesus can give you that.

When you place your faith in Jesus—when you trust that He died for your sins and rose from the grave—God replaces your heart of stone with a heart of flesh. He puts His Spirit in you. He gives you NEW desires.

And suddenly, following God isn't about forcing yourself to do things you hate. It's about becoming who you were always meant to be. That's the Gospel. That's the good news.

If you have never invited Jesus in to do this then maybe today is the day. Let's pray.

[PRAYER TIME]