

LIVE YOUR HEART'S DESIRE

"Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." (Psalm 37:4)

Before I take one step forward on this topic, let me remind you that "the heart is deceptive above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). So before you go making plans to live out your heart's desire, you need to conduct a thorough heart check. You may find that your heart is in need of a recalibration.

A sanctified heart, one reshaped by Jesus, is a heart that can be trusted. That's a fact. A more realistic fact is that we are not yet fully sanctified; at least I know I'm not. I can't always trust my heart. I can't even often trust my heart. I have to be careful when following my heart or its desires. Why? Because this life has shaped my heart in such a way that my desires are for human relationships and approval. Yes, human relationships are vital for our well-being, but they should be secondary to our relationship with Jesus.

The more you grasp the greatness of God's love, the more it becomes clear that He is your greatest need and desire. As you grow in your love with and for Him, you must take inventory of your heart's current desires. What or who comes first? What is most prominent? There are many examples, specifically with human relationships, where we can be off balance in our desires: the need for husband and mate kind of love and love for your children, parents, siblings, friends, and so on.

Let's focus on one area in particular: the love and desire for our (or a) man. That was once my own pitfall. Now, I'm in a healthy place where my husband is second only to Jesus, but that required me taking a sober look at my heart at its deepest level.

To establish my case, let's return to Eve in our story of the fall and its aftermath. Eve's original heart's desire was for relationship with God, but then the things of this world seemed more inviting. The serpent lied to her and convinced her that there was something more and that she was missing out. Next thing you know we are cussing Eve once a month and screaming in the delivery room. A part of the curse we don't often consider is this:

"To the woman He said: '...Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.'" (Genesis 3:16)

I can't count the number of times I've heard the part about "he shall rule over you" discussed when talking about the family structure. I honestly have no problem with this in our home. There are decisions that are deferred to my husband without hesitation on my part, especially when I'm too emotionally involved. Kelly has a level head in many areas where I don't. For the most part, though, we come to an agreement in all major decisions.

I want to camp at an all too underappreciated aspect of the curse: *"Your desire shall be for your husband."* Years ago, this struck me with fresh eyes. I can appreciate the magnitude of this desire considering it was once the most detrimental force in my life. Now, that curse over me is not only broken but totally demolished. Jesus is the unequaled desire of my heart, and growing my relationship with God the Father is the absolute priority in my life.

That has taken years of being loved with a healthy God-shaped love. Prior to that, my desire was for a man, sometimes any man. My teens and early twenties were some of the most self-destructive years of my life. My view of love was skewed because my desire was skewed. I thought a relationship with a man was what would complete me. It didn't help that Jerry McGuire confirmed that with his broken plea to Dorothy (eye roll). I fell for it.

Movies and fairytales train us from the time we are little girls that we're waiting for our prince to come. I never knew I was waiting for my Prince in the person of Jesus. Romance novels only add to the idea that if we will just find Mr. Right then everything will be all right. And I say that as a writer and lover of love stories.

In any story I write, though, my heroine always comes to the place of understanding her need for the love

of Jesus more than human love. It's usually the actual conflict to be resolved behind what seems to be the conflict. Why? Because in life that is the unresolved conflict with the woman's heart of flesh. She believes true love is horizontal rather than vertical. Some women are so desperate to love and be loved that they will settle for Mr. Right Now instead of waiting for Mr. Right. That may not be you, but if you've never been that girl, I bet you've known plenty of women like her over the years.

A thought occurs to me for the millionth time: Notice that the first of the Ten Commandments is to not have any other god before Him. The first part of the Greatest Commandment is to love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind. Everything else comes after vertical love—everything. Our love for others has its healthy basis in loving God and putting Him first.

That's not accidental. God knows the heart. If we jump back to our Jeremiah verse about the heart being wickedly deceptive, then we find in the very next verse:

"I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind." (Jeremiah 17:10)

He knows what our hearts naturally desire, and He knows what our hearts supernaturally desire – Him. Good news: Jesus came to break sin's curse over our hearts. When you accepted Jesus as your Savior and the Holy Spirit took up residence in you, your heart's desire was recalibrated. Now, in the spiritual realm, Jesus is the desire of your heart whether you feel it or not.

In your flesh, however, you're still living under the curse. Remember, we were set up by the fairytale scenario. The prince kisses the princess and breaks the curse. She wakes up to happily ever after with her husband, right? Nope. There's no such thing as happily ever after with marriage. No matter the beauty of a healthy marriage, it's still not enough to complete us. We need the Prince. We need salvation and then for the desire of our hearts to shift to Him alone. Everything after that falls in line just like the Greatest Commandment instructs. We love others out of the overflow of our love for God. We love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Okay, so what if that hasn't happened for you, loving God with your all? You wouldn't admit it to a soul, but what if your heart's desire is still for your man? There is nothing wrong with loving your husband. There's nothing wrong with wanting to be married if you're not. The point is: Without a husband, are you lost?

We come back to this concept: Is Jesus enough for you?

I genuinely love my husband. That's something I couldn't have said years ago. We struggled so many of our early years that I finally gave up on loving him or being loved by him. Now that our marriage has been miraculously restored, he's become my best friend. So, I must ask myself the same question: Without him would I be lost? In the physical sense, yes. We do everything together. I can't imagine going through life now without him. In a spiritual sense, though, I know I would be sustained by Jesus. I trust that. I've come to know such intimate healing over my worst wounds through my relationship with Him that I know He would be there to pick up the pieces if I were to be left a widow.

I've watched Him do that with my mom over the past few years. God has been there for her in every way she needs: Provider, Sustainer, Friend, Teacher, Father, and her Beloved. She has grown in spiritual ways that often surprise her. The loss of her husband wasn't her end as it felt at the time. It was the beginning of a new season with her Savior, one which allowed her space to let Him claim her heart in new ways. She has seen God's love in action in her life and is now more vividly living loved because of it.

Desire for our (or a) man is both good and bad, light and dark. It can define and destroy. Unbalanced human love is a curse that must be broken. When considering the Greatest Commandment, note how Jesus says to love others after He says to love God. We can't know healthy love for others until our heart's desire is Him.

I will give you a peek into a journal entry of mine from the other day:

"I think of my season of desperation and weeping before I knew You. I didn't hear it when You spoke my name, but my spirit did. Thank You for Your continual pursuit of me."

This wasn't referring to me before salvation. This was a reference to my fall and return. I didn't know Jesus as I do now. I didn't know His love and tenderness. I hadn't allowed grace to draw me deeper into Him.

All along, the simplicity of God as the desire of my heart had been lost on me.

Some who will read this are in the same situation. Even if they haven't taken rebellious steps away from God, they are still far away in heart. Intimate life with Jesus isn't a reality to them. Their desire is still trained on physical relationships, especially with men. The concept of Jesus being their ultimate desire is a foreign one and may seem like some lofty, unobtainable goal. It seemed like that to me in my early years. Is that you?

This is a question we would all do well to ask in every season. Is Jesus the ultimate desire of my heart? Sneaky little foxes, as we are warned against in Song of Songs 2:15, can come and rob us of our true desire. Every day it would be wise to begin with this question: Today, Lord, are you the desire of my heart? What a great way to recalibrate your mind to start your day.

Is it possible that Jesus is speaking your name without you hearing? Is your spirit longing for a call your natural heart ignores?

The following encounter is one of the most tender examples of the intimacy Jesus shared with a woman who adored Him.

Mary stood outside the tomb of Jesus weeping when she saw two angels where the body of Jesus had lain. When asked why she was weeping, she said,

"Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." (John 20:13)

The story goes on to say that she turned around and saw Jesus but didn't know it was Him. That was me. Maybe that's why I am so affected by this story. I spent many years with Jesus as my Savior but never saw who He really was to me. He asked her,

"Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" (John 20:15)

The next part of the story is the most touching and personal aspect. Once Mary tells Jesus she is looking for her Lord, He says one word for her to recognize Him for who He is. He calls her by name.

Mary knew Jesus and the sound of His voice speaking her name. He had once cast seven demons from her. His earlier activity in Mary's life had created the most profound love imaginable, one that kept her Lord as her first priority, even the morning after His death.

Beloved, you may not hear it with the clamor of the world distracting you, but He calls you by name so that you will see Him for who He is to you. He is the desire of your heart. No matter what you currently feel, prepare to embark on a journey to living your heart's true desire.

While gathering material for this section, I inadvertently turned to this verse when looking for the heart's desire passage. What a note to end with:

"May He grant you according to your heart's desire, and fulfill all your purpose." (Psalm 20:4)

If you will allow Him, He will be to you what you need. He will grant you the desire of your heart—Himself.

One thing that changed my relationship with Jesus was that I stopped praying to some far-away God and started praying to the next-to-me Jesus. In order to focus my mind and attention on the Son of God, even now I close my eyes and imagine sitting in my favorite place, the beach. I speak to Him as if He's sitting next to me there. That's what I mean by the next-to-me Jesus. I consider the verse where He says, "Abide in Me, and I in you." He's ever present: within and without, beside and before. He's our rear guard and vanguard. He is always the next-to-me Jesus.

Now it's your turn. Talk to the next-to-you Jesus as you work through the questions to follow. Trust this process. Remember, it's during the exploration of what living loved should look like that you will find Him exploring right alongside you. How can you not feel loved by the next-to-you Jesus? Remember, this journey with God is a life-long pursuit. Never stop seeking the deeper places with Him. Keep dancing, Beloved.

CHAPTER TAKEAWAY

Key Point

The more you grasp the greatness of God's love, the more it becomes clear that He is your greatest need and desire.

- 1) According to Jeremiah 17:9, why is it necessary to conduct a thorough heart check at times? In your past, what is an example that proves your heart cannot be trusted?

- 2) What or who comes first in your life? This could even be yourself.

While human hearts are accustomed to knowing human love, God created you to be completed only by His love. The supernatural process of getting to know Jesus and His love for you happens over time.

- 3) Why is it so difficult to believe that spiritual love can meet your heart's every need?

- 4) Since you can't see God or touch Him, have you questioned whether spiritual love can meet your heart's desire for love?

Key Point:

Jesus came to break sin's curse over our hearts.

- 5) Have you come to conclude that your heart may still be operating under the curse? Is your deepest desire still for human love, no matter its form: husband, children, parents, friends, etc.?

- 6) "Your desire shall be for your husband" (Genesis 3:16). As women under the curse, most place the desire for romantic love over their love for God. Has this ever described you? Is that a battle you still fight?

- 7) Eve fell and took us all down with her because she believed she was missing out on something. Are there lies the serpent whispers to you suggesting that you are missing out?

Key Point

No matter the beauty of a healthy marriage (or relationship), it's still not enough to complete us.

- 8) How have fairy tales and rom-coms misshapen tender hearts, compelling young girls to seek romantic love? How does this follow women into relationships?

- 9) Did you grow up anticipating a happily-ever-after life? What did you imagine your life would look like?

- 10) Do you feel that without a certain person in your life, whether a spouse or close family member, you would be lost, or are you so confident in Jesus's love for you that you know He would carry you through? Share your heart check below.

Key Point

The clamor of the world, and even good things, will always compete with Jesus to be your heart's desire.

- 11) Like Jesus did with Mary in John 20, He has been and is now calling you by name. Can you recall a time or season when you knew Jesus was calling you by name?

- 12) The enemy knows your weaknesses. How can you guard your heart against his whispers that try to draw you away from your first love, Jesus?

- 13) How can knowing that He is the next-to-you Jesus, that He is real and ever present in you, protect you from those things that compete for your heart?

"Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." Psalm 37:4