

A desire is the feeling that accompanies an unsatisfied state. It is a want to have something or a wish for something to happen. Desires move us to action. If we have an unsatisfied desire, we have an internal motivation to satisfy it. We all have desires. Hunger is a desire for food which moves us to make breakfast or get lunch. Thirst is a desire for water which causes us to get a drink. We desire purpose, companionship, friendship and fulfillment.

But problems arise when we choose to satisfy our desires in harmful ways. We may satisfy our hunger desire with too much food or food that's not good for us. We may satisfy our fulfillment desire by bullying our way to the top or the front so we get what we want. We have a desire for joy or happiness. But if we can't find that in everyday life, we may try to satisfy it through artificial means that eventually leads to some sort of addiction. We need to know and understand our desires so we can learn to satisfy them in God honoring ways.

That's what we'll talk about today as we continue in our new series on our understanding our hearts from the book of Proverbs.

We learned last week that Proverbs are kind of foreign to us. We are used to reading stories, textbooks and if necessary laws. But we don't find a lot of Proverbs in every day life. Perhaps the closest thing today is a meme which is a social media comment on something about life. A Proverb is a short concise statement that makes observations about life and reality. So we need to take a Proverb and think about it to gain its wisdom. Remember they are like hard candy with a sweet part in the middle. If you just bite down on the candy you might get a brief taste of the sweetness as it all breaks apart in your mouth. But if you spend the time sucking on the candy until you get to the center sweet part, then your whole mouth will be bathed with flavor. We can experience this with the Proverbs if we take one or maybe two and turn them over in our minds for a whole day.

Today we're looking at some Proverbs to gain insight about our desires. I want you to see some basic truths about our desires that we can gather from the Scriptures. Then we will look at some desires that may have gotten out of control in our lives – the desire for approval, comfort, power and control. We will see how they can be replaced with a much healthier desire by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We don't have a Scripture passage of multiple verses to read today. But we will look at some individual proverbs.

The first will be found in Proverbs 13. So please find Proverbs in your Bibles or on your devices and you'll be ready to follow along when it's time. Proverbs starts on Page 460 in the pew Bibles.

The question we're asking for the first few messages of this series is what must we know so we can cooperate with God's transforming work in us? Last week, we learned of our need to understand our hearts from God's perspective. We learned our hearts can deceive us but not God. We learned that no one has a pure heart. So we need God's grace to receive new hearts. Then we need to guard our hearts for out of them flows all of our lives.

What must we know about our desires to cooperate with God's transforming work in us? Since our desires do not naturally seek God, they need reshaping to desire Him.

How do we know this? First, we need to understand that many basic **Desires are given by God**. The first Proverb we'll look at is found in chapter 13, verses 12 and 19.

Proverbs 13:12, 19 – “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.” “A desire fulfilled is sweet to the soul, but to turn away from evil is an abomination to fools.” Notice in both cases, the desires are seen positively. Both verses affirm the goodness of desires. God created us with them. They motivate us to do what's needed to survive and live out God's purpose on the earth. They also help us enjoy the good things of life God has given us. We need to start here because sometimes the church has acted as if Christianity is all about denying your natural desires. Don't do this and don't do that. And when you look at the last 5 of the 10 commandments, you do find a lot of “You shall not.” You shall not murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness against your neighbor or covet your neighbor's stuff. Some might carelessly conclude that God commands His people to squelch their desires. But the commandments do not instruct us to stamp out our desires. They provide boundaries or guide rails to protect us from fulfilling them in harmful ways. We see plenty of satisfaction, fulfillment and joy for God's people when they satisfy their desires within His boundaries.

But we, who are naturally rebellious because of our sin nature, don't like it when others set boundaries for us. If you don't believe me, think about what rises up in your heart when you you're driving and see a speed limit sign that you think is set way too low. So because of our sin nature, our natural desires put there by God get tainted. **Normal God-given desires can be corrupted or twisted. Proverbs 19:2 alludes to this. “Desire without knowledge is not good and**

whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way. “Zeal” or “desire” (NRSV)⁴ needs the guidance of “knowledge” or it will walk in a way that is “not good.”¹ If we follow our desires without the boundaries of wisdom, they can lead to trouble. This is part of the human condition. The New Testament makes this point consistently. Romans 13:14. “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh or sinful nature, to gratify its desires.” 1 Corinthians 10:6 – “Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.” Galatians 5:16 – “Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” Ephesians 4:22 – “Put off your old self which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires.” Colossians 3:5 – “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness which is idolatry.” So the Bible alerts us to the reality of the desires of our sinful nature, evil desires and deceitful desires.

So our desires need to be reordered or redirected with a knowledge of God’s truth. Proverbs 23:17-18 – Do not let your heart envy sinners but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day. Surely there is a future and your hope will not be cut off.” So notice in verse 17 that is it possible for our hearts or desire to envy sinners. We can spend time looking at what people who don’t fear God have or are able to do. We can envy them because they are apparently free to do whatever they want. But this proverb says don’t just follow that desire. Look at that which will provide future hope. What will last for eternity so that you will not be cut off? The only One is God. This is an example of redirecting or reordering a desire after considering God’s truth. Galatians 5:16-17 state – “Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh for these are opposed to each other to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

So now let’s look at some ways to consider our desires and how to reorder them to God. **Evaluate whether your friends encourage evil desires or God-honoring desires.** Proverbs 24:1-2 – “Be not envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them, ²for their hearts devise violence, and their lips talk of trouble.” This Proverb instructs us to consider carefully who we desire to be like or associate with. Keller writes “Sociologists know that we tend to find most reasonable the ideas of people with whom we spend the most time and to whom our admiration is most directed. If we “sit in the company of mockers” (Ps. 1:1), or of the cruel and violent (Prov. 24:2), we will become like them. It is easy to envy mockers and cruel people because they are often successful through their ruthlessness.”

¹ Koptak, P. E. (2003). [*Proverbs*](#) (p. 467). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Then he makes an insightful point about the current trend to create our own identity and be true to yourself.

“Today, we believe that we can create our own identity through our own free choices. We may think we are being “true to ourselves” when we shed or throw off the constraints of traditional values and morality, but in reality we are simply allowing a new community to tell us who we are.” Do you understand what he’s saying? People today think by throwing off traditional values and moralities, they are truly free of allowing these values and that community to define them. . But they are simply allowing another community to tell them who they are. This is the anti-traditional community. No one actually comes up with their own identity free from external influence. Another commentator on Proverbs writes “The question of individual identity is always also a question of community, from family and church, school and business, all the way up to the nation and state. All these communities have influence on how we define ourselves whether we recognize it or not. Communities create the paths we walk.” (Van Leuween – Book of Proverbs).

We can think that we’re setting out our own free identity. But in reality we let the community we most admire or want to be accepted by shape our identity. This can be social media, news media and the endless stream of advertisements that come to us every day. This is especially true of our friends circle or social media group. What they do, think and like can shape us. If they don’t follow God, we can envy sinners. They can influence us greatly towards evil desires or a God fearing friend group can help us reorder our desires to be God honoring.

So we need to ask ourselves, “Who do you hang out with? Why do you hang out with the people you do? Have our choices been influenced by a desire to be like the people we spend time with the most? Are they influencing you to act on evil desires or God honoring desires? To combat this enslavement, we need to cultivate that desire for God. When our desire for God becomes stronger than our desire for acceptance or affirmation by a friend group, then we can truly be ourselves as God made us to be.

Now let’s look at some specific desires that can actually become God substitutes. One is related to our friends - the desire for approval. We get this cultivated in us from a young age. We receive rewards for good behavior. We get medals or ribbons or praise for doing well at school or in sports. There is value in doing well or trying our best or living respectfully. But when we let this desire go too far we can become an **Approval addict**. This person’s greatest nightmare is rejection. They find themselves plagued by an unhealthy anxiety that rises up whenever there’s a possibility that

someone disapproves of them. **Proverbs 29:25 - Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trust in the Lord is kept safe.** An out of control approval desire fears people. So they live and act for the approval of others.

A person with an over-emphasized approval desire might also be known as a people-pleaser. When you please people, they get pleased. They like what you do and you receive praise and benefits. But sooner or later the people pleaser realizes it's an exhausting way to live. People can be so fickle. Some people require a lot to be pleased. Some people expect us to sin to ensure they are pleased. "The fear of man is a snare." Keller writes "If we look to human beings more than to God for our worth and value, we will be trapped by anxiety, by an over need to please, by the inability to withdraw from exploitative relationships, by the inability to take criticism, and by a cowardice that makes us unable to confront others. Our feelings will be easily hurt and we will tend to overcommit out of desire for acceptance."

I have experience with this one. I once had a person who asked me to meet with them regularly as a pastor. Regular meant once a week. I was willing to commit to once a week for an hour. But this was not enough. They wanted 2 or 3 hours/week. They didn't ask – they just kept talking. But the conversations became more one way from them to me – they would last 2 and sometimes 3 hours. Every week. Finally, I had to say enough. This person did not respect my time. They did not take into consideration that I had other people in the church to minister to and I had to fulfill my responsibilities to the overall church. So I began to set a time limit on our meetings.

They did not like that. I noticed a more frequent criticism of me by them in public settings. There was a more open hostility towards me. But God had grown me away from seeing the approval of others as my ultimate god. He released me from the guilt and enabled me to bear with the insults because I am learning that ultimately it is God's approval that matters most. He would be sufficient for this person if only they would turn more fully to God than to sucking the life out of others like me.

So we must replace the desire for human approval with desire for God approval. Yes, God lays out for us His standards which are impossible for us to achieve in our own strength. But He supplied His Son to die for us. Through Him we receive the Holy Spirit who empowers and transforms us to become more and more like Jesus. God never demands anything from us that requires our sinning. God doesn't say "do whatever you want to do or be whoever you want to be" because that can be destructive for us." But He does say "follow Jesus; His pattern for living; His teaching and you will discover the God who dies for our sins and sings over His children." So if you are struggling with approval addiction, you

can begin the journey to freedom from it by discovering God through His Word and prayer. If you have a problem believing that God actually accepts you and affirms you, spend some time meditating on Zephaniah 3:17 – The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice or sing over you with gladness, he will quiet you by his love.” Is anyone’s approval more important to you than God’s? If so, we need to reorder that desire towards Him.

Then we come to the **Comfort Addict**. If the approval addict’s greatest nightmare is rejection, the comfort addict’s greatest nightmare is suffering. The approval addict is haunted by anxiety. The comfort addict is haunted by the nagging sin of boredom. **Proverbs 20:13 states “Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty, open your eyes and you will have plenty of bread. Proverbs 21:17 states “Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man. He who loves wine and oil will never be rich.”** Keller again “The pleasure described here is the joy that comes from the satisfaction of physical wants. Wine heightens spirits while oils were used in cosmetics and indicate beauty and sensual comfort. The bible isn’t against pleasure per se. Wine gladdens the heart of man and oil makes the face shine. (Psalm 104:15). And the over love of comfort is no more wrong than the over love of discomfort. Sleeping when you should work (20:13) and working when you should be resting (Psalm 127:2) are both wrong.

Yet, if we become lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Timothy 3:4) it leads to disaster – not only economic but also emotional and spiritual. At one level, addiction to comfort can make people detached, avoiding entanglements with people in order to protect their own time and convenience.” We can act this out when we deliberately avoid someone obviously in need so we don’t mess up our leisure plans. We walk by someone who is distraught in the church foyer because we’ve got a game to watch when we get home or a lunch to enjoy. The comfort addict is easily bored because they think that true fulfillment comes only with thrills, sensations and leisure. But Jesus left the unimaginable comforts of heaven for a life of hardship on earth for us. Someday we will live in that same unimaginably glorious world. But we must not avoid Jesus’ footsteps that sometimes include suffering on our life path today.

Then there’s the **Power Addict**. This person’s greatest nightmare includes losing or weakness. They are haunted by the nagging sin of anger. Yet **Proverbs 11:16 states “ A gracious woman gets honor and violent men get riches.** The word gain or gets means to seize or take hold of through sheer power. That is how ruthless people live. By contrast, the kind-hearted woman is “someone who is characterized by grace . . . someone who acts for the benefit of others, not expecting a return.” She gives up power to serve others while the ruthless serve only their love of power. Keller writes

“the over love of power can show itself in people who are opinionated, poor listeners, argumentative, highly partisan, unteachable and afraid to admit when they have been in the wrong.”

He also writes “power is seductive. If honest, we need to confess that there are many situations and relationships we enjoy mainly because of the power we exercise in them. We need help to kill the sinful parts of our hearts that rejoice in having power over others.” So instead of feeding the desire for power over others, we need to practice what Christ taught. If you want to be great, serve others. Jesus said in Luke 22:27 – “Who is greater, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves . . . I am among you as one who serves.”

Lastly, we come to the **Control Addict**. This person’s greatest nightmare is uncertainty. They are haunted by the nagging sin of worry. **Proverbs 27:1 states – “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.”** Keller writes, “Though the sluggard refuses to plan, the control addict thinks they can control the future – and their whole life – through planning and management. Those who believe they can eliminate uncertainty boast about tomorrow, thinking they have planned for every contingency. People with an over need for control have trouble sharing power, can’t delegate, and tend to manipulate people, using guilt and pressure to get people to do what they want.”

But we don’t know what is to come. The future is wholly in the hands of God. Confidence regarding the future is possible for the wise person, but it is not founded on our own abilities. Such confidence must be “realistic, modest, and grounded in the fear of the Lord.” This overconfidence in one’s ability to control life is always haunted by the nagging sin of worry, just as the desire for power is dogged by anger, the fear of man by cowardice and the lover of pleasure boredom. So instead of feeding the desire for control by trying to plan and engineer everything, we must trust in the Lord. Proverbs 3:5-6 – Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths.”

So we have desires, many of them placed there by God. But they get tainted and stained by our sin and sinful nature. So we need our desires reordered and redirected. We cooperate with the Holy Spirit’s transforming work in us when we recognize this reality. We need to ask the Lord to change our desires. We need to soak in God’s Word so we can see His will and where our desires may have gotten off track. Then we will see sometimes quickly but more often slowly and surely that change and growth towards wisdom and maturity.

Maybe today, it has been revealed that you live under the control of an evil or disordered desire. You may even be aware of it but have had no clue or ability to resist it. Maybe you even feel trapped or enslaved by these desires.

If you are not a Christian, the first step to rescue from this evil desire is to turn to Christ. You must turn from the God-substitute of your desire and turn to God. You must put the trust of your life onto Christ. When you receive Him as Lord you receive not only eternal salvation but God – a refuge and a very present help in trouble. If that is you, you can receive Christ in the next few moments when we pray.

If you are a Christian, has God revealed a disordered desire in your life today? If so, acknowledge it before the Lord. Then ask for the Holy Spirit to help and enable you to overcome it. Cultivate a deeper desire for God. The greatest strategy against evil desires is to find our satisfaction in God. When we are satisfied in God Himself, other evil desires lose their attraction.