

Decision Making and the Will of God

Lesson 5: Do I Actually Want to Do It? Sanctified Desire -- Psalm 37:3-7 (with 2 Thessalonians 1:11)

By now you may have noticed something about the order of the questions in this study. We did not begin with "What do I feel like doing?" We began with Scripture, then motives, then the impact of our choices on others and on the glory of God. And there is a reason the question of desire comes here and not first. If we start with what we want, our wants will simply bend every other question to serve them. But if we have already submitted a decision to the Word, searched our motives, and weighed its impact, then a new and surprisingly spiritual question becomes safe to ask: Do I actually want to do this?

Some sincere believers have come to distrust their desires altogether, as though wanting something were proof that it must be wrong, and the truly holy path were always the one we least prefer. But that is not what Scripture teaches. The God who made us with hearts and longings does not despise our desires; He aims to redeem them. "Delight yourself in the LORD," sings the psalmist, "and he will give you the desires of your heart." That is not a promise that God will hand us whatever we crave. It is something better. When we delight in Him, He begins to reshape what we want, until our desires themselves become part of how He leads us.

Think of how this works in a healthy life with God. A believer who has walked closely with the Lord for years, who has soaked in His Word and learned to love what He loves, develops holy instincts and sanctified longings. Such a person can often say, after testing a decision by Scripture and motive and impact, "You know, I genuinely want to do this, and I believe it is good," and that desire is not to be despised. It is one of the ways a maturing heart, shaped by God, is led. Nehemiah felt a God-given burden to rebuild a ruined city. Paul longed to preach where Christ was not yet named. Their sanctified desires helped move them in the will of God.

So this lesson invites you to take your desires seriously, but in their proper place, late in the process and under the lordship of Christ, not first and on the throne. We will learn to delight in the Lord before we consult our hearts, to commit our way to Him, and to be still and trust Him to act. Paul prayed that God would "fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power." That is the kind of desire we are after: not the raw appetite of an unexamined heart, but the deep, settled longing of a heart that has learned to want what God wants. When your desires have been sanctified, they become not a danger to your decisions but a gift in them.

Group Discussion: Why do you think we have placed the question of desire here, near the end, rather than at the beginning of decision making? As a group, talk about the difference between "following your heart" and having a heart that has been shaped by God. When can a genuine desire rightly help guide a believer's choice, and when is it dangerous to trust it?

Personal Reflection: Think about your desires honestly. Are they mostly raw appetites you have never examined, or are they increasingly shaped by your delight in the Lord? Take one strong desire you carry right now and ask: have I delighted in God enough for Him to shape this longing? What would it look like to bring that desire under His lordship this week?

Read Psalm 37:3–7 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11

Study Questions

1. The psalm opens, “Trust in the LORD, and do good... Delight yourself in the LORD” (vv. 3–4). Why does the psalmist place trusting God and delighting in God before anything is said about the desires of our heart? How does delighting in the Lord change a person’s desires over time?
2. Be honest about where your heart actually finds its delight. Is it mostly in the Lord Himself, or in getting your own way, in comfort, in success, in being approved? How might your decisions be different if your deepest delight were truly in God?
3. The psalm promises, “he will give you the desires of your heart” (v. 4). What does this promise actually mean, and what does it not mean? How is it different from believing that God will simply grant whatever we happen to want?
4. Have you ever assumed that because you wanted something strongly, it must be God’s will for you? Where might you be doing that right now? How could you tell whether that desire has been sanctified or is simply an unexamined appetite?
5. The psalmist says, “Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act” (v. 5). What does it mean to commit your way to the Lord in a decision? How does trusting God to act free us from the pressure of forcing our own desires to come true?
6. What is one decision or desire you need to genuinely commit and release to the Lord, trusting Him to act rather than seizing it by your own effort? What makes that hard to let go of?
7. The psalm counsels, “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him” (v. 7). How does stillness and patient waiting guard us from letting our desires stampede us into hasty decisions? Why is desire safest in a heart that has first learned to be still before God?
8. Where does impatience push you to force a desire rather than wait on the Lord? What would patient stillness look like in that specific area of your life right now?
9. Scripture teaches both that God reshapes the desires of those who delight in Him (Ps. 37:4) and that He works in us to fulfill “every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power” (2 Thess. 1:11; see Phil. 2:13). In light of this, what is the proper place of our desires in making a decision? How do we honor genuine, God-shaped desire while refusing to make “What do I feel like doing?” our first and ruling question?
10. Look back across Psalm 37:3–7 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11. The psalmist teaches us to delight, commit, trust, and be still, and promises a God who shapes and fulfills our desires for good. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth here that you most need to carry into your next decision?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Philippians 2:12-13, God working in us both to will and to work for His good pleasure; Psalm 1:1-2, the blessed one whose delight is in the law of the Lord; Romans 12:2, the renewed mind that discerns and delights in the will of God; Nehemiah 2:4-5, a God-given desire to rebuild moving a man to act; Proverbs 21:1, the king's heart as a stream the Lord turns wherever He will

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