

THE DESIRES OF THINE HEART¹

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September 20, 2014

George Müller of Bristol started an orphan home and never asked anyone but God to help financially. When there was no food and no money, he took it to God in prayer, and help always came.

When he was crossing the Atlantic by steamship to meet a special appointment in Quebec, the ship was delayed by fog. For hours the captain kept the ship at half speed for fear of icebergs and other ships.

Finally Mr. Müller went to the captain. "Captain," he said, "I have an appointment in Quebec Saturday morning, and I must be there."

"I am sorry," said the captain, "but I cannot get you there unless the fog lifts, and I do not see any chance of its lifting."

"In that case we'll have to ask God to lift the fog. I am sure He wants me to meet that appointment."

The captain was a Christian, but he had never seen God work a miracle. Nevertheless he accompanied Müller into the chart room, where they knelt. Müller offered a simple prayer of faith, asking God to lift the fog. It seemed such a childish prayer to the captain, who never dreamed it could make any difference. He was about to demonstrate what he thought would be a better one when Mr. Müller stopped him. There's no need for you to pray, Captain," he said; "the fog is already lifted. What we need now is full speed ahead." The captain was

incredulous and opened the door to see. The fog was gone, and Müller made his appointment.

Is there anyone anywhere whose prayers have never been answered, his/her dreams never fulfilled? After 120 years of hard work, Noah saw his family saved; Abraham's hopes realized after 25 years and also Sarah's yearning to become pregnant; Joseph's dreams were finally proven true; even Job's captivity was turned; David saw his ambitions fulfilled.

There's a promise in Psalm 37 that troubles many people: "Delight thy self also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (vs. 4). Years go by, and they seem never to realize the "desires of [their] heart." They never get what they wanted. Some want a happy marriage, and never get it; others want health, and they stay sick; others want the conversion of a spouse or children, and it never seems to happen. There's no end to the desires of people's hearts that are yet unfulfilled.

If you're not in this group, maybe you belong in heaven, not on this sinful planet. In trying to understand the problem, we want to read the conditions to this promise. Are they in fine print so you hardly notice them? No, let's see: (1) vs. 1, 2—the promise is not to "evildoers" or "workers of iniquity." Well, you're not in that group! (2) You are to "trust in the Lord." In other words, believe the Lord loves you, believe you have the blessing that you need even before you realize it. The heavenly Father cares about those "desires of thine heart" that are buried deep therein. He put them there. And He never instills such "desires" into "thine

¹ Ps. 37:3-7. 340; 516.

heart” without planning to “give” them to you as soon as you are ready to realize them without becoming proud (Ps. 37:4). The first step is for you to know Who put them there, and that He is the One who “satisfies” them (Ps. 145:16).

Learn to realize that a check signed by the Lord is as good as gold in your hands. Maybe that’s your problem! (3) “Delight thy self in the Lord . . .” Ah, there may well be the problem! “The desire of thine heart” is a new car like royalty rides in, but Jesus doesn’t ride around in a new car. If He rides at all, a Honda Civic might be much more appropriate for Him. Now, if you “delight yourself in Him,” you’ll really be happy with what makes Him happy. And lo and behold, you discover that you’re much happier in your Honda than you could possibly have been in a Rolls Royce. Yes, He has actually given you “the desires of thine heart,” the problem being you didn’t know what you really wanted, because you didn’t know your own heart. Well, there’s also (4), “Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him” (vs. 7).

King David cherished such “desires” from his boyhood. While he tended his sheep he dreamed of castles in the air, fantasies if you please. He hardly dared voice them in actual prayer—his supreme secret dream that he could someday fight the battles of the Lord (be king of Israel?). He couldn’t dare to mention them to his family, for his older brothers had an inkling and despised him just as Joseph’s ten brothers despised him for his “dreams” (see 1 Sam. 17:28; Gen. 37:8). David, unashamed to bare his soul in his psalms, wrote about those secret “desires of [his] heart.”

Have you dared to voice those “desires of thine heart” in actual prayer to your heavenly Father? Or are you ashamed to admit that you have them? Or do you think they are too trivial to bring to His attention? The Savior is sympathetic; you can voice “desires” to Him that you can’t admit to anyone else. He says, “Ask, and it shall be given you” (Matt. 7:7). That’s why He insists that true prayer must be a secret thing between you and your heavenly Father (Matt. 6:6). Such a secret with God can begin in your childhood; tell Him those hidden “desires,” without shame. He won’t despise you if you voice them in actual words of prayer!

David, your prototype, had to wait and wait and wait “patiently” for the Lord to give him those “desires” (Ps. 40:1)—years and decades, in fact. He offered his “secret” prayers, and finally the “Father which seeth in secret [rewarded] him openly.” Finish reading that psalm! It will link you to the secret heart of Jesus Himself.

We have the account of the first public appearance of David. The prophet Samuel had been directed by the Lord to go and anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king in the place of Saul, whom He had rejected. Seven sons of Jesse passed before the prophet, but the Lord’s choice was not among them. “And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep.” At Samuel’s order, he was sent for, and as soon as he appeared, the Lord said, “Arise, anoint him; for this is he” (1 Sam. 16:11, 12).

Immediately “the Spirit of the Lord came upon David.” What did David do then? Did he assume a lordly air, and demand to be treated as a king? Did he at once place himself before the public, proclaiming the fact that the Lord had chosen him king, and attempt to seize the authority, or demand at least to be consulted in regard to public affairs?—Nothing of the kind; he made no claim whatever in his own behalf, simply because the Spirit of the Lord was upon him. If he had put himself forward, he would have shown himself unfit to lead the Lord’s people.

Some time afterwards a musician was needed to play before Saul. Then some one recommended the son of Jesse, and Saul sent messengers, saying, “Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep” (1 Sam. 16:19). So we see that David had returned to his sheep, after he was anointed king, as though nothing had happened. An anointed king keeping sheep! How natural it would have been to persuade himself that he was wasting his talents, and that it was his duty to be leading men instead of sheep. But he did nothing of the kind, because he was a man according to God’s heart, and the Lord is “meek and lowly in heart.” “It was when he was walking in the counsel of God that he was called a man after God’s own heart” (CC 180). Here we have a sample of the kind of men whom God uses in His work.

“And David came to Saul, and stood before him; and he loved him greatly; and he became his armor-bearer” (1 Sam. 16:21). At last David is at court. It looks as though there was now more

prospect that he might fill the position for which he had been anointed, than when he was tending sheep. But still he is only an armor-bearer, a servant. Now we shall expect to see him begin to work himself forward and push his claims to the allegiance of the people. Ah, that’s because we don’t know the Lord. David was a man according to God’s own heart, and God’s heart is love, and love “vaunteth not itself,” and “seeketh not her own” (1 Cor. 13:4, 5).

Instead of seizing upon the throne, which was his by Divine right, “David went and returned from Saul to feed his father’s sheep at Bethlehem” (1 Sam. 17:15). The special object for which he was called to Saul seems to have been accomplished, and the anointed king returned contentedly to his father’s sheep in the wilderness.

But he did not stay there. There was war, and three of his brothers were in Saul’s army. The brothers, who had been passed by in the choice of a king, were in the army, where there was some chance of distinguishing themselves and becoming known while David, the one chosen and anointed, was an unknown shepherd boy. At last he also was sent to the army, but only as a messenger to carry provisions, and to come again. See 1 Sam. 17:17, 18.

Suppose that David had proudly refused to do such menial service. Why should he, the anointed king, act as an errand boy? Thousands of people do far less ability than he, and having no such evidence as he had that the Lord has called them to the work, have refused to do humble work that they

thought was beneath them, and have complained bitterly that they were not elevated to the position to which they felt sure that God had called them. But then they were not chosen ones, according to God's heart. If David had refused to perform that humble task, he would have missed the opportunity of doing a thing which brought his name before all Israel, and fastened the eyes of the nation upon him. We often miss a high place, because we think ourselves already too high to occupy a low place.

Goliath was slain, and David was in high favor. "And Saul took him that day, and would let him no more go home to his father's house." "And Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants" (1 Sam. 18:2, 5). Here at last was a position more in keeping with his real calling; nevertheless he was only a servant.

But "favor is deceitful," and Saul's regard for David soon cooled. The people's regard for David aroused Saul's jealousy, and so "Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand" (1 Sam. 18:13). Although called upon to step down to a lower position than he had occupied, there was no complaint; but "David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him" (1 Sam. 18:14). That was why David behaved so wisely; for Christ, when He was in the form of God, "counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:6, 7, R. V). By his willingness to serve, David was demonstrating his fitness to reign.

Finally, David was compelled to flee for his life from the presence of Saul. But why did he submit to such injustice? Why did he not stand his ground, and claim his rights? The throne was his by right, and the people respected and loved him. Why did he not assert his right to the throne, rally the people around him, and take possession of the place to which God had anointed him? The reason why is that "God was with him," and he was a man after God's heart. Christ was the manifestation of God to men, and He, "when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

Twice Saul was completely within his power, yet no advantage did he take of it. It was not because David restrained himself, that he did not kill Saul, but because he had no desire to do so. At one time he had cut off the skirt of Saul's robe, his heart smote him even for that. The Lord hath anointed David to be king, and David was determined to leave it wholly with the Lord to bring him to the throne.

It is easy for folks to say that their case is in the Lord's hands, and at the same time to persuade themselves that God has left all the details to them. The pagan idea that "God helps those who help themselves," has a large place in the thinking of many Christians. So the friends of David tried to persuade him. When Saul was in the cave where David was, they said, "Behold, the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him

as it shall seem good unto thee” (1 Sam. 24:4). But David was not to be persuaded to take the Lord’s work out of His hands. God had said that David should be king, and it was the Lord’s business to perform His own promise.

David’s manner of conducting himself was a revelation of God’s character to the people of his time and ours.

Why is God alone among “many gods” the holy One? Why does He demand exclusive worship? Is He divinely selfish? Why not share His worship with “lesser gods”?

But look at Philippians 2:5-8 at an x-ray of *agape*, the character of God. There are seven steps that the Son of God (who alone can reveal the Father) took in stepping down, lower and lower: (1) gave up His “equality with God,” (2) “emptied Himself,” (3) “took upon Himself the form of a slave,” (4) “was made in the likeness of [fallen] man,” (5) “humbled Himself,” (6) “became obedient unto death” (the only being in the wide universe of God who has ever become “obedient unto death”; no suicide is “obedient unto death,” for death is Reality, and suicides flee Reality), and lastly (7), “even the death of the cross.”

That’s the death that involves “the curse of God,” the awful condemnation of final conscious ruin, a death infinitely worse than the physical pain involved (which itself was terrible!). See Gal. 3:13 to learn what is “the death of the cross.” It was the concentrated death of humanity, for He “tasted death for every man” (Heb. 2:9), the total, final, giving of Himself, the “pouring out of His soul unto

death” until there wasn’t a drop left, “numbered with the transgressors, bore the sin of” everybody (Isa. 53:12).

If a picture is worth a thousand words, there we have it: this is *agape*, and “God is *agape*” (1 Jn. 4:8). No other being in the wide universe of the heavenly or earthly cosmos has ever made such a Sacrifice! Any “other god” is therefore an anti-*agape* “god.” That means, to worship any “lesser god” is to worship Satan himself.

No, God, our heavenly Father, our Saviour and Redeemer, is not divinely selfish-refusing to share His throne with “lesser gods.” He knows that to worship any “other god” means death to us; and He loves us too much to allow that. The final crisis of earth’s history will be a challenge to “worship the Lamb” alone, or to worship Baal. All worship of self which is disguised as the worship of “christ” is Baal-worship. Time to think!

It is self that has caused all of the mischief and all of the evil and all of the distress in the universe; and it leads in the shown-down of the world’s iniquity. 2 Tim. 4:2. The great contest of the universe and of the ages is of self against God. Micah 6:8.

The great question with all the intelligence in the universe and through all the ages is, *God or self*—which shall reign? Which shall be the way of the universe?

This way of self is sin. The way of God is Righteousness. Every person readily will say that the way of Righteousness is the preferable way. But when to take that way it is found that self must

surrender and be put down and out, and even to be crucified and die.

He *is* the Way of Righteousness against the way of sin: the Way of God against the way of self. Let this mind be *in you*, which was also in Christ Jesus who emptied Himself. “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”

We have churches filled with people who are there to get God to solve their problems and make them happy. Do they want their problems solved so that they can more effectively glorify and serve God? No, they want their problems solved so that they can enjoy a happy life. Unlike David, they have no burden for God and His purpose. Instead of being focused on God, they’re focused on trying to get God to meet their own needs for their own gratification. They’re focused on self.

Is there hope for someone who, like a fly in a spider's web, is caught and enmeshed in a tangle of evil desires and habits? If the answer is No, then if there is no hope for the “one” there can be no hope for the “many.” Several solid truths can be nailed down securely:

“Whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered” (Joel 2:32).

Obviously there must be some understanding of who the LORD is: “Let him . . . understand and know Me, that I am the LORD who exercises loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight” (Jer. 9:24). In other words, you must believe that God thinks kind,

loving thoughts toward you, that He wants to have the “fun” of saving you.

“He who comes to God must believe [a] that He is, and [b] that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).

The simplest common sense indicates that any “call” upon Him must be serious and sincere: “The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who reverence Him: He also will hear their cry and will save them” (Ps. 145:18, 19).

It becomes obvious by now that this is serious business. Your eternal destiny depends on getting freed from this trap. You don’t have to “seek” the Lord because He is trying to hide from you, but you must “seek Him” in the sense of seriously listening to Him, paying attention to Him. That is the meaning of this promise: “Then shall ye call upon Me and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the LORD” (Jer. 29:12, 13). In other words, God is a Grown-up; He is not playing childish games. If you mean business, you will find that He means business. Eternal life is at stake here!

There is objective truth you **MUST** understand: “The gospel of Christ . . . is the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn. 8:32). That doesn’t mean mere psychology; but it’s very simple—if the truth will make you “free,” it follows that you must understand it.

Christ wants you to be a part of His “body,” His church, for you need the fellowship of others sinners like yourself who are being “saved by grace”: “In mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said” (Joel 2:32).

Yes! It’s all true.

Jesus didn’t say, “If anyone wants to follow Me, I’ll meet his every need so that he can live a happy, comfortable life.” He said, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” If you want to be a person after God’s own heart, get your focus off yourself and your happiness and put your focus on His cross.

It is the way of the Cross: the way of crucifixion. But O joy! *He* is ever the Way; and when our old man is crucified with Him, it is “that the body of sin may be destroyed, that henceforth we shall not serve sin.” Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who emptied Himself that God might be manifest in the flesh. “This mind” in you will also empty yourself, and God will be manifest in the flesh again: God instead of self, *in you*.

“Delight thyself also in the LORD; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” You have to decide what is your evaluation of the character of your heavenly Father.

The way we humans naturally think, the text is written backwards. It should say, “Let the Lord give thee the desires of thine heart, and *then* I shall delight myself in Him!” But the “delighting” comes first, otherwise there could be no such thing as

faith. No matter how long you have waited for “the desires of thine heart,” you can choose to believe that your heavenly Father is true to His word even if you don’t see any prayers answered. This is an extremely critical point in our life: it’s where we choose to believe or disbelieve. God “callesth those things which be not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17), and we are privileged to share His faith—to believe in something we cannot yet see.

Your heavenly Father is not being mean to you; He needs you to honor Him before the world and before the universe as one who believes Him in the dark. That was the experience your Savior had on His cross: He *felt* that God had forsaken Him, yet He chose to believe in the face of total despair. That was the definition of His faith. And we have the Good News that He will have a people on earth who also have chosen to believe Him even in total darkness, when everything seems to be against them. They have asked their Father for a piece of bread; Satan wants them to think He put a stone on their plate. You have the choice to be loyal to your heavenly Father. And then leave that “desire of thine heart” in His care and thank Him in advance that at the right time you will enjoy it.

If the granting of those “desires” is delayed, could it be that the “desires” themselves need to be purified? If the “desire of my heart” is for a luxury sports car, if the Lord truly loves me, He will not grant that “desire”—at least not now in this poverty-stricken world. Spending that much for personal gratification and pride would not be consistent with living by faith in this cosmic Day of Atonement.

“The desires of thine heart” are not really to possess any human being. If we place any person as an idol before the Lord Jesus, that “desire” cannot bring happiness in the end. As an example, for a Christian to marry an unbeliever (“an enemy of God”) is something the Lord would save us from! If you knew your heart better, you would realize that the real bottom-line “desire of thine heart” is to see Jesus smiling at you, to know that He is proud of you, that He honors you. Nothing in this world can give you the joy that being in harmony with Him brings.

“Fast-food”-prayer-answers don’t bring the greatest joy. Immediate gratification in prayer is not what our kind Heavenly Father means in His promises. You may want something while you are a teen that later on you could enjoy far more. “He shall give thee the desires of thine heart” at the time when you are capable of the greatest thrill of realization—when you are more mature. So, believe, “rest in the Lord; wait patiently for Him” (vs. 7). That’s the path that will lead you into real happiness.