

The Romance of the Gospel: the Longings to be Great, Fascinated and Relevant

Jamaica House of Prayer – Yakum Fitz-Henley

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I. A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF DESIRE

A. Many assume that desires are inherently bad, particularly desires for pleasure. However, this is not a biblical view of desire. In the Bible, God ties some of the greatest calls to consecration and righteousness to our desire. He responds to our hungers and thirsts when we turn them towards Him.

*"[1] The Lord said to Moses, [2] 'Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If a man or woman **wants** to make a special vow, a vow of dedication to the Lord as a Nazirite..."*
(Num. 6:1-2, NIV)

*"One thing I have **desired** of the Lord,
That will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord
All the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the Lord,
And to inquire in His temple."
(Ps. 27:4)*

*"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone **desires** to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.'"*
(Mt. 16:24)

*"Blessed are those who **hunger and thirst** for righteousness,
For they shall be filled."
(Mt. 5:8)*

B. God is a God of desires. These desires inform what He does, what He throws His power and resources into and what He rejoices over. He deals with men according to their desires (Mt. 7:8).

*"Father, I **desire** that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."
(Jn. 17:24)*

*"[13] For the Lord has chosen Zion;
He has **desired** it for His dwelling place:*

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[14] *'This is My resting place forever;
Here I will dwell, **for I have desired it.**'*
(Ps. 132:13-14)

*"For **everyone** who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."
(Mt. 7:8)*

C. The Bible is clear that God intends our desires to lead us to Him, and He is greatly displeased when we satisfy our desires with other things (*Is. 55:2-3; Gen. 15:1*). We can give different names to these desires, and describe them in different ways. We do not ask you to accept our names and descriptions of these desires since they do not appear in the Bible. However, these desires (by whatever name we give them) were tailor-made by God to find their true, greatest, most pleasurable fulfilment in Him because He made us for Himself (*Gen. 1:26; 1 Cor. 6:12-13*), and He desires to be ours (*Jer. 32:38*).

*"[2] 'Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages **for what does not satisfy?**
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And let your soul delight itself in abundance.
[3] Incline your ear, and **come to Me.**
Hear, and your soul shall live;
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—
The sure mercies of David.'"*
(Is. 55:2-3)

*"After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, '... **I am your ... exceedingly great reward.**'"*
(Gen. 15:1)

*"[18] Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word,
[19] and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and **the desires for other things** entering in **choke the word**, and it becomes unfruitful. [20] But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."*
(Mk. 4:18-20)

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*"[12] All things are permitted for me, but not all things are of benefit. All things are permitted for me, but **I will not be mastered by anything.** [13] ... **the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.***

(1 Cor. 6:12-13)

"They shall be My people, and I will be their God"

(Jer. 32:38)

II. THE LONGING TO BE GREAT

A. People contending to be great in His eyes was God's idea (*Mt. 5:19*). He does not rebuke people for desiring to be great, but for seeking to fulfil that desire in a wrong way (*Mt. 20:25-28*).

*"Whoever therefore breaks **one of the least** of these commandments, and teaches men so, **shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**"*

(Mt. 5:19)

*"[25] But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and **those who are great exercise authority over them.** [26] Yet **it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, **let him be your servant.** [27] And **whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave**— [28] just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'"***

(Mt. 20:25-28)

B. Jesus gave four broad instructions regarding how to pursue being great in His eyes, and therefore deemed great in His Kingdom forever:

1. pursue walking out the first and great commandment [*Mt. 22:37-40*];
2. pursue doing and teaching all of the Sermon on the Mount [*Mt. 5:19*];
3. pursue humility [*Mt. 18:4*];
4. pursue being a servant to all [*Mt. 20:26-27*].

We must commit to a lifelong journey of searching these out with prayer and a spirit of obedience. This is an expression of our desire to give to Jesus on the day He judges our life "*all the pleasure of His goodness*" (*2 Thess. 1:11-12*) which He desires to see, enjoy, and display from our lives in this age and the next.

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"[11] Therefore ***we also pray always*** for you that our God would count you worthy of [i.e. give you strength to live in a manner that is appropriate for] ***this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness*** and the work of faith with power, [12] ***that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.***"
(2 Thess. 1:11-12)

- C. Greatness in God's eyes refers to Him calling our life choices great and rewarding us to show how He feels about those choices, so that we may be an example to His people forever. Practically, it looks like many forms of reward in the next age, including proximity to Him, things He says about us, leadership responsibility over things dear to Him, qualities in our resurrected bodies, garments and crowns we wear etc.

"[13] ... *each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.* [14] ***If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.***"
(1 Cor. 3:13-14)

- D. One of the main perils in pursuing being great in God's eyes is to forget that it was His idea first, and that He is actually more committed to our greatness than we are. We become quickly discouraged when we think it is solely up to us to pursue greatness in God's eyes.

"***But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.***"
(1 Cor. 15:10)

III. THE LONGING TO BE FASCINATED

- A. The fascinating, beautiful God, made us to long to be fascinated. He did this because He wants us to be His, and He wants to be ours (*Jer. 32:38*). He knows that He is the greatest possible source of fascination, and the only source that will never become stale to us.

"***Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.***"
(Jn. 17:24)

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- B. He has set creatures before Him to behold Him forever and explode with fresh discoveries and declarations of His unmatched beauty and glory, i.e. His holiness (*Rev. 4:8*). He calls these creatures 'living creatures' to show us that the greatest experience of true life is to behold Him continually and explode in enjoyment (*Jn. 17:3*).

"The four **living creatures**, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And **they do not rest day or night**, saying:

'Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!'"
(*Rev. 4:8*)

- C. The devil's strategy is to blind our eyes and confuse our mental processes so that we would not perceive the glory of God in this age (*1 Cor. 4:4*). If he succeeds, we will pursue other means of fulfilling our desire to be fascinated. But God desires to give us the knowledge of Himself, so that we would be transformed and respond to Him appropriately (*1 Cor. 4:6*). This is the true worship that He desires.

"[4] ... whose **minds the god of this age has blinded**, who do not believe, **lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.** [5] For **we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord**, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. [6] For **it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**"
(*1 Cor 4:4-6*)

- D. David identified the fact that he: 1) continually sought after this fascination; with 2) singular and focused passion; as the thing that sustained him through persecution, betrayal by family and friends, loneliness, fear, and doubt (*Ps. 27*). It will do the same for us. But:
1. it must become the primary pursuit of our lives, or else its effect will continue to be choked by our desires, fears, and worries about other things (*Mk. 4:19; Mt. 6:22-24; Lk. 10:38-42*); and
 2. we must ask God for grace to grow in pursuing Him as the singular fulfilment of all our desires, while trusting Him to add all the other things we need (*Mt. 6:33*).

"[22] 'The lamp of the body is the eye. **If therefore your eye is good** [i.e. single], **your whole body will be full of light.** [23] *But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that*

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*darkness! [24] **No one can serve two masters**; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammoth."*
(Mt. 6:22-24)

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."
(Mt. 6:33)

IV. THE LONGING TO BE RELEVANT/MAKE A DEEP AND LASTING IMPACT

A. The human heart was created for eternity (*Eccl. 3:11*), and it therefore longs for eternally meaningful impact. This desire to be relevant consumes our relationships and energy.

*"He has made everything beautiful in its time... **He has put eternity in their hearts**, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end."*
(*Eccl. 3:11*)

B. The apostles repeatedly expressed their joy at having eternal fruit by the impact they had on others (3 Jn. 4; 1 Thess. 2:19-20), and called others to labour for work that would 'remain'. Jesus desires that we have eternal fruit, i.e. internal and external things that remain forever because they are valued by Him forever (*Jn. 15:16*).

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."
(3 Jn. 4)

*"[19] **For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?** Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? [20] For you are our glory and joy."*
(1 Thess. 2:19-20)

*"...**I chose you and appointed** you that you should go and bear fruit, and **that your fruit should remain**, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."*
(*Jn. 15:16*)

C. The book of Ecclesiastes is a whole book of the Bible devoted to making the point that human desires find their only fulfilment and meaning when done out of love for God, and within His will (*Eccl. 12:13-14*). This is the only way to do anything of lasting meaning (*1 Cor. 13:1-3*).