

Passions of the Heart - Part 3

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[0 : 0 0] I know everyone's not here yet, but again, if we can start as close to on time as possible, then we'll be able to get through the material a little bit easier and give you some time! for discussion, which is really what trying to set the table for good discussions. All right, let me open us up in prayer and we'll get going. Father, we're so thankful for the Word of God. Thank you for how you instruct us through this living testimony, the Word of God that was made flesh and dwelt among us and that what we read here is meant to invite us to enjoy the same life that you imparted to your disciples and your followers in the first century. Lord, you have given us directions on how to live and those directions aren't to box us in and to make our life seem unbearable, but those boundaries that you've put in place, those standards that we see are meant to be life-giving. They're meant to be empowering and to keep us from the danger that we want to walk into day by day. So, Lord, I pray that you'd help us as we look into your Word this morning to learn from your truths and to delight in the standards that you've set. Help us as we impart this into our own lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. Good. Come on in. Come on in. I hope you have all been able to grab one of two versions, the one for teens that will always have kind of a yellow banner on it that says, hey, this is the teen version, and then the one that doesn't have the banner is the version for everyone else.

Okay? So, I hope you'll pick that up. If we need extra copies, I have at least one apiece that's here. We've been working through Passions of the Heart, and any of you who are kind of reading through this book, and anyone reading? Any adults reading through the book? Okay? There's several of you that are reading through the book. Today, we're going to be on chapter five, and we're going to be kind of taking it chapter by chapter now. Last week, we worked through chapters two to four, and so there was a lot of ground to cover, and now we kind of get to take it one chapter at a time, which I think would be beneficial to press in and to think more deeply about the subjects. Okay? But as we've been talking about passions, of course, the words that maybe come to mind are desires or the things that we really want, and so we talk about passions, and we talk about what is it in your heart, in your life that is driving you, and our desires always drive us to an action, good action or a bad action.

And so, while even our passions may drive us to things that we know are not right for our lives, passions and desires in and of themselves, we said, are neutral. They're neutral in that they're designed to help you understand what you value, help you understand what you worship, help you understand what's important to you, what matters to you. And the thing we've been seeking to learn is, what do we do with our emotions? How do those emotions become godly emotions as they're directing us to the Lord himself? And so we find throughout Scripture that apart from God, we're always trying to handle and cope with our emotions. We're always trying to deal with them in some respect.

And unchecked emotions have a way of controlling us, don't they? Unchecked emotions have a way of carrying us and ruling us. Bad emotions like anger and depression and fear have a way to paralyze us and to keep us from doing what God wants us to do. I love how the Apostle Paul addresses Timothy, where he says, Timothy, God has not given you a spirit of fear, but of what? Of power and love.

[4 : 38] And a sound mind. You don't have to succumb to these inner desires, these inner emotions. They don't have to control you. Timothy, learn to give your emotions to God. Learn to trust him when you're feeling afraid. Learn that he's dependable and trustworthy. Learn not just to find that you can trust in God, but he's going to lead you to a healthy kind of life, a life that's full of love and sound mind. That's what God wants for us. But even good emotions are strong. And even good emotions can be controlling. And we saw a couple of weeks ago the example of a very popular, contemporary song by Teddy Swims that says, I lose control. And that's really us, right? We, if we're run by our emotions and our passions, we find we just can't help ourselves. That's so often the nature of our condition. And so as we evaluate our emotions, we need to come to a place of realizing not only that they can be useful and helpful to steer us to God, but that even our heart is deceptive.

Like we think we have things in check. We think we're doing okay. We think we finally maybe overcome and arrived in some ways, but what we found the testimony through scripture, the heart is deceitful, right? The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. Who can know it? Your heart tricks you. My heart tricks me. It deceives me to think that I'm doing much better than I am. And so we need to come to understand that. And there are two remedies. There's two strategies that we need to put into place.

One that we looked at a couple weeks ago. One that we looked at last week. And I just want to touch on them briefly. That first strategy, that first solution is to take your emotion to God. Take your emotion to God by way of repentance. Recognize the significance of that reset that needs to happen on a continual basis. Realigning, recalibrating your heart so that it is consistently in tune with God.

And I love what the hymn writer says. Tune my heart to sing your praise. That needs to happen. There's a tuning process. And those of you who are very musical and I am not know the significance. It happens at the very beginning of every worship service. You're going to hear our musicians. They're tuning to a standard, but they're also tuning to one another. There's a tuning process. And if I didn't get that right, then you have to correct me later. But that's what I think happens. There's a tuning process. Something along that lines.

Okay, at least I'm close. You guys got the picture, right? There's a tuning process that must happen as we're tuning our lives to God. And, you know, there are times where our passions get the best of us, right?

[7 : 54] And then in that moment, what takes place is now you find yourself and others find you. You're exposed. Your sin, the way that you've wandered away from the Lord has been exposed. And now people see it.

It's public. You've gone public, okay? And there's one of two ways that we can deal with our sin once it goes public. We talked about the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow, didn't we?

Let's just pause for a moment. Help me out here now, okay? This is discussion time. What are some indicators, some characteristics of worldly sorrow? What does worldly sorrow do?

I'm sorry I got caught, okay? Good. But what else do we say about worldly sorrow? Anyone else? Timothy. Okay, sometimes worldly sorrow drives us to bitterness because you've gotten caught and now there's shame, right? There's shame for the consequences that you're experiencing. What else?

I heard something over here. It's all about me, right? I got caught. I feel ashamed. Now I have to deal with whatever consequences there are and it's very self-serving. Worldly sorrow is self-serving sorrow. Temporary sorrow. Good. Steve. Okay, it's somebody else's fault, okay? Like if it hadn't been for that person, then everything would have been okay, right? And so now you kind of place your blame on somebody else. So often that's what happens in worldly sorrow. How does it? Yes, Matt.

[9 : 43] Okay, fantastic. Okay, so even if you feel a measure of guilt, okay? And sometimes when people feel guilt, it can lead to this bondage and slavery of self, of staying there, this self-doom as it were.

And if it doesn't take us to God, then it's worldly in its effects, right? Good. Now let's transition. What about godly sorrow? What are some of the differences then with godly sorrow?

It's kind of all the opposite of what we have said. So what are some of those things? Great. It understands who the offense is really against. It's really an offense towards God, right?

And so instead of that sin and getting caught turning me inward, that sin is meant to help turn me outward, turn towards God. Now there is a sense in which I come to terms with the gravity of my sin and there is being sorry, there is being grieved over sin, but that doesn't end there.

It takes me to the solution. That solution is with the Lord. What else? What else about godly sorrow? How is it different? Heart change. That's good. I hate this sin. I don't want this to be true of my life ever again.

[11 : 23] Because not just that I don't ever want to get caught again, but I realize that what this has done is brought reproach on the name of God and I don't want to hurt this relationship with God again.

What else? Anything else? Great. Instead of blaming people, it wants to restore those relationships that were broken.

We'll do whatever it takes to restore those relationships. I will accept those consequences. I will do what it takes to restore the relationships that were broken.

That's the first solution. Repentance. Repentance that comes to terms with the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow. The second remedy that we talked about a little last week was understanding the course or the path that sin takes.

And we looked at James 1, verses 12-15, and we kind of saw the progression, this four-stage progression of sin. We saw that, first of all, our desire is stirred.

[12 : 34] We see something like, oh, wow. Well, that's interesting. I kind of like that. And it doesn't just get stirred, but it tends to want to dwell on that.

It's not just like a fleeting glance, but it's a turning back. Whatever that is, that it's stirred your affection, you want to see more, you want to know more, you want to kind of experience more.

There's that desire that is stirred. Then step two is, desire is awakened to the point where you say, you know what? I think I would like to have that.

And in your will, your will decides, you know what? I'm going to start making plans now to go after that sin. Step three is, your desires grow into sinful acts.

That now what you have seen and what your will says, you know what? I want to go after that. Now you are actually taking the steps. You are going after it. You are pursuing that sin, whatever it is.

[13 : 39] And finally, sin takes over and leads to death. And this is really the theme that we pick up today. We understand that sin starts somewhere.

And sometimes the sin that starts doesn't seem so bad. It's not so bad for me to do this. And so we take a step in the direction.

We begin to move our life in the direction of sin. And in our time today, we're going to talk about this as being a gateway. This is a gateway.

This is, you kind of walked through that gateway of temptation. And now you are taking action to sin. And whatever stage that that action is taking is beginning to condition your heart to do the same kind of thing the next time.

You are conditioning yourself to now respond in this way on a repeated basis. I wrote a little parable.

[14 : 47] Okay? And you have a picture of that parable. And I want to try to make this a little bit more visual for you. So let me read this parable and you can kind of see how it takes off.

There once was a traveler who came upon a stone gateway in the middle of a barren plain. Vines climbed its pillars. Warm light spilled through the opening. And carved into the arch were three words.

Satisfy yourself here. He stepped closer and saw what looked like a valley on the other side. Green and alive. He could hear water running. He could smell bread.

Fruit hung heavy on branches. The air itself felt like music. He stepped through. At first, it was exactly what he hoped. The valley stirred the senses.

Every taste felt bright. Every sight felt richer. The traveler thought, This is everything I could ever need. But after a while, something changed.

[15 : 49] What thrilled him yesterday felt ordinary today. So he went further in. Looking for the next experience. Something stronger. Sweeter.

Louder. And the valley provided. There were stands with delicacies. There were rooms with dazzling colors. There were cups that promised deeper pleasure.

And every time he took another step inward, The valley softly beckoned him for only one more thing in return. One more step inside.

But the further he went, the less satisfied he became. And the more he consumed, the worse he felt. The thrill that was once so present now seemed so distant. So empty.

So far away. He was finally coming to his senses, recognizing the trance-like pull this realm had on his life. It was an illusion. He turned around, finally resolved to go back.

[16 : 50] But the path behind him didn't look like the path he remembered. What had once been a simple trail now looked overgrown and treacherous. Brambles hooked like claws.

Vines braided into thick ropes across the way. Thorns hidden under leaves. The air behind him felt colder, darker, heavier. While the path behind was not impossible to travel, it was surely painful.

The road demanded pain and tears and humility, step by step. Oddly, the road ahead still looked bright.

It was still lit, open, wide. Not as beautiful as the first rooms of the valley, but it promised something easier. Keep on going. Don't stop. Don't face the thorns.

There's still something out there for you. And standing there caught between a bright road that would only take him deeper, in a dark road home that looked like thorns, he finally understood what the gateway never told him.

[17 : 53] The entrance seemed free and exciting, but the exit would cost him dearly. And that's the gateway that all of us are learning about this morning.

It's exactly how sin works. That's the desire. The desire that grips. It looks enticing. It looks exciting and thrilling. And it moves you in. But every step you take will be a step in the direction of the rest of your life.

And little by little, the heart learns to give way to the subtle demands of wanting more, yearning and craving. And ultimately leads to bondage.

We saw that a little last week in Romans chapter 6. Bondage that happens because of sin. But it's a decision that we can make. We can either choose to be slaves and bound to sin, or we can choose to be slaves and bound in freedom to righteousness.

Paul says in Romans 6, 16, he says, Do not you know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness.

[19 : 11] But thanks be to God that you, who once were slaves to sin, have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed. You see, to walk in the way of sin is to choose the path of idolatry.

That's the end of this road. The values and the things that you desire show where your heart really is in terms of worship. What you value, what you worship, what matters to you.

And ultimately, it's equated with idolatry in the scripture. But everywhere we see idolatry in the New Testament, and I just want to touch on this briefly by giving you a couple of verses that are there in your study guides.

Everywhere we see idolatry in the New Testament, there are ten of them. Ten times idolatry is mentioned in the New Testament every single time that idolatry is equated with sexual impurity.

It's equated with impurity. Here's a couple of examples. We're not going to go through them all. Ephesians 5, 3 to 5, says this. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you as is proper among saints.

[20 : 32] Let there be no filthiness or foolish talking or crude joking which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, who is covetous, that is an idolater, has no inheritance in the kingdom of God and Christ.

Colossians 3, 5. Put to death what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming.

And finally, 1 Peter 4, 3. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passion, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawlessness, or lawless idolatry.

And what's also interesting as you walk through this list, and it's almost common in every other verse, is that when idolatry is mentioned, not only is it connected to impurity, but it's often connected to covetousness, to greed.

And we're going to look at a little bit more these gateway sins. What are the sins that entice you initially, that lead you to some of these ultimate sins, these sins that become absolute bondage for us, and how is it that we can be alert to materialism, consumerism, the desire for more, the lack of dissatisfaction.

[22 : 16] And by the way, we're all there. We're all dissatisfied in some way with something that we don't have, or that we have, but it's not good enough. It's not as good as so-and-so's thing.

And these are the gateway sins that entice our heart and fuel greater dissatisfaction in a want for more. And so it's easier then for us to then fall, or run after maybe, is a better way, run after impurity.

How do we check our hearts? So, the end of all this is found in Ephesians 4, 17-19.

It says this, Now this I say, and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their hearts.

They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. Okay. I want to just pause there for a moment.

[23 : 29] What are the adjectives that are used to describe a heart that is totally given over? What do you see here? Ephesians 4, 17-19.

How does Paul describe that heart? What words does he use? Callous. Okay. And what is, when you think about being callous, what do you think about?

You think about hard work that puts calluses on your hands so that you can do more hard work, right? But along with having calloused hands, to put it on a calloused heart, it means that you are training yourself to not feel anymore.

That, those feelings of conviction, those feelings of sensitivity, of shame, now aren't feeling that way anymore.

We've trained ourself to be callous. We've trained ourself to not feel. We've allowed the rhythm of that to land on us enough that now we're not feeling the impact of it anymore.

[24 : 36] Or as much as we once did. Good. What other adjectives does he use? Ignorance. Okay. And when we think about ignorance, what do you think about?

Being oblivious. That's great. Great, great definition. Being oblivious. Just being out of tune. They're just not thinking anymore. They're so blinded by it.

And it's created this hardness, this darkening, this alienation from God that's happening in their life.

And notice, they want more. They're greedy to practice it again. Over and over and it leads to impurity of life.

So we need to understand and recognize that sin follows this road. sin follows this road. No one wakes up out of the blue one day and I think particularly about Philip Yancey.

[25 : 39] Those of you who are familiar, anyone, everyone know who Philip Yancey is? Okay. Philip Yancey, he's a prominent Christian author.

He's written I don't even know how many books. He is kind of one of the, at the forefront of our attention and somebody who has at least thought very deeply about the things of the Lord.

Well, just last week Philip Yancey had to admit that he's been in an eight year long relationship with somebody not his wife. Okay.

Philip Yancey didn't wake up one day and said, you know, I think I'm going to ruin my marriage today. He didn't wake up one day and say, you know what, I have a good idea.

I think I'm going to destroy my credibility. I know it would be really good. I'm going to obliterate my integrity, my reputation.

[26 : 37] I'm going to absolutely disqualify myself from ministry. I think that would be a great idea. He did not wake up one day and say that. It was this slow, gradual chain of walking, years of cultivating, months of excusing, small private compromises, moments of saying yes to sin so that once what's shocked is now feels normal.

That's the gateway we're talking about. And we're going to just spend a few moments introducing some of those gateway sins. What are some of those things, those sins we kind of give a pass to?

What are those things that that we kind of say, you know, this isn't so bad. We know it's wrong, but it's not as bad as such and such. And that's what I want to kind of address a little bit in the next few moments.

These gateway sins of anger and self-pity and discontentment and fear. And before I introduce them from the scripture, I have a little inventory there.

I want to give you just a few minutes to think about these gateway sins and just kind of evaluate your own life. Where are you in relationship to this? By the way, this is not to make you feel bad, but it's just, again, it's just kind of the dashboard lights to help you see for yourself.

[28 : 07] This is private. This is for you. This is not meant for you to share necessarily unless you want to, but just to check yourself and where you stand with these sins.

Okay? I'll give you a couple minutes to go through that. Okay. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[31 : 18] How's it going?

Almost there? Okay. Okay.

What'd you find? What were some of those, any of those that stood out and said, uh-huh, yeah, that's me. Anything like that? You'd be willing to share?

How about this one? I replay what someone did to me and build my case in my head. Anyone do that one? I can totally resonate with that one.

That's me. Oh, Lord, please forgive me. How about this one? When I'm mad, I say things I wouldn't say if Jesus were standing next to me. Oh, boy.

[32 : 35] Oh, boy. I feel out of control when I'm angry. Spike, slam, explode, rant, text, yell. Wow.

That was just the first category. How about, I constantly compare my looks, my popularity, or stuff to others.

Here we can kind of see how, how much we permit sin in our life, don't we? We give it a pass. It's, it's, it's kind of like, like those, it's those permissible sins in that they're things that everyone struggle with, so obviously, it's okay.

I know it's not okay. I need to know, I know I need to do better, but, you know, everyone else struggles with this, so, you know, if I put this off till tomorrow or next week, it's okay.

God will forgive me. But if I do this, then, yeah, that person is a scoundrel. The problem is that these are the kinds of sins that move us in that direction, they sweep us up, and then you have the Philippians that all of a sudden they turn around, and they just can't even describe how they ever got to the place where they are.

[34 : 05] How did I get here? How did I allow my life to walk that road for so long? And so we do ourselves a service by recognizing these gateway sins at the beginning, and we cut them off so that we can continue this road to repentance, and starting over, and recalibrating our heart so that we are in tune with the Lord and enjoy the benefits of slavery to Christ and to righteousness and the freedom that comes.

There is freedom. We talk about, it talks about slavery, but to be bound to Christ as master is actually freedom, right? It's freedom in so many ways.

So let's talk about, just briefly, just a couple minutes here. I want to touch on these, kind of lay them out briefly so you can see them, and then I'll let you discuss them in your groups.

The first is anger. In James chapter 4, verses 1 and 2, it says this, what causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, your passions are at war within you?

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

[35 : 29] And you ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?

Therefore, whoever desires or whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. And do you see kind of how James interplays a lot of these things that we would say, well, this one's not so bad, but that one, oh, yeah, that's a big deal.

And we talk about, he uses fighting and quarreling in the same sentence where he uses murder and coveting. And in his mind, they are synonymous because one just leads to the other.

One is the entryway. It's the beginning of the road that will eventually lead to the end of the road. If it's not cut off, it's not stopped because it's coming from the same heart.

I may have mentioned this already at some point, so if I have, just forgive me, but I can't, I just can't forget about an interview that was happening between two pastors at a conference.

[36 : 44] And one pastor asked the other one, he says, now, pastor, you have said that you honestly believe that you're the worst sinner in the room. Yep, that's what I believe.

And this pastor said, I can understand that theologically, but I know your church. You've got a big church and you've got a lot of really rotten people in your church, people who have done pretty despicable things, things that we can't even mention.

How is it that you might say honestly that you believe you're the worst sinner when there's a room full of those people? And his response was, because I know my heart.

And that's true. You see, the problem is, the things that lead me to lying, lead me to covering up, lead me to even discouragement, or to lead me to certain forms of leisure, and those kinds of things, those same attitudes lead other people to sexual sins, and to greediness.

And it comes from the same heart. It comes from the same place. It looks different, but it's coming, it's the wellspring of the same desire.

[38 : 11] I want something that I don't have. Now, it's taken some people a little further down that road, but inevitably, we're all on that path the moment we choose to have our own way instead of God's way.

And anger is probably something that many of us, we look in the mirror, and we know we struggle with this at times, either privately or publicly.

And we need to recognize that the end of this unchecked anger leads not just to murder, but it leads to being cut off from the Lord.

That's what he says here in verse 4. Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity or hostility against God?

You have become an enemy with God. And as Ephesians 4 has said, you have been alienated from him. You've been cut off from him. Oh, may God help us to check our anger.

[39 : 17] Self-pity. Self-pity. And you all know the story of Jonah, right? And it begins very early in chapter 4, where Jonah finally gets to the right place.

He finally preaches this, I think it's a five-year word sermon in Hebrew. In 40 days, you'll be destroyed. That's kind of five Hebrew words.

There's no offer of repentance. There's no even indication that things could be different. And God shows up and rescues the whole city. It's incredible.

This massive revival that takes place on five words. But how does Jonah respond? Well, Jonah 4.1 opens this way.

It displeased Jonah. What? It displeased Jonah? Are you kidding me? How does the... By the way, this is probably the greatest revival ever captured in the Bible.

[40 : 18] It's happening here. Literally hundreds of thousands of people. Not just 2,000 on the day of Pentecost. And then 5,000 a little later. We're talking about hundreds of thousands of people are committing themselves to God.

And Jonah is displeased. The greatest revivalist in human history is angry. Well, he's angry and God begins to reveal where it's coming from.

And God creates this object lesson. He gives him a little plant that grows in this very hot, arid weather. And so the Lord says in verse 4, Do you do well to be angry?

And Jonah went out of the city, sat to the east. And of the city, he made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade till he should see what would become the city.

Now the Lord God had appointed a plant and made it to come over Jonah so that it might be a shade over his head to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad. Okay?

[41 : 25] He was really happy about the plant and very displeased about the saving work of God. And you know the story. It's identified his heart. This self-serving, self-pitying heart.

He didn't really want what God wanted. He wanted what he wanted. It was just indicated by this response to the city and this work, this mighty work of God among the Ninevites.

Third is discontentment. Discontentment says I'm not satisfied with what God has given me. And a lot of these kind of come out of the same seeds or kind of bearing fruit just in different ways.

And Paul addresses discontentment in Philippians chapter 4 when he says, Not that I'm speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low.

I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

[42 : 36] That's what we all need. We all need the help of God to learn to be content. That's a hard one. And it happens in a lot of different ways, doesn't it?

Learning to be content. The secret of joy and thanksgiving. finally, fear. Fear is I might lose what I want, so I have to protect myself against these things.

And Jesus addresses this in Matthew chapter 6, verses 24 to 26. He says, No one can serve two masters. Actually, backing up, he begins this whole dialogue with, Don't be anxious about your life.

And I'm sorry I didn't include that part. Don't be fearful. Don't be anxious. Don't allow this grip of fear to control you. Instead, do this. Realize that no one can serve two masters.

He will either hate the one and love the other, or will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can't serve God in money. So I tell you, don't be anxious about your life. What you will eat or what you will drink or about your body, what you put on.

[43 : 52] Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow or reap or gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Are you not of more value than they? And that's where we have to come back to, is recognizing that whatever fears we feel, whatever insecurities we have, whatever anxieties are coming to the table, that God is bigger than those things.

He can provide, he can help, and even if bad things happen, no one can separate us from his love, right? And we might be severed from this life, but we're not going to ever be severed from his love.

And we have to hang on to that. We have to remember that, okay?