

# Passions of the Heart - Part 4

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[0:00] Well, it's good to see all of you. Welcome back. We had a week off.

How did the week of snow go?! With the snow.

Doing all right? Good. You know, sometimes, and I'm grateful for this, sometimes the Lord gives you a much-needed break. And I really enjoyed last week just being able to be home and to do the work I would normally do here, but do it at home, and to have some space to catch up a little bit. I always feel behind, so to be able to get ahead is always a very special blessing. But it's good to see all of you. I imagine that as we keep going, more people will kind of funnel in.

But we're in the middle of this series on the passions of the heart, and I trust it's been beneficial for you. It has been meaningful and beneficial to me as well.

[1:21] And how relevant, right? How relevant the Word of God is in impacting us right where we need to hear the Scripture. And so I trust it's been a blessing to you as well.

Let me pray for us, and we'll open this up. We'll get this started and see what the Lord does. Father, we are trusting you again today. Thank you for your Word, the trustworthy, dependable Word of God.

And thank you that you don't just talk about problems that are other people's problems out there somewhere, and it's detached from us. But thank you that the things that you share with us are so relevant and so accessible, and they penetrate the very core of who we are.

And they deal with the very issues that we struggle with day in and day out. Thank you, Lord, for your patience with us.

Thank you that even when we mess up, even when we fall on our face, even when we turn away in rebellion against you and decide to have our own way, Lord, that even then you are still, extend your grace to us.

[2:37] You invite us into relationship. You lead us by your mercy. And day by day, every morning by morning, we can enjoy the benefits of that mercy.

And so, Father, I pray that your mercy would be just present with us this morning as we work through this material and that you would use it instrumentally to change us into the likeness of Jesus.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. All right. So just by way of a little bit of review, and I don't want to do too much because we've got some things to cover, but if you remember a couple weeks ago now, because we couldn't meet last week, but a couple weeks ago, we talked about gateway sins. And I showed you that picture of that gateway and the land that's beyond the gate and how fertile the valleys were and how clear the waters seemed to be.

And it was a picture of something. Okay. What was that a picture of? And what did we learn a couple weeks ago about gateway sins?

[3:47] Anyone remember? Morning, guys. Great to see you. What did we learn about gateway? Yeah. It looks fun until you're in it.

Okay. It looks fun until you're in it. Okay. Good. Someone want to build on that? It never satisfies. It never satisfies. Okay. So it looks appealing. We see it like, wow, this is like Disneyland.

And so you want to walk in. You want to enjoy what's there. You see things that are attractive to you. And you get in. And initially, it's a blast.

It's meeting and satisfying every craving that you have, right? And then the further you walk into that, then what happens? What happens?

The further you walk in through this gateway and you're indulging in the land that's there in front of you. Anyone remember? It's hard to get out.

[4:46] And it's hard to get out for several reasons. And I want to just talk about what are some of the spiritual reasons why it's hard to escape back out of the gateway.

Okay? And so let me set this up for you. Okay? That we walk down this road. We walk down this road. We revel in the sins that are there.

It continues to carry us. And now because of that consistent progression of sin that takes us further away from God, and maybe sins that, by the way, become greater and greater in terms of their offense against God.

Hey, Timothy? I want you to pay attention, please. Okay? That the further we go in, there are spiritual things that take place in our life that make going back that much harder.

Right? Why? Why is it harder to return? Okay.

[6:05] Okay. That's good. It feels good. It is satisfying in some ways. And so in a lot of ways, it becomes electric. It becomes euphoric.

And we want that next hit. We want that next experience. We want that next sense of fulfillment.

Right? And so we're walking down this path and turning around, it looks like we're giving up those delights that we've experienced.

Good. What else is turning around and coming back hard? Pride and ego has to admit that we were wrong. Okay. That's it. That's another big thing. Pride and ego, now you're caught.

Right? Now there's a sense of, this has gone public. And now there's a shame that's attached to this sin and to now admit that sin and to come and make that right, that turning around.

We talked about repentance of the heart, kind of the realignment of the heart and moving back towards God. It becomes a bigger deal, not just because you're giving up some sort of delight or enjoyment that you're having in the sin, but also now the road back becomes hard because you've got to come to terms with the sin, your offense against God, and the way that it has brought shame to you, the way that it is.

[7:36] Others will now perceive you, and that's hard. Any other thoughts about why that road back is hard? Okay.

That's good. That's good. We talked about from Ephesians chapter 4, beginning in verse 17, where the apostle Paul says, don't be like the Gentiles. Remember?

Who have extended themselves beyond feeling. Now they've become calloused. Now they've become hardened. Now their eyes have been darkened.

Their hearts have become stony and hard and calloused. And so now turning back is not just no longer attractive. It's like, well, I'm not sure that I really want God anymore.

I'm not sure I really need God anymore. And that is really, that is really the essential danger, the essential danger, is what it does to our hearts and how it begins to turn our hearts off from God.

[8:44] That sensitivity, that tenderness that was once there is no longer present. And so you don't really need God as much anymore. You don't really want God as much anymore. And so the hard road back is compounded by the fact that now you're not really interested in wanting to please God anyway.

So why would I take that hard road if it's not really something that does anything for me? And so the further we go, the less exciting these sins seem.

And the more we need to do to get the same hit, the same high, that same euphoric experience, that same pleasure, and it just keeps taking you down that path, right?

And this story of the gateway really describes the power and the danger of these sins that we talked about. Because rarely do these sins announce themselves.

Those sins don't say, hey, if you walk down this road, there's going to be trouble. There's going to be danger. There's going to be a heartache and brokenness. So don't walk down that road.

[9:54] No, the road just keeps beckoning you in one step further. It seems harmless at first. It seems innocent. And it seems natural.

The world would want you to think that this road is the normal way. It's the road that everyone's taken. So of course, you need to take it too. If you want to fit in, if you want to enjoy that same experience that everyone else has, then join the crowd.

Do what everyone else is doing. Have some fun. Stop being such a goody two-shoe, right? Whatever they would say. So take one more step. Have one more taste. Have one more glance. Take one more look. It's okay. It's natural. It's good. And so little by little, what's happening is you're actually training your heart. You're teaching your heart certain things. You're conditioning your heart to believe certain things. And so little by little, those subtle demands now turn into cravings.

[11:05] We talked about four of those gateway sins. Four of those sins that seem like everyone's doing this. So this is natural. This is normal. This is what everyone does.

So we should do it too. We kind of excuse ourselves. And I know this was a couple weeks ago. Anyone remember what one of those four gateway sins was? Anybody? Anger. Okay. Tremendous. And probably, I don't want to put all the guys in this bucket, but I just know for myself and probably for a lot of men in this room, anger is something we excuse. Flying off the handle, being short with people, you know, pumping your fist, being upset, pushing your way around.

That's just seems natural for us. This impulse to respond in the moment because we're angry. Right?

[12:08] And so we excuse this sin because this is something everyone does. Anger. What's another gateway sin? Fear. Tremendous. Okay? So fear.

And, you know, we could say a lot of things about fear, but I think it shows up the most in how we are afraid to take certain steps and do certain things that we know are right because we're familiar with the word peer pressure.

Right? Peer pressure is a word that we hear a lot, especially for you students who may be going to school, high school somewhere. Peer pressure is a big deal. And peer pressure can be really negative to keep us from doing what we know is right.

Or the fear of losing something that you want, that you enjoy, and so you're willing to make compromises in your life because of fear to get that thing even though you know it may not necessarily be the right thing.

Discontentment is one of those things. And in our series through Colossians, we talked about the significance of Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is one of those things that helps to tune our heart to see what God is doing when circumstances seem to be negative.

[13:29] Right? Okay, so the Apostle Paul, I love how he says this in Philippians chapter 3. He says, I have learned in every state to be content. Whether I'm abased or whether I abound, whether I'm full or whether I'm empty, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Now, isn't it interesting that he attaches that promise of Christ's power to contentment? Why? Because, let's be honest, we're not very content people.

We tend to be very critical people. We tend to be complainers. We tend to be belly achers. We tend to be jealous of what other people have, envious of the things that they have that we don't.

Their talents, their things, their stuff, the fun they have, the people, the friends they have, whatever it is, it's really easy for us to be really discontent.

And especially when things aren't going our way. And the Apostle Paul says, you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you to be content, to be thankful, to be satisfied.

[14:41] I love that. The other one is self-pity. Feeling sorry for yourself. Nursing wounds without bringing them to God.

And it's okay, I think, for us at times to really feel the sorrow and the grief and the disappointment of a moment. I mean, I love how the Lord Jesus does this in John chapter 11 where Mary and Martha are grieving over the loss of their brother Lazarus.

And what does Jesus do? He enters in with them. He grieves with them. He sorrows with them. It's okay for us to feel lost. We don't have to just walk through life as if we're impervious to feelings. Feelings can be good, but those feelings must direct us to God. And that's kind of been the thrust of this entire time together. See, with gateway sins, no one wakes up one day and says, you know what, I think I'm going to ruin my reputation today.

I think I'm going to blow up my marriage. I think I'm going to bring devastate my integrity, my reputation. I'm going to mess it up today.

[15:56] I'm going to do it good. We don't do that. No, it's step by step, moment by moment. We're conditioning ourselves. And quietly, we transform our desires into demands.

Those things that once kind of pulled us in a direction because we wanted something, now we're demanding this. We feel entitled to this. We feel like we deserve this.

And so these countless moments of saying yes to sin, those things that once we were very sensitive to, now we're calloused to.

And the longer we walk this road, the more we convince ourselves that we deserve this. I actually deserve this. And that's where it becomes bondage.

We become comfortable with our sin and it doesn't embarrass us the same way it did before. It doesn't feel, make us feel guilty like it did before.

[16:59] It feels normal. It feels right. It feels good. It feels like this is what I should be doing. And this is where we move into our time for this week.

Our heart begins to excuse and to justify our sin. And the more we do this, the more we realize that we're actually slaves to that sin.

We have set up little sanctuaries or altars of worship to those things that we have to have. They become governing for us.

They become our masters in a way, right? Because we have to have this in order to feel right. And so, the life of Solomon gives us this remarkable, real-to-life gateway parable.

It's kind of written over the life of King Solomon. He is the ultimate gateway traveler. And so, I want to just look at his life briefly as kind of an introduction to what we're going to cover this morning.

[18:11] Do you have that in your... I didn't bring a guide with me. Okay. You have a section about Solomon as kind of the ultimate gateway traveler? Okay. Good. I want to just...

I'm going to read the little portions of this and take a pause and there's some lines there if you want to take some notes. but I want to just walk through this together so we can kind of see how this works, see how Solomon was this gateway traveler and what it led to.

The ruin and devastation that it led to in his life. Here we start. Ecclesiastes chapter 1 verses 1 and 2. It says this.

The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. By the way, King Solomon. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

Now that's the leading statement of King Solomon in this little book called Ecclesiastes. What do we... Someone summarize this for me.

[19:15] What does vanity mean? Chasing after the wind. Okay. Chasing after the wind. Good. That's a part of it. And so anyone who's chasing after the wind, what does that mean about their life?

What does it mean about the results of their life? What are they left with? Meaningless. It's good. It's meaningless. It's empty. It leaves them with this void in their heart.

They're missing something. They've been chasing and chasing and chasing. And all of that energy is resulted in nothingness. Vanity.

And that's kind of the headline over this entire book. And that's the headline, by the way, of this series. That apart from God, chasing your desires apart from God will leave you empty and devastated like it did the preacher.

chapter 1, verses 12 to 14. What are some things we're going to see that the preacher or King Solomon pursued?

[20:19] First, we see this pursuit of wisdom. He says, I, the preacher, have been king over Israel and Jerusalem and I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven.

It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of men to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun and behold, all is vanity and striving after the wind.

Verse 16, I said in my heart, I've acquired great wisdom surpassing all who are over Jerusalem before me and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge and I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly.

I perceived that this is also but a striving after the wind. Now, help me with the story that the initial story of Solomon, okay, and kind of have to rewind all the way back to the beginning of King Solomon's life and remember that God shows up to Solomon and says, essentially, I'm going to have to kind of put this in my own words and it may or may not be fully accurate, but essentially, Solomon, tell me what you want, whatever you ask and I will give it to you. Remember that? Something along those lines? What could Solomon have asked for? Wealth, popularity, army power, control, land, popularity, wealth, all of these things and he asks for wisdom and God honored that.

[21:52] That was a very good thing. But isn't it interesting here that while Solomon excelled in wisdom above anybody else who ever lived in that day and probably anyone else after with the exception of Jesus Christ, he excelled in wisdom and it's wisdom here that Solomon says, it's empty, it's worthless, it's meaningless.

It's something, isn't it? And really because, and maybe I won't give you the answer, why, why was wisdom meaningless for Solomon here?

What do you think? In Colossians, wisdom is a person. Okay. And so he's seeking wisdom apart from a person.

Okay. That's good. Do you notice that throughout this passage here in Ecclesiastes chapter 1 that he's applying his own heart to wisdom and so who is the beneficiary?

Solomon is the beneficiary. Right? It's all self-serving. It's all about what wisdom does for him and not about how wisdom is helping Solomon point to the Lord, to God.

[23:14] Right? And that wisdom as we kind of went through our study in Colossians, we saw that Jesus is wisdom. Right? He is the wisdom of God.

He's the knowledge that we get to enjoy and so wisdom is meant to point us to to the Savior and not to redirect ourselves to our attention to ourselves.

So there's no wonder why it was empty. No wonder why it was a striving after the wind because it was it was an objective that was self-serving rather than an objective that was intended to to serve and to help others.

Okay. In this next little section verses 1 to 11 of chapter 2 I have kind of bolded the ways in which Solomon applied himself to get pleasure.

And just as I'm reading I would just encourage you to to write down what you see in the spaces below all the different ways that or all the different things that Solomon pursued to try to get to try to get a hit to try to pursue this experience of pleasure.

[24:25] Okay. So he says I'll just read this. He says I said in my heart come now I will test you with pleasure enjoy yourself but behold this is also vanity.

I said of laughter it is mad and of pleasure what use is it? I searched with my mind excuse me I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine my heart still guiding me with wisdom I made great works I built houses and planted vineyards for myself I made myself gardens and parks excuse me let me put my glasses on so I'm not skipping lines and planted them with all kinds of fruit trees I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees I bought male and female slaves and had slaves who were born in my house I also had great possessions of herds and flocks more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem I gathered myself silver and gold and treasure of kings and provinces I got singers both of men and women and many concubines the delight of a son of man so I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem also my wisdom remained with me and whatever my eyes desired

I did not keep them or keep from them I kept my heart from no pleasure for my heart found pleasure in all my toil and this was my reward for all my toil then I considered all that my hands had done and all the toil I had expended in doing it and behold all was vanity and striving after the wind and there was nothing to be gained under the sun what do you see what are some of the ways that he tried to pursue pleasure what do you see that's good that's good and that is the essence that's the summary phrase in the entire passage that we arrive at fantastic that's good but what are some of the specific things possessions the things that he wanted right what kind of possessions does he mention here gold and silver right lands and vineyards flocks and and herds herds and flocks what else alcohol wine that's right hard work working hard success pools and parks and gardens right entertainment right beauty and all of these things are good by the way beauty is good

God put the most beautiful garden together that Solomon could ever imagine and that was good right but it was all for self gratification laughter that's right enjoyment and just just the experience of having fun together and and and and as Timothy did for us already that defining statement we see in verses 10 and 11 whatever his eyes desired he did not keep his heart from any pleasure and he and he saw at the very end of it it was all empty it left him feeling worthless right and and and so this no longer becomes a parable of a gateway does it this is this is an actual experience of King Solomon who's walked down this path and it's left him in bondage and we see that I don't have time to read it for you this morning but in 1st Kings chapter 1 or chapter 11 verses 1 to 10 God his his own indictment against King Solomon is that it had led his heart astray all of these things it actually left him in rebellion against against the Lord to the extent that Solomon built high places for himself and he built high places and he did this for his foreign wives and the Lord it says in verse 9 was angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord wow what a tragic ending Lord away by this impure desire this indulgence this passion this fuel of meeting needs in his own way and there are some reasons why we follow this course and so those gateway sins might be anger and self pity and fear and discontentment but there's something that moves us that direction there's something that kind of motivates us to even consider to walk down that path and that's what I want to talk about just a little bit this morning before we break up for discussion what are those motivations what are those cravings in our heart that say hey this is okay you need this or you deserve this and those four motivations that we're going to talk about are probably in your little guide but self reward for dedication that's motivation number one then a craving for flattery and praise that's motivation number two a desire for control that's motivation number three and a desire for comfort and we're going to come back to those and kind of talk about those a little bit more but we begin to make excuses for ourselves we begin to train ourselves that this is what we deserve this is kind of the reward that I should give myself for my dedication or this is a reward that I should give myself because

[30:39] I'm not getting it any other way and it's the way for me to control my environment the uncertainty that I experience I need to control it somehow and so we walk through this path and we begin to convince ourselves that this is something that we deserve something that we need and so these heart motivations are there and they're present for us and I want to just give you a few minutes right now to just evaluate your own heart just as you think about motivations these four motivations just evaluate yourself by working through these questions and see where your tendencies seem to lie with respect to these motivations okay what do Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[34:03] Thank you.

Is there anybody else but me? Oh man, it's so easy. The Apostle Paul says it this way, and I remember the very early being a pastor and struggling greatly with this.

But the Apostle Paul in Galatians 1.10 says, Do I seek to please men? Well, I'm so glad I'm in good company.

Because the Apostle Paul seemed to struggle with that too. Oh, that's so hard, isn't it? Oh, that's so hard, isn't it? We want to please others. We'll do whatever it takes to make sure they're happy.

How about, I'm tempted to bend truth or boundaries to preserve someone's approval. Anyone find themselves there?

[35:28] Other ones? Okay. I regularly avoid hard things by seeking quick relief. Okay. I regularly avoid hard things by seeking quick relief.

That is the spirit of our age, isn't it? Escapism. And there's so many ways to escape. So many ways to get away from what's hard.

Anyone else? I'm tempted most when my life is hard and I want to break. Okay. I'm tempted most when life is hard and I want to break. Oh man. That's tough.

Vicki. Well, I'm just going to say, maybe relationships are sometimes making more of them. Like the bounds. Yeah. Okay. That's good. Thank you. My temptation to be angry, fearful, controlling,

intensified, and microcaotic.

Okay. Read that again out loud. Nice and loud again. I guess I can't remember all those words. My temptation to be angry, fearful, controlling, intensified, and microcaotic.

[36:33] That's good. Boy. Yes. Timothy. Timothy. That's good. We all do that, don't we? Numb ourselves with when we feel in pain.

It's easy to numb ourselves. It's great. Well, I want to just briefly, you have a picture again on your page.

I think sometimes stories do a good job at helping to press the point in a little deeper. Okay. So kind of look at that picture. And this is a story about the puppet on the strings.

You deserve it. There once was a boy made of wood who tried hard to be steady, disciplined, dependable. He woke early. He did the right thing.

He kept his promises. He carried more than anyone noticed. He was a good little boy, but no one seemed to notice. So the harder he worked, the more he thought, I've worked so hard, I need some relief.

[37:39] That's the motivation. Discipline leading to reward. Then it happened. One night, after a long day's work, he walked through town and saw a bright wagon parked under a lantern.

Music drifted into the street. Laughter spilled out like warmth. A group of boys waved over to him.

Boys who looked carefree, fun-loving, fearless, and unburdened. Come on, one shouted.

Have some fun. You deserve it. Finally, someone noticed. And as he considered options between what he knew was right and disciplined and what seemed fun and carefree, he thought, you know, I do deserve it.

So he went on. At the wagon door stood a man with a smile too practiced to be sincere. He leaned in close like a friend. Are you ready for some fun tonight?

The boy hesitated. He knew the wagon wasn't harmless. But the man added softly, besides, everyone's going. Don't you want to belong? That appeal for praise.

[38:45] So he climbed in. The wagon rolled through the city, streets, past quiet neighborhoods, and then into the bright, restless heart of downtown where everything moved faster and felt louder.

It finally stopped in front of a towering glass structure that rose into the night, into a gleaming monument. Every floor was pulsing with light. Through the windows, he could see the world of thrill in motion.

Music thumping. Banners waving. Colors spinning. Silhouettes dancing. Laughter bursting like fireworks. The scene electrified every imagination.

This is what the boy felt he really needed. Then, in that instant, without warning, something happened he couldn't see. A thin thread, light as cobweb, wrapped around his wrist.

Not tight, not painful, almost comforting, like a bracelet, like permission. You earned this. The next week, the wagon returned. This time, the boys were louder.

[39:47] We told you, they said. You belong here. And the wooden boy felt the pull of something he didn't want to admit. The hunger for praise. To be included. To be wanted.

To be admired. So he went again. Another thread slid around his ankle. Week after week, the boy went back. And week after week, thin cords attached around the limbs.

He was offered pleasure for his pain. Acceptance from his peers. Control of his surroundings. And relief from his burdens. It was everything he had ever imagined. Months passed.

The threads multiplied. Still thin. Still almost invisible. But now, when temptation came, it was no longer a choice. This time, there was a pull. A tug.

An unbreakable resistance. A network of invisible cords that drew him in. Then, all of a sudden, the man's voice changed. No longer with warmth. No longer with praise.

[40:42] No longer with sympathy. You're mine, he said. And you won't visit anymore because you belong. And the wooden boy finally understood what promised him freedom had been training him for bondage.

The reward became a wage he couldn't stop collecting. The praise became a chain. The control became a cage. The comfort became a master. The cords weren't forged in a moment of rebellion.

