

3 Learn What He Desires

“On hearing this, Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick, But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’” (Matthew 9:13)

When you know someone well, you know their styles, their likes and their dislikes. It is important for you and them to get to know those kinds of things. As relationships deepen, it is important to not only know the personal preferences of a person, but to also know what their deepest heartfelt desires are in life.

Knowing what a loved one desires is part of a growing and vibrant relationship. Furthermore, you not only know what they desire, but what is important to them becomes important to you. The desires of their heart become a part of what you desire in life. This is evident among best friends, in marriages, and in healthy working teams.

It is also evident in one’s relationship with God as it matures and grows over time. It is not uncommon to find some in the faith whose main concern is to escape the fires of hell and make sure they will be in heaven someday. Their faith initially is fairly self-centered—like that of a toddler. Their concern is more on how God can help them with a variety of problems within their life. This does not mean they are not Christians. Their faith, however, needs to mature. Paul spoke about this when he said,

“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Peter 2:1-3).

This kind of growth is so apparent in the disciples who initially followed Jesus. At first their faith was very self-centered and immature. How often did Jesus find them talking about who was the greatest in their midst? Even on the day of Ascension, they were still focused on their needs and their desires. Remember them asking Him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Yet, along the way, as they are filled with the Spirit and mature in the faith, their focus and their desire are transformed. Christ’s mission becomes their mission. Christ’s passion becomes their passion. Christ’s desire becomes their desire. They became so identified with Christ that Paul was led to say,

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

What is it that Jesus desires? If you could put it into a sentence, what would you say is His heartfelt desire for you? For those in your life and in this world? Listen to what He says:

“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew (9:12-13)).

Jesus was not one to be overly impressed with outward show. People in His day were no different than people in our day—or for that

matter, than you and me. We often become so impressed by what is outside a person—the clothes they wear, the cars they drive, the salary they make. These were the kind of people who were upset with Jesus because He was hanging out with sinners and tax collectors, a less than impressive crowd. They could not stand it when He had the nerve to invite Matthew, one of the least respected in their community, into His circle of friends.

The heart of Jesus, however, desires something different than most people. Jesus looks for what is in a person's heart: *"I desire mercy and not sacrifice."* Mercy is a matter of the heart. Sacrifice is focused on the actions that show on the surface. Jesus, of course, is very interested in our outer actions. But first He looks into the heart as to what motivates the actions that surface.

David understood this so well when in his own guilt he came before God and declared,

"You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51: 16-17).

Many years ago, Fred Rogers of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" sang a song, "It's You I Like." In this song, he would sing:

"It's you I like; it's not the things you wear;
it's not the way you do your hair,
But it's you I like, the way you are right now,
the way down deep inside you,
not the things that hide you,
—not your toys, they're just beside you."

If Jesus were singing that song to you, what are the things that he would point out that identify you and give you a sense of value and yet are only beside you? They are not the real you. He would say to you, "It's you I like."

We may look inside ourselves and think, "If you only knew . . . If you only knew what I have done and what I have thought . . ." Jesus does know and His response is, "It's you I like."

Listen to what He says: *"I have not come to call the righteous but the sinners."* He is not impressed by those who pretend to have their act together and are impressed by their own righteousness—those who see no urgent need for Him. He is, however, touched by those whose hearts are broken and contrite. He is moved by those who know they have failed Him. His promise is there for you: *"All that the Father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37).*

The love of Jesus is like no other you could ever know. This does not mean that He winks at our sin. Consider the woman caught in adultery. After He places His own name and life on the line for her, Jesus turns to her and says, *"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? . . . Then neither do I condemn you . . . Go now and leave your life of sin"* (John 8:10-11). He loves us just the way we are, but He loves us so much that He does not want to leave us that way.

This promise is not just for you and me. There are so many others that Jesus desires to call to Him. It may be the last person you would ever think about as a possibility because, on the surface, they just do not seem to be open or receptive. Jesus looks at them in a different way. He looks at them the same way He looked at Matthew or the woman caught in adultery—straight into the heart. You know some of these people in your life. These are ones to whom we are called. These are the people who make up the 100 million to whom we can communicate the love of Christ so that their hearts might be ablaze with His love and presence.

Who is there in your life that might surprise you if you were to look at them in the same way that God looks at them? Would you be willing to pray for them over the remainder of these 50 days? Pray for their well-being. Pray for their family. Pray for the opportunity to share the love of Jesus with them. Responding to the call of Jesus to be His witness begins with learning about Him personally and about what He desires. It also involves learning about the people who matter to Him.

Prayer: Lord, you desire mercy and not sacrifice. Help me to learn what this means. So often I focus on the external things about those around me. I am attracted by those who seem to have their act together but ignore those who are less than impressive. Yet, you look into their

hearts, as you have done with me. You do not turn away from those whose hearts are broken and contrite. Help me to not turn away from them either. May they see you in me, through my words and my actions. In your name I ask this. **Amen.**

Challenge: If Jesus were to say to you, “It’s you I like, the way you are right now, the way down deep inside you, not the things that hide you—not your _____, they’re just beside you,” what would He put in the blank? What are the things about you that make you feel important but are just beside you? If you were to say these words to the people who matter to you—the people you are praying for—what are the things that are beside them? The things that hide them?

Scripture Reading: Psalm 51

From the Book of Concord: “This Christ calls all sinners to himself and promises them refreshment. He is utterly serious in his desire that all people should come to him and seek help for themselves. He offers himself to them in the Word. He desires them to hear the Word and not to plug their ears or despise his Word. To this end he promises the power and activity of the Holy Spirit, divine assistance in remaining faithful and attaining eternal salvation” (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article XI: Election, p. 517.8).