How do I know it’s God?

Week 3: Desire

**We get a lot of messages** in our lives.  We are constantly being **marketed to**.  We hear information that we must decide if it **is accurate** and if it **reflects something** that is from God.  **We feel things in our emotions** of excitement, passion, energy, fear, dread.  Are these things that I am feeling from God or are they from another voice?  Sometimes it’s **the way events take place** in our lives, and we need to know, is this God trying to tell me something by the way these **doors opened** for me or other doors close or was that **just random?**

The question is, **“How do I know if it’s God”** in all of this?  God speaks to us through his **Word,** the Bible, his **spirit** connecting with ours, **his body**, meaning other believers, and finally, through **creation**.  But **am I discerning his voice** from other voices?

In this series, we are learning to **discern or distinguish** if it’s God or if it’s not.  Part of that means we need to attack some **wrong-headed thinking**.  Or, as we’ve been saying, **debunk** some Christian nonsense.

**Last week we looked at one of the false messages** that we receive and think it's God.  That message that some of us have been hearing for years that we have credited from God is, **“I am good, you are bad, now go try harder.”**  We took that one behind the woodshed and beat it up pretty good.

Today we are going to try to answer this question.  How do I recognize a God given desire**?  How do I know if something that I want badly is from God** or is it just something that I want.  What if I feel **almost compelled to pursue** a desire and I’m a Christian, does that mean it’s from God and **not the culture, my personal agenda, or others telling me what I want**.

**You can keep wondering or you can go directly to one of those ways through which God speaks to us, the Bible,** and see if there is help.  Fortunately, there is.

**The apostle Paul wrote a letter** to a church in the town of Galatia.  This group was really struggling with how to **recognize a God given desire** as opposed to a sinful desire.  They saw them all as the same.  That’s a problem.  **Their confusion began with a wrong understanding** of what it means to be free in Christ.

**13**For you have been **called to live in freedom**, my brothers and sisters. **But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature.** Instead, **use your freedom to serve one another in love.** **14**For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”**15**But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another. **16**So I say, **let the Holy Spirit guide your lives**. Then you **won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves.** **17**The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And **the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires**. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. **18**But **when you are directed by the Spirit**, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

**19When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear**: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, **20**idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, **21**envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

**22**But **the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives**: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23**gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! **24**Those who belong to Christ Jesus **have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there.** **25**Since we are **living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives.** **26**Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.  Galatians 5:13-26 NLT

**We have two categories**: desires from the **Holy Spirit** and desires from our **sinful nature**.

**The desires of our sinful nature leads to what separates us from God, sin.**In other words, **it’s sin that Jesus hasn’t taken the punishment for, therefore, I will**.  Paul, to**be as clear as possible** with these people who cannot tell the difference between godly desires and sinful ones, **he gives a list**.  This is **not an all-inclusive** list, but it covers most of what will come out of following our sinful desires or our flesh.

**19When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear**: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, **20**idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, **21**envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these.  **If you grew up in church, there’s nothing shocking here**.  If not, then you **might be a little uncomfortable** with this list, because it is counter cultural.  **Many of these are celebrated in our culture.**

**In summation, I can tell it’s a desire that isn’t from God if it naturally leads me to these places.**

On the other side, **desires that come from the spirit lead naturally** to this list, which is very different from the first list.  But **the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives**: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23**gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!  “If I want it then it must be from God.”

**There are a couple of other key words** in these verses that will **help us discern** between a godly desire and a sinful desire.

* **Use your freedom in Christ to serve others,** not satisfy your sinful desires.
* “Let the holy spirit **guide you.**”
* “Nail your passions and…**to the cross**
* “**follow the spirit’s leading in every part of your life**.”

We will come back to these three challenges later.

**Here’s what our culture encourages us to think.**  Which just so happens to be what those **people in Galatia** were probably thinking.  “If I want it, then it must be from God.”

**This is based upon a foundational difference between what God’s Word teaches and what our culture teaches.**  The Bible teaches that **truth is external to me,** and it is **given** or **revealed** to me.  **God is the creator, and only source of truth, therefore, he must give it to me or, more accurately, open my eyes to it**.

**Our culture, on the other hand, believes that truth is within**.  **Therefore, understanding truth is about getting in touch with who I am as “the source” of truth**.  If I just **put my energy toward knowing me**, I will unlock the truth that is within and **then I will be free.**

**That truth is found in the desires or wants that I have**.  I **see who I really am** as the source of truth and then what I want must be right.  **If I am the source of truth and if I want something, then by definition, that must be right.**

**This is a basic difference.  If you really think that truth comes from within, then you will ultimately conclude, “If I want it, then it must be right and it must be from God who created me.”**

**God wouldn’t let me want something if it wasn’t his will**.

**Restraint…or resisting any desire is to resist truth**.  I am **not being genuine** when I resist something that I want.

**This is not God telling you to ignore or stuff feelings** that you have, or desires that you have, or try to handle them with **will power**.  No, stuffing something just means it will grow more powerful.  **Be honest**.  Yes, sometimes I want something that I know goes against what God wants for me.  **As for what to do about it,We will get to that next.**

**I don’t know how often I hear** someone who says they want to follow Jesus say,  **I’m not in love with my spouse anymore and I’m in love with someone else, therefore, the only right and noble thing is to dump the one I’m with for a different one.**

**Or a student who cheats because they need to get a certain gpa** to get into the right school, to get the right job, to make lots of money and have a happy life.  **The desire to get good grades, get into a good school and get a good job aren’t evil desires.**  The student knows that cheating is dishonest and wrong.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ makes me happy.  God would want me to be happy, right?

**Sin takes you further than you wanted to go, keeps you longer than you wanted to stay and costs you more than you wanted to pay… and turns you into a person you didn’t want to be.**

**I watched a show** about a woman who wakes up at 35 and realizes that her life is a mess and, in large part, because she is **an alcoholic**.  She has **past trauma**.  She was the one who found her brother after he took his own life.  This older brother was the **shining light of the family**.  Everyone loved him.  Because of this, the whole family is broken.  **Brokenness, for her, meant self-medicating** to forget what she saw.  This was her way of **numbing the pain**.

**She returns home broke** and out of work for her grandmother’s funeral.  Back home she runs into **the man she loved** from college.  He was a **successful artist** while she was still struggling.  **He wants to jump back into partying** with her and, of course, jumping back in the sack.  She keeps **making excuses for not drinking** or hanging out.  Finally, she tells him that she’s an alcoholic and wants to stay sober.  **He tries to argue with her conclusion.**  In his argument, he makes the statement **“didn’t we have fun?”**  She pauses and says, **“yes, until it wasn’t.”**

Her brokenness took her **further than she wanted** to go, she **stayed longer** than she wanted to stay, it cost her **more than she wanted to pay** and ultimately, she became a person she didn’t want to be.  **A person with no money, no job, who got blamed for everything, who no one trusted, and was the butt of family jokes.**

The stakes are very high, choosing this way of thinking.

Here’s the opposite side of the coin.  If I desire something that is “Jesus like”, then **it came from God**.

**Back to Galatians**.  If **following this desire leads to these Jesus-like attributes,** “love, joy, patience…” then it is from God.

**No sinful person like me wants something that is Jesus like if the holy Spirit isn’t drawing me to want it**.

**How did you sense a growing desire for fellowship** with other Christ followers, or to spend time **reading the Bible**, or loving difficult people, or **sacrifice financially** for the church of Cultivate?  **The Holy Spirit puts the taste in your mouth.  It wasn’t your idea, but you have to pursue those desires that come from God.**

**This requires that you** **grow in my knowledge of what Jesus is like.**

**We keep reading this verse,** maybe we should just commit it to memory.  **12**Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. **Work hard to show the results of your salvation**, **obeying God** with deep reverence and fear. **13**For God is working in you, **giving you the desire** and **the power to do what pleases him**.  Philippians 2:12-13

**He gave the idea and the want to.  Then he gave you the ability to go get it.  God, providing the want to and the power to do his will, is love.**

**I must compare any desire to Jesus.**Then, I need to**decide that I trust Jesus to become the best version of myself**.  God **is not holding out on me** by saying no to one thing and yes to another. That means that I need to…Decide that I want a full and satisfying life.

**Either these words from Jesus are true or they are the biggest fraud in history.**  **6**Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn’t understand what he meant, **7**so he explained it to them: “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. **8**All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. **9**Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. **10**The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.  John 10:6-10

**What did Paul say in those verses earlier would be the result of pursuing sinful desires**?  Paul gives that list of terrible things that come from pursuing sinful desires.  Then he says this, **“Let me tell you again**, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not **inherit the Kingdom of God.”**

“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.  We are far too easily pleased.”  C. S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses

**What is the entry point of the full and satisfying life** that Jesus was talking about in John 10?  It is **hearing God’s voice and then obeying** what he says.  **But I need to be willing to sacrifice, not just the sinful stuff that gets in the way, but also the good stuff that can become an idol.**

**Is it within my ability to achieve for myself this full and satisfying life?**  No, it **is a gift** from God.  He knows how he wants to transform us into people that look more and more like Jesus.  **So, what is my part in this?  It’s to not get in the way.  I must**…Cooperate with God’s plan to change your desires.

**Look back at Galatians 5** at the top of your outline.  **Mark these key phrases that talk about my part** in God changing me so that I want the best things.

“So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives.” V. 16a

This means the guide is not me, it's the Holy Spirit.  **The Holy Spirit is a guide who can be trusted.**  So someone is a guide, even having**“Guide” stitched on his shirt doesn't** make him my guide if I refuse to let him guide me.

“And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires.” V. 17b

**That thing that is opposite to what my sinful nature or what comes naturally for me, now I start to want.**  And that is from God.

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there.”  V. 24

**As I am being guided by the Spirit, I start to see my desires more accurately**.  When that becomes clear, I need to **consider myself dead** to these old desires,  power,  and control.

“Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives.”  V. 25

Not only is he my guide, but he becomes my guide**in all areas of my life, not just religious stuff** or what I say I believe about God.  This affects my job, my relationships, my family…

**It all comes back to trust**.  Listen to Psalm 37.

**Trust in the Lord and do good.**  Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. **4Take delight in the Lord**, and he will give you your heart’s desires.  Psalms 37:3-4

**Trust and delight and what will happen?**  He will give you the desires of your heart.  **That means that when I continue to trust him and delight in his goodness, what I desire will start to change.  I will desire what he wants, which he promises to give to me**.

**This isn’t a name it and claim it.**  That puts me in charge of what I want and **God is obligated** to give it to me.  That’s completely backwards.

**Trust him as a guide and delight in his goodness**.  That’s cooperating which is the opposite of this. **51**“You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That’s what your ancestors did, and so do you!  Acts 7:51 NLT

**Yes, we can be stubborn, like many people before us,** and resist the Holy Spirit’s plan to change what I want.

**If that’s not clear enough,** let’s try this one on for size.  **18**In everything give thanks. This is what God wants you to do because of Christ Jesus. **19**Do not try to stop the work of the Holy Spirit. **20**Do not laugh at those who speak for God.  1 Thessalonians 5:18-20 NIV

“…**try to stop” is also translated “quench” or “stifle”.**

**Quench…water on the fire**…**Stifle, talk to the hand**.  We can throw cold water on what God wants to do.  Or we can say, “Talk to the hand” because I know better and I’m not listening.

Here’s how to break down this whole process of how God changes us.  **It all starts with what we desire.**  That’s where we focus.  **If those can change then anything is possible.**

If I want to change what I want to what God wants, then the first step is to…

**1.Practice** or exercise a godly **desire**. I have to start doing something that helps me lean into this new desire.

2.Develop **habits** from those practices**.**  If I do this, remaining**connected to Jesus,** the vine, then these habits can become natural.  When they are **natural, I stop thinking about them,** I just do them.  **That’s the definition of training**.  Training is **knowing that there is something that I can’t do,** but I want to do.  So, I **start doing something I can do**.

Then the thing that I can’t do happens.  3. Notice how your **character** changes.

Noticing that you haven’t had a certain thought for a while.

**I wanted to be more effective**, **more positive, less ruled by negative voices.**  I started the spiritual practice of confronting truth with a lie.  As I did that more and more, I found that I was freer.  I started not needing the cards and my thinking got renewed.

Diagram pg. 116

You and I have three choices:

1--**We can continue to give in to our sinful desires**.  I’m **assuming that since you’re here** (or watching online) this morning, that this way of doing life is not what you want.

**You want to be the person God created you to be, which** means **you know you need a change** in the way you think, speak, and act.  **Or it’s not working for you and you are desperate for something better, more satisfying.**

**2--We can adopt the “sin management” way of life.** Also known as the **“try harder” method.**  If you were here last week, we laid out how this is a lie. It doesn’t work. ***Sin management is settling for less***

**3--Cooperate with God’s plan to change your desires.**

**The truth is that each of us has sinful desires to some degree or another.**

**If we believe that, we must try harder to manage our sin before we can cooperate with God’s plan of changing our desires, we will never get there.**All of our **focus and energy** will be on **using our willpower** to change ourselves. **Instead of letting the Holy Spirit be our guide.** And we will never have space for God to change us.

**But if we start with following the Holy Spirit’s lead and opening ourselves up to allow the power of God to change our desires from sinful to godly, the desires of our sinful nature will start to fade away.**

And before you know it, you’ll start noticing that you haven’t had certain thoughts/desires in a while.

Steps of Obedience

A desire I want is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

How I plan to feed it?

(3 for 30 pic)

Feeding the one does imply starving the other.

“A grandfather is walking with his grandson, and the grandson says, ‘I feel I have two wolves inside of me, at war with each other.  One of them is a good wolf, full of love, kindness, and beauty.  The other is a bad wolf, full of greed, lust and fear.’

The grandson suddenly stops walking and looks up at his grandfather.  ‘Grandfather,’ he says, ‘Which one will win?’

The grandfather quietly says, ‘Whichever one you feed,’ and begins walking again.”