

Cultivating a Heart After God, Part 3

INTRODUCTION

I'm giving the third and final message on a series about cultivating a heart after God. I started off a few weeks ago with a passage in 1 Samuel 13:14 where the prophet Samuel spoke of King Saul, the rebellious king of Israel, and his replacement. The Lord said that He had sought for a man. Of course, the man was young David. He was only in his teens, but God called him a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). I've spent the last two weeks and then finally this third session describing and defining what it means to be a person after God's own heart.

There's more scripture about David and his life and his heart than any other man in Scripture besides Jesus Christ. That's not an accident. There's a spirit of David that I believe is being released on the Church in the generation of the Lord's return. God wanted the weakness and the brokenness of David's life to be seen, because the passion of his heart in the context of his own weakness is an encouragement to us in our journey to go on to know the Lord. God says that there's a prototype of a broken human being that ends up in glory and in victory, and the prototype is David. I'm really glad it's David because he made so many mistakes, he messed up in so many areas of his life, that everyone can relate to David. It's not an accident that God chose him as the man He painted in Scripture with more detail than any other man.

Whether you're a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, we can all relate to the struggle that God reveals in the heart of David.

It's a very significant description that God gives. He's called the man after God's own heart. That's the first description of David in the Bible, and it's the last description David in the Bible. One thousand years later, God says, "I've thought on it for 1,000 years and with all of his weaknesses and all of his mistakes and all of his blunders, I still speak and I proclaim that he was a man after My own heart" (Acts 13:22, paraphrased). Again, when you really look at his life and you see God's evaluation, it gives you tremendous courage because the man really made some significant, significant mistakes.

DAVID FREELY RECEIVED THE PASSIONS OF GOD'S HEART FOR HIM

Just another moment of review. The first issue we talked about in the first two sessions about being a man or a woman after God's own heart was the fact that David freely received the passions of God's heart for him. David freely received the reality that God's heart was passionately enjoying and loving and delighting in David in his weakness. Most Christians can't receive that. They can't deal with the idea that God enjoys them in their weakness. This was the number one characteristic in David's heart. He had confidence to freely receive the truth of God's heart towards him: God's passion, God's enjoyment towards him in his weakness.

THE SPIRIT IS REVEALING A NEW WAY OF SEEING GOD'S HEART

I mentioned the other week that the theologians throughout history have studied God's wisdom. We have all kinds of books on doctrine, and many of them are wonderful books. We've studied God's power, and all the great acts of God in history. Rarely has the Church focused on the emotional makeup of God. We're comfortable with His wisdom; we're comfortable with His power, but when it comes to God's emotions, we say, "Ew." All of a sudden it's crowding in and making us feel uncomfortable. Church history hasn't been comfortable studying the emotional makeup of God. Typically, when we yield to it, we study God's negative

emotions: His wrath, His anger, and all those kinds of things. I believe the most significant need in the Church today in terms of understanding is a new paradigm, a new perspective of God's emotional makeup.

It's in the Word from Genesis to Revelation. There's no question; it's everywhere. When I began to be stirred up by this some years ago, I started in the book of Genesis and began to work right through to Revelation, noting whatever verses I could understand. I'm sure there are many that I missed that could have given insight into the emotional makeup of God's personality. However, I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of scriptures describing the emotional makeup of the personality of God in a positive way. There are many, many scriptures about His gladness, His rejoicing, His joy, His delight, His desire. As I began to read this, I came up with this list that was too long even to fully research. I never even finished the study, and I started it years ago. I said, "Lord, it's everywhere. Why is the Church not discussing this?"

Again, we're comfortable with His wisdom. We're comfortable with His power. We're comfortable a little with His emotions, as long as they're His negative emotions. I believe that the Lord wants you to discover and proclaim a new paradigm of the emotional makeup of God, a new perspective, a new way of seeing God's heart. I believe it's vital to the Church across the world that this takes place.

The first thing that describes David is this: he understood the delight and the emotion of God's heart towards him. He understood it a little, but certainly a lot more than a lot of us ever have. He was unique in his understanding of God's kindness towards him in his weakness. I believe that's the most significant element of being a person after God's own heart. We know the heartbeat of God towards us in our weakness. The devil comes with rage against this doctrine. You can hardly see it in church history. It's almost absent. It's not absent; there's always a voice here and there, but I believe God is going to raise up millions of voices that fully and clearly trumpet this message, whether in songs, music, drama, preaching, or teaching, works that magnify the emotional makeup of the heart of God in the positive sense.

FREELY RECEIVING THE PASSIONS OF GOD'S HEART IN THE MIDST OF OUR WEAKNESS

The first facet of being a person after God's own heart is being loved of God. Of course, you don't have to allow God; He does it anyway. But it's receiving the truth that God freely loves you. Receiving it is your part. You don't allow God; He does it by Himself. Freely receiving the passion of God's heart toward you in your weakness is absolutely vital for your spiritual maturity, and it's probably the greatest issue that the Church struggles with today. You'd think it would be the easiest issue. You'd think it would be the one issue where we would say, "Man, we would sacrifice everything to have this doctrine." This is the doctrine that has been hindered and resisted, I believe, more than any major doctrine in the Bible.

The second issue of being a man or a woman or a person after God's own heart is lovingly obeying the commands of God's heart. We freely receive the passion of God's heart, on the one hand. Then, secondly, we lovingly obey the commands of God's heart. When most people think of King David as the man after God's own heart, they go right to that issue. David, with love, wanted to be an obedient worshiper of God. He wanted to be an obedient lover of God. Let me tell you, David's desire to be an obedient worshiper and an extravagant lover of God was the second issue by which he was a man after God's own heart, because you'll never do that without the first issue being in place. You'll never, ever love God more than the understanding you have of God's delight in you in your weakness. My love for God is proportionate to my understanding that God likes me when I'm weak, because it makes me run to Him instead of from Him.

ESTABLISHED IN OUR IDENTITY AS PEOPLE AFTER GOD’S OWN HEART

That’s in review. Today, I want to talk a little about establishing our identity as a person after God’s own heart. Let me say it differently; I didn’t say it just right. A person who has a heart after God establishes his or her identity in God. A man after God’s own heart knows God loves him. Yes, a man after God’s own heart lovingly seeks to obey the commands of God. Thirdly, a person after God’s own heart establishes his or her identity after the truth of God’s heart.

Here’s our temptation, and all of us are really good at doing it: we derive our identity from our circumstances. It’s the most natural thing that we do besides sin. We derive our identity from our circumstances: from the people we relate to, from what’s happening, and mostly through what isn’t happening.

But first, let me define what I mean by deriving our identity. Our sense of identity is the way that we determine the value of our life. “Why are you valuable?” A lot of people don’t really have a clear answer to that question. “What brings value to your life? Why are you an important person?”

If you interviewed any given person on the street, they might say, “Huh, I didn’t know I was valuable. I don’t know if I’m important.” Their whole sense of identity is really wrecked.

“What’s your definition of purpose? What’s your definition of success? What has to happen before you’re defined in your own heart as successful?” I’m asking you that for your own heart. What has to happen?

Think for a minute before you say, “Oh, I’m successful?” Most people look to outward circumstances to come up with the grid by which they define success. They say, “When I conquer these three or four areas of my life, when I’m financially at this place, when I’ve relationally got these things going on, when my ministry is this big, and when I’m no longer physically sick, when I’m well and pretty, then I’m successful. If I’m sick and ugly, if I’m broke, if I’ve got problems in relationships, if my ministry is barren, and I struggle in issues... hello? I just described my life.”

Anyway, then we feel like we’re a total failure in life. Most people describe success and value related to those five areas I just talked about: their finances, their physical appearance and well-being, their relational status to the cool and important people in their life. Do they like them or are they mad at them? Is their ministry big or is it barren? Are they struggling spiritually or do they have every area conquered in victory? Most people are only successful when those five areas and circumstances are all at an all-time high, which essentially means that they’re never successful.

There are two different arenas of success that are very important to distinguish. The primary area of success in our life is the fact that we’re loved by God and we’re lovers of God. The secondary arena that determines success in our life is those five areas that I just talked about: physically, financially, relationally, ministry, and our spiritual attainment or spiritual maturity. Here’s the problem: most of us define our life by the secondary issues. I don’t mean those issues aren’t important. They’re important, but they’re secondary. Before the Lord, they’re very important, but they’re secondary. The primary definition of my life before God isn’t those five areas. I can have a whole lot of problems in those five areas and in the primary issue of life I’m still a successful man.

What I'm telling you right now is vital. This was a key to David's life because David felt successful even when those five areas were in trouble in his life. The power of this is very significant, because most people define their success by those five areas. They spend their entire life never being successful, living lives that are rooted in shame, always frustrated, always feeling rejected, and always trying to dig themselves out of a pit of despair and trouble. The base on which they operate their life is one of despair and rejection and failure. Then, when they die and go to heaven and go to the eternal city and they stand before the Lord, the Lord will say, "You know what, you struggled in those five secondary areas, but you were essentially successful in life the whole time, the day that you were born again."

YOU'RE ALREADY SUCCESSFUL IN THE BIGGEST ARENA OF LIFE

I'm not just giving you the positive to try and make you feel good today. I'm giving you something that's defined clearly and repeatedly from Genesis to Revelation. The day that you were born again something very, very powerful took place. You became a member of the remnant of the human race, that very small percentage of human history, that said yes to the free love of God.

You're so used to the fact that you said yes to the free love of God that it doesn't matter to you. You think, "Well, so what?" Let me tell you, there are six billion people on planet earth. There are 300 or 400 million who have said yes to the love of God. You're in a very small percentage. What's 300 million into six billion, Michael, quick? Five percent. Thank you. You're a part of the 5 percent of the human race. Is it 5 percent? It's close enough. I just guessed. You're part of the 5 percent of human history, the 5 percent of human history that has actually said yes to the love of God. You're in a very rare category. As far as God is concerned, that was the primary reason for which you have life on planet earth: to determine if you would freely say yes to Him, because the vast majority of human history said no to it.

Then, secondly, when you said yes to it and were born again by the Holy Spirit, something marvelous took place in you. Yes, it starts weak; yes, it starts immature; but the Holy Spirit awakened in you a genuine love for Jesus. The day you were born again, two things became true of you. You received the love of God, which changes everything, and you became a lover of God and truth. God says the day that happened in the primary arena of life, the day that you became a lover of God and you received the free love of God, you're tremendously successful in the biggest issue of life.

We're so used to the fact that we love God and that God loves us that that doesn't seem like a big issue. Here are Jesus and the thief on their crosses. The thief says, "Jesus, forgive me."

Jesus says, "Yes" (Lk. 23:42-43, paraphrased).

In the last moment of his earthly life, he said yes to the love of God. He became a lover of God, and for billions and billions and billions of years his life is only defined in one way—successful. This is true already of the vast majority of you in this room, if not all of you. You've received the love of God and you're a lover of God; therefore, you're already successful.

Here's the reason you have to understand this. David was a man after God's own heart. His identity, the way he defined his life, the way he defined value, the way he defined purpose, was rooted in this reality that he was loved and a lover; therefore he was successful. Therefore, David could go through all the different seasons of his life with all the turbulent waters that were flowing, the glory days and the days of hardship. David had

relapses, of course, over seventy years, but the rule of his life is that through the seventy years of his life, David emotionally operated out of a base of feeling enjoyed by God and successful. He could go through those seasons as a person after God's own heart.

WHAT'S ROOTING YOUR REALITY IN GOD?

One of the most essential issues of being a people after God's own heart is that our identity is firmly rooted in the reality that we're loved and we're lovers of God. Our identity isn't essentially rooted in our financial status, our physical health or beauty, our spiritual attainment or failure, the size of our ministry, how anointed our ministry, is or whatever the fifth one is. I forgot. Anyway, who knows? I'll get it in a minute. There are five of them; I say them all the time. Our identity isn't essentially rooted in vital relationships in our life, who likes you and who doesn't like you in your family, your church, your world, in your business. Do the important people like you, or are they mad at you? A lot of people only define their life as important and successful when those five areas are in place, which incidentally means they live their whole life never having the pleasure of the truth that they're successful. They're always living emotionally in debt, their entire life. What a horrible and unnecessary way to live, because the truth of God's Word gives us something very, very different than that way of life.

David was a man after God's own heart. One of the essential reasons is because he defined success as being loved and a lover. That's how he defined his life. He was a weak man, but a man whom God called a man after God's own heart.

THREE LONGINGS OF THE HUMAN HEART: ACCEPTANCE, SIGNIFICANCE, COMMITMENT

A proper sense of identity is related to God's design of the human spirit. In order to have a proper sense of identity, we need to understand the way He designed us originally. What's the word I'm looking for? He didn't just casually design the human spirit. He very, very specifically designed our human spirit to make us into the bride, the eternal companion of His Son. When God was developing the "genetics" or the chemistry of the human spirit, from the very beginning, He put at least three if not more very distinct issues into your spiritual or emotional genetics when you were created. These three issues are very vital for your identity being established in God. You need to have an expression of these three passions or these three desires, these three longings that God put in you when you were originally designed by Him. These three desires are expressed first towards God, and secondly towards people. I won't have time to go into the human expression and how we express them towards people. I want to give you just a moment on how we express them towards God. I've talked on these many, many times, so it will be repetitious for those of you who have been around for a while. I believe we need to hear it over and over and over. I preach this stuff everywhere and I still need to hear it. If you don't need to hear it, I do. Thank you for showing up so I could hear this. When I get done with this I always say, "This time I really believe it. This time I'm going for broke." I get all kinds of practice runs by going to other places to do this, you know. You'd think by now I would really have it.

THE LONGING FOR THE ASSURANCE THAT YOU'RE ENJOYED BY GOD

The number one longing/desire/craving/passion—put whatever you want there—of your human spirit is this. You have the longing to know with assurance that you're enjoyed by God. You've heard that over and over. It's absolutely the truth. There's no greater craving in your existence than the assurance that you're enjoyed by God. There's a human component: we want to be assured that we're enjoyed by people too, but that's secondary, though it's very powerful. It's not unimportant because it's secondary. On a list of 100, number two is pretty high on the list. Don't hear *unimportant* when I say *secondary*. If you want to understand how transformation

takes place in your life, I can assure you that the starting point, every single time, is this issue. There's a craving a longing, a desire, a pain in your spirit to have the assurance that God delights in you, that when God looks at you, He says in my language, "Hot dog, it's Mike again." No, God doesn't say that. I said "in my language." He doesn't say it that way, but that God would be excited.

Whatever way you would express that through your vernacular, that's the feeling, that you need to know how God looks at you.

THE THING THAT WILL SURPRISE YOU THE MOST ABOUT THE LIFE TO COME

He does this through the finished work of the cross, because Jesus bore the wrath of God on the cross for us. Everything that got in the way has been removed, number one, and the emotion of God that has been there from eternity past can be freely released and experienced by us. God has such hot emotion for us, such desire. I think that will probably be the first thing that shocks us in the eternal city. I don't think it will be the fragrance, which will be awesome. I don't think it will be the brilliant colors. I don't think it will be the awesome music, the majestic beings, the glorified bodies of the saints, the gardens, the foods, the rivers, the waters. All those things will really excite you, but I think the things that will hit you in the eternal city are the strength of the feeling of the heart of God for you. Mark my words; I'll say, "I told you so," although you probably can't boast up there, so I probably won't be able to do that. Just in case you get to boast up there, I'll tell you I told you so. I believe when you step into that eternal city, you'll say this, "I'm loved in such a devastating way. I had no idea how much I'm desired." I think it will conquer your heart in a way you can't fathom.

The problem is, it's true right now. It's not just true then. It won't be any truer then than it is right now. I believe the number one thing that will stun you, that will shock you, that will rock you, is the feeling of how precious and how desired and how longed for you are by the eternally sovereign One—the One from whom the seraphim veiled their eyes when they approach Him. He's the One who will absolutely shake you by the knowledge of His desire for you. I tell you, beloved, this is more than good news; this is marvelous kindness, King David said. Marvelous kindness. He said it over and over in the book of Psalms. He's the One from whom the cherubim bowed down when they approach Him. The seraphim shield their faces with those wings. They can't look upon Him. He has such stunning, overwhelming desire for you in Christ Jesus. I believe that's the first thing that will shake you when you step into that city. It doesn't become true when you die; it was true before you were born. It was true before the world was created. Before the first thing was created in the eternal councils of the Godhead, God's heart was beating with passion to give an inheritance to His Son, an inheritance that would conquer and ravish the heart of His Son forever. Then, God created the idea of you in His mind. He said, "This will satisfy My uncreated, eternal Son, and only this will satisfy," and God conceived of the human race and He conceived of you in His heart and understanding. That's who you are. It doesn't become true when you die; it's true now. We have to make this clear to the people of God.

EVERYONE LONGS TO BE BEAUTIFUL AND DESIRABLE TO GOD

You're enjoyed by God. Let me say it another way: you're beautiful to God. Everyone longs to be beautiful. Men, we don't use the word *beautiful*. "I don't want to be beautiful." We say we want to be cool or something, you know. Here's the bottom line: every human being craves to be beautiful, which means they want to be enjoyed. They want to be enjoyed by God. God created you with a longing to be lovely, to be desirable, to be beautiful in God's sight. You can't repent that away. You can't fast that away. It's built into your genetics. As a matter of fact, it's a bias in your spirit to drive you into the deep things of God. This desire has been put into you to drive you into the heart of God.

It's OK to channel that craving into outward things, but we throw our life into trying to cultivate an outward beauty only. Outward beauty is nice, but it's not what defines who you are. Outward beauty doesn't define who you are in the primary sphere of success. It takes a supernatural revelation of the Holy Spirit through the cross to understand that you're enjoyed by God. The people in the world can never get this. They may go to some false religion seminar and come back with five positive confessions: "I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful. Aren't we all? God is a..." Some crazy doctrine or something. They can psych themselves up, but let me tell you: this takes the revelation of the Holy Spirit to the inner man. You can't get it unless God gives it by revelation. The Holy Spirit will only give it to the people who have said yes to the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus died for them on the cross and offers them the free love of God based on the finished work of the cross.

The Holy Spirit has access to the human spirit. He's telling me, "Mike, I want to give you the assurance of the indescribable desire that God has for you even in your weakness because of the cross and because of the personality of God." It's a very powerful thing.

THE HUMAN HEART LONGS TO LEAVE A LASTING IMPACT

The second most important longing/desire/passion of your spirit is to make a relevant contribution in life; to do something that impacts; to do something that contributes in a relevant way. You don't just want to be desired; you want to do something that makes a difference. This is powerful, because God has offered in Jesus Christ this value system whereby we do these little, small acts of obedience. We give a cup of cold water in the name of the Lord and God rewards it, and He says, "Your life is relevant forever because of what you did on the earth." Let me say it differently: "Your life on the earth is relevant forever," is what I mean. Just being in eternity is good enough. My life on the earth is relevant because God rewards it forever. I'm making a relevant contribution because I'm saying yes to small things; not because of preaching, not because of writing books or those kinds of things. The cup of cold water, the little acts of obedience to Jesus Christ because of the cross make your life relevant. It's so pleasurable to know that your life is relevant. I like the phrase, "a sense of relevance in our life." Our life is eternally relevant. Our life is significant. I don't have to do big things. My life is accepted and significant. I'm enjoyed, or my life is relevant, regardless of my giftings, my position, the amount of money I make, the kinds of skills I have. All I have to do is keep giving a cup of cold water in the name of the Lord and do little, small acts of kindness and encourage people and obey the little promptings in my heart and my life is eternally relevant because my contribution on planet earth. I don't have to have a great gifting or a big position to be super-relevant. It's powerful.

YOU WERE CREATED WITH A LONGING TO BE A WHOLEHEARTED LOVER

The third longing of your spirit that God created you with is the longing to be a wholehearted lover of God. You were created to be totally committed. You know why? Because God is totally committed. There's no one more wholehearted than God, and you're made in His image.

Here's the dilemma: we get all these Christians trying to derive their identity from their circumstances. They're trying to get their money issues and their relational issues just right. They want lots of honor in their ministry. They want their spiritual maturity everywhere and they want to be totally healthy and good-looking. Once they get everything, then they can be happy. They're trying to get everything lined up. They've got all the plates spinning. Of course, the Lord keeps knocking these plates because He doesn't want you deriving your contentment from success in those secondary issues. We think, "If we can get those five areas, if we're rich, good-looking, famous, healthy, and anointed, that would work. That would work. Then I'm successful."

The Lord says, “Bologna.” No, He doesn’t say that. I say, “Bologna.” The Lord says, “No, you’re wrong. You’re successful because you’re loved and you’re a lover.” Those five other areas, though I’m not at all putting them down, are secondary. They’re important, but they’re secondary. I understand.

When those areas become primary, we go into emotional confusion that we can hardly get ourselves out of until we come back to the truth. It’s very, very difficult. Because God is wholehearted, we have to be wholehearted. We have all these people trying to line up all the secondary areas of their life so that they can finally be successful so that they can finally enjoy life, and it never works. You know what? They draw back from God and the Lord says, “The problem is, you’ll be bored if you’re not wholehearted. You’re like Me. You’re created in My image and I’m wholehearted. You’ll never, ever work properly emotionally apart from a wholehearted pursuit of being a lover of God.”

I maintain that one of the biggest problems in the Church today—and it’s in a different way than I’m talking about in God’s passion—is that the Church is dying, like Paul Cain says, of “terminal boredom.” We’re trying to have just enough of God to get into heaven and just enough of the world to get happy. We’re in a total mess. We were created to be wholehearted.

Let me give you the three issues again. We were created for the assurance that we’re enjoyed, that we’re lovely and beautiful to God. Number two: we were created with a need for significance, for relevant contribution. We can do that by giving a cup of cold water in obedience to the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, we were created to be wholehearted. Those are the three passions God put in our spirit: to be accepted, to be significant, and to be committed. When we have those three before God, then we have the power to have them before men. There’s a human expression of all three of those that I don’t want to go into right now.

DAVID KNEW HE WAS SUCCESSFUL LONG BEFORE HE WAS KING

We’ll look at Psalm 27. David writes this at the very end of his life. I’m just going to give you a few verses, because I’ve given you all the groundwork here. David is writing Psalm 27. What a blessed psalm. He’s an aged king. David was king for forty years. He died at the age of seventy. He was the king of Israel around 1,000 years before Christ. Though he made multitudes of mistakes, David understood that because he was loved by God freely and he was a lover of God, he was successful.

David was never successful because he was king. He was successful long before he was ever king. That’s why David could hold his kingship so lightly, because he was already successful before he was king. It’s so traumatic to derive our success from our ministry, because then when we finally get a ministry that increases, we’re slaves to it. We’re slaves to comparison. We’re slaves to fear that we’ll lose some of it. If we can be successful before we ever do any ministry, then our ministry is something that serves us. We don’t serve it. If we can be successful before we’ve ever made one dollar, then we don’t have this fear when we make a million dollars, as some of you will. You don’t have to be enslaved to it because you don’t have to be afraid of losing it. You don’t have to be afraid of someone taking it, because you’ll lose some of it and people will take some of it. The Lord will even allow some of that to happen because you’re successful in a way that is unrelated to the million dollars that you made. If you’re successful before you’re pretty and before your body is healthy, then you can enjoy those things or you can live with joy without those things because you’re already successful on the inside. If I can be successful being loved and a lover before all of my relationships are intact, when the important people in my life say no to me, I’m still successful. If my whole success is related to the rich and the

famous and the anointed people liking me, I'm in bondage my entire life and I never, ever enjoy success, even though I'm always pursuing it.

David was a man after God's own heart in this. He knew God's passion for him, number one. He had a desire to obey the commands of God's heart, number two. Number three, his identity was established in the fact that he was loved and a lover, and that was the basis of his success. David got this supernaturally, even as a young man. That was probably the greatest kiss that God ever gave David's heart—his young, little, fifteen-year-old heart, when he was learning the guitar on the backside of the hills of Judea, singing to those sheep, killing the lion and the bear out there all by himself; somewhere he connected with what success was about. That's probably the most supernatural reality of David's life. It wasn't his great victories, nor the vastness of his kingdom. It was this: at fifteen years old, he connected with truth. "I'm loved. I'm the apple of God's eye. I'm a little shepherd boy on the backside of Hooterville, somewhere no one ever heard of." He says, "I love You. You love me. It's happening and no one ever has to know me in the world. It's happening. The river is flowing on the inside right now." That, in my opinion, was the most supernatural reality that ever touched David. Then, when the prophet Samuel found David, he found a man who was already successful. That's why David was stable as far as stability goes for the sons of men. He wrecked about ten times, but that's not bad for seventy years on the earth. That's counted stable in God's estimation. David had this reality.

When you're successful, people don't have to treat you rightly for your life to work. You don't have to have a certain amount of money or a certain amount of physical this, that, and the other—gifts, beauty, or health. There are a lot of things you don't have to have if the river is flowing on the inside. Just for the record, I want all of those five things. I'm not standing up here like some aesthetic mystic that's not in touch with any of those things. I just want them to be secondary. That's all. I'm not saying they are; I'm just saying that the goal of my heart is not to disavow those five areas, but to make them secondary so that they serve me and I don't serve them. Granted, most people never really touch that in their life because they never touch Jesus. Only people in Jesus can really touch this stuff. We have to see the heart of God to really get hold of this.

“ONE THING I HAVE DESIRED OF THE LORD, THAT WILL I SEEK”

Here's what David says. We have to skip a lot of verses just for the sake of time, but you've got the flow of it. You can go back and fill in the blanks. He starts, and again, he's at the end of his kingship. He's at the end of his life, and there's plenty of indication to show you that, but I don't want to go through that to prove that. He is. Undoubtedly, he's in his sixties. He died at the age of seventy.

Here in Psalm 27:4, he opens up his heart. He says, "Let me tell you young people what the key to my life is, because I want to tell you how I started way back as a shepherd boy." He says, "One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek" (Ps. 27:4).

I imagine him talking to a bunch of young people. He says, "You want me to tell you what really makes this thing work?"

They say, "David, tell us your secret."

He says, "There was one primary thing that I focused on in my youth. One primary thing!"

They're thinking, "Wow."

He says, "I'm not saying I attained. I'm saying I've sought it."

That's very important. We don't have to attain to this; all we have to do is seek after it. Let the Lord worry about how much we've attained. I remember giving a message once and someone said, "Well, where do you think you are in all of this?"

I say, "I don't know. It doesn't matter to me. God can evaluate that when I die. My goal is not to measure it; my goal is to reach for it." I try not to measure any of this stuff. I'm afraid to measure it anyway. I don't want to measure it; I just want to get to heaven. I'm only called to reach for it, not to measure it. David said, "This is the thing I've sought for."

"TO BEHOLD THE BEAUTY OF THE LORD, AND INQUIRE IN HIS TEMPLE"

Then he goes down a line later and he says, "All the days of my life" (Ps. 27:4b). That's the key line. He says, "This goes way back to the days when Samuel first found me by the Spirit of the Lord on the backside of the hills of Judea singing my love songs to God as a young teenager." He says, "This is the thing that I had in my heart way back then."

They say, "What is it? Tell us. Tell us."

He says, "I'll tell it to you in one sentence. I wanted to gaze on or behold the beauty of God. That's what I wanted to do. When I was a boy, I wanted to understand one thing: the beauty of the heart of God" (Ps. 27:4c, paraphrased). He says, "If I could understand the beauty of God's heartbeat, then I would know that He loved me. Then I would be empowered to be a lover of God." He says, "When the Lord showed me that as a boy, if I could see the beauty of the heartbeat of God, I knew that I could walk before the Lord in a right way."

He develops this; we looked at this two weeks ago in Psalm 18:35. I'll just quote it to you. In one of the most traumatic hours of his life of sin and failure, David said, "It's God's gentleness towards me that made me a great man" (Ps. 18:35, paraphrased). David says, "I'll tell you why I'm a great man of God: because of God's gentleness towards me in my weakness and my brokenness."

He says, "When I blew it, I knew I was facing the beauty of God's heart. I was facing a God of gentleness who understood my frame. When I came before God, I gazed on the beauty of His heart, His emotion, His desire for me."

When he says "the beauty of God," he doesn't just mean God's power and God's wisdom, though certainly that's involved. I believe that young man gazed at the stars and wondered about God's majesty. I believe it's more than gazing at the stars. I believe that he had a supernatural insight into the heartbeat of God for him, the desire that God had, the beauty of God's heart, and the fact that David was beautiful because of God's beauty.

He says, "I was beautiful to You, God, because You were beautiful originally, before time was created. You're the uncreated God in infinite beauty, and when I gazed at Your beauty, I saw how You saw beauty in me through Your Son." I believe that was the most powerful thing.

He said, “I wanted to behold it.” The NIV says, “To gaze upon the beauty of the Lord” (Ps. 27:4c, NIV). If you want to understand the life of a man after God’s own heart, if you want to be a person after God’s own heart, gaze on the beauty of the heart of God all of your days. Make it the primary issue of your study. Make it the primary issue of your Bible reading. You want to know the emotional makeup of the heart of God as well as His majesty, His wisdom, His power. I’m not limiting God’s beauty to His emotions, but I believe that was the foremost thing that David understood as a young boy.

I want to say this as an individual amongst friends, that I want this in my life and I want my friends to make this the number one gaze of their heart. This will make you a person after God’s own heart.

Then, David goes on in verses 5 and 6. We’ll skip it. He had lots of troubles. He knows that he’s beautiful in God’s beauty. The more of God’s beauty he could see, the more of the beauty he could see that God saw in David’s life. When David saw the beauty of God’s heart, David felt beautiful under the gaze of God. He felt his life was lovely and enjoyed by God. I tell you, that will make you run to Him and not from Him, and that will make you a worshiper of God. If you want to get people worshipping with extravagance and with obedience, teach them about God’s beauty. Teach them to gaze on God’s beauty, and then teach them about God gazing on them and seeing their beauty in the cross. It’s powerful.

In verses 5 and 6, he has all kinds of trouble. In verses 7 and 8, he gives another insight about when trouble comes. He says, “Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice” (Ps. 27:7)! When he said *cry*, he meant, “I’m really having trouble in verses 5 and 6.” He goes right to that one string that he always plucks in God’s heart. “Have mercy.” You can put *mercy* or you can put *kindness*. They’re interchangeable. He says, “God, I know the string to pluck on Your heart that never loses: mercy. I know that You move when we cry out to You in kindness and mercy.”

He says, “When I got in trouble, here’s what happened. The Lord would always whisper to me first.”

Here’s what it says in the New King James: “When You said, ‘Seek My face,’ My heart said to You, ‘Your face, Lord, I will seek’” (Ps. 27:8). God would say to David, “David, seek My face. I’ll help you in some of your circumstances. Some of them I won’t help you in, but I’ll let you find Me in them. I’ll let you find Me. Seek My face first, David.”

God would whisper back to David. In verse 7 David would say, “Help, help, help, help.”

And God would whisper back, “Seek My face first; establish your identity as being loved and a lover. Then, your circumstances will take on a different look.”

David says, “My heart said back to You God, ‘Your face Lord, I will seek. Hear, O Lord, when I cry.’” Then, David kicks into this. He’s talking right to God. He breaks right into prayer. He says, “God, when I cried to You, You said, ‘Seek My face,’ and my heart said back to You. I changed my cry to change the circumstances. I switched over. I said, ‘Your face I will seek.’ I’m a lover of God. I love You, God. I want to be Yours God.” He would begin to kick into this focus, this realignment of his heart to be a seeker of the face of God.

In my own life, I haven't done this in any way that I want to talk about, but I've certainly done it a bit over the years. When I would have pain, and I still have pain, I would start thinking this thing through. "Let's think about this. Why am I on planet earth anyway?"

When pain comes and you can't get out of it, what do you do? You start getting philosophical. At least I do. I start talking a lot. Maybe some of you get quiet. "Why am I down here in this tin can called planet earth? I could be up on the mountain of spices," which is how the Song of Solomon describes the eternal city (cf. Song 8:14). "Why am I down here in this place that's a tin can when compared to the eternal city?"

The Lord says, "Here's the point, Mike. I love you; I have such desire for you. And you love Me. Therefore, you're successful."

I would look at these five areas of my life and I would always define my life from these other five areas, but pain would always make me realign my heart with truth because I couldn't fix whichever area was broken at that time. Always one of them was broken, all the time. I couldn't fix them and I couldn't get out of the pain. The only way I could get the comfort to touch my heart was by realigning my heart with the reality that I'm loved and a lover; therefore I'm successful.

"Wait a second. Let's do this again. My life isn't about the size of my ministry. It's not about everything relationally being hunky dory. It's not about my spiritual life being perfect. My life isn't about finances; it's not about physical issues. My life is essentially about being loved and being a lover, and I already am successful on planet earth. I've already been established in the thing for which I was created."

Then I would feel the burden of my heart lift, and ten minutes later I would have to go through the whole thing again, and I would have to go through it a few hundred times in four days. It's like working that muscle over and over and over. Pain ends up driving you to realign your heart over and over and over, because that's where you can find comfort. I can be comforted if I'm successful because being a failure in those five areas is such a horrible, painful thing.

WE WILL LIVE TO SEE THE GOODNESS OF THE LORD

How do we define our lives mostly? How big our ministry is, how healthy or good-looking we are, how much money we have, how much spiritual victory we have. We define our life by our spiritual failure. That's not what defines you; that's not why you're important. Your life is defined because you're loved and a lover. God will let pain into those other five areas to cause you to work that muscle over and over and over; to realign your heart with truth, because that's the only place you can find comfort.

Look at what he says here in verses 13 and 14. "I would have lost heart." The New American Standard says, "I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living" (Ps. 27:13, NASB). David says, "I know. I knew that if I connected with You again that the goodness of God would come." He didn't say every circumstance would get easy. He meant that his heart would grow in love. "I knew that You would overrule it for good if I just reconnected with You regularly."

"WAIT ON THE LORD . . . AND HE SHALL STRENGTHEN YOUR HEART"

Then he says in verse 14, "Wait on the Lord" (Ps. 27:14). There you can write, "Realign your heart with truth." Wait on the Lord. That little phrase, "Wait on the Lord," is the whole issue. Gaze on His beauty. When the pain

comes, seek the face of God instead of trying to identify your life by your circumstances being changed. Again, I'm all for God changing our circumstances and making them easy. I'm all for that, believe me. My life is still successful if the circumstances don't change. Wait on the Lord, and here's what happens in the second and third line: courage is awakened and strength is awakened in your emotions (ibid). When we realign our hearts, then courage rises up within us to face difficulty. When we realign our hearts with why we're really on planet earth, to be loved and a lover, and that we already are successful, strength enters into our emotional makeup. Strength and courage enter into us when we wait, when we realign ourselves with truth.

To sum it up, David says: "Let me tell you, my whole life I made it my passion to study the fact that I'm loved by God, and to gaze on the beauty of God. Secondly, when things got hard and I said, 'God, change the hard things,' God always whispered first, 'Seek My face first and then I'll talk about changing the hard things. Realign your heart. Be a lover of God. Seek Me first. Then we'll talk about those other five areas later. Some of them I'll change; some of them I won't. Here's one thing, though: you'll have a heart of courage and a heart of strength regardless of whether I change the circumstance or not.'"

Amen and amen. Let's stand.