

CHAPTER 3

DESIRE

SOAKING SESSION

Your Love Never Fails by Jesus Culture

Seeing the Impossible by Jasmine Tate



DESIRE FULFILLED

“Every change you want to make in life starts with an encounter
where you experience Jesus filling your deep desire.”⁵

Tony Stoltzfus

God’s plan to give you the future you hope for involves allowing him to fulfill your deepest desires. You can’t know love without embracing them. They are good, and the fulfillment of them draws us deeper into God’s transformative love. Desires of the heart powerfully drive us. They are designed to steer us back to the one who satisfies our heart with good things (Psalm 103:5). When we allow God to fulfill them, we find the kind of satisfaction that’s almost too good to be true—because *he is so good*. Life coach Tony Stoltzfus says:

*Jesus’ plan to change us into his image is an invitation to let him fill our deepest desires. He intends to win us by giving us every day what our hearts most long for, and binding us so closely to him that we never want to go anywhere else. I’m not talking about giving us mere things like houses or cars or mates: filling our desires means we experience being loved by him every day. It means hearing him tell us every morning how he approves of us, and seeing his face beam when he shows us how we belong in heaven. Formation happens when he fills the heart’s most passionate longings in our relationship with him.*⁶

God cares about our desires because we are his desire. With every desire that is fulfilled, we become more of who we were created to be.

God is not the only source we turn to to meet our wants. We can look to other sources, but because God designed

our deepest heart’s desires to be filled by him, other sources eventually leave us empty and disappointed. Other sources are often destructive—and they always have strings attached. Instead of a tree of life, a deep ache is created inside. When this happens, we begin to believe that our heart’s desires have caused the ache. We feel betrayed by our own wants so we numb them and forgo our heart’s wisdom. Instead of following our heart, we run from it. We become afraid to want because we can’t afford to be disappointed or hurt again.

Isaiah 55:1-3 explains that all of us thirst and hunger—we have real desires—but only God’s grace and love truly satisfy us.

*“Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.
Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.
Give ear and come to me;
listen, that you may live” (Isaiah 55:1–3 NIV).*

The enemy works to distort our God-given desires, and before we know it, we have been deceived into thinking that something or someone else is the solution.

If we look at the ads in magazines, on television, and online, we get a very clear picture of what people in our culture long for: they want beautiful bodies, great sex, perfect skin, wonderful friends, perfect enjoyment, plenty of money, gorgeous clothes and things, and the power to control their circumstances. The ads may promote toothpaste, beer, or banks, but the real promise is that these products and services will fulfill the deepest longings of the human heart. And too often, we believe them.

We may have turned to addictive behaviors, unhealthy relationships, or the relentless pursuit of other people's approval. Instead of feeling fulfillment, we feel angry, unworthy, or both. The emptiness and numbness we feel is somehow

preferable because hoping hurts too much. But feeling empty and numb is a high price to pay to a second-rate source that keeps us trapped.

Our heart's desires aren't the problem. The critical question becomes, "Who and what are your heart's desires driving you to?" We are only afraid of our desires when we have gone to other sources to meet them, and our dreams have been shattered. When we become afraid of want, we are no longer powerful stakeholders of our desires but powerless people putting our desires at stake. We become objects of desire instead of subjects of our desire. If God "satisfies your desires with good things," his way of fulfilling them never leads to destruction because he is the source of love and life. When God fulfills our desires, it always leads to life, love, joy, and meaning. He is the source of these things, and he delights to give them to those he loves.

JENNI'S DESIRE

The process of examining our desires often reveals that we haven't just tolerated our compulsive and destructive behaviors, but we've treasured them because they were the only source of hope we knew. We failed to comprehend that God has a far better, life-giving way.

When Jenni was in the grip of her eating disorder, she venerated it. It gave her meaning and safety. Her compulsive behavior gave her mastery over part of her life: She had felt out of control, and managing food and weight gave her control. With it, she had agency over her actions and emotions. She could assert herself and feel powerful.

The roots of Jenni's eating disorder were linked in part to a lack of safety and security in her relationship with her father, a relationship that contributed to a sense of self that was strongly tied to her ability to perform well. Her father's lack of physical presence in the household was a major contributing problem. He held a very important and powerful job as a physician, a consuming career that created anxiety in the family and a host of unmet needs for Jenni and the other members of her family, including her mother.

Jenni's mother dealt with her own anxiety by hiding behind a mask of perfection and the illusion that they were "the perfect family." This unrealistic expectation only increased Jenni's anxiety and fed her drive to perform to maintain her personal and familial facade. The absence of a positive emotional connection with her father left her insecure, without a sense of self-assurance. Her mother was of little comfort. Her method of coping sent an unspoken message throughout the household that emotions, like anxiety, dissatisfaction, sadness, or anger, were scary, unacceptable, and should never be openly expressed.

Jenni's eating disorder became her solution. She looked to the eating disorder to provide her with a sense of identity and to curb the anxiety that her insecurity created. These wounds were

connected with several false beliefs. One of the profound lies that Jenni believed was that she could never be good enough.

It's hard to believe God wants to fulfill your deepest desires while questioning if he really cares to be present and active in your life. In an inner-healing session with me, Jenni worked to identify and challenge her beliefs about Father God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit. She personally recounts this part of the session. Notice how her responses mirror what she experienced with her earthly parents.

Margaret asked me, "Jenni, Who is Father God to you? How do you see him? What does he feel and think about you?"

Tears came to my eyes. The first thing I said was, "I feel guilty." I felt like I did not know Father God, like I could not put into words how I saw Him. I told her that I couldn't picture Him. It was like He has no face. Margaret encouraged me to take my time. I remember saying a silent prayer, apologizing to Father God that I seemed to have negative images and impressions coming up. Then I began to say what came to mind and Margaret recorded it: I see him as aloof, disconnected and busy like Chief Webber (A character on the TV show *Grey's Anatomy* who is distant, disconnected, and busy). I see him as caring but distant, easier to disappoint than Jesus. I feel like I need an intercessor to get to Father God. He is not very

approachable. He seems impersonal. I think he tends to be annoyed with me. He loves me, but He has the whole universe to worry about."

Then she asked me my thoughts on Holy Spirit. I replied, Holy Spirit is an extension of God, but I don't have a personal relationship with Holy Spirit. I know He is there, but there is a disconnect—He is aware of me, but I feel unaware of Him. I picture an assembly line of workers, and the Holy Spirit is the assistant supervisor (with a clipboard), very busy, constantly moving, difficult to pin down or get attention from, pushing for work to be done a certain way and faster.

Next, we focused on Jesus. He was by far the easiest for me to describe and get a feel for. There is a split within me. Part of me feels like He can take the fact that I keep falling short, but part of me feels I am grieving Him. He has to forgive me again and again.

I want to be better for Him. He loves me. He does not seem aloof. Frequently, I feel He is sad and disappointed in me.

God had graciously showed Jenni her false and negative perceptions. It was a necessary first step to knowing the truth about who God is— a good, kind, and attentive father. She had taken an important step, but there was more to come. Slowly and with care, she chose to forgive her dad, her mom, and others who had wounded her and contributed to the formation of her toxic beliefs. Her choice to forgive them gave her more freedom than she ever imagined possible. Forgiveness allowed her to release those beliefs in exchange for God's truth. She was then able to feel and receive his love and care.

As she released her misperceptions and wounds, Jenni's heart was open, and she was eager to hear more from God. He began to share his thoughts with her about the eating disorder she relied on to fill her deepest desires. With her eyes closed, Jenni asked, "Father God, how do you see my eating disorder?" God immediately responded to her question. The words barely left her mouth

when she became visibly distressed and fearful—it was as if someone turned on a horror movie inside her head. She described a horrific black figure walking with her in the forest that she had frequented at the height of her eating disorder. She used to love to go there daily and walk for several hours to meet her addictive need for exercise.

In previous sessions, Jenni and I had discussed another reason why she loved to go to the forest: She loved to go where she could *be alone with him*. We had been using a metaphor in our counseling sessions: Jenni and I called her eating disorder *Ed* (an acronym for Eating Disorder). Ed was her friend. Ed was her confidant. Ed was the one with whom she *cheated on* her husband. For years, Ed was her *one and only* because she truly believed that Ed fulfilled her deepest desires. Ed was the one who got all of her time, all of her energy, and all of her affections.

Only God could show Jenni the reality of what she was experiencing in the forest. Only he could show her the true nature of what she was partnering with to get her desires met. While the eating disorder did, in fact, meet needs in a certain way and to a certain extent, it never filled her deepest heart's desire—to know that she is loved and worthy. Ed was an unworthy source, and an unworthy source can never provide the deep sense of love and value all of us desperately desire.

Anyone who treats individuals with eating disorders (or who has a loved one who struggles with this problem) knows you can tell them until you are blue in the face that the disorder is completely controlling their life. But it is extremely difficult to get them to *actually believe* this truth. At that moment in her conversation with God about the dark figure in the forest, Jenni's spiritual eyes were opened. Father God revealed the lies about her dependence on the eating disorder, and she was blown away! She learned that there were not only physiological and psychological aspects of the disorder that needed to be addressed. God showed Jenni the unique spiritual factors that were contributing to her battle with

the eating disorder. With this new understanding, she looked me squarely in the eyes and solemnly told me, "I'm done. Margaret, I'm done with my eating disorder."

"Done?" I asked. "Really?"

"Yes," she explained. "Anyone who saw what I saw would be done, too."

That day, Jenni was able to break off the physical, emotional, and spiritual ties to Ed. The crippling spiritual alliance was at last broken. It was broken forever.

She thought of her eating disorder as her lover, but it was a controlling monster. Now, she began to experience God's love. Jenni found a better desire, a true longing, and a hope that she could count on. A few years later, Jenni wrote out her story and gave it to me. She told me that she wanted me to share it with others so they could be encouraged by her testimony. She wanted others like her to know that true recovery exists. You have read excerpts of it in this chapter. Here is the final paragraph:

I am delivered! I am set free! My Father God delivered me, set me free and I experienced His love, His tangible touch and voice like never before. I go to Him boldly now. I know where to go for protection, provision and identity—to Father God; for communication and friendship—to Jesus and for comfort, nurture and teaching—the Holy Spirit. I can pray and ask with boldness for any need. My spiritual life has never been the same. I have experienced what it means to be set free from an evil bondage, a prison, and a walled-off existence. I have learned to forgive my parents, to release them from unrealistic expectations of perfection and being able to meet every need. I have grown in my love for them and am grateful for the wonderful gifts from God that they are.⁷

DESIRE SKILLS

We don't have to be afraid of our desires, but we do need to be aware of them.

If we are aware of our deepest desires, hopes and dreams, these can drive us back to God,
the source of all good things.

DESIRE ABILITY

What is your "desire ability"? In other words, what is your ability to identify and own your desires? Most of us need to do some work to uncover our true longings. Can you sort out the layers of your desires and identify your hopes and longings? When we are disconnected from our desires, they don't evaporate or disintegrate. They bury themselves deep into our hearts and drive us to find ways to escape the pain, experience thrills, dominate others so we don't feel vulnerable, or win approval. Don't expect to resurface and reawaken your deepest desires in an instant. It took years for fear, hurt, anger, and shame to numb them, and it will take some time, support, and courage to let them surface again. It may be frightening to go here. No one is rushing you. God invites you to let your buried desires come back to life. It's a part of being fully alive and vital for wholeness.

To grasp the complexity of our deep drives, we can identify three basic categories of desire:

The desire for security, which includes safety and serenity.

The desire for achievement, which includes recognition, success, and a sense of personal power.

The desire for belonging, which includes connection, love, and joy.



How would you describe your current desire ability?

Has there been a time in your life when you were more emotionally alive and you had real desires, hopes, and dreams?

Describe that time.

What are some desires you haven't allowed yourself to feel lately?

What are the fears associated with your deep desires?

Take some time to identify your deep desires and the fears associated with them in each category:

» Security, safety, and peace:

» Achievement, recognition:

» Success and personal power:

» Belonging and connection:

» Love and joy:

We can experience joy, freedom, and love but only if we realize God longs to fulfill our deepest desires. Then we're truly fulfilled, and we're more in touch with our desires than ever before. Desires also include dreams. Sit with God. Ask him to reveal to you any dreams that need to be uncovered or revived that are true to your heart. Write what he shows you.

CRITICAL MOMENTS AND UNMET DESIRES

Early social science research explained the impact of parents when they respond—or fail to respond—to a child's desires. When a child reaches out to have a desire fulfilled, the parents' attitude and actions in these critical moments define the child's beliefs about the validity of desires. A response of indifference is more harmful to the child than cruelty or abuse because it leaves the child feeling rejected, and the deep desires are neglected. A parent's indifference may be purposeful or accidental. Either way, it communicates a lack of warmth, affection, and recognition at critical moments when the child is vulnerable and hopeful.

Adolescence is another crucial time in human development. When a growing young person tries to assert herself and become more independent, she is again vulnerable and hopeful. In these moments, the adolescent is looking to the parent to determine if she is seen, valued, cherished, and validated as a competent person. If the parent is indifferent, insensitive, aloof, or critical, the child's deep desires go unmet. The child's reaction to the hurt of unmet desires often forms a pattern that extends into adulthood. This pattern affects how we relate to others as adults.

As you read these descriptions of the modes of relating, identify the adult behavior pattern in your life.

THREE MODES OF RELATING⁸

Aggressive (people who *turn against* others in their environment): A child's natural response to the indifference of a parent is anger. But this anger becomes a pattern when the child experiences it as the best or only way to illicit a response from the parent. Aggressive adults continue to use anger to meet needs and fulfill desires. They tend to be more competitive and see the world as a battle where only the fittest survive. They like the feeling of being fully present and important, being in control, having power, and being recognized. The aggressive adult (often unconsciously) believes, "I should be powerful, recognized as such, and I will *win* every battle! I am going to demand and command in order to feel present, seen, accepted and recognized." However, the attitude and behavior of aggressive people actually prevents them from acknowledging and fulfilling their deepest desires for love and acceptance. In their drive to win at all costs, they lose what they long for most.

Compliant (people who *turn toward* others in their environment): As we've seen, anger is the natural response to an indifferent parent. It's a normal cry for attention. But if the parent repeatedly fails to respond to this anger, the child becomes anxious, fearing her needs will never be met. She now acquires a new tactic that will solicit the parent's attention *and* deal with the anxiety created by her unmet desires: she becomes skillfully attuned to the parent's moods, needs, and wants, and she becomes compliant to the parent's desires in the hope of winning love and attention.

As the child becomes an adult, she uses her ability to "read" people so she can meet their needs, often before they even ask for help. Her helping and compliance, however, are based in a deeply rooted belief that she needs to be compliant with others to garner their care and acknowledgment. Compliant adults tend to be agreeable, constantly adapting to the desires of others to earn attention and acceptance. They

like the feeling of caring and loving, of appearing selfless. Validation and a good reputation as a "loving, giving, caring person" make them feel valuable, at least for a while. The compliant adult believes (often unconsciously), "I should be sweet, self-sacrificing, and saintly, and I will get what I need."

Compliant people lose themselves because they are too focused on the desires of others. They lose sight of who they really are and what they really want. In time they become resentful of all the demands they have taken upon themselves to meet others needs. Becoming aware of this resentment is often the first step for the compliant person to relate to others and themselves in a more authentic and self-respecting way.

Withdrawing (people who *turn away* from others and the environment): If the parent repeatedly fails to respond to the child's anger *and* compliance, the child gradually becomes resigned to the fact that his parents will ever be responsive. The child turns away, withdraws, and becomes self-reliant.

Withdrawing adults have developed a longstanding habit of pursuing isolation and self-sufficiency. They see the world as a "fend for yourself" kind of place. They like doing whatever is expected of them while protecting their delicate feelings, holding onto the secret hope that someday someone will see them as valuable and desirable. The withdrawing adult believes (often unconsciously), "I should be independent, aloof, perfect, and above the struggle, and that way, I'll get what I need."

Withdrawing types lose themselves because they disconnect from their own feelings.



Based on your early life experiences, what mode do you most relate to?

How do you see this playing out in your adult life with loved ones? Friends? Co-workers?

How does it show up in your relationship with God?

How do you lose yourself in this? How can you challenge yourself in this area?

TREASURE OR TRAP

As you identify your desires, the next question is this: Who or what is your source? Sadly, we're often deceived—we believe secondary sources will meet our deepest needs, and we avoid God, who can give us ultimate love and peace. When we make anything other than God our source to fulfill our deep longings, we have misdirected our worship to "gods" that fail to live up to their promises, and we become disappointed and confused. We become trapped by a wide array of behaviors and mental games to block the pain, gain control, and fill the emptiness.

If your source causes you harm, it's definitely not a treasure! It's a harmful trap that's not fulfilling your desire in any meaningful way. Common traps include money, sex, co-dependent relationships, or addictions. Even the misuse of religion can serve as a trap. Like a mirage of an oasis in a desert, these traps attract us with an illusion of love and meaning when we are desperate and dying of thirst. They arouse hope, but they inevitably leave us empty, confused, and even more desperate.



What are some traps that promise love and fulfillment? Why are they so attractive?

Who or what has been your source for security (safety, serenity)?

For achievement (recognition, success, personal power)?

For belonging (connection, love, joy)?

Has it led you to true fulfillment or has it been destructive?

What is God saying to you about how he wants to fulfill these desires? What good things does he have for you? Ask him. Write down what he told you:

Do you believe God wants to "satisfy your desires with good things"? Explain your answer.

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**PLANT YOUR OWN GARDEN AND
DECORATE YOUR OWN SOUL
INSTEAD OF WAITING FOR SOMEONE
TO BRING YOU FLOWERS.**

VERONICA A. SHOFFSTALL

OBJECT OR SUBJECT OF DESIRE?

When we become afraid of our wants, we aren't powerful stakeholders of our desires; instead, we are powerless people who deny or suppress our heart's desires. We become *objects* of others' desires instead of *subjects* of our own desires. It is important for us to be able to identify the differences.

Objects of others' desires

Think about an object. It is just a thing. It has no life or breath flowing through it. It can't have desire; it can only be desired. When we're afraid of our desires, or when we give our power of choice away, we become objects. For example, as a woman, if I believe the lie that the most important thing about me is my appearance, then I objectify myself. I start to treat myself like an object that should be made to conform to someone else's standards. My value as an object is dependent on the opinions of others. I need someone else to ascribe value to me and validate that value. As an object, I'm out of touch with my own desires (desire ability) and consumed with my desirability to others.

Seeing ourselves as objects is a never-ending pursuit of validation. I may be seen as beautiful and, therefore, valuable by one person, but what about the next person? And what happens when my beauty fades? If I see myself as an object, then I let others treat me like an object, and I find myself in relationships where people take advantage of me. This is an anxiety-provoking, exhausting, and identity-crushing way to live! It's also the dynamic seen in co-dependency and abusive relationships of all types because you don't relate to an object—you own it and control it.

Subject of our own desires

Being the subject of your desires means you are the author of your own opinions, needs, wants, and dreams. You don't rely on someone else to tell you if you're valuable or successful because you're not an object to be appraised! You know your value and worth. Your *desire ability* is strong because you are connected with your needs and desires—and you require others to treat you with respect. You make your own decisions and manage yourself instead of wanting others to manage you. You live out of your deep desires because you know that's an important part of what makes you, you.



What are ways in which you have acted like an object of desire instead of a subject of desire?

Do you find yourself more likely to become an object in certain situations or with particular people? Romantic relationships?

Relationships with authority? Family? Friends?

What needs and desires go underground when this occurs?

It's painful to be honest about the reality of being an object of others' desires instead of a subject of your own desires—but it's necessary if we're going to make real progress. A good grasp of reality gives us choices, and these choices are the pathway of hope. The exercises you completed in this chapter have helped you begin the process of learning to identify, value, and address your desires. Remember, God cares about your desires because you are his desire. He placed them in you when he created you. Take a chance on him. Give him permission to meet your heart's deepest desires. As they are fulfilled, they reveal the essence of who you really are. He can't wait to show you off to the rest of the world!