

August 2008

It is mid-summer, and I find myself thinking about desire, and disappointment, and how we shepherd our hearts in this journey we are taking.

I was supposed to be backpacking today with my sons. It was something we'd really been looking forward to. We haven't been backpacking all together for many years and what with Sam home from college this was going to be a really neat chance for the four of us guys to get some time and adventure together. And personally, I love the high country. It's one of the places my heart comes alive. (You might be wondering about Stasi. She was looking forward to our being away as much as we were, looking forward to spending a rare three days alone with God!). Anyhow, we made all our preparations, and headed up into the mountains yesterday.

Then the mosquitoes descended.

We hiked really hard and fast to stay ahead of them, hoping that when we reached the high country, out of the woods and the wetter lands we'd be past the worst of it. Not so. They swarmed us. Engulfed us. It was so bad we had to dive into the tent to have a quick lunch. I went out to pump some water and Blaine said there were 50 of the little blood suckers on my back. This in spite of layers of bug spray. Images of Old Testament plagues came to mind. We wanted so badly to stay. But we surrendered, and hiked back out of the mountains and came home, disappointed and utterly exhausted.

I found myself wondering what the heck happened. Did I not hear God? I prayed about the trip. How do I understand this story? I know that in the midst of disappointment, I have to be careful about the whole understanding thing. Maybe God will explain this, maybe he won't. Maybe more likely I'm not in a place to receive that just yet. But I know I have to be careful I don't start jumping to conclusions. What I *do* know is that I'm disappointed, and confused. And what I notice next is how quickly (and subtly) I move toward resignation. Seriously, right now I am thinking, "Screw it, I'll just clean the carpets."

How quickly I am ready to abandon desire (because it causes disappointment) and move towards resignation in the form of just getting things done. Good grief. How much of my life is shaped by disappointment? I pat myself on the back because I can really put my nose to the grindstone, doing chores, going to work, cleaning the carpets. But how much of this is fueled by a deeper underlying resignation? How much do we all live by a subtle agreement we've made with resignation, an agreement that goes something like, *You don't really get Life. So just get by. Control what you can. Don't risk desire. It never comes through. Just get by.* Some of us go to work, some of us eat, some check out and watch TV. It's all the same – abandoning desire because it causes disappointment and confusion.

And so I see again that how we handle desire is pretty much how we handle our hearts. And how we handle desire and disappointment says so much about what we think of God. (I know, I wrote all about this eight years ago in *Journey of Desire*. But, we forget. O, how we forget). I am very aware of all this this morning as I watch myself making choices in the wake of disappointment.

So here is danger #1 – we abandon desire because it causes pain and confusion.

But the deeper, truer part of me doesn't want to give way to resignation. I know that I need all the joy God has for me. So I found myself praying this morning what Paul prays in Colossians, "Asking God

to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding..." (1:9). I want to know his will. I *need* to know his will.

Because if danger #1 is abandoning desire, then danger #2 is letting my desire cloud my judgment. Sometimes I want something so badly that I have a really hard time hearing from God about it. Sometimes I don't even ask what he thinks about it at all, I just go chase it. And this is a very dangerous thing to do, dear friends. Not because desire is wrong, but because we are setting ourselves up for disaster. It might be the wrong timing. Are we open to hearing, "wait"? We might be mistaken about the object we think will fulfill our desire. Are we open to God changing our plans, open to letting him shape our desire?

If we don't abandon desire, what we usually do is pursue it naively. We don't *really* seek God about it. Then our tender hearts are open to disappointment, and the doubt about God that comes with it. We come to terrible conclusions like, *I guess God doesn't really care about my desire*. We come to doubt his heart towards us.

The truth is, God cares very much. "May he give you the desire of your heart..." (Psalm 20:4). But we live in a dangerous world, with many thieves. Desire is opposed, because "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life" (Proverbs 13:12). The enemy hates it when our hearts are full of life. So he gets us to abandon desire, or, he gets us to chase it naively. Our flesh is no help; if we don't let God sanctify our desires, we try and fulfill them in all sorts of foolish ways. Desire is a deep part of the life of our hearts. And so we must be careful here.

I know this – we must not abandon desire. That is a soul-killing act. We need the tree of life that is desire fulfilled. We need joy. I also know we must not simply run with it either. Chasing desire without God's leading is foolishness of the first degree. And so I find myself praying this morning,

*Lord Jesus, I don't get it. I don't like the way this story is turning out. I ask you into my disappointments, all of them. Come into this place in my heart. I know you are good. I know you love me. Show me what you have for me. Show me how much I have lived in resignation. Let me also not just chase my desires foolishly. God I pray for the knowledge of your will for me through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Show me the life you have for me. Shepherd me.*

May the rest of this summer bring you joy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'John' written in a cursive, flowing style.

John