

Lord of Our Desires



SABBATH—JULY 16

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Genesis 1; Genesis 2; Romans 1:3; Romans 6:1-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Timothy 3:16; Philippians 2:8; Colossians 2:11-13; 1 Peter 1:13-16; 1 John 2:1.

MEMORY VERSE: “For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature [of man], God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned¹ sin in sinful man” (Romans 8:3, NIV).

IMPORTANT THOUGHT: God created us with powerful desires for our enjoyment. As Christians, we should enjoy these desires. But we need to keep them under God's control.

SURRENDERING OUR DESIRES TO GOD'S WILL. The apostle² Paul warned that in the last days, people would “love what pleases them instead of loving God” (2 Timothy 3:4, NIV). This is a perfect description of people today! The number one rule for many people is: Satisfy your own desires. Christian values are thrown out as old-fashioned and unreasonable. The basic feeling is: If you want to do something that will not hurt anyone else, then you should do it.

But people who follow Jesus are called to surrender all their desires to God's will. Jesus Himself said, “‘I have not come down from heaven to do what I want to do. I have come to do what the One [Father] who sent me wants me to do.’” Jesus set the perfect example of surrendering to God's will when He prayed, “‘But let what you [God] want be done, not what I want’” (Mark 14:36, NIV). This should be our prayer, too. We must surrender our wills and desires to God.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 23.

¹condemned—proven guilty of sin.

²apostle—one of God's disciples who preached the gospel after Jesus returned to heaven.

SUNDAY—JULY 17**FLESH³ AND SPIRIT
(Romans 8:3).**

The Christian faith began within Greek culture. The Greek Empire itself had fallen to the Romans (Daniel 2). But the influence of Greek culture remained long after Greek political and military power faded.

One of the beliefs Greek culture influenced was the belief that human flesh was bad, and that human desires and passions were evil. One Greek philosopher (thinker) taught that humans were at first pure spirit. But through a “fall,” our souls were made lower and put into flesh. We were then to grow spiritually by working our way back to our original (first) spiritual condition.

But this view does not follow the Bible. According to the Bible, the human body is not bad.

What is the greatest example we have in the Bible that the human body is not evil? Romans 8:3; 1 Timothy 3:16; Philippians 2:8; Romans 1:3; Galatians 4:4.

Sin influences the human body with disease, old age, et cetera. But the body cannot be evil, because Jesus put on a human body when He came to this earth. However, what about New Testament verses that seem to



Jesus put on a human body when He came to earth.

say the spirit is better than the body? Some of these verses are Romans 8:4, 5; Galatians 5:24, 25; and Galatians 6:8. The word *flesh* in the older translations of these verses is not talking about our bodies. Instead, the word *flesh* in these verses is talking about our sinful nature. For example, in the King James, Galatians 5:24 says, “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” In the NIV, Galatians 5:24 says, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed their sinful nature to his cross. They don’t [do not] want what their sinful nature loves and longs for [desires] (NIV).” So what Paul is really talking about in these

³flesh—the body; skin, muscles, tendons, blood, hormones, et cetera.

verses is turning our sinful desires over to Jesus so He can cleanse us from sin.

Greek culture also taught that the spirit is something within us that is always fighting the body. But in Romans 8:4, 5; Galatians 5:24, 25; and Galatians 6:8, the *spirit* is our attitude⁴ of surrender and obedience to Jesus. It is also the Holy Spirit. People who live “by the Spirit” (NirV) are people who have surrendered their sinful natures to the Holy Spirit.

How can you know if you are walking in your sinful nature or “by the Spirit”?

MONDAY—JULY 18

CREATION (Genesis 1; Genesis 2).

Review the Creation story in Genesis 1 and 2. What proof do you find there that God planned for human beings to enjoy what He had made?

The Creation story shows nothing of the idea that the human body is bad. God created man and woman to enjoy what He had made. Man came directly from the ground, which God had just created. And woman came from the man. Thus, humans and the earth are closely connected. Together, man and woman were to live on this earth. They were to get food from it.

⁴attitude—how you think and feel about something or someone.

⁵paradise—a beautiful, perfect place.

⁶senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching.

They were to be “fruitful, and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). They were to be involved in the process of creating more human beings, more human flesh. God gave them “every herb” to eat (Genesis 2:5). He also gave them every tree pleasant to the sight. The trees and their fruit were “pleasing to look at” (Genesis 2:9, NirV). The fruit was “good to eat” (NirV). This shows that Adam and Eve enjoyed what they ate. Their food not only fed them but also pleased them. Truly God’s creation was a paradise.⁵ What helped make it a paradise was how well it pleased their human senses.⁶

God created us as physical beings (persons). He gave us physical desires, which are not bad. The problem is not our basic desires, but how we use these desires. The problem also is how we keep them under control so we are not lost. When we surrender our desires to God, He gives us the power to keep our desires under control.



God created us as physical beings.

Despite the results of sin, what examples do you see of how wonderful creation was? What are some of the things God gave us that we should enjoy? How do these things show God's love?

TUESDAY—JULY 19

THE FALL (Genesis 3:1-6).

God put Adam and Eve in a garden filled with good things for them to enjoy. But Satan used some of these things to cause the Fall.

How did the devil use the physical senses to deceive the woman and get her to disobey God? Genesis 3:1-6.

Genesis 3:1-6 should be a powerful warning to us. When they were perfect, Adam and Eve let their senses turn them away from God. Satan knows he can use our senses and appetites (desires; wants) to control us. That is why the Bible tells us we have to keep our senses and appetites under control. If not, Satan will use them to destroy us.

How do you see the principles in 1 John 2:16 in the story of the Fall? Does 1 John 2:16 mean that the eyes themselves are bad? Explain your answer.

All around us, we see the results of humans who have let God's gifts control them. God gave us sex. But many people become pornographers.⁷ God gave us good food. But many people eat too much. God gave us music. But we become half-crazed rock-and-roll singers. He gave us fire. But we become arsonists.⁸ He gave us words. But we lie and curse. He gave us grapes. But we become drunks. It is hard to think of any God-given gift that we have not abused because of our sinful habits. We see the results of our sinful habits everywhere.



Do you let God's gifts control you?

Imagine a world where our God-given senses are in perfect peace with Him. What do you think that world would be like? You cannot have that world now. But what changes can you make so your

⁷pornographers—people who make sexually filthy movies or books.

⁸arsonists—people who start fires because they want to do damage and hurt others.

desires and senses are more at peace with God than they are now?

WEDNESDAY—JULY 20

TIMES OF SOLITUDE⁹ (Matthew 4:1, 2).

Read Matthew 4:1, 2 (also read Mark 1:12 and Luke 4:1, 2). Why do you think Jesus fasted¹⁰ for so long? What can we learn from His example?

“Many people who claim to be Jesus’ followers do not question the reason for His long period of fasting and suffering in the wilderness. His suffering did not come from hunger. Instead, it came from His sense of the fearful result of the indulgence¹¹ of too much appetite and desire upon the human race. He knew appetite would be our idol. He knew appetite would lead us to forget God and would prevent us from receiving salvation.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Confrontation*,¹² p. 51.

Satan caused Adam and Eve to sin through appetite. After His baptism, Jesus also was tempted to sin through appetite. Adam and Eve failed. But Jesus succeeded. What a message His self-denial¹³ has for us!

What important message does 1 Peter 1:13-16 have for us about our desires and appetites?

Among these warnings is the call to be holy. That is a strong command for sinful people. But being holy is clearly a reachable goal. If not, why would the Bible often call us to holiness? Holiness means to “be set apart.” Holiness deals with the control of our desires and appetites. It says to be holy in all kinds of behavior. God has given us these basic desires. But we are to be separate from the world’s abuses of these desires.

How much self-denial do you go through? When your desires are leading you where you know you should not go, what do you do? What does your answer tell you about how well you obey the Lord’s command about controlling these desires?

THURSDAY—JULY 21

SURRENDER (Colossians 2:11-13).

It is one thing to read warnings from the Bible about keeping our desires under control. It is another thing to obey these warnings. We want to do

⁹solitude—being alone with God.

¹⁰fasted—went without food.

¹¹indulgence—having too much of something.

¹²confrontation—face-to-face meeting in a battle, in this case, the battle with sin.

¹³self-denial—the ability to reject (refuse) temptations over appetites and passions.

what is right. But sometimes it is so easy to give in to our desires. Perhaps Augustine¹⁴ best described this problem. He once prayed, “God, give me power over my passions—but just not yet!” Most of us are as human as Augustine was.

But there is great hope for us as Christians. We can have victory over our desires that can destroy us. We can have that victory when we surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit as He works in us. We all surrender to something. We can surrender to our passions, which will bring death. Or we can surrender to the Holy Spirit, who brings life. We have no other choices.

What is the basic message in the following verses? What personal experience are they talking about? Colossians 2:11-13; Romans 6:1-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17.



We are buried with Jesus and raised to a new life with Him when we are baptized.

Some people have totally surrendered their lives to Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit, they will die to their old selves and be “born from above” (John 3:3, NRSV). They have surrendered to God their whole life, including the desires of their heart and sinful flesh (Romans 6:13). Now they live under the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives them a new life in Jesus (Galatians 5:25). With the Holy Spirit’s power, people who have died to self and live again in Jesus can live with their desires and sinful natures under control.

We sometimes hear stories of people who have surrendered to Jesus and their lifelong habit of smoking and drinking quickly disappeared. But for most Christians, this is not true. Our character and habits do not quickly disappear. We have a day-by-day battle with sin, with self, and with our sinful nature. Our sinful nature may be under the power of God. But it is always trying to break away from Him. By ourselves, we cannot win against our sinful nature. All we can do is surrender our wills to Jesus, moment by moment. Moment by moment, we must claim His power over our sinful natures. This takes self-denial, struggle, and much prayer. But God promises us victory. If we do not surrender to God, defeat is sure.

How have you experienced surrendering to God? How have you experienced failure in surrender-

¹⁴Augustine—a Christian writer who lived in north Africa. He lived from 354–430 A.D.

ing to God? Why is knowledge of salvation and a relationship with Jesus so important to us during times of failure?

FRIDAY—JULY 22

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Think about the stories below of different Bible characters (people) who failed to surrender their desires to God's will. Study the results of their actions. Some of these people repented¹⁵ of their sin and trusted in God's grace for forgiveness and salvation. Others continued in their sin and will be eternally (forever) lost.

Bible Character	Results
Cain (Genesis 4:1-15)	
Moses (Exodus 2:11-15)	
David (2 Samuel 1–17)	
Peter (Matthew 26:69-75)	
Judas (Matthew 27:1-5)	

“You may live in the Holy Spirit, walk in the Holy Spirit, and have the fruit of the Holy Spirit. You may be filled with all of the fullness of God. Then you will be channels (ways) of light. Your life will be hid with Jesus in God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, p. 49.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As a class, talk about what it means to die to self and live a new life in Jesus. Share your own experiences and how some person may have changed your life. Suppose there is someone who wants to be a Christian but admits that he or she never had such experiences with God. What advice would you give that person?
2. In our struggle to keep our desires under control, why is understanding Jesus' death as our Substitute¹⁶ so important? Why is Jesus' death as our Substitute important when

we make a mistake by surrendering to our sinful desires?

3. In your community, where do you see businesses taking advantage of our God-given desires and sinful natures? What could you do to help limit the damage these businesses are doing to your community?

¹⁵repented—to have said you are sorry for your sins and to have turned away from sin.

¹⁶substitute—someone who takes another person's place. Jesus is our Substitute because He died for our sins.