

Our Natural Desires

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We've been talking loved ones, about the emotions and we've talked about the feelings, the life of feeling, and we've talked about affections. And just briefly maybe for about fifteen minutes or so perhaps we could think about the desires, and that's part of our emotions, our desires.

There are natural desires that God in his goodness has given us. It's really good that when you see a semi [U.S. abbreviated word for 'semi-trailer truck'; UK term is 'articulated lorry'] bearing down upon you, you don't just stand there and let it go over you. It's really good that you do have a self defense instinct or desire that makes you step out of the way, and God has given us that. And so we do all have our self defense instinct, or a self defense drive, or a desire simply to protect ourselves.

If we really did not want ever to have intercourse, the race would die out. And God has in fact put that desire within us for self propagation, and so that is a good and a healthy desire that the Father has given us. So the desire to propagate our race is another natural desire that is his gift.

You know what it's like, especially when you were a child you remember, and you were sick and your mom said, "But you have to eat. You have to eat." And it was just miserable when you had no appetite, you just didn't want to eat anything. And hunger is a blessing, and God has given us hunger and the desire to eat in order to preserve ourselves.

And so there are three desires that obviously God has given us, the desire for self propagation, the desire to preserve ourselves, and the desire to defend ourselves from danger. And all those things are right and proper, and we need to see that that are. And yet, it is important to realize that it's through those desires that Satan tempts us out of a position of trust in our Father. Now you'll see that loved ones, if you look at that famous description of temptation that you get in James, you remember, in James 1:14-15, "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death."

So actually it's through even our natural desires that Satan tempts us. And maybe it's good to see the subject or really the instrument there in Verse 14, "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." The desire lures and entices you. Instead of you being in control of it, it drags you out after it. Now I don't think it takes us very long to analyze why that is so. God's will for us was that we would trust him and know him as our dear Father. That whatever we needed we would ask him for, that when we needed love we would receive it from him. That everything we would need we would receive from God. And if we had done that he would have said, "Okay, there's an orange tree. Get some orange juice for the morning. You need orange juice." We'd get the orange juice.

He'd tell us how to take care of crops so that we had enough food to eat. He'd guide us in our love for our wives and our husbands so that it would be a balanced love, so that in fact we would have intercourse when it was his will for us to have it, and in the light of what his plan was for our

family lives. That was God's plan. But you know what we did. We decided we don't want to depend on him. We don't want to be so dependent on another person like him for guidance and direction. We want to go our own way. The result was we found ourselves very lonely. We found ourselves without the love that we were made to receive. We found ourselves in a world with millions of other people. And there all of them were trying to get attention and love, too. And we were trying to get attention and love. And it wasn't long before we felt, "Everybody wants to be loved, and nobody wants to love me." And so we begin to feel great emptiness in our hearts.

We began of course to worry so much about getting what we needed in the way of food and that sort of thing, that we became very, very miserable, and depressed, and despondent and lost all sense of happiness. And on top of that, we felt we had to, in some, way hack out a life for ourselves, so we began to try to hack away other people so that we could make room for ourselves. The result of all this was loved ones, that we desperately lacked the satisfaction that we were meant to get from God.

What we did was we turned to our desires. And self propagation was to beget the children or to fulfill the marriage plans that God had for men and women. It wasn't to provide us with the thrills and exhilaration that God fully intended us to get from beginning to explore and develop his world. There is enough excitement and exhilaration on the slopes of Mount Everest. There is enough excitement and exhilaration in crossing God's ocean and developing India and China. There is enough excitement and exhilaration there to make us all happy for the rest of our lives.

And there is enough excitement and exhilaration in the knowledge of God himself as a real person in our lives to fulfill us. But we didn't have that. And so we took the desire to propagate ourselves and we turned it into -- well, you know what it is when you think of old Playboy Magazine and Penthouse -- it is a multimillion dollar happiness industry that takes a good desire that God gave us and misuses it for a purpose other than he intended it to be used for.

So that many of us even in our -- even those of us who just married, we have a dreadful job trying to balance ourselves. We're constantly being snowed with this idea that if the marriage is not good in bed it's not a good marriage. And so we're overwhelmed by the desire to kind of live up to what everybody expects us to be. And so we have perverted the whole desire from something that was meant to procreate the race into something that is supposed to give us happiness. Of course, you only have to look at the loved one who has lived her life out on a red light district in a city; you see the happiness runs out very fast. And those dear girls will tell you that very soon after they begin.

The same kind of things seem to happen with hunger and food. We were meant to relax in God. Whenever people ignored us, or appeared not to think much of us, or whenever we lost our job, or we began to feel worried about our future, the Father expected us to lean on him, to "Trust in the Lord and don't despair; he is a friend so true. No matter what your troubles are he will see you through." He meant us to do that, to rest in him. To say, "Father, I can't see the way now but I know you are there. I know you're watching. And I know you have something around the next corner that I cannot see." Instead of that we tend to use the icebox, we tend to use the refrigerator. And the more worried and the more anxious we get the more we tend to eat.

And I don't know how many of us have had trouble of the whole business of disciplining our eating, not really because we love to take in mountains of chocolate chip ice cream, or because we just have a grave devotion to chocolate cream pie, but usually because there is some psychological reason deep down, some lack of real satisfaction and peace and rest. And some of us actually can trace it to

that. We will say -- some of us here tonight would say, "You're right. I eat more when I'm worried. I eat more when I'm anxious." In fact, there are those of us for whom it gets to the point, "Well, for my ulcer I have to eat." And so it's an endless circle that goes round and round.

So we have tended to take what is a good desire, hunger, and we have put it in the place of the rest, and relaxation, and the confidence that God intended to give us. Now we've done the same with the self defense thing. Self defense is good when you're avoiding a semi, or when you're avoiding a motorbike, or you're avoiding something else that's endangering your existence.

But we have developed self defense into a substitute for the important place we have in God's heart. You know, you don't realize that each one of us in this room has a special place in God's own heart. Really loved ones! I feel terrible even using those clichés because everybody uses them. But each one of us here in this room has a special place in God's heart. God knows each one of our names here. That's the important place that we have in this world. That's our significance in this world. It doesn't matter who else sees us or knows us, our God knows us and he only sent us here because there's a special thing that we've to do that nobody else can do.

But many of us have no sense of that at all. And so we take the self defense desire and we mutilate it and pervert it into eventually a self glory. Because, of course, if you decide, "There's no defense for me, accept what I put out myself," eventually you can see that the best defense is to get as many people under your control and under your power as possible. And so many of us spend our lives not in self defense but actually in domination of others, trying to get as many of the other three and a half or four billion --and it's a hopeless task -- but trying to get as many of that four billion under our control as possible so that we'll be safe. And so we take what is a good desire and we just turn it into a perversion.

Now, what I think most of us have found, is after we're born of God we still have problems with those things. We still have problems with those things because we have taken God into our lives, and we receive some peace from him, but we also still receive some peace from society, and from the world, and from other people. And that's why we are double minded.

"A double minded man is unstable in all his ways." And that's why many of us who are born of God are unstable still. Because, we take a little peace from God at prayer time at night, and then we grab a little peace from somewhere else. And we take a little chocolate cream pie to give us a little peace in here because God didn't somehow reach down there [Pats his stomach], he got up here [Points to his head]. And then we take a little sense of our importance before God from him in prayer, and then we grab a little bit at the office because we feel, "Well, we deserve to have more of a 'feeling' of power, and we didn't quite get the 'feeling' of power from God." And so we walk two roads [Gestures with his right hand out one way and his left hand out the other way].

Now it's a great moment when we see that being crucified with Christ means dying to this road [Gestures with his right hand again], and once and for all being ready to die to any importance, or any sense of security, or any sense of happiness that comes from the world, and people, and things and circumstances. And then we turn to God [Gestures with his left hand] and we say, "You alone Lord, will be our security, and our significance, and our happiness." Then there's great peace comes into the life. And actually of course what we've found -- we've called it the fullness of the Holy Spirit, because it seems as if more of God's Spirit comes into us then than we received originally at the new birth. Actually what has happened is we've just stopped filling our tummies from the world and we've turned to God and we found the fullness that he gives to our lives through

his Holy Spirit.

And so that is what we tend to call the fullness of the Spirit, or full surrender, or full consecration, or crucifixion with Christ. And many of us have found when we've come to that place where we've turned once and for all from the world and said, "Lord Jesus, I'm willing to live as you live. And you live at this moment away from the world depending only on God. I'm willing to live that way. I thank you that that's where I am. And now Lord will you give me all I need?" Then there comes a singleness of heart into the life.

Now after that loved ones, Satan's only method of using desires is through deception, because before that the desires are all self exaltation, self importance, self gratification, self deification. But after being crucified with Christ you have no longer that desire to satisfy self. And you're free from that. And so Satan's only method with you is to deceive you, to deceive you little-by-little into some of the old desires that you used to have.

Now it's maybe important, to see what the basis of that is. It's a verse that Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:23. It's that verse that he speaks you remember, in connection with this business of eating meat, whether it's lawful to eat meat. And he says in Verse 23, "All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up." You remember the King James Version I think, translates it, "All things are lawful, but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful, but not all things build up." And that's what Satan uses.

Augustine is really right when he says, "Love God and do what you like." That's really it, because if you really love God whatever you like will be what he likes. And really the life in Jesus is a free and liberated life. And so there are no desires that in themselves are wrong. But it is true that God wants you to live more and more deeply off him himself. And he wants to draw you more and more into his own heart. And Satan uses the technique of trying to get you to get a few things from other people besides God. And he knows of course, you don't want to put anybody before God, so he has to deceive you into it.

And this is the whole subtle area of things like comfort. Things like comfort! Satan says, "Now I know you get your main comfort from God, I know that. But God does work through people, doesn't he?" "Yeah, he does." "And you do have friends don't you?" "Yeah." "And there are times when you go to God and you don't exactly get through to comfort, isn't that right?" "Yeah." "What's wrong with getting a little comfort from God, through one of his dear servants?" And that's the kind of thing, that's it. And, it sounds great you couldn't argue with that. It sounds just good. I mean it'll allow you to give the other person a ministry for one thing. And it certainly lets God use them and make them feel part of his purposes.

But the trick is that it's the first little handhold that Satan gets again on your desire for consolation, and comfort, and a little self pity from somebody else. And so you listen to this person, and this person only has to be a little off. That's it, just a little off. In other words, if this person is not Saint Francis of Assisi, or Saint Teresa, or somebody equally perfect, it's very difficult for that person to walk a dead straight line and give you only what God is giving them to say to you. Because as they see your dear depressed face and your worried old frown, and they see it kind of lightening up as they comfort you a little, they're affected by what they see in your face and they think, "I'm doing pretty good." So they ladle in maybe an extra spoonful that God didn't give them. And it's not long before you're involved in a claustrophobic kind of mutual consolation and adulation society.

That's it loved ones. It's just so easy to slip from what seems a legitimate use of another child of God into depending on that person for comfort and consolation. Of course, the next step is once you've trained your soul a little in that way, even for a half an hour, then when you go to the office and the boss cuts you apart with criticism, you're a dead duck! Just dead! Because your soul is already trying to get comfort from some other human being's praises and now you're wide open. And you come against another human beings' criticism, and it tears you apart. That's how Satan works.

He deceives you gradually into beginning to indulge yourself in the old desires. Actually, the truth is, believe it or not, God is sufficient! Believe it or not God is enough! And probably anything that we get from anybody apart from God is always more diluted than it would be pure and strong from the Father himself. And I would remind you of your lowest moments. I would remind us all, think of the lowest moments in our lives. Think of the most desperate, depressing, disappointing moments when the bottom of our lives have dropped out. If you're the same as me, I can tell you those have been the most blessed times with my God that I have ever had. Those are blessed times, those are times when no other human being can help you, the situation is so bad. And you go straight through to God, and he is vividly real to you in a way that he never was before.

Now loved ones, that's a measure of what can take place when you're satisfied to go to God himself. Now it's that kind of thing that you get involved in. So, yes I think it is true every dad must kind of be proud of his son or of his daughter and it seems as if there is a right gladness, isn't it? You maybe don't like the word 'proud', but boy there's a gladness that your God has given you this kind of a son or this kind of a daughter. And so there's a gladness and delight that is always 'God related'. It's just that Satan is anxious to get you a little more over to the proud side.

And so it's not long before Satan says, "Yeah, but I mean you have some things to be proud about, haven't you?" "No I haven't." "Well, now you have. I mean, I mean think of the mind that God has given you." "Now that! Well, I should be thankful of that, yes." "Well I mean it does make you a little different from other people doesn't it?" "Well it does, yes." "Well I mean that's something to be proud." "Well, well, yes, well, maybe I suppose. Maybe I'm a little different from other people. Maybe I am, yeah. Yeah and I'm certainly very healthy compared with that person down the row, yeah. And my mind does work well, and yeah I have done –." And it's not long before Satan drags you along that line.

Loved ones, the key is God and him only. That's it. God is all we need. Gladness was created by God, so God is gladder than gladness. Happiness was created by God, so God is happier than happiness. Consolation and comfort were created by God, so God is more consoling than consolation and more comforting than comfort. Excitement was created by God, so God is more exciting than excitement. God is sufficient, but Satan is always trying to ease us a little towards something other than him.

Now old Nee [Watchman Nee] listed some of the things. And it's good just for me to sit under somebody's preaching too. So I thought I'd mention the things. He says under pride, "The desire to be honored among men." And I don't know how you brothers and sisters are. I know that it's very easy to think, "Well, now everybody deserves that." And our very educational system suggests that that is good. I mean it's healthy to honor other people. But loved ones, it seems to me once you go for that, you don't know where to pull back. And it seems to me, no! There's no honor among men worth talking about. And the only honor we need is the honor that comes from our God.

"Boasting of ones position." I don't know how you do with that, but it shames me when I think of how cleverly one tries to draw attention to something that one can do. And we often think, "Oh, it's nothing. It's unimportant." Loved ones, it's the beginning of a wedge that Satan will get between you and your God. And so it's not -- it's not a false humility to have nothing to do with that, and to have nothing to do with boasting, however gentle it is. And that is not a natural desire. It is not a natural desire to boast. It is a natural desire to be glad of what God has given us and to thank him eternally, but to see that it comes from him alone. "To boast of our temperament, or our ability, or our looks, or our power, dwelling on how differently one dresses, and lives, and eats..." And then it's interesting, old Nee has this phrase, "Dwelling contentedly on these differences."

And it's easy, you know, "Dwelling contentedly on these differences." "Well, I'm just being thankful to the Lord for all the things he's given me." Well it's tricky. It's tricky. When you're dwelling on them and sucking from them some little bit of comfort and encouragement that you're an 'individual'. You're an 'individual' because God has made you an 'individual', because he loves you in a different way than the way he loves everybody else. That's what makes you an 'individual', not the outward things. There are many people in a way outwardly like ourselves.

"Pride loves to be seen and to display itself. Pushing self to the front, unable to remain hidden and to deny himself when hidden. Suffers wound to self love when ignored." I don't know about you, but how many times do you find yourself thinking, "Well I mean, I did do the thing, I did it. I mean, I do deserve credit don't I, for it? I mean, I did do it. They didn't do it, I did it. And they ought to see that I did it." You see the moment you do that, you steal peace from yourself. Have you noticed that? It's as if you leak away some of the Holy Spirit. Have you found that after you done that you feel a little more dissipated? You kind of feel flat. God is so good; he's designed us so beautifully that when we do get off base there's something inside that shows us that we have lost something. We've lost something of that dear Savior, something of his humility, who doesn't care if anybody sees him.

"Pride leads to ambition to spread fame, to become man" -- or woman I suppose -- "become man above others, to attract the world's admiration, spiritual work, aspirations for success, fruit, power, usefulness, deeper experience and growth." I just wrote, "Wood, hay, stubble." But that's what we do. We think, "Well, we want to be used. We ought to be used by God. I mean that's a good desire isn't it? I mean we're supposed to be used. Now Lord, use me mightily!" And it sounds good, but it's just has that element of, "Use me in such a way that others see that you're using me." And really the safest place is in a little corner, of a little cottage, in the north of Scotland where nobody knows you or knows you even exist. And you can serve God there without any attention from anybody. And loved ones, it's amazing, whenever you come to that blessed place in your own heart, you find the blessing and the glory of God coming upon you. And so when you have nothing to do with the pride that everybody says we have a right to have, you receive God's own praise.

He talks about pleasure loving. And we often say, "Oh well, it's right to have pleasure." "Emotion cannot abide living wholly for God, a whole day in prayer without recreation or refreshing of emotion." And often that's true. We say, "Well now, I have a desire to enjoy God's presence. I mean, shouldn't I have that?" But it's not long before, as we shared last Sunday, you're going after the emotion instead of God himself. And it's not long before you're looking for the pleasure.

I don't know loved ones, if you have come to that. I know it, it sounds a fine line. But it does

seem that there is a time in even listening to good music, even in going to a play, where you can cross the line between God wants you to have and what he doesn't want you to have. And it does seem that the Father wants all our desires to be under his control. And it's surprising how easy it is to find yourself going after pleasure.

And I would testify gladly myself, that I've been amazed at how Satan can take a person who believes they are in a safe place on the cross, and can gradually draw them to love comfort or to love little excitements. I don't know if you find yourself doing that. I don't know if you -- you know TGIF, that restaurant on highway 12 [Western part of the Twin City area] really speaks for so much of America. "Thank God it's Friday;" or, "Thank God it's Saturday;" or, "Thank God it's Sunday; or, "Thank God it's my birthday;" or, "Thank God it's Washington's birthday;" [holiday in the US] or, "Thank God it's vacation time;" or, "Thank God it's something different because I need a little thrill to keep me going every moment."

And it's so easy to think, "Well isn't that fair? I mean my dad used to come home on a Friday night with a little treat for us, isn't that right?" Well, the treat is good. And the treat is good when it's an optional extra that you didn't expect, and you didn't depend on. But I wonder what kind of a drug addict we are when we're living for that treat? And so Satan gradually tries to entice us saying, "Now listen, pleasure -- isn't pleasure fair? Pleasure is a desire that God has given you." Yes, but 'as he gives it to you', as he gives it to you in his own good time. But as we go after it ourselves, we find ourselves drawn out into something that is not God.

Old Nee says about 'self-justification' -- I don't know how much you found this, "Common symptom among emotional Christians, explaining misunderstandings even if God does not direct. Cannot bear to be misunderstood." And we think, "Well, isn't that a normal desire? I mean, to be understood, isn't that normal? And isn't it normal not to like to be misunderstood?" Well it depends on why. It depends on whether you are concerned that the person doesn't understand how to receive Jesus, or whether maybe the person doesn't understand that you're not that dumb, that'd you'd say a thing like that.

"Misunderstood; speak on our own behalf; wants everyone to see his righteousness in no uncertain terms." Wonder if you found yourself doing that? "They're misunderstanding me. They don't understand what I really mean. And they don't really see how righteous I am. They don't really see that I brought this about."

And yet Jesus hangs on the cross, and what did they understand? They didn't seem to understand the first thing. Certainly most of them didn't understand he was not political at all. But even the ones who followed him spiritually, didn't understand why he was dying. And the safe place of course, is to be with him on that cross. "Lord, I am willing to die to whether people misunderstand me or understand me. And I'm willing to be misunderstood. And I'm willing actually to lose out because of that. I'm willing to put my life in your hands. And Lord, if you want to defend me that's good, and if you don't want to defend me that's good."

And loved ones, that's a place of freedom and peace. It really is. It really is. When you put your life into God's hands and you say, "Lord, it's up to you." Of course, it pleases him because he sees that you trust him. He sees that you are not stupid enough to trust the posters, or to trust the other people who think well of you, or think badly of you. He sees that you do believe that your life is in his hands, not in the hands of the boss, not in the hands of your peers, not in the hands of the people who misunderstand you. And so of course he showers upon you everything that

he has planned to give you.

So loved ones, it is through deception. It's through deception; it's through Satan suggesting to you that certain desires are legitimate. And of course God's way is, "Come to me first. Depend on me. Look to me for everything, and then your desires will work naturally and spontaneously in the right way."

Loved ones, it even refers to the food. Really, it does. Because the problems we have with food are the same as the problems we have with all our other desires: we're too important in our own eyes. We're always thinking of ourselves. And we're always thinking of what we deserve to have. And when at last you regard that as crucified with Christ and you as no longer as existing, and Jesus alone wearing this 'overcoat', then it's always, "Lord Jesus, would you like an ice cream today?" And you'll be surprised how often he'll in his kindness say, "Yes." But that's it. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus we do thank you, that as we look at Calvary we see that if you did this for us, then you certainly want the best for us. And you are not up there in heaven trying to work out how to make our days miserable. You're up there in heaven working out how to give us good days, great day -- indeed, how to have a good day in us yourself, and how to live fully in us tomorrow. Lord Jesus we thank you for that.

We would welcome you into our hearts this night. And Lord Jesus we would ask you to guard us from the evil one and from his deceptions. And we would ask you Lord, to draw us to yourself for the fulfillment of all our desires, so that we will experience that delighting ourselves in God and then he will give us the desires of our hearts. Lord Jesus, we would begin to put our desires under your control. And Lord we would see, that it really is you alive. It really is a case of, "Would you like milk tonight?" Or, "Would you like hot chocolate tonight?" or, "What would you like Lord?"

Oh, help us Lord Jesus to live that way from this night on, so that we can live free from ourselves and live in that position of power that you intended us to have over these natural desires that you've given us. So we pray for each other Lord in this regard, and trust you by your Holy Spirit to bring us each one, into victory.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with each one of us now and throughout this coming week. Amen.