

“What’s Your Driving Passion?”

by Pastor Jason Van Bommel

Isaiah 26:7-15

⁷ *The path of the righteous is level;
you make level the way of the righteous.*

⁸ *In the path of your judgments,
O LORD, we wait for you;
your name and remembrance
are the desire of our soul.*

⁹ *My soul yearns for you in the night;
my spirit within me earnestly seeks you.
For when your judgments are in the earth,
the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.*

¹⁰ *If favor is shown to the wicked,
he does not learn righteousness;
in the land of uprightness he deals corruptly
and does not see the majesty of the LORD.*

¹¹ *O LORD, your hand is lifted up,
but they do not see it.
Let them see your zeal for your people, and be ashamed.
Let the fire for your adversaries consume them.*

¹² *O LORD, you will ordain peace for us,
for you have indeed done for us all our works.*

¹³ *O LORD our God,
other lords besides you have ruled over us,
but your name alone we bring to remembrance.*

¹⁴ *They are dead, they will not live;
they are shades, they will not arise;
to that end you have visited them with destruction
and wiped out all remembrance of them.*

¹⁵ *But you have increased the nation, O LORD,
you have increased the nation; you are glorified;
you have enlarged all the borders of the land.*

- Isaiah 26:7-15, ESV

What Drives Your Life?

What is your driving passion, the indisputable and non-negotiable most important thing in your life? In the movie *City Slickers*, Billy Crystal's character needed to find out his one thing – which, for him, was his family.

How do you know what drives your life? Well, what never gets rescheduled in your life- if it's on the calendar, it's happening, and everything else has to move around it? What's the first thing you think of in the morning and the last thing you think of at night? What do you give first priority to in your budget and spending? If I were to ask 3 or 4 people who know you best, what would they say was the driving passion of your life?

If you have an answer to the driving passion question, the next question should be WHY? Why is this thing at the center of your life? Why build your time, budget, and life priorities around this central passion? For many people, the answer would be "This makes me happy." Whatever brings us the most satisfaction, the most joy, is the thing you care most about it and invest most heavily in.

Here's our main truth for this morning from this passage: The Bible tells us that, when you boil it down, there are two kinds of people in the world: The first are people living for themselves, aiming to do whatever satisfies themselves. In the words of Marie Condo, they do whatever will "spark joy" in their lives. The second group are people living for God and His glory, His renown. In the words of Isaiah 26:8: "*your name and remembrance are the desire of our soul.*"

To get very blunt about it and to use the language of the Bible, specifically the language here in Isaiah 26, these groups are the wicked and the righteous.

The Aim of the Wicked

The aim of the wicked is clear: to please themselves, to serve themselves, to advance their name, to enhance their comfort, to do whatever they think will make them happy. For many people, doing good makes them happy because it helps them believe they are basically good people. The most common American path for self-satisfaction is pursuing some version of the American dream, and we have even enshrined "the pursuit of happiness" in our Declaration of Independence as one of our God-given, inalienable rights.

- **What God Does for the Wicked**

Here's a surprising and yet plain truth taught repeatedly in the Bible: God is good to the self-serving wicked. Jesus tells His followers to love their enemies. In Matthew 5:43-45, He says:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (ESV)

- **How the Wicked Respond**

Here in Isaiah 26, we’re told –

*“If favor is shown to the wicked,
he does not learn righteousness;
in the land of uprightness he deals corruptly
and does not see the majesty of the Lord.”*

The distinguishing characteristic of the wicked is that they receive good things from the Lord, but they do not acknowledge the Lord as the Giver or give thanks to Him for His goodness. As Romans 1:21 puts it, *“Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”*

When self-centered and self-serving people live in the midst of believers who are honoring God sincerely, they are still blind to God’s majesty and goodness and they deal corruptly – that is, they serve themselves. So, goodness received is never gratitude returned, and opportunities given to see God’s goodness are manipulated into opportunities to deal selfishly and immorally. This is the regular pattern of human beings, how we all live by nature. It’s the way of the world and always has been.

At the end of the day, people who are living for themselves are users – Everyone else and everything else in their lives just serves to either make them happy or not. So, divorce rates in America skyrocketed when unabashed selfishness became a celebrated cultural aspiration. The #1 reason why people get divorced? “We’re just not in love anymore.” In other words, I married this person because they made me happy, but they don’t make me happy anymore, so now I’m going to find someone new.

- **What God Will Do to the Wicked**

God has said very clearly that He will judge the wicked. The prayer of God’s people regarding the wicked is in verse 11 –

*Let them see your zeal for your people, and be ashamed.
Let the fire for your adversaries consume them.*

And the final destiny of the wicked is seen in verse 14 -

*They are dead, they will not live;
they are shades, they will not arise;
to that end you have visited them with destruction
and wiped out all remembrance of them.*

The thing is, most people don't want to see themselves as being wicked. They just say, "I'm only trying to live my life and mind my own business. If I've found something that makes me happy, what's wrong with it." What's wrong with it is that our natural human tendency is to make ourselves and our desires the center of our own universe, and other people are dehumanized as we view them solely as those who are either helping us be happy or keeping us from being happy. Even God becomes just another instrument to be manipulated in the pursuit of our happiness, our selfish desires. So, most people claim to be religious in some way, but the majority of professing Christians in America now hold to some major aspects of the prosperity Gospel, a way of thinking that sees God as blessing those who believe in Him with health, wealth, and happiness.

If you want to know what people are really like, remove all restraint and all sense of accountability and watch what they do. If unhindered, people riot and loot, rape and pillage, enslave and oppress. It's happened millions of times on every continent in every human culture throughout history.

And what is at the root of all of this? The original lie, "You can be like God." Here's your ticket to God-like autonomy and power. You can run your own life however you see fit. The Bible tells us twice in Proverbs, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.*" Selfishness is wickedness and slavery to our appetites, and it leads to destruction.

The Aim of the Righteous

There is a better way. Remember that here in Isaiah 26, we're being given the song of the righteous, sung in the day of salvation. It contrasts the blessing of the way of the righteous with the futility and wickedness of the path of those who live for themselves –

*⁷ The path of the righteous is level;
you make level the way of the righteous.*

*⁸ In the path of your judgments,
O LORD, we wait for you;
your name and remembrance
are the desire of our soul.*

*⁹ My soul yearns for you in the night;
my spirit within me earnestly seeks you.
For when your judgments are in the earth,*

the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

¹² *O LORD, you will ordain peace for us,
for you have indeed done for us all our works.*

¹³ *O LORD our God,
other lords besides you have ruled over us,
but your name alone we bring to remembrance.*

¹⁵ *But you have increased the nation, O LORD,
you have increased the nation; you are glorified;
you have enlarged all the borders of the land.*

- **What God Does for the Righteous**

We need to remember from last week what God does for the righteous: He sets up an eternally glorious and secure city for us, a place for us to live and thrive, which is actually Jesus Himself. We are His body, the Body of Christ, His holy people and His holy city. God saves and keeps the righteous. He rescues us from the wicked futility of living for ourselves and reconciles us to Himself so we can joyfully and gloriously know Him and live for Him.

Here in today's passage, the first thing we see God doing for the righteous is making a level path for us: "*The path of the righteous is level; you make level the way of the righteous.*"

Now, to follow up on the questions from last week's sermon: Who is the Way for the righteous? **[Jesus]**

God leads His own people in the Way of Jesus, the level and straight way of Christlikeness. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian is shown the way to the Celestial City, and it is a straight path, never deviating to the right or to the left. He is to walk in this path, but the way is not always easy.

Here in Isaiah 26, we see that at times, we must wait for the Lord in His Way. We wait "*in the path of Your judgments*" which could mean the path of God's commandments or of His actions to judge and discipline His people. Either way, this is not easy. We must wait.

- **How the Righteous Respond**

So, God's people respond to God making a level path for us to walk by waiting for Him when the way is hard. As Christian was walking on the Way of Salvation, he had to climb the Hill Difficulty, a steep and demanding way that exhausted him. But the Lord provided rest for him on that hill. He later encountered Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation, and he had to

fight for his life. But God gave him armor for the fight and the Sword of Spirit, the Word of God, to counter Apollyon's attacks. He had to walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, where he experienced horrors and terrors beyond description. But God gave him the gift of prayer to call out to the Lord even in the deep darkness and the terrors of the night.

Here in Isaiah 26:12, there's a promise for us as we wait and a truth that undergirds that promise:

*O LORD, you will ordain peace for us,
for you have indeed done for us all our works.*

God has indeed done all our works. He has provided everything good for us. The righteous respond to God's good provision by waiting for His peace as we walk in what God has provided. Our walk is a waiting and anticipating walk - waiting for Him, seeking Him, desiring Him. We walk in the path of God's word and what God has appointed for us. We're not just looking for an escape. We wait **for the Lord**, not content to try to make things happen for ourselves. And we desire the Lord deeply, more than anything else.

"Your name and remembrance are the desire of our soul." What is your one thing? For the righteous, their One Thing is the Name of the LORD! God's name is His revelation of Himself, all that He has made known about Himself. And the remembrance of God is calling to mind, remembering, and living in active awareness of who God is. We want to know God and to make Him known. We want to draw near to Him and see others draw near to Him, too.

"My soul yearns for You in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks You."

This is the passionate longing of God's people for God Himself and nothing less. Because anything other than God is definitely something less than God.

And then we read, *"For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness."* This is the desire for the spread of the remembrance of God's name – to see God's ways known on earth and people come to share in glorifying and rejoicing in Him.

Psalm 67 prays this way –

¹ *May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us, Selah*

² *that your way may be known on earth,
your saving power among all nations.*

³ *Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!*

⁴ *Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity*

and guide the nations upon earth. Selah
⁵*Let the peoples praise you, O God;*
let all the peoples praise you!

⁶*The earth has yielded its increase;*
God, our God, shall bless us.
⁷*God shall bless us;*
let all the ends of the earth fear him!

This is what it's all about – We receive God's grace and blessing, and we know His favor shining on us in joy. We've been forgiven, reconciled to God, adopted into His family, and we are kept and loved by Him. In response, we love Him more deeply and we long to see all the peoples of the earth come to know Him and be glad and rejoice in Him.

Are you starting to catch the secret here? The way of selfishness pursues happiness and ignores or seeks to manipulate God. In the end, it misses the happiness it aims for and tragically misses God, too. The righteous are blessed by God and respond to that blessing with a passionate, dedicated, focused desire to know God and make Him known. They are not seeking the greatness of their own name or the path of their own pleasures. They are seeking the greatness of God's name and walking in the way of His commands. And they find in God the desire of their souls, the source of all joy, the only One who can satisfy and fulfill the yearnings of the nations.

- **What God Will Do for the Righteous**

God promises that those who seek Him in this way will find Him. God promises that those who desire eternal joy in Him will be satisfied in Him:

¹²*O LORD, you will ordain peace for us,*
for you have indeed done for us all our works.

¹³*O LORD our God,*
other lords besides you have ruled over us,
but your name alone we bring to remembrance.

¹⁵*But you have increased the nation, O LORD,*
you have increased the nation; you are glorified;
you have enlarged all the borders of the land.

Or, in the words of Psalm 16:11 –

You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Aim a Little Higher

The problem with the natural way of man is that we selfishly aim too low at things that will not satisfy us. We settle for a quick and easy happiness instead of an eternal and unfading joy. God gives us good gifts to enjoy in this life. We are blessed to be able to enjoy them. But they are enjoyed best as gifts from our Heavenly Father that reveal to us more of His heart for us, more of His goodness and love. When we make them ends in themselves, thinking they will, in themselves, satisfy our souls, we sell ourselves short and crash, because we're not aiming high enough.

Jonathan Edwards said –

“God is the highest good of the reasonable creature. The enjoyment of him is our proper; and is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Better than fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of any, or all earthly friends. These are but shadows; but the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams; but God is the sun. These are but streams; but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.”

But how can we do this? How can we set our hearts to enjoy God as the one thing most central and vital in our lives. Well, we need to start with repenting of putting God in second or third or lower place. We need to stop making excuses and believing lies that hinder us from the earnest pursuit of God.

We also need to help each other. The way of the righteous is not a path to be walked alone. Jonathan Edwards also said –

Let Christians help one another in going this journey. There are many ways that Christians might greatly help and forward one another in their way to heaven: by religious conference and otherwise. . . . This is the way to be more successful in traveling and to have the more joyful meeting at their Father's house in glory.

The world is always trying to convince us that the way of selfishness is the only way to be happy. They're constantly selling us cheap God-substitutes, and we need to remind each other of the truth and call each other to a higher joy and a deeper dependence on Christ. Together, we can walk the level way the Lord has prepared for us and enjoy the anticipation of eternal joy found only in the presence of the Lord.

