

Pondering the Ruin of Desire

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Well, hello, and welcome to Ponder by NorthernLife. We're having a conversation about the Word of the Lord, as it was preached to us on Sundays, and as we encounter it in our everyday lives.

I'm here today with Jono, Ben, Tristan, and our very special guest, Karen Braiding. Welcome to the podcast, Karen.

Thank you. An honor to be in such a lustrous company.

The honor is all ours. Now, today, we are reflecting on Jono's sermon on desire from our Roads to Ruin series. Jono, do you want to give us a quick recap of that sermon and what was about?

Sure.

Yeah. The last Roads to Ruin message was on desire. And I looked at James' classic teaching about two forms of birth that come from desire, from Chapter 1 of James.

One which leads to death and another which leads to life. I hope to drive home the seriousness, I think, of the teaching series.

And as part of that, introduce the illustrative metaphor of a fishing lure, which deceives and then catches people, typically a fish. But in this case, the metaphor points to people being caught on a hook.

But there is a narrow way through Jesus, that produces the opposite of death, full and flourishing life.

What were your reflections, the rest of the table just coming off from that sermon?

The image of the lure, I think, is very helpful for the whole series, not just for desire. That even the idea that the lure matches exactly the desire of the specific fish kind of changes forms. I found that very challenging and very helpful.

Yeah, I agree with that.

For me, I think I was reflecting also on where Psalm 37 says, to delight yourself in the Lord, and he will grant you the desires of your heart, and contrasting that with disordered desires, and trying to sort of grasp the difference, what they mean

Yeah, I was more looking in the direction, inwardly, of what does it mean to grant the desires of your heart?

What does that look like? And in the context of the full series of how vulnerable we can get with such things that lure us in differently. So it was nice to wrap it up in that way of, what are my desires with all these things that we've looked at?

How do I realign myself to the narrow road, which is Christ?

Yeah, for myself, I was really struck by this idea of impregnation, that desire can impregnate sin in us, but the spirit can also impregnate life in us. I thought that was a really interesting image to play around with. Question to start us off.

You noted, Jono, an important point that is, desire is not inherently evil, right? There is a level of healthy desire we have.

And I guess my first question is, how can we tell when what might be a normal desire drifts and crosses the line into something that is disordered or unhealthy? What are your thoughts?

Well, I remember what Jono said about the when you're looking for it in the wrong place. And that's got to be central. Because I think a lot of our desires are quite natural and good.

And I was thinking about, for instance, our desire for food, normal hunger. We need to have food to live, so it's not the desire that's wrong.

But when we look to food as our life satisfaction, and then it becomes disordered, that ends up in eating disorders.

Yeah, I always go back to the concept of the spirit-trained conscience, where if you have this initial desire that doesn't inherently look bad, but once it's over time, it starts to prick at you.

It starts to really create a questionable thought in your mind and in your heart. And when it gets to that point, you have two responses. You either cut it off, like discard that desire, give it all to God, or you can make excuses for it.

You can continue to dig further into the question mark of, is this a desire or not, and try giving to that.

So I think a spirit-trained conscience by the spirit through God's Word helps you navigate whether desire is an actual desire given from God, or just a big question mark.

Can I clarify what you mean by cut it off?

I think, like, not entertaining that desire anymore, and it's not always going to be immediate, but a good start is by actually praying it and surrendering it to God. That prayer that we prayed at the end, Lord, I renounce this desire.

Like, it's powerful when you speak that to God, when you're, like, in prayer. That's what I mean.

Where is it? Is it Hebrews that says you should have moved on from spiritual milk and repentance from acts that lead to death? I feel like there's quite a range of situations to answer your question.

For some people, their conscience is just prepped all the time, and they're struggling with very obvious gross sin. And so I think that answer, that type of desire is pretty easy.

But other ones are more nuanced, and it's like, is my job becoming an idol? Is my, one of the classic ones, I think, and Ben's touched on it a bit, is my family becoming an idol? That's like, that's subtle.

And you need other people to help you with that, I reckon. Or it's just a real process of, as a mature Christian, you're probably spending more time with the Lord to even be reflecting in such a way that that desire would be sinful.

Do you know what I mean? So I think a lot of people are just, it's just obvious. If you don't think that that thing that is sinful in the Bible is bad, as Tristan says, your conscience is being seared, and that's a problem.

But for others, and that's probably where you're touching on, like where's the nuanced desire. Yeah, it's asking the question, what's making me maybe angry? Or what's my love?

What do I feel the most angst about when I don't get it? Maybe that's part of finding out what is at the core of your heart.

I remember hearing a message from John Ortberg once, talking about this idea of the shadow mission.

And he was talking about Jesus in the wilderness and the three temptations that Jesus faced, and the fact that the things that the devil said to Jesus were not 180 degrees opposite of God's will. They were like 10 degrees off.

They were just slightly wrong, because Jesus does reign over all things, but the devil says, I'll give you all these kingdoms. So there is truth in it, but it is ultimately a lie, but it's a subtle lie.

I think that the desires that we experience are not, I mean, maybe early in faith, they're 180 degrees polar opposite to the way of Jesus. But when you mature in faith, the desires get more nuanced and subtle. They're just slightly off.

But that's the Proverbs 14 verse 12. There's a way that appears to be right, because it's only six degrees off, but in the end, it leads to death.

And so wisdom, as James prays in James verse one, if you lack wisdom, ask God and he'll give generously to be able to discern and course correct whether this desire is leading to death or it's leading to life.

And I think that's extra challenging nowadays because that blur is almost becoming acceptable. You know, what is acceptable has moved so much in our culture and society that it's really hard sometimes to discern, is this actually okay what I'm doing?

Everyone says it's okay, but maybe, you know, maybe it's not. And that's when you have to drive back into what, what does the Bible actually say.

And also, I think, consult some wisdom, and probably not just wisdom of your friends, because I find that sometimes that just echoes back what you want to hear, but some wisdom of, you know, other people.

For me, that means sometimes younger people, because they come from a different generation, and different generations have different, what, biases, I guess, understandings. And so crossing those generations is helpful. Yeah.

So, pivoting a little bit.

Actually, kind of drawing on what you said, Tristan, about sort of, when we identify the desire to pray to God, to cut it off. Often there's a certain place in our hearts or minds that that desire has occupied.

And taking it away kind of leaves an emptiness that could just be filled by something else. And so, I just wonder, how do we fill the place or replace that desire? What does it look like for that to happen?

We've talked about it before.

I think when we talked about desire, when you preached on Philippians about desire, I think it, I mean, there's that classic line, fake it till you make it. And it doesn't sound very Christian.

But I think it's just doing exactly like you said, putting something else in the place of an unhelpful habit. I know we don't like the habit loop, pop psychology stuff that much, but it's just true.

There are neural pathways that are formed through action. That you get up at a certain time and you do stuff. So I think you're right, that the problematic action needs to be replaced.

The replacement principle from waveform. And it's just, it's not just, but it is a matter of doing that. Finding something that's really helpful, beneficial for me, and do it.

And our minds and our hearts and souls do get formed through behaviour towards an increased desire to do that thing. I think desire can be nurtured, is my point.

I think the challenge is when you're not acting on your desire, but the desire doesn't go away.

And then, I was just thinking about, for instance, when you really want to, you want to find a life partner, and you can't see one in the wings, you don't know what the future holds. And that's a natural desire.

It's not something we necessarily act on, but how do we manage that desire in a way that is godly? And well, for me, it always goes back to trust God. Trust God.

He's promised to satisfy our deepest longings, and he may do that in a way that we don't expect, but he will satisfy our desires.

And that does come back to the point, John, I made in the sermon, that disordered desire is a lack of trust in God's ability to satisfy us.

And God normally uses pain and suffering and what seems like detours to get our attention.

You know, when you can't get rid of that desire, he sometimes puts us in a place where we can't really act on the desire, because you may be sitting in a hospital bed or something, or you just get forced to re-evaluate.

He's good like that, loving like that. But your point, Karen, is very true that there is a lament and a pain in life about unmet expectations. And they're there tomorrow.

They're there the day after. Because, I mean, if you think about the unfulfilled desire from tragic loss, that's another whole can of worms, isn't it?

You know, my desire was to fill in the blanks, experience the love of the loved one, or the love of the one that I had that I lost. Be it children, spouse, but there's so much pain that we live through in life.

That sort of is another angle on desire, isn't it? So, you mentioned it last time about self-control and surrender. That's essential in dealing with desire.

And that's what spiritual disciplines are, voluntarily putting yourself in that kind of place.

Willard, there you go, talks about, he puts kind of two big categories of spiritual disciplines, disciplines of engagement, where you do something that you weren't previously doing, but then there's also disciplines of abstinence, where you stop

doing something that you were doing. So fasting, solitude, silence, frugality, simplicity, chastity, these are disciplines of pulling back, abstaining from something.

In the case of food, when you stop eating food, which is a good thing, as we said, food is a good desire, but when you stop doing that, it brings to surface the ways that you have been disordered by your desire for that thing, which is kind of like a

suffering. You're putting yourself in a place of cutting off the fulfillment of the desire in order to tame that desire. And to find satisfaction in God instead of the thing itself.

And that is the historic 2000 year answer to your question. How do you identify desire? Through the practice of spiritual disciplines is what the most skilled Christians over the years have discovered.

To sort of narrow in on one of the points that we sort of just mentioned.

Some Christians who come to faith, maybe the younger, and yeah, they've got these negative desires that like everyone else that they're wrestling with.

But Jono, you talked about this positive desire that the spirit gives birth to, where we actively desire God and the things of God.

And I remember being a younger Christian, and hearing people talk about that, I'm like, okay, I don't really feel, I don't really feel that passionate desire. Like, I feel like it's an effort for me to want to, want to spend time with God.

And obviously, that's the work of the Holy Spirit. But I wonder what you would say to people who are in that space, or, yeah, if there's any clarity you could give to that sort of situation.

I would say a powerful example that I've seen, and I'm a big community person, obviously, when we just came back from our Young Adults retreat, there's different moments throughout the year where, depends on the season that you're in, if you position

yourself well within community, it really gives birth to a passion to be in community, one, and also to serve God and to be closer to him, because that was like found into flame in that moment. So I would say positioning yourself well in community is

I love what you bring to the podcast.

It's really cool. This sort of contextual Christianity in community is very strong for you. It's a great point you make.

I always come back to things like exercise. It's good for you, but until you do it and get a bit better at it, a bit proficient, a bit of fitness, it starts affecting you. It's a chore.

But everybody knows, if you exercise, it begets exercise. Health begets health. And you won't get revelation, which fuels desire for more, revelation from God, which is knowing Him, without spending time with Him.

And you've got to push through the, reading the Bible, then it's boring. It could be because of sin, really. It could be because of grieving the Spirit.

It could be because of a spiritual stronghold, a demonic power that's preventing you from getting stuff from the Word of God. But once you start getting it, it really does steamroll. It really becomes easier.

So you just got to start. And also, I think it's a little bit like with the community thing, a bit personality linked. If you're an introvert, you probably do it by yourself.

But if you're an extrovert, find someone to seek the Lord with. Pray together with others. There's a lot the community can do to bless you in fueling a God-honouring desire to be in His presence.

And one of the things that I always remember when I was at uni, actually, a long time ago now, but some of my love for God's word was stoked when I remember, I think it was actually the Book of James that really got me excited.

Because I hadn't read it before and I was reading, and I was hearing teaching about all these things that were so practical. So I started a system of writing out memory verses on cards. You wouldn't do that now, of course.

I do it on notes on a phone. But it started me to be able to tie together the different parts of God's word. And the more you get into God's word, the more you want to get into God's word.

You start to understand it a bit more, you start to discover pearls in it, and it makes you more excited. And then if you step back for a while, and you think, Oh, do I really want to do this? You can remember what it was like.

And that then gets you excited again.

For me, worship music helps me want God more, or even wants to want God more.

I'm musical myself, and so putting on a particular song, I have a couple of songs that almost without fail put me in a place of desiring God more after listening to the song. For some people, going for a walk in creation is helpful.

For some people, it's reading poetry or reading the Bible certainly should be key for all of us, or different types of prayer. It's time in community. I think that's your point about personality.

Find what works for you, the way God made you, the things that fan into flame, the desire for him in your heart based on your personality.

And when you see what God is doing in other people's lives, that becomes an example for you. You know, I want what that person has. Oh, okay.

I'll better follow what that person's doing.

Like yesterday was a key example of what passion looks like. We had a baptism yesterday. I just, I wasn't looking at the baptism.

I should have been looking at the baptism with those people in front of me. I was just looking at people's faces while it was happening, and the joy is so, it gets you emotional, man.

Like the joy of seeing someone come to Christ, that is what you're trying to cling on to, that sort of life-changing passion that Christ gives you. Like that's what you want to hold on to. That's what you're trying to seek out for.

Like it's those type of things that strike you hard. Yeah.

I don't know if it was because I was in the baptistry pool, and it's hard surfaces around you, and it's an angled sort of triangle going into it. But that was the loudest celebration I've ever heard after a baptism. It was raucous.

Not to bring the tone down too much.

But my next question is, obviously we're talking about roads to ruin. And I wanted to ask, get into a little bit more of what it looks like for desire to ruin us, or just to get a clearer picture of what the actual dangers of desire are.

Drugs will always work and will always be here, because there's always going to be pain. And if you can find something to take away the pain, it's going to keep satisfying, but it's just how quickly the relief dissipates and you get a relapse.

And where you're wanting to get to in the whole illustration of the cycle of addiction is the diminishing rate of return. The diminishing impact becomes circular and narrow and leads to death.

That's, you know, its cycle gets closer and tighter and tighter. And that's the sign of complete disorder and dysfunction. Yeah, the ruinous place is the metaphors of hooks and chains, strongholds, loneliness, despair, darkness.

It's pretty yucky. That's, I think, that's what it is. That's what I've found over, you know, a long time being a pastor and experiencing some levels of ruin myself in making bad choices.

Yeah, there's all the bad stuff of life. Guilt and shame is in there. But the sense of despair and self-loathing that comes, that they're all the sort of words that I would use.

It tends to be the ruinous road is not a party. It's not a party road. It's a lonely road.

It's a shame-filled road. You don't tend to talk about it, I don't think. What do you guys think?

I think the word shame is significant because that's how we handle that, sort of dictates what we do next.

Shame can make us withdraw, almost give up. I'm an awful person. I've got this terrible habit or sin or desire.

I'm just awful. Or to do something about it. And if that shame then drives us to say, well, actually, in God's sight, I'm not an awful person, but he does want me to get rid of this, I need to do something about it, then that's a positive thing.

And it's pointing towards the 12-step program.

That's the great example of a model that was developed for people who's stuck in ruinous addiction. And it begins with, I am stuck, I'm going to be real with myself and say, I'm stuck in this sin, and I need a higher power. We know it's God.

I need someone to rescue me. And so there's this sort of caught in the rib that Tristan talked about, and raising your hand and saying, I need help, I need help. I remember, we talk about Dallas Willard a bit, and just to do name dropping.

When I was with him in this course I did with him, I remember so distinctly him with this lovely calm demeanor, saying, you've got to be ready to forsake lust. Are you ready to forsake it completely?

And he said, when you talk about something like that, or it might be any other sin that comes from desire, when you actually say, am I willing to forsake it completely? You sort of are brought into the stark reality of yourself.

And the answer might be no. And then he says, and there you have found your problem. Are you willing to forsake it?

No more. No more at all. Or is it always in the deep depth of your hearts, like, I know the process.

I'll get some forgiveness and feel a bit better, and then I'll find my way back to forget about lust, revenge, spite, contempt, because rage, I love that. And that's what we're talking about. That's what you're saying, Tristan, isn't it?

Just identifying it and realizing, oh, wow, I'm really stuck in this because I love it. I love my sin. And I guess, again, that's graduate Christianity, and it's also entry-level Christianity, just realizing sin's got a hold of us and it's a problem.

And that's how you recognize it when it rears its ugly head up again, because you've acknowledged it the first time, you know what this looks like.

And that's coming back to your point, Karen, of I'm going to remember what Christ did for me that first time, and I'm going to cling on to that again.

That's how it just keeps repeating itself, and you know, and it's what you were saying yesterday, John, when you're doing karate moves up there with the...

Every good and pretty gift. Yeah.

Remembering having those verses in your arsenal just to smash it at sin. Like, that's what... That's life.

That's what it is.

And so often we may not like the outcome of the sin, but we don't want to actually let go of the sin itself.

And I'm thinking of the damage, talking about addiction, the damage that alcohol can often do, where, you know, you still want to drink the alcohol. You don't... You can't...

Your body still needs it in that sense. But you can see that you're doing damage to relationships. And so you want to do something about that.

But unless you fix the root of the problem, you know, and it gets... It just comes back to that. You just have to give it up.

And that's not easy. To something... The equivalent might be caffeine, for instance.

Caffeine is like a drug. And we enjoy our caffeine, let's face it. Cups of coffee around the table.

But yeah, if it's doing damage to you, are we willing to give it up? Something that sometimes my daughters challenge me with every now and again, because I enjoy my coffee so much. Hopefully, it's not doing damage.

All right.

Well, this was the last sermon in our Roads to Ruin series. And that's sort of a final question for our Palette Cleanser.

I wonder what your reflections were of this series as a whole, Road to Ruins, what you found helpful, what things maybe stuck out to you, thinking back on it.

I would say my personal reflection on the whole series was, it helped me to get comfortable with being uncomfortable when dealing with certain things.

Because most of the time, I would just turn a blind eye to something that could destroy me, that could lead me down this path, and getting uncomfortable and dealing with it. That's what this series encouraged me to do.

It's okay to wrestle with these topics because God is in control, and he has a way that leads to life through this thing. So it was very sobering to get uncomfortable talking about different topics. So it was good.

I don't think it's something you can sort of address in a few weeks.

In reflecting on each of the things, like have I been angry lately? No, I've been fairly moderate lately. But this is something we have to come back to because yes, do I have outbursts of anger?

Probably. Just can't remember the last time, but probably next time, that's when it's going to come back. And that's when I can go back and reflect on, this is the road to ruin if this gets out of control.

The notion of the narrow way has been helpful.

The idea that on both sides of all of these topics that we've looked at, there's ruin. Too much power, too little power, too much anger, not enough anger. But the narrow way of Jesus is in the middle of these things.

And it's, as Jesus says in Matthew 7, wide is the road that leads to destruction, but narrow is the way that leads to life.

And so I'm sort of, probably more questions than answers at this point, but questioning and trying to find that narrow way moving forward.

I hope the series has been a warning bell. And that's what has been for me a reminder that you can easily go down paths that are very destructive.

And, you know, as pastors here, and elders, and leaders in the church, if you've been around for a while, you sort of watch people walk out, walk away from the Lord. And this series is a reminder that it doesn't tend to happen just all at once.

It's a slow-growing unbelief, or winning over of the heart to something else. You know, as Paul says, we don't want to lose heart in the 2nd Corinthians, but we do. We lose heart, we get disappointed in the Lord.

He's doing things too slowly, and so we take it into our own hands, and we start doing other stuff. And you can go down roads that you thought were blocked off, you know. It's just very real, I guess.

That's the thing for me. So the two big illustrations are the rip in the surf, just dragging you further somewhere without you knowing it, and the lure with the hook, I reckon. It's very, very powerful.

Yeah, maybe if there's nothing else we take away from the sermons, just those two images will keep us in tune.

And also, sorry to keep talking, but as I was praying yesterday at the end of one of the sermons, I thought it's just so wonderful to remember that Jesus is the shepherd who finds the lost sheep.

So, if you're on a road to ruin, you're probably going to feel isolated. You're probably going to feel like you're on your own. Well, be encouraged that Jesus is the type of shepherd that finds people that are on their own.

It finds you and he'll bring you back.

The darkness of the road to ruin makes the light of Jesus shine brighter.

Amen.

All right. Well, enough talk about Ruin. I've got a quick palate cleanser question for you all.

Today is the last day of winter, which means spring and the warmer months are upon us. So what are you looking forward to doing in spring and summer? What is one thing that you're excited for?

Well, that's easy.

There's so many things. Getting out in the garden is great, but going to the beach, which I'm planning to do this week.

Yeah, I think more social things outside is always going to be a treat. And also, yes, the beach. I'm looking forward to it.

Looking forward very.

Looking forward very to it.

And now I know how to navigate rips and everything. I got a good understanding of water safety.

Yeah.

I like winter better than summer. So I'm a little bit sad myself, but swimming is the one thing you can't do. So I'm looking forward to that.

Getting in the water.

Wow, very consistent across the board.

Getting in the water again.

Be good.

You Jack?

For me, I'm looking forward to outdoor barbecues. I love a summer or spring barbecue, like out in the park or something. That's what I'm excited for.

Well, with that said, we'll wrap up. Thank you guys for coming. Thank you especially to Karen for coming on the pod.

Thank you.

Always great to have different voices on.

Thank you all for listening. I hope you have a really blessed week. Bye bye.