

Fully Devoted

Yesterday was a very special day for our church family. We had the privilege of witnessing two families come forward to present their child for a blessing and dedicate themselves to nurturing them in the way of Christ. Following that we witnessed three people enter the waters of baptism to declare their faith in Jesus and follow his commission to be baptized. What was so meaningful about these two moments was that they were moments of dedication where people came forward to declare their devotion to Jesus and have the blessing of God and the support of their church family.

At a time where I see many people setting patterns that are causing them to drift away from Christ and his Church, I found my heart stirred. I know that the times we are in have caused many of us to experience a great sense of heaviness and feel unmotivated in most areas of life, but let me take a moment to call you upward and encourage you to renew your devotion to the Lord today. To shake off the heaviness of our times and experience the power of starting this brand new day by declaring your devotion to God.

I think of the time in the Old Testament where Hanani challenged king Asa for his lack of trust in the Lord and said, "The eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

As God is watching over creation He is looking to provide strength to those who will devote themselves to Him. The powerful reality here is that strength to remain devoted to the Lord does not come from within ourselves; this strength is a gracious gift of God to those who will humbly receive it.

You know, these daily devotionals are very meaningful to me and I know they are to you. But God is not simply looking for us to do a daily devotional, He desires our whole being to be fully devoted to Him. So, take a moment now, yes, right now, to stand and declare your desire to be fully devoted to the Lord and let him fill you with all the strength necessary to carry it out.

Steven Amarin

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#Jesus #Bible #Devotional

The Narrow Way

If you were to ask anyone what they think about Jesus you would likely get a very positive response. The majority of historians agree that Jesus existed and most people are eager to point out that he was a wise teacher, peaceful, showed love to the poor and lowly; some might even claim that he was a great prophet even if they are not a Christian.

But there is one thing about Jesus that brings a great deal of resistance when people discover it. That is Jesus' claim to be the only way to God, salvation and eternal life.

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). He also said, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many" (Matthew 7:13).

I have heard people object, "Why are Christians so narrow minded?" "How could you be so arrogant to think that your way is the only way?" I have also heard people object with indignation, "What about people of other religions who are good people and sincere in their beliefs?" or "If God is so loving how could He send people to Hell?"

All of these objections assume that we humans are the ones who get to determine our own way to God and we somehow deserve his blessing or can earn his favour; they assume that we get to set the terms based on our level of religious sincerity, personal goodness and subjective ideas about a higher power.

If there were a criteria, how would you determine who is judged and who is blessed? Where would you place yourself on the scale? You might say, "I'm not as good as Mother Theresa, but at least I'm not as bad as Hitler!" Thankfully we can put the comparisons aside, the good news of Jesus is that there is nobody who is better than anyone else, all have sinned (Romans 3:23). Those who receive salvation all enter through the same narrow gate that is Jesus. He was clear that he came into this world to open the way to God, salvation and eternal life by giving his life in our place to take our sin.

If I had a terminal illness and was offered the only cure, if I was in a burning forest and pointed to the only bridge of escape; I would not be upset at the narrowness – I would be thankful for the cure, thankful for the bridge. This is what Jesus came to give humanity - we can be upset that God, salvation and eternal life do not come on our terms or we can humbly receive the only way that has been so lovingly provided for us in Jesus.

The truth is this: the way of salvation is as narrow as Jesus - but the invitation is as wide as every person willing to come and receive it as a gift today.

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Through Jesus' Eyes

Studies have shown that the amount of time it takes us to judge another person is about 0.1 seconds, as quick as the blink of an eye. From outward appearances we are able to produce a mental summary of a few things about those we encounter – their race, socioeconomic status, level of attractiveness, whether or not we think they are a threat to our safety or our social standing – or even develop a lustful thought. All of this can happen within the blink of an eye – if we humans are the fastest at anything – it is making judgments of others. While this ability can serve us well in the event of an emergency where we need to act quickly to make our flight or stand and fight – we quite often use our gift of sight for less noble purposes.

So, how are we meant to use our eyes? Let me point us to Jesus...

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:39).

In this moment Jesus had been preaching throughout many towns, bringing hope and healing to those in the crowds. In this moment he is about to send his disciples out into the world to do the same. In this moment we see the key to all of it – seeing others with compassion.

Jesus' eyes were remarkable. He had the ability to see things that most others could not:

Jesus could look at a Samaritan woman who had lived in sin and see a missionary to her village

Jesus could look at a short and greedy tax collector and see a man who would joyfully give it all

Jesus could look at an uneducated fisherman and see a mighty preacher who would change the world

Jesus could look at a sick or blind man and see someone healed and whole, sharing the joy of Christ with others.

Jesus can look at you and I with all our past and flaws and see the great plans and purposes he has in store for us.

Jesus' eyes are filled with compassion for all of us. Just as Jesus healed many people of blindness, he can do so for us today - to restore our vision to see ourselves and others through his eyes of compassion.

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Showing Love

How do you like to show love? How do you like to receive love? I remember reading a book years ago, just before I got married, called *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman. The idea behind the book is that each of us are wired differently and have a preferred way we like to show love and receive love in our relationships. These love languages are: 1) Words of affirmation, 2) Quality time, 3) Physical touch, 4) Acts of service, 5) Receiving gifts. The idea here is that relationships are at their best when each person takes time to get to know one another's particular love languages and seeks to give generously to one another.

What about when it comes to loving God? What are God's love languages?

When Jesus was asked, "*Which commandment is the most important of all?*" He answered, "*The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength'" (Mark 12:28-30).*

Heart has to do with our emotional capacity, feelings, desires and affections towards God

Soul has to do with our spiritual capacity, devotion of our self in obeying, honouring and worshipping God

Mind has to do with our intellectual capacity, our thinking, mental focus, learning of God's truth

Strength has to do with our physical capacity, working energetically for and serving God

I must admit there are many times where I find myself focusing on one of these to the neglect of others. Like times where I diligently study the truth of God's word with my mind, but lack a heart of affection towards Him; or when I eagerly pour out my soul in worship to God, but am lazy with using my strength to serve Him. In this passage, God is inviting us to love Him with not just part of our being, but our whole being.

All of this seems almost impossible and we may fear that this is just another way we have failed and don't measure up. But, as in any good relationship, we grow in our love for the other over time – as we get to know one another and deepen the trust. In our relationship with God, our ability to love comes from the fact that God has first loved us with a perfect and sacrificial love that is found in His Son Jesus. He graciously invites us to return that love and share that same love with others.

As it says in 1 John 4:18,19, "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us.*"

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