

Being a Person of Extravagant Devotion (Luke 10)

I want to talk on a subject of extravagant devotion as we are getting prepared for these forty days of fasting and prayer that is coming up. That is what is on my heart in sharing this tonight. Roman numeral I. The first priority on the heart of God is that we would love the Lord our God with all of our heart. Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.” To love God wholeheartedly means to love Him with all of your heart, all of your soul, and your entire mind. This is the first commandment and this is the great commandment.

Paragraph A. The first commandment: to love the Lord your God is the primary thing that God is concerned with. I want to make that really clear. I mean it is kind of really obvious, but I just want to say it. This is what the spirit of God is speaking to the Church today. You can be sure that the first commandment is the first thing that the Holy Spirit is emphasizing.

THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT IS TO LOVE GOD

Paragraph B. This is the great commandment: loving God with all of our heart. It is not only first on God’s list, but it has great impact. This is the commandment that impacts our heart, and it impacts our ministry more than anything else. It is first in priority, but it is also great in impact. I want to say that over the years, I have heard people offer a very false argument.

People argue between the first commandment and the second commandment: the argument between loving God and loving people. I want to say this: loving God always—100 percent of the time—leads to loving ourselves and loving others in a far superior way. We can only love others as we love ourselves. Loving ourselves actually comes out of this dynamic reality of loving God. We cannot love ourselves, nor can we love our neighbors as ourselves until we love God. The argument that people make in error is thinking that the first commandment takes away from the second commandment. That is a completely illogical, non-biblical argument. You cannot interact with God without becoming more in love with yourself in a biblical way. It is biblical to love ourselves, in the right way because we cannot function if we do not love ourselves. Self-hatred undermines so many other things in our life. On the other hand, loving ourselves always leads us to love other people in a superior way. Do not imagine that taking time to cultivate love for God is somehow going to make you less loving towards other people. Loving God will strengthen, empower, and give longevity to your love for other people. I have found over the years that people embrace this commandment to love one another in spurts. They kind of embrace it for a few months, and then they run out, then they kind of embrace it again. To have a sustained ability to love one another, we have to stay in this sustained place of loving God. That is where the sustaining power of loving others is: believers and unbelievers. We cannot do the work of ministry. We cannot do the work of bringing the gospel, or bringing good works to the kingdom if we are not in this dynamic reality of loving God.

LOVING GOD IS A DYNAMIC MEANS TO AN END

Paragraph C. Paragraph B. I want to stay there for one more moment. Therefore, loving God is a dynamic means to an end. Loving God always produces something else. It is a means to an end, but that is not the whole story. Paragraph C. The first commandment is the highest thing. Beloved, it is not only the first thing; it is the highest thing. It is the first thing on God’s agenda. You cannot do anything higher than this. That seems so obvious; but it is amazing that over the years many believers whom I have spoken with say, “Well. This loving God thing. What about ministry? What about the lost? What about this? What about that?” As though loving

God was anything besides the highest priority on the Holy Spirit's mind. It is the highest. There is no ministry that is greater in quality or importance to God than loving God. Again, it is the sustaining power of loving other people. It is not only a means to an end; it has great impact. It also is a means in itself. Loving God is an end in itself. It is, by itself, a good enough reason to give ourselves to it.

Paragraph D. We must consciously carry our hearts. We must consciously cultivate a spiritual atmosphere in our hearts and in a way that we are more responsive to God. God wants to enable us to be responsive to Him in love. This anointing to be able to respond to God in love is not something that is automatic. It is cultivated. The ability to respond to God in love is cultivated. It is cultivated deliberately. It takes time to cultivate it, and it does not come automatically. What happens is that our love for God diminishes? If we do not invest in growing in love for God, our ability to respond to God in love diminishes. That is what happens automatically. The enemy exerts a tremendous amount of energy against the kingdom of God to get us to be diminished in our life. I want to say it again. The ability to respond to God in love is something we cultivate. It grows, it increases, or if it is something we do not pay attention to, it decreases.

It is very important that we understand that because some believers assume automatically that our ability to love God is there. It is not an automatic thing; it must be intentionally cultivated. By making this the first priority in our mind, we understand that this is the highest way to live. There is no higher way to live. Some have wrong thinking; they think that somehow we are going to minimize our impact on others. It is the greatest way to impact others. Loving God is the most effective, greatest way of bearing fruit and touching others. Well, the enemy is really opposed to this issue of loving God. He attacks it.

Paul the apostle mentions this in 2 Corinthians 11:3: "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." I am reading from the NAS, or the New American Standard. Paul says, "I am afraid, lest as the serpent,"—or Satan—"lest as Satan deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be led astray from the simplicity," or the purity of devotion to Jesus. Beloved, the enemy wants to lead us away from the simplicity, the purity, and the greatness of devotion to Jesus. This is what is on the enemy's agenda. It is the opposite of the Holy Spirit's agenda.

DEVOTION TO JESUS IS TO BE THE NUMBER ONE ISSUE IN OUR LIFE

The Holy Spirit's agenda is to make devotion to Jesus the number one issue in our life. It is to make the first commandment not only the first option, but to make it also the highest commandment. It is the highest way to make impact on our own heart and make impact on others. It is also the number one agenda on Satan's mind. It is the number one goal of the kingdom of darkness: to undermine the simplicity and the purity of this devotion to the Lord. If he can undermine this successfully, then everything else in our spiritual life will crumble. If he can minimize this issue, then he can minimize our ministry, our impact, our character, and our growth; Satan can minimize everything else if he can get this one out of place. I want you to really get hold of this as a very primary issue in our life.

Paragraph F. I am giving this exhortation because I want to validate the wisdom of this lifestyle. I want to say it is biblical to maintain this lifestyle. It is wise to have a sustained focus on increasing our devotion. It is biblical, and it is wise to do this. It is a biblical mandate. This is what God esteems. This is what God remembers. This is what God rewards. Though the world calls this weakness and foolishness, even the Church calls this weakness and foolishness. Even the Church does not have a revelation of the supremacy of this commandment. Beloved, we need a revelation of the supremacy of the first commandment on God's heart, on God's agenda. Again, this

is not the first option; it is the first commandment. As the years go by, I gain a greater insight of how supreme this commandment is on God's agenda. It is not one of the neat things of the kingdom; it is supreme. It is the highest. It is the greatest. It cannot be surpassed. It is not equaled by anything else in the Word of God. The call is to love God with all of our hearts. It is not equal by any other commandment in the Word of God.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:27: "GOD HAS CHOSEN THE FOOLISH THINGS OF THE WORLD"

1 Corinthians 1:27: "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty." Paul has told us that God has chosen the foolish things to shame the wise. You should add the word, the "so-called" foolish things. These things are not foolish to God: prayer, fasting, obedience, and meekness. These are foolish to men's eyes. Again, even in large parts of the Church, it is not OK if you call people to this lifestyle. When people begin to really spend their time, their money, and their resources cultivating this, even the Church rises up and says, "Wait, let's be practical. It is not a very wise thing. It is a foolish thing." Even within the Church, that sentiment is present. I want to say to you clearly: God has chosen what is the so-called weak, foolish, and wasted life. He calls it wisdom; he has chosen it. When we settle this, it creates a sustained focus in our heart to pursue this kind of lifestyle.

THE CALL TO RENEW OUR HEARTS

Paragraph G. The next reason I am giving this exhortation is not just to validate the wisdom of it. It is a call to renew our hearts. We already know this; we know this call. I want to call us in this hour, in this forty-days of waiting on the Lord as a people. We are doing this in community with lots of ministries. I just got an email from Asher Intrader who is in Israel; he says, "All of our ministries are going to join you in this forty days of fasting and prayer. We are in this with you, and a bunch of other ministries are as well."

I appreciate this season that is ahead of us, but it is not just a personal season for us as a family; it has a wider scope than that. In this call, I want to exhort us to renew our hearts to this subject that we know so well. Most of you in this room have been wowed and wooed by the spirit to the call of full devotion to the Lord. It is something that struck a chord in your spirit. It is very common to lose the freshness of this call. It is very common to lose the freshness of our love relationship with Jesus. It is easy where it becomes something we remember being wowed by a couple years ago, and we remember even preaching and teaching on it. There are many of you in this room who have taught a seminar, who have taught a Bible study, or you have laid it out one-on-one to another person. You have called others to the life of extravagant devotion. You are good at speaking about it. You have got the language, but that is not enough. The reality itself requires a fresh present-tense reality. If it is not in the present tense, then it is not real today. This reality is not something we used to do; it is only real if it is present today. If it is not present right now, then it is not real in us. It does not mean we are hypocrites, it means we have lost our way. The enemy has led us astray from the simplicity and the purity of this reality. I want to have you just think for a minute: most of you in the room can remember an early season of your life, and you can remember the early days: maybe it was a year ago, maybe ten or twenty years ago for some of you. When God began to give you the revelation of living in extravagant devotion, the idea seized your mind, grabbed your heart, and it was exciting to live extravagantly.

WHOLEHEARTED DEVOTION BRINGS HAPPY HOLINESS

There is a tremendous exhilaration in living wholeheartedly. It is powerful. Beloved, it is one thing to have that moment and that season where we establish that in our heart. I have watched over the years how many people have that season for three months, or a year or two. Then the years go by, and it is only a memory, but they

retain the memory of how to speak about it. It is only a faint memory that is in their mind. Or it is a distant memory. That is a better way to say it. The romance of it is gone. Beloved, as Peter said here in 2 Peter 3:1-2: “Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words that were spoken by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior.”

Peter wants to stir your minds up by way of reminding you of that which you know so well. I want to call you back to those days—whether it was months ago, or years ago—where you were initially wowed by being extravagant in your devotion. I want to say that it is the only way of the kingdom. It is the highest way of the kingdom. It is the greatest way of the kingdom. It is the greatest way of impact: to give yourself to that.

Paragraph H. The church of Ephesus was one of the great revival centers in the early church. The first great revival center in the early church was Jerusalem. You see that in Acts 2-3 and on past that. Then in Acts 13, the church of Antioch becomes the new revival center with the power of God and multitudes being saved. People are filled with the power of the Word of God, and they are filled with the presence of God. A few years later in Acts 19-20, God really shines His light on Ephesus, and it becomes one of the greatest revival centers in all of history. Thousands were brought to Jesus under the power of the Word and signs and wonders. The very atmosphere of the community of God was filled with the power and the presence of God. After a few years came and went, they lost their freshness in the Lord. Even the mighty Ephesians’ revival center, they lost their freshness in God. It is very common to lose it. It is very natural to lose it. It is easy to lose it because it takes a sustained cultivation of an ability to respond to God in love. It takes a lot to keep this thing growing. It takes effort, focus, and determination. I tell you, the powers of darkness will want to lead your mind astray from this lifestyle.

REVELATION 2:4: “YOU HAVE LEFT YOUR FIRST LOVE”

The powers of hell have it number one on their agenda like the Spirit of God has it number one on his agenda, but they operate in the opposite direction. What happened in the church of Ephesus, this mighty revival center, is that people became powerful in love. They became workers for God, more than lovers of God. Here it is about 90 AD: it is about forty years later, after the great revival in Ephesus, somewhere in the early nineties, the Lord appears to John. It is as if the Lord says, “John, I want to give you a message, and have you take it to the church in Ephesus.” Or, I want you to write it and have it sent to the church in Ephesus. We know the Lord gave seven messages to seven churches. Look what he gives to the church in Ephesus. The Lord instructs them to tell John, or rather write it to them. It is as if Jesus is saying, “I know your works. I know how many ministries you have going. I see the growth of the ministries. It is good. I know you have persevered. I know you have labored, and you have not grown weary. You worked hard. You are workers for the kingdom. That is good; I know that. I can see that, and I honor that.”

WHEN OUR IDENTITY BECOMES WORKERS FOR GOD MORE THAN LOVERS FOR GOD

Revelation 2:4: “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.” They became workers for God more than lovers of God. I assure you that over the years of paying closing attention, lovers will always out-work workers—always, over time. The reason that this is true is because service, I do not care how noble the cause is. There are many noble causes, many noble causes in the kingdom of God. There are many noble assignments, ministry, or service assignments that do not come from a foundation of a present tense. That is the key word: present tense devotion to the Lord. That service leads the workers to burn out. I have been a believer and seeking the Lord diligently for thirty-five years. I have watched many of my friends in thirty-five years.

Most of the people who I have known over the years are not pressing into the Lord with the same fervor after thirty-five years. They are not actively serving the Lord. One of the reasons for this is that they put service ahead of their devotion to God. They kept their service for three to five years, but in the process of serving hard, some as much as ten years, they got disappointed, they got bruised, and they got wounded. Ten to twenty years later, you look back, and they are not serving anymore.

I take a step back as a shepherd; I look at the ten-, twenty-, thirty-, forty-year pattern of people's lives, and if they do not keep the first commandment in number one place in their lives, I assure you that they will not be doing the second commandment over decades. They will draw back with a jaded view of the kingdom of God, though they will still be born again and still in the kingdom. They will rarely ever be doing anything that is an act of service in ministry. Rather, they will be remembering the days saying, "Yeah. I have been there and done that; I am just not in that season now. I have heard so many stories like that, where they are in this kind of season of sabbatical, and it goes on for decade after decade. It is called burn out." What happens is that their ministry agenda becomes so dear to them where they would have died for it in that hour. Ministry becomes so dear to them that they put it ahead of their relationship with the Lord. For three, four or five years, it seemed to be working, but the disappointments settle in. The weeds begin to grow in the garden. They have frustrations of things not working well. They have wounding from relationships bumping into each other. It creates a jaded and a bruised heart ten, twenty, and thirty years later. They are not serving any more. Their argument for their service is now invalidated. Their argument back then was, "I have got to serve! What about serving?"

I do not want to sound like I know it all, but through the years, I have held the line where my heart in God and my private life in the Word must be first. It is my top priority to cultivate this. It did not take ten hours a day to do it; it takes some time though. I must attend to this first. If I attend to this first, I will stay in the race of serving for decades. I will not need a five-year, or ten-year sabbatical, which is a dressed up word for "burn out." I will not need it because something alive will be happening on the inside. Most people do not have to choose between the time it takes to keep our relationship with God alive and fresh with serving people. What we need to choose between is our free time and the mismanagement of our time. It is really wasted time; it is not really the service time.

WE DO NOT HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN INTIMACY AND MINISTRY

Even in saying all of this: I want to say it is not mostly between seeking God and serving people. We can have plenty of time for both of those two. We do not really have to choose so much between them. Even though I have watched people over the years, they get really consumed with their ministry. I say, "If you do not get the first commandment in first place, you think you are saving the world by saying, 'What about the poor, the children, the families, and what about all the areas of the lost?'" You will not even have this desire in you in ten years. In ten and fifteen years of bruising, it will just be a memory—this passion you have to serve other people. You have to have first things first, or our hearts break.

Paragraph I. Our relationship with Jesus is one of active intimacy. It is a present tense reality. We have to cultivate a responsive heart. I have said that over and over throughout the years. We have to cultivate a heart that has the ability to respond to Jesus in the present tense. That heart and our ability to respond goes away if we do not take care of it.

Paragraph J. We have many options. We even have option fatigue; we have so many options. We have so many options available to us in our careers, our ministries, hobbies, and entertainment. The options in themselves are

not necessarily bad, but the options overcome people. We do this even in our pursuit for relevance in ministry. I have watched this over the years, it happens real regularly. They change directions every two or three years. First, this is their main direction, usually it does not even go two or three years; it just goes a year or two. Really, this is the number one cause of the kingdom.

People move from fad to fad, and they attend any conference that is energetic. A whole bunch of people get excited that this is their new mandate. That is not the worst thing in the world; there is a better way to do it. They do not have longevity; so after ten years, they have gone to five or six main causes, and now they are burned out. They have a season of rest, recuperation, sabbatical of sort, and what happens is that season normally turns out to be about ten, or twenty years, or longer. Their spirits are bruised. Beloved, there is a reliable testimony in the Scripture, in the Word. We do not have to go with every fad that comes across in the Body of Christ—even every good cause. We have a reliable testimony of what God esteems.

The Word of the Lord is sure and reliable. The Word of God tells us clearly what is first. It is reliable; it is sure. We do not have to go through ministry anxiety attacks because a whole bunch of people on the other side of town are excited about a new way to do ministry. We do not have to go jump on a new train, and go change our life direction because we have insecurity and anxiety attacks about our ministry being relevant. Beloved, I can give you a reliable direction. Make the first commandment first; go after wholehearted devotion in the present tense. I tell you, the ministry focuses will come and go over the years. Make this the number one thing: The Word of God is sure in giving us this direction. The Word of God makes us wise. We do not have to guess in the dark about what God is excited about. It is considered weak and foolish by many people. Even in the Church today, it is considered weak and foolish.

BECOMING A PERSON OF EXTRAVAGANT DEVOTION

Paragraph K. The question is: how do we become a person of extravagant devotion? We have to change the question. We have to ask the right question is a better way to say it. Here is the question that we want to ask the Lord: “Lord, what will give me the ability, the power to love You with extravagant devotion? What level will You enable me to give myself to You? How far will you let me go?”

I love the song that we sing in some of the worship teams with Misty Edward’s lyrics: “How abandoned will you let me be?” That is the question of the hour. Many people ask the other question, which is the opposite extreme. People ask, “What is the minimal requirement, or the least I can do to stay in the kingdom? What is the least amount of spiritual vitality that I have to exert myself to cultivate? What is the least amount to keep a little bit of a lively ministry? I want to do less, but I do not want to mess up my ministry, and I do not want to lose my citizenship in the kingdom. Lord, tell me what I have to do, and I will do it. I do not want to know what I have the ability to do in the grace of God; rather, I only want to know what I have to do to stay on the team, and stay in the kingdom.” This is entirely the wrong way of thinking. We need to be asking the Lord not what is the bare minimum but, “Lord, what will you anoint me with? What will you give me the ability to do as a lifestyle?”

THE EXTRAVAGANT DEVOTION OF MARY OF BETHANY

Roman numeral II. The extravagant devotion of Mary of Bethany: this is one of the common testimonies of Scripture that formed IHOP–KC. It was the call to the lifestyle of Mary of Bethany; everybody is called to the Mary of Bethany call in life. Maybe not in the same application, but we all are called to this. Not that everybody is called to do IHOP–KC twenty-four hours a day; I mean to do this full-time, that is not what I am saying. This

spirit that is on Mary of Bethany is available to every single believer who wants it. Regardless what our other assignments in the marketplace, or in our families are, we can cultivate this spirit.

Let us read this passage about Martha welcoming Jesus into her home. She had a sister named Mary. Mary sat Jesus' feet, and Mary heard his word. Luke 10:40: "But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.'"

MARTHA WAS DISTRACTED OR BOTHERED

But Martha was distracted with much serving. She was distracted with much serving. She approached Jesus and it is as if Martha said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister, my little sister, has left me to do all this serving alone? Jesus, I want You to tell her and command her to help me."

Jesus patiently answered and said, "Martha, Martha you are so worried; you are so bothered." The New American Standard says, "bothered." It is as if Jesus is saying, "Things bug you too easily. You get bugged, and you lose your way, because you get bothered." Beloved, some of us in this room, we get bothered easy, and we lose our connection with the Lord. Little things bug us too easily. The Lord was telling this to Martha; it was a word of knowledge. He was actually functioning with a word of knowledge. Jesus was functioning with supernatural discernment, telling her that the way that she could get her life connected like her sister was to get her connected with the Lord.

LUKE 10:42: "ONE THING IS NEEDED, AND MARY HAS CHOSEN THAT GOOD PART"

Luke 10:42: "But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." He gives the great statement, this grand statement in Luke 10:42: "one thing is needed." This is not an exaggerated statement. This is not an overstatement. This is a profoundly wise and accurate statement from the heart of God to the human race.

One thing is needed: one thing is needed as the main thing. Many things will come into place, if this one thing is in place. If this one thing is in place, all the other dominoes will go down so to speak. All the other issues of character, service, right relationships, finances, careers, marriage, children, and all the other issues will find their proper place if the one issue is in place. If the one issue is not in place, you will have a skewed view of all of the other issues. You will not be able to discern them properly. You will exaggerate them. Or you might either overestimate or underestimate their importance unless you have the lens of the lifestyle of Mary of Bethany. You will think that what you are doing is over important, or under important, the different assignments in the Word of God.

The "one thing," if that one is in place, all the other ones will be in place. It goes on to say that Mary has chosen it, and Jesus called it "the good portion" in Luke 10:42. It is the good portion of life. Then Jesus goes on and prophesies about Mary. He basically says, "This thing will not be taken away from her. She is going to sustain this thing till the end." Well, what a fantastic prophecy.

HOLY SPIRIT EMPHASIZED MARY SITTING AT THE FEET OF JESUS TO HEAR HIS WORD

Paragraph A. The Holy Spirit in this story emphasizes Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus to hear His word. That is what it says. Luke 10:39: "And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word." Mary sat at the feet of Jesus to hear His word. There it is.

Beloved, it is Psalm 1 where we delight in the law, which is the Word of God. The law is the Word of God; it is the same thing. We meditate on the Word of God night and day. That is literal. It does not mean that we are in a prayer meeting night and day with an open Bible. Certainly, we do our fair share of that. We sit before the Lord with an open Bible.

DAY AND NIGHT MEDITATION: TEN CHAPTERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT A DAY

If we open the Bible on a regular basis and sit before the Lord, then we will carry the Word in our hearts in meditation even in our other activities. If we do not have regular times talking to the Lord with an open Bible where we are reading and talking back to Him, we will not meditate on His Word in our everyday lives. You cannot sustain day and night meditation if you do not have this: these specific regular times when you are with the Lord and are talking. You are sitting at His feet and hearing His word. That is why I encourage people, if they do not have a direction, in their personal Bible study to do ten chapters a day. I have encouraged this for many years; I did it for years. Read ten chapters of the New Testament every day, and you will read the New Testament once a month. As I have been telling people in the last couple of years to do it here at IHOP–KC, I have had numerous testimonies. I heard one just two or three days ago. A guy came to me and said, “I finally decided to do it though I have heard you say this for a number of years. I do not know the Bible very well, but I decided to do read ten chapters a day.”

You do it six days a week, four weeks in the month, and you will get the entire New Testament in one month. He said, “It has revolutionized my life. Why did I take so long to do this?” There is a supernatural thing that happens, as I have done this for years.

Years ago when I was twenty-years old, I heard a guy talk about it, and I also read it in a book. I said, “Hey, if they can do it, I can do it.” So, I tried it.

Then I heard some young guy say, “I am going to do two times a month through the New Testament.” So, they read twenty chapters a day. So, I said, “Well, if he can, I can.” So I did twenty chapters a day. I did that maybe for a year or so, I cannot remember, or maybe for a number of months. I tell you, it really changed the inward atmosphere of my heart. It really, really did. Throw some fasting in on that. A little bit of bridling your eyes and bridling your speech, and I tell you that your spirit starts getting alive. Put in a little salt and pepper: a little meekness in your relationships and a little servanthood, and you will have a vibrant spirit. Your spirit will be alive.

PSALM 1:3: “A TREE PLANTED BY RIVERS OF WATER, THAT BRINGS FORTH ITS FRUIT”

Psalm 1:3: “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.” You will be like a tree planted by water, and its fruit will come forth. You will feed others; you will have a sustained ministry for decades. Not just for three, four, five years, and then you get bruised. You will be serving people for decades. You will bear fruit. You will have a sustained ability to walk this walk. There will be freshness in your spirit. Read Psalm 1: I mean that is so powerful.

Paragraph B. The Word of God creates a living dialogue in our hearts. We read Luke 10 and Mary is sitting at Jesus’ feet. When I have my Bible open, and I am reading it; I do not just read it to study the information. I do that some as well, but it is not mostly that. I read it to have, to create, the Word enters my heart, and it creates

conversation back with God's heart. I say, "I do not understand. Explain it to me Lord," or, "I want more of what that verse said." Sometimes I say, "Lord, thank You," and "Lord, help me." It creates a response in my heart back to the Lord. You want to read the Bible in an open dialogue back to the Lord.

READ THE BIBLE IN AN OPEN CONVERSATION BACK TO GOD

Do not just read it; read it and dialogue—that is the power of it. We must have a running dialogue with God. The Word of God is powerful. Paragraph C. There are three components necessary for the power of the Word to be in us. First, the individual has got to choose to do it. Human beings have to choose to fill themselves with the Word of God. Number two: you have got to put the Word in you. Number three: the Holy Spirit will move on it. Some people do not want to make the personal choice to eat the Word of God. You can read more specifically what I mean by that in the handout there. They do not make the personal choice; they just want the Holy Spirit to give them love for the Word. No, you have got to do all three things. It has got to be the human being who says, "Yes, in a devotional way and in a spirit of obedience." You have got to put the Word in your heart. I love what Abby Bennett said. I loved when little eleven year-old, or twelve year-old Abby said, when we were sending her off to North Carolina. I said, "Abby any last words?"

She said, "Yeah. The Holy Spirit lives in you. He gets really hungry; he wants you to feed Him the Word of God."

If you feed the Holy Spirit the Word, he gets really hungry; the Holy Spirit really gobbles it up, and he loves it when you feed on the Word." I said to little Abby, "That is profound theology." I might say it slightly differently, but it really is good theology. The Holy Spirit lives in you, and the Holy Spirit is really hungry and loves eating the Word. So, eat it, feed it to Him all the time.

Here is what Abby said in response, "If I go a couple of days and I do not read the Word, I get back in my little chair in IHOP-KC. Then I read the Word and I say, 'Oh, I can feel it again.'"

I said, "That little gal, that is for real. That was not an imitation; she actually experiences that." Beloved, you cannot trust the Holy Spirit to make the Word alive in you if you do not feed it, you do not put the Word in you. It is more than putting the Word in you; you have got to have a devotional spirit while you are doing it.

Let's go to paragraph D. Top of page three. Martha was distracted with much serving. She said, "Jesus, get my sister to help me serve." She is appealing to legitimate humanitarian needs. She is appealing to commands in Scripture that are biblical. To me, it is biblical to go into the kitchen and serve. It is a very biblical thing to do. Martha's problem was not that she was in the kitchen serving. Sometimes people present this: that the people in the kitchen are second rate, and that people in the prayer room are first rate. That is not it at all. Brother Lawrence wrote the little famous book of fifty pages on the practice of the presence of God. He was the cook, and he learned how to constantly commune with God in the kitchen. That is the power of that kind of lifestyle. The correction to Martha was not that she was in the kitchen. That is a good thing to be in the kitchen; it is a good thing to serve people. She was criticized for doing it with the wrong spirit. It was the spirit, which Jesus was correcting. It was not the act of being in the kitchen. She appealed to the humanitarian need and said, "Hey, what about helping, serving, and blessing others?"

The Scripture says that her serving distracted Martha. There are some of you in this room, and your serving distracts you. Now, I am not telling you to serve less and play more. That is not what I am telling you to do. If

your option is serve less so you can play more, and then keep serving; serving is good for your spirit. It really is: serving is good. Our mandate, our biblical mandate is to serve the needs of mankind and humanitarian issues. I am saying that in the best sense. Serving the real needs of real people. When that somehow slips into first place, our devotion to the Lord becomes second. That is what Jesus was correcting in Martha. Paragraph E. Jesus said to Martha in Luke 10:42: “One thing is needed.” If we cultivate this ability to respond to God in love by hearing the Word and by sitting before Jesus and the Word, that is not all that is involved in cultivating that, but that is the primary thing. Then I am telling you that all the other issues are going to fall in place.

Paragraph F. Jesus said that Mary has chosen the good part, and it will not be taken away. Jesus calls this the good part. We have the testimony of Scripture; we are not guessing, or grabbing in the dark, so to speak. We have clear revelation that this is what God esteems; this is what God wants. This is not guesswork. We have the Son of God from heaven. He is on the earth. Jesus says, “This is the good part. This is wise what Mary is doing.” I do not care if ministry tells you opposite. It is wise to make this the number one thing in your life: to sit at His feet and hear the Word of God. I do not mean you miss a day or a week. That will happen sometimes. But if it happens for months and months and months, I am telling you that you are out of balance. You are off the right path. You are out of the revelation of what Jesus said is the good part of life. It is not just good as in the fun part of life; it is fun. When God reveals God to our spirit, it is exciting. It is good in terms of it is the part of life where you can be sure God will reward us. God will honor us when you stand before Him. Notice, it says that Mary has chosen it. Beloved, no one can choose this for you. You cannot go to a prayer line, and have somebody lay hands on you to choose that part.

WE HAVE TO CHOOSE THIS OURSELVES

You have to choose it yourself. You have to sustain that choice because Satan, the crafty one, will come to lead you astray from this choice. If he cannot get you into depression on one, he will try to get you into sin. If he cannot get you into sin or depression over here, he will push you and exalt your ministry. So you get so busy with an exalted ministry with favor on it than you get distracted from the way of simplicity of devotion to the Lord. He will push you to the right, and if that does not work, Satan will push you to the left. He does not care if he has to give you exaltation, or if he can get you with sin. He would prefer to do it that way. Satan will try to attack you by being busy, if Satan cannot get you with sin. He wants you off the path. He will use plenty of good Christian voices to help you get off the path.

Paragraph G. Mary is described three times in Scripture. Every time that she is described, the Holy Spirit sets her in Scripture as sitting at the feet of Jesus. This woman, this unknown woman, does nothing in the book of Acts. She never has a ministry; she never has a platform ministry. She never has that kind of thing at all. Besides these three episodes in the gospels, she is unheard of in Christian history. I guarantee you that she has made her mark in God’s record and in God’s history. Beloved, we want to make our mark in God’s history, not just in man’s history books. This woman is not celebrated anywhere, except that the Holy Spirit sees that the story is told in a very, very little snapshot. Three times she is sitting at the feet of Jesus on each occasion. The first one is the one we are talking about right now. In Luke 10, she is at the feet of Jesus in her house.

The second one is in this next passage in John 11: that is when her little brother Lazarus dies, and she goes to the grave sight. It says that she fell down, but she is at the feet of Jesus there. She is weeping, but she is at Jesus’ feet. Again, that is not an accident. Then, the third time is right before Jesus was going to the cross in John 12, and it says Mary took a pound. A very costly oil of spikenard, which is perfume. Here she is anointing the feet of Jesus, wiping His feet with her hair. The whole house is filled with fragrance. I tell you that she is at

the feet of Jesus, and she has so given herself. She has taken this fragrant perfume, and the whole room is filled with it.

Beloved, I assure you this: if you live this Mary of Bethany lifestyle, you will fill the room, wherever God puts you with the fragrance of God. Your presence in that room will impact the spiritual dynamics of that room. You develop this lifestyle.

MARK 14:3-9: MARY OF BETHANY

Let's go to Roman numeral III. Let's look at that episode in her life from Mark 14, instead of John 12. We will read a more extended version of it. Mark 14:3-9 is where Jesus is in Bethany, at the house of Simon, and Jesus sat at the table. Mark 14:3-9: "And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head. But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted? For it might have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply. But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her."

A woman came with an alabaster flask, or a jar of very costly perfume. She broke the jar, poured it over his head, and at His feet as well in John 12. There were some among the apostles; we are talking about the apostolic band of leaders. They were mad at her. They were indignant. They said, "Why has this oil been wasted? It was a waste. She is wasting the money. She is wasting her life doing this." Mark 14:5: "For it might have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply.

For the perfume could have been sold for 300 denarii, which is a year's wages. Just think in our society here: She had \$50,000 worth of perfume. Where did this young woman, she is in her early twenties, get the money? The common idea is that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, their parents died. Martha becomes the owner of the house. In Luke 10, she is the owner of the house of Martha. Mary has \$50,000 worth of perfume. Perfume is really a very practical item; it was like an investment item as well. It was as good as gold because showers were not really that effective in those days. Perfume was really important. She had very costly perfume, and just a little bit of it would be really powerful. She took \$50,000, which was her whole future. It was not just a lot of money for her. It was her entire inheritance. It was her future. She pours this thing out at the feet of Jesus.

Look what happened: they criticized her sharply. They criticized her. The apostles did. Beloved, you will be criticized sharply by the leadership in the Church by living this kind of lifestyle. You will be criticized. Again, they appealed to a humanitarian cause. She should have helped the poor with it. Jesus speaks up. "Let her be alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for me," Jesus said in Mark 14:6. Mark 14:9: "Assuredly, I say to you wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done, will also be told as a memorial to her?" Mary will be known, and she will be heard of. She is honored in the sight of God. Other than her acts of devotion at the feet of Jesus, she makes no other impact that actually makes the record of church history. Let's go to another story or two. I want to read two more stories to you. I will be just really brief with both of them; you can read them more on your own.

EXTRAVAGANT DEVOTION EMBODIED BY DAVID’S MIGHTY MEN

Roman numeral IV. Extravagant devotion is depicted in David’s mighty men. These mighty men are a picture of our devotion to Jesus. Three of David’s thirty men came to David at the cave of Adullam. The army of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. Instead of the word *garrison*, you can put the word *army*. Now Bethlehem was David’s city; David grew up in Bethlehem. Bethlehem was a really little town; so here they are in his hometown. David and his group are just a few miles down the road. Imagine David is at the campfire one night. Imagine David saying with a longing or a sigh, “I grew up in Bethlehem! Oh that somebody would give me a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem. The well that is by the gate.” In other words, there were several wells in Bethlehem. However, in this one well, the water tastes different. 2 Samuel 23:16: “So the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, drew water from the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David. Nevertheless he would not drink it, but poured it out to the LORD.”

Three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines. They drew water from the well; they brought it back to the camp to David. David would not drink it; he poured it out to God. David basically said, “Far be it for me, Oh Lord, that I should drink this water. The water required the blood of men who placed their lives in jeopardy. These men laid their lives on the line to get this water from the well. This could have cost these men their whole lives to give me this gift. So I freely offer it to You Lord.”

These men hear David around the campfire one night. They say, “I would love to. To drink just that sweet water from that one well over on the north side by the gate. Oh it is so good.” We are saying that the question of their heart was not, “What do we have to do to stay in the army? What do we have to do to stay on the team?” The question of their heart was, “What can we do? What is the highest thing that God will let us do?” I am not talking about just an extravagant act, although that is what I am looking at here.

EXTRAVAGANT SPIRIT

I am talking about the extravagant spirit, which causes these acts of devotion. It is the extravagant spirit, which I am talking about, not the particular act. Some folks would be happy to do just one or two radical acts and live the rest of their life passively. Do not focus on the act; focus on the spirit behind the act. These three guys, they fight with swords, they are mighty in the army against a troop of Philistines. When they finally arrive at the well by the gate, there are two guys fighting with swords, as the one guy is getting the water from the well. They say, “Hurry up! Get the water. Quick, they are coming!” He gets the water, and they are running back. They say, “Do not spill the water. Watch the water. Do not trip.” They are fighting all the way back. I mean they risked their entire lives to get the water. They give the water to David; David is so awed by this. He pours it out before the Lord.

JESUS WILL POUR OUT OUR LIVES AS A DRINK OFFERING TO THE FATHER

Beloved, on the last day, Jesus will take your life. He will offer you to God as His gift back to God. He will say, “Father, these peoples’ lives of extravagance is what I offer you—their very lives poured forth.” They are giving in the way that Jesus will respond to. Many in the Church will look at their extravagant devotion, write them off, and criticize you sharply. I assure you that Jesus will respond in the way that David did with these men. Let’s go to one more story.

NUMBERS 25: ISRAEL’S HARLOTRY IN MOAB

Roman numeral V. It is Phinehas. We will just end of this story and these couple of verses. They began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. Moab was the nation right next door to Israel, which is modern day

Jordan. So, this is the nation right next door to Israel. They began to commit harlotry with them. The Moabite women invited the men of Israel. They said, “Hey! Why do you not come to our worship party? We are worshipping this god called Baal—this false god.” The men of Israel went and bowed down to this false god, which is really demon worship. The Lord was angry in Numbers 25:3: “So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.”

Numbers 25:4: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the LORD, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel.’” The anger of the Lord was aroused. The Lord told Moses, “I am not happy with this. The covenant nation is committing acts of immorality and worshipping demons with these ladies. I want you to take all of the leaders who did this, and I want you to hang them, so that my anger will turn away from My covenant nation.”

One Israelite guy presented to this Midianite woman to his brethren. In the sight of all the congregation of Israel, he brings this woman before them. Then Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, basically says, “I want you to see Eleazar, and Aaron because they are functioning as priests.” It is not enough for him to just be a priest. It is as if he says, “I want to do more than just to do my priestly duties.” In our little world, it is as if he is on the IHOP–KC staff; I do not think you have to be on the IHOP–KC staff to function as a priest—that is not my point. He is doing his function; he is in the priesthood, but his spirit is far more extravagant than just doing his job as a priest. Something was bigger in his heart.

When Phinehas saw this, he saw this Midianite woman who this guy presented to his brethren. He rose from the congregation; he took a javelin in his hand, and he went after that man of Israel. He went right into the tent where this woman was. This man and woman are together in the tent. He thrusts them through and killed them. This is radical. So, the plague was stopped.

Numbers 25:9: “And those who died in the plague were 24,000.” The plague killed 24,000 people, but God lifted His hand and His judgment. Here is what the Lord said. Numbers 25:11: “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal.” The Lord spoke to Moses and said, “Phinehas has turned back My wrath.” Why? He was zealous with God’s zeal, or the New American Standard says, “He was jealous with my jealousy.” I like that word *jealousy*. It is as if God says, “Phinehas has turned back My wrath” because He was jealous with God’s jealousy.

Numbers 25:12: “Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace;’” God is saying, “go tell Phinehas this: I am going to give to him the covenant of peace. I am going to give to him a particular promise and added blessing. It shall be given unto him, and it is going to affect all of his children for generations.” They are going to have an everlasting priesthood. It is a gigantic thing; it will go right on into the Millennium, right on into the new heavens and the new earth. This act, it was not one act. Here is the key: do not focus on the one act because people in their exhibitionism will try to do one act just to get a lot of attention. It is not a radical act. It was a radical spirit; it was a lifestyle of devotion for which the radical acts come from.

A SPIRIT OF DEVOTION, NOT JUST ACTS OF DEVOTION

I talk to people regularly who want to do something radical. What they mean when they say that they want to do something radical is that they want to go on a three-week trip, and they want to do something radical for three

weeks. They want to do something radically for three months, or a year maybe. They want to be radical, so they want to do an event for three weeks, or three months, or something like that.

Beloved, I will tell you what radical is: a sustained lifestyle of cultivating a heart that is responsive to God. That is radical. It is easy to go do an event for a week, a month, or a short period of time. What you need to do is have a lifestyle that does it decade after decade. That is radical.” They say that young people are looking for something radical to do. There are a thousand different events both in and outside the kingdom that can answer that need. Beloved, there is no one specific event, or no one trip that defines radical. It is the consistency of decades of living with this devoted spirit. It is out of that spirit that some extreme acts will come. God is calling us to be zealous with His zeal, to be jealous with His jealousy, to hear the whispers like these three mighty men did from David. We need to ask ourselves, “What would God desire?” Rather than wondering what we want to do, we must ask, “God, what would You like to be done through your servants? What kind of devotion will You give me the power to walk in?”

Amen. Let’s stand.