

Being a Person of Extravagant Devotion

I. GOD'S FIRST PRIORITY: TO LOVE GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART

³⁷ Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment." (Mt. 22:37-38)

- A. The Holy Spirit is restoring the first commandment to first place in the Church worldwide. We must consciously cultivate the ability to be responsive to God with wholehearted love.
- B. Loving God with all of our heart is the first commandment because it is the first priority to God. Jesus did not call it the first option (it is a commandment). God sees this as the highest response that anyone can walk in. The Scripture makes it clear that wholehearted love for God is the highest and greatest lifestyle. Loving God is a glorious end in itself. We need a revelation of the supremacy of the first commandment (it will be used at the Judgment Seat of Christ).
- C. Loving God with all of our heart is the great commandment because it is great in impact. Loving God *always* has a great impact on our heart in that it leads us to love ourselves and to loving others (believers and unbelievers). We will love ourselves and others much better as we grow in our wholehearted love for God. It is a dynamic means to an end. There is a confused argument that calls us to choose between the first commandment and the second commandment.
- D. Service without the foundation of extravagant devotion leads to burn out, disappointment, and wounding. Thus, the service is not sustained over decades. I have seen many seek to serve others in ministry that continues for 3-5 years but then is not sustained after that because of burn out.
- E. The Church of Ephesus was one of the great revival centers in the early Church (Acts 19-20). Yet, they did not sustain the freshness in their love for Jesus. They became workers for God more than lovers of God. Lovers will always outwork the workers.
¹ To the...church of Ephesus write, ² "I know your works...³ you have persevered and have...labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. ⁴ Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent...or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand... (Rev. 2:1-5)
- F. Cultivating a responsive heart of extravagant devotion to Jesus takes time and effort. It is something that we must do deliberately. Love does not automatically grow. Rather it automatically diminishes unless, we intentionally cultivate a responsive heart to God.
- G. The Scripture validates the wisdom of a lifestyle of sustained focus on cultivating devotion to God. God esteems, remembers and rewards this, although the world calls it weak and foolish.
²⁷ God has chosen the (so called) foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and...the (so called) weak things of the world to put to shame the... mighty... (1 Cor. 1:27)

H. Do you remember when you felt the joy of abandonment to Jesus when you first heard the call to extravagant devotion? The Lord wants that freshness to return to us. This requires cultivating a renewed responsiveness of love to God. Do not allow any substitute for the real thing. We must not allow our experience to be reduced to just language about being extravagantly devoted.

I. Satan's first priority against the Church is to lead us astray from cultivating the ability to be responsive to God with wholehearted love and extravagant devotion. If Satan leads us astray from the purity of devotion to Jesus then our service and love for others will eventually fail.

³ ***I am afraid, lest as the serpent (Satan) deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (2 Cor 11:3, NAS)***

J. In a desire to stay up with the current popular ministry trends, some people regularly change directions in their ministry. We must not get our ministry focus from the latest trends, rather we must take it from God's Word which is a reliable source of wisdom in a dark world. We are not left guessing as to what God delights in. He wants us to make the First Commandment first.

⁷ ***The testimony (Word) of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; 8 the commandment (Word) of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. (Ps. 19:7-9)***

II. THE EXTRAVAGANT DEVOTION OF MARY OF BETHANY: FILLED WITH THE WORD

³⁸ ***A certain woman named Martha welcomed Him (Jesus) into her house. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. 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." 41 Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled (bothered; NAS) about many things. 42 But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." (Lk. 10:38-42)***

A. The Holy Spirit emphasized that Mary sat at Jesus' feet to hear His Word (Lk. 10:39). As we feed on the Word, we stay fresh in our relationship with God and fruitful in our ministries. Mary is described three times in Scripture. Each time the Holy Spirit highlights her as sitting at the feet of Jesus (Lk. 10:39; Jn. 11:32; 12:3). Mary was a young single woman who was not mentioned in the Book of Acts or in Church history. She had not known public ministry, yet she was known in the courts of heaven though unknown in the courts of men during her lifetime.

³² ***Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet... (Jn. 11:32)***

³ ***Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. (Jn. 12:3)***

B. The Word is meant to create a living active dialogue in our hearts with God. We pray-read the Word or we converse with Jesus as we read it. We thank Him for certain truths as we ask Him to reveal them more. We commit to obey other truths as we ask Him for help to fully obey them.

¹² ***For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit... (Heb. 4:12)***

- C. If we have regular times in the Word, then we will be able to meditate on the Word through the day as our hands are occupied with service. Our spirit need not wither in our journey in God.
¹ Blessed is the man...² (whose) delight is in the law (Word) of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. ³ He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit..., whose leaf shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. (Ps. 1:1-3)
- D. The implanted Word delivers our soul from bondage to filthiness.
²¹ Lay aside all filthiness...and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save (supernaturally deliver) your souls. (Jas 1:21)
⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you...ask...and it shall done. (Jn. 15:7)
- E. There are three components necessary for the power of the Word to live in us. First, we use our choice to pursue God with a spirit of obedience, faith and loving devotion. Second, we feed our heart continually on the Word (implant it in our heart) through mediation. Third, we need the activity of the Spirit to turn meditation into living revelation (turn water into wine, Jn. 2) to save or deliver us from sinful desires. We must fellowship with the Holy Spirit by talking to Him. Summary of the three components: we must obey God, feed on the Word and talk to the Spirit.
- F. Martha was distracted with much serving (v. 40). Scripture calls us to serve much and to help to meet humanitarian needs in a practical way. Martha appealed to this legitimate call to meet humanitarian needs by serving in the kitchen. Jesus did not correct Martha for serving but for serving with a wrong spirit. Brother Lawrence's book, *Practicing the presence of God*, describes a man's heart preoccupied with God as his hands were occupied with service.
- G. Many live distracted by their serving, or the amount of recreation and entertainment they partake of or just by being disorganized in their time management. Being distracted is not what is penalized, but staying distracted is after the Lord confronts us with it.
- H. Jesus said to Martha that Mary did the one thing needed (v. 42). In other words, Mary took serious the call to cultivate the ability to respond to God in love with extravagant devotion. This is the one thing needed or the only non-negotiable thing. Why? When this is in place then we have the discernment and resolve to sustain love and obedience in all the other issues of our life and ministry. As we sit at the feet of Jesus then we are in the place to receive God's help that is indispensable to the other issues of our lives being in their proper place. If this issue is not in place, then all our other decisions will be jaded as our judgment will be clouded.
- I. Mary has chosen that good part (v. 42). We must choose this, no one can choose it for us. Jesus Himself settles the issue of how important this is by calling this posture of heart the one thing needed and the good (wise and effective) path for our life. All in the Church can debate whether we should or should not live this way, however, Jesus settled it with heaven's wisdom.

- J. Jesus prophesied that this good part would not be taken away from Mary (v. 42). This good way was sustained throughout her entire life. It is rare for one to sustain this focus for a life time.
- K. Sustaining a fresh walk with God through decades is the definition of living radically before God. We are not radical because we do something unusual for a few weeks or months. David sustained his passion for God for decades. He referred to seeking God “all” the days of his life.
⁴ ***One thing I have desired...that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD... (Ps. 27:4)***
- L. Daniel sustained his prayer life with passion for decades (from about age 16 to 82 years old).
²¹ ***Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus (605-539 BC or 66 years). (Dan. 1:21)***
¹⁰ ***Daniel...knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. (605-539 BC or 66 years) (Dan. 6:10)***

III. THE EXTRAVAGANT DEVOTION OF MARY OF BETHANY: WASTING HER LIFE

³ ***Being in Bethany at the house of Simon...as He sat at the table, a woman (Mary of Bethany; Jn. 12:3) came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard (perfume). She broke the flask and poured it on His head. 4 Some (apostles) were indignant...and said, "Why was this...oil wasted?" 5 It might have been sold for...300 denarii (a year's wages) and given to the poor." They (apostles) criticized her sharply. 6 Jesus said, "Let her alone...She has done a good work for Me... 9 Wherever this gospel is preached...what this woman has done will be told as a memorial to her." (Mk. 14:3-9)***

- A. The apostles appealed to serving the poor as their reason to criticize Mary's extravagance. They appealed to a scriptural mandate to serve the practical humanitarian needs of the poor.
- B. Jesus vindicated Mary (v. 6). Jesus will vindicate the lifestyle that cultivates a heart that is responsive to God in love. Mary's act of devotion is remembered through all history. **Principle:** unusual acts of devotion come from cultivating a spirit of radical devotion as a lifestyle.
- C. We all know these truths, yet Scripture calls us to renew our hearts to that which we know. It is common to lose our freshness in our love relationship with Jesus.
¹ ***I write to you this second epistle...I stir up your minds by way of reminder... (2 Pet. 3:1)***
- D. People who are seeking to be truly be devoted to the Jesus ask, “What is the most that God will empower me to give to Him?” We are not content with the minimum requirement of salvation. We do not ask, “What is the minimum that is required? What can I get by with?”
⁹ ***For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. (2 Chr. 16:9)***