

## Devotion #1 - Living Like A Child Of God

*Colossians 3:8-10 (NLT)*

*“But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander and dirty language. Don’t lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old evil nature and all its wicked deeds. In its place you have clothed yourselves with a brand-new nature that is continually being renewed as you learn more and more about Christ, who created this new nature within you.”*

As we were getting ready for Church the other day, I was dressing my 2 year old son. I was trying to put him in his very first dress shirt and tie. His first response was to start wiggling and to let me know that it was not comfortable. When I recognized the first stages of the “wiggling out” process, I commented that he was going to look just like his daddy. I then pointed out that his shirt was the same color as mine and that he was going to be wearing a tie like I was. I didn’t point out the differences, I pointed out the similarities. He instantly lit up and was excited. He ran out of his bedroom to my wife who immediately said, “Oooooo-you look so handsome! You look like daddy!”. What we told him is what he believed he was, so he started walking around saying, “I’m handsome! I look like Daddy!” One of my daughters saw him and said, “You look so cute!” which prompted an immediate, “I’m not cute...I’M HANDSOME!” as a response. Anything less than handsome was unacceptable. He went to church and was very confident in his appearance and in the fact that he was dressed like dad. It was pretty adorable. Here is my thought, how much pride do we take in looking just like Jesus? Inside of us is this new nature, one that is longing to take on the image of Christ. In *Romans 8:28*, Paul makes the statement that, “*God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son.*” Even though we are full of flaws and mistakes, we have been called and chosen to be clothed in His nature. The problem is that we have a tendency to not be very excited about it. We find the process of change and transformation a little uncomfortable. Here is what you need to do. It’s time to take your eyes off the things that seem so hard to get rid of. Instead of allowing yourself to get all frustrated and throwing a fit like change is impossible, you need to focus on who you are called to be. It’s time to start declaring who you are, a child of God, and not focus so much on the differences you see in the natural. My son didn’t look exactly like me, but the thought alone was enough to change his mind and attitude, and walk out like he was. Don’t allow your shortcomings to trip you up. Realize your growth, and then allow the Holy-Spirit to continue the transformation as you learn more and more about Christ. It’s a process that will last a lifetime, so don’t expect it all to happen overnight. As you continue to strip away your old nature, you’ll begin to see the reflection of our Savior in your character and life. Refuse to settle for anything less than who God says you are. His nature is within you, so it’s time to just start living like it!

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## Devotion #2 - Eager To Help

*Matthew 25:14-30 (NIV)*

*“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability...After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See I have gained five more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’...”*

One of the gifts that we gave our children this year for Christmas was a small tool box full of miniature tools. We knew the kids would love them. My 4-year old daughter was ecstatic. She had this grin that went from ear to ear. She always wants to help me out, so she immediately took ownership of them. One of the first things she did was batted her little eyes, tilted her head sideways and asked ever so adorably, “Daddy I need a doghouse. Can I help you build one?” I had no choice but to melt and say, “Of course we can...but just not today.” Well the next day, my promise was still ringing in her ears and she reminded me that I had given my word. She just wanted to use her new tools. Needless to say, we went and made a miniature doghouse together for her stuffed animal. As my other girls saw her building with me, they wanted to do the same. All three of my girls were lit up as I allowed them to help me build their little doghouses. They got such joy in working alongside me to get something done. My littlest helper didn’t stop there though, she insisted on coming with me to work at the church the next day as well. She brought her little toolbox, and was giddy about the chance to once again help me out. She stuck it out for several hours, just looking and waiting for opportunities to do something for me. She’d run off and play for a bit, and then come back and see if she could help again. I loved the attention, and she loved being used. Here is my thought, wouldn’t it be amazing if we were all that eager to help God our Father. This verse in *Matthew 25* states that God has given each of us different gifts and talents according to our abilities; but how often do we go looking for something to do with them? What are you doing with what you have been given? The gifts and talents that God has richly blessed us with are for our service to Him. In *verse 26* of this passage, Jesus calls the servant who did nothing, “*wicked, lazy & worthless*”. Those words are strong, but ever so true. What’s the point of giving somebody a gift if they don’t appreciate it and use it? I gave my daughter tools that she could handle and use, and she was excited and looking for opportunities to use them. What about the gifts that you have received? Are you eager and looking for ways to use them in your service to God? If not, what’s holding you back? There is great joy when you put yourself out there and let God use you. Why don’t you today, make a decision to use your gifts and talents for God? Ask Him what you can do, and then keep looking for more opportunities to serve. When you live your life eager and ready to do something with what you have been given, you’ll be in the perfect position to share in your Master’s happiness.

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## Devotion #3 - Fan Those Flames

2 Timothy 1:5-7 (NIV)

*"I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."*

We have had this tradition for the past 8 years of holding a New Year's Eve Lock-In with the youth group. We all converge on the Youth Center for a worship service, food, fun & an entire night of craziness that ends with breakfast in the morning. This year, we had several adults who helped for the first time, and one of the gals asked this very sincere question, "Did anybody else feel like they had burning lumps of coal in their eyes?" In other words, her body was screaming at her to get some sleep - she was miserable! Likewise, as each new year passes, I have found it harder and harder to make my body submit and be energetic without getting it's sleep. The teens however have found many ways to keep themselves going. They drink energy drinks, devour chocolate, play sports & drink Mt Dew like it's going out of style. They are willing to do whatever it takes so that they can keep their energy level at it's peak without crashing. They have determined to make it through so they don't miss out on anything. As the younger children in the church grow up, they can't wait for the day when they are finally teenagers and get to go. I guess I will have to keep finding ways to make it happen. When Paul was speaking to Timothy in this letter, he is reminding him of the incredible & real fire for God that has been passed down for generations. Paul then encourages him to keep doing whatever it takes to keep that fire burning, to not let this great tradition come to an end. Imagine if we were as passionate about our zeal for the Lord as we are about natural traditions like staying up all night. The most valuable thing we can pass down to others is our love for God. If you determine to make any kind of New Year's resolution, let it be to not let your zeal and love for Jesus dwindle. Get creative, do whatever it takes for you to stay on fire spiritually. Here is the simple truth about a fire: it is either growing because it is being fed, or it is in the process of burning out because it has been ignored. What are you doing to keep your spiritual fire awake and burning? It's time for us to start taking the necessary steps in tending to our fire. How's your prayer life? How's your Word life? Those are great ways to add fuel to your fire. Make a decision today, to begin fanning those flames. It's never easy to make your flesh do something that is against it's nature, but it's always worth it. Paul continued with his encouragement to Timothy by assuring him that God has given him the power and ability to do it. So why not pull up your sleeves, blow some fresh air on your fire, and use this year to show others what a passionate relationship with Christ looks like. As John Wesley put it, "Set yourself on fire, and the world will come and watch you burn."

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## Devotion #4 - Slip Of The Tongue

*Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)*

*“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”*

It's been years, but my memory of this slip of the tongue is still very much alive. I was at my parents house when one of my sister's old highschool friends came by for a visit. When she walked in, I greeted her with a warm smile because I hadn't seen her in awhile. I immediately tried a little small talk to pass the time until my sister arrived. My first attempt went something like, "Wow, it's great to see you! Are you expecting?" She thought for a moment and then responded with, "Expecting what?" Without hesitating, I rephrased the question for her and asked, "You know...when are you due?" She had a very puzzled look on her face this time as she answered, "Due for what?" Then suddenly what I was asking clicked in her head, and her whole countenance changed. This strange red hue took over her face. Her next statement made me want to crawl in a hole. Her eyebrows went in a new direction as she, obviously very embarrassed and hurt, exclaimed - "You think I'm pregnant don't you?" No response was needed from me, I had said more than enough. She had simply put on some weight, and I had ever so foolishly pointed it out. I made some quick assumptions based on what I saw in the natural, and then let my words fly without putting another thought to them. In a split second, I had crushed her with my mouth. If I would have even thought for a moment about what I was about to say, I probably wouldn't of asked such a foolish question. That was the problem, I wasn't thinking - I was acting like a fool and just speaking. It says in *Proverbs 10:32* that, "*The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.*" In the moment, my words weren't very fitting, they were damaging. We are also told in *Proverbs 12:18* that "*Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*" I think it would be safe to say that we can gauge the amount of wisdom we have by our daily conversations or statements. Do people walk away from their time with you feeling encouraged, or do they leave hurt and weighed down? In the passage you read in Ephesians it's pretty clear - if your words aren't going to bless somebody, don't say them. Don't just stop there though, take it a step further and become a good listener. When you begin to hold your words and hear what others are speaking, you'll have time to think about what you can say that would be a blessing. So as you go about your day, don't let careless words slip out of your mouth. Put a guard on your lips and think before you speak. God has called you to be a minister of truth and grace, so don't let your tongue be used for anything less than that.

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## Devotion #5 - You Are Needed

*Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NLT)*

*“Two people can accomplish more than twice as much as one; they get a better return for their labor. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble. And on a cold night, two under the same blanket can gain warmth from each other. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.”*

When I first started attending Bible College, I was somewhat of an introvert. I was all wrapped up in my own world, and didn't care a whole lot about developing friendships. I actually took pride in not getting caught up in trivial relationships with people. Every time a new speaker would come to the college, most of the students would flock to them - but not me! I would intentionally go out of my way to avoid them. One afternoon, at the end of a long week, I was doing some cleaning in the church offices. Suddenly, the guest minister walked into the hallway where I was. I couldn't run and hide, so I just casually tried to avoid making any eye contact. The guy instinctively walked right up to me and extended his arm for a handshake. He greeted me by my first name, and then introduced himself. It completely caught me off guard, especially since he knew who I was. My silence prompted him to continue the one-sided conversation. “Did you know you're the only student in the class that I haven't met this week?”, he remarked, “Why did you rob me of the opportunity of knowing you?” I hesitated, and then responded with uncertainty, “I don't know...I guess I just didn't want to waste your time!” He went on to explain that by not opening the door for a friendship, we both missed out. He finished by quoting *Proverbs 18:24*, “*He who has friends shows himself friendly...*”, and he walked away. In that moment of embarrassment, it clicked. I got what he was saying. As much as I thought I was doing fine alone, I was really missing out. Not only was I robbing others of the things God had blessed me with, but I was struggling to get by on my own. As different as we all are, the one thing we have in common is that we aren't designed to live this Christian life by ourselves. That's why in *Hebrews 10:25* it says, “*And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.*” It's hard to fall into sin when you surround yourself with strong Christian people. It's hard to be depressed or discouraged when you have others speaking hope and purpose into your day. Don't let the enemy draw you away from the flock where he can devour you, stay close and stay protected. So lift up your head, open up your eyes, and start looking for godly people to connect with. Always keep the door open for new friendships, and don't rob others of all that God has given you. There is great strength & encouragement that will come from Christ-centered relationships, so don't avoid them, they are exactly what you need to stay strong. Together we can do great things for the Kingdom of God.

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