

Devotion #21 - Are You Changed?

Galatians 5:14-16 (NLT)

“As for me, God forbid that I would boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world died long ago, and the world’s interest in me is also long dead. It doesn’t make a difference now whether we have been circumcised or not. What counts is whether we really have been changed into new and different people. May God’s mercy and peace be upon all those who live by this principle. They are the new people of God.”

I remember about two years ago when I was given the opportunity to attend a pre-screening of “The Passion” movie in Indianapolis. I was glued to my seat and overwhelmed with emotion as I viewed a very realistic portrayal of what My Savior went through for me. When the movie was over, I stood up and walked out speechless. I had no desire to talk with people, I just wanted to go and spend some quiet time with Jesus. In the moment, nothing else mattered to me. I didn’t care about what I was wearing, where I was going to eat, what kind of car I drove, my schedule for the next day - all the stuff of the world seemed trivial. I had totally lost interest in those natural things, and was consumed with gratitude for Jesus. The next day, I was still thinking about it, but I started back into my routine. Within a week, after I was home again, everything was back to normal. My interests were once again diverted with the cares of this world. When I read this passage today, I was blown away by Paul’s ability to simplify the truth of our relationship with Christ. The only thing that counts is whether or not we have been permanently changed. The movie ministered to me in the moment, but I didn’t let it change me. I jumped right back into the world. God isn’t looking for an encounter with us, He is longing for a life-changing relationship. It’s not how well we follow rules or what we think, it’s about the Creator of the Universe taking our lives and shaping them into something amazing. The reality is that as long as we are interested in the world, the world will be interested in us. People will only offer us things that they think we might want or are maybe willing to do. When we are so consumed with our love for God that we are transformed, people will know that the things of this world aren’t an option for us. Where are your interests and desires? How much of your life has been impacted by your love relationship with Jesus Christ? Remember, Jesus said in *Mark 8:35* that, *“If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will find true life.”* So why not start today by laying down your worldly interests, and spending some time with God. Remember though, it’s not about what we do, it’s about what we let God do in us. Are you changed? If not, it’s time to start living out what you believe so that the change can take place.

Pressing Towards

Danny

Devotion #22 - Curiosity

Genesis 3:2-6 (NIV)

“The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’ ‘You will not surely die,’ the serpent said to the woman. ‘For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”

I don't think it's an accident that my 2 yr. old son loves Curious George. The boy has more toys than I ever dreamed off, but yet he is constantly strolling around looking for something else to get into. The other day, he noticed something on the counter that he had never seen, so he walked over and reached up to try and grab it. Being as short as he is, he had to just blindly search with his hand, and so he ended up with a container of Cayenne Pepper. The problem is that as it came down, the lid was open and it dumped all over him. His first reaction was to give it a little “taste test”; because it just might be enjoyable. The immediate burning of the tongue proved otherwise, and he quickly started to rub his tongue to try and remove the burn. Within seconds tears were flowing, so his hands went straight to his eyes to wipe away the tears. A natural reaction, but not the right one in this situation. The screams of our son's pain immediately reached my wife who ran into the kitchen to rescue him. His eyes were burning, his mouth was on fire and he had no idea what to do - the poor kid. A quick trip to the sink to rinse his eyes, face and hands off - along with some loving, eventually calmed him down and brought relief. What started out as a seemingly innocent journey, turned into a situation beyond his control. He did not intend to put himself through that torture, but found himself in the middle of something that really hurt. When it comes to sin, it doesn't usually seem to be that big of a deal. It is appealing to the flesh. We get curious and we don't see any real danger or consequences, so we listen to the lies of the devil and give it a try. Before we know it, we find ourselves caught in a situation that is out of our control. I heard a great quote that says, “Sin will take you further than you wanted to go, cost you more than you wanted to pay, and keep you longer than you wanted to stay.” Simply put, if we want to avoid the pain, we're best to not toy with the temptations and just obey God. I don't know what you've been entertaining in your mind, or what worldly things are starting to draw you in, but I do know that obedience to God pays off. When Adam & Eve allowed themselves to be deceived, they paid a great price. Their lives and relationship with God were forever changed. When you find yourself about to venture down the wrong road, remember what it says in *2 Corinthians 10:5*, “...take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” When you choose to heed this command, you spare yourself all the hurt and consequences. If this warning is coming too late and you are already caught up in something beyond your control, just cry out to Jesus. He is just waiting to jump in and give you the freedom and comfort you need.

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Devotion #23 - We Are Family

1 Corinthians 12:12, 13 (NIV)

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

When I was 17 years old, I loaded up my Honda Civic and moved out. I was sick of all the pressure that I thought I was under, so I decided to run away to the Rocky Mountains and enjoy living life hassle-free. After 2 days of driving, I ended up in Lake Louise, Alberta. It was late at night on a long weekend, my car was almost out of gas and there was a terrible snow storm. As I pulled into town, I discovered that I had left my wallet at a grocery store in the USA. With no identification or money, I slept in my car that night, trying to keep warm. When the sun came up and I realized I was still out of options - I made a collect call home to my mom. Even in the midst of my rebellion, I still understood a little bit about the value of family. My mother was a little shocked when she heard about my situation. With me being hundreds of miles away, and all the banks and stores closed for the weekend, she was initially at a loss for ideas. After some thought, she asked me for the address where I was calling from, and told me not to move because she was sending someone over. I hung up the phone confused, because we definitely did not know anybody in the area. My sweet mother proceeded to dial directory assistance, and got the numbers of all her “family members” in Banff. She understood that she was a part of the family of God, and so she began calling different churches until somebody agreed to go and pick me up. Within the hour, a complete stranger picked me up. He bought me lunch, gave me some money and paid for me to stay a couple of days in the Youth Hostile. I was floored that a complete stranger would do all that for me. The reality was that my mother, and her brother in Christ, understood what it meant to be a part of the family of God. Neither of them hesitated in the midst of the circumstances, even when they had never even met before. One of the greatest things that happens when you give your life to Christ is that you are adopted into a huge family. Paul goes on to say in *verse 27* that, “...*you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*” As a family member, there are privileges and responsibilities that go along with it. We are supposed to look out for each other and protect one another. Far too often though, we don't value each other or love one another like we should. In *Galatians 6:10* it says, “*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*” Are you trying to get away from and avoiding your family like I was, or are you a healthy part of it? When is the last time you sacrificed something for another believer? Can your brothers and sisters count on you? It's time to recognize your role, and start looking for opportunities to do good to those who are a part of the family of God.

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Danny

Devotion #24 - Moved With Compassion

Matthew 9:35-38 (NIV)

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’”

As we were driving home tonight in the mini-van, the children were watching a Christian children’s video. All of a sudden I heard my 2 yr old son start quietly crying. I looked in the rearview mirror and saw these big old crocodile tears rolling down his face. My wife immediately asked him why he was so sad, and he explained that the mommy bug in the show was sick. He then stretched his arm out and said, “Mommy hold my hand!” as he held back more tears. The little guy was so wrapped up in the cartoon, that he was feeling some serious compassion for the daddy roach whose wife was about to die. It was kind of a shock for me, because my son is normally pretty self-absorbed. I’ve never seen him be that sympathetic towards someone else, especially a cartoon character. Here’s the point though, my little man had literally allowed himself to get so caught up in the movie that he was able to feel what that daddy bug was feeling. Now flip that over to your life. When was the last time that you were so focused on somebody else who was hurting that the love of God rose up on the inside of you? The passage you just read in Matthew is just one of several instances where Jesus looked around and allowed himself to feel what others were feeling. The difference though is that Jesus also purposed to do something about it. Sympathy is just feeling sorry for people in tough situations, whereas godly compassion will cause you to try and bring about a change for them. *Colossians 3:12* actually says to, “...*clothe yourself with compassion...*” I guess you could look at that scripture and say that we are to be clothed, or equipped, at any given moment to do whatever we can for those who are hurting. You also just read that the harvest is plentiful, but there are very few who are willing to go out and do something about it. Don’t allow yourself to get so consumed with your own worries and life that you forget where others are at. As you go throughout your day, lift up your eyes and look for those who are lost and hurting around you. In the same innocent way my son was stirred by another person’s sadness, open up your heart to those you come in contact with. Let the compassion of Christ well up inside of you and then be a vessel that God can use to bring about a change. Jesus and his disciples were first moved with compassion, then they prayed, and finally they went out with power and authority and did something about it. It’s time to start following in their footsteps.

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Danny

Devotion #25 - Denying The Truth

John 8:31,32 (NLT)

"...If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you."

As I was laying down with my four year old daughter last night, she was fighting the fact that she had to go to bed. Nothing in her wanted to go to sleep. It was well past her bedtime and she was tired, but she just wouldn't admit it. As I was laying next to her, she flipped over and started to throw another fit. She began to boldly proclaim her feelings by saying, "I told you so daddy, I'm..just..not..tir..e..d." The last syllable barely made it's way out of her mouth, and she was asleep. It took everything in me to not laugh and wake her back up. She couldn't stop herself from fighting against and denying the facts though. My son did a similar thing the other day. I knew he had to go to the bathroom, but he insisted that he did not have too. As I placed him on the toilet against his will, he is screaming, "I don't have to go potty!!!" He was barely finished that sentence when nature took over and proved him wrong. The crazy thing is that with his next breath he again stated, "I don't have to go potty!". Ultimately in both these situations, the truth prevailed. Now what is it about the truth that is so hard for us to accept? We fight it, we deny it and we resist it, rather than just embracing it. There is something about our carnal nature that just doesn't want to accept what someone else tells us to do. The passage you just read in John clearly explains that you have to stick to Jesus' teachings, and start living them out, in order to experience for yourself what the truth is. In other words, head knowledge won't do it for you. It's only when you begin to apply what you know, that you'll be able to discover what the real truth is. As you just learned from my two youngest kids - the truth is the truth, whether you accept it and live by it or not. Both my children were in turmoil simply because they refused to accept the truth - they kept denying it. It says in *Hebrews 2:1* that, *"...we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it."* The things we are taught from God's Word are principles that we should pay close attention too. When you chose to accept what God says, and you hang on to it no matter what it feels like, you'll discover for yourself the truth. And when you know the truth, you'll begin to start walking in the freedom associatd with it. That's the simple process - just take God at his Word and do it. If there is an area of your life that you are not experiencing victory, it's time to look and see if you have submitted that area to God's guidelines. If you haven't, stop fighting against it, admit that you're wrong, embrace what the Bible says, and start walking it out. There is no greater joy than living in the victory and freedom that comes from accepting & experiencing the TRUTH.

Pressing Towards

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