

Just "That Close" To Loving God

OPEN: In my files I have the observations someone made about how our culture uses the word "heart."

- For example, a person without compassion is described as "**heartless**," and we urge them to "**have a heart**."
- The truly evil are "**black-hearted**" while godly saints have "**hearts of gold**."
- Courageous soldiers are "**brave hearted**."
- Jilted lovers are "**brokenhearted**."
- If we need to speak intimately with someone, we have a "**heart-to-heart**" talk.
- But when we lose our passion for life, when a deadness sets in which we cannot seem to shake, we confess, "**My heart's just not in it**."
- And our deepest hurts we call "**heartaches**."
- But when we love someone as deeply as we can - we're said to love "**with all our heart**."

APPLY: In our story today Jesus says that the greatest commandment in all Scripture is to "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength**." Mark 12:30

I. We often speak of how much God loves us.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..."

But sometimes people fail to think in terms of how WE feel toward God.

I mean, we'll go to church, give our offerings, do all kinds of good works, work for the kingdom but often - in our prayers - all we talk about our needs and wants.

Rarely do we take the time to tell God how much we love Him.

Rarely do we spend the time telling Him why we love Him.

We'll do our duty and presume God loves us but for many believers, the idea of emotionally loving Him is somehow hard for them to wrap their minds around.

By contrast, **Psalm 42:1** tells us, "**As the deer pants for water so my soul pants for You**"

Psalm 84:2 John 8 and 3 John 4. **While the reward will not be given to the converts until**

Christ comes, yet the hope that it will

be done was possible for Paul to enjoy

in this life, by observing the faithful-

ness of his brethren. Psalm 143:6 "I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land."

And Isaiah 26:9a "My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you..."

This is a love that is an all-consuming passion - a desire for God that goes so deep that it can literally hurt sometimes.

But what if I don't have that kind of love for God?

What if I don't have this kind of passion - that love for God that comes from loving Him with all of my heart?

If I don't have it, how do I get it?

Well - in each of those Scriptures we just read - the writer is crying out to God because he seems to understand/remember what God has done for him in the past.

The psalmist says

"I REMEMBER the days of long ago;

I MEDITATE on all your works

and CONSIDER what your hands have done." Ps 143:5

This man spends time just thinking about what God has done, and praising Him for His goodness. He is spending deliberate time thanking God for His mighty works.

Philippians 4:6-7 says

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with THANKSGIVING, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Give Thanks!

Remember what God has done for you in the past.

And when we do this, not only will anxiety melt away, but you'll experience a peace that passes all understanding. It almost defies explanation, but that's what we'll receive.

Loving God with all of our hearts, is a love for God that is saturated with thanksgiving.

ILLUS: In the middle of President Lincoln's Presidency, an

elderly lady made an appointment to see him. As she entered his office, he inquired, "How can I be of service to you, Madam?"

The lady answered, "Mr. President, I know you are a very busy man, and I have not come to ask you for anything. I simply came to bring you this box of cookies."

There was a long silence. Tears flowed from Lincoln's eyes as he began:

"Madam, I am greatly moved by what you have done. For since I have become President, people have come into this office one after another asking for favors and demanding things from me. You are the first person who has ever entered these premises asking no favor but bringing a gift. I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

In our prayers, we need to learn to deliberately set aside time to come into God's presence – not asking favors - but bringing the gift of grateful heart. That's what it means to love the Lord our God with all of our hearts.

II. Jesus also says that we need to love the Lord our God with all of our SOUL.

This is the **idea of total commitment.**

When a person is in love with God with all of their heart they become consumed with the idea of committing their time, talents & treasures to God.

David was a man after God's own heart and he reflected that in loving God with all of his soul. In 2 Samuel 24 we're told of an Israelite who offered to supply David with the wood and animals for a specific sacrifice. But David responded:

"... I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing..."2Sa 24:24

David loved God so much that he was committed to giving something to God that actually cost him something.

Martin Luther once said

"A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing."

Loving God with all my soul is a love that leads me to give of myself because I love Him ... not because of duty or obligation. This kind of love is overwhelming that I'm just so consumed with God. I can't help but dedicate my resources to pleasing Him.

III. Jesus also says my love for God should be with all my STRENGTH

When I love with all of my heart (that's my emotions) that kind of love leads me

to love God with all of my soul - **to make an emotional commitment to please God.**

AND if I love God with all of my heart... and all my soul... then I will be lead to want to love Him with all of my Strength.

To love God with all my strength means that - whatever I do - I do it all for Jesus.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 10:31**

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

Then in **Colossians 3:17** he tells us that

"...whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

This kind of love should effect how we worship Him on

Sunday AND how we live for Him on Monday thru Saturday.

In **Ephesians 6:5-6** "**Slaves** (or you could read "employees" here) **obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart."**

When you love the Lord your God with all of your strength, you do everything in life with an eye toward pleasing God. That is your driving passion whether anyone sees what you do or not. You do it totally for God. You do it for God as an employee, an employer, a husband/wife, a relative, a friend, or even stranger. It doesn't matter what your role in life... you should do all that you do for the glory of Christ. And that kind of love God is that the type that requires ALL your strength.

ILLUS: The movie "Facing the Giants" was based upon a true story. Shortly after he and his wife decided to believe in Christ, the Coach in that movie found that he was in danger of being fired. In addition to this he also discovered

that it was his fault that he and his wife couldn't have kids. He spent an entire night reading scripture and pleading with God. Later, when his wife came out to join him he asked her: "Will you still love God if He doesn't give us children?"

What he was asking her was this:

"Does our love for God override our present circumstances, and our personal agenda, and our felt needs?"

And she answered "yes".

That became a turning point in their lives. As the movie explained: this coach determined to love God with all of heart, soul, mind & strength. As a coach he decided to coach his team to play football to glorify God - to give Him the glory whether they won or lost. They praised God when they won, praise God when they lost.

The coach put all of his strength into loving his God no matter what the outcome.

Ultimately, the football team won their championship... and the coach's wife gave birth to a child. But even if God had not been kind to them in this way, they still had determined they would dedicate themselves to loving God

with all their strength.

IV. Now I've deliberately taken Jesus' comments out of order.

Jesus said: **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30)**. I've told you about loving God with all of your heart/ all your soul/ all your strength - but I've left "loving God with all your mind" to the last.

In the story told in Matthew, Luke & here in Mark, Jesus was approached by teacher of the Law. According to Matthew, this young man had been hanging with the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and he had come up to Jesus with the express purpose of "testing" him.

These Pharisees and Sadducees weren't comfortable with Jesus.

They didn't really like Him and eventually, they would conspire to kill Him.

But right now, they were content to try to expose Him as a fraud

And that is the focus of this young man's question: he

wants to trip Jesus up.

“Teacher (he says) what’s the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Now, there were 613 laws in the Old Testament and experts in God’s law would spend hours arguing over this very question. Jesus responds by taking 2 commands these experts would have regarded as somewhat obscure - they weren’t even in the same book of the Law.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength” was from **Deut. 6**

While **“Love your neighbor as yourself”** was from **Leviticus 19:18**

But Jesus explains that all the law and the prophets hung on these two commands.

Jesus’ response is so obvious that you can almost see this young man who asked Him the question - standing there with his mouth open. He can’t contain his admiration for something he’d never even thought about before.

“Well said” he exclaims **“these are more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.”**

Then Jesus says something that really caught my attention:

“When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God...’” Mark 12:34

He was not far from the Kingdom? What did Jesus mean by that?

He meant that this young man had come to a decision.

Up to that point he was just engaged in legalistic argument. That’s what he did for fun. That’s what passed for worship in the circles he ran in. But up until this point in his life he hadn’t understood the God of Love Jesus had just introduced him to.

Suddenly he began to see God as He really was.

This was a God who wasn’t impressed with people who just wanted to know God’s word, but rather a God who wanted His people to love Him passionately.

ILLUS: The son a preacher once asked his father, "Dad, what is the difference between the cherubim and the seraphim?"

The father explained that the word cherubim came from a Hebrew word meaning "knowledge", while "seraphim" was

from another Hebrew word which meant "burning," pointing of the fact that the seraphim were angels known for their burning love.

The child thought about that for a few moments and then said "**Dad, I hope that when I die I shall be a seraphim, because I would prefer to love God than to know anything.**"

That was the choice this young man was now facing.

You see, **when I love God with all of my mind that mean's I've made a choice.**

I've made a decision that it's God I want - more than anything else in this life.

In **Deuteronomy 30:19-20** Moses said it this way "**This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life...**"

CLOSE: Make a choice.

Decide who you're going to love.

Because on that single choice hangs your very eternity.

I once read a TRUE story that powerfully illustrated that truth. In WWII soldier who, just before he shipped off to Europe, found a used book in a USO store. In the margins, a woman had written some observations that he found insightful and caring. Touched by this unknown person's insights, the soldier made inquiries until he found out the name and address of the donor, then he wrote her. He told her of how he had found the book, how impressed he was with her thoughts as he found them in the book, and that he was soon to go off to war and that had no one stateside with whom he could write. Would she write to him? She replied and said that she would.

Throughout the war, the soldier and the woman exchanged constant letters and he found that he was falling in love with her. He said as much in one of his letters. She responded that she was feeling the same for him. He sent her his picture.

She wrote back and said that if he truly loved her... a picture would not be necessary.

At last, he was to return from the War and wrote her that his ship would be docking at NY, not far from where she lived. If she could come and meet him at the dock, he

would bring the book and she could wear a red rose on her lapel to help him identify her. She agreed.

When his ship docked, he descended the gangplank and searched the crowd for the woman he had written to for so long. Suddenly he was approached by a stunningly beautiful blond woman, dressed in a crisp green suit and eyes twinkling as she looked at him and walked up to him. In the wonder of that moment, he neglected to see that she was not wearing a rose on her lapel. She spoke: "Hi soldier." She winked and walked on. For a moment he was tempted to follow her and ask her name, but just then he noticed a woman standing alone, wearing a red rose on the lapel of her brown suit. The woman was about 40, plain, thick ankles, even the suit was worn and not well pressed. He struggled for a moment with his dilemma, but then he realized that this was the person who had given so much of heart to him and had given him strength in the midst of very difficult times. Perhaps he could not feel romantic love for her, but the very least he could do was ask her out to eat and explain how much her letters had meant to him. Straightening himself, he crossed to her and saluted. Taking her hand, he introduced himself and asked if she would do him the honor of eating with him. With a startled look, the woman said, "Look, Mr. I'm not

sure what is going on here, but that blond woman that just passed you gave me this rose to wear on my suit and said that if a soldier were to ask me out to eat, she would be across the street in the diner waiting on him."

That soldier made a choice about love that affected his entire future.

What choice will you make?