

DEVOTED TO BEING TOGETHER

Series: Devoted to...

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Scripture

Acts 2: 41-46, Psalms 119:9-17

So the world is living through a season that will shape our generation. One of the beautiful promises Jesus made is that he would not leave us on our own. He would send the father's promise. A helper. That he would be with us.

As the church goes into a new season, I believe we are called to shape culture. You see economists on wall street are not waiting for permission to shape the world. Politicians in Nairobi and Atwoli's home are not waiting for permission to shape culture. Hollywood, Bollywood, Nollywood, they are not waiting for permission to shape culture.

How about the church? Coz I really believe we are God's plan to heal the world. Now listen I am not saying the church is the KOG, I am saying we are his plan in the world. How about the disciples, those who Jesus gave his authority and power? We should not wait for permission to shape this generation. If anything we have it already.

When the world reopens, I think believers should be on the front lines of shaping schools, arts, banking, politics, family life and everything. And listen we do it differently. Our weapons are not of this world. Our fight is not with flesh and blood with principalities.

Yet, if we are to join God in shaping our world, even though it may look very different, we have to be reminded of our identity. Who is the church called to be? And so for that, I have been taking us back to the birth of the church in Acts 2 and seeing what things shaped the church.

The community continually devoted themselves to learn what the apostles taught them, gathering for fellowship, breaking bread, and praying. Everyone felt a sense of awe because the apostles were doing many signs and wonders among them. There was an intense sense of togetherness among all who believed; they shared all their material possessions in trust. They sold any possessions and goods that did not benefit the community and used the money to help everyone in need. They were unified as they worshipped at the temple day after day. In homes, they broke bread and shared meals with glad and generous hearts. The new disciples praised God, and they enjoyed the goodwill of all the people of the city. Day after day the Lord added to their number everyone who was experiencing liberation.

Acts 2:42-47

This is what shaped the early church at inception. And I have been captured by this word devotion. Which really means to be given to, to do everything it takes. And last week I talked

about the church's devotions to do everything it takes to be together and united beyond dividing walls.

Today I want to shortly talk about their devotion to what the apostles taught them. You see, a good number of these guys and girls had not walked with Jesus even though they may have heard of him. So it mattered to them what the apostles most of whom had been witnesses of the life of Jesus.

Some of these teachings went on to be written to form what we today call the New Testament. Yet what the disciples were using was the Torah or what we call the Old Testament and interpret it in light of the teachings, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. So this is what they devoted themselves to.

And I think the church even today is invited to devote themselves to God's word. You see one of the biggest tension of the life of faith is living in the world but not being of the world. We got to the same stores and the same schools and work in the same market and the same economy yet we are called out from all of it.

How do you then not yield to the same patterns of culture? How do we not get carried away? By being given to; by being committed to; by doing everything it takes to make sure that our mind and hearts are formed by the word of God.

You see politicians, the arts, economics, no one is waiting for permission to shape what you think about God, others and yourself. Yet this is so key because how you think about God will determine your worship and practice. What you think about others will determine how you treat them. How you think about yourself will determine how alive you live your life.

The main message of Jesus was Repent for the Kingdom of God is within your reach. And that word repent is not only about turning your life around actually it more directly translates to change your mind. Change how you think about things. Change your worldview.

And being surrounded by political culture that often say our politicians are Kings and Messiahs. We are called to repent.

A social culture that often says God is not there and we are our own God. We are called to repent.

Art that often says God does not care for how we live our lives. We are called to repent.

An economic culture that tell people life is about consumption, and the lie that all those who do not have did not work as hard as you. We need to repent.

We will need consistent and devoted repentance. Changing our minds about how we think about these things. Changing our minds every day, forming our worldview to that of Jesus Christ. To constantly make sure our reality is formed by God's word.

So with the Holy Spirit; a practice, a life of devotion to reading the word of God will slowly and sometimes in big chunks at a time change our worldview, shape our minds and hearts and consequently how we act in the world for the Kingdom of God.

Here is some ancient wisdom from one of the first Kings of Israel. And this is a big deal because this King despite all his brokenness is described as a man after God's own heart. Here is what he wrote

How can a young person remain pure?

Only by living according to Your word.

I have pursued You with my whole heart;

do not let me stray from Your commands.

Deep within me, I have hidden Your word

so that I will never sin against You.

You are blessed, O Eternal One;

instruct me in what You require.

My lips have told how

You have delivered all Your wise rulings.

I have celebrated Your testimonies

as though rejoicing over an immeasurable fortune.

I will fix my mind on Your instructions

and my eyes on Your path.

I will find joy in Your ordinances;

I will remember Your word forever.

Psalms 119:9-16

Fixing our minds, our hearts, our attention on God's word, his instruction and his teaching. So if we are to shape the world we must have ourselves devoted to being shaped by God's word. How are you going to do all it takes to be shaped by God's word?

But I do not want to assume, this is an easy practice. How do you engage with literature that is thousands of years old? There are some portions of scripture that can get tiring to read.

Some for me is upsetting because I do not like what God is saying to me there. I do not like what it demands of me sometimes. Take up your cross and follow me? Don't let the sun set when you are still angry? It demands action of me and sometimes I am just not liking it.

Some of it is upsetting because the message is carried in a very broken culture that in some cases oppressed women and other people.

And I have always said I appreciate the honesty of scripture. It gives me hope that despite my brokenness God is patient enough to tell his story through my life. Because again, as I am shaped by the word of God, I will be the only Bible the world around me and mostly the unbelieving will be reading.

On my journey, I have had days and even weeks when I have not wanted or even read the Bible. I have had exciting seasons where I just felt power all over and that God was opening it up to me. And there are times I have done it begrudgingly.

Yet somewhere in me, I am making it my devotion, I am ensuring that I will do everything I can to make sure I spend some time in scripture. I am still quite young so I am yet to see fully the fruit that will bear.

But it is exciting to know that hundreds of people who shaped the world for better were influenced by the Bible. Let me read you some

William Shakespeare, the playwright was described by Victor Hugo as having being shaped by the Bible. Even in one of his undying works, Romeo and Juliet, he subtly makes reference to the book, 'Song of Solomon'.

William Wilberforce who among others devoted his life to fight for the abolition of slavery was a believer because as he was shaped by scripture it changed his worldview. It changed what he thought about God, himself and others, especially the opposite other.

Fredrick Douglass, a former US slave in the South who risked his life for freedom and rose to the level of Presidential advisor. Fighting to end slavery in the US. Fighting for equal rights for women. He constantly used scripture in his speeches.

In science, people like Albert Einstein. One of the most brilliant minds we have known. Giving the world the theory of relativity. constantly read the psalms. In awe of its observations of the world and its intoxicating joy.

US republican president, Ronal Reagan whose speeches reveal a reliance on the Bible. In a personal letter to a football player, he says that there was never a day 2 Chronicles 7:14 was not in his mind. That verse says if God's people called by his name, humble themselves and turn to Him in prayer He will forgive their sin and heal the land

Martin Luther King Jr. one of the leaders of the Civil rights movement in the US that went to shape conversations on human rights and race relationships all over the world was a believer.

Africa's own Desmond Tutu, Archbishop, who among others was key in the fight against apartheid in South Africa.

Reggae's legendary Bob Marley. There is no listening to his music without seeing the powerful spirituality behind it. Some of them coming directly from scripture.

Bono, the lead singer of the group U2. They fill stadia over and over again with their electrifying music. And he is open about his faith in Jesus. His songs are deeply influenced by scripture.

Barack Obama, the first African American and 44th President of the United States and might I say the son of Kenyan father. I really tried looking for Kenyan examples. Who was keen to ask his pastor-in-chief DeBois to send him scripture to use to comfort the nation in times of great tragedy and he would include them in his speeches.

Kenya's very own, Archbishop Timothy Njoya, now late. Who, because of his shaping by scripture could not help but join the fight for multiparty freedom here in Kenya.

And of course, there is me. I do not know what people will say about me or you when you are 97 but I have a much that if you let your worldview be shaped by the word of God it will be beautiful.

And some of those people, we know well the mistake they made because they live or lived in our lifetime or we see in history what mistakes they made. But is that not the story, that despite our faults and failures, God will still write the story of the Kingdom through us and with us, if we repent, if we change our minds, if we let him shape our worldview.

1. Set aside to do it. It does not have to be in the morning or day evening. It can be any time that is best for you.

2. In a digital age, you can use technology to help. There are multiple apps out there that can help with a schedule to create a rabbit of reading scripture. My personal favourite is the Bible in one year out of Holy Trinity Brompton. I simply sit and have the bible read out to me and Nicky Gumbel usually has a commentary afterwards.

3. Do it with people. We are meant to do life together. It is in community and often small community. It is in the community that real transformation happens. You see, in a church of over 100 people gathering, you can bow to social pressure or even hide. But in small family groups, you get to be known and seen and heard. Held accountable, encouraged and loved.

Back at the compound, there are 3 families and every Tuesday we have been going through Psalms together. And even this needs a bit of structure. Nothing in us enjoys discipline. So we set aside a time, we ring a bell and guess what even on the compound we have to wait for each other.

But over time we are all agreeing that these times spent in fellowship are some of the best we have had in this season. Sometimes we read something and it's like popcorn all over. Everyone I excited at what God is saying to them. Other times, it's struggling to get anyone talking. Yet, we keep doing it.

And what if you live alone? Do everything it takes, find a way around it. Meet online with friends, try what WhatsApp can do. The point is, do everything it takes to shape your worldview with God's word.

And you see the thing is, it's not just about forming a philosophy shaped by the Bible, but because of the Holy Spirit on us, as we repent, change our worldview to that of Jesus, we begin to see the Kingdom of God at work in and around us. We begin to see the KOG breaking through around us in power just like it happened with the early church.

Will you do all it takes?

Today I will take you through a simple tool you can use as a family, or as friends online or living together. You can use this whether you have been a believer for ages or jus recently gave your life to Jesus or you have never encountered the Bible before.

It's called the Discovery Bible Study Method.

Start off with Praying. Nothing complicated, nothing big just be real and simple.

If this is your first meeting together, read the passage.

Let one of you retell the passage from memory. If you are alone, I would usually try and rewrite the passage from memory.

This helps you become aware of what things caught your attention. Because I think that is where God will speak to you from. The things that catch our attention are not always the same.

Then read again, this time maybe fill in what was missing from your retelling. If you are in a group you are doing it together.

Then answer out loud or in journaling if alone just a few simple questions

1. What does what you have read say about God. And just what you have read. Believers are notorious for explaining things and bringing in other scripture from other places. Which is fine, but not with this tool. Because it is designed to also be used by people who may not know so much about the Bible and you are trying not to intimidate them.

We are trusting that the Holy Spirit can speak to each person just from that word.

2. Read again, What does it say about humanity?

3. Read again, what does it say to you? What in your life is being encouraged? What are you being invited to walk away from? What can you do in the next week in obedience to this?

4. Finally, ask yourself who in your life needs to hear this? How can you tell them? Text? Call? Now that they came to your mind, do you think they would be willing to join the simple Bible Study?

5. When you meet next time, start with telling stories of how the previous week went.

Will You do all it takes to be shaped by God's word?

Let's pray