

**Joke:** A pastor walks into the bishops office, plunks down into a chair and lets out a heavy sigh that was filled with frustration.

“What troubles you, John ?” The Bishop asked, “I thought this was the day you spent with your family.”

“It was,” “And I went to play golf with my brother. We try to play golf as often as we can. You know I was quite a talented golfer before I devoted my life to Christ.”

“I seem to recall that,” the Bishop says. “So I take it your day of recreation was not so relaxing?”

“Far from it,” the pastor says with frustration. “In fact, I cussed more today then ai did before I became a Christian” the pastor says rather shamefully.

“My goodness, John!” astonished by the pastors honesty about the situation. “Please do tell!”

“Well, we were on the fifth tee — and this hole is a monster, 540 yard par 5, with a nasty dogleg right and a hidden green ... and I hit the drive of my life. The sweetest swing I’ve ever made. And it’s flying straight and true, right along the line I wanted ... and it hits a bird in mid-flight!”

“Oh my!” “How unfortunate! But surely that didn’t make you cuss did it?”

“No, that wasn’t it,” admitted the pastor. “While I was still trying to fathom what had happened, this squirrel runs out of the woods, grabs my ball and runs off down the fairway!”

“Oh, that would have made me cuss a little for sure!” The Bishop announced feeling rather bad for the pastor.

“But I didn’t ” “And I was so proud of myself! And while I was pondering whether this was a sign from God, this hawk swoops out of the sky and grabs the squirrel and flies off, with my ball still clutched in his paws!”

“So that’s when you cursed,” said bishop with a knowing smile.

“Nope, that wasn’t it either,” cried the pastor, anguished, “because as the hawk started to fly out of sight, the squirrel started struggling, and the hawk dropped him right there on the green, and the ball popped out of his paws and rolled to about 18 inches from the cup!”

Bishop sat back in his chair, folded his arms across his chest, eyes glued to the pastor with a piercing stare, and said: “You missed the stupid putt, didn’t you?”

---

Do you ever feel a bit disappointed or discouraged about where you are in life? You thought, by the time that you got to his point in your life, that you’d be doing something more, something different. something maybe more significant?

You just haven’t completed your bucket list of life’s goal that you thought you would by now.

Or maybe, and hopefully you have accomplished many, you might have some left, but the ones you have accomplished, the ones you thought you wanted, that if you completed would make you happy, after all of your accomplishments you still feel like life is a bit empty and you find yourself wondering is there something more?

You look around and wonder where all the time has gone? Think about it it's already the end of January.

We are in a message series called determination.

We are looking at the idea of determining today what we will do tomorrow so that we can make better decisions and not wait until the circumstances arise to figure out what to do. But instead determine in advance what to do in any given situation.

The truth is our decisions are important. And as I told you, many of us are not good decision makers. Now let me share with you why I think that is the case.

Ready? It's because we don't determine in advance what to do, but rather make decisions based on the emotions in the moment.

Ever have a Kirby vacuum sales pitch brought to your house? They have been trained to wear you down. After hours and a 1500 dollar vacuum that you can buy today for only 800 you finally say what a deal, fine I'll take it simply because you didn't determine in advance you didn't need a Kirby.

So, we're not waiting until the future to decide what to do in the moment, but with the wisdom of God, we're determining in advance so that we can make wiser, better choices.

In this series so far we have not looked at just learning to make better choices, we also talked about being ready. Ready for when the enemy attacks, and he will attack. He is prowling like a lion watching your every step. Last week we looked at being consistent. Because successful people do consistently what others do occasionally. A body builder is in the gym more than a couple hours a week to get to the place they want to be.

Today, I want to share about being devoted.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to be devoted to Jesus.

And here's a thought for you, why is it we can be devoted to the gym, the diet, work, but have a hard time being devoted to the One who gave up everything for us?

Jesus said this in Matthew 6 verse 33.

Matthew 6:33 (NIV): But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Seek when? First. . .

Seek what? His kingdom, and His Righteousness

When you do that then all those other things you are searching for in life, the little things, those things that still matter, but in themselves could never bring fulfillment, happiness, peace or joy will be given to you as well.

The problem is for many of us is that we chase after the things leaving out His kingdom and His righteousness and even after we catch up with the things we thought we needed we still feel unfulfilled. Why? Because we were seeking the wrong thing first.

When you seek first Him, then God brings fulfillment into your life.

And that's why we today to determine that, I will seek first, the one who matters most. Because I am devoted to Jesus.

Declare that over your life today, say that with me. . .

I will seek first, the one who matters most. Because I am devoted to Jesus.

I am determining now before the next day comes, I will seek first, the one who matters most, because I am devoted to Jesus.

And maybe I should have asked this question before I had you declare that over your life so you knew what you were getting into, but anyway. . .what does it mean to be devoted to Jesus?

Let me give you some context from the book of Acts.

When we look at the first century believers, after Jesus had given His life on the cross and was raised from the dead, He ascended to a seat at the right hand of the Father.

And when all the believers were together, God sent a wind, some fire and He filled them with the Holy Spirit.

After all that, what did these first century followers of Jesus devote their lives to? And I think whatever that was church, it's safe to say that we ought to follow suit. Don't you?

Acts 2:42 (TPT): Every believer was faithfully devoted to following the teachings of the apostles. Their hearts were mutually linked to one another, sharing communion and coming together regularly for prayer.

They heard teaching about God, they fellowshiped with each other, they broke bread, and they were devoted to prayer.

And here's the result.

Acts 2:43 (TPT): A deep sense of holy awe swept over everyone, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.

The result was that everyone, who, everyone. . .everyone around them was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

Because they determined to be devoted to the things of God, that made them close to God.

The first part of James 4:8 tells us,

James 4:8 (TPT): Move your heart closer and closer to God, and he will come even closer to you. . .

They were seeking first Jesus and His kingdom and His righteousness. And then God added everything else, they were effective in ministry, people took notice that they had spent time with Jesus.

Even nonbelievers looked on them in awe saying these people are so full of love, look at it they're doing miracles, signs and wonders.

And it was all born out of seeking first, the one who matters most.

They were devoted to the Word of God, to prayer, to fellowship and the breaking of bread.

The Greek word translated as devoted, is in the imperfect tense. And what that means is, it's ongoing.

It's an ongoing, continual devotion. It's not I came to Jesus once at an altar. I said a prayer of faith now I'm good type of relationship.

Let me read Matthew 6:33 from the Passion Translation. . .

Matthew 6:33 (TPT): 33 “So above all, constantly chase after the realm of God’s kingdom and the righteousness that proceeds from him. Then all these less important things will be given to you abundantly.

It is accurately translated that they were continually devoted. In other words, these disciples had a single minded, unified, ongoing pursuit of Jesus.

We seek first, the one who matters most, and we continue to seek first, the one who matters most.

Let me pause for moment. . .I want you to think about that verse in Acts 2 that was written about the first century Christians, had that verse been written today describing our modern day Christianity I think it may have been something quite different.

Perhaps it would read more like this. . .

The people heard the Word and devoted themselves to what made them feel good and sounded good, but to them not all was good, they fellowshiped when it was convenient, they broke bread and prayed together occasionally.

Truth is for many we would rather fit in, be liked or known to others on Facebook than known by our God. We will spend hours scrolling through our posts, and minutes looking into the Book of Life.

Listen church, I know we all just want the normal stuff in life. . .

We want to finish school and have a job that we love, marry the right person, and have a nice house. And one day it would be nice to maybe travel the world and then die and go to heaven.

I'm the modern day Christian.

And honestly, I hope that's not you.

But truth be told, it might be more you than what you think. Let me give you a simple illustration just for perspective.

**(Lay out tape measure 168 inches, that's 14 feet).**

168 inches, what is so significant about 168? 168 represents 1 week of your life. There are 168 hours in any given week.

How do you spend those 168 hours?

I've mentioned this before in another message, that one thing I have learned is that we will make time for what is important to us.

Let me change that up a bit by saying, you tend to devote your time to that which you're devoted to.

And so, what I want to do is illustrate for you, and I want you to think about, where do you spend your time during those normal 168 hour weeks?

I'm going to share where many of those go. If you sleep 8 hours a day that's 56 hours. That leaves us with 112. If you work and I'm going to say 9 hours and that's probably conservative that's if you don't work Saturday that's 45 hours. That leaves us with 67 hours. The average person watches about 21 hours a week of TV. So, now we are left with 46 hours. Approximately 5 hours in the bathroom. Leaves us with 41. 6 hours running errands. 35 left. If your on social media and have a cell phone that's around 25 hours a week. That leaves us with 10 hours a week left and I haven't included eating meals getting ready for the day and I'm sure a couple others I've missed as well. You know the other



stuff we do. So maybe the other stuff takes us another 8 hours a week. So out of our 168 we started with we now have 2 hours left to give to the One that matters most.

Those 2 hours obviously most go to God because after all I'm a follower of Jesus. Devoted to Him. Or do they? Some of us may give them to Him, others of us give far less than that.

Is this a tough to hear?

Now let me ask you, do you think if you spent 2 hours a week at anything, do you believe for a second your going to improve at that thing in any significant way?

I dare say no. . .

If you only exercise two hours a week and eat whatever you want, you're probably not going be in the best physical health.

If you only spend a couple hours a week in the same room as your spouse, you're probably not going have a dream marriage.

I can assure you that if you only spend a couple hours a week at your job. Your not going to have a job for too long.

If you practice piano for 2 hours a week, chances are your not going to hold a concert at Carnegie Hall.

And if you only study for two hours a week, you're probably not going graduate summa cum laude. No, chances are your going to more like me and graduate Thank The Laude.

So, if we are only partially devoted to God, spend just a little time, that left over time with God, you know those times when it's easy, when it's convenient, when we don't have anything else to do, no

game to watch, then it's no wonder we're not spiritually where we would like to be and struggle with living as God desires us to live.

No wonder we feel unfulfilled and less than satisfied.

No wonder we rarely if ever share our faith. No wonder we're more concerned with what people think about us, than what God thinks about us. It's no wonder we find ourselves wondering, is there anything more in life?

If we only give God what's left over, we have to ask ourself, are we really devoted to Him? Have we really like the song says surrendered all?

In her book Wildfire Jessi Green says this: "If you want to see transformation, growth, and to live the life God created you for—you cannot skip time in His presence and live a lifestyle absent of repentance. The sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary makes it possible for us to come before a holy God in our mess, in our sin, and allow His glory to change us from the inside out."

If we want to live a life fully devoted to the things of Jesus, and I hope you do, what I want you to realize is that it won't happen by accident, because truth is all that other stuff in life just seems to take over.

I have never had anyone come to me and say, wow pastor I woke up today and I'm not sure what happened but I became a spiritual powerhouse. I heard the devil run from my room when ai jumped out of bed this morning. I don't know what happened but I have an incredibly powerful ministry it just happened. My life is holy, I'm walking in victory, I'm not tempted anymore.

Don't get me wrong, God wants you to have a powerful ministry, to walk in victory, to live a pure and holy life, to not succumb to

temptation but the truth is it isn't going to happen by accident by giving Him the leftovers of our 168 hours.

You and I need to determine today that we want to live an ongoing devoted life in pursuit of Jesus and serve Him faithfully not just today, but every day. It is going to take you and I being intentional we won't just wake up one day, look in the mirror and see flames resting upon our heads as God displays His glory to us. Oh that might happen but it is only going to happen because we are in a relentless pursuit of knowing Him better.

So, how do I get to that place? I'm glad you asked. . .

Let's look at John 15. Jesus is telling a parable, He is likely near a vineyard as He's sharing. At the very least He's talking to people that understood the concepts of a vineyard. And He says this to His disciples. . .

John 15:5 (NIV): 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Jesus says, "I am the vine." And what are you? You are the branches.

Your role in this parable is to be what? The branch. . .Who's the vine. . .Jesus is the vine.

Here's the key. When you, the branch, are connected to Jesus, the vine, you bear spiritual fruit.

Galatians 5 talks about some spiritual fruit.

Galatians 5:22–23 (NIV): But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Notice first off if says fruit not fruits.

So, it you're displaying consistent love, joy, peace, gentleness, kindness, goodness, self-control and are faithful in it. Chances are you figured out the connection between the vine and the branch.

And if you did do you think your life will be empty? Wondering, is there anything more to life?

Your life used to be empty, but when you're the branch connected to the vine, your life starts to be full of what matters. It starts to be full of what lasts. It starts to produce the fruit necessary for sustaining life.

But what unlocks that door?

There's a word used in John 15 eleven times it's used, let's see if you can figure out the word. We find it first in verse 4. . .

John 15:4 (NIV): Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

He continues. . .

John 15:5–10 (NIV): 5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will

be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. 9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

Figure out the word? The word is remain

It comes from the Greek word, M-E-N-O. And it means to abide, to dwell, to live in.

This is not just a two hour weekly duty to God. I have to do my Bible time. I have to go to church to please God.

No, this is a fully devoted, I'm all in to the one who matters most.

Hopefully you picked this up as I read from John 15 but let me state the obvious in case you missed it, the branch needs the vine.

If you don't stay connected, you're just a dead limb. You lose your life source. You don't produce the fruit you were designed to produce.

And that's why it is imperative that you determine today that I will seek first, the one who matters most not just today but every day of your life.

Because truth is church, if we are not connected to the vine, we won't get the spiritual nutrients that we need to bear fruit.

Jesus is the vine, you are the branch. So be the branch! He is divine you are not.

Be the one who seeks and stays intentionally connected.

I am going to determine in advance that no matter what circumstance I find myself in I am staying connected to the life source.

I will seek first, the one who matters most.

So, you have determined to seek first Jesus, but how do you live that out?

Let me give you three things that can help you do the very thing God desires you to do and that is in case you missed it, once again seek first His kingdom and righteousness.

The first thing you need to is, determine in advance to decide on a time, secondly decide on a place, and the last thing is to determine in advance a plan.

Understand church seeking God is not something we hope to do it's something you intentionally do.

Proverbs 25:2 (NIV): 2 It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.

I don't want to spend a lot of time with this Scripture but let me just say this about Proverbs 25. God doesn't hide things from us, He hides things for us. And if we will passionately seek after those things He will reveal them to us so that He gets the glory through us.

Back to seeking God intentionally. I'm not saying you have to have a specific time but you might want that. I also don't know what the best time is for you.

Maybe it's in the morning you can have coffee with Jesus. For others it might be before you go to bed at night.

Whatever time it happens to be for you determine in advance, today is as good a day as any, that your going to intentionally seek God in prayer, through His Word, your going to take time to connect with Him. To remain in Him.

Second thing is determine a place. It doesn't have to be the same place but you need a somewhat regular place. Someplace where you can get away from the distractions long enough to connect with Papa.

I will say this the living room with the television blaring probably isn't the best place.

For some of you that place may be the beach, don't forget we are in Michigan, might want to wait awhile to go back to that place, it might be a walk in nature, on your knees by your bed, in your favorite chair, at that kitchen table, on your back porch, or even on your commute to work. Wherever your prayer closet happens to be put on that worship music and spend some time in that place. Just be sure to have a prayer closet place.

You just need to determine in advance this is the time, this is the place, but, then also have a plan.

One thing I've learned, if somethings important to you, you always plan ahead of time how to get it accomplished.

You don't wake up in the morning knowing this important thing has to get done, thinking what am I going to do today. It's already been placed in your calendar.

Want to set a goal to read the Bible in year. Then make a plan there are a bunch of folks that have already made a list of what to read, how much to read, so that you can fulfill that goal but you need a plan.

Want God to speak to you? He desires to speak to you. Make a plan to be still and know that He is God. Take a journal in your quiet place. Write down what you hear Him speaking.

You need to determine in advance your time and place so that you can make a plan. Make the best of those 168 hours you have each week.

Determine in advance you no longer want to give God what's just left over, but you want to seek first the one who matters most.

And then what happens is, we just start walking with God.

Our time with God isn't limited to that 10 minute, 30 minute, hour long devotion, but we're just, throughout the day talking to God, listening to God, we're aligning our hearts with God's heart.

And we have a posture, a mindset, that is seeking Jesus first.

And when we do that transformation begins to take place. The Holy Spirit begins to show us things that if we will put them aside will make us more like Jesus.

We start to love our enemies. Have joy unspeakable full of glory, He starts to give us words to share with others so that we can encourage them and help them encounter Jesus in a fresh new way.

God no longer gets just what's left over in your life, because God is not just a part of your life, He is your life.

He's not a compartment, He's everything.

You become fully devoted to the one who matters most.



And because you're talking to Jesus, and you're listening to hear what He has to reveal to you He starts to impact your work life. And gives you wisdom, and direction. He starts to correct you and guide your steps and lead your ways. And you're a fully devoted follower of Jesus, aligning your heart to His heart.

And I love this watch this John 15 verse 11. . .

John 15:11 (NIV): 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

When you determine in advance to remain in Him your joy will be complete.

When all of hell comes against you, your joy will be complete. When you find yourself in a situation that is less than desirable, your joy will be complete. When it seems like everyone is against you, you realize that God is for you, your joy is complete.

Determine in advance to be fully devoted to the One who matters most because of who Jesus is and all He's done, He is worthy of everything.

I want to devote my life, not to something that's self centered easy and comfortable, but rather to the vine, so that I hear the voice of the Spirit whenever and wherever He speaks.

I'm want to seek first, the one who matters most.

You will never accidentally live a fully devoted life to Jesus.

It doesn't work like that. Determine in advance, decide today, that He doesn't get just the leftovers. He doesn't get what's easy

or convenient. He doesn't get my attention when there's nothing else going on.

No game this weekend, the weather's not great, guess I can go to church. By the way if that's the way you look at that you need to go back and find your prayer closet.

I don't get to go to church, I get the opportunity to fellowship with those who claim to be and hopefully are the church.

Jesus is the vine, you are the branch.

The branch needs the vine. The vine is not optional. Without the vine you never produce fruit and you wither and die.

I need, you need, to stay connected to the vine. The vine is the source of life. And when we're connected, there's love, there's joy unspeakable, there's a peace that passes all understanding.

There's goodness and faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

And what I know, is that Jesus doesn't want to be just a part of your life, He wants to be your life.

Acts 17:28 (TPT): It is through him that we live and function and have our identity; just as your own poets have said, 'Our lineage comes from him.'

So, because of who He is, and what He's done. Because eternity is real, and I don't know what tomorrow holds. I want to invest my life for the One that matters most not just today but every day.

I have determined my yesterdays might not have been as devoted as they should have been. But today is a new day.

And I have determined today, tomorrow is going to be different.

I have decided to seek first the one that matters most.

Listen, church and I'm trying to wrap up this message.

It takes more than just one prayer to be fully devoted. It takes a heart postured every day to want to follow in the paths of the One who gave His all so that you and I can have it all.

He gives us a way, we just need to determine to remain.

Papa, we pray today, help us commit not to give You what's leftover, but to make You first our ongoing single pursuit, let You be the devotion of our hearts. Help us to connect to the vine. For its in You we live and move and have our being. Help us to be fully devoted to You. Empower us to to be intentional in our relationship with You. To intentionally seek You first in every area of our lives. In Jesus name.

Now hear this church, I will close with this, when you connect to the vine, suddenly it's not just a little bit of time in the morning or the evening or on your commute, but it becomes an ongoing pursuit of the one who matters most. It becomes a life style of hearing Him speak, Him leading the way, walking in victory, free from the sin nature because He created a new man with you and in you. You walk in peace in spite of the storms.

I promise you He's worth the relentless pursuit of getting to know Him better.

If you agree then declare over your life once more. . .I will seek first, the one who matters most. Because I am devoted to Jesus.