

## HOW TO KEEP YOUR HEART FROM WANDERING FROM GOD

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**Psalm 103:1** - "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!"

I like the modern, albeit cynical, oft repeated paraphrase of John 3:16 that says, "***For God so loved the world that He didn't send a committee.***" If redemption hinged on a committee decision, we'd all still be lost in our sins.

It's difficult to get a group, even a very **good** group, to move ahead in a **united** decision. Different heads have different thoughts, different tastes, and different plans of attack. It's not easy to move as one.

Or look at the state of marriage in our society. Nowhere is unity more important and yet, frequently, more elusive. To take two minds and hearts and make them breathe as one requires no small miracle. A marriage licence is needed to help cement a covenant because romance alone won't do the job. Unity is a life-long task and commitment.

But the Psalmist zeros in on the place where unity is the **most** difficult of all - and the most **crucial** to achieve: "***Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy Name.***" All of you - **everything within you** - has to make the **same** decision to honor the Lord. There has to be **inward unanimity** in the commitment to bless His Name.

Don't misread these familiar words. This is not a verse about **volume** in worship. It's about **unanimity** in worship. David is saying the decision to honor the Lord is a useless decision unless it is made with every distinct part of your being. A **partial** decision carries very little spiritual dynamic. This is a huge issue. This is what leaves professing Christians with a faith that, in spite of their churchgoing and Bible reading, feels unreal and anemic.

The remedy is in this life-changing verse. Every part of the life must unite around the worship of the Lord the way bees unite around their queen. "***Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy Name.***"

It won't work any other way. One part of your life, offered to the Lord in worship on Sunday, won't hold up your faith any more than one leg will hold up a table. If you and I just work on serving the Lord with **some** of our lives we might as well not serve Him with **any** of it.

We need to think carefully about this. There's a lot "**within**" each one of us. We have **knowledge** - the accumulated information and understanding of our study and experience. Then we possess the capacity of **choice**. We are all creatures of **will** and **volition**. Our lives don't just happen. We **choose** our way through this world. We are also made up of **emotions**. While we have knowledge, we are not the same as computers or machines. We all have the capacity to **feel** and to **be moved**. There is anger, joy, sorrow, contentment, bitterness, greed, and a host of other important, deeply felt reactions to the circumstances of life around us.

We also have **desires** within. Some are good and some are bad. These desires are the raw fuel of many of the choices we make. The Apostle Peter actually tells us the world is in the mess it's in **because** of the desires that seek to rule within each of us - **2 Peter 1:3-4** - "***His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, [4] by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.***"

All of this lives **within** each one of us. And David recognized that each one of these elements needed to be united in a unanimous pursuit of the worship of the Lord - "***Let everything that is within me unanimously join together to bless the holy Name of the Lord!***"

1) **THE WILL MUST MOVE IN THE SAME DIRECTION AS THE UNDERSTANDING**

This is why I must love the Lord with all my ***“heart, soul, mind, and strength.”*** *Mind* must be linked to ***strength***. Thoughts alone don't take much strength. But ***living out*** all of that understanding takes ***great*** exertion - ***great strength***.

Knowing the truth is never enough. The Bible says so: **James 4:17** - ***“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”***

The holy life doesn't work like a game show. You can become a millionaire on TV just by knowing the correct answers to enough questions. The Christian life is never like that. As important as solid doctrinal truth surely is you get no points whatsoever ***just for knowing*** the truth. The Christian life isn't a quiz show. James says people can have the right answers and still live sinful lives.

Now, David certainly valued the truth. He spent hundreds of chapters and verses in his songs of worship praising the beauty and wonder of the ways and precepts of God:

**Psalm 19:9-10** - ***“....the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. [10] More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.”***

David spent a lot of time ***learning*** the truth of God's Word. He said he meditated on it day and night. But he didn't ***just*** learn the truth. He ***lived*** the truth:

**Psalm 37:34** - ***“Wait for the LORD and keep his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land; you will look on when the wicked are cut off.”***

**Psalm 119:104-106** - ***“Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. [105] Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. [106] I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules.”***

David said God's precepts gave him ***“understanding.”*** Understanding is great. It's wonderful. But it's never enough. You are more than just a ***mind***. You are also a ***will***. The knowledge and understanding God gives you is always for your ***feet***. It's to light your ***path***. It's knowledge that shows you where to go and where to plant your next step.

If you think I'm laboring the obvious, think again. Listen to these words from **George Barna**

***“Consider the following: 85 percent of all adults claim that religious faith is very important in their lives. Also, 85 percent claim to be Christians. More than four out of five adults claim to know the basic teachings of the Bible, and nine out of ten own at least one Bible – good.”***

***“Yet, just one in four adults....believes in absolute moral truth. In fact, less than half of those who call themselves “born-again” Christians believe that anything is ‘absolutely true.’”***

This mental disconnect comes from what Barna calls America's evolving values: ***“Our culture's embrace of moral relativism has led to an abandonment of traditional values - including loyalty, morality, accountability, and sacrifice.”***

***“Most distressing is the fact that the church seems to be right in line with today's evolving values. People's church preferences frequently line up with their relativistic approach to life. Americans often do not join churches these days. Instead, they attend churches based on how far they have to drive, the convenience of***

*the worship schedule, the kinds of emotional experiences they can enjoy, and whether or not the sermon is upbeat and interesting.”*

*“Now, none of those reasons is inherently bad, but all too often people are choosing their church without regard for doctrinal purity or reliable teaching. Convenience, comfort, and emotion tend to be the values that drive today’s spirituality.”*

*“Accordingly, Christians are increasingly indistinguishable from their non-Christian friends. A recent study of sixty-five common values and traits shows that the values of today’s born-again Christians are not substantially different from any other segment of society.”*

Those are scary words. You may not realize it right away, but George Barna and King David are talking about the same problem. Christians become as Barna describes when they *know the truth with their heads* but don’t *live the truth with their wills*. This is what made David pray that *everything within him would bless the Lord’s holy Name*.

## 2) THE WILL MUST ENFORCE THE PROMPTING OF CONSCIENCE

Of course, I’m talking about a Scripturally informed, sensitive conscience that hasn’t yet been hardened by repeated disobedience. Everything successful in the Christian life hinges on the ability to *not* yield to sinful inclinations. We are all creatures of passions and desires. They make up a part of the *“all that is within”* each of us.

No one can consistently *avoid* sinful desires. They live in all of us. This means they must be dealt with in some way. And God has made provision for this. He has placed a *moral counterweight* in each one of us to pull us, at least initially, in the opposite direction of desires that *appear* satisfying, but are ultimately, and usually secretly, self-destructive.

And here’s the important point: *A small, or tentative decision to renounce a specific sin will never be effective*. It’s not enough that your *conscience* hates sin. Your *will* must hate it too. Your conscience doesn’t have the power to fight off sin on its own for very long. It’s only purpose is to prompt action in your *will*.

Jesus made some very drastic statements about how earnest the will must be in turning from sin:

**Matthew 18:8-9 - “And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. [9] And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.”**

There is constant debate over the exact meaning of those words from Jesus. People seem almost shocked that He ever uttered them. Did Jesus actually want us to be physically maiming our bodies? If not, what was He trying to say?

Here’s what should be clear to everyone. Jesus is surely saying you and I won’t be able to resist sin with *small, casual decisions*. This is Jesus’ way of saying that a big part of the victory over specific, besetting sins is making sure the decision to forsake them is a *big, drastic, committed decision*.

When I was a kid I used to have a book of stories about the Civil War. Being a typical boy I loved the gory details of how the wounded soldiers would be liquored up, and then a hot knife or sword would cut through the infected flesh to remove an arm or leg. The bone would then have to be sawn in two.

Whatever else you say about that practice, you don’t make the decision to cut off a hand lightly. It’s not going to

grow back. There's no turning back the process once it's completed. No, it's a **big** step, cutting off a limb.

Whenever I counsel people and they tell me they're **thinking** about quitting some specific sin, or **considering** breaking off a sinful relationship, or **praying** about their addiction to pornography, I know they're never going to make it. There is no gradual or delicate way to cut off an arm. You make some decisions **drastic and definite** or you **don't make them at all**. You never gradually **grow** out of besetting sins.

Everyone hates sin **generally**. To hate sin **generally** is easy. It's expected. But Jesus makes the point that forsaking any **specific** sin is a different story. It costs to turn from any specific sin. It's like cutting off a hand.

The secret to victory is to have your whole being - "**all that is within you**" - moving toward the same goal, with the same effort and determination. When your conscience deals faithfully and puts the light on some specific sin, make sure your decision is just as faithful as your conscience. It takes a determined, holy effort to forsake some specific sin.

### 3) **THOUGHTS MUST BE GOVERNED BY PURITY**

Your thoughts make up a huge part of the "**all that is within**" you. To profess pure worship and devotion with a dirty mind is like smuggling a gun onto an airplane.

But there's a problem with holiness of mind. Because nobody else on earth sees our thoughts there is very little **external pressure** to keep them clean. That is why the keeping of the thought-life is perhaps the best indicator of what is the most purely **spiritual** part of your walk with Jesus.

It's easy to indulge a **phoney** love for Jesus. True love for the Lord isn't always easy to measure. The only real incentive for a pure mind is your love for Jesus because no one else can ever tell if your devotion to Him is genuine. Examining your thoughts will take anything **artificial** out of the measurement of the Lordship of Jesus in your life.

**Mark 7:21-23** - "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, [22] coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. [23] All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

**Matthew 12:35** - "The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil."

This is what Jesus meant when He said if you wanted to make the **outside** of the dish clean, you don't **start** with the outside. You start with the **inside**. This way, you will get both the inside and outside clean in the most effective way.

I hope you can see the principle in these three examples of **will**, **conscience** and **mind** making sure the heart is **unanimous** in its choice to honor the Lord. Anyone can worship the Lord temporarily with one stray faculty of his or her being. But the call of discipleship is much deeper. Give this much attention. Pray with David, "**Lord, unite my heart to fear Your Name!**"