

Looking to give our all to Jesus (you will need a bible for the references)

Giving our all to Jesus turns a book into God's Word, prayer into conversation and a life into imitating Jesus. Easy to say but the pressures of modern life make it so difficult to accomplish. It doesn't get any easier however long you've been a Christian or however old you are or which generation you identify with. It's no different now in many ways to the battles other generations have faced and some of those battles changed the world

What has changed is the media - our access to information. With the modern media of tv, radio, the internet we've never been so bombarded with ideas and opinions. Some thought provoking, some conspiracy theory, some propaganda, some a weapon of war and some promoting hate. There's never been so much pressure to conform to society's values. There's never been so much pressure to fit in.

It's all too easy to become half hearted in our living for Jesus or even to make compromises - intentional or accidental. So how can we live a life that gives our all to Jesus and God? Jesus was asked a question by an expert in the Law (Luke 10:25-28) about what was needed to gain eternal life. The expert gave the correct answer and quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5. Sometimes the simpler the statement the harder it is to achieve.

Giving our all to Jesus is driven by our relationship with Him and if we're honest we know we only have a relationship with God through what Jesus did by His death and resurrection - everything else is driven by that relationship. Giving our all to Jesus means putting time and effort and resources into knowing God better - it doesn't come via osmosis. We don't get closer to God by standing next to the Minister or another Christian. Every relationship is two sided and to be successful needs working at..

God is committed to His side of the relationship (Romans 5:8). God, who we can barely understand, the creator and sustainer of the universe, who is awesome beyond words loves us. Us! with all our flaws. How much more committed can God be than sending Jesus knowing what it would cost?

How committed are we to our side of the relationship? Giving our all to God means engaging more deeply with Jesus - an act of will - putting the time, effort and resources intentionally into it. Giving our all to God means recognising we are His children (1 John 3:1a) and you can't undo birth! If we are God's children then it's 24/7/365. There's no such thing as being a child part time. We can't give God just a bit of us. Giving our all to God changes how we live (James 2:18). It changes our priorities. Giving our all to God carries responsibilities. By giving our all to God we become witnesses and ambassadors for Him (2 Corinthians 5:20). Folk will look at us and make judgements about God (Matthew 5:16).

Giving our all to God is lived out in good Stewardship. Giving our all to Jesus means getting the relationship with God right first and then showing its fruition in our stewardship. Good Stewardship is hard. We can get lost in debates about things like tithing. As far as I can see the principles of tithing are not in the New Testament and tithes are only mentioned 4 times - 3 of those by Jesus clarifying another point. Our responsibilities are much more challenging. Summed up really in Paul's second letter to Corinth "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." 2 Corinthians 9:7 NIVUK. How much is required financially in many ways is the wrong question, wrong starting point, wrong attitude. We don't give any of our resources out of requirement but out of love.

For Jesus, as a Jew, tithing was a fact of life but Jesus went beyond that and focused on the whole purpose of stewardship. It's all about how you honour God in your stewardship of what He's given you in the first place

Jesus showed us the basic principles of Christian Stewardship - why we give is more important than what we give (Mark 12:41-44); God trusts us in how we use His bounty (Matthew 25:14-30); stewardship must be generous (2 Corinthians 9:6); stewardship should give the glory to God (John 15:8);

Who do we want to be like? We are all accountable to God for how we've used what He has given us (Romans 14:12). It's up to us how we handle what God has entrusted to our stewardship. We will all be asked at some point by God what we've done with our lives and the talents and time He's given us. We can choose how we lead our lives and use our resources - it's a God given responsibility. Ultimately we want to be more like Jesus and our first question should be "What would Jesus Do?". It both reminds us of priorities and gets us to involve Jesus in our day to day life. This in turn deepens our relationship with Jesus

We can set up a virtuous spiral. Giving our all to God by engaging deeper with Jesus will not only bring us closer to God but will increasingly be seen in living our lives for God. Living our lives for God will increase our awareness of being trusted by God. As we are trusted by God we realise that we are not possessors or owners of God's bounty merely its stewards. Recognising that we are only stewards of God's bounty directs glory to Him. As we direct glory to God we come closer to Him and engage more deeply with Jesus and create a virtuous spiral

Food for thought and prayer as we continue to strive to give our all to Jesus as we work through a new year.