

From the Many to the One¹

We're talking here in the early summer about the healing of the self. Part of the design of Christian faith is that God restores our broken selves to the beauty, nobility, and brilliance that God intended for us when he created us. This restoration or healing has several dimensions. There is healing in our ideas, our emotions, our relationships, and our bodies. Today I'd like to ponder God's healing of our will, or to use the old-fashioned way of saying it, our hearts.

We're going deep now, more deeply than ideas or emotions, which we've looked at. When we talk about the heart and the will, we're not talking about something we want to get from WalMart. Our will is what we want out of life. "Desire" is a good word. What do you desire?

You may not know. How could you miss what your heart wills? Well, we miss it because we get so busy doing what everyone else wants us to do. I learned several years ago that a couple of the women in my congregation would—if the service was boring—work on their list of things they needed to do. "Let's see, get the kids to swim practice, stop at Publix to get a couple of things to make the picnic with the in-laws perfect, fix the hem for that skirt I'll wear to work tomorrow..." On and

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on. Can't you and I live entire lives checking off items on the "to do" list, and never have a clue as to what we really want?

I'm not picking on women. Men's wants can be maddeningly temporary. Once upon a time he wanted to be successful in the workplace. He wanted the woman he married in the worst way. She's wonders what happened to that passion of 26 years ago. Then he wanted a boat. That didn't last long. Then it was the country club life. Now he's fifty six. He doesn't know what he wants.

Why's it important to talk about what we want, desire, in life? It's important because what we most deeply desire is the one thing that no other person or influence can control. Your boss has your body and some of your brain for eight hours a day. The situation around and the culture vies for your attention. But only you have your will. Animals don't have will in the sense that you do. Animals are programmed by instinct. Every Wildebeest wants what every other Wildebeest wanted. Every Large Mouth Bass desires what every other Large Mouth Bass has ever desired. But you have a will. God put it within you. Your will, your heart, makes you like God. Because God has a heart and will.

Now, the big idea of our faith is that your will and my will merges with God's will. From one black leather cover of

your Bible to the other black cover, the Bible, plus the Church, the whole "enchilada" is an invitation to desire what God desires.

First Commandment—"You shall have no other gods before me." We let ourselves off the hook on that one if we think that by "gods" the First Commandment means name brand deities like Krishna, Shiva, Allah, Baal. We check off the First Commandment thinking, "Gosh, not only do I not have other gods, I never heard of 'em."

Not so fast! Nowadays, gods are anything we reverence in our hearts, which is usually some variation of ourselves. Our god is what we spend most time thinking about. Our religion is what problems we spend the most brain-time solving. Our worship is what gives me glee and satisfaction. What we think about, crave, honor, serve, and desire is who our god is.

Jesus makes a powerful remark in the Sermon on the Mount. If your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light. Now, that word for "sound" can also be translated "simple" or "single" or "unambiguous." In other words, if our eye is fixed singly and simply upon God our whole being is filled with light. Brilliant, enlightened living—according to Jesus—desires one thing.

Most people are surprised to hear that the word, "Christian" is used very, very few times in the New Testament. So, what are we called? The word "disciple" appears well over 200 times. You and I are disciples. I think that teaches us something important. To be a Christian suggests that we have a conviction. We're Republicans or Democrats, Bull dog fans, and Christians. Those are our opinions. A disciple is someone who goes deeper than having an opinion. A disciple follows Jesus. That means when Jesus moves, we move. We're drawn by the tether of his will. To follow someone is more than sharing his views. To be a disciple you have to drop your nets and boats and kiss your aunt goodbye and take off down the road not sure where you're going.

So, a fundamental calling for each of us in our faith is that we may say with the Apostle Paul, "this one thing I do..."

Now, in our fallen world very few people live willing one thing. We are slaves to a new Pharaoh, a new Nebacudnezzar, a new Caesar, and that tyrant is contemporary life.

Over the last several months the FBI has arrested several hundred fraudulent mortgage sellers who have deceived simple people into binding themselves to, what for them was a dangerous enslaving home loan. I'm talking about the subprime lending crisis. Today American private indebtedness is 2.54 trillion

dollars—an all-time high. We all owe. In turn, our lives are tied down for years working and paying off our indebtedness.

Parents must raise children in an increasingly seductive, addictive, world. There's the internet, drugs, school performance pressures, consumerism, peer group demands, and the soccer coach saying, "show up or else."

By the way, a marvelously powerful biblical insight is that every god you and I serve who is not God, is a tyrant. If our deepest desire—that is if the religion of our hearts—is fitting into a certain social circle, or getting high, that object of our devotion will enslave us. This is where the healing or restoration of the heart comes in. If our will is fixed on anything less than God, or, as is the case for most people, if our will is knocked around like a ping pong ball, we are in bondage. Maybe you've felt it. If that thought has ever gone through your mind, listen again to the sweetness and liberation of Jesus' words: "If your eye is single, your whole being is full of light."

How can you and I begin to know healing of our heart, that is, how can we be filled with the light that comes from willing what God wills? A first step is simply to be aware of the kinds of things we've talked about in this sermon. Having the light bulb go on, having our consciousness raised is a big first step.

All slavery is supported by ignorance. Simply to know that God's design for our lives is that we live willing one thing is a huge step.

A second step is to utilize spiritual disciplines. What are spiritual disciplines? They are practices like prayer, study, fasting, service, solitude and so on that give God a toe hold in our lives so he may begin to work on us and with us.

Let's say you endeavor to keep a one-meal fast. You plan to skip lunch and instead you will pray by yourself. Now when you really do such a thing lots of marvelous insights come to light. You find yourself resentful that you must go without food. Wow! Having a meal exactly on cue three times a day is awfully important—too important really. Fasting helps you awaken to just how dependent you are. The other disciplines have a similar effect of smoking your habits and expectations and cravings and false gods out of the shadows. Whoa! I'm really needy with wants and habits and expectations and a sense of entitlement.

Edith Shaeffer tells of a simple man from the Lisu tribe in the remote hills of China. One day he found on the ground a page torn from a Chinese Christian Catechism that read: "Are there more gods than one?—No, there is only one God. Should we worship idols?—No. The rest was torn away. The man immediately

went home and destroyed household idols. Suddenly, his daughter became ill. His neighbors taunted him for making the gods angry.

Now, the man knew nothing about prayer, but he reasoned that he might reach God by shouting towards the sky. He even climbed a high mountain to get closer to where God might be. He shouted his prayer for his daughter. In that moment she became well. That was the beginning of the man's effective work as an evangelist.

You and I are called to the freedom of the single eye and pure heart. Wouldn't our prison doors fly open and a great power be released if you and I were to do as God calls us to do? And would not there be a great healing of ourselves if we would align with God's will? How does the old gospel song put it?

Turn your eyes upon Jesus'
Look full in his wonderful face.
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim.
In the light of his glory and grace.