

Deuteronomy 6

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[0 : 00] I'm glad you are here. If you're a sports fan this weekend, you will know, particularly if you are a baseball fan, you will know that this weekend there's a very important series going on because the Yankees and the Red Sox are playing.

Now, I've been in Connecticut far too long to take sides publicly. For the sake of Christ, I will forbear. But what strikes me is that if you walked over to the green, walked over to the nightclub district of New Haven, and you walked around, you would find people all over the place for whom this event, this baseball series, is the defining reality of their weekend.

You will find people wearing jerseys with names like Jeter and Ortiz, Ramirez and Pedroia on their back.

You will find them decked out in blue and white or red and white, depending on which side you are on. And if you stop them for a moment, they would be able to tell you the history of the rivalry, the current condition of what's going on in the standings.

And they would pose the questions to you about whether the starting pitching injuries to the Yankees is a more significant problem than the clubhouse turmoil with the trading of Kevin Euclis.

[1 : 31] Now, for some of you, you don't care at all. But for these people, it consumes their life. It bonds their friendships.

It is almost an obsession. What about you? People looked at your life tonight.

What would they see as the things that control your conversation? What are the things that you find instant bonds with others who share the same interest about something?

When you have free time, what do you spend it thinking about? If you have money, what do you spend it on? Discretionary money or maybe even more tellingly, non-discretionary money that you ought to be spending on other things.

What oozes out of you at every opportunity? What is the thing that if your friends would ask you, what's that guy like? They would say, oh yeah, that guy, he's the peanut butter guy.

[2 : 37] He talks about peanut butter all the time or whatever it is. Whatever the thing is that is perhaps your obsession.

Obsessions are funny things. They can take different forms for different people. I remember, there are some that are more like passing infatuations. I remember when I was in high school and I first fell in love, I wrote a poem to the girl talking about how she was the first one I thought of when I woke up in the morning and the last one I thought of when I fell asleep at night.

The first face I looked for when I walked into a room with flowers and cards and all candies. A passing infatuation.

She's not my wife. She's still a friend, but a passing infatuation. But sometimes obsessions look more like dogged, diehard determination.

Think of someone like the cyclist, Lance Armstrong, or the swimmer, Michael Phelps. Think about how their life is completely controlled by their desire to be a champion in the things that they compete in.

[3 : 55] Their diet is completely determined by their desire to have maximum energy and maximum fitness. Their schedule is dictated by getting enough sleep, by spending enough time in training, by spending enough time in rest.

Everything they do is calculated along the axis of will this help me be a champion in the sport that I compete in? So whether it's a passing infatuation or a diehard obsession, there's often something that characterizes who we are.

It is, dare I say it, our obsession. And if the people who you know well could be asked, what would they say is your obsession?

The passage we're going to look at tonight is Deuteronomy chapter 6. Do you want to turn there in your pew Bibles? It's page 151. We're going to look at one at the whole chapter.

But I think that this chapter will speak to us about this question. That God actually has something to say to us about what are the things or what is the thing that could be, maybe should be, our obsession.

[5 : 15] So, read with me as we look at Deuteronomy chapter 6. I'm going to read the whole chapter for us. Now, this is the commandment, the statutes, and the rules that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over to possess, that you may fear the Lord, you and your son and your son's sons, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long.

Hear, therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you in a land flowing with milk and honey.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit down in your house, when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hands, and they shall be as frontlets before your eyes.

You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and your gates. And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to you, with good and great cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant.

[6 : 57] And when you eat and are full, then take care, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. It is the Lord your God you shall fear.

Him you shall serve, and by His name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you, for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God, lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and He destroy you from off the face of the earth.

You shall not put the Lord your God to the test as you tested Him at Massa. You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God and His testimonies and His statutes which He has commanded you.

And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you, that you may go in and take possession of the good land the Lord swore to give to your fathers by thrusting out all your enemies from before you as the Lord has promised.

When your son asks you in time to come, what is the meaning of the testimonies and statutes and rules that the Lord our God has commanded you? Then you shall say to your son, we were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

[8 : 15] And the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household before our eyes. And He brought us out from there that He might bring us in and give us the land that He swore to give our fathers.

And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes to fear the Lord our God for our good always, that He might preserve us alive as we are this day.

And it will be righteousness for us if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God as He has commanded us. Let's pray.

Lord, we do praise You for Your Word and thank You that in it You teach us. Lord, about You and Your works and Your greatness and Your character, about us and what it means for us to relate to You.

God, I pray tonight that in the midst of the heat You would help us Lord, to hear Your Word. Lord, to not only hear it but Lord, to sit under it and to allow You to do the work You want to do in our hearts tonight.

[9 : 27] We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. What I want to do tonight is I want you to start by looking with me in verses 4 and 5 because in verses 4 and 5 we see the central idea of our passage tonight.

Let me read it again as you look there. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

In this verse, Moses is giving a summary. He says, this is one commandment that I'm giving you. And remember, in the context, this is right after he's given us the Ten Commandments in chapter 5.

And what he's saying is this is the one commandment that sums up all of the Ten Commandments. And the Ten Commandments themselves are a summary of all of the law that you see in the whole book of Deuteronomy.

Or if you want to go back and it's the same thing in the second half of Exodus and Leviticus. This thought that we should love the Lord our God with all of our heart and soul and strength is the central idea of the whole giving of the law.

[10 : 50] In fact, we see even Jesus says this in the New Testament when he is asked, what's the greatest commandment? In Mark 12, 30, he says, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul and all your strength.

So this is the central idea and it may be so familiar to you as it is for anyone who's grown up in a Jewish area. This Shema is the center, central affirmation of God in the Jewish religion.

Let me restate it for you so you can hear it just a little, maybe a little differently. What Moses is saying here is this, listen up, covenant people of Yahweh.

Make Yahweh alone your God. That is, make Him your holy obsession. This is what I want to explore tonight.

What does it mean to make God our holy obsession? What does it mean for Him to take that place, to occupy that place in our lives?

[11 : 57] And as we're looking, we're going to explore three questions. First, what does it mean to make God our holy obsession? Secondly, why do we struggle to make God our holy obsession? And third, how?

How can we actually make God our holy obsession? So those three questions, what does it mean, why do we struggle, and how can we actually make it so that God would be our holy obsession?

So first, look at Neah verses 4 through 9. Moses starts by saying, Hear, O Israel, the Lord, the Lord is one. The Lord, our God, He is the only God.

And he's saying this to a people who are on the brink of entering into the land of Canaan, which is filled with peoples. And each of those peoples have their own gods that they bow down to and worship.

And Moses is reminding them, Hear, O Israel, Israel, this God, this Yahweh, the God who has delivered you from Egypt, the God who has brought you through the Red Sea and brought you through the desert, this God, He alone is our God.

[13 : 08] And you are to worship Him alone. And then he says, because of that, as an expression of that, you are to love Him.

You are to love Him with all of your heart and your soul and your strength. And it's very easy to read this passage and think, oh, God is telling us that I need to love God with all the different parts of my life.

So my heart is where my emotions live. So I want to worship God with all my emotions. And my soul is my spiritual life. So I want to love God with all of my spiritual life.

And my strength is all of my resources in my body. So I want to love God with all of my resources in my body. And that would be a great sermon. But it's not, I think, what Moses is actually saying here.

When you look at the meaning of these words, when he says, love the Lord your God with all your heart, the word heart there is used in other places to mean not only heart, as we would think of it being our emotional faculties, but also your mind.

[14 : 12] And in other places, your will. So your heart is actually the core of your being, the crossroads where your heart, your emotions, and your mind, and your will come together.

And then the word that says, love the Lord your God with all your soul. It doesn't mean soul as opposed to our body. It means soul in the sense of, it's, again, in other places it's translated, your being, your very essence, who you are.

Love the Lord your God with who you are. And thirdly, when you get to this last one about worshiping God with all of your strength, it's a funny word that is almost never translated as a noun.

It's actually usually an adverb that means very or a lot more so or much. And so, it might be translated, love the Lord your God with all of your muchness or all of your veryness, which doesn't really make much sense, does it?

But listen to this. One commentary restates this verse in this way. Love the Lord your God with total commitment, with your total self to total excess.

[15 : 24] And I think that that captures it. And that's why I have used the word obsession tonight. Because I think that's what an obsession looks like.

Total commitment with my total self to total excess about something. It is a total absorption. Being sold out and sold on God's greatness.

Being completely committed to loving Him with all that we are. And at times, it should look like an infatuation where there is a swell of emotional outbursts, where there is, it ought to bring songs and poems and art to our lips and to our heart and to our mind.

It ought to look like that some of the time. And other times, it will look like dogged determination, commitment, unbreakable loyalty, sacrificial self-denial.

To love God like this is to be both totally infatuated and totally committed to God. Alright, so practically, what does that look like?

[16 : 39] What might it look like? I want to paint some pictures for you. These are stories from history and from people that I know. Little pictures of what it looks like for them to love God with all of their heart.

I want to start with Jonathan Edwards, a young man in early America who in his early years as he was off at university began to write down resolutions.

This is what I want my life to be about. This is what he said, resolved, never to do any manner of thing whether in body or soul, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God, nor be, nor suffer it if I can possibly avoid it.

What was that? He writes in 17th century English. It's not super easy to hear. Let me restate it. He's saying, I don't want to do anything.

I don't want to be anything. I don't want to experience anything unless it moves me towards the glory of God or displays the glory of God to other people.

[17 : 48] Here's a second resolution he made. Resolved, that no other end but religion shall have any influence at all on any of my actions and that no action shall be in the least circumstance relating to it but what helps religion.

Again, let me translate to 20th century English. I want to do, I don't want to do anything that is not motivated by and contributing to a life of wholehearted worship and devotion to God.

Jonathan Edwards set these resolutions to set a course for his life. Helen Rosevear was a missionary in Africa. She wrote a book that was deeply influential in my life about what does it mean to love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength.

For her, it meant things from the very mundane to the very extreme. It meant for her giving up her right to be first to pick out from the clothes that were shipped to her from her supporters in England watching instead as national women who would have no other access to these clothes with delighted joy would pick out a dress and hold it up and celebrate it.

It meant for her living an entire life as a single woman forsaking offers of marriage because they would have taken her away from her calling to be a missionary.

[19 : 24] It meant for her in the darkest days of colonial rebellion offering herself up to submit to torture and rape so that other women would not have to endure as she did.

And at the end of her ministry a seasoned veteran missionary it meant giving up her role of actually working with patients and working with rising doctors in training to sit in an office and sign papers and correspond with the government so that the hospital that she had devoted her life to building and the ministry of evangelism that happened through that hospital could continue to run while she sat more and more obscure doing administrative behind the scenes work.

For her all of these decisions were decisions based in her calling to love the Lord her God with all of her being.

From history I turn to the present. All of these examples are things that are true of individuals that I know. To love God and make God a holy obsession might mean getting up at 4 o'clock in the morning to spend time in God's Word and praying out of love for the Lord.

It might mean being known as the one who won't get drunk at parties, who won't sleep around, who won't sleep with their girlfriend for the sake of loving God more than fitting in with their peers.

[21 : 12] It might mean setting boundaries on the hours you spend in lab and the library to make room for participation in church life and ministry when in the minds of those who oversee you there is no such room.

It might mean taking your vacation and spending it not at the beach in relaxation but on a missions trip serving the kingdom of God somewhere in the world.

The list could go on and on. I want you to hear me clearly on this. This is not a checklist of are you doing all of these things.

There are portraits. There are pictures of how some people in their circumstances have lived out loving God with everything that they are with being wholly obsessed with God.

This is the question Jonathan Edwards resolved to ask over and over again. Does everything that I do flow from and express my wholly obsession with the God of the Bible?

[22 : 22] Do I love God with all my heart and soul and strength? And you may have heard about it. That wholehearted devotion is characteristically sacrificial.

It is costly. It requires self-denial and often willful decision. It is an obsession that excludes rivals, that prevents us from a peacetime mentality of leisure and ease, that rejects comfort for the sake of something of greater value.

And God invites and calls His covenant people into a relation like this. That they might treasure God, that they might value Him so much that He would be their holy obsession.

salvation. Moses then develops this idea a little further. In verses 7 through 9, he talks about passing this on.

He says, if you are a father, you must think about how you pass this along to the next generation. If you are a mother, you must pass this along to the next generation.

[23 : 38] God isn't simply calling this generation that Moses is talking to, but he is calling God's people in every generation. So he says, we must pass it along. And this would only be natural, isn't it?

If your best friend is a Red Sox fan, you know far more about Bucky Dent's home run to win the playoff tie-breaking game that put the Yankees through to the World Series when I was an 8-year-old and rushing home to watch, have my heart broken, oh, I just broke, anyway.

You would know far more about some incident that happened way back in the 70s than you ever wanted to. Obsessions are things that we naturally share with those around us.

But God knows our weakness and God knows that particularly with our spiritual lives, it is not easy to do this. And so he says, we must pass this on. We must pass it on as we rise up and as we go to bed.

If nothing else, if nothing else, take the opportunities. Read the Bible with your children before they go to sleep. Pray to the Lord and give thanks for food when you sit down and eat with them.

[24 : 56] And pray with them. Pray with them before you go to bed. Even something as simple as that begins to teach and to pass along a holy obsession.

And for those of you who are here who are thinking, this doesn't have anything to do with me. I don't have any kids. Well, first of all, you may someday. And even if you don't and never will, God calls us to do this not only in our human physical families, but in our church family as well.

Paul in Titus 2 talks about older women teaching younger women and older men teaching younger men. And this is meant to be a pattern for God's people in community.

That we would pass along this holy obsession. That we would talk of His wonders. That we would read the Bible together and encourage and exhort one another.

Pray together and worship together. That we would be looking for opportunities both to receive that from others and then to give it as we are able. To pass along this holy obsession that God says ought to be.

[26 : 10] That is at the center of what it means to be God's covenant people. So God has called His people across generations to this one holy obsession of loving God with all of their being.

But then He moves on in the next sections in verses 10 through 19. And in this He talks about He actually gives warnings.

The centerpiece of each of the next two paragraphs is warnings that reveal why we struggle to make God our obsession. The first warning we see in verse 12 and He says when you've entered into the land do not forget the Lord your God.

What does it mean? To forget the Lord your God? Well in this case He's saying don't forget the Lord because once you go into this land you're going to be surrounded by people that worship other things and it's so easy to forget what God has done in the past.

And it's so easy to think God what are you doing right now? And when you're surrounded by other people who worship other things who are saying this thing can give it to you right now. This Canaanite God can give you bounty and fertility and your crops right now.

[27 : 26] it's easy to forget the Lord. Now I don't think that many of us are tempted to bow down to Canaanite fertility gods.

There aren't a lot of roadside shrines for us to burn incense to in America. But I think instead that what we end up doing is falling into the same lie.

We forget the Lord because there are immediate things things that we think we need to take hold of or pursue. I'm going to call them distractions.

The things that we embrace in our lives that keep us from being obsessed with God. They're the weeds that grow up in our life. They're leeches on our spiritual vitality that suck away our ability to be completely obsessed with God.

because we think that we need something else. We think that this one more activity will round out our resume.

[28 : 29] This one more hour in the office will get us over the hump. That this one more party is going to make us happy. We spend our energies countless hours on the internet gathering information that might at some point be somewhat useful in our lives.

We spend hours of time in social media so that we could be just a little more connected and we spend our money and our weekends in hobbies so that we can find a little more pleasure.

And we do all of these things because we think that we won't find them in a single-minded obsession to God. Now I want you to hear me say this clearly.

None of those things are wrong. It is not wrong to do that activity or to spend one more hour of work at the office. It is not wrong to have a Twitter account.

But the question that I want to ask you is do these things become the distractions where a single-minded obsession on God becomes frayed at the edges or maybe even more tragically ends up supplanting God as the obsession of your life.

[29 : 49] So that's the first warning about forgetting the Lord and these distractions. And then secondly in verse 16 Moses says do not test the Lord your God.

And what he's getting to here is he reminds him of the historical account where at Massa God had brought his people out through the Red Sea through the Passover he had brought them where he had provided food for them manna they had seen God do amazing things and they're out in the desert and they have no water and they despaired they doubted God's goodness they questioned why have you brought us here to die they grumbled and complained about not getting what they wanted when they wanted it and they demanded that God prove himself by providing water right then and there now again most of us don't live in a desert we might be tempted to do this but it might look a lot more like this we put conditions on God God if you will do this then I'll believe in you or God if you won't let this happen to me then

I'll believe in you and be whole hearted for you or maybe it's in the past God you let this happen to me how can I ever be whole hearted for you that that that is one of the ways that I think it looks like in our lives today but I'll be honest with you I'm too much of a coward to look at God and to say God you owe me a better life I don't tend to do that I instead tend to just exclude God from the parts of my life that I don't trust him anymore instead I say God you're great but there are parts of my life that I just need to take care of myself because you I don't think you're going to be active in there and so when I'm sick I go to a doctor but I don't pray because I don't believe that God will heal me physically maybe it could look like I'm in a business deal and don't ask God to lead or provide in it because

I don't think that God is interested in contracts and negotiations it could be that you've lost your job and you think it's both your fault and your responsibility to replace it without even asking God for his comfort for his provision for his leading you might begin to date not asking God what are his standards and how would you have and do it to love him with all your heart but you take your own relational needs into your hands and then you ask him to bless it on the back side and so we end up by doing this we compartmentalize our lives instead of God being our holy obsession that everything is encompassed by we give God our slice our church piece yeah God gets my church piece but look I have to deal with my family I have a job I have my pleasures God doesn't have anything to do with those things we compartmentalize and do you see how when we compartmentalize our lives like that we cannot be wholly obsessed people with

God so what about you what are the distractions of your life what are the places that you excluded God from said God you don't have anything to do with us here and this of course leads us to the last question I want to consider tonight which is how if this is true if we struggle with this like we all do how can God make us a people who are wholly obsessed by him and it's a beautiful thing that God does here in this passage we're now in verse 20 looking at the last section verse 20 through 25 Moses pictures a dialogue your son comes to you and he says dad why has God given us all of these commandments and statutes what is the meaning here and it's very easy that there could be lots of possible answers it could be we could say these this law is wants to be intimately involved in every area of your life so learn these laws so that you will know how to be a better parent a better alderman a better neighbor a better businessman a better worshiper and though the church over the years has seen that there is some value for this what

[34 : 44] I want to point out here is that's not the response that's given in this passage nor is what I think is typically our response to the law which is this this law is given to you so that you can obey it because if you are able to do all these things God will love you and accept you so he'd well be diligent to do it all because on this basis God will be your God if you do it right then you'll be okay with God but neither of these are the responses in fact that Moses gives look with me in verse 22 and 23 sorry 21 and 22 then you shall say to your son we were pharaoh's slaves in Egypt and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and the Lord showed signs and wonders great and grievous against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household before our eyes he says look you have seen the

Lord do amazing things he has shown immense and unfathomable power he has demonstrated this by delivering you from Egypt he delivered you from slavery a slavery that was brutal a slavery that killed children a slavery that was oppressive in every way God says through Moses what is the meaning of this law do you remember God showed up when you were in slavery and he delivered you he dismantled the power of Egypt and their gods he demonstrated over and over again that he was greater than all these things he showed that he was able to deliver them even parting a red sea that they might be saved he showed that the blood of a lamb might cover over their sins and keep them from judgment he showed that he could give them water from a rock and manna where there was no food to eat and verse 23 builds on this answer not only is the answer why is this law here because of what

God has done and delivering you from but it says in verse 23 the Lord and he brought us out from there that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to our fathers this is the promised land the land flowing with milk and honey the land that as we read about earlier had houses and cities and vineyards and cisterns that were ready for them to move into God provided for them a fully furnished promised land God had done all of this for them so what is the meaning of these commands the meaning of these commands is that because of what God has done for you he now makes you people who are able to love him with all of your heart and soul and strength as the new testament puts it we love because he first loved us and we who stand here today thousands of years later we have been delivered from a greater slavery the slavery of sin our rebellion against

God our desire for a life independent from him our exalting of lesser things into the place of supreme importance has made us slaves to sin we're slaves to our passions slaves to our careers slaves to the approval of those around us and we reap the consequences of these masters that we submit ourselves to and we feel powerless before them but in Christ God has broken the sins of sin and death by his death in our place he removes the curse and by his resurrection he brings us with him into a new life this is what we read about earlier in first Peter according according according to God's great mercy he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable undefiled and unfading kept in heaven for you who by God's power are being guarded through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time

God has brought us out of slavery to sin and self and into a new relationship with God in Christ in Christ where we have every spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms in Christ where we who are alienated from God are called and adopted as his children we who stood under judgment are in Christ declared guiltless innocent before his throne of judgment we who are enemies of God in conflict with him are brought into a place of reconciliation with God because Christ has removed the offense and brought us to him and we who are dead in our sins and trespasses have been born again have been made alive and given a life that is both abundant and eternal all my friends the treasures of being in

[40 : 40] Christ beyond our wildest imaginations and what I want you to see is that Moses says this is the answer what is the law about it is about these things it is about what God has done for us and therefore when these things come into focus the distractions fade away as they are seen as lesser importance and lesser value when this comes into focus the compartmentalization ends and we joyfully bring all of our lives to God knowing that he has already given us everything that we need to live a life of love for his glory John Piper puts it this way he says you do not merely decide to love God but something changes inside of you and as a result he becomes compellingly attractive his glory his beauty compels your admiration and delight he becomes your supreme treasure and you love him and this is how

God makes us people who are wholly obsessed with him and when we're wholly obsessed with him wherever we go it oozes out God becomes the topic of our conversations he becomes the object of our hope he becomes the thing we delight more than anything to talk about it is him that we serve and him that we worship and in that we make him our holy obsession let's pray Lord we pray tonight that you would help us to see what you have done for us in Christ the deliverance that you have taken us out of slavery sin and self and you have brought us in to a new relationship with Christ by faith and

Lord as we do that then we are called to make you our holy obsession oh Lord show us where we are distracted show us where we exclude you and Lord tonight set our hearts free to be wholeheartedly whole with heart and soul and mind and body and strength worshiping you loving you with all of our hearts we pray this in Jesus name amen in response we want to sing together I love you Lord good Thank you.