

Obeying Matthew 12:36 in a Dangerously Digital Age

My chest hurts so much, and I know yours does too. Honestly, I am having a hard time catching my breath. Finding words to speak is difficult, and this does not happen to me very often. I am a verbal processor, but the pain is so deep, the dismay is so near, that I cannot find another way out but to type.

The Impulse

It has crossed my mind that the misinformation we as people believe, the opinions and life experiences we all deem as truth, the rhetoric we all speak and simply do not live by, are serving as a mirror to our own souls.

Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). First, permit me to say that I am not troubled by the negative, ignorant, raging posts by non-believers. When they come from someone who doesn’t know Jesus, I cannot nor will I expect him or her to adhere to a biblically-based worldview. What troubles me are the non-edifying comments by those of us professing to be disciples or at least followers of Christ. Men and women who consider themselves or are considered by others to be fathers and mothers in service of Jesus’ body.

Somehow we all have forgotten—you and I alike—that we will be held accountable for each word we speak. Or, as my sister-in-law Esther pointed out to me the other day, for every word you and I post on Facebook or whatever social media outlet you fancy. Jesus tells us, “For every idle word that men speak, they will give an account on the Day of Judgment” (Matt. 12:36b).

Our trigger-finger posting impulse is exposing our hearts. And what the x-ray is revealing is not the fruit of the Spirit but

that of the flesh. As I looked over one particular historically inaccurate, misleading, divisive social media post, my anger reached a flash point.

To be honest, it made my chest hurt. Please know this—I am not exaggerating. I held my breath, trying to wrap my mind around both my anger and as well as to wonder, *What in the world would possess someone to think this was a good idea, let alone to post it on a social media outlet? How is this drawing people to His light? How is this bringing glory to Jesus?* I just had no words. I felt overwhelmed with anger, and I knew I needed a way out.

The Way of the Cross: Hebrews 13:12–13

In my quick-burning anger, the beginnings of a murderous spirit rose up in me. It started with murmurs about this brother's posts, the under-the-breath, "Well I wish I ... " or "I ought to ... " But wait a minute, Nayomi, whatever happened to "Bear with one another and forgive one another. If anyone has a quarrel against anyone, even as Christ forgave you, so you must do" (Col. 3:13)?

Oh, but it is so hard. Umm ... yeah. Of course it is. It's called "If you want to be my disciple, carry your cross and follow Me" (see Matt. 16:24). It's completely countercultural and against our flesh.

The road of a disciple is not easy. We are told to daily carry our cross and to renounce all we have. My right to be right, my need to be vindicated, my anger, my need to be defended in the eyes of man—all those count as "possessions" I need to lay down. Hebrews 13:12-13 tells us to go into the outer camp and bear the reproach with Christ.

Nowhere does it say to tell the other guy off; nowhere does it say to "let him have it" or to grumble against him. Nowhere.

You may be thinking, *I should send this blog to so-and so*, but allow me to remind you that the psalmist's words are still true: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight" (Ps. 19:14a). For me, as a woman—a black woman—the issue is not my right to be seen and heard, but bearing graciously the reproach of Christ. It's not my blackness that I am representing; it is Christ the King.

In Him there is room for all people, but all people are to become like Him if they want to enter in. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me (see Gal. 2:20). I am not going to defend the "Yeah, but you are still black" argument; make it as you will. At the end of the day, Christ is to be formed in me and that can only happen if—I. Die. Daily.

The same goes for you. Whatever misgivings you might experience at the reading of a post, you have no rights. Say it with me: "I have no rights." We gave those up at the foot of the cross.

Beyond the Horizon

OK, so really, Nayomi, what then? How do I motivate my own heart, what's it all about? "I shouldn't fight for my rights?" If I shouldn't defend myself, then how do I keep my sanity? This is just not fair.

Since you asked, verse 14 of this passage gives us an amazing response: "For [or because] here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come (Heb. 13:14)."

That's it. All of this is passing and temporary—including or especially those social media posts that so infuriate me and all the comments attached to them. The Father knows and sees all things. Of Jesus, the Father said He feared the Lord which is why, not solely but in part, Isaiah 42:2 says of Him, "He shall not cry out, nor lift up his voice, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street." He feared the Father and fully trusted Him to know that one day the Father would make all His

enemies His footstool.

I Continually Forget

I love Jesus so much. He is so strange and so different, magnificent, mind-blowing, mood-altering, awe-inspiring. I squeal with delight when I think about Him more than I have when I've thought of anyone I have ever known. At the same time, I often find it so tempting to do things my own way and in my own strength, which is not the way of the cross. The truth is, many of us are fighting the same battle—the battle of who is right and who is wrong. Perhaps the issue is not so much what battle we fight, but rather how we fight. We are fighting without wisdom. If we truly possessed wisdom, it would be evident in our speech. True wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord.

So, help me, Lord—help us to be like You.

Teach us to abide, Lord. Teach us to dwell in Your house, to gaze upon You and then, only then, to ask You questions, to inquire and simply ask of You. In patience, we will watch You work through us like You, Father, worked through Your Son. Not in our own strength but rather in our weakness is where Your strength is made perfect. Amen.

How is the Lord inviting you to guard your speech—both in person and online? {eoa}

Nayomi Thomas (MS, Organizational Development, Avila University) was raised across three continents, including a small island in the Netherlands Antilles, and now has a broad view of life, which she shares with her eighteen-year-old daughter Mahan, four-year-old-son, Justice, two-year-old daughter Addison, and husband, Jaye. Together, the Thomas family resides in Kansas City, Missouri, and are part of the International House of Prayer.