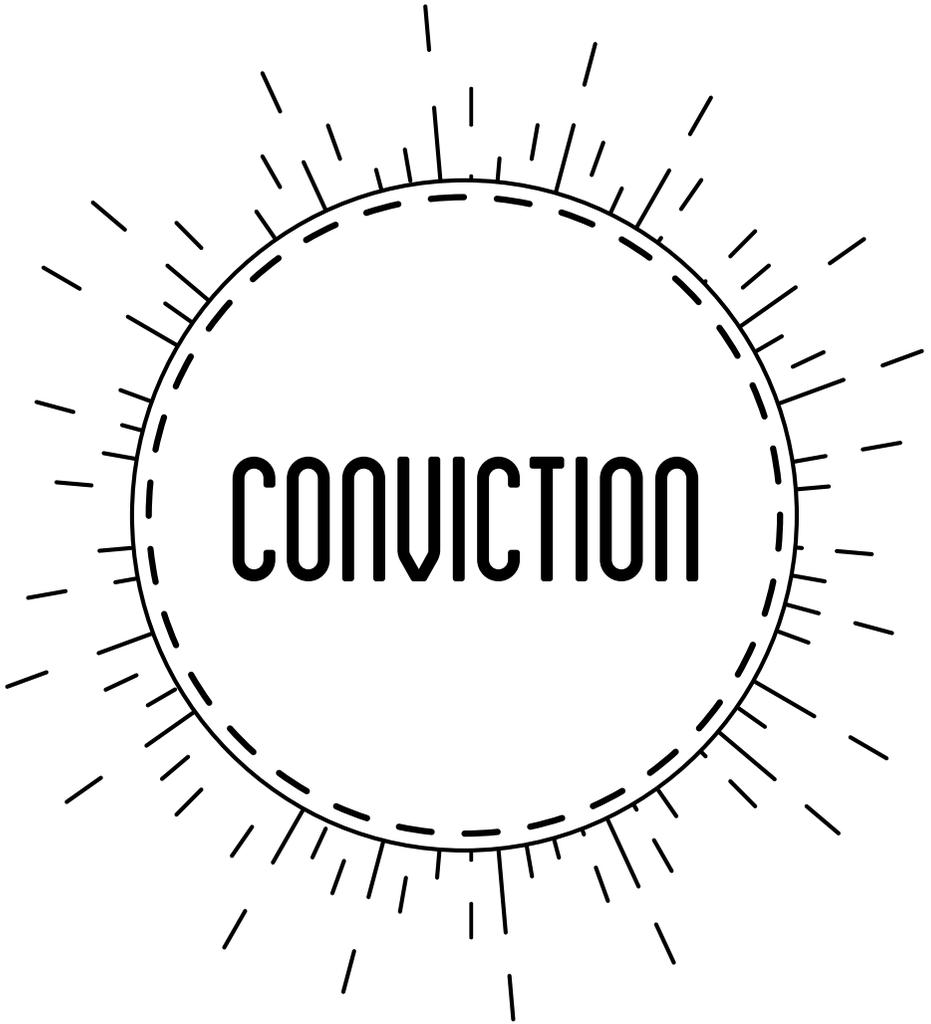


*Stirring a conviction that is deep,  
resolute, and enduring*



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# INTRODUCTION

The quest of young adults for conviction is a process of learning how to combine the mind and the heart with action. While some have firm opinions and even personal beliefs, a conviction compels you to live differently. In other words, there are things you *can* do, *want* to do, and *should* do, but a conviction is something you feel you *must* do.

What truth do you believe rises to the level of conviction? What cause moves you to risk ending a relationship? What action is so necessary in the world today that you would spend yourself to see it succeed? Name the virtue that you are unashamed to display in public or the quality you work persistently to shape your character, even if doing so moves you out of your comfort zone. Although the word “conviction” does not appear in the Bible very often, the evidence of people who live according to conviction is common in scripture. In this book you will see how conviction stirs, builds, and changes a life. All over the world, young adults yearn to commit their lives to what is convincing.

Biblical conviction is refined in the fire of effort, failure, faith, and hope. Even though conviction is a matter of the heart, it is often displayed on your sleeve. Some themes that you will encounter in this book are rich insights into human nature and the rules of the heart. You will meet biblical people stirred to their core by conviction. As you read, consider the relationship between the Holy Spirit, the conscience, and the person you are called to be. Take this journey and discover how you can be resolute, sure, and confident in your faith.



# HEART BURN

There is a lot of talk about the heart. Is it an organ? Is it the mind? Does thinking with your heart mean completely disconnecting from a coherent thought process? When all are called to “love God with all your heart, soul, and mind” how does this occur? Why are some ideas so important to some believers and not so much to others? Are convictions more like “love at first sight” or do they tend to be born out of commitment and sacrifice? How is it that our hearts can be so unreasonably passionate and so surprisingly inconsistent? Conviction is a matter of the heart, but see how the heart works according to God’s great design.





# 1. SENSE ABLE

*“Therefore we do not lose heart... For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”  
(2 Corinthians 4:16-18)*

Conviction begins and ends with the heart. Whether it is a truth you love or an idea you learn to love, your conviction grows the more you commit your heart to action. For example, if you deeply believe that followers of Christ must defend and protect those who are vulnerable, then your belief only strengthens as you practice it. It is also true that when you don't exercise your conviction, your heart eventually weakens in its fervor. In other words, the core beliefs of the heart never remain static, but ebb and flow with practice or neglect. Think about the landscape of your convictions through the years and identify seasons when your passions soured, and new ideas became sweet. If you reflect long enough, you may recall truths you had a heart for, but the passion eventually faded. You are not alone.

“Therefore we do not lose heart.”

How? How do you keep growing? How do you thrive? How do you win when everything around you seems to be failing? It seems as if every time you take a step forward life knocks you back two steps. Problems afflict you. Financial trouble assails you. Work discourages you. Relationships devastate you. Disease threatens you. Sickness weakens you. And death... well, death waits for you. If you use your five senses, they all echo you the same basic message: don't expect much and you won't be disappointed. It is futile to try. Joy is destined to end. Everything new gets old. If good happens, then the bad is just around the corner.

The apostle Paul is swift to curb despair into hope by saying, “If you want to grow your heart, deepen your belief, and strengthen your conviction, you must learn to be *sense able*.” Intentionally activate a new way of seeing,

feeling, tasting, touching, and hearing. Paul explains further, saying, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.”

To “fix our eyes” is not simply an attempt to keep one’s attention from drifting or restrain the mind from chasing distractions. To “fix your eyes” is to know when to cover your ears and look instead of listen. Sometimes it even means you close your eyes and trust that God hears you even though you can’t see Him. To “fix your eyes” is not a commitment to only use the sense of vision; it’s about purposing the mind to see more than what eyes alone can see. Examine your heart today. What are the truths that you can know even with your eyes closed? Living by faith is not walking through this life blind, ignorant, and disconnected from the world around us. Fixating on the eternal is the way to set your heart on eternal things first and foremost.

## INSIDE OUT

What is your strongest sense? Smell? Taste? Sight? Touch? Hearing? If you had to live without one of your senses, which would you choose to give up? Even with the knowledge that your brain can reconfigure pathways to compensate for the loss, it would be difficult to make that choice. Reflect and share your response.

Think about this process: Convictions are non-negotiable beliefs that run deep in the heart/mind. When your ideas become actions, and actions produce experiences, and ultimately those experiences become values to live by. Think about how this process describes the way your convictions have come into being.

We tend to see what we are looking for. Look at your immediate surroundings for anything that is red. Did you notice how easy it was to identify red items because you set your mind to do so? While it may not be as easy as seeking out a color, consider looking for a positive quality in a person or listening for the sound of encouragement and hope throughout the day. Also, practice looking for examples in your daily life that contrast the eternal versus the temporary.

Read and reflect on what the Bible says about spiritual vision.

- Psalm 19:8
- Matthew 6:22
- Matthew 13:15
- 1 Corinthians 2:9
- Ephesians 1:18
- Hebrews 12:2

## 2. SEARCH CONDITIONS

*“But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.”  
(Deuteronomy 4:29)*

The journey from childhood to adulthood is a road paved with many different commitments. Early in life children learn what they are good at and commit to developing skills to become even better. Later on youth commit to friendships that resonate with their ideas about who they are and who they want to be. As the journey continues, youth mature into adults as they are called upon to relate to God personally, intimately, and resolutely during a season when all of their choices seem to be pivotal. To fully commit *all to God amid all the other things they are expected to work on* is a challenge for many. However, if you want God, He wants *all of you*. Only those who *seek with all of their hearts* encounter an enduring life with their Creator. Just in case you are wondering what it really looks like to commit your all at the outset of the relationship, consider Christ, who led the way.

The story of the lost sheep and coin are a response to the Pharisees' complaint that Jesus “welcomed sinners and ate with them” (Luke 15:2). Is it any surprise that the owner of the sheep and the woman who lost the coin search *until* they find what they are looking for? Not when the owner of the sheep and the woman in the parable represent God's commitment to find lost people. The question is, “Does God expect the same kind of commitment from those who would seek Him?”

Reflect on the promises God made in the Old Testament to His followers: “I will make *all your enemies* turn their backs and run” (Exodus 23:27); “Before *all your people* I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world” (Exodus 34:10); “Worship the LORD your God; it is He who will deliver you from the hand of *all your enemies*” (2 Kings 17:39); “...you will be clean from *all your sins*” (Leviticus 16:30; God's promise on the Day of Atonement); “I delivered you from the hand of *all your oppressors*” (Judges 6:9).

The condition of a full commitment is not some Old Testament tactic that has now become outdated or irrelevant. When curious disciples inquired about where He was going, Jesus replied, “Come and you will see” (John

1:39). If you were hoping to fully vet the teachings of Jesus before you choose to embrace them, then you might want to read John 7:17, where the Savior declares, “Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” Finally, the apostle Paul urges all seekers: “Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship... Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:1, 2). To some, this sequence of logic does not sound right, but the more you think about God’s commitment to people, the more it starts to make sense.

When you search for God “with all your heart”, it is not some arbitrary obstacle meant to make your relationship with God more difficult. God has always been the first one to fully commit. This is how He relates to the human family: “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8); “This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

First. All. Then.

Those who stir with Christian conviction *first* place their lives in the Savior’s hands. Those who live a life marked by joy, victory, and promise leverage *all* that they are for a genuine walk with God. According to Scripture, then *and only then* do seekers find what they are searching for. As you think about your relationship with God today, are you committed to pursue God with all of your heart and soul?

## INSIDE OUT

As you reflect on your own journey with God, when did you come to the place where you understood that God wanted to have a personal relationship with you?

Often the things that get in the way or distract you from a close walk with God are not inherently evil or destructive, but they tend to seem equally important in the moment. What are some obstacles that get in the way of a full commitment to a life with God?

In your mind, survey through the Bible and identify people who fully committed their lives to God even though they did not have all the answers.

This week how will you organize your life to put your relationship with God first? What are specific choices that you will make?

## 3. ALL FOR LOVE

*“Of all the commandments, which is the most important?’ ... ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.’ ” (Mark 12:28-31)*

**M**atthew, Mark, and Luke all tell the story of religious leaders testing Jesus on the question of the greatest commandment. Some people today recoil at the terms “command” or “law” or even the word “obey”, because it somehow seems to convey an empty religious practice. Note that the answer Jesus gives does not begin with “Thou shall not...” but the word “love”.

Now, think of all the things in life you love and make a list. I love chocolate, warm weather, and the color of amethyst. I love the smell of bread baking, my 30-year-old car, my soccer shoes, and the rich sound of a cello. I love my wife, my sons, and my barbecue recipe. I love the wind, the mountains, and paper plates that I don’t have to wash. I love my friends, my dog, and Jesus.

Of course, this list is not ranked in any kind of order, but notice the range of things that get the label of being “loved”. The point is sometimes the word is used so often that “love” can lose its luster. However, when Jesus replied, “Love the Lord” and “love your neighbor”, He was selecting one verse from the Deuteronomy 6:5 and another from Leviticus 19:18. The Jews had a way of expanding the law and summarizing the commands to one sentence.

Isaiah 33:15 reduces all the law down to six simple statements and Micah 6:8 simplifies the law to three, saying, “Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.” Read Isaiah 56:1 and the faithful prophet squeezed God’s commands to two: “keep justice” and “do righteousness”. However, Habakkuk 2:4 is the ultimate summary, declaring, “The righteous shall live

by faith.” John would take a lesson from the prophets of old and distill the gospel down to: “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8).

It may be that some people crave well-crafted phrases and eloquent sentences that inspire and enlighten the mind. The point of asking people to summarize the law was to move people to wrestle with the word of God. Basically, it’s one of the oldest teaching strategies in the book. The process of thinking, choosing, and distilling the law to a few important truths is how you come to own the message. Your own sense of conviction will stir the more you actively process God’s truth for yourself.

Also, notice one final thought about this encounter in Mark 12:28-34. Even though three of the four gospels tell this story, each story is a little different. While Matthew and Luke describe the hostility between the Jewish leaders and Jesus, Mark tells the story showing a warm, appreciative encounter. After the teachers of the law heard how Jesus silenced the Sadducees, they simply shared back and forth until Jesus declares, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” May your love for God continue to find new ways to organize and express the truth you believe.

## INSIDE OUT

Examine the three accounts of this story and note the way each perspective is different and how they all still portray the same event.

- Matthew 22:34-40
- Luke 10:25-37
- Mark 12:28-34
- Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Read Psalm 15:1-5 and notice how David tried to summarize the whole law in about five or six statements. Think about how you would condense the Ten Commandments to five one or two-word statements.

Paraphrase. Choose a handful of your favorite passages from Scripture and rewrite them, but don’t use any of the words that are already used in the text. Of course, necessary words like *to*, *and*, *the*, and *it* are appropriate. The task of paraphrasing the Scripture in this way forces the reader to wrestle with what it means.

Read John 20:30, 31. Think about what John had to leave out and what he chose to include. Such a process might be one of the ways to discover what your core beliefs are. If you had to say who you are by telling five stories or events from your life, which five would you tell?