

Living
The Maximum Life
With
Power and Purpose

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Committing to Christ

Previous lessons in this series emphasized two critical steps: a) clarifying your values and b) identifying your God-given make-up, your shape, toward maximizing your life. But they're absolutely worthless unless you commit your life to Jesus Christ, which is the focus of this lesson.

Now we live in a time when our society fears commitment. Robert Bellah, sociologist at the University of Southern California, wrote *Habits of the Heart*. He said, "Americans are committed to nothing. If we're committed to anything it's individual freedom and keeping our options open." Now the problem with that is where it leads. If I don't commit to anything, then I'm not going to get anything out of life. It's like going down a cafeteria line and saying, "Well, I'm not going to choose my entree right now, I want to keep my options open. I'll wait on the vegetables. I am going to keep my options open." By the time you get to the end of the line. You don't have anything on the tray, and that's what happens in so many lives.

Earlier in this series, we said that maintaining a focus is essential to the maximum life by not wasting time on things that don't matter. The key to focus is commitment. The number one thing necessary to living a life that is really full is to commit your life to God's will through his son, Jesus Christ. Paul said in Romans 12:1, "I beseech you brethren to present your bodies as a living sacrifice which is your reasonable service (spiritual service-ASV)." Now hear me, when I say, "Commit to Christ," I'm talking about more than a decision. I'm talking about a commitment.

Many of you have made a decision about Christ, but I think it's fair to say that there are many of you who have not really committed to Him. You want the salvation that He offers, but you're not sure you want the lordship that He demands. That's what we're talking about with commitment.

We need to commit our life to Christ because:

1. It is part of God's plan for our life.

"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10) There are good things that He created us to do. Notice "We are created (how?) in Christ Jesus to do good works." In other words, apart from a genuine commitment to Christ, we will never realize life's maximum purpose, our potential until that commitment is made.

I'm grateful for my salvation.

Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:9 [Jesus] saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done, but because of His own purpose and grace. I need to give my life to God because He's given His life to me. Amen? God made the ultimate commitment when He took on the form of man and came to earth to die on that cross for us as the perfect sin atonement. It's pretty obvious, but at the same time extremely powerful.

If God never did another thing for me, never blessed anything else in my life, never answered another prayer, never gave me another morsel of food or never said another kind word my way, I owe Him my all right now because of what He did for me on the cross. Paul writing about His own motivation in 1 Corinthians 15:10 stated, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and I labor more abundantly than they all—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." I commit to Christ because I'm grateful for my salvation.

2. God promises to reward that commitment.

If I'll jump in, I mean if I'll really jump in, He'll reward that commitment. Look at Luke 6:38, many consider this verse to talk about giving money, but it really refers to all of life. "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap." Matthew records Jesus stating about the same thing "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33)

Those are just two of dozens and dozens of fantastic promises in Scripture where God says if you'll just put your life in my hands, I'll bring you blessings and benefits you can't even imagine—if you'll just trust me. The more you commit to me, the more I will accomplish through you.

Are those not good reasons; are those not great reasons to commit your life to Christ? I can't think of any better reason. So immediately somebody says, "Why doesn't everybody do it then? Why doesn't everybody commit to Jesus?" Everybody doesn't really commit to Christ because of the resistance to commit, three of which are discussed below.

Resistance to commitment to Christ:

1. Nearsightedness- failure to take the long look.

We don't look 20 or 30 years down the road, much less from an eternal perspective. We just tend to live for now. C. S. Lewis wrote something excellent in one of His books, "We have the wrong view. We tend to think of ourselves as human beings who have a spiritual dimension, when in fact, we are spiritual beings simply passing through the human experience. The big picture is, I'm a spiritual being, and I'm going to live forever somewhere. But, we get nearsighted and see ourselves packaged in the flesh. Nearsightedness keeps our focus on what's the easy thing, the fun thing and the convenient thing, ignoring our long-term values.

Jesus said "'But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.'" (Mark 4:19) Our Lord hit the nail right on the head. We focus on the urgent, not the important. We lose sight of those real values that we evaluated in the "What Are My Values" lesson. We stopped asking, "When I'm 90 years old and looking back, what is it that I most want to have done? How do I most want to be remembered?" All we think about is now. We don't commit!

I love the story of John Skulley. In the mid-70s, he was the president and chief executive officer of Pepsi Cola. He became president at age 34. He had his face on the cover of every major magazine. At age 42, he was on top of the world making more money than he could ever spend if he doled it out every second. A fellow by the name of Steve Jobs had started up a fledgling little computer company called, Apple Computer. He had taken it about as far as he could take it. He knew this man John Skulley was the man who could take it to heights as yet unperceived. He begged, and begged, and begged, and begged him to come, but Skulley was making too much money. Finally, in a New York penthouse, he looked at John and he asked him this fateful question: "John, do you want to spend the rest of your life making sugared-water, or do you want to change the world?" That did it. It broke him out of his nearsightedness, and he did take Apple Computer to unprecedented heights.

But there are heights beyond computers. The apostle John said in 1 John 2:17, "The world and all its passions and desires will one day disappear, but anyone who does the will of God will live forever." We've got to get over that nearsightedness to commit.

2. Selfishness - thinking only about self.

Many millions of people build their whole world around themselves and they don't have time for God. I don't have time for God; I'm too busy with my career. I don't have time for God's purposes in my life, I've got places to go, people to see and things to do. I've got dreams, I've got plans, I've got ambition. Now these are people who are in essence saying, "Now God, I know more about my life than you do. I know what's going to make me happy, I know what's going to fulfill me." But God says, "No, you don't. I designed you and I built you. You think you know, but you're blowing it."

Some of you read *Calvin and Hobbs*, the cartoon in the newspaper. There was one I saw some time back that I thought was really cute. Calvin was looking at Hobbs and said to him, "I'm at peace with the world, and I'm completely serene." Hobbs said, "Well, why is that?" Calvin said, "Well, I've discovered my purpose in life, I know why I was put here and why everything exists." Hobbs said, "O really?" Calvin said, "Yes, I'm here so that everybody can do what I want." Hobbs said, "Well, it's nice to have cleared that up." Calvin said, "Yes, and once everybody else accepts it, they'll be serene, too."

We laugh at that, but there are a whole lot of Calvins in the world. The world revolves around them. Once everybody else figures that out, they'll be serene, too. But when you live for yourself, you have a pretty small goal in life. But Jesus said as recorded in Mark 8:35, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and the gospel will save it."

3. Fear.

Among those who have not yet really committed their life to Christ, pure and simple fear is probably the most common reason. As fears come up, we ask ourselves questions like: What will it cost? If I really commit to Christ, what will God require of me if I really took His hand and let Him lead me? Would I become a fanatic? What will other people think? Will I lose my secular friends? Will I no longer be cool? What if I can't keep my commitment? What if I fail?

Those are the kind of fears that keep people from committing. Now, if that includes you and those fears have kept you from being what God wants you to be, let me tell you what the source of those fears is, aside from the old devil himself. The source of the fears is you don't understand the character of God. Either you don't really trust His wisdom, or you don't really trust His love. Sadly, I think for too many people, it's the latter.

Folks, I want to tell you God is not some cosmic killjoy in the sky waiting to deal you a bummer. He said, "I know the plans I have for you. They are for good, and not for evil." (Jeremiah 29:11) Every father, every parent can identify with this. If your child was to come to you and said, "Dad, I respect you and I love you, you're my dad, and I want to live life the way you want me to live it." How would you respond to that? Dad, would you look at that child and say, "Ha, ha, ha, O boy, you don't know it, but you're going to be miserable from here on out. No more ice cream—spinach, artichokes, and anchovies for you. I'm going to break your play station. You're going to sit in that corner and wear a dunce cap the rest of your life and never go out."

Isn't that ridiculous? It's absolutely absurd. Yet, that is the very concept many people have about their life if they commit it to God. He's going to put me through some obstacle course to make me miserable.

I want to tell you what, if my son walks up to me and says, "Dad, I want to commit my life to your purposes and goals, I want to be the son you want me to be." I would do everything, everything in my power to make his life as wonderful as it could possibly be. God, our Father, says, "I want to do the same." That's why Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and I'll add all these things to you."

Look at Psalm 37:3, "Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this:" That's the promise. I've got nothing to fear by committing my life to Christ. Life is going to be more wonderful than it could be otherwise.

Why we need to commit to Christ.

How do I respond with commitment to Christ? Obviously, if you're not a Christian, you need to put your trust in Christ and obey the gospel. Obviously, you need to recognize Jesus as who He is, the Son of God. You need to come to Him on your knees saying, "I believe that," confessing His name. You need to be immersed into the death of Christ being buried with Him, baptized into Christ, for the forgiveness of your sin. That is the means by which one accepts the grace that God has offered. But some of you have already done that. You've already obeyed the gospel. You have put on Christ having been buried with Him in baptism. Some of you assemble with a church regularly, but if the truth is known, you've yet to really commit your life to Christ. You've yet to really step on His power and grace saying, "I want His way more than my way."

What do you still need to do? The first thing you need to do is calculate. In Luke 14:25, Jesus is up front about commitment. He said if you're going to follow me, you'd better think about it. He said there's not a man who would build a tower without first taking inventory of his money and his materials. He would make sure he could finish. He's not going to get halfway up and quit. He said there's not a king who's not going to take care to count his own forces before he goes to war. If he's got 10,000, he's not likely to go do battle against somebody with 20,000. He said, "If you're going to commit to me, you better think about it, you better calculate it." In every commitment, there are benefits to be had and prices to be paid. You decide whether you're committed based on whether you think the benefits outweigh the costs. That's it. In other words, is the cause worth the costs?

I want you to do a little experiment. Picture in your mind two ledgers. On one side in this ledger is the question: What is the cost to follow Jesus Christ, because there is a cost? On the other side of the ledger the question is: What does it cost not to really commit to Jesus Christ? By your response to these questions you are making a commitment.

When you commit to Christ, what do you give up?

1. The right to personal sovereignty.

I'm not going to pull any punches. Don't say "I'm committed to Christ" if you're not going to commit. In other words, it's no longer what do I want, but God, what do you want? It's not what I want to do, it's God, what do you want me to do?

See, amazingly, the God who created the universe gave each of us the ability to choose how much influence the Almighty God will have in our lives. He didn't have to do that. If He wanted to, He could have made every one of us puppets, robots or animals, birds or fish. But He made us with the ability to think, reason and choose. He gave you the ability, right, to decide. So if you commit to Jesus Christ, you're saying, "God, I'm turning that right back over to you." Look at what Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." There was a commitment, and He turned over personal sovereignty.

2. Personal priority of your resources.

Whew! That one stings! It's no longer what do I want to do with my time, it is, God what do you want me to do with your time? It's no longer what am I going to do with my money, but God what do you want me to do with your money? See, it's the concept of stewardship. When you commit to Jesus Christ, you're saying, "I realize that God owns everything I have and He wants me just to manage it for just a little while for His glory. I give up "the my and mine concept." It's God. I give up priority of my resources, any kind of resource.

3. Worldly value system.

This concept was discussed in the "What are My Values?" lesson. "For everything of the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world." (1 John 2:16) Power, pleasure, prestige and possessions, it's not that you never have any of those things; it's that you don't spend all of your attention, your time, and your emotions trying to acquire it. If I commit my life to Christ, I give up a relentless pursuit of what the world says is important. Now that's a pretty big price, isn't it?

When you give up your personal sovereignty you realize you're not the manager of the universe, you're not even the manager of your life. You're going to let God call the shots. Give up the priority of your resources, the chasing after the worldly value system.

When you choose NOT to commit to Christ, what do you give up?

1. It costs me God's plan for the best use of my life.

If I decide I'm not going to commit to Christ, but just drift through life. I'll get little snatches of pleasure here and there, but I never come close to tapping into what God can and wants to do with my life because that only comes from really walking hand in hand with the Lord.

2. Satisfaction and joy

Those of you who are maybe advanced in years who have never made that commitment could testify you've felt a hollow feeling for a long time. That empty or hollow feeling is the lack of satisfaction and joy that you gave up.

3. Eternal life.

You gave up a reward in heaven, an eternity of absolute bliss where I'll never hurt, cry, or mourn again. You will never hear the Lord say "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter now into the joys of the Lord."

Once you've made that commitment, then CHARGE! I mean charge, dedicate, go for it, and don't turn back. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship." (Romans 12:1)

When a pilot turns and starts a big 747 down the airport runway, he gets to a point of no return. He is getting more and more speed, either he's going to get airborne or crash and self-destruct. I'm afraid there are some of you who've got your engines revving. There are a lot of other people out there who aren't even at the airport. Some don't even know there's a plane. Are some of you sitting on life's runway, revving up, building up a little speed, but not enough speed to get airborne? You've never gotten off the ground in your relationship with Christ. You know about Him, but you've never gotten off the ground in real commitment to know Him.

Some of you may have been sitting on that runway for years, revving your engines and saying, "One of these days, one of these days, I'm going to get committed. One of these days I'm going to give my life to God. One of these days, I'm going to stop living out my plan and start living God's plan." I really worry that someday you're going to stand before Jesus Christ with major regrets saying I did such a stupid thing! I invested my life, I invested my time and I invested my talent for the wrong purpose. How I wish I could do it over again. But it will be too late.

What is it that's holding you back from your commitment? What is it that's keeping you on the runway, instead of being airborne? Is it fear? Afraid of what God will do with you? Is it nearsightedness, are you just still looking at all these things around you? Is it just pure selfishness? Is it a relationship? What is it? Has there ever been a time in your life since you made your initial commitment to Christ that you made an unreserved commitment of your talent, your time, your treasure or your life without hesitation or reservation? You see the real issue is do you want to be a casual, lukewarm, Christian the rest of your life? You can't be partially committed to Christ. The one thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important. You can hide, you can stay uncommitted, and basically, nobody will know—but God knows. Lesson # 1299 - February 2, 1997