

Are You Committed?

Do you need to be committed? (Just Kidding)

Prayer

April, 1985 Good News Broadcaster, p. 12

A missionary society wrote to David Livingstone and asked, "Have you found a good road to where you are? If so, we want to know how to send other men to join you." Livingstone wrote back, "If you have men who will come only if they know there is a good road, I don't want them. I want men who will come if there is no road at all." ⁽¹⁾

We have a God given vision for this church. Now we need visionary leaders to take ahold of it and do what it takes to make it happen.

Now a lot of you know about being consecrated unto the Lord. As a minister of the Gospel, my life has been set aside and has been consecrated to him... Each of us as Christians need to take the step of Consecrating our lives to the Lord.

I have been asked in the past what does consecrated mean, and I have used dictionary definitions to describe it, but I came across an excellent example that explains it so well...

A Christian Woman approaches her pastor and asks him: "What is your idea of what Consecration means. I really want to understand it." The pastor held out a blank sheet of paper and said: "Consecration is to sign the bottom of this paper as a covenant between you and God." The woman said "...but there is nothing on the sheet!" That's consecration to trust God completely with your life and let him fill in the sheet as he wills.

So many in the churches today, hand over only a portion of their lives. Or they try to set up boundaries between themselves and their commitment to Christ. To see God move powerfully in your life, you need to allow him to write your story with you.

Now the world is coming to a state when it will be very difficult to be a Christian in our society. If society ostracized you for your faith, would you still believe? Are you Grounded in the word?

Principles and Ideals have always come at a cost... One famous example of this is the US Declaration of Independence. "We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish Justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of

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2 - "Regions Beyond," Vol 37, #1, p. 2.

3 - Mark DeVries, Family-Based Youth Ministry, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1994, pp. 150-151

4 - In the Eye of the Storm by Max Lucado, Word Publishing, 1991, pp. 35-36

5 - Leadership, Vol X, #3 (Summer, 1989), p. 35

Liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this constitution of the United States of America.”

This document was written with the intention and belief of those righting it. They pledged themselves to an ideal. They detailed a progressive vision for the future for their children and their children’s children.

Why would I use this in a sermon?

Well... if you are a student of history you will know that there were 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence. Did you know that their conviction resulted in untold sufferings for themselves and their families? Of those original 56 visionary men, 5 were captured by the British and tortured before their deaths. 12 of them had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army. Another had two sons captured and 9 of the 56 fought and died from wounds or the hardships of war.

These 56 men believed in one nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for ALL.

As Pastor Kyle Idleman states in his series Not a Fan, God wants committed followers not fans.

Perhaps some here may be of the mind that it will get better and society as a whole will smooth out, people will no longer be bigoted, kindness will return and things will once again be done in Canada and the USA, in fact, the world.

My friends we are literally in the last days. The signs are coming to pass around us telling us that the season of the Lords return will be soon.

Turn with me to 2 Timothy 3:13-15

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

What do we do?

2 Timothy 4:1-5

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I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Our freedom has been won at a terrible cost in blood. Once from our savior to cleanse us of our sin and give us eternal life and other times by brave men and women who have defended our right to worship God freely in this country.

Have you seen the videos on the Internet where in people in countries that are not free are receiving bibles. They are hugging them, they kiss them and they hold them to their hearts. If they are caught with them, they could be killed. They are literally putting their lives on the line to pursue Jesus. Interestingly in these countries we are also seeing 10s of thousands of people coming to Jesus and miracles happening.

Ask yourself this morning... Would you risk your life for a bible?
Since you don't have to right now... I ask each person here to consider for themselves a simple question: "What am I doing with the opportunity I have been given paid for with the blood of Canada's sons and daughters?"

Commitment

Adoniram Judson sweated out Burma's heat for 18 years without a furlough, six years without a convert. Enduring torture and imprisonment, he admitted that he never saw a ship sail without wanting to jump on board and go home. When his wife's health broke and he put her on a homebound vessel in the knowledge he would not see her for two full years, he confided to his diary: "If we could find some quiet resting place on earth where we could spend the rest of our days in peace. . ." But he steadied himself with this remarkable postscript: "Life is short. Millions of Burmese are perishing. I am almost the only person on earth who has attained their language to communicate salvation. . ." (2)

Have we as a society become apathetic to those souls that are being lost forever? If Not, what are we doing to reach them? When we think of Judson's story, can we see his discouragement and yet his commitment to mission.

What about our kids?

Let's look at a football team vs. a youth group in the church...

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I have often wondered what would happen if football coaches approached their work like most youth ministers are expected to. For example, I wonder what would happen if when a player was too busy to show up for practice, the understanding coach simply said, "We'll miss you. I hope you'll be able to make it next week sometime." Imagine the players leaving practice and hearing the smiling coach say, "Thanks for coming. I hope you'll come back tomorrow."

If a football team operated like a typical youth ministry, we might expect concerned parents to call the coach, saying, "Can you tell me what's been going on in practice? My son says it's boring, and he doesn't want to come anymore. I was wondering, could you make it a little more fun for them? And by the way, you might want to talk to the coach at the school across town. He seems to have the right idea." The coach might send out quarterly questionnaires about what the players would like to change about the team (I can just imagine the answers: "shorter practices," "more winning").

A coach, responding like a typical youth minister, might first feel guilty that the practices were not meeting the boy's needs, and he would try to adjust his program to suit this boy (and every other boy who complained). Between trying to keep everybody happy and giving every student a good experience, the coach would squeeze in a little football practice. And what kind of season would this coach have? It's a safe bet that the coach wouldn't be the only one who felt like a loser. But this is the very way that most churches expect to run their youth ministries.

To expect that youth be committed to the church at the same level of commitment that would be expected on an athletic team would draw the charge of legalism and of religious individualism that the expectation of commitment to the church has become implausible to most Christian parents.

Because the god of individualism pressures us to program to the lowest common denominator, we seldom raise the expectations high enough for teenagers to experience real community.

Real community means real responsibility for each other. It means a commitment to be there for each other even when the schedule is tight and when motivation is low. But the typical Christian adult in our culture knows little about commitment to community.

We Embrace Community...

We can't let them take the highway to hell without at least trying... Can we?

I like what John Wesley said: "Give me 100 men who hate NOTHING but sin and LOVE God with ALL their hearts and I will shake the world for Christ!"

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Great men in history have been afraid of the unknown, but have had the courage to move forward anyway. Take for example Hernando Cortez. In 1519 he landed at Vera Cruz, Mexico. His goal was conquest. Either he was afraid of his own determination or he was concerned over the lack of commitment to the cause by his men.

Cortez set fire to his 11 ship armada. He believed that with no means of retreat his army had only one direction to go; Into the interior of Mexico. Cortez saw there was a price to pay for his commitment ...and he paid it.

The word of God says in Luke 9:62b "...No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

When committed to Christ, don't look back. Plow the furrows straight. We are committed to doing what God wants. Folks, God doesn't look back at our past nor does he remember our sin... Why should we?

We need to be committed to moving forward with a unified progressive vision...

One of my favorite authors: Max Lucado. Anyone else read his work?

Anyway in his book *In the Eye of the Storm* he relates a story of commitment and courage; that I will share with you now. Try to look for the commitment in this narrative.

February 15, 1921. New York City. The operating room of the Kane Summit Hospital. A doctor is performing an appendectomy. In many ways the events leading to the surgery are uneventful. The patient has complained of severe abdominal pain. The diagnosis is clear: an inflamed appendix. Dr. Evan O'Neill Kane is performing the surgery. In his distinguished thirty-seven-year medical career, he has performed nearly four thousand appendectomies, so this surgery will be uneventful in all ways except two.

The first novelty of this operation? The use of local anesthesia in major surgery. Dr. Kane is a crusader against the hazards of general anesthesia. He contends that a local application is far safer. Many of his colleagues agree with him in principle, but in order for them to agree in practice, they will have to see the theory applied. Dr. Kane searches for a volunteer, a patient who is willing to undergo surgery while under local anesthesia. A volunteer is not easily found. Many are squeamish at the thought of being awake during their own surgery. Others are fearful that the anesthesia might wear off too soon.

Eventually, however, Dr. Kane finds a candidate. On Tuesday morning, February 15, the historic operation occurs.

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The patient is prepped and wheeled into the operating room. A local anesthetic is applied. As he has done thousands of times, Dr. Kane dissects the superficial tissues and locates the appendix. He skillfully excises it and concludes the surgery. During the procedure, the patient complains of only minor discomfort.

The volunteer is taken into post-op, then placed in a hospital ward. He recovers quickly and is dismissed two days later.

Dr. Kane had proven his theory. Thanks to the willingness of a brave volunteer, Kane demonstrated that local anesthesia was a viable, and even preferable, alternative. But I said there were two facts that made the surgery unique. I've told you the first: the use of local anesthesia. The second is the patient. The courageous candidate for surgery by Dr. Kane was Dr. Kane.

To prove his point, Dr. Kane operated on himself!

A wise move. The doctor became a patient in order to convince the patients to trust the doctor.

Sometimes commitment to mission is not only required of others but of ourselves.

I think I am on a quote roll this morning, so let me continue with world renowned tenor Luciano Pavarotti.

"When I was a boy, my father, a baker, introduced me to the wonders of song," tenor Luciano Pavarotti relates. "He urged me to work very hard to develop my voice. Arrigo Pola, a professional tenor in my hometown of Modena, Italy, took me as a pupil. I also enrolled in a teachers college. On graduating, I asked my father, Shall I be a teacher or a singer?"

"Luciano," my father replied; if you try to sit on two chairs, you will fall between them. For life, you must choose one chair."

"I chose one. It took seven years of study and frustration before I made my first professional appearance. It took another seven to reach the Metropolitan Opera. And now I think whether it's laying bricks, writing a book; whatever we choose we should give ourselves to it. Commitment, that's the key. Choose one chair."

You may be asking yourself? Is this really good advice? What would God say?

James 1:8 - *A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

The bible exposition commentary says:

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“Double-minded” means “two-souled.” A two-souled man wavers and is uncertain about God. He partly believes and partly disbelieves God – he debates whether he can trust God. This person lacks certainty because he is a man of no fixed or decided purpose.

This double-minded man is the person of verses 5-7 who lacks wisdom but does not ask God for it in belief. His prayer life is like a raging sea driven and tossed by the wind.

A two-souled person is inconstant, unstable and unsettled. His belief is like a drunk – a belief that staggers down the road of life. People whose faith falters with the ebb and flow of life do not have God’s respect because they divide their loyalty between God and other things. It is usually pressure that cause them to crumble. Doubt blunts the faith we need to receive from God. This creates a chaotic spiritual life, the opposite of a spiritual life that draws on God by implicit faith in God’s promises.

Let’s look at Peter’s commitment for a sec.

Remember in Matthew 14:22-36 the narrative relating Jesus sending his disciples across the lake? So many read this and fail to consider that Jesus knew there was going to be a storm. In your life Jesus knows you are going to come upon storms too. Consider with me, is it possible that Jesus wanted to test their commitment and their faith? The synoptic Gospels give us a great picture of what happened here. John 6:19 tells us that the boat was over three miles from shore. Mark 6:48 Mark tells us Jesus could see his disciples from where he sat praying on the mountain. The wind was blowing, the boat was rocking and they are committed to their struggle against the wind to get the boat to the other side.

Jesus walks out on the water...

In Matthew 14:28-29 we read:

“Lord, is it You?” Peter asked. “If it is, tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” Jesus said.

Let’s make a couple of points before moving forward here. Peter waited for Jesus to tell him to come so that he was in the will of God. Second, why was Peter the only one who asked to come to Jesus?

If we are truly committed we need to ask Jesus to use us and seek opportunity to engage our faith. Third, Peter miraculously walked on the water while he was

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committed to keeping his eyes on Jesus, but when he let the circumstances around him distract him, he began to sink.

I would assert this morning that we need to be faithfully committed to Jesus and not allow the world even the smallest anchor within us.

In closing let me illustrate: (5)

A certain man wanted to sell his house in Haiti for \$2,000. Another man wanted very badly to buy it, but because he was poor, he couldn't afford the full price. After much bargaining, the owner agreed to sell the house for half the original price with just one stipulation: he would retain ownership of one small nail protruding from just over the door.

After several years, the original owner wanted the house back, but the new owner was unwilling to sell. So the first owner went out, found the carcass of a dead dog, and hung it from the single nail he still owned. Soon the house became unlivable, and the family was forced to sell the house to the owner of the nail.

The Haitian pastor's conclusion: "If we leave the Devil with even one small peg in our life, he will return to hang his rotting garbage on it, making it unfit for Christ's habitation." - Dale A. Hays

This morning, as we close in prayer, let us reaffirm with our savior our commitment to his kingdom. Your heavenly Father doesn't just want your weekend visits. He wants full custody of every aspect of your life.

prayer

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