

# Home Campaign: Commitment

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Date: 13 February 2022

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, again, I say good morning to those of you who are here in person and online. So glad that we can be together. We are very excited this morning because this is Commitment Sunday.

It's the culmination of the Home Campaign, which has been going on for some time. And we started the campaign a couple of years ago and then COVID hit, so we had to hit a brief pause on it, and now it's our joy and delight to come back and to reach this day, which is a huge, momentous occasion.

This is one of the biggest things, if not the biggest thing we've ever done as a church community. We have the opportunity to take this massive step of faith together. So in a little while, you're going to have an opportunity to come forward.

We're all going to have an opportunity to come forward having filled out a pledge card, the amount that we intend to give to this campaign, and to bring it up as an offering and to put it in one of the offering plates up here.

So in light of the fact that we're going to make this major commitment together, I thought it only appropriate that we spend a little bit of time before we do this reflecting on commitment and the role of commitment in the Christian life.

[ 1 : 1 0 ] Hopefully it's become clear by now in this Home Campaign series that what we're really talking about is not a campaign, it's discipleship. That all of these topics that we focused on are core aspects of what it means to follow Jesus.

And one of my great hopes, as I have prayed for this day for years, is that whatever commitment we make this morning to this campaign, whatever that is, we would only do it because we see it as an extension of the commitment that we've already made to Jesus.

And we see this act as a part of our discipleship. So this is what I want to look at this morning, this idea, this theme of commitment as a part of discipleship.

And we're going to do that by looking at Luke chapter 14, verses 25 through 35. That's going to be our guide to help us understand commitment for disciples of Jesus.

So we're going to see the cost of commitment. commitment, we're going to see the heart of commitment, and then finally we're going to see the purpose of commitment. So let's pray and then let's open God's Word together.

[ 2 : 2 0 ] Lord, we thank you for your Word and I thank you that we can come in here with all kinds of distractions, anxieties, things that are tugging at our minds and hearts, Lord, and yet we can come into this space and open your Word as your people and that you will speak to us.

Because these aren't just dead words on a page and you're not just a dead God, but you're a living God. And these words are living and active. And your Holy Spirit is in our midst, ministering to us even now.

And so I pray that wherever we're coming from this morning, whatever view we have of you, whatever we think we need, Lord, that you would give us what we truly need, that you would do your work through your Word in us, Lord, that we might be a people who glorify you.

We pray this in your Son's holy name. Amen. So first of all, we're going to talk a little bit about the cost of commitment. As we hear these words read, Jeff read this passage a moment ago.

It's easy to miss, but I want you to take note of Jesus' audience here. A lot of the time we read Jesus' teaching, He's teaching His disciples, but not so here.

[ 3 : 3 0 ] It says in verse 25, now great crowds accompanied Him, and He turned and said to them. So this entire section is what Jesus is saying to the crowds.

So this is not something that He's saying privately to His disciples. He's speaking to potential disciples, potential recruits. They're interested. They want to learn more.

And I think that that's worth noting because I think many of us, if we were trying to accumulate a mass of followers, we might be tempted at this point when we see all of these potential disciples, we might be tempted to dumb it down a little bit.

We might be tempted to sort of dumb down discipleship, a kind of try it before you buy it approach. You know, well, just give it a try, you know, follow me for a few weeks and see how it works out. But that is not what Jesus does. Jesus basically says in this entire passage, I want to make sure you understand what you're getting into if you become one of my disciples.

[ 4 : 33 ] I want to make sure you fully understand the kind of commitment that is required before you become one of my disciples. I want you to know what it might cost you.

In her essay, *An Expedition to the Pole*, which is in *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, Annie Dillard tells the story of the ill-fated Franklin Expedition.

I'm going to read a shortened quote from her description. I had to cut a little bit for the sake of time. Here's what she says. In 1845, Sir John Franklin and 138 officers and men embarked from England to find the Northwest Passage across the high Canadian Arctic to the Pacific Ocean.

They sailed in two three-masted barks. Each sailing vessel carried an auxiliary steam engine and a 12-day supply of coal for the entire projected two or three years voyage.

Instead of additional coal, according to L.P. Kerwin, each ship made room for a 1,200-volume library, a hand organ playing 50 tunes, China place settings for officers and men, cut glass wine goblets, and sterling silver flatware.

[ 5 : 54 ] The officers' sterling silver knives, forks, and spoons were particularly interesting. The silver was of ornate Victorian design, very heavy at the handles and richly patterned.

Engraved on the handles were the individual officers' initials and family crests. The expedition carried no special clothing for the Arctic, only the uniforms of Her Majesty's Navy.

The ship set out in high dudgeon amid enormous glory and fanfare. Franklin uttered his utterance, The highest object of my desire is faithfully to perform my duty.

Two months later, a British whaling captain met the two barks in Lancaster Sound. He reported back to England on the high spirits of officers and men. He was the last European to see any of them alive.

For 20 years, search parties recovered skeletons from all over the frozen sea. Franklin himself, it was learned after 12 years, had died aboard ship.

[ 6 : 59 ] One search party found on the ice far from the ships a letter clip and a piece of that very backgammon board which Lady Jane Franklin had given her husband as a parting gift.

Another search party found two skeletons in a boat on a sledge. They had hauled the boat 65 miles. With the two skeletons were some chocolate, some guns, some tea, and a great deal of table silver. That was the Franklin expedition. Before you go on an expedition to the Arctic, it's very important to count the cost of that kind of endeavor.

And Sir John Franklin failed to do that. He greatly underestimated what was going to be required of them. And so, what they did was to pack like tourists, going on a pleasure cruise.

And the results were disastrous. Later in her essay, Dillard writes, Why do we people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the absolute?

[ 8 : 10 ] As you see the statistics of people leaving the church right now in the West, I can only wonder how many of those people were sold a version of Christianity that promised a packaged tour of the absolute.

A version of faith that said, We can bring our sterling silver and our china with us. Bring your politics. Bring your priorities.

Bring your preferences. Bring your wealth. Bring your allegiances. Bring your personal agendas with you. Because this trip is ultimately about your pleasure, your enjoyment.

Nothing much will be required of you. It's God's job to make sure you have what you need and that you feel fulfilled in your life.

And I think that Jesus doesn't want us to make that same mistake. So, Jesus very clearly calls us to count the cost before we commit to following Him.

[ 9 : 18 ] He says, Before you build a tower, make sure you have enough money to finish the tower. Because otherwise, you're going to have a half-finished tower and people are going to make fun of you. And then He says, If you're a king and you're going to go to war against another nation, make sure you have the resources to win that battle.

Otherwise, don't fight it. Don't start a fight you can't finish. Instead, sue for peace. Jesus is very clear on the fact that if we commit to following Him, we need to have counted the cost.

We need to be willing, as He says, to pick up our cross. We need to be willing, as He says, to renounce all that we have because it may cost us everything. It's all or none.

So, this is the first thing. Jesus wants us to count the cost of committing to Him. But wait, there's more. He goes on to take aim directly at our hearts.

Jesus doesn't just go after our possessions. He goes after our affections. Right? In verse 26, If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

[10:39] People sometimes point to this. Skeptics will point to this and say, this is one of the reasons why I don't want to follow Jesus because He says awful, bizarre things like this. Who in the world would say, I need to hate my family.

What we need to understand is, the word hate here is rhetorical. What Jesus means is that He wants us to love Him more than anything else in the world.

He wants us to love Him so much more that all other loves look like hate. That there is such a difference between our love for Jesus and our love for anything else that these loves look like hate. If you're in a dark room and you light a candle, that candle is very bright by comparison. But if you take that same candle and you hold it up to the sun, it's going to look like a dark spot by comparison.

So this is what Jesus means. And the reason that Jesus talks about hating your family, you know, I mean, I heard somebody say, well, no problem, I already hate my family.

[11:41] You know, so that... But the reason Jesus talks about hating one's family is because He's speaking to a traditional, patriarchal, family-oriented culture.

In this culture, where was your highest allegiance? It was to your family. Everybody knew that. So your father, your mother, your wife, your children, your brothers and sisters, all life was meant to revolve around those relationships.

And if you, for whatever reason, lost sight of that, people would very quickly remind you that's where your allegiance should be. So for this to apply to us, we have to ask, where is our greatest allegiance?

What in our culture represents our highest priorities? Now, maybe for some of us, maybe for some of you, especially if you came from a more traditional, family-oriented culture, maybe this is true for you.

But I think many of us probably go in the opposite direction. We are highly individualistic in this culture. So for us, it may not be hate your family.

[12:51] It may be hate your personal autonomy. Hate your wealth. Hate the status that you have in the world. Hate your sense of the core right that you have to be able to live and do as you please.

Whatever it is for us, Jesus is aiming at the things that are most central in our hierarchy of priorities. And what he's saying is, in order to be my disciple, you need to love me so much more than these other things that they pale by comparison.

That's his point. Now, I want to stop and just ask, As you think about the cost of this commitment and then the heart of the commitment, Jesus is going after not just our possessions, our lifestyles, but really our affections.

I think we have to ask at this point, why in the world, as Jesus is talking to these great crowds, why would he make such extreme demands? Why would he not say, try it before you buy it?

Why would he not say, there's a bronze level commitment, a silver level commitment, a platinum level commitment? Why would he be all or none about this? It seems so extreme.

[14:09] What's the purpose of commitment in the life of people who follow Jesus? And the answer is, the purpose is that Jesus came to set us free.

And this is the only way we will ever experience that freedom. The Bible says that the thing that wrecks our lives, the thing that leads to so much injustice and suffering and brokenness in the world, is that we love the wrong things in the wrong order.

If you ever want to know a summary of the teachings of St. Augustine, this is essentially it. So I want to be very clear here. The problem is not that we love anything too much. The problem comes when we love something the most.

And that's the difference. So let me give you a few examples of this. You cannot possibly love your parents too much. There's nowhere in the Bible that says there should be a limit to how much you love your parents.

You cannot possibly love your parents too much. But what happens if you love them the most? What happens when you look at that hierarchy of loves and the thing at the very top is your parents?

[ 15 : 30 ] They are where you look for meaning and identity and purpose. They're the source of those things for you. Well, what happens is they will crush you.

Regardless of their intentions. They may be amazing parents. But if you love them the most, they're going to crush you. Even if they're great people.

Because as adults, there are times when you may need to make decisions for yourself or make decisions for your family that may disappoint your parents.

That they may disagree with. Especially if you're a follower of Jesus and they are not. There's a difference between honoring your parents and obeying your parents when you're an adult.

You have to know the difference. With all due respect, there are some marriages in this room that are held captive by the need for the approval of somebody's parent.

[ 16 : 38 ] So you can't possibly love your parents too much. But if you love them the most, that's where the problems start.

You cannot possibly love your kids too much. But if you love your kids the most, if they are where you find your meaning and your identity, you're not actually going to be the kind of parent they need.

Right? Because what your kids need is a parent who is willing to do what is necessary, not what is easiest. And I can tell you this.

My parenting comes down to basically that decision every single day. Am I going to do what's easiest for my child in this moment?

Or am I going to do what's best for my child in this moment? And at least in our house, what's best often feels like perhaps the hardest option. But that's what they need.

[ 17 : 42 ] Right? They need a parent who's willing to do what's necessary. So if you get your emotional needs met through your children, it's going to be almost impossible for you to do that consistently in your home.

One more example. You cannot love individual freedom too much. The Bible says that we are to be free. Jesus came to set us free that we would have life and have it abundantly.

This is very clear in Scripture. But what if you love individual freedom the most? What if that sits at the top of the stack? Well, guess what? Among other things, you're going to be very, very lonely in your life.

You're going to be very lonely. Because all real relationships require us to prioritize the needs and preferences of other people to make massive compromises in terms of our own preferences.

So you can have personal autonomy in this world. You can have total personal autonomy. But you're going to have it all by yourself. Because your relationships won't work. Unless you're willing to sacrifice a great deal of that individual freedom of choice.

[ 18 : 50 ] For the sake of loving and serving and being in relationship with other people. This is one of the big challenges for people when they think about committing themselves in life to anything.

Whether it be a long-term job or a spouse. Living in a certain place for any length of time. That commitment is a sacrifice of individual freedom. But it's the kind of commitment that is necessary for the things that are most valuable in life.

Like relationships. And the same principle is true for virtually anything in our lives. There are a lot of things that we can love.

A whole lot. But if you love any one thing the most, that's where problems come. So it could be your wealth. It could be financial security. It could be status. Whatever you love the most is going to dominate you.

It will become your master. So what's the answer? What's the answer? Well, we basically have two choices. We can either try to love the things that we love in our lives less.

[ 19 : 56 ] Which requires us to sort of forcibly suppress the love. To suppress parts of our heart. That doesn't work.

I've tried it. It doesn't work. The only other option is to love Jesus the most. It's that our love for Jesus grows to such an extent that all of these other loves pale by comparison. It's the only other option we have. But in order to do that, we need what the Scottish preacher Thomas Chalmers referred to as the expulsive power of a new affection. He gives all of these examples of how in our lives we will have a love of something. And then that love is displaced by a love of something higher. And something better. And something more significant. And that's how love shifts in our heart. That's how the stack of the hierarchy of loves ultimately gets changed. [ 20 : 57 ] Whatever sits at the top of that stack has to be displaced. And something else has to come in and fill it. Right? So he says what cannot be destroyed. We can't destroy the love that we have for things.

May be dispossessed. The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one. In other words, our hearts have to be captivated by a new love that so far surpasses anything else we have ever loved that it all pales by comparison. And this is why the gospel is such good news. This is why we need Jesus. We ask, how is it possible for us to make the kind of commitment to Jesus that he is calling us to in this passage? And the gospel says, on your own, you can't. On your own, that's impossible. The only way this becomes possible for us is when we realize that Jesus has already made this kind of commitment to us.

It's the only way. When Jesus says in verse 27, Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. What that sounds like he's saying is, You need to be willing to accept the reality of your own suffering and death.

[ 22 : 18 ] Accept the inevitability of that. And prove your devotion to me by being willing to suffer and die for me. But the meaning is utterly transformed because of what Jesus then does.

After saying this, Jesus continues his journey, ultimately leading to the cross. And what we see on the cross is Jesus being willing to suffer and die for us because of his commitment to us.

And so what this means is not that we need to suffer and die for Jesus. It means that we need to identify with Jesus who suffered and died for us. Take up your cross.

Identify with me as I suffer and die for you. And this is exactly what Paul means in Colossians 2 when he says, Of Christians, having been buried with him, meaning Jesus, in baptism, You were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God.

When you put your faith in Jesus and when you were baptized in his name, you die. You die on the cross. And from that moment on, for the rest of your life, no matter how badly you mess up, No matter how much you might be tempted to beat yourself up or feel like God is disappointed in you, God looks at you and says, Why are you troubled by that?

[ 23 : 44 ] You already died for that. You've already paid the price for that. You already died on the cross for that. In Christ. So you're free.

It's why Paul in Romans 8 can say, There's therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And when you realize what Jesus has done for you, When we realize that all of our hope rests not in our ability to commit to him, But in his willingness to commit to us.

And when you realize that that commitment is absolutely unshakable and eternal, And that he committed to us while we were still sinners. As Paul says in Romans, While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He made that commitment when we were looking the other way.

When you realize that, That is what begins to melt your heart. That's what begins to melt down all of these loves in the hierarchy.

And that is what brings about that expulsive power of a new affection. Jesus' affection. We love because he first loved us. And the reason, by the way, That Jesus desires this kind of commitment from us, Is not only to set us free.

[ 24 : 56 ] There's one additional reason that we see here in the text. The reason, the other reason that Jesus wants us to make this kind of commitment, And to be set free by this kind of commitment, Is because that makes us the kind of people that this world most desperately needs.

Verse 34 implies that when you are someone who is completely committed to Jesus In the way that this passage talks about, You become like salt for the world.

You become like salt for the world. And in the ancient world, Salt was used for two primary things, In addition to enhancing flavor. It was used as a preservative, To protect against decay.

And it was used as a fertilizer, To promote growth of things that are good. And so Jesus is saying that committed disciples, People who are all in, Fully sold out for him, That those people are the kind of people who, Wherever they live, Wherever they work, Wherever they are, They are like a preventative against decay in our society.

That those people prevent the kind of decay that would otherwise happen around them. Because of that commitment. And he says they're like a fertilizer. That the good and the true and the beautiful grows up around them Because they've been set free from the tyranny of lesser loves.

[ 26 : 20 ] So Jesus is saying committed disciples are like salt in the world. And to bring this all together, friends, This is what the home campaign is really all about.

This is why commitment matters so much. Because we believe that we are called to be a salty people. A salty community in this city. And we want to be here as long as God would have us be here.

That we want to be salt for many, many, many, many generations. That we might preserve against the decay that happens here. That we might also promote the growth of all good things. All beautiful things.

All true things. That bring glory to God. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you and recognize that none of this is possible apart from you.

I pray that everything we do this morning would be done in light of the commitment that you have made to us in Jesus Christ. That Lord, even when we try to let go.

[ 27 : 17 ] Even when we try to run the other way. You hold on. You pursue. You pour your love and your grace into our lives. And we pray that in light of your love and your commitment and your presence, Lord.

We would be set free from lesser loves. That we would feel able, willing, even excited and delighted to give ourselves fully to you. Lord, we pray this in your son's holy name.

Amen.