

The Discipline of Commitment

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[0 : 00] When I was dating Vivian, we ran rolling in the national park a couple of times.

In the spirit of being equal and not wanting me to do all the driving and all the rolling, I guess also wanted to be a bit more intimate. She would offer to sit next to me and roll with me.

I would always tell her I enjoyed seeing her face more than having her sitting next to me. And I do all the rolling myself. Have you ever rowed a boat with a very uneven force or even on one oar? The boat will just move in circle and never goes anywhere. The two sides need to be equally strong to get somewhere. If you have met Vivian, you will know why I would do the rolling myself. However, I was truly sincere about enjoying seeing her face-to-face. And not just seeing her face while we're dating, we make commitment to marry each other in November 2003, which is a bit more than 15 years ago.

[1 : 10] We've made many different commitments in our lives. If you're a Christian, can you remember the day you turned to Christ? What was the reason that you decided to become a follower of Jesus?

What commitment did you make at that point of decision to follow Jesus for the rest of your life? If you are not yet a Christian or interested to find out more, what are you looking for as you investigate into Christianity?

What are you waiting to find out? Are you waiting to find out what you should do or what you should bring to God as an entry fee? Last week, we looked at disciplines of grace, and today we're going to look at three commitments of discipline.

But before we do so, I want to look at dependence with you. Imagine all the disciplines that we are looking at this few weeks is one side of the boat and one of the oar that we go to roll.

But dependence is the other oar that we need in order for that we'll not just go around and run in a circle as a Christian. We need both discipline and dependence.

[2 : 27] The Westminster Catechism says that the chief and highest goal of human is to glorify God and fully enjoy Him forever. We need both dependence and discipline to achieve the true and full meaning of life.

We were reminded last week that grace of God allowed us to have full assurance that despite the sin that we have done, we are loved and bought by Christ.

By His death, our debts are paid. It's all about what God has done to save and sanctify us. God's grace is unearned, undeserved, but a gift.

Unearned because we did nothing to earn it, undeserved because of our sinful nature, and God's grace transformed all Christians. We form Martin Luther's say, Christians are simultaneously saints and sinners.

In Christ we are saints, in ourselves we are sinners. Keeping these two perspectives about ourselves will help us to be humbly authentic as we follow Jesus.

[3 : 40] As a saint and sinner simultaneously, we need both dependence and discipline to ensure we are going where God intended us to go. They are like the two oars on a rowing boat.

Our oar that sums up all the disciplines and our oar of dependence need to be equal in size and portion. There are many examples in the Bible about dependence.

We will look at one from the Old Testament, from a person called Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a cupbearer to a Persian king, a high-ranking official trusted by the king.

His prestige in society did not lead to self-centeredness or self-sufficiency. Instead, he was genuinely concerned about the well-being of his countrymen and his homeland.

After hearing the reports from his brother of the situation of the Jewish remnant and Jerusalem, it says in Nehemiah 1, verse 4, that when I heard all these things, I sat down and wept.

[4 : 49] For some days I mourned and fast and prayed before the God of heaven. Based on his belief that God keeps his confidence of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, God must be very pleased with him to give him such a high-ranking official job within the palace.

But his concern was not just for himself. He was genuinely, sincerely concerned about God's people and God's name. He considered himself as part of a sinful nation of the Israelites.

And he prayed in verse 6-7, Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel.

I confess that since we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you, we have acted very wickedly towards you, we have not obeyed the commands, decrees, and law you gave your servants, Moses.

He fully entrusts himself to God by praying day and night. He called on God to remember his promises to his people. He prayed in verse 11 for God to make your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.

[6 : 14] He wanted to be successful, not for his own good. But to be able to fix the situation of his homeland. Nehemiah illustrated his dependence on God by his prayer.

And there were two kinds of prayers, planned and spontaneous. It's said he prayed before God day and night for some days, which in fact was about four months before God gave him an answer.

We can assume during that time, he mostly set aside time and planned his day so that he can go to God and pray regularly in between performing his official duty as a king cupbearer.

His planned prayer was with endurance, persistence, and perseverance. And after four months of praying, the king noticed his face look sad.

And he had not been sad in front of the king, so the king asked about the cause of his sadness. And Nehemiah explained to the king in chapter 2, verse 1 to 3, and then the king asked him in verse 4, what is it you want?

[7 : 25] He had prayed for four months, and the opportunity is right there for him to lay before the king his request to go to Jerusalem and rebuild its wall. But before he answered the king, verse 4 says he prayed to the God of heaven.

He offered up an unplanned, spontaneous prayer to God. Nehemiah sent a quick, silent prayer to God as he was opening up his mouth to speak to the king.

He did not just burst out. He did not wait till this moment to pray. He saw a need and persisted in prayer until God's answer. At the same time, he was very conscious of his total dependency of God. So he did not burst out with his request to the king without first praying quickly and silently. Because of his consciousness of his total dependence on God, his quick and silent prayer was a reflex action rather than a planned one.

His planned prayer for four months helped him to depend on God. His spontaneous prayer showed he was authentically humble and dependent. If you have been praying for a pay rise or a change of position for a period of time, and the answer came as a question, what is it you want?

[8 : 49] How would you respond? Would you respectfully pray or do you panic? Nehemiah did not allow his social prestige to get in the way for his genuine concern of his countrymen.

He did not rely on his position to rush into fixing things by his own strength. He depended on God to enable him to be successful. In chapter 2, verse 8, he says, because the gracious hand of God was on me, the king granted my requests.

In the Old Testament, the hand of God upon someone is often referred to the Holy Spirit is at work at that person. Nehemiah set aside each day for planned, persistent, enduring, persevering prayers for four months for God's Holy Spirit to enable him to deal with the situation.

And he prayed spontaneously when God answered his prayer. Prayer helped us to focus our dependency on God instead of our own willpower as we live out our life and bring the assistance of Holy Spirit into our life.

We need both planned and spontaneous prayer, both to help us cultivate a sense of our dependency on God and to receive his help that he sends through his Spirit.

[10 : 17] As we look at different disciplines in this series, remember to balance the boat with ever-increasing or of dependence because in failing to do so, you will only move in circle and will not go anywhere.

Now I would like to talk to you about the three commitments of this discipline and let's turn to Romans 12, verse 1, starting with the first commitment, which is commitment to show

Christ-likeness and resist sin.

Let's read from Romans 12, verse 1. Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your true and proper worship. I quoted Martin Luther, the Reformer, earlier, of his conclusion that Christians are simultaneously saints and sinners.

We are saints in view of what Jesus has done for us, and we are sinners because we still sin every day and many times a day. That is what we are.

[11:26] We are brought by Christ to be a new person. We are saints of God, and we need to commit ourselves in showing Christ-likeness, Christ-like characters in our daily life as we are committed to resist sinful habits.

Paul calls and urges to offer our body as a living sacrifice in view of God's mercy. An offering is once for all, all in, without holding back a shot of action.

At the same time, a living sacrifice means a constant, a constant, repeated dedication that is never to be regretted, a decisive commitment that is continually reaffirmed.

The term in view of God's mercy helped me to think about the time I learned to ride a pushback, which was a very long time ago. I was so concerned about falling and running into other people, I keep looking at the front wheel to make sure I'm okay.

And as I focus so much on this short distance right in front of me, I keep wobbling and eventually fall down because I could not find my balance. And then I was suggested to pick a target in the distance and stop looking so closely in front of me.

[12:48] It was at that point that I found my balance. Our scenes are like that front wheel that are real every day right in front of us. We need to make a commitment to resist it.

However, if we focus on it too much, we will fall even more. We need to fix our eyes on God's mercy and grace. Consider more on how to show our Christ-likeness in our daily life while you're driving, while you're doing your shopping, in your dealing with an interaction with people that God put into your path, with your family and friends, sprouts and children, and your colleagues and fellow students.

There are many occasions in daily life that you can present Christ's character to them in how you love and stand up for righteousness and truth.

In whatever you do, in what your eyes look at, your mouth speaks, your hands and your feet do, in your mind and in your heart, be committed to show Christ-likeness with a feel to God's mercy and grace.

It's almost impossible to resist sins if we are not fully committed to become like Christ, to live out our true identity as a saint, to glorify God and enjoy Him.

[14:16] It seems almost impossible to keep such a commitment and we are often reluctant to make a commitment we know we will not keep. But if you are a Christian, I believe you have once made similar commitment.

Are you confident in telling others that you are Christians? Have you been focusing on the funniness of sin on your pushback of Christian life and wobble and fail?

Or have you lost the focus of God's grace, stopped pedaling completely, only doing things to look like a rider? Find your aim of God's grace again in view of His mercy and start pedaling again and you will realize you are not alone in this journey because God's Spirit is always by our side as we live out Christ-like character and resist sinful behaviors.

This leads to the second commitment we need, a commitment to be led by the Spirit. Let's read on in Romans 12, verse 2. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

We're presented with two alternatives. We are either conforming to the pattern of this world or be transformed by the renewing of our mind. These two alternatives are very hard to realize because we often do not realize that the first one or the second one are being done to us.

[15:52] I do not know about you but I like patterns. In most things I do I like something that I can follow along.

When I cook a new dish I like to look at cookbooks and when I write an essay I need sample essay to give me the structure and guideline. I often look for some foolproof way to do things because I genuinely do not think do not like to think or do not think.

And if I follow a pattern and things did not work at least I can have someone to blame. What kind of pattern are you looking for or are you following in being a Christian?

Do you have a list of things to take off and tell yourself that you are right with God? Can you give a reason to why you do what you do? Do you come to church read the Bible and pray do charity works because they are the right thing to do?

All these show that you are only following a pattern and not having a renewing mind. We are being urged to be transformed by the renewing of our mind and extend through the commitment to be led by the Holy Spirit.

[17:12] How do we know whether we are being led by the Spirit? Remember Nehemiah? He knows because he spent time thinking and praying. When he prays, he can recall what God has done through history.

He meditates on the great and awesomeness of God. He remembers God's promise to his nations and reminds God. God's promise and he did that day and night over a long period of time.

When we talk about meditating on God day and night, it does not mean every moment in life, especially like Nehemiah. We all have works and other duties to fulfill.

We need to commit to turn our mind to God and his word when our mind is free to turn to anything. When you can think about anything you want to think about, what do you think about?

Do you think about your problems or do you engage in mental arguing with someone else or perhaps even allowing your mind to drift into wasteland of impure thoughts?

[18:25] To allow yourself to turn to God and meditate about him, we need to be practical. When we read the Bible, take notes of passages that remind you of God, passages that address issues that you are dealing with in life, address sins that easily entangle you.

Take time and find a way to memorize those passages. Write them on your hand in a card to keep on you or on your desk. When you have God's words in you or near you, when you are free to think about anything, you can think of greatness of God or draw on them to deal with sin when temptation arises.

We can meditate about what the Bible tells us about God, how is it different to what you assume him to be, and how are you going to respond to this new knowledge.

We can reflect on your own life to determine the degree of conformity between your character or conduct to what God has set for his people, and how are you going to respond to this information.

Like Nehemiah, we allow the Spirit to guide us and to bear fruits in our life as we meditate on God's word and pray day and night, and our mind will be renewed and our life will be transformed.

[19:50] And finally, we need commitment to search God's word. Let's follow on with Romans 12 verse 2. Then you'll be able to test and prove what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will.

As we commit ourselves to meditate on God and the Bible, we need to be confident that the Bible do tell us about God's will. We will not be able to test and approve God's good, pleasing, and perfect will if we are not committed to search and examine the scripture to confirm what we heard is in fact the truth of God.

As mentioned last week, God has a multitude of options to show us his will, especially when ours is not in line with his. He uses preaching words of someone in our community group or a friend to correct and train us.

Our commitment should be like the period in Acts 17. They received the message with great eagerness and examined the scripture every day to see if what they heard was true.

To be able to receive God's message with great eagerness and to allow ourselves to examine it, we need to be a person that is quick to listen and slow to speak.

[21:20] We need to listen and revisit what has been said. Imagine we only rely on listening to God's word for 20 to 30 minutes on Sunday once a week to be healthy and grow spiritually.

It's like having only one meal a week and starving yourself for the rest of the time. We will become spiritually anorexic. If we let our busy life get into our way to search into God's word, we will be left desperately wanting.

The word of God is the fruit of the spirit without which it would be impossible for us to become holy and be like God. Our attitude and commitment to the word of God should be like a tree planted by streams of water which uses fruits in season to glorify God.

a commitment to a good spiritual diet is so important and most of us know that. However, as you open the Bible, are you at a loss in where to start reading?

Should I start from the Old Testament or one of the Gospels? As you are reading more, what should you do when there are things that seem not in unison or words still contradict each other? [22 : 41] It is at those points that we need to use our arc of dependency to keep us on course. Bring those issues to God in prayer, speak with each other within God's families to ask for suggestions, but most importantly, remember that we are not alone in our journey.

The Spirit of God is always by our side. God's Spirit enables us to be successful in pleasing God and to live out His will.

I am so glad that God is not like me. He will not ask me to sit on the other side of the boat and do all the rowing himself and make me feel useless. God involves us to sit next to Him and do the rowing without discipline.

On the same time, rely on Him to do the rowing on the side of the dependents. even though there is such a great mismatch of strength, the boats can and will always get to where God wants us to go if we keep rowing and paddling.

Because God knows exactly how much strength we have and He will match it to a point to keep the boats on course. Our tendency is to even out all our disciplines on both sides.

[23 : 58] We lie on our own strength. It will work in a very short period. But you will be so exhausted and you cannot go any further. God does not want that to happen to us.

In His mercy, He wants us to glorify Him and at the same time fully enjoy Him forever. He's there sitting next to us and work with us to get there.

As we look at different disciplines in this series, remember to balance the boats with an ever-increasing auger of dependence. Because in failing to do so, you will only move in circles and will not go anyway.

There's a hymn that I learned a long time ago and it helped me to renew my commitment to God, especially when I want to stop growing. It says, I am resolved no longer to linger, charmed by the world's delight.

Things that are higher, things that are no bore. These have elude my sight. I am resolved to go to the Savior, living my sins and strife.

[25 : 08] He is a true one, he is a just one, he has the words of life. I am resolved to follow the Savior, faithful and true each day.

Hear what he said, do what he will, he is a living way. I am resolved to, and who will go with me, come friends, without delay, taught by the Bible, led by the Spirit, will walk the heavenly way.

The chorus say, I will hasten to him, hasten so glad and free, Jesus' greatest and highest, I will come to thee. If you're a Christian, can you remember what commitment you made on the day you turned to Christ?

Let's live out those commitments again in your life to glorify God and fully enjoy him. And if you have been searching and investigating about Christianity, I hope you join on this heavenly way soon.

Thank you.