

Letting Go of Mediocrity To Be Set Free Sermon

3/11/2018

1. From a scale of 0 to 10 (with 0 being an atheist) and 10 representing a willingness to give your life up for your commitment to Jesus Christ) where would you rate yourself right now?
2. Secondly, where would you like to be in your commitment level to Jesus Christ?
3. Lastly, what would it take to get to where you want to be?

This level of commitment is what I want to talk about this morning.

It's pretty clear early on in Scripture what level of commitment God desires and expects from His followers. When God first gives the Torah to the Israelites He specifically said, *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (NIV)) Not a lot of ambiguity in that command. On our previous scale, God clearly demands that we be a 10 – all in.

This principle is reiterated by the prophet Jeremiah when he said: *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.* (Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV))

When God set up the sacrificial system He required that they offer up to God the first fruits of their harvest (right off the top) and if it was an animal sacrifice it was required to be without defect or blemish. God's not interested in our gift of leftovers to Him. But often that's exactly what happened over and over again throughout the Old Testament. Many times the Israelites thought it would be okay to serve God but also serve other gods of the land – just to cover their bases, in case Jehovah God wasn't listening to their prayers maybe one of these other gods would. They thought it should be all right if they served God part-time. And they took that same approach regarding their sacrifices. Often we see God judging them because of their casual approach to Him.

- Through the prophet Haggai, God addresses the fact that God brought them back out of captivity in Babylon to rebuild the temple and serve Him. They successfully laid the foundation of the temple in 536 B.C. but then encountered opposition and quit their rebuilding efforts. 16 years later God saw them and they'd all built nice homes for themselves and were living comfortably but they'd never returned to building the temple. God judges them for their lack of commitment to rebuilding His house instead of making it a priority to build their own homes. They respond to God's word of warning and they finish rebuilding the temple in 516 B.C.
- Then through the prophet Malachi we get a glimpse into what's happening now that the temple has been rebuilt. They are worshipping in the temple but the tithes to God were being ignored, the Sabbath wasn't being observed, people were intermarrying with foreigners and the priests had become corrupt. And when they actually did offer up sacrifices they weren't giving God the best but rather the lame, diseased and injured animals. God says, "Try offering those sickly animals up to your governor and see if He'd accept them. (Malachi 1:6-8)

When we get into the New Testament we see the same level of commitment required by Jesus in our commitment to God. When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus repeats the level of commitment God had required in the Old Testament.

Matthew 22:37-38 (NIV) *Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment.*

At another time Jesus said *"No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."* (Luke 9:62 (NIV)) That's a sign of a divided heart.

And yet again Jesus taught: *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it."* **Luke 9:23-24 (NIV)** It's pretty clear that a part time follower of his is not an

option. You've either got to be all in or not at all. Later on in Luke's gospel, Jesus repeats a shorter version of this but right before the taking up your cross talk he drops a bombshell when he says: **Luke 14:26-27 (NIV)** *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.* It's a bit confusing this talk about hating our mother and father and siblings but Jesus is stating that our love for him must have no equals in this life. It doesn't mean that you can't love your family members, but that your love for God needs to be so much stronger than any other love you have in your life.

At one point Jesus pointed out this level of commitment when they observed a widow put in two small copper coins into the temple treasury and Jesus said: *"Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They gave all out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on."* (Mark 12:44)

And it appears that often when individuals became grateful followers of Jesus, they pretty quickly became these types of followers of Jesus.

- **Zacchaeus** – who wasn't a follower of Jesus until he invited himself over to his house for lunch. After they'd dined and talked with each other Zacchaeus stands up and declares: *"Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."* (Luke 19:8)
- One time, while at a party, **a sinful woman**, came and anointed Jesus with a jar of very expensive perfume from head to his feet and then proceeded to wipe his feet with her tears and hair. And Matthew makes an editorial note that the value of this bottle of perfume would have been worth **a years wages**. (Mark 14:3-9)

Let's just stop a minute and put back onto the screen our very first slide and ask, where those people who you work with or attend school with or your neighbors or friends – where would they rate your commitment to Jesus? There was no fuzziness where Zacchaeus or this sinful woman's commitment was from an outsiders perspective.

When we get to the **early church** and the writings they all stress the importance of the level of commitment we make to Jesus Christ and how that should be reflected in the way we live our lives.

The **apostle Paul** wrote to the Christians in Rome these words:

Romans 12:1 (NIV) *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.* Very similar to Jesus call to daily deny ourselves and take up a cross and follow Him. Let me point out that if you take this seriously, you can't part way offer up yourself as a sacrifice to God. A sacrifice, by the essence of it's definition, needs to be dead. Not just partially given to God but given all the way.

Then later in that same 12th chapter of Romans Paul continues on with this call:

Romans 12:11 (NIV) *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.*

I want to spend a couple of minutes on this Scripture because it has some powerful instruction for each of us to grasp and apply to our lives.

- The word for **"lacking"** there means to be lethargic, apathetic, lukewarm, lazy or slow to act. It's the same word that Jesus uses to describe the "wicked lazy servant" in the parable of the talents. This person might occasionally attend church and might even read their Bible every now and then. When the offering plate is passed they open up their wallet and grab a dollar to give to God and think they are being generous and that God ought to be grateful. Paul says don't be that way when it comes to you "zeal" for the Lord.

- “**Zeal**”, in contrast to “**lacking**” denotes someone who is quick to move in the interests or another. They move with a sense of cause, urgency or haste. It conveys the sense of doing something with eagerness.
- “**but keep your spiritual fervor**” = the word for “**fervor**” is the Greek word **zeo** which indicates **an eagerness, a striving or enthusiasm**. Originally this word meant **to boil**. This is a picture of a person so enthusiastic about their task that they can hardly contain their excitement.

This word can also convey the idea of being **jealous** for someone or something. And while we typically think of jealousy as being a negative thing, it can also convey the idea of a very strong desire for something. God is described often throughout the Old Testament as a jealous God, in the sense that He wants you with all of His being and doesn't want anyone else to compete for His love for you and your love for Him.

And if you read through the rest of Paul's epistles carefully you'll see this emphasis on giving God everything we've got repeated often.

Colossians 3:23 (NIV) *Whatever you do, work at it with **all your heart**, as working for the Lord, not for human masters*

Titus 2:14 (NIV) *Jesus gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, **eager** to do what is good.*

Philippians 3:13-14 (NIV) *Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and **straining toward what is ahead**, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.* Paul is talking about much greater effort than merely showing up most Sundays to church service and occasionally read his Bible and pray. He's talking about an all out effort given each and every day to serve God with all He's got.

This idea of straining toward what is ahead it reminded me of the exciting race in the recent Olympics when our very own, **Jessie Diggins**, won the cross-country women's team sprint.

As she headed up the steepest, most grueling hill of her life in third place, Jessie Diggins thought to herself just winning an Olympic medal was no longer good enough. The Afton native wanted more. She wanted gold.

Diggins dug deep, remembering all the years of training she had put in, and of all her teammates waiting for her at the finish line to bring home the United States' first medal ever in women's cross-country skiing — and then she let loose.

Diggins reached the peak of the hill in third place but sped past the Norway skier on the last big, winding downhill. She rounded the final corner and took dead aim at Sweden's Stina Nilsson on the final 100-meter homestretch.

The crowd in the grandstand was on its feet sensing history, and at that moment Diggins said she felt “*unstoppable*.”

“*Around that final corner I felt like I was uncoiling a spring and letting it go,*” Diggins said. “*Giving it everything I had, digging as deep as I could and putting it all out there. When your team is counting on you, you don't give up ever.*” Diggins certainly didn't give up.

She blew by Nilsson in a blur to capture gold in the team sprint, bringing the United States its first gold medal ever in cross-country skiing.

That's the kind of effort Paul talks about giving in his chasing after Jesus Christ. And yet, just to be clear, Paul recognizes that this isn't totally his own effort. That he's working with Christ towards this end.

Colossians 1:28-29 (NIV) *Jesus is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end **I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.***

Christ wants all of us to give it all we've got in our pursuit of a relationship with Him and He works with us and in us to achieve this end result.

The apostle Peter also joins in with encouraging all Christians to give God their total love and effort to the very end.

2 Peter 1:10-11 (NIV) *Therefore, my brothers and sisters, **make every effort** to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

Don't spare any effort to live out your relationship with Jesus Christ. You won't hear any talk from Paul or Peter about coasting or taking it easy in your relationship with Jesus Christ. They were pretty clear that it takes everything you've got to live out this relationship with Jesus.

Sadly, even with all of these instructions to give God everything we've got, when we get to the very end of the Bible, we read of two churches that have failed to do this.

- The **Church in Ephesus** had accomplished a great deal to be proud of:
 - They had many good deeds
 - They'd worked hard and persevered
 - They refused to put up with wicked people
 - They'd been bold enough to stand up to false apostles
 - They'd endured hardships and yet not grow weary

But tragically God says that they had **forsaken their first love**. (**Rev. 2:4-5**) God warns them that if they don't repent He will come and remove their lampstand (which is their witness). God instructs them to repent and do the things that they had done at first.

- The **Church in Laodecia**, (**Revelation 3:19-20**) God says that they are neither hot nor cold and so He's going to spit them out of His mouth. They were materially rich but spiritually poor. His advice to them is to be earnest and repent. See that word "**earnest**"? It's that same Greek word **zoe** which means to be hot or boiling over. God wants them to be boiling over with love, excitement and commitment for Himself.
- And then notice that right after God's call to be boiling hot for Him and repent, He states that He is standing at their door knocking and wants them to open it and invite him in and sit down and share a meal together. In that 1st century culture, to go into someone's house and share a meal conveyed acceptance of that person. That's why Jesus often got into so much trouble for eating with sinners in their homes. Because the religious leaders of the time had already written them off as not acceptable to God. And here was a man claiming to be from God eating with them and thereby conveying acceptance of them. And that's exactly the point in this verse. While God is sitting on judgment on the Christians in this church at Laodecia, He hasn't written them off. He wants to come into their house and eat and live and begin the process of restoring that red hot love for Himself that they once had.

And God is making the same offer to each of you this morning. Where are you on that continuum of your commitment level to Christ. Is it possible that God's reaching out to you this morning and knocking on the door of your life and wanting to come in and begin to reveal Himself more fully to you so that as you behold Jesus in all of His love and compassion and grace and forgiveness that the fires of love will begin to burn brightly and hot once again and it will draw you deeper into a relationship with Him? What will be your response?

So, what if that's you and you want to be a 10 instead of a 5 in your commitment and passion level for Christ? What do you do? What if you feel like you've settled recently in your walk with the Lord and are not giving it your all - what do you do?

Let me quickly give you three action steps:

1. **Pray for God to deepen your level of commitment and increase your love for Him.**
2. **Spend more time with Jesus**, read through the Gospels slowly and picture Jesus as you do. Notice carefully how He treated people who were told they didn't matter to God and thank Jesus that you mattered enough to Him for Him to die for your sins on the cross and that He is seated at the Father's right hand and waiting for you to open that door and begin that deepening process. Spend more time also in prayer – talking and listening.
3. **Hang around other Christians who are on fire for the Lord.** Zeal for the Lord is contagious and can be caught.
4. **Tell someone else about your love for Jesus.** Sharing your faith with others will stretch you but it will also be an opportunity to watch God work in someone else's life. And it takes the focus off of you and onto trusting in Jesus. And nothing is more exhilarating than watching someone else come to know the love God has for them. And that's where this sermon ends - on a focus on missions. Missions isn't just meant to be about telling others about Jesus, like a salesman would tell someone about their product they are trying to sell. And way too often evangelism has been treated like that. Evangelism and missions is first and foremost about someone who's zealously in love with Jesus and is boiling over on the inside with excitement and out of that boiling they can't help but tell others about Jesus. If we all would strive to get to that point, the witness of this church will explode outside of the walls of this church and reach all over the world.

I'll end with the following quote:

"All other passions build upon or flow from your passion for Jesus. A passion for souls grows out of a passion for Christ. A passion for missions builds upon a passion for Christ. The most crucial danger to a Christian, whatever his role, is to lack a passion of Christ. The most direct route to personal renewal and new effectiveness is a new all-consuming passion for Jesus. Lord, give us this passion, whatever the cost!"

- Wesley L. Duewel

Sing a hymn of invitation

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Scale of Commitment to Jesus Christ

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1. Where would you rate your commitment to Jesus Christ?
2. Where would you like to be in your commitment to Jesus Christ?
3. What would it take to get to where you want to be?

According to Deut. 6:4-5, how much commitment is required of us?

Who can you think of in the Old Testament who demonstrated a 10?

According to Jesus what is the level of commitment required of us?

Who can you think of in the New Testament who demonstrated a 10?

“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.” (Romans 12:11)

What does the word *“lacking”* mean?

What does the word *“zeal”* mean?

What does the word *“fervor”* mean?

Action Steps for Deepening Your Commitment Level:

1. _____ for God to deepen your level of commitment and increase your _____ for Him.
2. Spend more _____ with _____.
3. Hang around other _____ who are _____ for the Lord.
4. _____ someone else about your love for Jesus.

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