

*Filling the Bucket to Overflowing*

**Luke 9:18-27**

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We've had an exciting time looking at the *Treasures of the Transformed Life* during these past forty days. You'll recall that six weeks ago, we began our forty-day study by discussing the importance of commitment. Now we have an opportunity to make some commitments today. We began this series with the idea of commitment as priming the pump so the water will start to flow. We've talked about prayers, presence, gifts, and service. And today we're going to celebrate and turn in commitment cards and forms where we've indicated our personal, specific commitments in these areas.

Commitment is very important. No one would actually begin working for a company unless the paperwork indicating the agreement had been processed. Marriage is the same way. Suppose someone proposes to you, and you say yes. You have agreement. But if sometime before the marriage ceremony, one of you says, "Wait. I'm not ready to get married," well, then, you don't have a commitment. You have the intention, but no true resolve and promise. You wouldn't begin a marriage that way, would you? If a student selects a college and gets all the facts necessary to attend, but fails to sign up for classes, then that student isn't committed. They're not part of that college community.

Today is Commitment Sunday. It's a day for making specific commitments about how we're going to allow God to use us through prayer, attendance, giving, and service. Next week we'll talk about witness and a way to commit to that.

We were encouraged this past week about filling the bucket to overflowing. David exclaims in Psalm 23, "My cup overflows." Jesus promises to give living water that truly satisfies. He doesn't dispense it in an eyedropper; he pours out life that fills us and overflows. Our commitment is one way we open up to receive God's abundant blessings of life, peace, joy, and every good thing God wants to give.

As we prepare to return our commitment cards and service commitment forms, let's remember that we make a commitment because God first makes a commitment to us. We're not initiating this commitment; God has already done that through Jesus. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

The psalmist David said, "He always stands by his covenant / the commitment he made to a thousand generations" (Ps 105:8 NLT). When God makes a commitment, he stands by it.

Today we have an opportunity to commit to our church and respond to the covenant that God has made with us in a way that indicates how we choose to experience the treasures of the transformed life.

God expects us to be committed to him. He sent his Son into the world with the expectation that we would respond. We don't have to respond; we can choose to reject God's covenant, but God really expects us to respond and receive it. Let's consider five things this kind of commitment includes.

First, commitment involves *establishing priorities*. We're assured in Matthew 6:33: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Someone may be wondering, "Could I make a commitment of a tithe or more?" You can't possibly outgive God. Or maybe God's calling you to serve in some specific area, and you might be questioning, "Can I do that?" God never calls us to serve unless he also supplies everything we need to be a good steward of that responsibility. You might be considering a bold commitment for church attendance next year, or a commitment for praying. God will make a way and God will provide. You make these things a priority, and God will provide everything you need to carry them out.

We need a desire, a passion for God—to know, love, worship and serve God alone. God isn't something we add to our already busy lives. God is our life. I once heard a man talking about making a list of his

priorities. He worked God in somewhere on the list. Then he heard God speaking in his heart, "I don't want to be *on* your list. I want to *be* your list."

Making God our priority makes it possible to be committed to other people in our lives. Loving God with all we are sets us free to love others more purely and more freely. Commitment helps us establish our priorities. What's really first in our lives? What we put on these cards and forms indicates what our priorities are.

I once read a story about a missionary at the end of his career describing how God had called him. When he was young, one day he went into the church sanctuary determined to find what God wanted him to do with his life. He began writing on a piece of paper all the things he would be willing to do for God: preach, teach, be a missionary, and so forth. Then he signed his name to show his commitment. As he prayed over his list, God said, "That's not the kind of commitment I want. Tear up that paper." So he did. Then God said, "Now take out a blank sheet of paper, sign your name to it and let me fill it in." He did that. Concluding his testimony, the old missionary said, "For the last forty years, God has been filling in that paper" (in James Dobson, *Emotions—Can You Trust Them?*).

Can we give God the blank paper of our lives? That's our basic commitment of ourselves to the Lord. Within that commitment, today we give God the specific commitments we're making on these cards and forms. Will we give ourselves to God and, with him as our priority, let him guide us in all our commitments?

Second, commitment involves *sacrifice*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great Lutheran pastor who was executed by the Nazis during World War II, wrote about our tendency to avoid sacrifice. He called it "cheap grace."

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

<https://www.azquotes.com/quote/365928>

There's no way around the sacrifice that real commitment involves. Jesus said:

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)

If we try to save things for ourselves, we actually lose them. But if we're willing to lose ourselves in commitment with our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness, then we'll discover how much of the transformed life—the freedom and the treasure—we'll receive. Commitment involves sacrifice, but that shouldn't discourage us. We've found the pearl of great price; are we willing, by God's authority, to go and to get it, to give everything for it? Commitment involves sacrifice.

Third: commitment involves *planning ahead and looking to the future as members of a local church*. Local churches are the instruments God chooses to use. God intends to work through people like us. Commitment helps us to join in God's work. And it helps us plan both individually and corporately. The service commitment forms we submit will help the church plan how to do ministry by knowing where we're going to serve. Planning ahead allows us to know where we're going.

But committing doesn't just benefit the church. We've learned through this study that it also benefits us. How can God push back the financial limitations we've set unless we make some commitments? God will open windows of opportunities when we respond by making financial commitments or commitments to pray.

God will provide everything that's necessary for us to follow through when we follow his direction in how he wants us to make these commitments. It helps to plan ahead.

When a church knows who's going to serve, what the financial commitment is, which people are going to be praying in this area, and that it can depend on people being present for worship, powerful things

happen. If we can push back the boundaries that sometimes have limited the church, God's Holy Spirit will work through it. Commitment involves planning ahead.

Fourth, commitment involves *making some choices*. We have to choose what's really important. Every Sunday morning when we get up, we're going to make a choice as to whether or not we'll go to worship. If we've already made a commitment to be in worship, say forty-eight times during the year, then we don't really have to make that choice when we get up in the morning. We already know what we're going to do. If we make a commitment to tithe and give gifts, when our paycheck comes in, we already know what our commitment involves. We've already made some choices.

Let's make good choices. A year from now, where you are in the growth of your Christian faith will be directly related to how bold your commitments are today. Every choice has a consequence.

Joshua exhorted the people of Israel to have reverence for the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. "...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.... [A]s for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (Josh 24:14-15). You're making some choices with your commitment forms and cards. They're going to provide a great opportunity for families to make good choices together. They also offer great opportunities to teach our youth and children about choices.

Fifth, commitment means *finishing the task, staying the course*. Paul encourages us to persevere when he says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Tim 4:7-8). Earlier, he wrote: "Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him" (2 Tim 2:11-12). Commitment ensures that we grow in our Christian faith.

The combined vehicle of these commitments and the study we just finished is a vital part of taking the steps necessary to move us toward being fully devoted followers of Jesus. We're growing in the Christian faith, and our church is giving us an opportunity, through this study on commitment and the transformed life, to make a bold move forward toward Christian maturity and wholeness, toward becoming more like Jesus.

So, commitment involves establishing priorities, sacrifice, and planning ahead. It involves making choices and then staying the course. It's what God expects of us.

There's another note in all of this. *God expects us to be committed to each other.* If the local church is to be the instrument God will use, we need to be a team. Commitment helps us join hands together, encouraging and offering accountability as the New Testament tells us to do: "encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thess 5:11). Romans 15:7 says to "accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you." And we're to "live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited" (Rom 12:16).

In the church, we're all different. We don't all share the same interests or the same gifts. But we're a team when the whole group comes together and each person is able to use his or her resources and gifts in an area of interest to them. When that happens, the church will come together as a solid unit.

Romans 12:10 says, "Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves." Our congregation is going to be so much stronger. We're going to reach out in new and exciting ways. People are going to come into relationship with Jesus Christ. Our youth and children are going to be disciples. There are amazing possibilities for the church when we're responsible in our commitments of prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness—and we're committed to each other.

Would you say today, "God, what do you want me to do, and how do you want me to pray? How do you want me to attend? How do you want

me to give of my financial resources? How and where do you want me to serve?"

What God offers is far more valuable than monetary treasure. God offers life. It's the abundant life with a capital L, and it involves not only this life but all of eternity. It's a deeper relationship with God, with your spouse, your children, your church; it's freedom from fear; it's provision for our needs and the ability to be generous; it's the peace that passes understanding. God offers more than we knew we were thirsty for. God is "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph 3:20).

What a great day to be a part of this church! What a great day to have an opportunity to return God's tithes, to volunteer for service in the life of the church, and to make a solid commitment concerning attendance and prayer. We'll find God blessing these commitments, empowering us to keep them. God's covenant faithfulness enables our faithfulness. These commitments allow us to be more open to all that God wants to give to us and through us.