

## Bought In or Sold Out?

### Memory Verse for the Week:

*Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 2:12*

Following Jesus is a long-term, passionate endeavor. When Paul writes these words he has already planted churches throughout Asia and Europe. He has written numerous books in the New Testament. He has suffered persecution from all directions and nearly given his life for the Gospel on more than one occasion. He has seen thousands of people come to Christ. And he has grown in intimacy and holiness with God at a depth few people have experienced. Yet with all of this he realizes that he has not “arrived.” He has much more growing, serving and loving to do. He is relentless in his commitment and enduring in his passion for Christ and His Kingdom. Like us, he is not perfect, yet he continues to pursue Christ with everything that is within him. If we are true followers of Christ, we know what it is to be passionate and committed... at least at some point in our lives. We need to learn to sustain this focus, this commitment, this passion for a lifetime. This week ask God to grace you with a renewed commitment and a rekindled passion. There is no such thing as Christ-like half-heartedness and complacency.

**Day #1 [Read 2 Samuel 6:12-23; Philippians 3:7-14]**

*We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.*

C. S. Lewis

What are you passionate about? Are you caught in the trap of loving lesser things, or do you joyfully say with the Psalmist that there is nothing in heaven or earth that you desire besides God (Psalm 73:25). Our passions determine the course of our lives and the shape of our souls (cf. Matthew 6:21; 2 Timothy 4:10). We are people with intellect, will and emotions (head, hand & heart) and Jesus us Lord of them all. Don't minimize your passions... cultivate them to God's glory. When we come face-to-face with God and His Kingdom our passion and will respond or we have not really understood God's truth.

The Kingdom is populated by those who treasure it above all else (Matthew 13:44-46) and is forcefully entered in a decisive act (Luke 16:16). We must learn to sustain this committed passion. Commitment is not vague... it is concrete. It will cause us to live *intentionally* in this world. Passion does not result in a domesticated or diluted life... it fosters *intensity*. Kingdom citizens live with intentionality and intensity. This may *look* different in the life of the "superman" missionary and the "soccer-mom" next door, but at the core there is no difference. Every follower of Christ is to have 100% commitment flowing from 100% passion for Him and His Kingdom, the rest is just details.

Dawson Trotman\*, founder of the Navigators, was a man who understood the importance being intentional in his passions. He lived as a man on a mission. He had a goal to "touch a life a day for God." One night as he climbed into bed he suddenly realized he hadn't spoken to anyone about Christ that day. He got dressed and climbed into his Model T and headed out. Soon he saw a man with a briefcase who had just missed his train home. The man gladly accepted a ride. After introductions, Dawson said, "You may not believe this, but I got out of bed to come down here. It's a rule of my life never to end the day without sharing with someone the most wonderful thing in life. I am a Christian." Instead of laughing, the man listened intently, and before the ride was over he said, "Twenty years ago I started to search for God. I've gone to church nearly every Sunday for twenty years. Tonight you have told me about what I've been looking for." The man's search ended that night. We are all "on a mission" to become like Jesus and bring others to him. Are you passionate enough to shape your life around it?

Passion brings intensity. In 1727 an intense Spiritual movement began among the Moravian people with a prayer meeting that lasted for 100 years (literally!). They lived by a simple, but powerful confession: "I have one passion; it is Jesus, Jesus only." After an incredible period of prayer they began a practice known as the "hourly intercession".

Everyone took turns praying to God for “all the work and wants of His church” so that there was never a time when someone was not interceding. As their passion grew they looked outward. They adopted the motto: “Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow him.” They lived this out through self-denial, sacrifice and prompt obedience. They targeted some of the most difficult places to spread the gospel. In 1732, the first two Moravian missionaries; John Dober and David Nitschman set sail from Europe to the Danish West Indies. Their mission: to reach the slaves there. Their strategy: to sell themselves into slavery! That’s intense! Later Moravian missionaries sailed to America with John Wesley. He was so impressed with one of their hymns that he translated it into English.

### **God Will Lift Up Your Head**

*Give to the wind your fear.  
Hope and be undismayed.  
God hears your sighs and counts your tears.  
God will lift up, God will lift up, lift up your head.  
Leave to His sovereign sway  
To choose and to command.  
Then shall we wandering on His way  
Know how wise and how strong...  
God will lift up your head.  
Through waves and clouds and storms,  
He gently clears the way.  
Wait because in His time,  
So shall this night, soon end in joy.*

The group Jars of Clay remade the song recently and said this:\*\* “The Moravians were selling themselves into slavery so they could be a witness to their masters of God's love and his work. That just blows our mind today. Today's all about freedom and self-discovery. We would never dream of the concept. And they were on a boat with John Wesley to America. These Moravians would come up at the same time every day and sing these hymns in German. And so John Wesley translated them into English... [Our prayer is that everyone will have this] battle cry, that God will lift up my head. You can defeat me and enslave me, but at the end of the day God is my help and my refuge.”

How’s your passion? ...Your commitment? Are you living with focused intentionality and spiritual intensity? Do you find any area of your life where you resonate with David and Paul in today’s readings? Have you “domesticated” or “diluted” your faith because of the people around you, distractions, or the siren call of lesser things? Are you willing to be fired-up about God and His Kingdom work in the world? Are you willing to worship Him without concern for how others look at you? Are you willing to turn your back on whatever you have called gain in order to pursue Christ and His agenda for your life above all else. Do you get as excited about God as you do about a really great sale at your favorite department store? Do you want to jump up and cheer and high-five as

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much when someone comes to Christ or you witness his grace in another's life as you do when your team scores in the Super Bowl? Passionate commitment is a matter of the heart. It's not just for some group of "super-Christians," it is God's desire for us all.

[\*Taken from Trotman's biography, *Daws*; \*\*Interview in *Christian History Newsletter*]

**Day #2 [Read Haggai 1; 2 Corinthians 8:7-11, 9:1-5]**

- inertia:*
1. A body at rest, tends to remain at rest and resists movement
  2. A Christian at ease, tends to remain at ease and resists movement
- entropy:*
1. Self-contained systems tend toward disorder and lose energy over time
  2. Self-contained Christians tend toward disorder and lose energy over time.

Inertia and entropy are universal physical laws. They are also active in the spiritual life of every believer in Jesus Christ. Good intentions too often do not translate into good actions. Scripture input is sometimes short-circuited and does not result in Christ-like output. Often we know what we are to do, who we are to become, how we are to live... and yet, somewhere between vision and execution there is a breakdown.

In 2003, our leadership team felt impressed to establish a prayer/faith goal to ask God for 100 people to come to faith between September and December. No one claimed to have “a direct pipeline” to God about this but it seemed right to ask for something concrete. We believed being specific would make us more deliberate in our prayers and our actions. For me, that was our first “mistake”. Sharing it with my wife was my second!

God had allowed me to lead many people to Him, but my desires and intentions in this area were far ahead of my lifestyle. I was personally very excited because I thought this was a key way God wanted to grow our congregation. I envisioned many people getting serious about sharing their faith and many new believers resulting. One hundred people in four months was a lot for our congregation. We hadn’t seen that many new births in the prior several years combined... but if everyone reached out, why not? The number was beside the point anyway, we believed God would bless as desire became action.

My wife has “prophetic elbows” and every once in a while she plants one in my ribs. This was one of those times. She asked me a question that was so practical and direct it stopped me dead in my tracks. “You are the pastor, how many people are you going to try to reach?” I squirmed under the point of her question, but she had pinned me. How could I encourage others to be specific and intentional if I remained vague and indefinite? “I dunno. What do you think?” My reply was a naïve invitation to finish me off. God used her first question to set me up for the knock-out blow. “I think you ought to pray for ten people.” Stunned, I argued, “Ten! That’s insane. Are you serious?” She responded quietly, “Yes, I am. You should at least pray about it.” Oh she was good! How could I say no to that? And that’s when God stripped my mask. I had every *desire* to see people come to Christ, but I had *no deliberate plan* to do something to help the process.

After praying I sheepishly agreed with her. I was more than a little bit scared about this. To have integrity in the process I told the congregation on Sunday. Thus began a whirlwind change not just in my life, but in our entire family. It is amazing how a specific commitment acted on can be a channel for God’s grace to flow. I had been developing relationships with non-Christians (I hadn’t been hiding my head in the sand,

I'd simply been reluctant to "pull the trigger"). Now I listened more carefully for signs of spiritual openness and became more intentional in my conversations and prayers.

Monday morning after sharing with the congregation I got an e-mail from a former neighbor. We had tried to reach them before they moved, but when the woman straight up asked me to share the Gospel, I was unprepared and botched it. They moved shortly after this. Her e-mail re-opened the conversation. I called her on Tuesday and by the end of the conversation God had redeemed my failure and she was a new sister in Christ. God opened my eyes to what I had been overlooking as well. We had a custodian (from an outside service) who had asked me significant questions in the months prior. Now I realized he might be spiritually open. On Thursday of the same week I ran into him. Instead of a polite hello, I asked him a spiritual question. Immediately he opened up, and within 45 minutes I was praying with him to receive Christ. In one week I was able to report that God had allowed me to pray with two people to receive Christ. Wow!

More opportunities followed... a neighbor, a new person at church... a man I had been developing relationship with for some time. I became a different person. I have always been an introvert so outreach has always been especially difficult for me, but God was growing me greatly. In fact there was a period of time that fall that if my family did not know where I was they just assumed I was sharing the Gospel with some neighbor and immediately gathered to pray.

This passion and focus transferred to my home as well. My wife and daughters who have always had more boldness found themselves stepping out in new ways. My third grade daughter prayed with a classmate on the playground. That afternoon when she called to tell me this I was expecting it. We had been praying for that friend and that very day I felt moved to pray for her salvation to come before the end of the day. My wife had an opportunity to go speak to a total stranger in the hospital and without giving it a second thought jumped at it. An hour and a half later the lady was a new Christian!

On New Year's Eve we had a big baptismal celebration. I met with the last candidate an hour before the service. He was a man I had led to Christ the month before. His (non-Christian) girlfriend sat in the interview with him. As we spoke her spiritual lights went on. I was 15 minutes late to a service I was supposed to lead, but I had with me a brand new baby Christian! In the end, we saw 50 people come to faith and I had the privilege to pray with 6 that fall. Neither goal was hit... but that was never the point. I believe God led us to be that specific so that we would have to get intentional and active. He used it to overcome our inertia and entropy.

Is there an area of your life where you know God wants you to act, but not much is happening? Are you giving in to inertia? Are you sliding backward with entropy? In Haggai, the people have stopped building the temple they started. In Corinthians, Paul reminds the church to follow through on a financial commitment they made. Prayerfully

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read the two passages and ask God to spotlight what is going on in your own life. Ask Him for the grace to overcome whatever inertia or entropy He exposes to you... then take some decisive step to act! Perhaps you need to share with someone else to help you be accountable. Perhaps you need to pray about some very concrete and measurable steps you can take... not because there is some virtue in picking a number, but because you can't rationalize around the specific.

**Day #3 [Read Daniel 3; Galatians 2:1-14]**

*The surest road to hell is the gradual one - the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.*

C. S. Lewis

The Christian life should have some “bite” to it. In our effort to be winsome and in our desire to show love and grace we must never blunt the edges of God’s piercing truth. In our desire for holiness we must not lower the bar of God’s standards to make it easier to surmount. Minor compromise comes easily to the unresolved... especially when the edges of the path are shrouded in the gray fog of ambiguity. We must guard our integrity trusting the grace of God to help us live attractively as people of absolute standards in a culture that views this as judgmental arrogance and trusting the help of God’s grace for our own lives as we fall short of God’s standards ourselves.

Chuck Colson\*, founder of Prison Fellowship and former top aid to Richard Nixon learned this lesson in the days of Watergate. The unraveling of his powerful life was exactly what God had used to bring him to faith in Christ and now it was the very thing that would test his new faith in Christ. The country was out for blood, and Colson’s was highly prized. He was charged in two different cases with crimes that he did not commit, yet his attorney said he had, at best, a 50/50 chance, given the mood of the country. At one point he was offered a plea bargain on a misdemeanor charge that would result in probation only and would protect his right to practice law (attorneys are automatically disbarred if convicted of a felony). The deal was highly advantageous to him and his attorney wanted him to take it, but he steadfastly refused because he would have to say that he had done things which he had not done.

About a month before the trial, Colson was speaking at a prayer breakfast in Michigan when the Holy Spirit revealed to him that, although he was indeed innocent of all the crimes he was charged with, he was not innocent of wrong moral behavior in the circumstances. When he told his attorney that he wanted to plead guilty to his immoral conduct and try to convince the judge that there was something criminal in it his attorney literally thought he was crazy! His first response was, “I’m taking you to a psychiatrist on Monday.” Colson responded, “Dave I want you to talk to the prosecutor Monday... tell him we want no deal, no strings. Just say I am ready to plead guilty to disseminating derogatory information to the press about Daniel Ellsberg while he was a criminal defendant.” Shapiro (his attorney) argued, “It’s not a crime. How can I plead that for you? No one has ever been charged with that... you are an idiot and you are going to end up in the slammer... I won’t do it.” Colson replied, “Then get me a lawyer who will.”

That Monday, Shapiro met with the prosecuting attorney who quickly agreed to the idea. Now they had to convince the Judge, who was on vacation, that an actual crime was committed. Colson writes, “Over the phone Judge Gesell also cautioned Shapiro and

Merrill (the prosecutor) that he would have to be convinced that what I was pleading to was, in fact, a crime. The plea would be an important precedent. Shapiro thus began the anomalous task of researching legal arguments to persuade a judge that his client was actually guilty of a crime.” To help the process Colson gathered with his closest prayer partners, a small group of high level political officials from both sides of the aisle to pray that the judge would accept his plea. Three of them quickly agreed, but the fourth didn’t like it. “What you are pleading to isn’t any crime, nor do they have a case against you in either indictment... you guys can’t expect me to pray for the judge to accept this.” Colson’s response was simple, “That is just what I want you to do... but only if you feel it in your heart.”

In the end, the judge accepted the plea and legal precedent was set. In the end, Colson went to prison as a felon and lost his right to practice law by pleading guilty to immoral conduct which, up to that time, was not considered a crime instead of going free and maintaining his rights through a plea bargain that was advantageous but not based in truth. As a result, God has used him mightily and one of the great ministries of our day was begun. As a result, the name of Christ was exalted in the world and some small improvements were made to our judicial system. As a result, Colson was greatly blessed by God and is a radically different man today.

How crisply defined are the edges in your life? Are there areas where you are compromising God’s truth in order to fit into a world system that is warped? Are there areas that you are compromising your integrity in order to make life a little “easier”? These are issues that confront the godliest of people. They are areas where the godly sometimes do well other times stumble. As you read today’s passages pray that the Holy Spirit will shine his light on your life and show you areas of compromise or of wavering that could lead to compromise. Ask Him for the grace and faith to take on whatever issues He raises with courage and forceful commitment. Where appropriate, share your wrestlings with someone who can support and encourage you in the process. None of us has this all figured out, but the way forward is not by compromising God’s standards to make them more palatable, it comes through broken and frail people seeking His grace and Spirit’s empowerment to live rightly and to trust Him with the uneven process that unfolds in our lives as we pursue His righteousness.

[\*This story is drawn from Colson’s book, *Born Again*]

**Day #4 [Read 2 Chronicles 26:1-21; 2 Timothy 4:1-18]**

*There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness... [quoting a German philosopher] "The essential thing... [is] that there should be long obedience in the same direction."*

Eugene Peterson

Late in life, Corrie Ten Boom\* (of *Hiding Place* fame) became very ill. She wound up in the hospital and the doctors said she would soon die. A pastor from the city came to pray with her and encourage her in her final hours. He left the hospital believing she would soon be with her Lord. Needless to say he was startled when he ran into her at a department store in town a few weeks later. She was obviously in good health and, of all things, buying new luggage! He couldn't believe that she was well enough to be out of the hospital, much less to travel. He asked her what she was doing. She replied that she had a lot of ministry yet to do in her life and that her old luggage was not up to the challenge. When he probed her further as to why she was even alive, she related a dream that she had one night shortly after his visit.

In her dream an angel came to her and told her that the Father was very pleased with the life she had lived and the ministry she had done. He went on to say that God knew that she was weary with age and illness and that He was happy to receive her into heaven... if she wanted. However, He was also willing to give her a number of additional years on earth if she preferred. If she chose this option life would get significantly harder and more painful for her. She definitely wanted to go to heaven to be with her Lord and had no desire to experience greater suffering, yet before she gave her reply, she asked the angel a question.

At this point she paused and the pastor breathlessly asked, "What was your question?" She replied, "I asked the angel which way my Father would get more glory." The angel had told her that God would be more glorified in her continued life on earth so she promptly chose that option. Corrie woke up from her dream and not long after that she recovered. She had only gotten out of the hospital and wanted to get ready for what God had for her next. At a time in life when many of us choose to shut down, she kicked the door open to an active future. In fact she willingly chose the hard path, because it was the best path.

In our lives it is not only important to begin strong, we must also finish strong. How many of us cut ourselves off from what God wants because of challenges or pain? How many of us lose steam over time and end with a whimper rather than a bang? Our resources, our schedules and our bodies can all be limiting factors on our activities, but nothing should limit our commitment and passion. Nothing should lessen our worship or

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prevent some sort of ministry for His glory. As you read today's passages ask the Holy Spirit if you are on track to be a Uzziah or a Paul. If you need to make life-course corrections, do so. Pray that God would grace you to run the whole race well... to begin the race strong, not to fade or grow weary in the middle and to "kick" your way across the finish line at the end. Be attentive to whatever might be creating drag in your life and as Jesus has demonstrated, "Lay aside the weight... run with endurance the race before you." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

\*[This story was told to me by a person I deemed reliable, but I have not been able to verify the facts]