

## Commitment 014: A Commitment to Endure and Finish

### Carrots, Eggs and Coffee

“A daughter complained to her father about how hard things were for her. “As soon as I solve one problem,” she said, “another one comes up. I’m tired of struggling.” Her father, a chef, took her to the kitchen where he filled three pots with water and placed each on a high fire. Soon the pots came to a boil. In one he placed carrots, in the second, eggs, and in the last, ground coffee beans. He let them sit and boil, without saying a word.

The daughter impatiently waited, wondering what he was doing. After a while, he went over and turned off the burners. He fished out the carrots and placed them in a bowl. He pulled the eggs out and placed them a bowl. He poured the coffee into a bowl. Turning to her he asked, “Darling, what do you see?”

“Carrots, eggs, and coffee,” she replied. He brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they were soft. He then asked her to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg. Finally, he asked her to sip the coffee. She smiled, as she tasted its rich flavor.

She asked, “What does it mean, Father?” He explained that each of them had faced the same adversity - boiling water - but each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard, and unrelenting, but after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg was fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior, but after sitting through the boiling water, its inside hardened. The ground coffee beans were unique, however. By being in the boiling water, they changed the water. He asked his daughter, “When adversity knocks on your door, which are you?”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Resourced from the Internet; “submitted by Eric Reed, managing editor of the “Leadership Journal.””

The Apostle Paul changed countless lives because he endured until he fulfilled the will of God. Like the boiling water, Paul was the catalyst for incredible change in those he touched. His determination to run his race all the way to the end is clearly seen in the Acts narratives that show his determination to keep going. He never let the opposition or hardships of his journey deter him. He was a man on a mission and wouldn't allow anyone or anything to dissuade him. In spite of the tribulation he suffered, Paul never regarded himself as being in hot water. Instead, he saw himself as becoming part of the hot water. Those he touched and continues to touch have been forever changed. He was literally boiling with zeal for Jesus! Paul's epistles often illustrate his mindset. He refused to be denied the prize that awaited him at the end of his journey. He wrote of this in his First Letter to the Corinthians:

*1 Corinthians 9:24 (NKJV)*

*“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.”*

Nearing the end of Paul's life, he waited in a cold cell, imprisoned in Rome, knowing his execution was at hand. He had no hope of there being an acquittal. In this setting, he wrote to his spiritual son Timothy. In this final letter, Paul acknowledged to Timothy that he was finished with the race. He *“fought the good fight.”* He *“kept the faith.”* He completed his assignment from Christ. Now, he looked forward to his eternal reward. It was time to be poured out.

*2 Timothy 4:6-8 (NKJV)*

*“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. {7} I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. {8} Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”*

## It's a Consistently Recorded Commitment.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews provided a parallel set of thoughts to those in 2 Timothy. Both 2 Timothy 4:6-8 and Hebrews 12:1-2 refer to faith in Christ, along with the rewards that follow, when our time on this earth has been completed. There is a striking similarity between the two sets of Scriptures. It's encouraging to know that both of these biblical books carry the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and reflect the heart of God.

In Chapter 12 of Hebrews, we read encouraging words to the church that are filled with the commitment to finish. Keep going. Resist the weight of your journey. Don't allow sin to trap you, taking you off course.

### *Hebrews 12:1-2 (NKJV)*

*"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,{2} looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

## It's a Strong Christian Commitment

As you can see from the Scriptures above, the strength of our commitment to run our race comes from two directions. First, there's an emotional and highly personal appeal in these writings to be like long-distance runners. Press on past all the barriers and temptations. Never becoming sidetracked from the goal. Second, we are reminded of the primary theological truth of salvation. The Scriptures ask us to look to Christ and His work on the cross, knowing He has made available to us the gift of eternal life in the presence of God. This is a reference to the foundations of our faith. So, we see both the personal emotional appeals, sourced from the writers' personal experiences, and theological facts upon which we may confidently find strength to run to the finish without compromise. These two directions of inspiration combine to form a solid argument, encouraging us to finish our commitments without wavering.

*Our commitment to run to the finish should never waver.  
It's not supposed to be optional.*



## A Christ-like Commitment to Endure

### Endurance Turns into Glory

Philip Yancey tells of a letter he received from a friend whose daughter was terminally ill. The mother wrote: "The weekend before she went into the hospital for the last time, she came home all excited about a quotation from William Barclay that her minister had used. She was so taken with it that she had copied it down on a 3x5 card for me: "Endurance is not just the ability to bear a hard thing, but to turn it into glory." She said her minister must have had a hard week, because after he read it he banged the pulpit and then turned his back to them and cried."<sup>2</sup>

The greatest inspiration to finish our commitments is found in the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. He would not be deterred by His circumstances or the emotions He experienced, even though He knew His crucifixion was at hand. His prayer to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane showed that even as He struggled with what He knew was coming, He overcame His emotions and carried through on His commitment to propitiate our sins through His torture and death. This kind of commitment is well beyond normal human understanding. We can rejoice and be thankful for it, but certainly would find it beyond a normal challenge if we had to experience it. God coming to this earth as a baby is beyond our comprehension. How He did this and died for our sins is an even more profound matter.

#### *Philippians 2:5-8 (NKJV)*

*"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, {6} who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, {7} but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. {8} And being*

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<sup>2</sup> Lee Eclov, Lake Forest, Illinois; source: Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God*, Zondervan, 1997, p. 157.

*found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”*

*2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV)*

*“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*

## The Cost of a Commitment to Finish

Most everything worth doing or having carries a price. There is always a cost to pay. In the case of a commitment to finish, the greatest cost may be the sacrifice of personal wants and legitimate needs. Finishing requires keeping the goal or end game prominent in our hearts and minds. This is not always easy. We suffer distractions, detours and barriers that carry the power to stop us from finishing... if we allow them the freedom to do so. Though they may differ, they always find their way into our thinking. It's actually the thoughts they generate that work to stop us.

The battle, though in the mind, is ultimately spiritual. Distractions, detours and barriers will play mind-games with us, except it's never really a game. It's spiritual warfare, and it's a deadly serious struggle for the heart. The solution to having success over them is to take them captive and disallow them to work in your life. Here's how you do it. You knock down the strongholds of human, prideful reasoning, making a way for people to truly know God. Paul understood this and clearly communicated it in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians.

*2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (NLT)*

*“We use God’s mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. {5} We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.”*

As in any demolition of what needs to go, there should follow a new and effective replacement. This is accomplished with the proper building materials. Paul constructed a set of directions for this replacement in his

Epistle to the Philippians. He did it with these verses:

*Philippians 4:8-9 (NKJV)*

*“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. {9} The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”*

Let's list some of Paul's instructions to the Philippians for building this new structure of spiritually enabled thought patterns that replaces the *“human reasoning”* and *“false arguments”* that he wrote of in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5:

1. Think on what's *“true.”*

How do we determine what really is true? We must go to the Bible and check our thoughts against the body of Scriptural instruction and principle that's so clearly available. This will allow us to freely commit to what's true.

2. Think on *“noble”* things.

This means to focus on those things that carry the dignity of God's way of looking at things. It means to have decent, righteous and honorable thoughts, while always being aware of the dangers of those thoughts that are worldly and rebellious. *“Noble”* thoughts confront our carnal natures and yield to what's spiritual. At times, this will require deliberate focus and determination. Part of human nature is to think the worst and not the best. Paul invites us to move up beyond such thinking.

3. Think on what's *“just.”*

For a thought to be *“just”* it must pass the test of telling it to God. It must have the qualities of fairness, and compassion. The motives behind it are pure and beyond reproach. At times this will be a challenging test for any of us.

4. Think on what's *“pure.”*

The potential for purity is a gift from God that accompanies our salvation. Purity is not perfection. Consider it an attitude that says you will be

offended by what offends God. Now, that's a formula for success in the Christian walk! Growing into this attitude is a function of knowing God and desiring to please Him. It is a byproduct of sanctification (Christian growth). It is demonstrated by how we use our thought life in what we say and do. Commitment to what's pure is a commitment to holiness.

5. Think on things that are *“lovely.”*

This is not a reference to physical beauty, but about having thoughts defined by God-pleasing things. Such thoughts align with the characteristics of a godly, righteous life, which is defined by the entire content of Philippians 4:8-9. Consider what you can do to govern your thinking with this God-pleasing combination.

6. Think on *“whatever things are of a good report.”*

Too many of us major on the negatives. We allow the bad or ugly things we see or experience to define our thinking, and thus, our lives. What Paul has written here is that we are to control what we allow to have a home in our minds and hearts. We are to give precedence to those God-pleasing things Paul has listed in Philippians 4:8-9. When properly measured by the Word of God, they will form effective foundations of our understanding. Then, we can commit to them to make a difference in our lives and others we may touch. In doing so, we become our own *“good report.”*

7. Here Paul writes about *“any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy.”*

What qualifies this statement as so full of insight is that it covers a wide range of possibilities of what we can think about. It also suggests that we are to judge for ourselves what we consider will meet the definition of *“virtue”* and *“praiseworthy”* things. If we are true to the Word of God, using it as the final authority in our judgments, we can be sure our thoughts will lead to actions that we will use to make a difference for Jesus and in others He brings to us. This is a *“noble”* commitment and it brings results that are in themselves, *“praiseworthy.”*

The driving spirit behind Paul's life and his words have been and continue to be the model to imitate. Paul demonstrated biblical wisdom to us through his example in Acts and his words in his epistles. The wisdom is there for us to see and then apply. Use it gratefully and effectively. Be careful not to make it less of a priority than it should be. The message is simple: Properly committing to the use of the God-given wisdom you have, with grace and

care, will bring you to an understanding of yourself that will give you peace and fulfillment. If you fail to commit to what God has shown and then given you, you will lose something far beyond what it would have cost to embrace it. You will lose an opportunity to be that shining light God has called you to be. As Matthew 5:16 says, *“Let your light so shine before men that they will see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

## Where Does Personal Sacrifice Fit into Our Commitment to Finish?

It’s a life-long commitment to take it to the finish line. This will include the willing sacrifice of those things that would be barriers to dedicating our lives to being useful to God all the way to the end. What is it we will be called to sacrifice? Quite simply, it’s the sacrifice of many personal priorities for the sake of keeping the commitment we made to honor, serve and follow God. Will you commit to serve, intervene, impart and finish the course God has laid out before you? It’s a *“noble”* and *“just”* call from the throne of heaven. It’s well worth the sacrifice.

*Hebrews 4:14 (NKJV)*

*“For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,”*

*Commitment to finish never shrinks from sacrifice. “Never” means not today, not tomorrow, not any day!*

