



COMMITTED AS CHRIST

*2022 Commitment Series
Figtree Anglican Church*

'And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.'
Luke 14:27

When Jesus Christ emptied himself of heavenly glory, taking on the nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and breathing his last on the cross for us, he modelled unfettered commitment. Such is His love that he cannot love us more, and will not love us less. As we journey together through our commitment series we pray that God may move our hearts, and empower us by His spirit, that we may be found as faithful, adventurous, and compassionate disciples. Disciples who delight in carrying our cross and following our saviour. Disciples who are committed as Christ.

Series Outline

Week 1	Committed as Christ in Treasures	Ezra 1:1-11	Matthew 6:9-13
Week 2	Committed as Christ in Testimony	Ezra 7:8-28	John 4:39-42
Week 3	Committed as Christ in Talents	Nehemiah 1:1-11	Romans 12:6-8
Week 4	Committed as Christ in Time	Nehemiah 7:73b-8:18	Hebrews 13:7-14
Week 5	Committed as Christ in Totality	Nehemiah 12:27-47	Luke 14:26-27

New studies available each week online at figtree.church/ministries/lifegroups



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Study One ***Committed as Christ in Treasures***

You have 2 minutes to design your own movie montage – share with your group a skill you'd love to acquire or a change you'd like to make to yourself. What would be the background song in your movie as you change?

Or what motivates you when things are a challenge?

Read Ezra 1:1-11

1. Using verse 1, along with your combined knowledge of books like Daniel and the very famous Jeremiah 29:11, help one another to construct the context for this book.
2. Consider Cyrus' proclamation (verses 2-4)
 - a. What does Cyrus say of himself (verse 2)? Note both the familiar and peculiar about his statement.
 - b. What option does he give God's people (verse 3)? What is his attitude toward them?
 - c. How is his attitude demonstrated in the command to those remaining local (verse 4)?
3. What led to this extraordinary proclamation from Cyrus?
4. Consider and comment on the groups and their responses to Cyrus' proclamation. (verses 5-6)

5. How does the book explain the response of those who chose to commit themselves to build?
6. How has God demonstrated his faithfulness, power, and providence in this section?

Read Matthew 6:9-13

7. What are some of things the Lord's prayer tells us about God?
8. Methodically think about how this prayer asks God to act upon our heart:
Verse 9 – Your name
Verse 10 – Your will
Verse 11 – Daily bread
Verse 12 – Forgiveness
Verse 13 – Deliverance
9. As you reflect upon how God acted in Ezra's time, and the prayer modelled by Jesus – Where do you suppose true commitment to the Lord begins?
10. In the realm of finances where does commitment to the Lord begin? Are there places you have felt blockages, or empowerment from God in this area of commitment?
11. Is there anything at all that you would love God to work on in your heart that you think would be freeing?

Study One - Leaders Notes

Committed as Christ in Treasures

You have 2 minutes to design your own movie montage – share with your group a skill you'd love to acquire or a change you'd like to make to yourself. What would be the background song in your movie as you change?

A montage is a sequence of change in a movie. Usually set to an inspiring song; beginners become experts, or the mundane get a new look. It's all about big change shown over a short period. You can use this activity for a bit of creative fun, to learn about each other, and be in the mindset of change.

Or what motivates you when things are a challenge?

Members can share where their drive comes from. It may be discipline that has been learnt, or it may be motivation of a goal, it may be the accountability of another. As above we are thinking about the change of going from here to there and the things that hold us back. This might be a simpler option if your group is pressed for time or does not delight in the creative space.

Read Ezra 1:1-11

1. Using verse 1, along with your combined knowledge of books like Daniel and the very famous Jeremiah 29:11, help one another to construct the context for this book.

We find ourselves with the people of the southern kingdom (Judah) in Babylonian exile. They are away from their homeland. You will note however we are not in the time of King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians but of King Cyrus and the Persians. As we saw in Daniel mighty kings and kingdoms come but they also go. The vision's God gave Daniel are playing out. Jeremiah 29:11 'I know the plans I have for you (plural)...' is now playing out too. Some 70 years after God promise through Jeremiah the people in exile have the prospect of returning home and rebuilding. This verse alone offers much in seeing God's faithfulness to promises, and his power to act on them.

2. Consider Cyrus' proclamation (verses 2-4)

a. What does Cyrus say of himself (verse 2)? Note both the familiar and peculiar about his statement.

Cyrus acknowledges himself as recipient of his Kingdom from the God of heaven. (Perhaps he stands on the shoulders of a humbled Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4?) Cyrus understands himself to be the King of kings, holding all the kingdoms of the earth. Cyrus understands that God has appointed him to build a temple. Nothing in the text or beyond suggests any of this is untrue. The language is quite familiar and is found usually in the context of God's Messiah – see Psalm 2, 2 Samuel 7, and with people like David, Solomon, Jesus.

Here it is peculiar to find the language applied to a King of the nations. Combined with what we have seen above in context setting, we see it is God who sets up and tears down Kings and kingdoms.

b. What option does he give God's people (verse 3)? What is his attitude toward them?

The King grants them permission to return to the holy city and build the temple of the Lord. His attitude is not begrudging or coerced (consider Pharaoh at time of the exodus) but of blessing.

c. How is his attitude demonstrated in the command to those remaining local (verse 4)?

He commands provisions be made for those returning by any survivors of the exile.

3. What led to this extraordinary proclamation from Cyrus?

Significantly (and to be repeated) it is that 'the Lord moved the heart' or also translated 'roused his spirit.' Again, the power of God is demonstrated – you may hear an echo of God hardening Pharaoh's heart in Egypt. Once

Study One - Leaders Notes

Committed as Christ in Treasures

more God demonstrates his sovereignty over the kings of the earth, and his provision for His people.

4. Consider and comment on the groups and their responses to Cyrus' proclamation. (verses 5-6)

The family heads of the 2 tribes (Judah is the prominent tribe) plus the Levites, prepared to go build. Why? Once again God has moved the hearts, of them and the people.

There is no protest from the neighbours noted, they provide for the project with valuable gifts. God moves the hearts of the people, they are moved in action, and God does not leave them but sees them provided for too.

5. How does the book explain the response of those who chose to commit themselves to build?

As above, God has moved the hearts.

6. How has God demonstrated his faithfulness, power, and providence in this section?

As seen above, he keeps his promise through Jeremiah – faithful. He demonstrates that the most powerful kings are instruments in His hands – power. He sees that all the people he has moved will have all they need for his purposes by the release of valuable resources. You might find the final inventory of the items taken and returned (verses 7-11) strange. But note these are temple articles – holy to the Lord. Through geography, kingdoms, and almost a century God has seen them preserved and now returned as the holy items. How much more His holy people! What a faithful God!

Read Matthew 6:9-13

7. What are some of things the Lord's prayer tells us about God?

Along with the traits established we see the intimacy of Him as our Father, and his echoing the return from exile his grace and mercy to forgive are on display.

8. Methodically think about how this prayer asks God to act upon our heart:

Verse 9 – Your name – Teach us to revere you.

Verse 10 – Your will – Let our hearts be moved to delight in your will.

Verse 11 – Daily bread – Teach us to trust and rely on your provision daily.

Verse 12 – Forgiveness – Teach us mercy and grace as you have shown.

Verse 13 – Deliverance – Teach us to follow, show us what our passion should be for (evil is simply misdirected and disproportionate passion)

9. As you reflect upon how God acted in Ezra's time, and the prayer modelled by Jesus – Where do you suppose true commitment to the Lord begins?

Surely this begins with spiritual heart surgery. It is not purely about doubling down in discipline, or revving up in motivation, but setting our hearts before the Lord and asking him to change them.

10. In the realm of finances where does commitment to the Lord begin? Are there places you have felt blockages, or empowerment from God in this area of commitment?

Once again it is a state of the heart. Sometimes our hearts need to know the providence of the Lord, that he has given, and he will not abandon us when we return finances to Him in worship. Sometimes our hearts need to know his faithfulness and power to keep his promises and overcome obstacles. He does not call us to give because he needs us, he calls us as an opportunity to trust him and come with him in what he is doing – he calls on us not to burden but to bless. We need to ask him to teach this counter-intuitive reality to our hearts sometimes.

11. Is there anything at all that you would love God to work on in your heart that you think would be freeing?

An opportunity to share and pray as you feel willing too.



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Study Two *Committed as Christ in Testimony*

What is the best thing you have bought in the last 5 years?

The people of the Southern Kingdom of Israel, Judah have been in exile in Babylon. God had moved the heart of the new ruler, King Cyrus of Persia, to allow them to return. The return to Jerusalem and rebuilding of the temple has not been without opposition from Judah's enemies. This included the petitioning of the Persian King Darius (Cyrus successor) to stop them. As the work continues our passage opens in the era of the next King Artaxerxes and the journey of the priest Ezra to Jerusalem.

Read Ezra 7:8-28

If working in a group, divide into 3 groups; Artaxerxes, Darius, and Cyrus. In your groups take on the project of your namesake below. Come back together to discuss your findings before moving on to project Samaria together.

Project Artaxerxes

1. What does verse 11 tell us about the text from verses 12-26? Consider Cyrus' proclamation (Ezra 1:2-4)
2. Summarise the key edicts:
 - Verses 13-14
 - Verses 15-17
 - Verses 18-19
3. How would you summarise the posture of Artaxerxes toward the returning exiles and their God? (verses 21-26)

Project Darius

Read Ezra 6:1-12

1. What does verse 2 tell us about the text from verse 3-5?
2. Summarise the key edicts:
 - Verse 3
 - Verse 4
 - Verse 5
3. How would you summarise the posture of King Darius toward the returning exiles and their God? (verses 6-12)

Project Cyrus

Recall your work in **Ezra 1:1-11** last study – you may like to reread.

1. The Lord moved in King Cyrus' heart – he was moved to two things, what were they? (verse 1)
2. Summarise the key edicts:
 - Verse 2-3
 - Verse 4
 - What further action does Cyrus take in verse 7?
3. How is the moving of the Lord on Cyrus' heart, come to be influential in the time of Ezra's return to Jerusalem?
4. How has this movement been carried over generations of pagan kings?



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Study Two ***Committed as Christ in Testimony***

Project Samaria

Read John 4:39-42

1. What is the original source of the people's belief, why did they come to investigate Jesus?

Project You

1. Discuss what is the unique value of knowing and sharing your own story of how Jesus has acted on your life?

Assignment: Prepare and write your testimony – the 'Your Story' tool below may be useful to you. Over the remaining 3 weeks of the series take some time to hear each person's story from your group.

Is there somebody who has not yet met Jesus you could share your testimony with?

Your Story

Sharing life experiences is a really important part of contemporary culture. People are seeking that which is 'real' and reject anything that comes across as fake. Your story is therefore a powerful tool to show that entering a relationship with Jesus is not an abstract set of beliefs, but a life changing experience. It can create a desire to hear the Gospel.

It's been said, "You can lead a horse to water; you can't make it drink." But you can make a horse thirsty by giving it a salt tablet. Christians are the "salt of the earth" and their salty personal stories make non-Christians thirst for the Water of Life.

The principle focus of your story

- Don't preach – tell the story.
- Don't use generalizations
- Not our sinfulness, but God's faithfulness.
- Your testimony should be God focused.
- Express what God is doing in you – not what you are doing in you.
- Your story shows how God is working in real people today, and takes the discussion out of the merely abstract or theoretical.
- Personalize your story with stories from your own life experiences.
- Give concrete details that make the illustrations come alive.
- People remember specifics, but forget generalities.
- Don't overstress the "before" section, or highlight what you gave up or lost. Focus on what you have gained.

Tips when sharing your story

- Be real
- Identify with your listeners.
- Express the positive benefits of having eternal life.
- Use humour (if appropriate).
- Don't use Christian clichés.
- Speak pictorially; that is, paint a word picture so that people can visualize what you are talking about.
- Remember your body language, just 7% of communication is the words we say, 35% of our communication is our tone of voice and 55% of communication comes through your body language.



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Study Two ***Committed as Christ in Testimony***

BEFORE AND AFTER STORY

If your story is a before and after story these concepts may be helpful in putting it together:

- Loneliness vs. **Friendliness**
- Strife vs. **Love**
- Guilt vs. **Freedom**
- Fear of death vs. **Courage**
- Weakness vs. **Strength**
- Emptiness vs. **Purpose**
- Rejection vs. **Acceptance**
- Fear of Failure vs. **Fulfilment**
- Depression vs. **Hope**
- Rebellion vs. **Obedience**
- Insecurity vs. **Security**

1. Before you were a Christian – what is one concept that describes how life was? (e.g. fear of death, worry etc.)
2. Illustrate that concept with a story from your life.
3. Briefly share the actual story of how you became a Christian. (e.g. a friend shared with me)
4. How did that concept change when you came to know Christ? (e.g. hope, peace)
5. Illustrate that new concept with an actual story from your life.
6. Finish by expressing the assurance and hope you have in Jesus. Ask them if they would talk about that with you.

ALWAYS STORY

1. State one positive life concept that describes the difference Jesus makes in your everyday life.
2. Illustrate that concept with a story from your life.
3. State a second positive life concept that describes the difference Jesus makes in your everyday life.
4. Illustrate that concept with another story from your life.
5. Finish by expressing the assurance and hope you have in Jesus. Ask them if they would talk about that with you.

Study Two - Leader's Notes

Committed as Christ in Testimony

What is the best thing you have bought in the last 5 years?

Much of this study is about testimony or recalling the story. The first question is a chance to practice telling a story.

Read Ezra 7:8-28

Project Artaxerxes

1. What does verse 11 tell us about the text from verses 12-26? Consider Cyrus' proclamation (Ezra 1:2-4)

Verse 11 alerts us that what we are to read is a copy of the letter King Artaxerxes had given Ezra. We are reading the commands and testimony of this King expressed in letter form.

2. Summarise the key edicts:

- **Verses 13-14** – Israelites who wish to go to Jerusalem may go. And you are to seek the ways of your God.
- **Verses 15-17** – You will be provided for, and the provision is for your service to the Lord's temple
- **Verses 18-19** – Worship the Lord, and return to him the Holy items of the temple to the temple

3. How would you summarise the posture of Artaxerxes toward the returning exiles and their God? (verses 21-26)

He is robustly blessing them. He ensures they are provided for, and sent with blessing, and are protected against any dissent.

Project Darius

Read Ezra 6:1-12

1. What does verse 2 tell us about the text from verse 3-5?

This is a scroll – it contains a memorandum from King Cyrus. It is noted and acted upon by King Darius. Note we get our language today of media (as in recording) from the kingdom of the Medes. Who pioneered the practice of keeping records and documents.

2. Summarise the key edicts:

- **Verse 3** – The temple of the God of the Jews is to be rebuilt.
- **Verse 4** – The building of the temple is to be provided for by the royal treasury.
- **Verse 5** – The holy items of the temple are to be returned to the temple

3. How would you summarise the posture of King Darius toward the returning exiles and their God? (verses 6-12)

Darius is supportive and protective of those returning. He provides for them, he instructs that they are not to be interfered with, and he guards his edict with zero tolerance for anyone defying it.

Project Cyrus

Recall your work in **Ezra 1:1-11** last study – You may like to reread.

1. The Lord moved in King Cyrus' heart – he was moved to two things, what where they? (verse 1)

Cyrus was moved to make a proclamation, and to record the proclamation in writing.

2. Summarise the key edicts:

- **Verse 2-3** – Build a temple to the Lord in Jerusalem, allow willing Jews to return to Jerusalem to build.
- **Verse 4** – The people in his locality are to provide for those returning to build.
- **What further action does Cyrus take in verse 7?** He brings out the holy temple articles that have been kept many years in his temple, and gives them to the prince of Judah that they may be returned.

3. How is the moving of the Lord on Cyrus' heart, come to be influential in the time of Ezra's return to Jerusalem?

The Lord moved on Cyrus' heart, and Cyrus proclaimed and recorded the prompting of the Lord. His testimony was kept, and then read by Darius. Darius acted according

Study Two - Leader's Notes

Committed as Christ in Testimony

to his predecessor and once again as King had the edicts recorded on a scroll. Despite the interference of others (Chapter 4-5), Artaxerxes acts also according to the testimony of the Mede kings, and now the Persian King's commands are consistent in the time of Ezra.

4. How has this movement been carried over generations of pagan kings?

God has preserved his message through the testimony of the Median and Persian kings. The moving of Cyrus' heart and the reforming of God's kingdom plan has been held by reliable testimony. Each time we are told that these things were written or recorded, and in the time of the Medes - the people remembered to this day as record keepers in the word media. We speak of media as a way in which information is stored and transmitted.

Project Samaria

Read John 4:39-42

1. What is the original source of the people's belief, why did they come to investigate Jesus?

It was the woman's testimony. She had an interaction with Jesus and recounted it to others. Her testimony provoked them to come and meet him for themselves, to find out more.

Project You

1. Discuss what is the unique value of knowing and sharing your own story of how Jesus has acted on your life?

Assignment: Prepare and write your testimony - the 'Your Story' tool provided may be useful to you. Over the remaining 3 weeks of the series take some time to hear each person's story from your group.

Is there somebody who has not yet met Jesus you could share your testimony with?



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Study Three ***Committed as Christ in Talents***

Read Nehemiah 1:1-11

1. Help us understand where Nehemiah is situated with reference to the exile and return of God's people? (verse 1-2, 11)
 - a. Help us understand 'when' Nehemiah is with reference to the exile and return of God's people? (verse 1, Ezra 7:7-8)
2. What do you recall from the Kings' edicts in the book of Ezra? (Ezra 1, 6, 7)
3. Speculate regarding the report Nehemiah might have hoped to receive about Jerusalem, and progress of the people?
4. What is the content of the report Nehemiah receives? (verse 3)
 - a. Why do you suppose they are in 'trouble'? (verse 3)
 - b. What is their 'disgrace'? (verse 3)
5. Following Nehemiah's confession (verses 5-7), he makes two requests of the Lord. What are they? (verses 8-11)

Read forward to Nehemiah 1:11-2:5.

6. Why is it significant to know Nehemiah was cup bearer to the King in all this?
 - a. Why do you suppose he refers to King Artaxerxes as 'this man' in his prayer? (Verse 1:11)

7. How does the opening chapter of Nehemiah challenge God's people to consider their kingdom building opportunities and responsibilities?

Read Romans 12:6-8

8. What is God's Kingdom expectation of the people he has brought into his family?
9. Which statement suits you best?
 - I don't believe or understand how God has gifted me.
 - God has gifted me but I'm not sure how to serve.
 - God has gifted me but circumstances are prohibitive.
 - God has gifted me but my character needs work.
 - God has gifted me but I need more training.
 - God has gifted me and I'm pleased with how he has deployed me.
10. Based on your most suitable statement above, what should your next step be?

Study Three - Leader's Notes

Committed as Christ in Talents

Read Nehemiah 1:1-11

1. Help us understand where Nehemiah is situated with reference to the exile and return of God's people? (verse 1-2, 11)

Nehemiah is not with the returned exiles in Jerusalem. He remains in Babylon, in the service of the Persian King Artaxerxes. His service to the King is an intimate and trusted one as he is the king's cup bearer. As cup bearer think more along the lines of a bodyguard than a butler. Thus, Nehemiah is dependent upon a report from those coming from Jerusalem, and will have his own hopes and expectations of how things are going.

a. Help us understand 'when' Nehemiah is with reference to the exile and return of God's people? (verse 1, Ezra 7:7-8)

Nehemiah begins his narrative in the 20th year of the Reign of Artaxerxes, we can note that this is some 13 years after Ezra returned to Jerusalem, and many more years since the edicts granting return from the preceding kings Darius, and prior to him Cyrus.

2. What do you recall from the Kings' edicts in the book of Ezra? (Ezra 1, 6, 7)

In summary, the edicts include permission to return to Jerusalem, to rebuild the temple, to be restricted in no way by either resistance or lack of resource, and to return the articles to the temple, to worship the lord, and to do whatever seems best to them in accordance with the will of God with the remaining resources (Ezra 7:18).

3. Speculate regarding the report Nehemiah might have hoped to receive about Jerusalem, and progress of the people?

Nehemiah may have expected a report of great progress, based on the great provisions made, and the time that has elapsed. He might have hoped to have heard of the temple, and indeed the holy city taking real shape in restoration.

4. What is the content of the report Nehemiah receives? (verse 3)

This is not a pleasing report. The only positive (which may compound the negative) is that the people are back. However, they were sent back with purpose, and here is where things are not good. The wall of the city and its gates have not been restored and remain in the state they were left in from the attack of the Babylonians many years ago. Further there is no mention at all of the temple. It is conspicuously absent! What is ominous that here we see a returned people perhaps setting out to rebuild life without God at the centre. Old habits die hard!

a. Why do you suppose they are in 'trouble'? (verse 3)

A city without a wall, is a city without defence! The lack of a wall leaves them exposed. Perhaps beyond the physical trouble, we may understand that they are very much spiritually exposed too. No wall, no mention of the temple, we have a people who have returned and have forgotten to obey and take refuge in their God. Both the wall and the temple are part of God's will for the holy city. God at the centre dwelling with His people, and God as their refuge, fortress and strength. It would appear the people have been inattentive at restoring the physical (and quite practical) representation of both divine blessings. They are exposed, they are unsafe.

b. What is their 'disgrace'? (verse 3)

As above, they are building life without their God. Something, and right now we don't know what, has distracted them from putting their hands to the work of building God's city. Perhaps exile made them homesick but has not done a lot to cause them to seek the Lord.

You may find it useful to confirm this argument by sharing Haggai 1:1-4.

Study Three - Leader's Notes

Committed as Christ in Talents

5. Following Nehemiah's confession (verses 5-7), he makes two requests of the Lord. What are they? (verses 8-11)

Remember his promise to gather a repentant and obedient people no matter where they may be scattered to a place where he may dwell WITH them.

Nehemiah asks that the Lord may give His servant success before 'this man' the king. Nehemiah is asking the God may move see to it that he may become involved in changing things in Jerusalem, he will need the permission of the king.

Read forward to Nehemiah 1:11-2:5.

6. Why is it significant to know Nehemiah was cup bearer to the King in all this?

Nehemiah has no small role. He has obviously gained great trust of the king. Nehemiah is a man with a big and important job. His job is to make sure the king is never poisoned or harmed by his food. It may be that Nehemiah takes the first sip to ensure that the king's cup is not only tasty but not lethal. If Nehemiah thinks his job is important, how much more does Artaxerxes think the job is important! Now Nehemiah is going to go to the king and essentially say, though you have trusted me and put your life in my hands, and I am honoured among the kingdom to be in the king's presence (even on special high occasions – signalled by the presence of the Queen – Nehemiah 2:6) there is a more significant role the Lord calls me to. My work for the lord is higher in priority than my work for the king. Note we do not read that God commanded this of Nehemiah, but that Nehemiah moved by the purposes of God, asks God that it may be so.

a. Why do you suppose he refers to King Artaxerxes as 'this man' in his prayer? (Verse 1:11)

There is no way Nehemiah is cupbearer to the king without having shown loyalty, honour and reverence. However here things are put in perspective. To

Nehemiah, the king of kings Artaxerxes, who's life he guards, is just 'this man' in contrast to the Lord who moves and moulds the hearts of kings and pharaohs.

7. How does the opening chapter of Nehemiah challenge God's people to consider their kingdom building opportunities and responsibilities?

We will be hard pressed to find a friend with a higher stake's role than Nehemiah – yet his priority is service to the kingdom where he sees a need first. At this stage there is nothing in Nehemiah's cv that even suggests he is gifted for the task, but he sees the need to advance God's kingdom – so he presses in. And he does not allow another commitment to get in the way. The people of God are in trouble and disgrace. They are relieved to be home, and have not continued to seek after their God, and work his purposes. The opening chapter here challenges us as people saved into God's kingdom to consider what we are doing as kingdom builders and workers. The chapter is a bold challenge to our priorities, and proactivity in serving the Lord.

Read Romans 12:6-8

8. What is God's Kingdom expectation of the people he has brought into his family?

We recall the context of these verse as 'presenting ourselves as living sacrifices in view of God's great mercy (Romans 12:1; Romans 1-11). God expectations is that we will seize the opportunity to serve as he empowered us to do. Find your thing and get on with it.

9. Which statement suits you best?

The statement may not be perfect, but which is closest? Be brave, be honest, be gracious. Grace is the space for change.



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Study Four Committed as Christ in Time

Discuss these quotes, what do you think?
You may like to consider what causes you to embrace or recoil from what has been said.

'Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.'

– Abraham Lincoln

'I have so much to do today that I'm going to need to spend three hours in prayer in order to be able to get it all done.' – Martin Luther

Read Nehemiah 7:73b-8:18

1. The wall is built, and the people have returned to Jerusalem. How do they choose to restart life as God's people in God's city? (Nehemiah 7:73-8:3)
2. What do you note about the time markers placed around Ezra's reading? (verses 2-8)
 - a. The priority of the reading of God's Torah (Instruction) is demonstrated by a number of elements between verses 2-10. What elements can you see?
 - b. Try to imagine this same occurrence happening in your fellowship? What might prevent it?
3. *"Be still, for this is a holy day..."*
These were the calming words of the Levites. Do these words bring you calm, why or why not? Is there anything you would like to adjust in yourself?

4. What is the result of this dedicated time to the Lord's instruction for the people? (verses 12-18)
 - a. What do you suppose is so significant about these people taking time to dwell in temporary shelters. What might God be teaching them?

Read Hebrews 13:7-13

5. How does verse 7 set God's people up for the preferred outcome described in verse 9-14?
6. How is time a significant factor in verse 7, and the strengthening of God's people?
7. Review the quote from Luther above again. Have your thoughts developed in anyway?
8. As you consider your time with the Lord, and for the Lord's service, do you see any blockages? Is there anything you would like to change?
9. What would be step one in your change plan?
10. Who, besides the Lord, can help you?

Study Four - Leader's Notes

Committed as Christ in Time

Read Nehemiah 7:73b-8:18

- 1. The wall is built, and the people have returned to Jerusalem. How do they choose to restart life as God's people in God's city? (Nehemiah 7:73-8:3)**

On the very first day of the seventh month, they begin their new life by asking Ezra to bring out and read the book of the law of Moses (Torah) to them.

- 2. What do you note about the time markers placed around Ezra's reading? (verses 2-8)**

This is a first fruits exercise, on the first day of the seventh month. It is not a brief reading, but a reading that begins first thing in the morning, and goes till noon.

- a. The priority of the reading of God's Torah (Instruction) is demonstrated by a number of elements between verses 2-10. What elements can you see?**

As noted, this is a first fruits activity, from daybreak on the first day. It is an enduring activity lasting a good many hours. It is read together, with all assembled at the same time, not when convenient to each individual. It is read aloud. The assembly is not just the men, but everyone who could understand. The people don't endure, they listen attentively. Ezra read from an elevated platform, built for the occasion. Ezra reads in the company of elders. All the people stand for the hearing of the word. All the people responded with raised hands and responded that the words were true (Amen). Note the people who returned from exile spoke Aramaic. The word was in Hebrew! The Levites took the time to explain to all what was being said. The people respond in worship.

- b. Try to imagine this same occurrence happening in your fellowship? What might prevent it?**

Discuss in your context.

- 3. "Be still, for this is a holy day..." These were the calming words of the Levites. Do these words bring you calm, why or why not? Is there anything you would like to adjust in yourself?**

Discuss, some of us find the idea of being still and reflecting on the speech of God, and His presence with us stunting, or too slow. Others may naturally find it comforting to do nothing. This is not doing nothing though, this is to sabbath. This is to pause other things and tune into the Lord. Be still draw near to him.

- 4. What is the result of this dedicated time to the Lord's instruction for the people? (verses 12-18)**

It results in much rejoicing. Celebrating with great joy. That is because the words of God are now known to them.

- a. What do you suppose is so significant about these people taking time to dwell in temporary shelters. What might God be teaching them?**

They discover this command from the Lord to celebrate the feast of booths, or tabernacles. Once more taking the time to do this is an effectual sign of God's grace to strengthen their faith. God reminds them in this space of how he led his people, and dwelt and dwells among them.

Read Hebrews 13:7-13

- 5. How does verse 7 set God's people up for the preferred outcome described in verse 9-14?**

We are called much like those in Nehemiah and Ezra's time to pause and remember the leaders who spoke and speak the word of God to us. Further we pause and consider their way of life. It is in recalling and reflecting upon God's word, and the example of it lived that we are set up to not be carried away, and to be strengthened in the hope we have in Jesus who suffered for us.

Study Four - Leader's Notes

Committed as Christ in Time

6. How is time a significant factor in verse 7, and the strengthening of God's people?

As above we pause to remember, to reflect and to consider. And what we consider is not an instantaneous thing, but the outcome of a life lived. This is a period to be observed. Further this is a period to be imitated, not just in an instant but in the period of an intentional life. We recall the time investment that our leaders have made in following the Lord, and teaching and modelling to us as well. None of this happens quickly.

7. Review the quote from Luther above again. Have your thoughts developed in anyway?

Discuss.

8. As you consider your time with the Lord, and for the Lord's service, do you see any blockages? Is there anything you would like to change?

Talk about where you are and where you would like to be. This is not a negative space, but one to embrace a positive dissatisfaction and a preferred picture of the future.

9. What would be step one in your change plan?

Every journey starts with a single step, don't miss out on planning the very first one. It's a good idea to write it down and share.

10. Who, besides the Lord, can help you?

Nehemiah and Hebrews are both stories of devotion to the Lord, and devotion together. Think about who can help perhaps as a coach / mentor or an encourager, or an accountability partner etc.



COMMITTED AS CHRIST

Study Five **Committed as Christ in Totality**

Committed as Christ in Treasures, Testimony, Talents, and Time. Would you add, delete, or change about any of these categories when thinking about commitment?

Do you feel the above items are equal for you to surrender, or are some harder than others for you? Discuss.

Read Nehemiah 12:27-47

1. Verbally (or in some other creative way) recreate the scene we have just read. What do you imagine? What sounds do you hear? What feeling is in the air? What extraordinary things are taking place?
 - a. What is the occasion and significance for the people?
2. Considering what you know of Israel's history and behaviour before exile, what are we inclined to hope for these people going forward in Jerusalem?

Read Nehemiah 13:1-4

- a. How do these actions demonstrate a commitment to the Lord first?

Read Luke 14:26-27

3. How do you understand the use of the word 'hate' by Jesus. (see also Malachi 1:2-3)
4. What is it that Jesus is calling for from us regarding Him and others? (verse 27)
 - a. What is it that Jesus is calling for from us regarding Him and us? (verse 27-28)
5. What can prevent one from being a disciple of Jesus?
 - a. What do you think a disciple is?
6. Discuss the statement, *'Jesus is Lord of all, or not at all.'*
7. Are there any learnings, or changes you would like to implement as a result of this series? What are the next steps to consolidate these?

Study Five - Leader's Notes

Committed as Christ in Totality

Committed as Christ in Treasures, Testimony, Talents, and Time. Would you add, delete, or change about any of these categories when thinking about commitment?

This is an opportunity to share together the spaces and places in our lives that we are learning to surrender to the Lord, and to understand his Lordship of all of us.

Do you feel the above items are equal for you to surrender, or are some harder than others for you? Discuss.

Read Nehemiah 12:27-47

1. Verbally (or in some other creative way) recreate the scene we have just read. What do you imagine? What sounds do you hear? What feeling is in the air? What extraordinary things are taking place?

This is such a significant ceremony. As I read, I recalled some of the pomp and circumstance of Queen Elizabeth's funeral, and imagined, no doubt, King Charles' coronation next year. Explore this scene together.

a. What is the occasion and significance for the people?

This is the dedication of the wall, but it should not be thought of as a ribbon cutting ceremony - well at least as much more. This is a reformation, a rededication of the people to their God. Here we have something of Moses and the people at Sinai version 2.0. We are hopeful for a much better life together with the Lord for them after being returned to Jerusalem.

2. Considering what you know of Israel's history and behaviour before exile, what are we inclined to hope for these people going forward in Jerusalem?

As above we ache now with the people for faithful and obedient covenant keeping. We don't want to see the heartache of exile again; we want to see them obedient and blessed.

Read Nehemiah 13:1-4

a. How do these actions demonstrate a commitment to the Lord first?

The Lord's word is read on that day. They start with the Lord. The book is read aloud not privately, or when convenient but in the hearing of all. As a result of God's command painful 'God first' decisions were made. They excluded (rightly) those of foreign descent. This must have been painful, and difficult, and seems so unfair, yet it was a trust in the Lord, and an obedience to Him that drove their actions, they did not compromise.

Read Luke 14:26-27

3. How do you understand the use of the word 'hate' by Jesus. (see also Malachi 1:2-3)

The driver behind the word is one of making a defining and clear choice. As with Jacob and Esau, the Lord remained kind and providential to Esau, but Jacob was his choice. And the choice was significant. Jesus is not calling for active hate, so much as demonstrating the polarity of the priorities. Jesus always first.

4. What is it that Jesus is calling for from us regarding Him and others? (verse 27)

Jesus knows there will always be a tension between disciples who follow Him and who are attached to people and will seek to please them. Jesus is calling for us to always put Him first if we desire to follow him. There is no room for deviating to walk with others instead of following Jesus.

a. What is it that Jesus is calling for from us regarding Him and us? (verse 27-28)

Jesus also understands our attachment to ourselves and our interests. Here he is calling for us to likewise deny ourselves, and choose Him - not actively despise ourselves, but once again make the clear choice of following him. And in doing this we carry a burden, the burden is dying

Study Five - Leader's Notes

Committed as Christ in Totality

to ourselves (carry cross) and follow him. That is just as Jesus gave himself up for the Kingdom, so we as disciples follow the pattern of our Rabbi.

5. What can prevent one from being a disciple of Jesus?

Jesus explains there is a definite cost to being a disciple. We should not be confused, God's grace is free, we are freely rescued to follow. But following one way means turning our back on another. To say 'Yes' to Jesus is to say 'No' to something else. Jesus explains that the refusal to say 'No' to other things or people will prevent us from following, will prevent discipleship.

a. What do you think a disciple is?

It is important to understand this beyond student. A disciple not only receives education and information, but they are also patterned on the one they follow. Literally walking behind, and adopting the Rabbi's way of life, and values.

6. Discuss the statement, *'Jesus is Lord of all, or not at all.'*

It is important that we receive Jesus as Lord of every facet of our lives. Even if we have not gained mastery of that area, or it is still very much lacking we give it to Jesus. We surrender all, the good, the bad, the ugly, the unformed and unimpressive.