

MOVING TO THE CORE

Part 4

These are taken from resumes and cover letters that were printed in the July 21, 1997 issue of *Fortune* magazine. The spelling is exactly the way it appeared in the magazine:

- Received a plague for Salesperson of the Year.
- Reason for leaving last job: maturity leave.
- It's best for employers that I not work with people.
- Let's meet, so you can 'ooh' and 'aah' over my experience.
- You will want me to be Head Honcho in no time.
- I have an excellent track record, although I am not a horse.
- I have become completely paranoid, trusting completely no one and absolutely nothing.
- I procrastinate, especially when the task is unpleasant.
- Personal interests: donating blood. Fourteen gallons so far.
- Reason for leaving last job: They insisted that all employees get to work by 8:45 am every morning. Could not work under those conditions.
- The company made me a scapegoat, just like my three previous employers.
- References: None. I've left a path of destruction behind me.
- Note: Please don't misconstrue my 14 jobs as 'job-hopping'. I have never quit a job.
- Marital status: often. Children: various.
- Marital status: single. Unmarried. Unengaged. Uninvolved. No commitments.

It is that last notation that captured my attention. Again, "Marital status: single. Unmarried. Unengaged. Uninvolved. No commitments." Sad, isn't it? Since when has commitment become a dirty word; a vice rather than a virtue?

According to *USA Today*, The Year 2000 Census figures showed that nationally there were 72 percent more unmarried-partner households than a decade ago.

In fact:

- since 1970 the rate of marriage has dropped by about one third,
- the out-of-wedlock birth ratio has climbed from 11% to 33% of all births,
- the divorce rate has doubled,
- And the number of people living together outside of marriage has grown by over 1000%.
- Presently, some 5.5 million unmarried American couples are living together without the benefits of holy matrimony.

I have faithfully followed these trends for a number of years. I have discovered that many cohabiters, simply put, want a relationship minus strings; a partner, not a commitment.

I was reading a poem this past week that was entitled: "No Commitments I Seek" Two lines from the first stanza notes:

I want only your love, nothing more
I seek no commitments, any more.

The owner of a photographic studio tells the story of a college boy who came in with a framed

picture of his girlfriend. The fellow wanted a copy made of the photo. In removing the print from the frame, the studio owner noticed the inscription on the back, written by the girlfriend: "My dearest Tommy: I love you with all my heart. I love you more and more each day. I will love you forever and ever. I am yours for all eternity". The note was signed "Dianne", and following the signature there was a P.S.: Diane had added: "If we should ever break up, I want this picture back"

THIS LACK OF COMMITMENT HAS SPILLED OVER INTO NEARLY EVERY AREA OF SOCIETY, INCLUDING THE CHURCH.

It is sad but true, many American Christians hop from one church to another without any identity, accountability, or commitment. Our large churches have become safe havens for a new breed of Christian who wants to report in on Sunday morning, throw two dollars into the offering plate, and then pass quietly out of the life of the church for the next six days. Like the fellow who sent in the resume, they want to be, "unengaged, uninvolved; no commitments."

I once read that a Canadian railroad company, urgently in need of sleeping cars, inserted the following ad in a trade journal; "300 sleepers wanted at once." A short time later, they received a letter from a minister in Iowa offering his entire congregation.

Another minister, a pastor of a church in St. Charles, Minnesota, advertised in the Want Ads, "Wanted: men, women and children to sit in slightly used pews on Sunday morning.

Commitment is something that is in very short supply today.

This morning, as I continue my series of messages on "Moving To The Core", I obviously want to talk to you about commitment. The core of the church is committed to Christ and His Church.

PLEASE OPEN YOUR BIBLES TO JOHN 6.

I want to share with you a number of observations from this chapter beginning with the first three verses: "**Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.**"

I want you to pick up on three quick points here.

1. First, notice the crowds, they were huge, numbering in the thousands.
2. Secondly, the passage points out that these folks followed Him because of the miraculous signs that accompanied the Lord's ministry.
3. Third, the original language notes that the people "were continually following" Jesus, for Jesus was continually healing people. Everywhere He went, at that time in His ministry, the crowds thronged Him.

Moving down the chapter, we see the Lord feed the multitude with the loaves and the fishes. After that, we find the miracle of Him walking on the water. The passage then picks up with the crowd finding Jesus, the next morning, on the other side of the lake.

At this point, Jesus begins teaching on the price of following Him. In short, He spoke on commitment. He said in verse 26, "**I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.**"

He knew their motives:

1. Some were more interested in what they could get from Him -- material gain -- the loaves and the fishes -- than in letting Him master their lives,
2. Others, He noted, were satisfied with having a form of religion, minus commitment.
3. Then, seemingly for good measure, He talked about personal holiness.

What happened? Notice verse 60 from the *God's Word* translation, **“When many of Jesus' disciples heard him, they said, ‘What he says is hard to accept. Who wants to listen to him anymore?’”**

Verses 66-67, from the *New Living Translation* adds, **“At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, ‘Are you going to leave, too?’”**

Peter then answered in verses 68-69, **“‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.’”**

This passage is one of the most startling in all of John's Gospel. As a result of Jesus' sermon here, most of the Lord's disciples went back to their old life, their old religion, and their old hopeless situations.

What a sifting. In this one chapter the Lord's followers dropped from numbering somewhere in the thousands to the original 12. Jesus even questioned whether or not they were going to desert Him.

The point I want to make here is, look at the vast difference in commitment:

- between the crowd, and the disciples;
- between the multitudes, and the twelve,
- between the majority of His followers, and the core.

Jesus obviously had those who were on the edge too.

The truth is though, people do make commitments:

- Some of you are members of a civic or service club. They ask for a commitment.
- Some of you are members of a labor union. They ask for a commitment.
- Some of you are members of a particular political party. They ask for a commitment.
- Some of you are members of some sports team or league. They ask for a commitment.
- Some of you are members of an athletic club. They ask for a commitment.
- Some of you have children that are on a soccer team. They ask for a commitment.

In fact, these commitments may require you to provide fees, refreshments, transportation, trophies, and victory parties in addition to your attendance. What if the church were to require that same level of commitment? Would you meet it?

A New York minister was happy when a brother came requesting permission to join the church. After a rather long talk with the fellow, the preacher said that "one of the things you will want to think about as a new member is, which department of the church will you want to serve in?" "Oh," the man said, I am not interested in anything like that. I just simply want to take out membership."

The minister was patient but insistent, "It is our custom to have all the members divided into different service groups. Some work in Sunday school. Some work in music. Some work on a committee while yet others visit. There are others who...."

"I didn't know that this was that kind of a church," the man interrupted. "I believe that I will visit some other churches in the area before I make up my mind." The minister smiled and said, "This church, you know, is called the Church of the Savior. I think you might be looking for the Church of the Heavenly Rest."

Do you realize that there are people looking for the Church of the Heavenly Rest in Janesville? Hey, I'm not kidding. I have met some of them face to face.

LET ME POINT OUT, THE LORD STILL HAS SOME PRETTY HARD SAYINGS

For instance, Matthew 6:24 notes, **"No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will stand by and be devoted to the one and despise and be against the other."** (*The Amplified Bible*.) Pretty straight, isn't it?

How about Luke 14:26-27? It says, **"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."**

Christ was not saying that one's family and one's self were to be literally hated. The true believer is to honor his father and his mother, to love even his enemies. What then did Jesus mean then?

Very simply...

- The Lord will not accept second place in a believer's life.
- Christ is to be first: before family, even before self.
- All—even family and self—are to be put behind Jesus and His mission. All must be denied and put behind a person's love and devotion to Christ and His cause.

Luke 14:33 adds, **"Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."** I think that we would all have to admit, that this again is a hard saying of Jesus.

Last Sunday I told you that one out of every three people that makes a decision for Christ drops out of the church within three months. In addition to that, research shows that over 50% of new members to any church choose to fade from their commitment within the first year.

The *World Christian Encyclopedia* notes that more than 53,000 people leave church every week never to return. (From Focus on the Family's *The Pastor's Weekly Briefing*) 53,000!

Let me quote the Lord's words in John 6:67 once again, **"At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, 'Are you going to leave, too?'"**

What will you do with these hard sayings? Will you respond with the commitment that He is seeking, or will you also turn and walk away as did those so long ago? Will you move in obedience, or simply ignore Him into silence?

I WANT TO NOW ISSUE A CHALLENGE TO EACH ONE OF YOU HIS MORNING.

When Hitler's planes were raining death and destruction on London during World War 2, and when an invasion of England by the foe seemed imminent, an Englishman wrote these words to a friend in America, "As one man, the whole nation has handed over all its resources to the

government. We have given the cabinet the right to draft any of us for any task, to take our goods, our money, our all! Never have rich left so little store by their wealth. Never have we been so ready to lay down life itself if only our cause may triumph!"

If so many were ready to lay it all down for Jolly Old England, then I want to challenge each and everyone of you to lay everything down for Jesus Christ: right now.

He is worth...

- Our time,
- career,
- family relationships,
- friendships
- wealth,
- home,
- habits,
- recreational pursuits,
- aspirations,
- and energy.

Everything.

I am asking you to commit it all to Him this morning. He may allow you to pick everything back up; maybe not. That is entirely up to Him. You see:

- Jesus deserves our highest praise,
- Our deepest devotion,
- Our absolute utmost,
- Our commitment,
- Our life, our all.

The challenge has been given, now how are you going to respond?

HERE ME; I WANT TO ASK YOU THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION THAT CAN BE PRESENTED TO ANOTHER PERSON:

- I am not going to ask you whether or not you are a Christian. Most people in America consider themselves Christian.
- I am not going to ask you whether or not you believe in Jesus Christ – the demons believe and shutter.
- I am not going to ask you whether or not you attend church, or if you have taken out church membership somewhere.
- I am not going to ask you about your denominational affiliation.

No, all of those questions pale in comparison to this one. **IS JESUS YOUR LORD. HAVE YOU COMMITTED YOUR LIFE TO THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST?**

There are four classes of people who may be described by their relationship to the Lord.

1. Those who neither call Him Lord, nor do the things which He says.
2. Those who call Him Lord, but do not the things which He says.
3. Those who do not call Him Lord, but do the things which He says.
4. Those who both call Him Lord, and do the things He says.

Once again, the committed core fall into that forth group.

The term LORD actually means owner. **“The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.**

The world and they that dwell therein, for He hath founded it upon the seas and established it upon the floods." He is owner.

Let me again quote from a message by the black Baptist pastor from Los Angeles --S. M. Lockridge:

"Man doesn't want to recognize the fact that God is the owner.

- Even though He did not have to put His signature in the SUNSET--He's still the owner.
- Even though He did not stamp a laundry mark on the MEADOW--He's still the owner.
- Even though He did not have to put a brand on the cattle of a thousand hills, He's still the owner.
- He did not have to take out a copyright on the songs that he gives the birds to sing--BUT HE IS THE OWNER.

HIS LORDSHIP IS BASED ON HIS OWNERSHIP! Yes, Creation bows before Him and cries, LORD!"

Jesus, in one of His parables, pictures the saint as a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great worth, he sells everything he has in order to buy it. Jesus is that great pearl. Notice: Man marvels at such a pearl and says:

"I want this pearl, what does it cost?" The seller says, "It's rare; thus it's very expensive."

"Well, how much?"

"What do you have?"

"If I have enough, can I have it?"

"Oh, of course, anybody can have it if they'll pay the price."

"But you say it's so expensive; how much is it?"

"It costs everything you have--no more, no less."

"I'll buy it then."

"What do you have? Let's write it down."

"I have \$10,000 in the bank."

"Good. \$10,000 and what else?"

"I have nothing more. That's all I have."

"Have you nothing more?"

"Well, I have a few dollars here in my pocket."

"How many?"

"Let's see: 5, 10, 15, 16, 17--17 dollars."

"That's fine. What else do you have?"

"I have nothing else. That's all."

"Where do you live?"

"I live in my house."

"I'll take it."

"Then you mean I must live in the garage?"

"Have you a garage, too? That too, then. What else?"

"You mean I must live in my car, then?"

"Have you a car?"

"I have two."

"Both become mine. What else?"

"Well, you have the house, the garage, the cars, money, everything."

"What else?"

"I have nothing else."

"Are you alone in the world?"

"No, I have a wife, two children."

"It will cost you the three of them."

"My family?"

"Yes, everything you have. What else?"

"I have nothing else. I am left alone now."

"Oh, you, too. Everything.

Everything becomes mine: wife, children, house, garage, cars, money, clothing, everything -- including you.

Now, you can use all those things here, but don't forget they are mine, as you are. When I need any of those things you are using, you must give them to me because now I am the owner--I am Lord over all."

As strange as it might sound, that story is consistent with Scripture.

True commitment is acknowledging His rightful place as Lord; as owner over us; over all.

WHAT DOES COMMITMENT LOOK LIKE?

Let me give you several examples:

Commitment looks like God.

- Is He not committed to setting the sun in it's place each morning?
- Is He not committed to watching over the food chain?
- Is He not committed to regulating the temperature of the earth?
- Is He not committed to today, tonight, and tomorrow?
- Is He not committed to grace?
- Is He not committed to His Word? 1 Kings 8:56 tells us that **“Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.”**

Commitment looks like:

- The Lord Jesus Christ
- The disciples
- The Apostle Paul
- The Virgin Mary
- The Three Hebrew Children
- David going up against the giant Goliath
- Noah building a boat.
- Esther requesting an audience with her king.

Commitment looks like:

- Otto Lemberg and Gerry Christianson,
- The host of missionaries that we support,
- The number of faithful workers that give themselves to Prime Time, Saturday after Saturday.

- The legion of teachers and leaders that faithfully serve you and your families week by week;
- It looks like those who drive the van on Sundays in good or bad weather, in the cold or in the heat.
- It looks like nursery workers, musicians, ushers, and deacons.
- Look around you. Commitment looks like many of the faces to your left and right here at New Life Assembly of God.

One brother simply called the church "The Company of the Committed." Don't you like that? I do.

One more face, A few weeks ago I was noting to one of our families that I had missed them the previous Sunday. The lady then preceded to tell me that she and her husband had been ill. Then she added how the two of them hate to miss services. We live to go to church, she said. That's commitment! By the way, they are here this morning.

A hen and a pig approached a church and read the advertised sermon topic: "What can we do to help the poor?" Immediately the hen suggested they feed them bacon and eggs. The pig thought for a moment and said, "There is only one thing wrong with feeding bacon and eggs to the poor. For you it requires only a contribution, but for me it requires total commitment!

Some here have stepped over the line to total commitment. Have you?

I WANT TO CLOSE WITH A FINAL OBSERVATION:

Someone once wrote: This is my church. It is made up of people like me. We make it what it is.

- I want it to be a church that is a light to those who are walking in darkness. It will be if I am.
- It will be friendly, if I am.
- Its pews will be packed with people, if I help fill them.
- It will do a great work, if I work.
- It will bring other people into its worship and fellowship, if I help bring them.
- It will be a church of loyalty and love, of hope and faith; if I am filled with these things.

Therefore, I dedicate myself to the task of being what I want my church to be. I dedicate myself to the task of commitment; of moving to the core.