

Staying Faithful Over The Long Haul

(appropriate for High-Schoolers and older)

Michael R. Daily July 2017

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My wife and I met at the age of 15 in high school when we were non-christians. We started dating at 16, became Christians our Freshman year at college when we were 18, were married at 22 and have been together ever since. A few months ago she said to me, "One of the things I admire the most about you is when you became a Christian at age 18, you followed Christ and you never looked back".

Although I have not finished the race yet I have learned a few lessons about perseverance and faithfulness that I would like to share with you with the hopes that it will help you stay faithful over the long haul.

1) Meditating On and Obeying God's Word and Trusting in Him

Psalm 1:1-3

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. ³ He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.

Jeremiah 17:5-8

Thus says the LORD, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD. ⁶ "For he will be like a bush in the desert And will not see when prosperity comes, But will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, A land of salt without inhabitant. ⁷ "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD And whose trust is the LORD. ⁸ "For he will be like a tree planted by the water, That extends its roots by a stream And will not fear when the heat comes; But its leaves will be green, And it will not be anxious in a year of drought Nor cease to yield fruit.

I remember as an engineering graduate student back in the 1980's sitting with Rev. John S. Mahon (Navigator campus representative at Oklahoma State University) and our wives in the living room of the Mahon home as he talked about these verses and he drew a picture of a tree, its roots, and a stream of water next to the tree, and the hot sun in the sky.

As I thought about and meditated on these verses, I was impressed with the truth that for the rest of my life I was going to have to constantly decide which plant I was going to be. A fruitful tree with green leaves, planted by a stream of water, or a scrubby bush living in stony, salty soil out in wilderness. I was intrigued by the idea that my ability to be spiritually fruitful throughout my life would not be affected by the circumstances of my life, the actions of other people, or the environment I lived in. These passages made it clear I could not use those as excuses.

If I stopped being spiritually fruitful it would be because I stopped doing two things: 1) Meditating on God's word in order to obey Him more fully and 2) Putting my trust in God and not in men. If I stopped being faithful to God at any time in my life there would be only one person I could blame for that – myself.

The person who meditates on God's Word day and night and trusts in Him becomes a person who remains spiritually healthy and able to bear fruit regardless of the circumstances around him. God's Word is like a stream of water that our roots constantly draw from that keeps us bearing fruit during times of drought and heat. In addition, meditating on God's Word brings success in many areas of life.

This is why quiet time, bible study, and scripture memory are so important. They enable you to meditate effectively on God's word and apply it to life.

2) Putting God and His Kingdom First in Life

Matthew 6:32-33

For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

I also had to decide if I was going to put the activities of life first, then fit God in around the edges, or if I was going to put God first and fit life in around the edges. Most people seek worldly things first. I will give my best efforts to my education, my career, and my comfort. Then, whatever time, money, and energy is left I will give to God. But God tells us to do the opposite. Put God first in the priorities of your life and He will give you things that non-believers spend the focus of their lives seeking. Its counterintuitive.

Do you complete your tasks for God with the same energy and dedication as you do in meeting your work deadlines or school assignments? You should!

I remember as a freshman in college, at 18 years of age, having become a Christian only a few months earlier, full of anxiety as to whether I had what it took to successfully complete college and be successful in life. It was the evening of a weekly bible study I was attending, but I had a Math test the next morning. So, I decided to do what most people would do in that situation, skip the bible study and prepare for the Math test. But the Holy Spirit would not leave me alone about it. A thought finally came into my head, “one hundred years from now, which one will be the most important - understanding the Bible and obeying God, or the Math test”? So, I changed my mind and went to the bible study. After the study was over, I prepared for the test when it was later in the evening and I was a little more tired. God got the best hour and the Math work got the second best hour. Notice the decision was not God or Math. It was God first, then Math. I have often used that question throughout my life when tempted to short God, in order to help me keep my priorities straight. Now, 40 years later, as I look back over the years, I cannot think of one instance where putting God first caused any damage to my life. But, I can point to times of disobedience or delayed obedience that did cause damage. So, put God and His Kingdom first – you won’t regret it.

3) Neutralizing Bitterness

Hebrews 12:15

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

There are things in life which can cause us such disappointment that we get bitter and give up on following God. For me, the most challenging temptation toward bitterness is when other Christians, particularly Christian leaders, treat me unfairly or even with sinful motives. For example, there are times when Christian leaders may kill a successful ministry you have been involved in for years for reasons that appear to be unbiblical or, perhaps, even sinful. There are some Christian leaders who are not supportive of certain types of witnessing or discipleship activities and, as a result, may oppose you or the things you are doing. In these situations, it would be easy to say, “I am treated with more respect and kindness by the non-Christians at work than I am by my own Christian brothers and sisters. I think I will just set this Christian stuff aside and focus my energies on my work or my other interests. I don’t need this!” But that would be the wrong response. Remember Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17 – circumstances and other people can’t stop you from being fruitful. The only person who can stop you is you!

There are two things that have helped me in this area:

Hebrews 11:6

And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

- 1) Deep abiding belief that God exists and is in control. If He’s not in control then He isn’t God!
- 2) Deep abiding belief that God is a rewarder of those who follow Him.

God is in Control

Regardless of how circumstances look from a human perspective, we know that God is in control.

Romans 8:28

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

If something gets taken away from us (ex: like an effective ministry), or a door closes on us, even if it appears to be happening for sinful reasons, we know that if God is letting it happen, it's because He is moving us to something new. At the time, it does not feel good, but it is actually a very effective way for God to move us to do a new thing that He wants us to do. For example, looking back 15 years ago to a time when an effective ministry was stopped, I can see now that God moved me to a new ministry at that time that has been even more effective and impactful. I also know that unless something powerful and outside my control had not happened, I would still be doing the less effective ministry. So looking back, it makes sense that God would allow this to happen. It led to something better! This is why we don't get bitter. An excellent example of this is when Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers.

Genesis 45:4-5, 8

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

⁸ Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Don't pray that you will be treated fairly – God will often say "no" to that. Instead pray that God would keep you in the center of His will for your life, and that He would use whatever means are necessary to do it – that's a prayer He will say "yes" to.

God is a Rewarder

At the judgment, we will be rewarded by God for our work for Him. Because of that, no sacrifice we make of our time, money, or emotional energy will be regretted. Our work for Him will not be in vain but will lead to spiritual fruit and eternal value.

I Corinthians 15:58

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in* vain in the Lord.

Hebrews 6:10

For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.

God will never forget the work you did for Him. In fact, someday He will remind you of things you did for Him that you forgot you did!

I Corinthians 3:10-15

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. ¹¹ For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

What if someone pulled up to your front yard in a large dump truck, the kind used for industrial mining. Then they backed the truck up to your yard and lifted the truck bed up, dumping a large pile of gold bars into your front yard, a pile taller than you are. How would that change your experience of life on planet Earth? Your life on Earth would be significantly better with the gold bars than without them.

In a similar fashion, when we get to heaven, each Christian will have his reward given to him by God. Some Christians will have a lot and some a little, depending on their obedience and service on Earth. Just as a pile of gold bars would significantly improve your experience of life on Earth, these eternal rewards will significantly improve your experience of eternity! This is why we don't get bitter. Regardless of what other Christians are, or are not doing, we can remain steadfast knowing that every sacrifice we make out of love and devotion to Christ will be more than worth it! Eternal rewards enable us to remain faithful in service to God which is why **Heb 11:6** says that its impossible to please God if you don't believe He's a rewarder.

4) Having an Example Person You Can Follow

Another form of discouragement can come from the example of other christians. A study done among christians in 2007 had the following results:

"When asked to identify their activities over the last 30 days, born-again believers were just as likely as non-christians to bet or gamble, to visit a pornographic website, to take something that did not belong to them, to consult a medium or psychic, to physically fight or abuse someone, to have consumed enough alcohol to be considered legally drunk, to have used an illegal, nonprescription drug, to have said something that was not true, to have gotten back at someone for something he or she did, to have said mean things behind another person's back, and to have an intimate sexual encounter outside of marriage."

Kinnaman & Lyons, "Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity & Why It Matters", BakerBooks, 2007, p. 47

But the good news is it only takes one person living God's way to keep you faithful and encouraged.

Hebrews 13:7

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

Proverbs 27:17

Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.

When we were first married, my wife never wanted to have children because she had never seen children raised in a way that was effective while also preserving the parents' dignity. Even though the vast majority of Christians raise their kids the same way the world does, it only took one example (John and Eleanor Mahon) to give her the confidence she needed that raising children could be done without losing your dignity and that God's ways were the right ways to do it. Today, we have three children.

Good news: most people only need to see one example of "doing it right" to stay encouraged and faithful.

Find someone who is living the Christian life the right way, even if you can only find one person, then befriend them and imitate their faith.

5) Using The Wheel Illustration As a Diagnostic

Even when things seem to be going well and we are living life with the proper priorities, its possible to have "blind-spots" that we honestly don't recognize due to the deceitfulness of our own hearts and the craftiness of satan.

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?

II Corinthians 11:3

But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

To counter this we can use The Wheel Illustration to test things to help reveal areas where we have been deceived into not seeing a weakness needing attention.

Galatians 6:4-5

But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. ⁵ For each one will bear his own load.

You can use the Wheel to evaluate any ministry work you are involved in. Reviewing our teen ministry using the Wheel showed that we were pretty good at everything except Witnessing so we added the Bridge Illustration:

Please see, "First Person Five Minute Bridge Illustration" at:
<http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

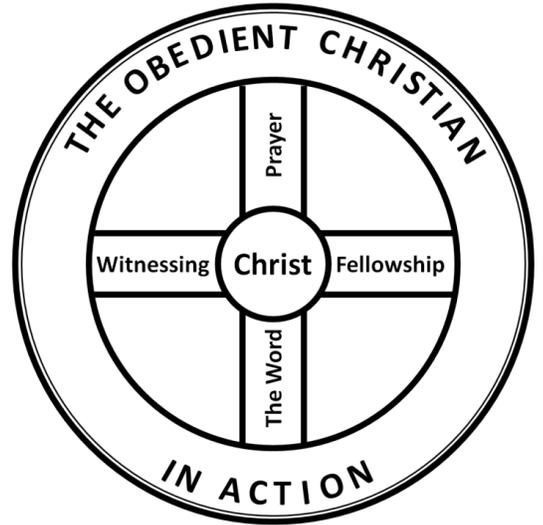
You can also use it when discipling someone to make sure you cover the fundamentals in a balanced way and are training them in doing, not just knowing.

You can use it in making decisions about the future. For example, if you are a young adult, the Wheel is a good dating aid! If you are thinking about dating a girl ask yourself if dating her is going to help you in your prayer life or your witnessing or will she get in the way? Will this girl help me memorize verses or laugh at the idea of memorizing verses?

When selecting a job which one will enable me to be involved in these things (the four spokes) and which one will make it more difficult for me? If one job option is high travel, will that hinder your ability to be involved in the activities of the four spokes?

What about what house to buy? There is a church in town that would clearly be best in terms of my involvement in the four spokes. Maybe I should buy a house close to that church.

So, use the Wheel Illustration to help you in your decision making and for revealing blind spots.



The Wheel Illustration (NASB)

Source: The Navigators (<http://www.navigators.org/us/resources>).

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The Hub: Turns and supplies power to the wheel. Christ our hub, supplies the power necessary for the Christian life.

II Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come

Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

The Rim: Supplies the friction for motion. Where the “rubber meets the road”. The words, “The Obedient Christian In Action” remind us that we spring into action, responding to the power source of Christ, our Lord.

John 14:21 - He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”

Romans 12:1 - Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

The Spokes: Give us balance and enable the transfer of Christ’s power to our daily lives. Through the implementation of these disciplines in obedience to Christ, we spring into action.

The Word: Reveals His principles and commands for life and ministry enabling us to know Him more personally.

II Timothy 3:16 - All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

Joshua 1:8 - This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

Prayer: Unleashes the power of God in your personal battles and in the lives of those for whom you pray.

Philippians 4:6-7 - Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

John 15:7 - If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Fellowship: Learning from and encouraging others through interdependence and loving relationships with each other.

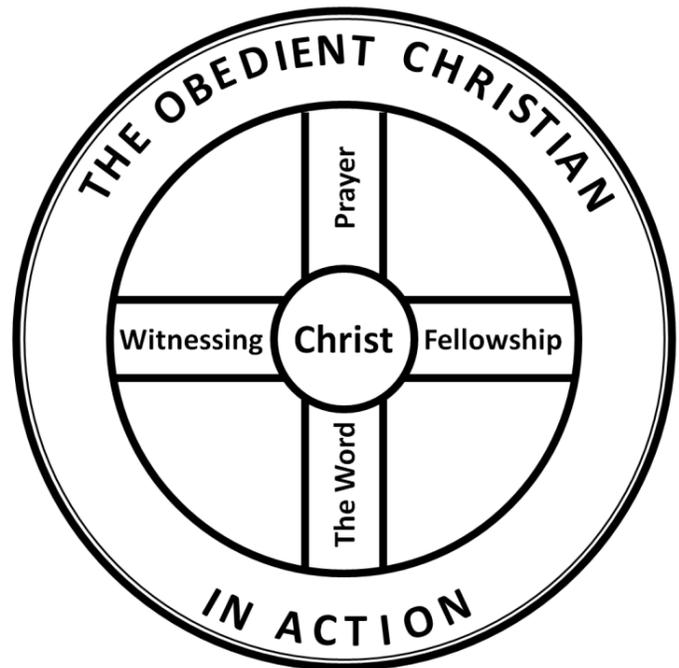
Hebrews 10:24-25 - and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Matthew 18:20 – “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

Witnessing: God has given Christians the privilege and responsibility of sharing the Good News about Christ.

Matthew 4:19 - And He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Romans 1:16 - For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.



QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Staying Faithful Over The Long Haul*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Psalm 1:1-3*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Jeremiah 17:5-8*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Matthew 6:32-33*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Staying Faithful Over The Long Haul*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Hebrews 12:15*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Hebrews 11:6*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Romans 8:28*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Staying Faithful Over The Long Haul*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Genesis 45:4-8*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Corinthians 15:58*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Hebrews 6:10*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

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QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Staying Faithful Over The Long Haul*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Corinthians 3:10-15*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Hebrews 13:7*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Proverbs 27:17*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Staying Faithful Over The Long Haul*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Jeremiah 17:9*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *II Corinthians 11:3*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Galatians 6:4-5*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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