

What's It Going To Take To Get You To Quit The Christian Life?

(appropriate for High-Schoolers and older)

Michael R. Daily March 2018

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(based on the work of Rev. John S. Mahon, Grace Community International, www.gciweb.org)

A lot of Christians start well in the Christian life but the number who finish well is far less. Tonight, we are going to look at some of the things that cause Christians to not finish well. Yes, they may continue to go to church, but they stop sharing the Gospel and they stop making disciples. They stop being fruitful. They quit.

Mark 4:16-20

In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky *places*, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; ¹⁷ and they have no *firm* root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸ And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, ¹⁹ but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²⁰ And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.”

Some Christians don't finish well because they put their desires for money or other temporary things (ex: being comfortable) ahead of doing what God wants us to do. Some have chosen to replace faith in what God has said, with worry. Others quit when following Christ becomes difficult.

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **3** For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**

Some Christians don't finish well because they allow themselves to be entangled in sin or they grow weary and lose heart.

I became a Christian my Freshman year in college. Bryon, the Junior who led me to Christ and discipled me, mentioned that he was discipled by someone who had done a really good job but later stopped making disciples because of how much effort it was. Six years later, when I was in graduate school, my wife and I were attending the Madrigal Dinner Concert at Oklahoma State University at Christmas time. We were seated right across from a couple who was a few years older than us. As we introduced ourselves I realized that the man was the one who had discipled the man who discipled me! He was my spiritual grandfather! I mentioned this to him, realizing that we both knew he had stopped making disciples. He had not even made it to 35 years old and he had already quit. So he got to spend his Madrigal Dinner looking at me all evening, knowing that we both knew he had already quit the Christian life! I don't want something like that to ever happen to me.

But if you, by faith, keep yourself free from sin, you live a life of faith and not worry, and you keep money and other temporary things in second in priority to God's kingdom, and you obey God among the non-Christians without being ashamed to be a Christian, then all will go well for you, won't it? Isn't that true? Not exactly. If you do all of these things, you are now high on Satan's radar. If you do all of these things you are negatively impacting Satan's kingdom. You are hurting him. You have to be stopped!

There is a question about you that Satan will want to find the answer to as quickly as possible and here's the question, "What's it going to take to stop you?" What's it going to take to stop you from living the Christian life? What's it going to take to get you to stop reading your Bible, to stop praying for the things that God wants, to stop sharing the Gospel, and to stop making disciples? What is it I (Satan) have to do to get you to quit?

Job 1:8-12

The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil." ⁹ Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? ¹⁰ Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹ But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face." ¹² Then the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.

Job 2:3-6

The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause." ⁴ Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. ⁵ However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face." ⁶ So the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life."

Satan wants to know the answer to this question so he can stop you. What is interesting is, God also wants to know the answer to this question, so He can reward you more greatly in eternity!

I Peter 1:6-8

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ⁸ and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,

There is great eternal reward for those who suffer for obeying God.

I Peter 4:12-13

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³ but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

The testing will come. Its important to understand what to expect so that you are not surprised or caught off guard. By knowing what to expect you are less likely to quit when it happens to you.

We will discuss four areas of testing that mature, Christian ministers (full time and laymen) who have finished well or are close to finishing well have reported. Most of us will be tested by most, if not all, of these.

1) Personal or Family Tragedy

You are going to experience tragedy in your personal or family life. **Tragedy:** *a sudden disastrous event bringing great damage, loss, or destruction.* For example, people you love are going to die.

Hebrews 9:27

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment,

(Job 14:5)

Since his days are determined, The number of his months is with You; And his limits You have set so that he cannot pass.

God has appointed the people you love to die. Parents die, husbands die, wives die, even children die. The time God has appointed for their death may be different that what you expected. When that happens, what will you do? Will you get bitter at God? Will you stop living the Christian life? Will you quit?

Ezekiel 24:15-19

And the word of the LORD came to me saying, ¹⁶ “Son of man, behold, I am about to take from you the desire of your eyes with a blow; but you shall not mourn and you shall not weep, and your tears shall not come. ¹⁷ Groan silently; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban and put your shoes on your feet, and do not cover *your* mustache and do not eat the bread of men.” ¹⁸ So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. And in the morning I did as I was commanded. ¹⁹ The people said to me, “Will you not tell us what these things that you are doing mean for us?”

God told Ezekiel ahead of time that He was going to kill his wife in order to teach Israel something. If God needs to take the life of someone you love for a purpose He has, are you OK with that? Ezekiel didn't get bitter and he didn't quit. (In this particular situation Ezekiel was told not to mourn but its OK for us to).

Psalm 71:19-20

For Your righteousness, O God, *reaches* to the heavens, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You? ²⁰ You who have shown me many troubles and distresses Will revive me again, And will bring me up again from the depths of the earth.

There are times in life when we will experience other types of unexpected loss, tragedy, and distress. Will we continue to trust in God or not? What's it going to take to make you quit?

Psalm 119:71

It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.

Sometimes the best way for God to help someone live for eternity is to shatter their earthly dreams. A good response to tragedy is to draw closer to God and focus on living for eternity instead of this life.

(Job 1:20-21)

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshipped. 21 He said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Regardless of what is going on we can always thank God for saving us from the penalty of our sin and giving us eternal life. We don't have a basis for complaint.

Job 13:15 - “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.”

What's it going to take to stop you? Will you continue to obey God even if it kills you?

(James 5:10-11)

As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and *is* merciful.

Don't quit. When you get to heaven you will find out that the eternal reward God has set aside for you is so much greater than the temporary suffering was, you will be glad God gave you the opportunity.

2) Failure in Work or in the Ministry in the Eyes of Men

(Numbers 14:26-29, 34-35)

The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ²⁷ “How long *shall I bear* with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. ²⁸ Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the LORD, ‘just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you; ²⁹ your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me.

³⁴ According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years, and you will know My opposition. ³⁵ I, the LORD, have spoken, surely this I will do to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be destroyed, and there they will die.”

According to **Deuteronomy 34:7** Moses lived for 120 years. But out of that 120 years how many years did Moses look like a success as a religious leader? About 3 years! From a human perspective, he did the miracles in Egypt, he economically destroyed Egypt, he freed Israel and led them out of Egypt, he destroyed the Egyptian military, won battles, and parted the Red Sea. All of that took less than 3 years. After that what happened? Moses led Israel around in circles in the desert for 40 years while everyone complained. If you had been living among them during that time, you would have said that Moses looked a lot like a failure. Moses was supposed to lead Israel into the Promised Land. Did he do that? No, he died in the wilderness along with his entire generation! Moses, from a human perspective, looked like a failure. But was Moses a failure? Absolutely not! Moses was a great man of God, but he went through many decades of looking and feeling like a failure. Moses was tested with failure and you will be too.

II Timothy 4:10, 16-17

for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

16 At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. 17 But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth.

There were times when Paul was deserted by those he ministered with and to. Why? Because he looked like he was failing. He spent five or six years alone in prison instead of out preaching the gospel. He was supposed to be out preaching the gospel and changing the world for Christ. But instead he was stuck in prison, staring at the walls. He was failing. So he started writing letters to the churches. What happened to those letters? They became part of the New Testament! What impact have those letters had over the centuries? Literally billions of people have been impacted by those letters. Far more than the number of people Paul could have reached through his personal preaching. Did Paul know that at the time? No. He probably felt like he was failing. But looking back we now know that Paul was not failing. And while he did that he also shared the gospel and made disciples while he was in prison. He didn't quit.

(John 6:66-68)

As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, “You do not want to go away also, do you?” 68 Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.

Even Jesus, if compared by today's standards of success in ministry, would be considered a failure from a human perspective. He died with 11 men and a few women following him. But was He? No.

Some pastors, once they realize they will never pastor anything larger than a small church, leave the ministry.

An October 2017 article by Forbes listed the 20 richest “Christian” ministers in the world. Out of those, 17 were false apostles (7 Nigerian, 5 American, 2 South African, 1 Zimbabwean, 1 Israeli, 1 Brazilian). Out of the 3 legitimate ministers, one became rich in his secular work before becoming a minister. The remaining two were Billy Graham and Rick Warren. If your dream is to go into the ministry and be famous and have a large church and a lot of money, the data says the best way to accomplish this is for you to become a false apostle! The false teachers are the ones making all the money. If you accurately teach the bible and make disciples, don't plan on becoming rich and famous (at least not in this life).

There will be times of failure in your job. Times when you will be treated unfairly or let go. Perhaps, even because you are a Christian. How will you handle that? Will you get bitter at God and quit the Christian life or will you faithfully continue?

3) Failure in Finances

Philippians 4:11-13

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹² I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. ¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

What if God decides He wants to teach you the secrets of going hungry and suffering need, will you be OK with that or will you get bitter and quit? Paul says that because of God's grace, he can continue to share the gospel and make disciples, even when suffering financial problems or other trials (see **Acts 16:22-32**).

Habakkuk 3:17-18

Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines, *Though* the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food, *Though* the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸ Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

No matter what trial we are in, we can always praise God for his gift of eternal life. We have no grounds for complaint or excuse to quit.

4) Serving Under Unjust Leadership

Ecclesiastes 8:9 - All this I have seen and applied my mind to every deed that has been done under the sun wherein a man has exercised authority over *another* man to his hurt.

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.

Many years ago I was meeting with two junior level pastors to set up the logistics for the coming year of a large and fruitful ministry (room reservations, child care, etc.). As we talked, one of the young pastors said, "It would be easy for me to kill this ministry". I looked at the other pastor as if to say, "What planet is this guy from?" I then said, "Yes, you could, now let's get back to the preparations". The ministry that year continued, but what did that pastor's comments reveal about his heart?

Ephesians 4:11-12 tells us that the primary mission of pastors is to train the rest of us so that we can do the ministry. Mature pastors know that if they help laymen develop successful ministries they are fulfilling God's role for them and God will bless them and take care of them. **Layman:** *a person who is not a member of the clergy.* But some pastors struggle with a temptation the rest of us don't face. It goes something like this. **If a layman can do the same things for free that we are paying you a lot of money to do, then why do we need you?** In other words, a successful lay ministry is sometimes viewed as a threat to the pastor's income, the money he uses to support his wife and children. If this is a pastor's mindset, the best thing to do would be to kill the ministry and eliminate the threat. This is a faith issue. Pastors struggle with faith issues just like the rest of us.

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 intentionally shut down your ministry. 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.

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 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, its because He wants to move 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 a year later that was 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 prayer. 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 every time.

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.

I Corinthians 3:13-15

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.

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 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 **Hebrews 11:6** says that its impossible to please God if you don't believe He's a rewarder.

For more information on this topic please see the study, "Staying Faithful Over The Long Haul", at: <http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *What's It Going To Take To Get You To Quit The Christian Life?*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Mark 4:16-20*

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 12:1-3*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Job 1:8-12, Job 2:3-6*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Peter 1:6-8, I Peter 4:12-13*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Hebrews 9:27, Job 14:5, Ezekiel 24:15-19*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Psalms 71:19-20, Psalm 119:71*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *II Timothy 4:10, 16-17*

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JEREMIAH 15:16

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *John 6:66-68*

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: *Philippians 4:11-13*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Acts 16:22-32*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Ecclesiastes 8:9, Ephesians 4:11-12*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Hebrews 12:15, Hebrews 11:6*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Romans 8:28*

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

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

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