

C.S. Lewis on Commitment (The Call to Discipleship)  
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C.S. Lewis was one who was deeply committed to Christ. Douglas Gresham, C.S. Lewis's stepson, calls him "The finest and best Christian I have ever known." Walter Hooper, who lived with Lewis the last few months of his life, said the nature of his faith in God—the bigness of Lewis's God—always humbled him because of how his own view was paltry by comparison.

One of Lewis's favorite passages (his most often quoted passage) was Mark 8:34f:

<sup>34</sup>If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. <sup>35</sup>For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels shall save it. <sup>36</sup>For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

When we look at the kind of radical commitment Jesus calls for—deny self, pick up a cross—you might wonder why anyone would do such a radical act. Why would anyone answer Jesus' call to "Follow me?" But Jesus gives a sufficient reason why we ought to say "no" to self and endure the cross. If you try to save your life, you will lose it, and if you lose it, you will save it.

C.S. Lewis puts it this way:

Give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work. I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desire you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked – the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself; my own will shall become yours. (*Mere Christianity*, p. 167)

If you try to be your own savior, to pursue your own pleasure and do things your own way, to pursue any of the false "gods" of the culture (i.e. money, sex, and power) then you will lose your life. Not only will you lose your life eternally, but you will lose the satisfaction of life here and now. From Jesus' teaching we are aware of the specter of eternal judgment that hangs over us; but we are less aware that choosing the way of self-salvation means losing life's fullness in the present.

John Piper argues that “God is most glorified when we re most satisfied in Him.” God’s glory and our own self-satisfaction meet in exactly the same place. Following God’s glory is the way to eternal joy and present joy. You might argue (with Augustine, Pascal, Edwards, C.S. Lewis and others) that all sin is exchanging a higher satisfaction for a lesser one. For instance, pride is saying “no” to God’s joy in order to say “yes” to taking pleasure in yourself. Covetousness is saying “no” to God’s joy in order to take pleasure in acquiring material things. Certainly there is pleasure to be found in pursuing lesser things, but sooner or later the pleasure fades and then is lost. My favorite quote from C.S. Lewis says

Our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak.  
We are half-hearted creatures fooling around with  
drink, sex, and ambition when infinite joy is offered us.  
Like an ignorant child, content to play with mud pies in  
a slum because he does not know what it means to have  
a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

We do not even desire our own greatest happiness. Giving your all for secondary things such as drink, sex, and ambition is saying “no” to infinite joy. On the other hand, by saying “yes” to first things like the infinite joy offered us, we can rightly enjoy secondary things in the way God intends.

After Jesus said that people must lose their lives in order to save their lives, he went on to ask, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36). Jesus calls you to weigh your values. What kind of investment do you want to make? What if you gain everything—money, fame, power, sex—and lose your soul? Who would make that kind of investment? It is better to give up everything temporal—time, money, and even earthly life—in exchange for that which is eternal and of infinite value, and which you cannot lose.

Choosing otherwise would be foolish, yet people make that choice all the time. Constantly they find that the things they desire are not adequate to satisfy them. So they get a new car, a new house, a new vacation, or a new spouse. But sooner or later the newness wears off, and they continue from thing to thing, marriage to marriage, always seeking but never finding ultimate satisfaction. They want more from life but do not know where to find it. C.S. Lewis expressed the dilemma and the way out (in the last paragraph of *Mere Christianity*):

But there must be a real giving up of the self. You  
must throw it away “blindly” so to speak.  
This principle runs through all life from top to bottom.  
Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose  
your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death  
of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and  
the death of your whole body in the end; submit with

every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.

C.S. Lewis really meant “Keep nothing back” and lived it out in his life in many ways. One example was in his attitude towards money. Nothing reveals our hearts like our attitude toward and use of money. In response to the question, “How much should we give?” he responded, “The only safe rule is to give more than you can spare.” Lewis put all of the money from his ministry—book royalties, honorarium from speaking, fees from the BBC, etc.—into an Agape Fund, to be given away. His lawyer friend, Owen Barfield, had to remind him to keep a third for taxes. Lewis also gave away half of his meager salary as an Oxford don. When Walter Hooper lived with Lewis, he noted that they subsisted in virtual poverty. When Hooper asked if they had money for new drapes, he was told that they were too expensive. Once, Hooper asked Lewis why he gave so much away. Lewis responded that “The Lord has done so much for such as I, how could I not give everything to him?”

C.S. Lewis’s deep commitment to Christ runs right through his writings and his life. His committed faith is a model for us all.