



REFLECTIONS

Reflections on God's revealed truth

GOD SUSTAINS ALL THINGS

Lord, You know us better than we know ourselves, and yet You chose to serve us in the life and ministry of Your beloved Son. How can words express the magnitude of Your lovingkindness and mercy? You are in authority over all things, from the microcosm to the macrocosm. You order the stars, the galaxies and the clusters and superclusters of galaxies that are spread over distances so great that even to get a glimpse of the magnitude is terrifying. You sustain the sun, the planets, and all that dwells on the Earth. You form life out of matter that has no life, and You shape our complex bodily systems, as well as our minds, personalities, and moral capacities. You have made all things well, and even in this world that was subjected to futility, we see Your marvels and handiwork. I live in hope of the redemption of the body and of the whole of creation.

A teaching letter encouraging believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart



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STARING DOWN FEAR



Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:9)

If anyone might have claimed a legitimate reason to be fearful, it would have been John and Betty Stam. From one minute to the next on December 9, 1934, they did not know whether they would live or die. As newly married career missionaries to China, the Stams were living in Tsingteh with their one-year-old daughter when a band of 2,000 communists attacked the village. Having lived in the midst of anti-Western and anti-Christian feelings, they were still shocked when they were taken into custody by the communist soldiers. The seriousness of their situation set in as they heard the soldiers discussing ways to dispose of their baby.

In spite of their reasons to be afraid, the Stams were not. They were ultimately beheaded a few days after their capture (though some Chinese Christians smuggled their baby safely to her grandparents, also missionaries in China, a hundred miles away). When being led away to their death, someone called to John Stam, asking where they were going. Stam replied that he didn't know where the soldiers were going, "but we're going to heaven."

What gives people like the Stams the ability to "be strong and courageous" (Joshua 1:7)? No doubt their faith came from the same source as God wanted Joshua's to come from. Like the Stams, Joshua faced an uncertain future. He had just been commissioned by Moses to lead a fledgling nation into its new homeland: Enter the promised land, drive out the present inhabitants (who would not be excited about leaving), and stay alive in the process. God told Joshua that two things

would keep him strong and courageous: the promises of God and the presence of God. It was Joshua's job to stay focused on the Book of the Law, moment by moment. It was God's job to stay focused on Joshua's and Israel's needs, moment by moment. That combination allowed Joshua—and will allow any believer—to stare down fear every time.

If you have a courage-draining situation on your horizon, remember the antidote to fear: His promises and His presence. You do your part (stay close to the promises), and God will do His (stay close to you).

GOD'S PROMISE:

Courage is found in His promises and His presence.

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COMMITMENT, PART 4

COMMITMENT IN ACTION

COMMITTING VS. BARGAINING

How on earth do leaders establish and retain committed followers? How, in some cases, do we get ourselves committed enough to pay the high price of success? God knows how, and the prophet Habakkuk models an essential truth about God-focused commitment:

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. (Habakkuk 3:17–18 NIV)

What a refreshing statement! Many leaders would love to have followers who are this committed to the cause. In fact, many leaders would love to have this level of commitment to their own cause. The key ingredient to Habakkuk's statement is that it is unidirectional; he promised to maintain his attitude regardless of the payback.

That's really what "commitment" is. The statement, "I will be committed *if*" isn't commitment-making; it's deal-making. It's not committing; it's bargaining. In

Habakkuk 2, God explained His justice and His majesty to the prophet. The passage above is the prophet's response to that revelation of God's character.

In the absence of a life-consuming ideal, asking for the level of commitment Habakkuk expressed is absurd. No sane person will commit to things that don't really matter. But when a goal and outcome are properly related to the living God, then commitment makes sense.

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This idea has great relevance to leadership of an organization. Leaders must identify what it is within their organization that is genuinely worthy of commitment; until they complete this definition, they sound rather shallow even talking about commitment. Instead of asking, "How do we get commitment?" effective leaders begin by asking, "To what (or to whom) are we committed?"

THE REWARDS OF COMMITMENT

What does commitment look like in real life, and how can we practice it? Jesus reveals His standard of deeper commitment in Matthew's Gospel:

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:24–26 NASB)

Jesus spoke these words to His disciples, but they still call us to action today. Through these living words, Jesus makes it clear that He requires total commitment of His followers. He said that unless one commits everything, one loses everything. For the Christian, that commitment must remain strong until the end of our earthly walk.

Inspirational and motivational speaker Og Mandino expands on the necessity of strong, long-term commitment. One of Mandino's 10 common causes of failure is

"quitting too soon." Mandino tells the story of Raphael Solano and his companions, who were looking for diamonds in a dry riverbed in Venezuela. Discouraged and facing the thought of returning home to his very poor family empty-handed, Solano claimed he had picked up about 999,999 rocks and was quitting. His companions said, "Pick up one more and make it a million." That "millionth" rock was the 155-carat "Liberator," the largest and purest diamond ever found. Mandino writes,

I think he [Solano] must have known a happiness that went beyond the financial. He had set his course; the odds were against him; he had persevered; he had won. He had not only done what he had set out to do—which is a reward in itself—but he had done it in the face of failure and obscurity.¹

Jesus urged his followers, "Take up [your] cross and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). He knew better than anyone else how elusive the great prize is. But He also knew that anything less than a total commitment to achieving the prize would not suffice. In the Christian life, total commitment to the cause facilitates success.



EXTRA GRACE REQUIRED

Harpo [Arthur] Marx (1893-1964) was the member of the famous Marx Brothers comedy team who pretended to be dumb. He was a skilled harpist.

During a visit to New York, Harpo was plagued by representatives of charities wanting him to appear at benefits. One persistent lady telephoned him no fewer than twelve times in forty-eight hours. Harpo eventually agreed to appear for her charity. To ensure that he would not escape her at the last minute, she called to escort him personally to the benefit. As they were leaving his hotel suite, the telephone began ringing. "Don't you want to go back and answer it?" the lady asked. "Why bother?" responded Harpo with a weary sigh, "It's undoubtedly you again."

All of us have experienced the draining effects of people who sometimes play the role of an "EGR" in our lives—"Extra Grace Required." Before we respond with avoidance and criticism, we would do well to remember that we may play a similar role with others, and we certainly do before God.

¹Og Mandino, *Og Mandino's University of Success* (New York, Bantam Books, 1982), 45.