

# **Wholehearted Generosity**

## **Wholehearted Commitment**

*Selected Texts*

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# Wholehearted Commitment<sup>1</sup>

## Scripture

For the next four Sundays I plan to preach a new series of sermons, which I have titled, *Wholehearted Generosity*.

Now, what is “wholehearted generosity”?

*Wholehearted* is defined as “completely and sincerely devoted, determined, or enthusiastic; marked by complete earnest commitment; free from all reserve or hesitation.”<sup>2</sup> Related words include “ardent, fervent, impassioned, passionate; earnest, serious; authentic, bona fide, genuine.”<sup>3</sup>

Recently, I attended a *Walk Thru the Bible Old Testament* seminar. Some of you may have attended one of those seminars. It is a helpful seminar in which one learns an overview of the entire Old Testament in about 5 hours. The seminar is highly interactive using key words and hand signs to help with the learning process.

During the seminar students learn about the first three kings of Israel: Saul, David, and Solomon. Each king is described in terms of his heart attitude and relationship to God: Saul has “no heart” for God, David has a “whole heart” for God, and Solomon has a “half heart” for God. Now, how would you want to be described? Clearly, you would want to be described as “whole heart.”

*Generosity* of course refers to “the quality or fact of being generous.”<sup>4</sup> It has to do with liberality in giving.

Thus, “wholehearted generosity” refers to a person who is completely and sincerely generous.

And wholehearted generosity begins with *wholehearted*

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this material is from Kirk Nowery’s book *Revolutionary Generosity* (Camarillo, CA: Spire Publishing, 2006), 17-38.

<sup>2</sup> Inc Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, Includes Index, Eleventh ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Inc Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Thesaurus*, Previously Published as: Webster’s Collegiate Thesaurus. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1996, c1988).

<sup>4</sup> Inc Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, Includes Index, Eleventh ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

*commitment*. And that is where we will begin our series today: “Wholehearted Commitment.”

My favorite character in the Bible is the apostle Paul. Few people in the Bible illustrate wholehearted commitment as well as the apostle Paul. Today’s message is an exposition of wholehearted commitment in the life of the apostle Paul rather than an exposition of a text. Let me begin by reading you the account of Paul’s conversion as it is given to us in Acts 9:1-20.

Let us read Acts 9:1-20:

**<sup>1</sup>But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup>And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” <sup>5</sup>And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup>But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” <sup>7</sup>The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. <sup>8</sup>Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup>And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.**

**<sup>10</sup>Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” <sup>11</sup>And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, <sup>12</sup>and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” <sup>13</sup>But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” <sup>15</sup>But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gen-**

tiles and kings and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup>For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” <sup>17</sup>So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>18</sup>And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; <sup>19</sup>and taking food, he was strengthened.

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. <sup>20</sup>And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” (Acts 9:1-20)

## Introduction

“I have seen the most horrible things, but I have met people who are still full of faith in spite of what they have endured.”

That was the opening statement to a gathering of leaders and supporters of Samaritan’s Purse, the organization led by Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham. The speaker was Matt Nowery, who serves with Samaritan’s Purse in Sudan, the most dangerous place in Africa and perhaps the entire world.

His speech continued, “Eighteen months ago I was at home, a recent graduate of the University of Georgia waiting on an opportunity, looking for a place to commit my life.”

Matt then turned to face Franklin Graham.

“Mr. Graham,” he said, “this is the first time since the day you gave me the opportunity in Sudan that I have been able to thank you publicly. So, tonight, in front of all these people, I want to say thank you for challenging a young man like me to wholehearted commitment to Christ.”

Now, let me rewind the story a bit to eighteen months earlier. Matt’s father, Kirk, was a friend of Franklin Graham. Not long after Matt (and his older sister, Ashley) had graduated from college, Franklin called Kirk in the middle of the night.

“Kirk,” he said, “this is Franklin. Hope I’m not calling too

late. I have had your kids on my heart. I heard that they are at transitional points in their lives, out of college, and looking for something beyond the mundane. I have a little project I want to present to them. Could all of you come up here to talk about it?”

The next day the family talked about it, and Kirk, his wife Denise, Matt, and Matt’s older sister Ashley (a nursing school graduate), went to visit Franklin Graham at Samaritan’s Purse.

After a few pleasantries were exchanged, Franklin turned to Ashley and said, “Sudan is the most desperately needy country in the world. There’s been a civil war there for decades, and the U.N. calls it the most dangerous place on earth. We have a field hospital near the Darfur region where we treat people there who have been shot, beaten, slashed with machetes, and tortured by Muslim forces from the north. There’s also every kind of disease you can imagine, and if that wasn’t bad enough, our hospital has been bombed seven times. These people are going through so much, and I think that when this kind of thing is happening, the first hand to reach out to people in need should be the hand of Jesus. *We* are that hand. Ashley, you’re a talented nurse and I want to invite you to join our team at the hospital in Lui.”

Ashley’s parents were shocked. But before they could say anything, Ashley said, “Mr. Graham, my daddy trusts you and we’ve always been taught to live by faith and make strong commitments. I believe God has prepared me for this, so sign me up.”

Kirk Nowery was thinking to himself, *Sign me up? Doesn’t this require a family meeting? No one asked me for a vote.*

He looked at his wife, Denise, and she was speechless too. Before either parent could say a word, Franklin turned to Matt and said, “Matt, I want to talk to you about a tougher assignment.”

*A tougher assignment?* Kirk thought. *Are you kidding me?*

Franklin continued, “In southern Sudan we have identified more than 200 churches that radical Muslims have either bombed, burned or looted. In many of the churches they locked the people inside, tied the pastors to the doors and burned them to the ground.”

He paused, letting the picture form in everyone's minds.

"Matt," he said, "I want you to go in and get the names and stories of every pastor that has been killed. I want you to get the names of all the Christians who have been killed and all the churches that have been destroyed. And I want you to commit to leading the effort to build five churches for every one that has been destroyed and to raise up five pastors for every one who has been martyred. Jesus Christ will stand in the end."

Matt's exact answer was, "Mr. Graham, I can't let my sister make me look bad. Sign me up, too."

On the way home, Matt and Ashley reminded their parents that they had raised them for big challenges and to respond with wholehearted commitment. And that is exactly what they had done.

Ashley worked in an indescribably intense setting at the hospital in Lui, often experiencing more in heart-wrenching moments in a single day than many people experience in a lifetime. She was even attacked by radical Muslim soldiers who killed one of her patients in front of her. But she continued to serve because of her wholehearted commitment.

Now, back to the gathering at Samaritan's Purse. Matt went on to say, "My team and I have recorded the stories of 429 Christian pastors who have been tortured and martyred in Sudan. In most cases, their church buildings were destroyed, sometimes burned down with the church members locked inside. The Christians are victims in a reign of violence driven by the fierce Muslim government in the north. They have been severely persecuted, and many have died, but others are waiting to take their place."

At the end of his speech, Matt walked over to where Franklin Graham was seated and looked straight at him.

"Mr. Graham," he said, "Thank you again for challenging me, for asking me to make a difference, for calling on me to make my life count for the kingdom of God. Please don't ever stop challenging young people to wholehearted commitment to Christ."

## Lesson

Only a few people are called to serve in a place like Sudan. However, all of are called to wholehearted commitment wherever God places us. But what does wholehearted commitment look like? Let me give you the priorities of wholehearted commitment.

### I. Keep Listening

First, wholehearted commitment means to keep listening.

The apostle Paul's ministry began with a clear voice from God. After encountering a blinding light from heaven on the road to Damascus, we read in Acts 9:4, "And falling to the ground *he heard a voice saying to him*, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'" (Acts 9:4).

From that first dramatic encounter throughout the rest of his entire life Paul kept listening to God.

On his second missionary journey, a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." The Bible says that Paul concluded that God had called him to Macedonia to preach the gospel to them (Acts 16:9-10).

God continues to speak to us today. He speaks to us primarily through his written Word. But he also speaks to us through the godly counsel of believers, God-directed circumstances, and the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. But we don't always hear God when he speaks to us.

Wholehearted commitment begins with listening to God. Make a commitment to begin each day in the Word of God. Read God's Word so that you can listen to God.

### II. Keep Surrendering

Second, wholehearted commitment means to keep surrendering.

Obviously, the apostle Paul surrendered his life to God on the Damascus road. Jesus told Paul to enter the city of Damascus, and he would then be told what to do. And even though Paul could not see, that is exactly what he did (Acts 9:5-9).

But surrendering is not a one-time action. It requires recurring action.

When a man and a woman get married they enter into a new commitment with each other. It begins with a public commitment expressed at a wedding ceremony. But, each day they recommit themselves to each other in their attitudes, words, and actions.

Many professing Christians think that they are in a right relationship with Christ because they made a commitment some time ago. I remember being the chaplain on call at the local hospital in Beaver County many years ago. In the middle of the night I was called to go and see a patient who was dying. I got dressed and went to his room. I was surprised to find about fifteen family members there when I entered the room. The family asked me to pray for the man. I asked them where he went to church.

“Oh,” said someone, “he hasn’t been to church for 63 years.”

“But,” said another, “he is a Christian because I found a card in his Bible that said he prayed to receive Christ 63 years ago.”

Wholehearted commitment involves surrendering to God. Surrendering is not a one-time action. It is a recurring action.

### **III. Keep Sacrificing**

Third, wholehearted commitment means to keep sacrificing.

The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Romans 12:1).

Someone said that “sacrifice is giving up something you love for something that you love more.”<sup>5</sup> I think that is helpful.

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<sup>5</sup> Kirk Nowery, *Revolutionary Generosity* (Camarillo, CA: Spire Publishing, 2006), 34.

Johnny meets Suzy. He falls in love with Suzy. The only problem is that Suzy is a full-time college student and also works virtually full-time to pay for college. The only time she doesn't have class, studies or work is on Saturday evening. But, that is the time that Johnny goes fishing with his friends. So, what does Johnny do? Fishing? Or Suzy? Johnny loves fishing, but he realizes that he loves Suzy more. And so it is not difficult for him to give up fishing to spend time with Suzy.

Presenting your bodies as a living sacrifice means that you continually give yourself to Christ and his service because you love him more than anything or anyone else.

Wholehearted commitment means that you keep sacrificing. You make Christ and his service your supreme goal. You prioritize your life around Christ. You evaluate your schedule, your opportunities, your relationships, your vocation, and even your free time in light of your commitment to Christ.

#### **IV. Keep Committing**

Fourth, wholehearted commitment means to keep committing.

The apostle Paul understood that God had called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13). He said to the Romans, "And thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation" (Romans 15:20). He had embarked on three missionary journeys. He had planted numerous churches throughout the Mediterranean basin. He had written many letters to the churches, thirteen of which survive in the New Testament. Further, Paul had endured great suffering in his service to Christ. He said that he had served Christ "with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent jour-

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neys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:23-33).

I imagine it would be easy to say after one incident, “You know, Lord, enough’s enough! Wholehearted commitment is tough. Let me take a break, and let someone else get active. Yes! Let someone else serve for a while. I am going to take it easy.” But not Paul. He kept on making daily commitments to serve Christ.

Paul understood that to make a commitment is to make an agreement. And to keep a commitment is to fulfill an agreement, even if circumstances change or difficulties arise. Paul encountered changing circumstances all the time. He routinely ran into difficulties. But he kept committing.

Wholehearted commitment means that you keep committing. If circumstances change or difficulties arise, as they always do, you keep the commitment that you have made to serve Christ.

## V. Keep Pressing On

And finally, wholehearted commitment means to keep pressing on.

The apostle Paul had experienced suffering and hardship that few will ever know. He said to the Philippians, “But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13b-14).

Paul does not dwell on the past. He focuses on the future. Life is not without an aim. We are moving inexorably toward a goal. And that goal is to receive a prize for which we are called heavenward.

What is the prize? Is it the crown in heaven that we lay at the

feet of Jesus? Is it the word of favor we hear from our heavenly Father for our labors? Commentators differ on what the prize is. But what I can say for sure is that nothing else in life compares with a wholehearted commitment of pressing on to receive that prize.

### **Conclusion**

Now, I don't want you to think that wholehearted commitment means that you must go to the Sudan, or be beaten, or shipwrecked. Wholehearted commitment may involve that for some.

But, for most of us, wholehearted commitment means doing what God has called us to do. Wholehearted commitment means listening to God daily, primarily by spending time in his Word.

Wholehearted commitment means surrendering to God regularly. It is not just making a profession of faith way in the distant past, but it is believing the gospel every moment of every day.

Wholehearted commitment means offering yourself as a living sacrifice by loving Christ and service to him more than anything else. Nothing compares with your love for Christ.

Wholehearted commitment means that you keep committing. If circumstances change or difficulties arise, as they always do, you keep the commitment that you have made to serve Christ.

And wholehearted commitment means that you keep pressing on. You forget yesterday and its troubles and difficulties. You press on to receive the prize that awaits you when you see Jesus.

Wholehearted commitment is done in your home when you do your part to make it a Christ-centered home. It is done in your relationship to your spouse when you love her as Christ loved the church, and when you submit to him as the church submitted to Christ. It is done in your vocation when you serve with integrity. And it is done in the church when you give and serve in ministry.

May God help each one of us to serve with wholehearted commitment. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

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**PRAAYER:**

O Lord our God, when you call us to yourself you call us to a wholehearted commitment to you. King Saul had no heart commitment to you. King Solomon had a half-hearted commitment to you. King David, however, like the apostle Paul, served you with wholehearted commitment. Help each one here today to make a wholehearted commitment to you. Help each one of us to keep listening, keep surrendering, keep sacrificing, keep committing, and keep pressing on to you.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.