

Keeping Commitments to God

The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day (Deuteronomy 5:3 *KJV*).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 5:1–7, 12–15

Song: “O Jesus, I Have Promised”

A big lesson I learned during my first semester at college had to do with commitment. I’d found a high-paying, part-time job off campus, and I asked two fellow students to consider working with me there. The first student quickly told me no; even though his on-campus job was low-paying, he had made a one-year commitment to it. The second student told me that he had made the same commitment to an on-campus job and then added, “But maybe I can get out of it.” I was struck by the first student’s level of commitment and by the second student’s lack of integrity.

Before the Israelites entered the promised land, Moses reminded them of God’s covenant with them: He would be their God, and the Israelites would forsake their idols and be His people. Moses also charged the people to show their commitment to God by honoring His commandment to keep the Sabbath.

When we as believers come to know Christ, we are making a commitment to follow Him. But it is keeping that commitment—not just making it—that pleases God. As we obey His will, we demonstrate just how seriously we take our commitment to Him.

Father, help me be faithful in keeping the commitment I’ve made to follow You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

July 7–13. **David Madsen** lives in Wisconsin with his family. He teaches English at a Christian college.

Looking Forward to Eternity

There remaineth . . . a rest to the people of God (Hebrews 4:9 *KJV*).

Scripture: Hebrews 4:1–10

Song: “When We All Get to Heaven”

As a child, name-brand foods were almost non-existent in our home—nearly everything we ate was generic. One time I asked my mom why we couldn’t buy the brands I always saw on television commercials. She told me that we used generic products throughout the year to save money for something special, something we could look forward to: family vacations. A little deprivation of top-notch items throughout the year meant extra money for fun summer trips.

The writer of Hebrews explains that God established the Sabbath as a day of rest as far back as the creation, and God expects His people to observe it. After six hard days of labor, the Israelites could look forward to their Sabbath rest. The author of Hebrews states that God has prepared rest for those who belong to Him. As believers we look forward to eternity in heaven—the ultimate rest after our labor on earth.

The Lord gives us many things to look forward to in this life, such as beginning a career, starting a family, and pursuing new hobbies. However, these pale in comparison to what God has in store for us. And since even the best lives on earth include plenty of trials and hardships, believers are blessed to be able to look forward to an eternity of rest from earth’s woes as we rejoice in God’s presence.

Father, thank You for Your promise of a rest that lies ahead in my eternal home with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Being a Good Ambassador

Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me (John 7:16 *KJV*).

Scripture: John 7:14–24

Song: “Christ’s Ambassadors”

Edmond-Charles Genêt (1763–1834) was the ambassador from France to America during the French Revolution—but he wasn’t a good one. Genêt was sent to the United States to gain support for France’s conflict with European powers. But instead of going through the appropriate diplomatic channel of meeting with President George Washington, Genêt began recruiting American citizens to fight Britain and Spain *without* federal authorization. Alarmed, President Washington and his Cabinet had France recall Genêt, since the maverick ambassador did not represent his country well.

As Jesus taught in the temple, the Pharisees were astonished that He did so with such authority. They criticized Him for speaking against them and for healing a man on the Sabbath. But Jesus reminded the Pharisees that He wasn’t working on His own behalf. Instead, He was His heavenly Father’s ambassador on earth. Jesus delivered the message the Father had given Him and drew His followers’ attention back to the Father, rather than to Himself.

Scripture tells us that, as believers, we are Christ’s ambassadors. As such, we must represent Him well to those around us by our speech, actions, and attitudes. Like Jesus, we are to be faithful messengers of God’s Word. Rather than speaking on our own behalf and acting in our own interests, we need to draw all attention back to Him.

Father, as Your ambassador in this world, help me represent You well. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Boasting in the Lord

Thou, LORD, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands. O LORD, how great are thy works! (Psalm 92:4–5 *KJV*).

Scripture: Psalm 92

Song: “I Will Make My Boast in Jesus”

Being in the spotlight can be fun, even if it's somebody else's spotlight. When I was in junior high, my school participated in an event with an international organization that delivers food to people in need. As I helped pack boxes, I noticed a local television news reporter and camera operator covering the event. Wanting a chance to be seen on the local news, I moved to where the camera would catch me behind the reporter. Sure enough, that night I saw myself in the background of the news broadcast! What a thrill as I got to see myself participating in the organization's good work.

In Psalm 92, David boasts of the Lord's lovingkindness, faithfulness, and great works. He also gives thanks for God's deliverance from his enemies. He seems overjoyed that, as one of God's servants, he can delight in such an amazing Lord. David is not glorying in himself but in his God.

As believers, being part of God's family really does have its privileges. We have a Savior who is wonderful in His steadfast love and awesome works. Like David, we should recognize how great the Lord is and how good He has been to us. When we do, we will find that we can easily rejoice in Him.

Father, it's my joy to glory forever in Your greatness and goodness! In Jesus' name, amen.

Remembering the Main Thing

[Jesus said,] Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? (Luke 13:16 KJV).

Scripture: Luke 13:10–17

Song: “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love”

A 1959 episode of *Candid Camera* featured a car that had no motor, rolling down an incline and into a full-service gas station. The actress posing as the car’s driver complained the vehicle had stalled. When a man came over to look under the hood, his confusion and consternation at not finding an engine created a hilarious scenario. Of course, a motor is central to a car’s ability to move and couldn’t be left out, no matter how many of the other parts of the car were still there.

When Jesus healed a woman with an 18-year-long impairment, the Pharisees criticized Him for healing her on the Sabbath. In response, the Lord chided them for being willing to take care of their animals on the Sabbath while being indignant about a woman receiving healing. The Pharisees missed out on the central idea of the Sabbath: to give relief to the weary, as Jesus had done for this woman.

Sometimes it’s easy to prioritize specific practices of our faith but forget what is essential to God. Just as God showed how much He cares for us by sending Christ to redeem us, we are to show that same kind of care to others so they can find their rest in Him.

Father, help me keep as my priority what You care about most. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Staying True

David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king hath commanded me a business (1 Samuel 21:2 *KJV*).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 21:1–6

Song: “I Would Be True”

As teenagers, my sister and I accompanied my parents to a conference. During their meetings, we were taken to a youth event at a park. During free time, the two of us wandered off from the group. It wasn't long before we decided we would be missed and, noticing an activity was underway, we tried to sneak back to the main group. Unfortunately, the conference-issued neon-blue shirts we were wearing caught the eye of the activity directors, who came to where we were and marched us—both thoroughly embarrassed—back to the group.

David, while running for his life from King Saul, lied to Ahimelech the priest to get food and hide his fugitive status. Ahimelech gave David priestly bread, and the priest and most of his family were later killed by Saul when he learned Ahimelech had, unknowingly, helped David. David's deception brought him immediate gratification of food but ended with his own shame when he realized his responsibility for Ahimelech's death.

Pragmatism, the belief that the ends justify the means, is a common idea in our fallen world. Yet there are serious consequences to following such a philosophy. Often, people get hurt when we do wrong, regardless of our motives. Rather than justifying wrong actions, we can endeavor to stay true to what we know is right and trust God when we have needs.

Father, help me to be true when I am tempted to do wrong. In Jesus' name, amen.

Mercy Above Sacrifice

[Jesus said,] If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless (Matthew 12:7 *KJV*).

Scripture: Matthew 12:1–8

Song: “God of Mercy, God of Grace”

Some gifts are priceless—especially relational gifts. My dad had his own business, and when I was a boy, every night like clockwork, he would take his business mail to the post office in a nearby town, and he invited me to go along. Our father-son chats in the car became a special memory. Even though my dad worked hard to make sure I always had presents on my birthday and Christmas, no gift ever compared to the delight of that time with him each night.

When Jesus’ disciples picked and ate grain on the Sabbath, the Pharisees accused them of violating the day of rest. But Jesus pointed back to the Old Testament story of Ahimelech the priest, who gave David the priestly bread intended for them. Just as Ahimelech had mercy on David and gave him the holy bread when he was hungry, Jesus directed the Pharisees to value mercy toward others instead of carefully scrutinizing their observances.

We are all beneficiaries of God’s mercy as followers of Christ. As such, we should remember the importance of showing mercy to others in need. As we begin to value people as the Lord does, we will see the importance of extending mercy to those who need it.

Father, help me to give mercy to others as You have given it to me. In Jesus’ name, amen.