



FUNDAMENTAL #5

I'VE MADE A FORMAL COMMITMENT.
NOW WHAT?

“Commitment is what transforms a promise into reality.”

Abraham Lincoln

Jean-Paul Sartre, a 20th-century French philosopher said, “Commitment is an act, not a word.”¹ Unfortunately, a *verbal* commitment between a college coach and a student-athlete is not a guarantee that the coach or athlete will actually act on their word. Verbal commitments are unofficial and the NCAA does not recognize or even track them; so, any tweet or story you see of an athlete getting an offer or committing to a school before the signing period of their senior year is considered unofficial.²

Aren’t you grateful that God’s offer of salvation is never retracted? Friend, if you’ve just prayed to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then today is your signing day! It’s official! You are now a child of God (John 1:12)! You’ve made the best decision of your life! There is no power on earth or in heaven that can separate you from the love of Christ or snatch you out of his hand. He guarantees it (Rom. 8: 38-39, John 10:28)!

On signing day, it’s common to have a host of family members, coaches and friends celebrating around an athlete as he or she signs their letter of intent to play for a particular college program. Well, I can assure you, the angels are celebrating over you right now (Luke 15:10)! While the angels and I take great joy in celebrating over you, I want you to know that your decision to follow Jesus *does not* demand an emotional response from you. You’re not expected to feel a certain way other than being grateful for what Jesus has done for you. Whether your decision is accompanied by tears of joy, a heart that is bursting with delight, or you currently feel indifferent, if you truly meant what you prayed, your decision is just as valid and can never be made void!

Committing your life to Jesus Christ is just the beginning of a newly paved road that leads to eternal life in heaven that actually begins *now*. It doesn’t mean that the road will always be easy and smooth because contrary to what you might think, Christians are not immune to hardship or suffering. However, it does mean that you will never walk alone! Your Heavenly Father will be with you every step of the way; whether you’re on the mountaintop or in the valley, or somewhere in between, he will never leave your side (Deut. 13:6).

So now what are you supposed to do as a new Christian?

Any good coach knows that you can’t teach an athlete all there is to know about their respective sport in a short amount of time. It’s a lengthy process and so is living the Christian life. In fact, it’s a lifelong process. Therefore, I will only give you five “next steps” to jump start your new journey of faith.

1. Read The Bible

The number one way God speaks to his people is through his Word, the Holy Bible. It is filled with instruction, encouragement, praise, challenges, direction, guidelines, and hope! God loves us so much that he not only tells us how to live, but we see it demonstrated through the life of Jesus. The Bible is God's love letter to us, and it's just as relevant today as it was when it was written.

- *Before you begin reading, ask God to speak to you.* Pray Psalm 119:34, "Give me an understanding heart, so that I may passionately know and obey your truth" (TPT).
- *Concentrate on what you're reading.* If necessary, place your phone in another room so you won't be distracted by it.
- *Personalize what you're reading.* As you read, substitute your name or personal pronouns such as "I" or "me" into verses so that they speak directly to you. For example, "He will cover *me* with his feathers and under his wings, *I* will find refuge; his faithfulness will be *my* shield and rampart" (Psalm 91:4).
- *Keep a journal handy and write down anything important that stands out,* such as scriptures, thoughts, questions, prayers, blessings and highlights from church sermons. If you're picking up a Bible for the first time, the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John), are a great place to start. And you can't go wrong with Proverbs or Psalms! Proverbs is filled with great wisdom and teaches you how to interact with others the way God intended. No matter where you start, just start!

2. Talk to God

Just as God *really* does speak to us through his word, he is also *really* listening when we pray. One of the greatest gifts God has given us is the privilege of prayer. We have direct access to God because Jesus removed the barrier between us and God—the barrier that was caused by our sin. Jesus Christ is our mediator; our middleman. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus," (1 Timothy 2:5 NIV).

It would be irresponsible of me to say there is a "right" way to pray because that is simply not true! However, may I suggest that as you bring your cares and concerns to Christ, you sprinkle them with thanksgiving and confession as well? As a mother, it brings me great joy when I hear my children say, "Thank you, mom." In the same way, I believe it delights the Lord when we acknowledge and give thanks for what he's actively doing in our lives. Additionally, while you are now a fully forgiven believer, the fact remains that even though we have been made righteous by the blood of Jesus Christ, we will still encounter sin and should never feel "okay" with it. Therefore we must continually confess and repent of our sins the moment we become aware of them.

There's no secret formula for praying. Prayer is simply talking to God—sharing your heart with him, just like you would your best friend. He hears our prayers on all occasions—whether we're praying silently, out loud or unable to voice a prayer because we're overwhelmed with grief or anxiety. God just wants to hear from you! A final word on prayer—never feel like someone else's prayers are more worthy to be heard than yours just because they use "religious" words or pray with great passion. God does not show favoritism (Romans 2:11)!

3. Get Baptized

Baptism is a lot like getting married and putting on a wedding ring. Whether I wear my ring or not, the fact remains, I'm married. However, wearing the ring publicly is a symbol of my love and commitment to my husband. In the same way, baptism does not save you; rather it's a symbol of your lifelong commitment to Christ and your willingness to share it publicly. Here are three reasons why you should get baptized after receiving Christ as your Savior and Lord:

- *To declare your commitment.* When athletes commit to a college program, they make a big deal of it; they tweet it and post it in every way imaginable, making their decision public. Baptism is a public declaration about your decision to follow Jesus. (I dare you to tweet it or post it). Our faith should be personal, but not private. Baptism is about going public with your faith and telling people about the change that's already happened in you.
- *Jesus was baptized and commanded it.* Shortly before Jesus started his ministry on earth, he was baptized by John the Baptist, even though he was not a sinner. Yet he humbled himself to identify with us and give us an example to follow. If the Son of God pursued baptism, why shouldn't we? Not only did he get baptized, but in Matthew 28: 19-20 he commanded all of us to make disciples, (students of Jesus), and to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Baptism is a symbol of what Jesus did for us. Water baptism is a beautiful picture of what our Lord has done for us. As we are immersed in the water, we are symbolically buried with our Lord. When we are raised out of the water, we are symbolically resurrected, raised to new life in Christ! Water baptism also illustrates the spiritual cleansing we experience when we are saved; just as water cleanses the flesh, so the Holy Spirit cleanses our hearts when we put our faith in Christ. Baptism by immersion can be done in a swimming pool, church baptistry, a river, lake or even a bathtub!

4. Build Friendships with Other Christians

"Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14, NLT)

This verse is commonly used in regards to marriage; however, I can't think of any reason why we shouldn't apply this verse as a guideline for our closest friendships. Don't get me wrong. If you have friends who don't believe in God or could care less about Jesus, I'm not encouraging

you to ditch them. On the contrary, who needs the message of hope more than them?. What I *am* encouraging you to do is to seek-out like-minded friends who will keep you be accountable to your new faith in Christ. Here are some key characteristics of authentic Christian friendships:

- *Unconditional Love.* Proverbs 17:17 says that a true friend loves at *all* times, not when it's convenient for you. Unconditional love is loving your friend for *who* they are, not for *what* they can do for you. Unconditional love overlooks one another's weaknesses and instead, builds one another up according to their needs (Ephesians 4:29).
- *Rejoice and mourn with one another.* Romans 12:15 says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." A true friend doesn't envy your success but rejoices with you. Conversely, a true friend mourns with the friend who experiences failure. It's what godly friends do. Take the time to celebrate each other's victories but even more importantly, be ever-present during the hardships.
- *Accountability and correction.* "You can trust a friend who wounds you with his honesty but your enemy's pretended flattery comes from his insincerity" Proverbs 27:6 (MSG). If you're a good friend, you will gently correct your Christian friend when they're behaving in a manner that is contrary to what God would approve of. On the other hand, you should be willing to accept accountability and correction from a godly friend in return. There's no need to point out minor flaws, but when you see behavior that can cause serious damage to another person or to their own reputation, lovingly point it out.

5. Attend a Bible Believing Church

When searching for a church home, the most important thing to look for is a pastor who preaches from the Bible! That may sound obvious, but I can assure you, there are plenty of pastors who don't carry a Bible to the pulpit. Here are some tips when trying to find a church that preaches the truth of the gospel:

- *Biblical truth should be preached.* If what you're continually hearing sounds more like motivational speeches, practical how-to guides, or the focus is on prosperity, then the Gospel of Jesus Christ is likely being skirted around. Take the motivational speech for what it's worth but be cautious.
- *Sermons should be inspired from the Bible.* There should always be a chapter and verse mentioned from either the Old or New Testament. The Old Testament is just as relevant as the New Testament, so if the church regularly excludes the Old Testament, be on guard. The "whole counsel of God" should be preached (Acts 20:27).
- *All teaching should be "Christ-centered."* The bible is Christ-centered from Genesis to Revelation so sermons should be too. The Old Testament records the unfolding of the promise of salvation in Christ and the New Testament reveals how Christ came to fulfill

that promise; therefore, if sermons aren't consistently pointing toward Jesus, keep searching.

One word of caution: do not look for the “perfect” church because it doesn’t exist. All churches are filled with imperfect people so why would any church be perfect?

To recap, your action steps as a new believer are to begin a journey of reading and studying the Bible, praying often, pursue baptism, seek-out godly friendships, and find a church that will disciple you and help foster your faith. Remember, the faith journey is lifelong! We will never fully understand the ways and thoughts of God on this side of heaven. According to Proverbs 25:2, “it is God’s privilege to conceal things and the king’s privilege to discover them.” I wonder if God hides things from us so that we will diligently seek him and in turn, make new discoveries about not only him but also about ourselves; a spiritual game of hide-and-seek, if you will.

While God has reserved the right to conceal *some* things, we do have the benefit of having *much* revealed! “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29 NIV). As you begin (or continue) in your journey with Christ, may He richly bless you and reveal to you, and your children, for generations to come His love, mercy, grace and goodness! Now go get back in the game!