You Are Your Commitments Aug. 8, 2021

5 of 9 in *Who God Says You Are*

I recently came across an old Indigenous story. It begins with a mischievous young man placing an eagle's egg into a turkey's nest. The eaglet hatched and grew up with this brood of turkeys.

Thinking he was a turkey, the young eagle did what the turkeys did. He scratched and pecked in the dirt for seeds and insects. He gobbled. He flew but only in fits and starts with a brief thrashing of wings and a flurry of feathers.

Then one day, he looked up, and saw this magnificent bird far above him in the cloudless sky. Hanging with graceful majesty on the powerful wind currents, that bird soared with scarcely a beat of its strong golden wings.

"What a beautiful bird!" gasped the displaced eagle. "I wonder what it is."

"Oh, that's an eagle, the chief of birds," gobbled a nearby turkey friend. "But don't give him a second thought. You could never be like him."

So the displaced eagle put it out of his mind, until one day he took notice his own reflection in the water as he bent down to drink. For the first time, it dawned on him that he didn't look like the other turkeys at all. In fact, he looked very much like that eagle he had seen soaring above.

That's when he had an epiphany: "I'm not a turkey after all— I'm an eagle!"

It didn't happen overnight, but the displaced eagle eventually learned to soar, and when he did, he left the turkey life behind. Not that he doesn't still catch himself pecking, scratching, and gobbling sometimes—old habits die hard. But then he remembers who he really is. "I am the chief of birds. I've been made to soar."

Many people come to believe they are someone—or something— other than who they really are. For example, there are documented cases of children who were lost in the wild and raised by animals. In 1987, a boy was found living with a group of monkeys in Uganda. When taken away to an orphanage, the boy would squeal, jump on his hands, eat grass, and was very afraid of people. Scientists refer to such behaviour as "imprinting." You might also call it an identity crisis.

Many Christians suffer from a crisis of identity. We become so "imprinted" by the patterns of this world that we don't see who we really are in Christ. In a manner of speaking, we see ourselves as turkeys, and so we live like turkeys, when all along, God's word says we have been made to mount up with wings like eagles (Isaiah 40:31).

We're in the middle of a very important series about identity. It's important because your identity is the most important thing about you. It's who you are. It's what makes you—*you*. And like the eagle in the story, how you see and think about your identity profoundly influences the way you live your life every day—for better or worse.

It all comes down to the degree to which you're learning to live in line with who God says you are—which is the title of this series. Because who God says you are is the *real* you. Are you learning to live in line with the person God made you to be and intends you to become? Or, are you more inclined to think and act— like a turkey?

Now a person's identity is complex. There are many aspects to it. Accordingly, in this series, we're exploring what the Bible says about nine factors that shape our identity.

The factors we've looked at so far are your body, your history, your relationships and your mind. Today, we're going to look at our commitments.

How do your commitments relate to your identity?

They do so in two ways. Your commitments SHOW your sense of identity, and they also SHAPE your sense of identity.

First of all:

1. Your commitments SHOW your sense of identity.

Now, if you could list your top 3-5 commitments at this point in your life, what would they be? Go ahead and actually make a quick mental list of your top commitments if you can.

If you're with us online today, feel free to type some of your top commitments into the chat as they come to mind.

I trust that most of you who'd bother to attend a Sunday worship service like this would put God at the top of your commitment list. Family is also likely to make many of your lists. Marriage, for example, is such a major commitment that it calls for vows of lifelong faithfulness. Parenting is also a major commitment, of course, and caring for aging parents can be as well.

You might be highly committed to your career, your education, your church or ministry, or to some kind of cause. You might be committed to an activity, hobby or pastime.

I trust that by now most of you have made a mental list of some of your top commitments. Keep that list in mind, as I read the following passage from Matthew's gospel:

> Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"
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> "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."
>
> "Which ones?" he inquired.
>
> Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"
>
> "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"
>
> Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."
>
> When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. [1]

By all appearances, this young man was very committed to God. He claimed to have carefully kept the commandments, and seemed poised to become a follower of Jesus.

But Jesus could see into his heart, and challenged him to sell his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. Jesus did this to expose the fact that this guy's primary commitment wasn't to God. It was to his wealth.

You see, as much as the young man talked about God and eternal life and keeping commandments, it became clear that he had built his sense of who he was— his sense of self, his sense of *identity*— not on God, but rather on his financial status.

And given a stark choice between God and his wealth, the young man hung his head, turned around, and walked away from Jesus.

One New Testament scholar says that:

[1] Matthew 19:16-23 (NIV)

Our commitments are lived, or they are not commitments. [2]

With that in mind, go back to the commitment list you made in your head. How many of the commitments on your list are actually *lived* commitments? To what extent are you *acting* on the things you claim to be committed to? If the commitments on your list aren't *lived* commitments, then maybe you're not as committed to those things as you thought you were. Maybe your true commitments lie elsewhere.

Now some of you may have commitments that are hard for you to live out the way you'd like to due to factors beyond your control, such as poor health, for example. But that's not the kind of scenario that's really in view here.

What is in view here is that Jesus can see into your heart, just like he saw into the rich young man's heart. If Jesus, looking into your heart, were to make a list of what he knows your *actual* commitments are, would his list look the same as the one you just made? Or would it look different?

True commitments are *lived* commitments, and your true commitments reveal the sense of identity you're trying to build your life on— whether you're building your life on who God says you are, or whether you're building your life on some false sense of identity having to do with wealth, power, position, popularity, or what have you.

Sometimes, our commitment to family—as important as that is— eclipses our commitment to God. There's no question we're called to love and care for our family, but as followers of Jesus, our ultimate commitment— and our ultimate identity— is not rooted in our family, but in Jesus alone. This is what Jesus has in mind when he says:

> If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters— yes even their own life— such a person cannot be my disciple. [3]

Of course Jesus doesn't mean we should literally hate our families. He's just using hyperbole to make a point. As much as we're called to be committed to our families, our primary commitment must be to Jesus, because our ultimate identity is found in Jesus alone. And here's the irony of it all— I love my family better when I put Jesus first than I do when I put my family first.

Sometimes our commitment to our ethnic, cultural or national identity eclipses our commitment to Jesus. Sometimes our commitment to our gender or sexual identity eclipses our commitment to Jesus.

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[2] Klyne Snodrgass, *Who God Says You Are*, 119.
[3] Luke 14:26 (NIV)

While all of those things are important aspects of who we are, they were never meant to serve as the foundation of our identity, because scripture says:

> There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. [4]

Sometimes when I look at what's been happening in my own country of origin—the United States—I'm saddened to see that the commitments of many American churchgoers reveal the extent to which their sense of national and political identity has become inappropriately and I would say dangerously fused with their sense of Christian identity.

Sometimes, even our commitment to ministry can eclipse our commitment to God. Whenever my heart has tried to find its sense of identity in the ministry God gave me rather than in the God who gave me the ministry, those are the times I've made ministry an idol.

You see, from a biblical perspective, that's what misplaced commitment really comes down to—*idolatry*. Idolatry happens when you make something or someone other than God your ultimate thing. It happens when you take an originally good thing—like ministry, family, ethnicity, a hobby, or anything else—and make it the foundation of your identity.

But none of those good things is meant bear the weight of your identity, because you've been created in the image of the God who loves and values you so much that in Jesus, he died to redeem and restore your life and purpose in his image.

So it's important to be able to critically discern where your truest commitments lie—and by extension where you're seeking—whether rightly or wrongly—to find your sense of identity. Here's a set of diagnostic questions adapted from Tim Keller that can help you with that:

- **What occupies my mind when I have nothing else to think about?** Where do your thoughts tend to turn when there is nothing else demanding your attention? Chances are, what you tend to think about habitually in the privacy of your heart will reveal where your truest commitments lie.

- **How do I spend my time and money?** Your time and money flow most readily to the relationships and things you're most committed to. If Jesus, through his sacrificial love for me, has won my heart, my time and money will increasingly flow toward his kingdom priorities. Many of us, though, spend inordinate amounts of

[4] Galatians 3:28 (NLT)

time on trivial pursuits and creature comforts, or inordinate amounts of money on clothing, kids or status symbols.

- **What outcomes in life do I most insist on?** Are there certain things that I feel must, at all costs, turn out a certain way? This question may reveal your true commitments, and so can the following related question:

- **What are my hardest to control emotions?** When you pray and work for something and don't get it, and respond with explosive anger, deep despair, or seething resentment, then what you're truly committed to may have been exposed.

You may want to spend some time on your own prayerfully reflecting on those questions. You'll find them in the chat, as well as in the sermon notes online.

The point is, your commitments—whatever they may be—reveal the sense of identity that you're trying to build your life on, whether rightly or wrongly, for better or worse. Your commitments SHOW your sense of identity. Now, let's consider how:

2. Your commitments SHAPE your sense of identity.

What is a commitment, anyway?

To make a commitment is to voluntarily limit yourself. Have you ever considered that before?

A commitment is to choose one option among a range of possible options, and then to bind yourself to that one option. So marriage is an obvious example of a commitment. You bind yourself to your spouse, and forsake any options you might otherwise have for a mate.

Your commitments also limit you because you only have so much time and energy. And you only have so many resources. Therefore, you need to find a *focus* for where you're going to invest your limited time, energy and resources.

So our commitments are the things to which we give our focus. [5]

From a biblical perspective, what you focus on *sets the entire orientation and trajectory of your life, and it affects the kind of person you're becoming*. In other words, your focus—your *commitments*— shape your sense of identity, for better or worse.

Jesus puts in this way:

[5] Snodgrass, *Who God Says You* Are, 126.

> "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness.
>
> No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." [6]

When Jesus says the eye is the lamp of the body, he's talking about where you focus your attention in life. In other words, he's talking about your commitments.

If your eyes— meaning your focus or commitments—are healthy, your life will be full of light. But if your focus and commitments are unhealthy, then your life will be full of darkness. So your commitments shape the kind of person you're becoming.

Jesus goes on to say that it's impossible to serve two masters— you can't make primary commitments to both God and money, for example. Just like the rich young man we read about earlier, you can only be truly committed to one or the other— because that's how commitment works.

To make a commitment is to voluntarily limit your focus, and from there, your focus is going to shape who you become. Your commitments, therefore, will shape your sense of identity, powerfully so, whether for light or for darkness.

Here's an eye-opening verse from the book of 2 Kings, where the Bible says that the people of Israel committed themselves to false gods, with this result:

> They worshiped worthless idols, so they became worthless themselves. [7]

This verse is indicative of the principle that over time, and in a very real sense, **We become our commitments**. Accordingly, C.S. Lewis suggests that:

> The dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. [8]

[6] Matthew 6:22;24 (NIV)
[7] 2 Kings 17:15b (NLT)
[8] C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

Some might say, "Well if that's the case I'm just going to play it safe then. I won't make any commitments at all." And then they pass the time with frivolous forms of distraction and amusement.

But don't you see? That in itself a form of commitment. It's like basing your life philosophy on the premise of the sitcom Seinfeld, which prides itself in being "a show about nothing."

And if we become our commitments, then to commit to nothing is to essentially become… *nothing*. It's to waste of your life— which amounts to a massive sin. God didn't give you your life so you could waste it. God gave you your life so you could become who he says you are—the person he made and redeemed you to become.

To quote C.S. Lewis again—and this is a quote Pastor Andrew shared in a previous message:

> The question is not what we intended ourselves to be, but what He intended us to be when he made us. [9]

To this end, scripture has an almost singular focus on calling us to not only make good commitments in general, but to make God and his kingdom our primary commitment. Let me site just a small handful of texts from among what could be hundreds and hundreds.

In the Psalms, we read:

> Commit your way to the Lord. [10]

In Deuteronomy we read:

> "Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. [11]

In Matthew's counterpart to that verse Jesus says:

[9] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*
[10] Psalm 37:5a (NIV)
[11] Deuteronomy 6:4-6 (NLT)

> "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." [12]

Peter writes:

> So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. [13]

In Ephesians Paul writes:

> Therefore I… beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. [14]

And in Colossians Paul writes:

> Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. [15]

In scripture, we see that all of the commitments we make are to flow out of a primary commitment to God, who alone is the foundation of our identity. If your primary commitment in life is to God, then all of your lesser commitments and needs will fall into their proper place. And so Jesus tells us to:

> Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. [16]

What has God been saying to you about your commitments today?

We've seen that your commitments SHOW your sense of identity—they reveal where you're trying to build your sense of self on. And they also SHAPE your identity. Your commitments set the entire orientation and trajectory of your life, and shape the kind of person you're becoming.

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[12] Matthew 22:37-40 (NLT)
[13] 1 Peter 4:19 (NIV)
[14] Ephesians 4:1 (NLT)
[15] Colossians 3:2 (NLT)
[16] Matthew 6:33 (NLT)

I ask you again: What's God saying to you about your commitments today?

One practice to help you surrender your misplaced commitments and strengthen your commitment to God is worship. We worship when we set our hearts and minds—our focus—on *Jesus*.

When you focus on Jesus, the beauty of his love and grace and truth will become more attractive to your heart than your misplaced commitments, and you'll be drawn to commit your life more fully to him. As Tim Keller puts it:

> Jesus must become more beautiful to your imagination, more attractive to your heart, than your idol [or your misplaced commitment]. If you uproot the idol and fail to "plant" the love of Christ in its place, the idol will grow back.[17]

The best way to surrender your misplaced commitments and strengthen your commitment to God is to renew your worship of Jesus.

For starters, **be consistent in your Sunday worship attendance**. If you agree with the following statement, please raise your hand if you're here in person, and if you're with us online click the hand icon in the chat area: "By coming to this worship service, I focused on Jesus today in a way that I never would have if I hadn't come here." Okay, lots of hands here in person. Good—*whew*! You've helped make the point. Make Sunday worship attendance a priority. This is a day and age when they say that Christians are attending Sunday worship less and less, whether in-person or online. My prayer is that Cornerstone will always be a notable exception to any trends like that.

Also, **set aside daily time for private worship**. It can include prayer and the reading of scripture along with good, Jesus-focused devotional material. For some great prayer resources for your private worship time, check out www.cornerstonechurch.ca/prayer.

It can also include putting on your headphones, turning on some good worship music, and lifting your praises to Jesus. The music and its lyrics help me to appreciate to breathtaking beauty and extravagantly generous grace of Jesus all the more, and help to renew my heart's affections for Jesus.

We have actually curated a Spotify playlist with some great worship songs about your identity in Jesus, which you can check out www.cornerstonechurch.ca/identityplaylist.

[17] Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, p. 172.

Remember, we're not turkeys, so let's not live like turkeys and make commitments like turkeys. In Jesus, we've been made to mount up with wings like eagles, and soar. Amen? Amen.