



The Long Haul

Adapted from “Christian Discipline” series by Dennis Marquardt

The problem today with people’s interest in becoming spiritual is that it is usually the result of a crisis, and they see spirituality as a quick fix to an immediate need. Once the need is over, so is the spirituality.

Satisfying spirituality, however, requires a long-haul viewpoint. We cannot afford to promote a Christianity that is devoid of long term commitments. Do you have a faith that can weather time? What is your faith built on? Can it endure no matter the external circumstances of your life? Can it stand against all the critics?

Colonel George Washington Goethals, the man responsible for the completion of the Panama Canal, had big problems with the climate and the

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geography. But his biggest challenge was the growing criticism back home from those who predicted he would never finish the project. Finally, a colleague asked him, "Aren't you going to answer these critics?" "In time," answered Goethals. "When?" his partner asked. "When the canal is finished."¹

The call of God on our lives is for the long haul. The real strength of spirituality is found in the long-term commitment, not the short-term experience. The Bible teaches us to develop a lifetime strategy for godly living, not to just have “flash point” spirituality. The results of a lifetime commitment will not only bless our lives but also help others to make the same commitment.

¹ “Giving Critics the Best Answer,” PreachingToday, March 1998, <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/1998/march/4297.html> (accessed August 1, 2017).

COURAGE Level Questions

Exercise #1: Describe (briefly) the circumstances, decisions, and events that led you to become a follower of Christ.

C1: In your story, is there a crisis of some kind? If so, what happened after the crisis was over?

Exercise #2: Read and answer the following.

Hebrews 10:35–39 (ESV) Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

C2: From these verses, what do you learn about the concept of the “long-haul?”

C3: Many men cry out to God in their time of need, but when the need is over, they go back to forgetting about God until the next need arises. What are some steps you can take as a godly man to keep God first and foremost in your life for the long haul (in normal times **and** in crises)? Be specific.

Exercise #3: Read and answer the following.

1 Timothy 4:1–16 (ESV) Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require

abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

C4: 1 Timothy 4:1 (ESV) states, “...in latter days some will fall away from the faith.” What does the rest of the chapter teach you about why that will happen?

C5: In firefighting, there is a term called “flash point,” or where everything in the room combusts and then quickly goes out. Is your faith like a “flash point,” quickly igniting and then fading out? How can you make sure you do not fade out?

C6: What is the nature of your commitment to Christ?

- Is it only good in the convenient moments of your life?
- Do you find your commitment to Christ runs second to other commitments?
- Does your job get more commitment or God?
- Do your own needs dictate priorities or do God's commands?
- What is your testimony?
- Have you made plans for retirement from your occupation? Have you ever thought about the long term of having Christ in your life?

STRENGTH Level Questions

Exercise #1: Describe your walk with Christ. How did you meet Him? How long has it been? What have been easy and difficult things about it? Etc.

Exercise #2: We challenge you to share that story with another man. Remember that he will need to know that a commitment to Christ needs to be more than a “quick fix” response to a crisis. It needs to be a long-haul commitment.

Exercise #3: Read 1 Timothy 4:1–16 (ESV), and spend a couple minutes meditating about it.

Exercise #4: 1 Timothy 4:1 (ESV) speaks of some falling away from the faith due to outside influences. Name a negative influence that affects (or has affected) you walk with Christ and how you would advise another man to address it.

Exercise #5: Paul shares with Timothy that to have a long haul with Christ, a man needs training. Describe what type of Christian life training are you currently involved in? If you are not involved in such an effort, talk to your pastor about what to do. Or, you can call the National Men's Ministries at 417.370.6280, or email us at men@ag.org.

S1: In 1 Timothy 4:13 (ESV), Paul speaks of being devoted to the public reading of scripture, and to preaching and teaching. Do you think today's man is dedicated to those things? If not, how might you try to set an example to change that?

Exercise #6: Read and answer the following.

Hebrews 10:35–39 (ESV)

S2: How can you be sure that your walk with Christ is deep, rather than shallow?

S3: As people observe your walk with Christ, do you think people can tell if you are a “flash point” believer or a long-haul Christian? Be specific and honest.

Exercise #7: In the next 30 days, spend time daily asking the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and life and speak to you clearly about areas where you are weak, or are drifting away from Him. During the 30 days, write notes to yourself about what you think God is saying.

S4: What role does the Holy Spirit play in helping you develop a long-haul commitment to Christ?

S5: Having a long-term commitment to Christ means you are willing to accept discipline. How can you share the importance of discipline with another man when it comes to your commitment to Christ?

ENDURANCE Level Questions

Exercise #1: One sign of a mature Christian man is in the endurance of his faith. Many men today are “crisis Christians”, coming to Christ based solely upon a crisis in their life. In the next 60 days, find three men with whom you can discuss the importance of a long-haul faith.

Make sure you include the importance of the Holy Spirit’s role in a long-haul commitment to Christ. Write down some of their feedback and keep it somewhere safe for future reading.

Exercise #2: Read and answer the following.

1 Timothy 4:1–16 (ESV)

E1: In 1 Timothy 4 (ESV), Paul discusses the importance of discipline and godliness. Describe specific ways you can discipline yourself to cultivate the kind of *godliness* Paul describes.

E2: Describe the importance of godly training (what we often call *discipleship*) to your life and think of some sources from which you might receive it.

Exercise #3: Read and answer the following.

Hebrews 10:35–39 (ESV)

E3: In these verses, Paul discusses *not shrinking back*. What does that look like in a Christian man's life? How can you be confident you have the necessary spiritual endurance to finish well?

E4: Understanding the meaning of long term commitment to Christ and living by faith will ensure victory. How would you advise a younger Christian man to increase his commitment to Christ and live by faith?

Exercise #4: Read and answer the following.

John 14:9 (ESV)

E5: Jesus makes the statement, “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.” When people see you, whom do they see? Be honest with yourself.

E6: How would you counsel another Christian man on ways to let others “see Jesus” in him?