



A WORD FROM THE DEAN

Commitment and its role in spiritual formation

William MacDonald's popular primer *True Discipleship* begins with the assertion that "true Christianity is an all-out commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ". These opening words echo Jesus' own teaching that those who seek to be his disciples must be committed to him.

From our reading of the gospels, the notion of commitment seems to leap out at us from their pages. For example, we read Jesus' words to the "large crowds" gathered to hear him that unless they "give up everything" they possess they cannot be his disciples. (Luke 14:33).

But despite the preponderance of references to that notion and the fact that "commitment" is bandied about often in Christian circles, the term is seldom defined. In consequence, what commitment means and entails has often been variously and inadequately understood.

To redress the situation, I propose that we think of commitment broadly as an undertaking—voluntarily accepted—to pursue some cause, some ideology, or some end (*telos*) with consistency and perseverance. In the specific context of Christian discipleship, making a commitment entails that one pledges to devote oneself wholly to Jesus as Lord, taking seriously his call to deny oneself, to take up one's cross daily, and to follow him until the very end (Luke 9:23).

All this is familiar enough. There is, however, one important reminder worth bearing in mind: in speaking of commitments, we are to think "not of isolated or once-for-all decisions, but of *persistence* along the line opened up by the initial decision." (John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity*, 142f). When Jesus said, "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62), he was making the same point about the importance of persistence.

There is yet another, intriguing aspect to commitment. Because commitment involves our whole being—our thinking, our feeling, our judgement as well as our acting—it can play a role in forming us to be the person God wants us to be. How so? Some light is cast on this matter by Dallas Willard who observes that

Over time and with persistence, and as we give ourselves and whatever energies we possess to be shaped by the Lord, character and personhood are formed.

while spiritual formation "is simultaneously a profound manifestation of God's gracious action through his Word and Spirit, it is also something we are responsible for before God and can set about achieving in a sensible, systematic manner." (*Renovation of the Heart*, 25).

As a factor on the human side, commitment to the Lord Jesus directs us away from ourselves, yet exposing to ourselves our own flaws, defects, inadequacies, and even duplicity.

Over time and with persistence, and as we give ourselves and whatever energies we possess to be shaped by the Lord, character and personhood are formed. Here the apostle Paul represents a case in point: he became the unique person he was because of his enduring commitment to the Lord Jesus. (1 Cor. 15:10).

Admittedly, the commitment that Jesus requires of us is stringent and therefore bound to be painful. On its reverse side, we are presented with the prospect of our own spiritual maturation and formation. May our response to what is demanded spring from a desire to obey and an openness to be moulded.



DR LIM K THAM
Dean

The truth about truth

Dr. Robert Shaughnessy

We hear the bad news daily about wars and rumours of wars, famines, domestic strife, families being torn apart, Covid and its variants, the climate crisis.... Subsequently, an increasing number of people are saying that the world is facing a time when we need to hit "the reset" button.

The challenge can be presented that it is not so much a matter of hitting a reset button as it is a time to return to truth and allowing truth to guide us through this perilous time.

Some ask the question: "But, whose truth"? We are bombarded with the message that while truth exists, it is subjective. Subsequently, the proponents of the subjective nature of truth argue that your truth is your truth, and mine is mine, and they might be different, but they are equal.

Clearly, there is an inconsistency in such reasoning, a dangerous inconsistency. The view that an objective truth does not exist will inevitably lead to a distorted view of truth, disharmony, and quite possibly anarchy; ample examples in human history support this view.

Either truth exists or it does not, but surely one can see that a subjective truth is a contradiction of terms, which leads to seeing truth as something that can be viewed as simply "alternative facts". The challenge needs to be raised that either facts are facts, or they are simply false statements.

Further, Victor Frankel's thoughtful book on meaning, *Man in Search of Meaning*, stimulated the conversation around the essential role that meaning has within the human journey. Meaning is indeed essential to interpret life and it greatly determines the direction, goals, values, and the measure of one's existence, and ultimately, humanity's destiny. Logic leads one to the conclusion that meaning is contingent upon truth; if truth does not exist, then who determines the meaning of life, or anything else?

This short article will not resolve the crisis that pertains to truth, but I do challenge the readers, the leaders within the church, and all followers of Jesus to discover the truth deeply and intimately embrace the truth; or more accurately embrace Jesus.

Having faith

To discover truth involves faith, and this faith must also be real, and not just a "faith borrowed" or some form of "easy-believism". Instead, it must be a faith that allows reason to assist and enrich the search for truth, the discovery of truth, and living in truth.

The relationship between reason and faith is a partnership where sometimes one partner is weak and the other supports it, and vice versa, and sometimes both are weak or both are strong; the point is, they need each other.

Os Guinness effectively points out the danger of

distorted views of faith when trying to discover and understand truth when he states:

They believe because 'it's true for them,' which is relativism. Or they believe because "they felt it and experienced it very deeply," which is subjectivism. Or they believe because "it works for them," which is basically pragmatism. But for followers of Jesus, relativism, pragmatism, and subjectivism are three fundamentally inadequate views. The Christian faith is not true because it works, it works because it's true.¹

So, where does this lead us with regard to our understanding and experience of truth? It leads us back to where we must start; namely, Jesus.

Embracing Jesus

Jesus did not say, "I am one of the ways, a partial truth, and I lead to a pretty good cheerful life." Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6). He also taught that the knowledge of the truth is possible and liberating, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32).

These statements are not new to most of us, but the invitation, the call, is for all of us to grow in our understanding and experience of this liberating truth.

We must faithfully and persistently ask ourselves, churches, and leaders, are we being guided by Jesus, the embodiment of truth, and his teachings? We must also ask, how are we proclaiming and defending truth? Have we been so socialized by society that the lines between truth and simple propositional statements about truth have become blurred? How are we living in the liberating truth of the gospel? Are our words, actions, and lifestyle markedly different than those who do not claim to be followers of Jesus?

Nancy Pearcy prophetically states:

The life of salvation is a life that corresponds to truth, participates in truth, acts upon truth, proclaims the truth, and seeks greater understanding of the truth. Salvation is so intertwined with truth, as the apostle Paul wrote: "God desires that everyone be saved and come to knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).²

In conclusion, the calling of every follower of Jesus is clear: Allow the one who is the truth to lead us into truth!

The writer served in pastoral ministry, and then was called to serve at Tyndale University (Toronto, Canada) as the Director of the Internship Program and a Professor of Christian Ministry. He is now an adjunct professor and teaches internationally.

¹Cited in Dallas Willard, *A Place for Truth*, p. 46.

²Nancy Pearcy. *Finding Truth*, p. 20, Kindle.

DTC welcomes new students

We introduce three students enrolled in two programmes since July this year: the Graduate Diploma in Intercultural Studies (GDIS) and the Master of Christian Ministry (MCM).

Efrain Balawag (The Philippines), GDIS

My life at DTC is like I am in a year-long camp. The place is not just a school but a community as well, comprising different nations in Asia willing to learn and follow Christ. We share our lives here and accept our differences. It widens my perspective about unity in diversity.

I'm in Singapore for a year of study leave, after eight years as a staff worker with Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF) Philippines. The first term was quite challenging because of changes in my routine, community, and environment. The food is tasteless for someone like me who used to eat salty foods. But after a while, I learned to like it. After almost a month without conversing in Bisaya, I missed it badly. I have no idea that it's not just the people and places you will miss, but also your dialect.

But please don't get me wrong. I am so grateful to God for the privilege to meet different people from different countries. Listening to their stories about their country, family, and faith—the good and bad sides—is a fantastic experience. It is heart-warming how the Lord saved us all and brought us together in his community from different cultures and backgrounds.

In the middle of the first term, maybe because I missed my life back home so badly, I became unproductive for a week. I slept late at night and could not cope with what I needed to accomplish. Praise be to God, for he enabled me to overcome it. God sent people to help me process my thoughts and feelings. Writing a daily thanksgiving to the Lord and exercise were also very helpful.

I enjoy studying and learning new things but doing it with deadlines is another story. Please pray for efficiency so I finish all my requirements on time and simultaneously learn excellently. Please pray also for provision.



Jim Leong (Singapore), GDIS

I came to know Jesus in 1984 through a neighborhood outreach from Grace Baptist Church. The group of adults from the church spent time with us weekly in the evening and shared with me the good news about Jesus.

My curiosity grew, leading me to ask many questions about God and Jesus. Eventually, I gave my life to Jesus during an evangelistic event held at the church.

I was serving in Singapore Youth For Christ (SYFC) reaching out to youth at risk prior to coming to DTC. Through God's leading and my Pastor's encouragement (Jim is with Bartley Christian Church), I felt a need to grow and deepen my knowledge of God. After praying about it, I responded in obedience. I hope to renew my mind and encounter Jesus in seeking His Word.

Serving God in SYFC has been a big part of my life. Pray for a focused heart and mind as I settle into a new environment in DTC. Studies have never been a strength in my life, so pray that I will be able to cope well with all my studies and fulfill my family and church responsibilities.



Bann Sambor (Cambodia), MCM

I was born into a farming family and was a devout Buddhist. I have one sister and three brothers, and I am the third child.

Due to my family's poverty, I started school at the age of nine. The distance from home to school was about 2 to 3 km and I had to get up early to take the cows to the fields before I went to school. In 2010, I took a cow to a field near a church. I saw many children happily learning English and computers. I wanted to study with them but my family would not be able to afford it. But by the grace of God, as I stood by the school fence, a teacher called me and told me that there was no need to pay tuition. I was very happy because I got in for free. I was converted in 2011.

Before coming to DTC, I worked with young people. The church provides accommodation for students continuing their studies in Phnom Penh. I worked with them for four years as a leader. I also taught children in elementary school for two years, and then worked for an organization in human resource.

I came to study at DTC for three main reasons. First, I want to be a servant of God to bring the gospel to people around the world. Second, I want to cultivate my mind more broadly. I want to know God better and have the knowledge to bring the gospel to the world. Third, DTC is not just a school but also a community for me. Living here is like a family that always encourages the children to walk in the correct way and learn how to live with different cultures.

Please pray for the supply of all study and living expenses here for two years. Pray for wisdom, health, and safety. Pray for my family in Cambodia.



RECENT NEWS

A quiet day

Eight teachers of the kindergarten sponsored by Bethesda Hall Depot Walk attended a Quiet Day@DTC retreat on 1 Oct 2022 (right). The programme included biblical teaching about the presence of God and the practice of centring prayer (led by former DTC staff Elsie Lim). They spent about five hours in solitude and silence, and a meditative walk around the neighbourhood. This is the sixth Quiet Day@DTC retreat conducted by DTC since 2020.



Alumni visit

Among the alumni who visited DTC in the second half of this year were former DTC Dean Dr. George Capaque and his wife Dawn (1987–88, Dean 2009–18) (right), and Dr. Barnabas Boon and his wife Choy Ying (1986–88) (extreme right), who serve at Malaysia Bible Seminary. They spoke at a family evening in September.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Biblical Hebrew for beginners

DTC is offering a course in Biblical Hebrew for Beginners from Jan 31, 2023, on Tuesdays (7.30 pm to 9 pm), taught by DTC's new faculty member Dr. Vincent Ooi.

This two-part course introduces participants to the rudiments of Biblical Hebrew grammar and syntax.

Part 1 is in six sessions and will enable participants to read and translate basic Biblical Hebrew sentences. Part 2, also in six sessions, will build on part 1 with the view to enable participants (i) to read and translate selected Hebrew texts of the Old Testament with pertinent tools and (ii) to profit from Bible commentaries that engage the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament. Participants are welcome to sign up for part 1 with no commitment to sign up for part 2.

Part 1 is scheduled for 31 Jan; 7, 14, 21, 28 Feb; 7 March; and Part 2 for 21, 28 March; 4, 11, 18, 25 April. The course will be held in person at DTC. For enquiries,

email disciple@singnet.com.sg or call 6256-3208.

DTC courses open to audit students

If you would like to take a course at DTC in Term 3 from 10 Jan to 3 Mar 2023, you may consider applying to be an audit student.

Audit students are expected to attend all lessons and complete the course (weekly, over eight weeks) but are exempt from assignments.

Although they do not live in, we expect them to appreciate DTC's ethos of training in the context of a small, cross-cultural community of students and teachers living together and sharing in study, worship and recreation. By participating in the community, they can be a blessing to others and be blessed as well.

Term 3 courses include Christian Education, Christian Ethics, Biblical Basis for Mission, Biblical Hermeneutics and Apologetics. Classes are held in the morning. For enquiries, e-mail disciple@singnet.com.sg or call 6256-3208.

Giving to DTC

Donors may issue a cheque made out to Discipleship Training Centre Ltd. and mail it to **33A Chancery Lane, Singapore 309554**; or transfer the funds to DTC's account number **024-901049-4** with DBS Singapore by ATM, Internet banking or telegraphic transfer. Donors may also scan the PayNow QR code. UEN Number: **197100578E**

Beneficiary bank swift code: **DBSSSGSG**
Beneficiary bank: **DBS Bank Ltd**
Beneficiary bank's address:
12 Marina Boulevard, DBS Asia Central, MBFC Tower 3, Singapore 018982
Beneficiary's name: **Discipleship Training Centre Ltd.**

