

Fully Invested

“If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession” (Exodus 19:5).

Scripture: Exodus 19:1-8

Song: “Covenant Keeper”

Newlyweds may have a mental picture of what their lives together will look like—but in reality, they have no idea what the future holds. All sorts of changes can crop up and test their commitment. How encouraging it can be to see a couple adapt to challenges while remaining fully invested in their promise to love and honor each other until death.

God brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to set them apart as His special people. He asked them to commit to His covenant before He laid out the details and requirements. The Israelites’ obedience would ensure their own well-being and also bless the nations, pointing the way to relationship with God.

When we choose to follow Christ, we don’t know ahead of time all the trials our future holds. But He has promised to be faithful to us in all circumstances. And the knowledge that our obedience opens the door to even more of His blessings encourages us to be fully invested in our commitment to Him.

Father, help me respond to Your unconditional love and faithfulness with unwavering trust and obedience. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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 September 20–26. **Dianne Neal Matthews** lives in Louisiana with her husband of 47 years. In between trips to visit their scattered children and grandchildren, she enjoys cooking, DIY projects, and serving her local church.

First Place

“You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3).

Scripture: Exodus 20:1-6

Song: “I Give You My Heart”

People often told my friend how lucky she was. Her husband bought her lavish gifts, took her to expensive restaurants, and treated her like a queen. That’s why her words shocked me when she broke down one day and confided the true nature of their relationship. At home, she and her husband had little conversation. He spent his time watching television, making business calls, and planning his next fishing trip with buddies. Although he played the role of a doting husband in public, his wife felt like the least important part of his life.

An outward show of affection and love means nothing if it’s not backed up with corresponding actions day to day. In the Old Testament, God commanded His people not to worship physical idols; He also warned about the dangers of going through the motions of religious observances without loving and worshipping Him from the heart. In the New Testament, Jesus equated love for God with obeying His commands and seeking Him above all else (Matthew 6:33; 13:44-46).

God wants more than verbal expressions and external rituals from us. He wants to have first place in our hearts. Our daily schedule reveals the depth of our love for Him. If we spend most of our time thinking about or pursuing something other than God, then we might have an idol problem. It’s time to shift our focus to the only one who is truly worthy to be worshipped.

Father, help me make You the first priority of every moment, every day. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Together in Him

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! (Psalm 133:1).

Scripture: Psalms 133–134

Song: “Bind Us Together”

For many years I attended and helped lead in-depth, inductive Bible studies at my church. After a number of people moved away, we no longer had enough people committed to the classes. When my neighbor invited me to a Bible study, I hesitated. Then she explained that she'd formed a group called “Together in Christ” to offer Bible studies to bring together all the women in our small town. I never regretted singing and studying the Word with ladies representing different denominations. We didn't agree on all theological points, but we found joy in celebrating the Savior we had in common. (We shouldn't be afraid to dig in to various views and discover what the Bible says about them.)

As the body of Christ, we are His representatives in this world. Others will not glimpse His love, forgiveness, and grace if they see churches and denominations fighting over points of doctrine or being immature regarding assorted disputes. A lack of unity hinders our work and hurts our witness to the world, both individually and as a church body.

We can rise above such clashes by remembering how much we have in common. We are all sinners, forgiven through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, longing to serve Him and see others brought into His kingdom. If we find joy in celebrating Christ together, more people will want to join us.

Father, help me spread peace and unity among believers. In Jesus' name, amen.

A Comforting Reminder

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,’ who was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8).

Scripture: Revelation 4

Song: “Revelation Song”

As a child, it didn’t take much to scare me. When my family watched *A Christmas Carol*, I would duck under the kitchen table and peek through the doorway to watch the scenes featuring ghosts. But I grew up to count Charles Dickens among my favorite authors and treasure my copy of his famous Christmas book.

I used to feel frightened by the heavenly scene John describes with thunder, lightning, fire, and especially the four creatures covered with eyes and chanting day and night. But now I’ve grown to love their declaration of God’s holiness, sovereignty, and timelessness. God has worked out His purposes in history, He is involved in current events, and His plan for the future will surely unfold.

On any given day, I find myself haunted by my own “ghosts.” Regret over past mistakes and failures, dissatisfaction with my present circumstances, and worry about what might happen in the future attack singly or sometimes all together. That’s when I need the reminder that God was, is, and is to come. He has forgiven my past. He offers guidance for my life right now. Regardless of what I face in the future, He has guaranteed the security of my soul. That is a comforting revelation!

Father, thank You that Your holiness and sovereignty never change. Help me trust You to handle my past, present, and future. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Learning a New Language

“We [Jews from every nation] hear them [Galileans] declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” (Acts 2:11).

Scripture: Acts 2:1-12

Song: “We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations”

William Cameron Townsend traveled to Guatemala in 1917 to sell Spanish Bibles. But he discovered that many people spoke other languages (for which there was no Bible translation)—and they couldn’t read Spanish. This need prompted Townsend to start a linguistics school to train people in Bible translation. He officially founded Wycliffe Bible Translators in 1942. Wycliffe completed its 500th translation in 2000 and adopted a new goal: to see a Bible translation project started in every language still needing one by 2025.

God has made it clear that the gospel message is intended for the whole world. At Pentecost, citizens of 15 different geographical locations heard Peter and the others praising God in languages they understood. Similarly, Jesus approaches each person in the exact way He knows will be most effective at getting their attention and helping them understand Him.

Each of us might speak just one language, but we have many ways to communicate God’s truth. Some people will respond to our testimony, others to a theological discussion, and others through casual conversation during social activities. With God’s help, we can learn to recognize other people’s emotional or spiritual “language” and speak of His wonders in ways they best understand.

Father, make me sensitive to the best way to communicate Your truth to each person I meet. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Path Ahead

David said about [Jesus]: “You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence” (Acts 2:28).

Scripture: Acts 2:22-36

Song: “There Will Be a Day”

By the time I managed to get to my hometown 600 miles away, my 89-year-old dad lay in the hospital bed with eyes closed, morphine dripping through an IV. All that week I sat in his hospital room with family members. Early on the ninth morning, Dad’s blood pressure dropped too low for the nurses to get a reading. As I stood by his bed with my hand on his forehead, his shallow, irregular breaths gradually decreased. Finally, the last bit of air softly left his lungs. My dad was no longer on this earth. We all felt my dad’s loss deeply, but God’s promises comforted us.

Peter told a crowd that God had raised Jesus from the dead “because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Acts 2:24). Because of Jesus’ sacrificial death to pay for our sins, death can’t keep a hold on our loved ones either, or on us.

From a human standpoint, death may seem like the end of the road. But for a believer in Christ, that last breath we take on earth continues us on the path of our eternal life of being filled with joy in the presence of our Savior.

Father, help me live each day with bold faith and courage, secure in Your promise that I will be forever in Your presence once this earthly life ends. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Lasting Legacy

[The believers] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42).

Scripture: Acts 2:37-47

Song: "Only Jesus"

The news of my longtime friend Judy's death saddened me. We had attended church together for years until we'd both moved away. I spent much time reflecting on what Judy had devoted her life to after her teaching career: studying and teaching the Bible, serving in our prayer ministry, fellowshiping with family and friends, and using her sewing and crafting skills to create handmade gifts of love. I decided that my memories of Judy painted a picture of a life well-lived.

The early Christians devoted themselves to the study of God's Word, fellowship, prayer, and taking care of each other's needs. As a result, they grew in their personal faith and in their numbers. Their spiritual growth and their love for each other proved to be a powerful witness to those around them. Many responded to the gospel message, adding to those early believers' legacy that still lives on today.

We all devote our lives to something. Whatever we spend our time, energy, and other resources on reveals what we consider most valuable. This commitment affects our daily choices and decisions, and eventually shapes the legacy we will one day leave behind. If we keep our focus on loving God and others, our earthly life will be well-lived and leave memories that continue to point others to Him.

Father, help me live each day in a way that honors You and builds a lasting legacy for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.