

## The Year of The Story; The Year of Commit

### 1 Timothy 6:17 - 19

1/4/15

- Many of us might know the name Luciano Pavarotti. In case you don't, before he died several years ago, he was a world famous Italian operatic tenor. Over his career, he performed in front of millions of people around the world. In fact, he became one of the most commercially successful tenors of all time. Most people in the opera don't get the kind of recognition, notoriety and financial success that say, pop stars or rap stars get. But, Pavarotti changed that up a bit.
  - o He tells the story of when he first started singing. He said, "When I was a boy, my father, a baker, introduced me to the wonders of song. He urged me to work very hard to develop my voice. Arrigo Pola, a professional tenor in my hometown of Modena, Italy, took me as a pupil. I also enrolled in a teachers college.
  - o On graduating, I asked my father, 'Shall I be a teacher or a singer?' "'Luciano,' my father replied, 'if you try to sit on two chairs, you will fall between them. For life, you must choose one chair.' "I chose one - singing.
  - o It took seven years of study and frustration before I made my first professional appearance. It took another seven to reach the Metropolitan Opera. And now I think whether it's laying bricks, writing a book--whatever we choose--we should give ourselves to it. Commitment, that's the key. Choose one chair."
  
- If you were to look up here on the wall, you see the purpose statement for our church. We are to share the PEACE of Christ and the peace we are to share comes through five purposes or actions: Proclaim, Exalt, Accept, Commit and Equip.
  - o Each year, we have concentrated primarily on one purpose for that year. This year, Our Purpose: Commit. This year, we are going to be challenged to commit fully to becoming fully devoted, Bible reading disciples of Jesus Christ. We are going to be challenged to choose one chair and sit in it well so that we don't fall between while trying to sit on two or more chairs!
  - o 2015 is the Year of Commit!
  
- As part of our year of commit, we, as a congregation, are going through The Story together. The large majority of our congregation has made the resolution, but let's call it the commitment, to experience the Bible in a fresh way, to read this Bible together through The Story which is Scripture in the form of the New International Version that is laid out in a condensed and chronological format so that it reads more like novel.
  - o It really is Scripture. There are some transition paragraphs in there to help fill in some gaps. And, as you are reading, you will notice that because the transition paragraphs are in a different font than the Scripture part. But, it is 95% pure Scripture.
  - o As we read through the Bible and learn God's story and how His story relates and

intersects with our story, we will then see where we need to make some commitments with our lives. Our purpose of commit is all about committing to Christ, by being people who live by the Word of God because they know the Word of God. We choose to sit on the chair that is Jesus.

- **1 Timothy 6:17-19** gives instruction to Timothy to help people in his congregation commit to the Word of God because it brings true life. Let's read that together.
  - o We are rich in so many things. Regardless of the economic condition we find ourselves in, we are still in one of the richest nations in the world. But, there is no hope in that. There is no life in that.
  - o Instead, to be rich in the knowledge of the Lord will enable you to take hold of the life that is truly life. When we commit to knowing the Lord, when we commit to knowing the Word of the Lord, then we begin to discover what true life is and how to live life in a way that is beyond anything we could live on our own or in our riches.
  
- Unfortunately, most people, even Christians, don't know much about what's in the Bible. Some, don't even know the bare basics.
  - o I had a youth pastor friend who was inspired to write Bible studies to be used in youth groups because he was dismayed by how little Christian teens, who had grown up in the church, knew about the Bible. In fact, one evening during a teen small group, one student picked up a Bible and said, "I have like three Bibles. But, how do you use this thing? I don't even know where to start."
  - o Many, many people feel this way! Maybe you do to. Maybe you feel like some of the people in this video...
  
- One common misconception about the Bible is that it contains hundreds of separate stories that don't seem to go well together. Part of that is the way the Bible is laid out.
  - o In reality, though the Bible isn't hundreds of unrelated stories, but one grand, big story: the Story of God. It is the story of God's interaction with the people he created and desired a relationship with.
  
- Now, let me pause and ask you a question. Who here, when they started to read a book, read a few pages in the beginning of the book and then cheated and flipped back to the back to see how the book is going to end? Come on, you can admit it. I will admit that I have. Part of it is because we want to see if we are going to read a good story or not. If we don't like the ending, then chances are, we're not going to like reading all of pages in between!
  - o Well, if we open our Bible and read the first verse of Genesis 1, we find the words, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."
  - o Now, if we flip back to the last book of the Bible, Revelation and we read some of the last words of the Bible, we find in Revelation 21:1 that it says "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth has passed away and there was no longer any sea." Then, if we go down a few verses in that chapter to verse 5, we read, "He who was seated on the throne (who we would rightly assume as God) said, "I am making everything new!"

- So, in the beginning and in the end, God is creating the heavens and the earth. Now, that should bring some questions to our mind. The one that comes to my mind is “Holy moly! What on earth happened?!”
  - o Seriously, what happened on earth that made it necessary for God after he created everything to later create everything again! That is going to be our central question.
  - o To answer that question, we will uncover one grand story of God in the middle pages of the Bible.
  
- But, first we have to make a commitment to doing that together. Are we going to choose to sit in the chair of uncovering the grand story of God or are we going to fall between the spiritual chairs – again – and still be like the people in the Jeopardy video?
  - o So, this morning as we start our journey through God’s Story, we are going to look at one more game show. This one was on a few years back. It was called Deal or No Deal.
  - o This morning, we are going to open five boxes that represent five “deals” of commitment and ask each of us the question: Deal or No Deal. During this year of commit in God’s Story, are you going to commit or not?
  
- In your bulletin, there are a three different inserts. If you want to get them out, that would be great because we are going to look at them and use them. The first one, looks like this...These have the five deals of commitment and you are going to mark which deals you are going to take.
  - o Now, the object is not to mark all of them off in order to show your neighbor or me or anyone else who super spiritual you are. Make a commitment on the ones God is showing you and then commit to sit in the chair!
  
- Are you ready? Box #1: Personal Reading.
  - o This is the commitment I pray everyone will make because it’s all about reading God’s Word.
  - o This commitment is to Read one chapter a week from The Story, because it is Scripture. Each chapter is roughly 12 pages long. If you were to break that down into a daily reading, you would basically read 2 pages a day. Isn’t that much, is it?
  
- Now, I realize not everyone likes to read. If that’s you, then we will read the chapter to you. Pastor Wil and I have committed to come to the house of anyone who doesn’t like to read and you can curl up on the couch with your hot chocolate as we read the chapter to you each week.
  - o As a bonus, you even get to choose what accent you would like to hear it in: An American Midwest accent or a Haitian French accent.
  - o Obviously, we’re just kidding. We each need to get into God’s Word on our own.
  
- Deuteronomy 17:19 says “It (meaning the law or word of God) is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow

carefully all the words of this law and these decrees.” We each need to have the Word of God with us and read it.

- So, with this commitment of personal reading, it really is a commitment to Study the Story on your own. Like I said last week, reading God’s Word is not just so you know the facts about some stories, but it’s about seeing what God is trying to communicate to us that then applies to our lives.
- So, we have included some tools for you to do this commitment to read and study one chapter each week.
  - The first tool is a reading plan that looks like this. This is the reading plan for the next two months of January and February. Then, at the end of February, we’ll give you the next two months reading plan. There might be weeks, like around Easter, when we take a break from The Story to concentrate on Easter or another time of the year. Or, if you can’t be here on a certain Sunday, you can still be reading the same thing as everyone else.
- The second tool in your bulletin is a Seven Questions Bookmark. You might want to use this to keep your place in the Story. This bookmark gives you seven general questions so you start thinking about what God wants to communicate to you through what you are reading.
  - Now, if you want more specific questions for each particular chapter, those have also been provided for you. If you turn in your Story book, starting on page 473, you will see that each chapter has specific questions about that chapter to get you thinking and seeking what God is saying to you.
  - All of these questions are designed to get you thinking, meditating, digging in and chewing on God’s Word and not just reading to get through something on a spiritual “to do” list.
- So, my question for you this morning is – Deal or No Deal?
- Let’s move on to Box #2: Family Time.
  - This deal is about spending family time in the form of doing Family devotions. These devotions consist of reading The Story with your family together.
  - Now, if you have kids of different ages, I would suggest reading the version of The Story together that is most age appropriate for the youngest one and then discussing the story with the other ones as they read their own version.
  - Or, you can divide your kids according to age and do separate readings together – whatever works for you.
- If you have children, this deal is very important. I served in the church as a youth and Christian Education pastor for 13 years. Let me share with you what I observed first hand.
  - Parents who left the spiritual education of their children up to the church – they were the ones who brought (or sent) their kids to church, they were supportive of the involvement of the church and counted on the church to give their children all the Bible knowledge they needed – we found that the likelihood of their kids staying

in the church and committing to Jesus Christ with their lives into adulthood was minimal.

- The kids with the highest likelihood of staying in the church and living as disciples of Jesus Christ were kids with parents who knew that as parents, they held point in taking the responsibility of educating their children about the things of God and then living those out in their own lives in front of their children.
  - And men, let me tell you this – the kids with the highest likelihood of being disciples of Jesus Christ into adulthood were those kids whose fathers took the spiritual lead in the family.
- Since I have had kids, the highest goal of my life is for my sons to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. There is nothing more important to me than that. How many want your kids to know Jesus?
- We each have to take the lead for our own children.
- Too often, maybe because we feel like those participants on that Jeopardy video, we feel like we aren't going to know the answers to the questions our kids are going to ask. And, they are going to ask questions – you know it! Josiah comes up with questions that can completely stump me, in part because I have to find a way to explain it in a way a five year old can understand.
- But, here is the truth: You don't have to know all the answers, but you do have to be engaged and take the lead in the journey.
  - It's OK to say, "You know what? I don't really know. Let me find out and get back with you." And then, do it! But, you take the lead. Don't say, "Let's go ask Pastor Angela or Pastor Wil because they know everything about the Bible or any spiritual question!"
    - We don't! Sometimes people think we do. I had a friend who sent me a message a couple weeks ago to ask why Jews don't do animal sacrifice any longer followed by some other questions about Jews. I don't know! I'm not Jewish! So, I'm going to have to do what anyone else would have to do – Google it!
  - Now, of course, if you have question and you come to us, we are going to help you with the answer. But then, you take that answer back to your children so that you are engaged in the process and taking the lead as the spiritual leader in the family.
- Deuteronomy 11:18-21 shares the responsibility we have as parents for the spiritual development of our children when it says, "Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>19</sup>Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>20</sup>Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, <sup>21</sup>so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth."
- So, the question of commitment is – Deal or No Deal?

- Let's go on to Box #3: LIFE Groups. In our church, we have four LIFE Groups. One meets on Sunday morning at 9:30 and includes both men and women, one meets on Sunday evening at 6p and is mostly women, although we didn't mean for that to happen, one meets on Monday at 6:30 and is for men and another meets on Monday at 6 and includes mostly women. Three of those groups – the evening ones – will be digging deeper into The Story through discussion and a Story small group curriculum. If you want to go deeper, be involved in a LIFE Group.
  - In fact, if you want to make it through this church campaign of The Story, get involved in a LIFE Group or commit to connect with somebody for discussion. Because, here's the deal – we each are going to need encouragement and accountability to make it through this campaign.
  - The Story is developed to take 31 weeks. That's a long time. This is not a six weeks and we're done and off to the next thing. This is a commitment.
  - There are going to be times when you are going to want to move on to something else. You are going to want to get on another chair. You are going to need the encouragement and accountability of a community, of a group, to make it to the end.
  - We are giving you a lot of tools – The Story books, a Bible reading plan, Study questions, sermons, etc., but there is something that will help us when those tools don't and that is community.
  
- The Wall Street Journal once posted a study done on those desiring to quit smoking.
  - Those who tried to do it on their own, just cold turkey, by themselves, had a 0% chance of actually successfully quitting. Now, maybe you know someone who did that. But, out of the millions of smokers, the number of those who could actually quit smoking by themselves is so statistically insignificant that it ends up being a 0% chance of being done.
  - Now, those who added a tool like Nicorette or a patch or something like that, the chance for successful quitting went up to a whopping 5%.
  - But, for those who added a tool, plus they became a part of a community of people who were also there for support, encouragement and accountability and who were all working toward the same goal, the chance for successful quitting catapulted to 45%.
  - This shows us that Tool + Community = Greater Results. The same is true for our spiritual development and commitments for God.
  
- The early church found this to be true. They had a system of community and small groups in place. Acts 5:42 Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house (meaning they were meeting as small groups in people's homes), they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.
  - Wouldn't it be great if we find that people are just hungering for more information and so we have to create more LIFE Groups?
  - Holly Hazard is our Deacon of Accept and is responsible for our LIFE Groups. I'm sure she would be tickled pink to see more LIFE Groups come together! Then, we would

- see that Acts 5:42 passage happening in our own church as we go from house to house, teaching and proclaiming the good news of Jesus!
- So, the question again – Deal or No Deal, mark it on your commitment card.
- Moving on - Box #4: Worship Services. This is a commitment to being here.
    - Over the years, a few people have asked us the question, “What can we do to support you?” or “What can we do to support the church?” Now, to be honest, not too many people have asked that question, probably in part because they don’t really want to hear the real answer.
    - The answer is: Show up!! Your level of commitment and support can be seen by whether you show up to church services and other activities, particularly outreach activities.
  - A pastor shared a story about a man who was terminally ill. As part of his illness and treatment, he was in chronic pain. Yet, he showed up Sunday after Sunday. One Sunday morning, the pastor could see the pain in the man’s face and so he went up to the man and asked, “Jim, how are you doing?” Jim answered, “Pastor, I’m in a lot of pain today.” The pastor said, “Jim, why don’t you go home and relax. God knows you love him and desire to worship him.” Jim responded, “Pastor, I hurt just as much here as I do at home. I would rather be in God’s house.”
    - Oh what a difference that attitude is compared with most. The weather will still be rainy or snowy or cold whether here or at home. I’m still going to have a bad hair day whether here or at home. I will still be tired and stressed whether here or at home. I will still have problems whether here or at home. I would rather be here in God’s house!
    - It’s good to be in the house of God! Maybe because in God’s house we can focus on the One who supersedes what’s going on in our lives.
  - Acts 2:42 says “They (meaning the believers in the church) devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”
    - There was something powerful in being together – more powerful than if they just worshipped on their own. It boils down to what chair are you going to choose?
    - If you can’t be here due to something that is beyond your control, we are looking at putting sermon transcripts on our website, so you can read the sermon on your own.
      - I know it won’t be nearly as entertaining as seeing me preach in person 😊, but it’s something that will keep you up to date along with everyone else.
      - Now, that’s not so you can say, “I don’t need to go to church because I can just read the sermon online.” No, we need the community and the experience of corporate worship.
    - So, again, the question – Deal or No Deal.
  - We are down to the final box - Box #5: Align my life with God’s Story. This is the commitment where you say, “I choose to align my life with God’s Story.”
    - This is when you know that God’s Story is not some ancient text which has no

- relevance to today or to your life. It was not just meant for back then.
- The Story isn't over yet. God's plan of redemption and reconciliation is still being carried out today. He is still writing his Story right now in this time in history.
  - In fact, we are all characters in God's Story. I have shared before that God has a plan for us right here and right now in this time of history. You were not a random person placed in a random place on the map in a random time. You were made for such a time as this and for such a place as this.
- Now, what we are going to see as we read The Story is that, like us, people were called to commit to align their lives with God's Story. Some did and some did not.
- The same is true today as back then. Those who are against him, resist God's plan for them. Those who are for God, align their lives with his life.
  - Which chair are you going to choose? The chair where you align your life with God's or where you resist him? Deal or No Deal?
- Joshua, the leader of the Israelites in the Old Testament, asked the people that question – Deal or No Deal? He said to them, “Chose this day who you will serve.” Then, he chooses his chair in Joshua 24:15 when he declares “As for my and my household, we will serve the Lord.”
- This morning, as we have a final responsive song, I'm going to ask that you take your commitment card. You will notice that it is folded in half. One side says “retain” and one side says, “return.” On both sides, mark which of the five deals of commitment you are going to make.
- Then, rip it in half. You are going to keep the retain copy. Then, you are going to fill out the rest of the return copy with your name, email, address and sign it.
  - The only people who will know your commitment will be myself and Pastor Wil, although, I would encourage you to share your commitment with someone else or maybe your LIFE Group.
    - Now, why do Pastor Wil and I want to know what you are committing to? Is it because we are nosy? Is it because we want to talk about you if you don't keep your commitments? Hopefully everyone should know us well enough by now to know that's not true.
    - It's for accountability. If we see you struggling, we might check to see if you're doing OK. It's so we can pray for you and encourage you. It's so someone else knows your commitment which gives you a greater likelihood of keeping that commitment.
  - During the song, if you are making any of the deal of commitment, I'm going to ask you to leave your seat with the return side of your commitment card and place it on the communion table. For this is an act of worship. Making a commitment to the Lord is always an act of worship that requires action on our part.
- The final question this morning: Deal or No Deal? Deal or No Deal?