



One way we can show our “total commitment” and “complete devotion” is to serve those in need.



Our Commitment to God

“A successful life . . . requires commitment—whole-souled, deeply held, eternally cherished commitment to the principles we know to be true in the commandments God has given.”

From the Life of Howard W. Hunter

When Howard W. Hunter was called to be a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, he declared, “I accept, without reservation, the call . . . made of me, and I am willing to devote my life and all that I have to this service.”¹

Elder Hunter lived true to his commitment. After he was ordained an Apostle, he returned to California to complete Church and business obligations and to begin preparing to relocate to Salt Lake City. It was difficult for Elder and Sister Hunter to leave their family and friends in California—and for Elder Hunter to leave his law practice. As he concluded his career as an attorney, he wrote:

“Today I finished most of my work at the office. Nearly all of the pending matters are completed. I was alone in the office today with the realization that my practice of law was now at an end. I made notes on a number of files and left them on the desk. . . . I had a sick feeling as I left the office. I have enjoyed the practice of law and it has been my life for the last number of years, but in spite of this I am pleased and happy to respond to the great call which has come to me in the Church.”²

Elder Hunter knew from personal experience that “submitting to our Father’s will is not always easy.”³ Nevertheless, he knew the importance of being fully committed to God. Concerning that commitment, he wrote: “Most people do not understand why persons of our religious faith respond to calls made to serve or the commitment we make to give our all. I have thoroughly enjoyed the

practice of law, but this call that has come to me will far overshadow the pursuit of the profession or monetary gain.”⁴

Teachings of Howard W. Hunter

Our Father in Heaven requires our total commitment, not just a contribution.

As I think of the blessings God has given us and the many beauties of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I am aware that along the way we are asked to make certain contributions in return, contributions of time or of money or of other resources. These are all valued and all necessary, but they do not constitute our full offering to God. Ultimately, what our Father in Heaven will require of us is more than a contribution; it is a total commitment, a complete devotion, all that we are and all that we can be.

Please understand that I do not speak only of a commitment to the Church and its activities, although that always needs to be strengthened. No, I speak more specifically of a commitment that is shown in our individual behavior, in our personal integrity, in our loyalty to home and family and community, as well as to the Church. . . .

Let me recall briefly just one of those magnificent examples from scripture where three relatively young people stood by their principles and held to their integrity even though it seemed apparent that to do so would cost them their lives.

Approximately 586 years before Christ, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, marched against the city of Jerusalem and conquered it. So impressed was he with the qualities and learning of the children of Israel that he had several of them brought to the king's court [in Babylon].

Trouble came to the Israelites the day Nebuchadnezzar made a golden idol and commanded all in the province of Babylon to worship it, a command that the three young Israelites—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego—quietly refused. The king was full of “rage and fury” and demanded that they be brought before him.

(Dan. 3:13.) He informed them that if they did not fall down before the golden image at the appointed moment, “ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.” Then with some self-satisfaction he asked, “And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?” [Dan. 3:15.]

The three young men responded courteously but without hesitation:

“If it be so,” they said, “[that you threaten us with death,] our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

“But if not [if for whatever reason he chooses not to save us from the fire], be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” [Dan. 3:17–18.]

Of course Nebuchadnezzar was more furious than ever and ordered that one of the furnaces be heated to seven times its normal temperature. Then he commanded that these three valiant young men be thrown fully clothed into the midst of the fire. Indeed, the king was so insistent and the flame so hot that the soldiers who carried Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego fell dead from the heat of the furnace as they cast their captives forward.

Then transpired one of those great miracles to which the faithful are entitled according to the will of God. These three young men stood and walked about calmly in the midst of the furnace and were not burned. Indeed, when they were later called out of the furnace by the astonished king himself, their clothing was untarnished, their skin was free from any burn, not a hair of their head was singed. Not even the smell of smoke had come upon these courageous, committed young men.

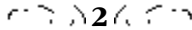
“Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego,” said the king, “who hath . . . delivered his servants that trusted in him, . . . [who] yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

“. . . Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, in the province of Babylon.” (Dan. 3:28, 30.)

The ability to stand by one's principles, to live with integrity and faith according to one's belief—that is what matters, that is the difference between a contribution and a commitment. That devotion to true principle—in our individual lives, in our homes and families, and in all places that we meet and influence other people—that devotion is what God is ultimately requesting of us. . . .

A successful life, the good life, the righteous Christian life requires something more than a contribution, though every contribution is valuable. Ultimately it requires commitment—whole-souled, deeply held, eternally cherished commitment to the principles we know to be true in the commandments God has given. . . .

If we will be true and faithful to our principles, committed to a life of honesty and integrity, then no king or contest or fiery furnace will be able to compromise us. For the success of the kingdom of God on earth, may we stand as witnesses for him “at all times and in all things, and in all places that [we] may be in, even until death.” (Mosiah 18:9).⁵



**Be committed to obeying the Lord regardless
of what others decide to do.**

When Joshua was directed to destroy the city of Jericho that lay before [the tribes of Israel], the great walls of the city stood as an imposing and physically impossible barrier to Israel's success—or at least so it seemed. Not knowing the means, but assured as to the end, Joshua carried out the instructions he had been given by a messenger of the Lord. His commitment was to complete obedience. His concern was to do precisely as he was instructed, that the promise of the Lord would be fulfilled. The instructions no doubt seemed strange, but his faith in the outcome urged him on. The result, of course, was another in a long series of miracles experienced by the Israelites as they were led over many years by Moses, by Joshua, and by many other prophets who were committed to follow the commandments and the directives of the Lord.

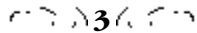
As Joshua and his people approached Jericho, the instructions of the Lord were followed precisely, and according to the scriptural account, “the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into

the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.” (Josh. 6:20.)

The record states that after Israel had rested from the wars with their enemies, Joshua, who was now very old, called all Israel together. In his farewell address he reminded them they had been victorious because God had fought for them, but if they now ceased to serve the Lord and keep his law they would be destroyed. . . .

This great military and spiritual leader then urged a commitment, and made one himself and for his family: “Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Josh. 24:15.)

Here was a great statement of full commitment of a man to God; of a prophet to the desires of the Lord; of Joshua the man to his God, who had many times previously blessed his obedience. He was telling the Israelites that regardless of how they decided, he would do what he knew was right. He was saying that his decision to serve the Lord was independent of whatever they decided; that their actions would not affect his; that his commitment to do the Lord’s will would not be altered by anything they or anyone else would do. Joshua was firmly in control of his actions and had his eyes fixed on the commandments of the Lord. He was committed to obedience.⁶



Decide now to choose the path of strict obedience.

After having come to an understanding of the law of the gospel and the will of the Lord by reading and studying the scriptures and the words of the prophets, then comes the further understanding of the reason why obedience is often referred to as the first law of heaven and why obedience is necessary to be saved. This brings us to the supreme test. Are we willing to become totally obedient to God’s law? There comes a time in our lives when a definite decision must be made.⁷

Surely the Lord loves, more than anything else, an unwavering determination to obey his counsel. Surely the experiences of the great prophets of the Old Testament have been recorded to help



“How pleased the Lord must have been when Abraham . . . did as he was instructed, without question and without wavering.”

us understand the importance of choosing the path of strict obedience. How pleased the Lord must have been when Abraham, after receiving direction to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, did as he was instructed, without question and without wavering. The record states that God said unto Abraham:

“Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” (Gen. 22:2.)

The next verse simply states:

“And Abraham rose up early in the morning . . . and took . . . Isaac his son . . . and went unto the place of which God had told him.” (Gen. 22:3.)

Years later, when Rebekah was asked if she would go with the servant of Abraham to become Isaac’s wife, and no doubt knowing

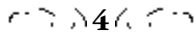
that the servant's mission had the blessing of the Lord, she simply said, "I will go." (Gen. 24:58.)

A generation after that, when Jacob was instructed to return to the land of Canaan, which meant leaving all for which he had worked many years, he called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was and explained what the Lord had said. The reply of Rachel [and Leah] was simple and straightforward and indicative of [their] commitment: "Whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do." (Gen. 31:16.)

We have, then, examples from the scriptures of how we should consider and evaluate the commandments of the Lord. If we choose to react like Joshua, and Abraham, and Rebekah, and Rachel [and Leah], our response will be, simply, to go and do the thing that the Lord has commanded.

There is good reason to make our decision *now* to serve the Lord. On this Sunday morning [of general conference], when the complications and temptations of life are somewhat removed, and when we have the time and more of an inclination to take an eternal perspective, we can more clearly evaluate what will bring us the greatest happiness in life. We should decide now, in the light of the morning, how we will act when the darkness of night and when the storms of temptation arrive.

I pray that we will have the strength to decide now to do what we ought to do. I pray that we will decide now to serve the Lord.⁸



**Belief alone is not sufficient; we also
need to do Heavenly Father's will.**

When speaking to the multitudes, the Master said: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 7:21.)

As I listen to these words, it seems to me that the Lord is saying, "Just because a person may acknowledge my authority or have a belief in my divine nature, or merely express faith in my teachings or the atoning sacrifice I made, does not mean he shall enter into

the kingdom of heaven or attain a higher degree of exaltation.” By implication he is saying, “Belief alone is not sufficient.” Then he expressly adds, “. . . but he that doeth the will of my Father,” that is, he that works and prunes the vineyard that it may bring forth good fruit. . . .

All nature, which is God’s domain, seems to portray this same principle. The bee that will not “doeth” will soon be driven from the hive. As I watch the busy ants on the trail and around the ant pile, I am impressed by the fact that they are doers and not just believers. Clucking doesn’t produce any seeds for the hen; she must scratch. A stagnant pool, green with algae and the scum of inactivity, is the breeding place of the diseases of the swamp, but the clear mountain stream dashing over the rocks as it winds its way down the canyon is an invitation to drink.

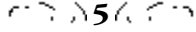
The words of the Master regarding the house without a foundation say to me that a man cannot have a shallow and reckless notion that he is sufficient to himself and can build his own life on any basis that happens to be easy and agreeable [see Matthew 7:26–27]. As long as the weather is fair, his foolishness may not be evident; but one day there will come the floods, the muddy waters of some sudden passion, the rushing current of unforeseen temptation. If his character has no sure foundation in more than just lip service, his whole moral structure may collapse.⁹

James said, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

In other words, religion is more than a knowledge of God or a confession of faith, and it is more than theology. Religion is the doing of the word of God. It is being our brother’s keeper, among other things. . . .

We can be religious in worship on the Sabbath day, and we can be religious in our duties on the other six days of the week. . . . [How] important it must be that all of our thoughts, the words we speak, our acts, conduct, dealings with neighbors, business transactions, and all of our everyday affairs be in harmony with our religious beliefs. In the words of Paul, “Whatsoever ye do, do all

to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). Can we therefore eliminate religion from our weekday affairs and relegate it to the Sabbath day only? Surely not, if we follow Paul’s admonition.¹⁰



“Living members” strive to have a total commitment.

The Lord revealed in the preface to the Doctrine and Covenants that this is the “only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth.” Then he added, “with which I, the Lord, am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually” (D&C 1:30). This should raise a question in our minds of eternal significance: We know that this is the true and living church institutionally, but am I a true and living member individually?

. . . When I ask, “Am I a true and living member?” my question is, am I deeply and fully dedicated to keeping the covenants I have made with the Lord? Am I totally committed to live the gospel and be a doer of the word and not a hearer only? Do I live my religion? Will I remain true? Do I stand firm against Satan’s temptations? . . .

To answer affirmatively the question, “Am I a living member?” confirms our commitment. It means that we now and always will love God and our neighbors as ourselves. It means our actions will reflect who we are and what we believe. It means that we are every day Christians, walking as Christ would have us walk.

Living members are those who strive to have a total commitment. . . .

Living members recognize their duty to press forward. They are baptized as a first step of their living journey. It is a sign to God, to angels, and to heaven that they will follow God’s will. . . .

Living members give heed to the Spirit, which quickens the inner life. They constantly seek its direction. They pray for strength and overcome difficulties. Their hearts are not set upon the things of this world but upon the infinite. Spiritual renewal is not sacrificed for physical gratification.

Living members put Christ first in their lives, knowing from what source their lives and progress come. There is a tendency for man to put himself in the center of the universe and expect others to

conform to his wants and needs and desires. Yet nature does not honor that erroneous assumption. The central role in life belongs to God. Instead of asking him to do our bidding, we should seek to bring ourselves into harmony with his will, and thus continue our progress as a living member. . . .

Living members, once they are converted, fulfill the commandment to strengthen their brothers and sisters [see Luke 22:32]. They are anxious to share their joy with others, and they never lose this desire. . . .

Living members recognize the need to put into action their beliefs. These Saints are anxiously engaged in bringing to pass many good and noble works of their own free will and accord [see D&C 58:27]. . . .

Living members love one another. They visit the fatherless and the widows in their afflictions. They keep themselves unspotted from the world [see James 1:27]. . . .

We have a firm belief in the statement that this is the true and living church of the true and living God. The question we have yet to answer is: Am I dedicated and committed, a true and living member?

May we stand firm and be true and living members of the Church and receive the promised reward to be among those spoken of in the Doctrine and Covenants “who are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly place, the holiest of all” (D&C 76:66).¹¹

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Questions

- Review President Hunter’s teachings about the difference between a “contribution” and “total commitment” (section 1). What difference does it make in our lives when we are totally committed to God? What applications might the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have for us?
- Review President Hunter’s account of Joshua in section 2. What can you learn from this account about being fully committed to

God? How can we develop a commitment to obey God regardless of what others do? How can we help children and youth develop this commitment?

- What are your impressions as you review the scripture stories in section 3? What other scriptural examples of obedience have influenced you? Why do you think “the Lord loves . . . an unwavering determination to obey his counsel”?
- Ponder President Hunter’s teachings in section 4. Why is belief alone “not sufficient”? How does doing Heavenly Father’s will help us prepare for times of trouble? How can we apply President Hunter’s teachings about living our religion?
- Review each of President Hunter’s descriptions of a “living member” in section 5. How do we develop these qualities of “living members”? Consider how you could be a better “true and living member” of the Church.

Related Scriptures

1 Samuel 15:22–23; Psalm 1:1–3; James 2:14–26; 2 Nephi 32:9; Omni 1:26; Mosiah 2:41; Alma 37:35–37; 3 Nephi 18:15, 18–20; D&C 58:26–29; 97:8; Abraham 3:24–26

Teaching Help

Read together several quotations from the chapter. After reading each quotation, ask class members to share examples from the scriptures and from their own experiences that relate to the teachings in the quotation.

Notes

1. In Conference Report, Oct. 1959, 121.
2. In Eleanor Knowles, *Howard W. Hunter* (1994), 153.
3. “The Opening and Closing of Doors,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 54.
4. In Knowles, *Howard W. Hunter*, 151.
5. “Standing As Witnesses of God,” *Ensign*, May 1990, 60–62.
6. “Commitment to God,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1982, 57–58.
7. “Obedience” (address given at the Hawaii Area Conference, June 18, 1978), 5, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.
8. “Commitment to God,” 58.
9. In Conference Report, Oct. 1967, 11, 12–13.
10. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1997), 111–12.
11. “Am I a ‘Living’ Member?” *Ensign*, May 1987, 16–18.