

### *Impulse Buy or Commitment?*

Lessons: 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, John 1:35-42

All four gospels record the calling. Matthew, Mark and Luke say the men were at their boats, tending their nets and cleaning up from the day. Jesus walks up, says “Follow me,” and “immediately” they leave their nets and boats. As they say in the mountains, they sell the stove and join the circus. The stories speak to Jesus’ charisma and magnetism. And they speak to how dramatic the commitment to follow can change lives. But they sound a little like an impulse buy to a sales pitch.

We all know what an “impulse buy” is. It is “an unplanned purchase tied to the basic want for instant gratification. It’s buying because when something is connected to the product that stirs a particular passion.” ...like putting an American flag on a product aimed at senior citizens. Call me a cynic, but that huge flag in front of the car dealership is not an act of pure patriotism. Impulse purchases are based on emotion more than reason, an interruption that disturbs the normal rational decision models. Brands are powerful because of our emotional associations with sentimental memories or a particular experience. Commercial sell to our emotions and attractions, and don’t have much to do with the product.

The power is the distraction. In the moment when we are focused on something or nothing in particular, something distracts our attention and gets our focus! We may file the message away on the hard disk of our brains for later recall – conscious or not. Or we may become so focused on the message that we can’t remember what we were doing before. Put football, outdoor grilling, and pretty girls in a 15 second beer commercial, and the target audience will watch it repeatedly until the hard disk can’t erase the brand. These impulse experts are so good at their craft that they even know how to use your hating the commercial to make you remember the product. “Repetition is the mother of all learning,” so your only protection against this distraction is to distract yourself with something else instead of their message. Surfing with your remote during the five minute commercial break is really your only protection. Keep the remote handy.

They didn’t have remotes or marketing psychologists back then. But people in New Testament times could be impulsive, too. There were people who heard Jesus was in town, and dropped everything. They followed him for the miracles or the free food or the teaching or the crowd appeal. And then they went back home to the “real world” of their living before.

We know how that is. The “way we wish” is a powerful distraction, but it is still just a wish. “The way we are” always pulls us back. The “way we wish” is powerful and never goes away, but most of the time the “way we are” is more powerful. It takes something more than an impulse to change “the way we are.” It takes, ... **a commitment**.

John tells a different story from Mathew, Mark and Luke, maybe to help correct the impulsiveness of the accounts in the others. John’s account is not about impulse and distraction. It is more about the strategy of Jesus selection process than about the follower’s impulse. Jesus finds them. He knows them by name. He selects them before he calls them. They had found the man that the law and the prophets had said would come. John’s memory is much more about the power of the message itself and the appeal of the messenger.

Who Jesus was and what he said to them was so attractive and so convincing that they focused all their attention on it. What he said made them see the way they were in a different light, with a new clarity. What he promised was bigger than the way they wished. His vision offered more than their imaginings of who they could be and how the world could be. He changed their reasoning and their emotions, their thinking and their feeling. He committed to them. He invited them to come with him. It was not an impulse buy. They made an immediate commitment.

Think about your life. I've thought back on mine this week. I've made more than my share of impulse buys, and I confess to you that most all of them have been followed by "buyer's regret" and an about-face to the way things were before I followed the impulse. When I look back on my life, most every really positive move toward "the way I wish" came because of a commitment I made to go and to keep going in that direction.

I could tell you meaning-full and wonder-full stories about how vague dreams of the way I wished were met by some opportunity in happenstance. The direction of my life changed for the better in ways that are so good I call them the providence of God. They are landmarks of my life: choosing a college, transferring seminaries, making a visit back home and deciding the friend I invited to supper would become my wife, jumping denominations and coming home with no job to join the Presbyterian Church.

These and many more have some common themes that I'll bet resonate with some similar events you have recalled from your own life. They were immediate and not-so at the same time. There were circumstances and thoughts and feelings in me that were building for a while that made me think more about the way I wished because I was not happy with the way I was. I tried to avoid them and chase distractions sometimes, but I always came back to the reality of a need for change. The need for change was not immediate, but when I was presented with an opportunity out of nowhere, the commitment was immediate. I knew what I had to do, and I knew I had to do it.

It should teach me – maybe teach us all – to listen to the thoughts and emotions that build over time and won't go away. God is always speaking, and God won't go away. I can be patient in the listening and watchful at the same time. Some opportunity will present itself, and it will be too good to pass by. We know what we have to do, and we have to do it. When we know it is too good to give up, commit – immediately! There is no such thing as a commitment that is not immediate. Committing is a decision in the present tense, and a real commitment is decision that stays present in every moment to change the future tense.

Those men Jesus chose by the shore or under the fig tree must have been paying attention to their longings in their daily lives. They were listening to their wishes and hopes, and watching for an opportunity to present itself. Everyone was saying he was the one the law and the prophets had dreamed. When he showed up, they committed – and it wasn't an impulse buy. He invited them to follow. They did!

There is a huge difference between an impulse buy and an immediate commitment. The difference is the commitment to pay attention to the reality of the way we are that needs to change to the way we wish. We commit to focus our emotions and our reasons toward a change,

because we know deep down that any movement toward the way we wish will make us better and happier than we are the way we are - for ourselves and for others.

Let's face the fact. We are programmed to immediacy, seduced and brain-washed to the lie of the impulse buy. We may joke about shopping being a sport, and we may say that "you can't buy happiness." But we buy something small or big anyway thinking it will change us, when we know that only **we** can change us.

January is the month for "resolutions." We look at the way we are and the way we wish, and we say to ourselves that we are going to do something about it. We write down some goals on a piece of paper, or we share some wish with a friend, or we file some deep and secret desire we have for ourselves onto our mental hard drive into that folder that is filled with our longings.

Then we find some impulse solution that will solve the problem for us, or we lose focus with some distraction or pre-occupation or just-plain-ignoring like staring at the television until we tell ourselves that we are just too busy. All of a sudden it is July, and we are still the way we are. Then we punish ourselves and tell ourselves that we will never have the power or energy for change, and so we are not going to make those resolutions anymore. We are just going live by grace, and love ourselves "just the way we are."

Let's face the fact. God's grace loves you the way you are, but that does not mean that God is happy about some of the ways you are. God is the one who puts the vision of who you wish in you, because of who God has made you. So, don't think that God is blessing you in the ways that you are that are not the ways God wants you to be. God calls you to commit. God's love is **the power and the motivation** that makes commitment work for you. God commits to your change when you commit to change.

What we need to face is the fact that resolutions require **resolve**. And resolve means commitment in the doing. The followers became followers on commitment and doing. They followed. They listened and they agreed that what Jesus said was strange and new, but Jesus made sense like no one before had ever made sense. They felt the emotions of hope and joy, and they responded. The response was not an impulsive outburst. They knew what they had to do, and they had to do it. They had no idea where they were headed, except they were going in the right direction if they were following him. They committed heart and mind and soul and strength. They "dropped their nets." They left all and followed him.

I don't know the things in your life that mark the gap between the way you are and the way you wish, but I am just as sure that you have them as I am sure that God's love is with you and God is always speaking to you. It may be a relatively small thing as matters are measured on the span of change, and it may be that one thing that you have thought was the impossible dream and the unconquerable defect for so long that you have given up making resolves.

I do know this much. The way you see "the way you are" and the way God sees "the way you are" are different, and the way God sees you is the way you **really are**. Grace means you can live to the way God sees you really are.

I do know this much. You know deep down that you do not have to get to the finished dream of fulfill all your wishes to be better off than the way you are now. You know that you will be better just for making a move toward the way you wish that God wishes for you, and Christ will be with you and lead you as step follows one after another.

Jesus told Nathaniel, “Do you believe? ... You will see great things than these.” So focus on your longings that are God’s greater longings for you. Listen and keep watch. God is always speaking, and God is always closer than you think. Don’t hesitate to answer. It’s not an impulse buy. It’s a commitment, and they are always immediate. Jesus says, “Come with me.” It’s present tense. You know what you have to do, so why not do it? The time to commit is always now.