

**Tuesday 7/7/20**

**SERIES: CHARACTER OVER COMPROMISE**

**SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD**

**TITLE: Conquering the Rat Race Pt. 2**

**We are called to live for the things that matter.**

But I think this is only possible when we live for God and not men. Think about what Paul said to households in Colossians 3 (ESV). Listen to his counsel, “**Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. <sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ**” (3:22-24).

So, what are you living for? That answer is a reflection of who you aim to please: God or man?

When we live for the things that matter, we consider eternal legacy over earthly legacy. When we live for the things that matter, we commit to our local church over our local hobbies. When we live for the things matter, we live for outreach instead of outdoing our neighbors. When we live for the things that matter, we live for leading our families over living our fantasies. When we live for the things for matter, we are pleasing God.

When we live for the things that matter, we set an example. That’s what Paul says in verse 12. We, as the body of Christ are called to be an example. Live a life that matters, a life on purpose for a purpose. We are called to model a new – a better way - of living, one that conquers the rat race. And **you can be such an example in 5 ways.**

Paul says first be an example **in speech**. What you say and how you say it reflects who you are at your core. Jesus said “*whatever is in your heart determines what you say.*” When you face trials, do you express your trust and dependence on God; or do you express anger towards Him or doubt that He will provide? Likewise, when you experience success, people will listen. Do you give all the glory to God, or do you take full credit? What do you talk about at school? Are you bad mouthing people behind their back? What is your speech like on Facebook? Are you an example there? What about at work? Are you engaged at gossip at the water cooler?

But it’s more than just speech; it’s **in your actions**. It’s also how you live. I have had more conversations with non-believers, asking “Why on Earth would I become a Christian? There’s no difference in the way you guys live.” If this is, in fact true, I’m afraid we’re not listening to the Word. As a Christian, our actions should be reflective of that of Jesus, of Paul, of Peter, of John. Are we serving others? Are we outward focused? Are we consuming entertainment that’s good for our growth? Are our actions at work, at home, in our neighborhoods, a reflection of the Word, or are they a reflection of the world? People are watching.

Paul shifts from outward focus to the inside: the heart. Are we an example **in our love or charity**? Do we act and speak out of love or out of some negative emotion? Out of guilt? Out of fear? Are we self-serving or others serving? Peter wrote **“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8)** What’s your motivation? Is it a love for God? For people around you? Or is it a love for yourself?

Paul says be an example **in faith**. Is your life an example of your faith in God? Do you truly trust Him to meet all your needs, or simply your salvation need? Do you have faith, so that you act in accordance with it? I know I struggle at times with practical faith.

In October and November, our family was displaced from our home for three weeks due to an unexpected catastrophe. We ended up needing to move out while work was done. As soon as that situation was resolved, our transmission went out on our van. The outlook was bleak from these two major financial experiences. We had a choice to make. Do we embrace our faith, or do we panic? Do we fret over the financial insecurities, or trust God to meet our needs?

I don’t know about you, but I believe in my heart that God has my soul secure. Salvation is in the bag. But I struggled living out my faith with a car repair or an unexpected home disaster. The fact is, that He has never let me down, but I know I still struggle. Can you relate? I know in order to be an example in my faith, I need to act in accordance with it.

Last, Paul says, be an example; live for the things that matter **in purity**. Purity here has an element of sexuality. We are to remain sexually pure. Follow God’s plan for sex in all its beauty. But do it God’s way. Purity here also has an inner element. Will we remain pure? Will we do what Paul instructed the Philippians to do? He said **“whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things” (Phil. 4:8)**. Will we remain pure in what we watch? Will we remain pure in what we read? Listen? Consume? Remember that children’s song “Be careful little eyes what you see? What you hear?” We must remain pure.

**To conquer the rat race, we must first train for godliness. Second, we need to live for the things that matter.** The last step we’ll see in the remaining 3 verses. Paul continues,

**<sup>14</sup> Do not neglect the spiritual gift you received through the prophecy spoken over you when the elders of the church laid their hands on you.<sup>15</sup> Give your complete attention to these matters. Throw yourself into your tasks so that everyone will see your progress.<sup>16</sup> Keep a close watch on how you live and on your teaching. Stay true to what is right for the sake of your own salvation and the salvation of those who hear you. (1 Tim. 4:14-16)**

Paul says, “Give your complete attention to these matters. Throw yourself into your tasks so everyone will see your progress.” Do you catch what he’s saying? He’s saying you’ve got your identity in Christ. You’ve got a mission. You’ve got a vision. Now go and do it. Here we find the last step in conquering the rat race: **You maintain your focus.**

Paul is addressing Timothy directly with some specific elements of his mission, as being a pastor combatting false teachers. But the principle stands: as a Christ follower, we need to throw ourselves into our tasks, our mission – stay focused no matter what. Paul knew being a Christian

isn't easy. It's hard if you're doing it the way Christ and the apostles lived and taught. It would mean persecution. It would mean defending our faith. It would mean being under the radar of our friends and our enemies. This is tiring. It can be painful. But Paul says, "Stay focused."

## **DISCUSSION:**

N: Well, it just happens that both of my discussion partners are very focused individuals, so let's talk about staying focused. Cara, moms not only have children to take care of, but many also have jobs, as well as chores, schedules, and the list goes on. How do you focus in the midst of it all?

C: Well, our little researching buddy over there, CEO Arnie Cole, will probably tell you this, but when you get out of the Word, everything else gets out of balance too. So I have to stay in a daily routine of being in the Word, or else my life, my work, my relationships, start to slide as well. So relationships, the Word brings more meaning to them. There's more purpose in my life, my journey through life is much sweeter. There's a - was it John Wesley, his mother? - I mean, there was a whole slew of kids in, and every afternoon she'd pull her apron up over her head, and the kids just knew that was her time with God. I know it's hard to carve time out. That's why, you know, we talk about goTandem [app], just to get into that Word every day. But I'll be honest, sometimes I carve out time watching *Green Acres*, instead of more time with God. But I do slide; I feel myself slide. So don't be like me; go to goTandem, because that's fruit. It's going to remind you, you need to feed your soul to keep you on track.

N: Well, and I think what you just described really is intentionality. And intentionality is a word and a posture that I bring up often, because no one coasts to growth; no one coasts in their walk with Christ; and no one coasts in a relationship, at least not to a good relationship. And so what you've just described as intentionality with every day, and even on the days where maybe you do realize you're not getting home runs in that focus, you are intentional about correcting the course when you feel that tug. So I think part of that's intentionality.

Arnie, there are so many things in this world screaming for our attention; it's really easy to lose focus and get off track. How do you keep that from happening?

A: Well, I have an advantage, because when you work for Back to the Bible, a lot of your focus is on the Bible, okay? But that can also be a disadvantage, because it can become routine, which is not a good thing. But for my focus, one of the things I did - actually I think it was a couple of years after I came to Back to the Bible - is I made a little ring that goes on my right hand, where you put a wedding band on your left hand, and it says Christ follower. And that has helped me so many times when I'm out, not thinking about anything; in per se, it reminds me Who I'm following. And it's pointed at me - not at the other person, so everybody thinks I'm like goody-good - it's pointed at me. And it's like, "Hey, stupid. You're a Christ follower, behave like one." So there's a lot of different things you can do. But those kinds of things help. I've had friends who will put Scripture on their mirror, with it on a three by five card, or they used to call them "sticky notes". I don't know if they still have them, but those kinds of things help.

N: Yep, having anchors and reminders of who you are in Christ, and what really matters, is a powerful tool to get us all on track, and staying on track as well.

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One of the greatest concepts I ever learned in my years of leadership development was an equation that Jack Canfield taught. It's the equation  $E + R = O$ . E represents our experiences or events. We all have events and experiences; some good, some bad. R represents our response. How will we respond to these events and experiences? The bigger our E's, the bigger our R's need to be; because our R's determine our O's, that is, our outcomes.

This equation has gained recognition, because of an executive coach by the name of Tim Kight, who taught this to the Ohio State Buckeyes. In August of 2014, their star quarterback Braxton Miller had a season ending injury. This is a devastation for any football team. Their backup quarterback ended up winning 10 out of 11 games, until he had a season ending injury against the Wolverines. Their third string quarterback ended up leading them to a national championship that year. How does a team win a national championship on a third string quarterback? Yes, great coaching, but beyond that, they maximized their responses. They mastered themselves, to stay focused no matter what. They had a mission, and nothing was going to sideline them. They were focused.

Are you focused? Are you aware of your mission as a follower of Christ? Our mission comes from our identity in Christ. Our **commission** was given to us by our Lord and Savior. Did you know that? Do you know what our mission is? If not, you cannot be focused, because you have no clear direction. Your purpose in being a Christian is not to avoid Hell. You were saved on purpose and for a purpose.

Salvation is a reason to rejoice. But I encourage you, don't stop there. Your mission in being a Christian is to partake in Jesus' Great Commission. He said, **"go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you."** (Mat. 28:19-20)

His mission is your commission! He came to seek and save the lost. He is asking you, as His servant, to make disciples who make disciples.

This is why Paul said, *"Stay true to what is right for the sake of your own salvation and the salvation of those who hear you."* This is why we train for godliness. This is why we stay focused. This is why we live for the things that matter. It's all for that glorious powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is that Gospel that is the power of salvation for everyone who believes. We live on mission, so people might know Christ.

If you don't know what the Good News is, it is this: That Jesus Christ – God in the flesh - came to Earth to pay the penalty for sin. No one I've ever met has avoided sin. We are all sinners in need of a Savior. And that Savior is Jesus. He came. He died a painful death on the cross. He was buried and He rose again. He defeated sin and secured eternal life. All you have to do is believe this – to embrace it. Recognize you have a problem and embrace Jesus. This is your only hope. If you do this, you will be His, and He will be yours. That is the Gospel – the Good News.

So where do we go from here?

We live in a fast paced, high activity culture. Virtually everyone around us is running the rat race and running themselves ragged. We have the choice to run alongside of them, trying to keep up with the Jones'. But is this what Christ called us to do? To be? Scripture tell us no.

How do we conquer the rat race? I don't know if you figured this out or not, but to conquer it, we simply avoid it. We avoid doing life the world's way. Instead, we do it God's way. We train for godliness. We study God's Word - the Bible. The Bible is God's love letter to us, and it contains our source of hope, joy and strength, no matter what comes. We live for the things that really matter. We daily ask ourselves, "If this were my last day on Earth, is this what I need to be doing for the mission God has called me be in?" Last, we maintain our focus. Both the good and bad of life will come. No matter what happens, we need to focus on Jesus, His Word, His promises, and His mission, no matter what.

The rat race is everywhere around us, and we are all trying to conquer it. You can run the rat race for a perishable prize. But if Scripture is right, and I know it is, we should run THE race for all, for the glory of God.

Again, Paul says, "Give your complete attention to these matters. Throw yourself into your tasks so that everyone will see your progress. <sup>16</sup> Keep a close watch on how you live and on your teaching. Stay true to what is right for the sake of your own salvation and the salvation of those who hear you." Give your whole attention or focus on training for godliness, which results in living for the things that matter.

People are watching. That's why Paul says, everyone will see your progress. This has nothing to do with being motivated by the approval of others, nor in the fear of being rejected for your faith. This means, when we live and teach according to God's Word, people will notice. People are always watching, so let's - with intentionality - let's live with focus. Let's live in a way that makes the world around us say, "Whoa. There's something different about the way they live. I need to find out what it is."

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N: Let me turn now to Cara and Arnie. Could you share a story about someone who noticed the difference in your life and how that allowed you to talk with them about Christ?

C: My husband was always a lover of Jesus, but he says he backslid, which is an old fashioned way to say, he just kind of walked away from it a little bit. I came to know Jesus and I was in the Word every day. And then Dan liked me, but he liked the new version of me even better. So he noticed a difference in my life, and that convicted him to get into the Word. So just that alone, in my own household, my kids see it for sure.

N: So that was a positive response to it. Arnie, what about you?

A: Yeah, I agree. It starts at home. I mean, these are people that are with you 24/7, and if they can see Christ in you, and they'll talk to you about how your life is, and how you've changed,

that's where it starts. And then from there, it goes out, and people do notice a difference, and they will talk to you about it. And here, again, being CEO at Back to the Bible, people aren't surprised that I'm a Christ follower, if they know what I do, or if I have my Back to the Bible shirt on. And I learned early on, that I behaved a lot differently when I wore my Back to the Bible shirt, than not, especially when I'd get cranky after traveling for 32 hours, going somewhere. But people do notice a difference, but mainly it's, and I think there's even a saying for it, but it's not so much what you say, it's how you live.

C: Well, you know, even my family outside of who I live with, so my mom and my sisters, and they have since come to know the Lord; I wouldn't say it's because of me, but they did see a difference in me for sure. A lot of my friends are working through their faith right now. Some of them have come to know the Lord. Some of them are still declared atheist, but they definitely have seen a difference in me. So I just wonder what I was like before, "Geesh", you know.

N: Well, I was curious if you guys felt a negative response to your relationship with Christ, because I know, in my early twenties, I went from a guy who went to church re-deyed, because I'd be out drinking with buddies Friday and Saturday night. And then once, I'll say, God lovingly brought me to my knees, and I dramatically changed how I lived, how I talked, how I would spend my time, there was a lot of uncomfortable feeling at times with these friends. Because they'd say, you're not the old Nat, and to be honest, you're kind of not a lot of fun to be around. So there was that negative pushback, but over time, they've seen that difference, and they've seen the benefit, and the positive outcome from it. But initially, it was actually a pretty negative response. Did you guys ever experience that as well?

C: Well, I have one friend in particular who is a declared atheist, and he is so, it's just odd, because he assumes that because I follow Jesus, he knows what my responses to things are going to be. And he has this impression - it's the same old/same old - that my views are hateful and things like that. So when I don't respond the way he assumes I'm going to respond, I will say it does throw him for a loop. So I found that that's been my best way to evangelize to him, and to also check in with him periodically, because I do love him and I do care. And so I can text him and say, "Hey man, I'm thinking about you. I hope things are going good", speaks volumes.

N: Well Arnie, let's talk about behavior. You've done a lot of research on the behavior of Christians. Talk a little bit about what that looks like and what you've seen.

A: I remember as a researcher, before I became a Christ follower, and I was kind of laughing to my mom and dad, that Christians have a higher divorce rate. And I thought, well, of course, you know, they're messed up people. And then I really started behavior, doing research on Christ followers and Christians, and found out that there's cultural Christians - I'm not saying they're not going to Heaven - and then there's Christ followers, people that are on fire. And there is a tremendous difference in the behavior of someone who is a Christ follower, who's engaged in Scripture, than someone who just claims to be a Christian, and doesn't act on it. It's just night and day. And in fact, there's such a difference ...

We were invited to present our findings at this conference at the University of Tel Aviv. It was

the Enlightenment Conference, of all things, talking about the difference that the Bible makes. Now, after I did my research on how it affects people's behavior, I did say it's not just the Bible; it's Jesus Christ that makes the difference. So those were my parting words. And I think that made them a little uncomfortable.

N: Right. Cara, both the good and the bad in life are going to come. We just can't avoid it. How do you stay steady in your focus through the ups and downs?

C: Well, even just lately, we've been waking up every morning and there's something new going on in the world with the COVID-19 stuff, or just with everything political. But here's the good news: our faith is in someone who does not change. His promises stay the same. So I just put my focus on what I know to be true about God. And then it just puts some adrenaline in my veins. It gets me going.

N: Yeah. Constantly going back to God's Word and just focusing on His truths and His promises really do help the believer, because the reality is, we are going to be hit with all sorts of trials. And as we're seeing right now, there is no shortage, when it rains, it does pour. And having that focus and solid base really does matter. Arnie, making sure that people have Heaven in their future, it's very important. But is that the full Gospel message? Is there more to salvation than just a destination?

A: Okay. You're the theologian, but I'm going to try this out here. And if I get in trouble, arrest me. So yes, Heaven is the final destination, but I believe the Scripture says you work on your salvation throughout your life. So that doesn't mean you're getting saved every day and getting baptized. But what it means is, I think it's called sanctification. You're working on moving closer to Jesus today than you were yesterday. And that's a progressive thing. So it's not like one and done, you raised your hand; now you can go live your life. But it's truly working out your salvation for the rest of your life.

N: That's beautifully said. I think the issue we have with some people, is that they think it is just a one way ticket to Heaven. And they deny the reality of that sanctification, that ongoing process of becoming more and more like Christ. In preparing for this message, and in preparing for our discussion, I went back and I was curious, what did our statement of faith have to say about Christian conduct? And what I saw was actually something really encouraging. And I thought our listeners would like to hear it. Article Seven of our statement of faith is *The Christian Life*. And it says, *We believe that God expects every believer to live a life full of obedience, in which every area of his life is brought under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and the fruit of the Spirit becomes increasingly evident in his or her life. The goal of the Christian life is to be conformed to the image of Christ*, and then it would go on from there. So what you just described is exactly what the Bible teaches and what we hold to as an organization. Cara, there are many people listening today who are discouraged by the rat race - I know I can be - that there are people who feel like they're running over and over again and getting nowhere. They just don't think that their lives make a difference in the kingdom of God. Can you give them some encouragement from today's passage?

C: Well, I think it's just a matter of how you're looking at it. Are you in a rat race, or are you in the place where God wants you now? I've been through that. I mean, I've been there. I wanted Him. When I came to Christ, I wanted to make a difference. I think it's Charles Spurgeon - I read a story about him. I'm pretty sure it's him - it's some big evangelist, some big preacher. One of the first people that ever disciplined him was the lunch lady at his school. That really encouraged me, because at that time, it made people content to be the lunch lady: God placed her there; she had reached out and given him the Gospel and talked about God to him. So be content being the lunch lady, because God is making oak trees out of those seeds that you're planting.

N: Wow. Beautifully said.