

LEARN FOR LIFE BLOG

COMMITTED BEYOND CIRCUMSTANCES PART 1

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2025 without question knocked the wind out of my sails. My mother passed away at the beginning of the year, which in and of itself, is a seismic event in anyone's life. Additionally and as a result, I paused my doctoral studies for the remainder of 2025 to take time to grieve both immediately and understand the new normal of my life moving forward. I ended a long-distance relationship that I had high hopes for making a lifelong commitment, and on top of all of that, the United States shifted culturally back towards a tumultuous time that resembles the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s rather than the beautiful complex tapestry of a multicultural nation and world.

Protests, shootings, political upheaval, breaking of long-held social norms, and more.

2025 was a lot. But it has also ended.

The question becomes where do we go from here? There seems to be only two roads in front of us: apathy or engagement.

Apathy seems like the easiest course of action. People are grieving the losses of family and friends, the reality of the gift and pain of life. Politics are so polarizing that they are dividing communities, churches, and more. It seems easy to just go home, stay indoors, watch television, and doom scroll waiting for the chaos outside to pass. Under apathy—at least partially—lies the belief that "If I can't fix it completely, why try at all?" or "My actions don't really matter anyway." When circumstances feel overwhelming, we withdraw. We protect ourselves. We go numb.

The second option is reactive engagement. To protest, to confront the injustices that are happening in our nation—whether they directly or indirectly impact our community/family—because to be Christian is to confront injustice as an outward demonstration of a gospel that has inwardly transformed us. Under reactive engagement—at least partially—lies the belief in the fierce urgency of now: "This crisis is uniquely critical and must be solved right now." We mobilize every resource, cancel everything



else, and throw ourselves into the work. But then the question becomes: Where do we engage? We can become incarcerated in our own inertia. There are so many pain points and the work is so vast—where do we go, what do we do? And what happens when we burn out?

As I am in my mid-40s, I have seen enough to know there will always be something. People who have been on the earth longer than me know this principle far deeper than me because they have seen more than me. The crises change, but they don't stop coming.

The Hidden Problem

Both stances—apathy and reactive engagement—share a hidden assumption: that our actions should be determined by circumstances.

When things feel hopeless, we withdraw. When things feel urgent, we mobilize. We swing between paralysis and frenzy, between doing nothing and trying to do everything. If our apathy is rooted in frustration that things didn't change at the pace we wanted, and our reactive engagement is rooted in the hope that we can solve centuries-old problems in our lifetime—both can lead us to unhealthy, unsustainable places.

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But what if this circumstance-driven approach is itself the problem? What if the cycle of withdrawal and burnout isn't a personal failure but a structural flaw in how we're thinking about commitment?

I want to suggest a third alternative: Commitment Beyond Circumstances.

What Does Commitment Beyond Circumstances Mean?

To be committed beyond circumstances is to cultivate a disciplined life that pursues the same habits, practices, and actions regardless of external situations. It means our commitments are sustained not by how we feel about current events, but by who we are called to be.

Let me illustrate from my own life.

Roughly 20 years ago, I was working as a Campus Minister with a faith-based nonprofit and like everyone in their 20s, the day came when my body decided to inform me I was mortal. I was out of breath walking on a campus where I was once a student. My muscles were stiff and my energy would not endure throughout the day. I got a gym membership, changed my diet, set a goal to get in shape and build muscle.

And I did.

And then I stopped. And started. And stopped. The cycle continued.

Sometimes, I was apathetic and the only thing I wanted to lift was a glass of wine, the remote control, and food that was flavorful—which contained every warning from a doctor about heart health, blood sugar levels and more (e.g. a good steak, loaded mashed potatoes, a tiny salad, and SLICES of cheesecake).

Other times, I was an Avenger, a Superhero. My attendance, or engagement, at the gym was solid. I would work out 4-5 days a week. I would get physically stronger with visibly more muscle mass—but it was always toward a goal: to lose weight, gain weight, to hit some benchmark. Once that goal was accomplished, I would slack off and eventually stop.

Both approaches—apathy and goal-driven intensity—were circumstance-dependent. I worked out when I felt motivated or when a goal demanded it. I stopped when circumstances changed.

There is a scene in *The Dark Knight Rises* when Bane (the supervillain) confronts Batman before a massive defeat of the Caped Crusader. Batman has been out of commission for a few years and when he tries to punch Bane, the villain catches his hand, looks at him and says something quite chilling:

"Peace has cost you your strength. Victory has defeated you."

This is the danger of apathy and reactive engagement. One is the arrival at a false peace; the other is the improper pursuit of it. Both leave us weaker than we need to be for the long journey ahead.

Apathy will not sustain us. Reactive urgency will exhaust us. If we are going to live differently, we need more than conviction. We need a way of life.

In Part 2, we will explore what it looks like to actually build that kind of commitment.

