

# SERIOUSLY?

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Have you ever had this nightmare, where you're a guest on a late-night television show, and after the opening banter, the host looks across the table at you and with raised eyebrow says, "So, you're a Christian... seriously?!"

If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

Let me tell you an old story. After five years as king of ancient Judah, when Rehoboam had established his kingdom and made himself strong, he and all Israel abandoned the LORD's teachings.

Then, as a sign of God's disapproval, the Egyptian king, Shishak, attacked Jerusalem, with 1,200 chariots, 60,000 horsemen, and an army of countless footsoldiers.

A prophet named Shemaiah then came to King Rehoboam and the leaders of Judah, saying, "This is what the LORD says: 'You have abandoned Me, so I will abandon you, and hand you over to Shishak.'"

The leaders and the king saw the error of their ways and humbled themselves, saying, "The LORD is right!" and they determined to change their ways and follow the LORD.

When the LORD saw their response, He relented of His anger and decided not to destroy them, so Shishak's campaign failed. Then Rehoboam ruled over Judah and Jerusalem for another 12 years.

But the lingering testimony of Rehoboam's life is found in the 16 words of 2 Chronicles 12:14, "*He did evil things because he was not serious about dedicating himself to serving the LORD.*"

Rehoboam was not a wicked king; neither was he a godly king. His life wavered from doing right to doing wrong, because he "was not serious" about his dedication to God. One translation says that Rehoboam "was not determined to follow the LORD" (NET).

How would you feel about an epitaph that read: "He was not serious about dedicating himself to serving the LORD"?

How will people remember you? You see, it is not the circumstances that envelope you from day to day—whether favorable or unfavorable—that will determine your epitaph; it

is your response to those circumstances. Most likely, it will not be a single moment of heroism that defines you, but the way you met the thousands of ordinary moments of life. Was there integrity? Consistency? Faithfulness?

The winds of circumstance blow across every life. That is not what determines one's course or destiny. It's what sailors call the "set of the sail."

Ella Wheeler Wilcox, 1916, published a poem which captures this principle. The last part of the poem is as follows:

*But to every man there openeth,  
A high way and a low,  
And every mind decideth,  
The way his soul shall go.*

*One ship sails East,  
And another West,  
By the self-same winds that blow,  
'Tis the set of the sails  
And not the gales,  
That tells the way we go.*

*Like the winds of the sea  
Are the waves of time,  
As we journey along through life,  
'Tis the set of the soul,  
That determines the goal,  
And not the calm or the strife.*

William Arthur Ward wrote that "the pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails."

Motivational teacher, Jim Rohn, once said, "It's not what happens that determines your life's future. It's what you do about what happens. All of us are in what's like a little sailboat, and it's not the blowing of the wind that determines your destination, it's the set of the sail. The same wind blows on us all—the wind of disaster, the wind of opportunity, the wind of change, the economic wind, the social wind, the political wind. The difference in where you arrive in one year, three years, five years, is not the blowing of the wind, but the set of the sail.

"So, it's not what happens. What happens happens to everybody. For things to change, you have to change. I was hoping the government would change, and taxes would change, and economics would change, and my boss would change. I wished for

everything around me to change. Then I learned that for things to change for me I would have to change.

“Don’t wish it was easier, wish you were better. Don’t wish for less problems, wish for more skills. Don’t wish for less challenge, wish for more wisdom. You can’t grow without challenge. You can’t get rich without challenge. You can’t fly without gravity. You have to develop wisdom to overcome the challenge.”

Now, let me paraphrase Chapter 1 of A.W. Tozer’s book, *The Set of the Sail*:

*Religion lies in the will. Not how we feel but what we will determines our spiritual direction.*

*"Jacob vowed a vow," and it was the beginning of a wonderful life with God. The following years brought a great many challenges, and Jacob did not always behave himself like a man of God, but his early determination kept him on course, and he came through victorious at last.*

*Daniel "purposed in his heart," and God honored his purpose by rescuing him when he was left overnight in a den of lions, and delivering him and his friends from the fiery furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar.*

*Jesus set His face "like a flint" and walked straight toward His death on the cross, regardless of public appeal, or of misunderstanding and resistance by friends, or of the opposition of enemies.*

*Paul "resolved to know nothing while [he] was [among the Corinthians] except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2), and in that determined spirit he ignored the arguments of learned philosophers, preached a gospel that was considered foolishness and earned himself a reputation for ignorance, though he was easily the greatest brain of his generation.*

*These are only a few of the many men and women of the Bible who have left us a record of spiritual greatness born out of a will firmly set to do what pleased God. They did not expect to float to heaven on a perfumed cloud, but cheerfully accepted their calling to "remain faithful to the Lord with heartfelt devotion" (Acts 11:23).*

*In the Kingdom of God, what we will is accepted as what we are. "If any man will," said our Lord, "let him..." (Luke 9:23). God does not desire to destroy our wills, but to sanctify them. In that terrible, wonderful moment of surrender it may be that we feel that our will has been forever broken, but such is not the case. In His conquest of your soul God does not destroy any of its normal powers. He purges your will and brings it into union with His own, but He never breaks it.*

*In the diaries of some of God's greatest saints will be found vows and solemn pledges made in moments of great grace when the presence of God was so real and so wonderful that the reverent worshiper felt he dared to say anything, to make any promise, with the full assurance that God would enable him to carry out his holy intention. The self-confident and irresponsible boast of a Peter is one thing and is not to be confused with the hushed and trustful vow of a David or a Daniel. Neither should Peter's embarrassing debacle dissuade us from making vows of our own. The heart gives character to our pledges, and God knows the difference between an impulsive promise and a reverent declaration of intention.*

*Let us, then, set our sails in the will of God. If we do this we will certainly find ourselves moving in the right direction, no matter which way the wind blows.*

One translation of today's Bible text says that Rehoboam "was not determined to follow the LORD" (NET). Determined to follow.

In a former church, Martha and I stopped by the home of one of our deacons one afternoon. After 45 minutes of preparing green beans from the garden with the family, sipping iced tea, and talking, he walked me to the door and, because we would not stay for dinner, he said, "Well, we can't say you visited, but we'll say you stopped by."

The point is that you cannot make a Christian life by simply dropping in on Jesus once in a while. Even voraciously reading Christian literature or devouring Christian websites cannot make up for spending personal time with Jesus in prayer and worship over the Scriptures and then doing what He tells you. GET SERIOUS.

We must determine to follow the Lord. Only then will we keep in step with the Holy Spirit, when He makes an "unexpected turn" to the right or left. Only then will we let go of our expectations when God reveals a different plan. You cannot "drift to Jesus"; you can only drift away.

Another translation says he "did not set his heart to seek the LORD" (NASB). Just like you need to set your watch to the correct time, and adjust the setting from time to time, you also need to "set your heart." That means make sure it's pointed in the right direction, giving attention to the proper things.

To the church in Colosse, Paul wrote, "*You have been raised to life with Christ. Now set your heart on what is in heaven, where Christ rules at God's right side*" (Colossians 3:1).

The woman of Luke 15, who lost her precious coin, would not have swept every corner of her house if finding it was not the most important thing on her mind. This was no casual search, but an all-out hunt for an irreplaceable treasure.

The shepherd (of the same chapter) would not have sought his one lost sheep until he found it, for the hour was late and the search was long, and, after all, it was only one of a hundred sheep. But this was his livelihood, his responsibility. THIS WAS A SERIOUS SEARCH.

Their hearts were set “to seek until” they found what they were looking for.

Yet another translation says Rehoboam “did not seek the LORD with all his heart” (NLT).

God told Jeremiah to tell His people, “*You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart*” (Jeremiah 29:13).

Are you easily distracted from seeking the Lord? Is yours a journey of fits and starts? Then your whole heart isn't set on it yet. God is not hiding from you, but He reveals Himself fully (and fulfillingly) to those only whose whole hearts are engaged in the search. Casual won't cut it! YOU MUST GET SERIOUS or God will remain a puzzle, an enigma (or worse), to you.

Someone asked Jesus what was the most important command that God had ever given. Without hesitation, He replied, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength*” (Mark 12:30). Please note, this is not a suggestion; it is the greatest commandment of all. It is an order. We are each responsible for how we carry it out. IT'S SERIOUS.

King Rehoboam of Judah “*was not serious about dedicating himself to serving the LORD.*” Don't be a casual church member or attender. Get serious. And demonstrate your seriousness by dedicating yourself to service. In the name of Jesus, and for His honor, serve your family, serve your church, and serve your community. Determine NOT TO BE part of an irrelevant, unnoticed church that is the butt of jokes on late night television. Be serious about doing your part to live the Good News in the company of other serious Christians.

“*Seek the Lord, while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near.*” (Isaiah 55:6)

If you are not serious about dedicating yourself to serve the Lord, you may display the “form, but lack the power” of the Gospel of God's grace. “*For,*” Paul has written, “*the Kingdom of God is not in word but in power*” (1 Corinthians 4:20). John concurred by admonishing, “*Let's not just talk about love; let's practice real love*” (1 John 3:18; MSG).

For things to change, you have to change.

Don't wish it was easier, wish you were better.

Don't wish for less problems, wish for more skills.

Don't wish for less challenge, wish for more wisdom.

It is high time to become a seriously devoted follower of Jesus Christ.