

when the whole shebang falls apart around you.

staying dedicated when it all goes wrong.

...take a moment...

So we know what it means to be dedicated to God, and why we should do it. But it's not easy. Take some time by yourself or in your group if you'd rather to thank God for who He is. Thank Him that He longs to have a relationship with you, and that you're the most special thing in the world to Him. Take a few moments to think about where you are with God - are you dedicated to Him? Think about when you find it hard, and how you feel.

what about when things go belly-up?

Hang on a moment. If God wants us to be dedicated completely to Him, and He's a great big huge amazing God, that means everything will be peachy, right? So how come it's so tricky to give your Monday-Saturday to God when you're going through your regular life at school, college, uni or work? What about when you're at home? With your family? With your non-Christian friends? Not so easy then, eh? Why is it that stuff perpetually goes wrong and you mess up in the same old ways over and over again? Isn't asking you to be dedicated to God asking too much? Wait a mo - suddenly this dedication idea seems a bit mental. What on earth are you supposed to do when things suddenly get stuffed up?

pause.

Right, so it's not all a walk in the park. But it was never going to be.

Genesis 3:6-13

Romans 5:12

What does this say about our nature? Does the fact that we're Christians mean that we're going to lead sorted lives? How can we follow God with all we are if all we are is inherently sinful?

The Fall - we live in a sinful world and we're always bound to make mistakes, act in a way God doesn't want us to. As Christians, we're released from the bondage of sin but that doesn't mean we're not ever going to do it again. It's easy to mess up when we're surrounded by a world that wants to ignore God.

Romans 5:17-6:2

Romans 6:14

Ephesians 1:7

How do these verses make you feel? What do they explain to you about living a life for God in a sinful world? What do they say about who God is? How does that make you feel?

Although the world's not a place where God is held important, and we're not ever going to be perfect, thankfully God's endless grace holds us up.

How do you feel you "cope" in the world when things around you tempt you to sin? Do you feel like you mess up all the time? Do you feel God's grace surrounding you?

Right, so we've established that things are never going to be easy. The world's just not that nice a place. We're going to mess up. God knows that. He expects us to mess up occasionally. But the good news is He's always ready to forgive us by His grace when we come to Him to honestly admit our mistakes. He isn't looking for perfection. He knows we're never going to be that this side of heaven. He understands who we are because He made us and He loves us. He doesn't expect the impossible - He just expects your best!

2 Corinthians 12:9

Our human weaknesses are even something God can use. When we recognise our limitations, we have to allow ourselves to decrease, and God to increase. Through admitting our weaknesses and inabilities, we have to stop relying on ourselves, and give it up to God. Because His grace is sufficient for us. And that's dedication.

you're not alone...

It was never going to be entirely an easy life for any of us. Being a Christian means being prepared to take the hard stuff as well as the good stuff, and it's not always going to be a barrel of laughs. And we've always messed up. Even when Jesus was around on Earth for us to see and touch. Take a look at this...

Matthew 26:69-75

Put that into perspective - Peter was Jesus' closest disciple and trusted friend, yet he messes up three times and denies that he even knows who Jesus is. Peter had claimed to be willing to die with Jesus, and he'd been with Him since that day on the shores of Lake Galilee. You'd think he'd know better. Peter's messed up big style.

Now read this:

Matthew 16:13-18

John 21:15-17

Why do you think Jesus tells Peter that the church will be built on him and his faith? Have a look at Matt 16:16 - is there significance in Peter's name change?

Now, bearing in mind that God knows the future, why does He choose to found the church on someone like Peter who will deny Him when it gets tough? Looking at the passage in John, remember that these events take place following Jesus' resurrection and Peter's denial of Him, but after the events of Matt 16. What's the significance of what Jesus asks Peter? Do you think there's any significance to the number of times Jesus asks Peter the same question?

How does it make you feel to think of God's continual forgiveness, continual grace and continual love? Does it make it easier to feel like you can be dedicated to God?

...so what does that all mean for you?

So God's full of grace. This much we know. Now that we know that, we need to think about what that really means for us as we go about our lives. God's willing to give us His grace day after day. So what do we need to do in return?

Hebrews 12:1-2

1 Corinthians 9:26

1 Corinthians 10:12-14

What are you heading for? How easy do you find it to fix your eyes on Jesus in the life you live every day? What things are there that entangle you and trip you up? How do you feel about God going through your race with you? Does it make it easier?

We need to run the race with perseverance. We need to be sure about what we're running towards. We also need to make sure daily that we're not running aimlessly. It's easy to just get stuck in a rut, a routine, and just stay there, "beating the air" like Paul says in 1Cor. We need to make sure we're standing firm, not getting complacent. When we get complacent, we push God out of the picture and forget why we're running the race in the first place.

So fix Jesus as your goal. You're bound to fluff it at some point because you're only human and God doesn't expect you to be perfect. But PERSEVERE! When you become a Christian, you're not suddenly going to snap into a perfect lifestyle, it's a gradual transformation. There will always be things in your life that God needs to work on. You're an ongoing work!

Ephesians 4:22-24

Romans 12:2

What's the secret of being made new? Is renewing your mind a once-only thing? Remember that dedicating yourself to God by following Him means that He will give you all manner of gifts - new life, love, peace and lots more!

Dedicating yourself to God doesn't mean you won't find yourself tempted! If you follow God wholeheartedly, you can bet that Satan will redouble his efforts to try and knock you down again. Even Jesus was tempted by Satan before he started His ministry. Watch out for the devil's tricks and attempts to get you to fall back into your old lifestyle.

SO...

- Spend time with God in prayer and Bible study. If you don't spend time on your relationship with God it'll never grow. Spend quality time with Him. He loves you! Enjoy Him!
- Look for help from other Christians. Often, people have experiences that can help you. Or they'll be able to pray with you and encourage you. God wants us to be an encouraging group of people, passionate not just about Him, but about each other. We need to hold each other up, encourage and love each other!
- Think about finding a person or small group you can be accountable to. Be honest! Together, you're stronger and can build each other up, to run the race as God intended.
- Don't be afraid of messing up! You're precious to God and He loves you nonetheless.