

Commitment

The Bible passage today is about Jesus' praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before his arrest, his trial and his crucifixion. According to the narration, Jesus' soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. He told his disciples Peter, James and John to keep watch while he went to pray. The passage gives us a rare glimpse into the agony and distress felt by Jesus. He knew very well that in the days after, he would be humiliated and mocked, and that He would die a cruel and excruciating death on the cross. It also shows us a man committed to finishing the task that he set out to do despite the unbearable burden that He had to bear.

Making a commitment to a particular course or goal seems to have long been forgotten in this quick and throw-away society where it is everyone for themselves. Yet, making a commitment to what you do, whether it is a relationship or marriage, job or career venture, your health, your studies or a personal improvement goal, is key to a meaningful and fulfilling life.

A commitment is much more than a wish to do something or being interested in doing something. When you make a commitment, you invest your time, energy and effort into it. You need to be disciplined and be ready to act outside your comfort zone. Imagine a student offering a commitment to attaining outstanding academic results but not devoting themselves to their studies. The commitment simply becomes lip service and an unfulfilled dream.

A commitment, unlike a half-hearted hope or just trying to give your 'best shot', also requires persistence. No matter what the commitment is, there will be setbacks and the temptation to quit will arise. Making a commitment means trying harder, looking for solutions when you are faced with obstacles. However, quitting is not an option because commitment is all about striving forward, forging ahead regardless and never backing down. When the going gets tough, the tough get going.

This is the story of Xia Boyu, a double amputee, who lost both of his legs after suffering from severe frostbite during a failed attempt to climb Mt. Everest in 1975. For an athletic young man at that time, it was devastating and he thought he would be spending the rest of his life wheelchair-bound. However, with the prosthetics given to him, he embarked on a gruelling routine of harsh training, waking up at five in the morning to train for five or six hours a day. Sometimes he would cycle the 24 km from his home to the outskirts of the city to practise climbing, often making the stumps of the base of his legs bloodied and bruised.

In 2014, he organised his own team for another attempt to scale Mt. Everest, only to be told when they arrived at the base camp that all expeditions had to be aborted after an avalanche at the mountain had killed 16 Sherpas. A plan to try again in the following year was similarly thwarted but this time by a 7.8 magnitude earthquake which struck the Himalayan nation of Nepal. In 2016, Xia's team made another attempt. They made it to within 100 metres of the summit when they were hit by a snowstorm forcing them to turn back down the mountain. The decision to turn back

was a really difficult one but Xia knew very well that he could not risk the lives of other teammates simply just to achieve his own goal.

Undeterred by these trials and with an indomitable spirit, Xia planned another mission in December 2017 and he finally climbed to the top of the mountain in May this year, at the age of 69, an age that most people would consider retiring.

There are many words or phrases that we can use to describe him: he is persistent in making different attempts to scale Mt. Everest and though he had failed many times, he was tenacious; unwilling to accept defeat or easily give up attempting the climb. He is also resolute and realistic, determined to succeed even though the odds were stacked against him. He is indeed very dedicated and disciplined, and he is very passionate about achieving his goal. In fact, all these are the qualities of a person who is committed to a task or a goal.

I hope you find Xia Boyu an inspiring example to follow: his persistence and tenacity, his single-mindedness, his discipline, his passion and his determination are all exemplary. I challenge you all to make your own commitment in life.