

I would say we could all agree Sam Smith is successful in his form of art. He is not only a talented artist, but well accomplished. He is 23yrs old, has been nominated for over 52 awards winning over 20 of those awards. I mean when I was 23 I was lucky to be getting out of bed and getting to work on time. He has won four Grammys this year alone, song of the year, best pop vocal album, and is worth roughly 15 million dollars. We might even say Sam has reached the American dream. That he has arrived and is no longer pursuing life, liberty, or happiness. He is there and is now actively living. He is living in his freedom and individuality and embracing every aspect of it.

We look at his life and think, 'That must be so great!' But does the singer of that song SOUND happy? He doesn't to me... he sounds really lonely." Lets take a look at some of the lyrics.

*These nights never go to plan  
I don't want you to leave, will you hold my hand.*

The song is beautiful, but this lyric is sad, pathetic. He's begging his lover not to leave, so he doesn't have to be alone. He's so hungry for human contact he's begging not for a lifetime. Not for years. For one whole night.

Maybe we haven't been to that extreme (though some of us have), but we know what it feels like to have settled for something less. Whether it's because we either believe this is the best we deserve, maybe we gave up on relationships, or maybe we really think this is as good as it gets. "This ain't love it's clear to see" Maybe we gave up on love?

*Deep down I know this never works, but you can lay with me so it doesn't hurt.*

This is what we tell ourselves. We have all time and time again given ourselves to something for the comfort or for the ease. Giving a night or a weekend in a temporary fashion because nothing "lasts forever". In a way that just works for the moment. We take part into what just makes us feel better. Even though we know it really doesn't. We have a culture that feeds off of hooking up. We have apps like "tinder, hitch" or websites like Ashley Madison.

We have complete freedom from attachment. Someone told us that was the dream, but we're living it and it's actually leaves us lonely and isolated. Why are we still so committed to be against commitment? Why are we so certain that saying Yes to forever is the end of our freedom? And we ARE afraid of that. I remember my own bachelor party. I remember all the comments " Better have fun last night as a free man" "This is your last chance to back out" "You sure about this thats a big commitment. None of this meshed with me I was so excited to marry Teresa and begin our life together. Anyone who's been married (or been to a wedding) knows exactly what I'm talking about. We've ritualized our fear of commitment (which is why most Millennials just don't get married in the first place). We've been told commitment is the opposite of freedom, that to share your life with other people means sacrificing the best parts of yourselves. But the song writer has found what many of us have learned - there's no joy in the freedom of individualism.

## 2 | Top 10 Songs Week 2 – Stay with Me by Sam Smith

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So what if we're wrong? What if commitment ISN'T the opposite of freedom? What if commitment is the soil in which freedom grows? What if commitment is actually GOOD NEWS for all of us begging for someone just to Stay With Me?

What if I told you to feel free to commit? What if I told you there is not only satisfaction in commitment, but there is life and happiness that comes with that freedom. I know what you're thinking commitment cost something. I would have to agree with you. For now though I want to walk you through why there is freedom in commitment and why that's good news.

If freedom were actually found in freedom from commitment, we would have grasped it already. A lot of us are still trying to convince ourselves it's true, even though we've learned again and again it's not. I can't tell you how many times...

We can even get to the point where we believe it. I can't tell you how many times I see someone on my FB feed or Instagram living this out. If I'm being honest I struggled with this idea in the past. Even though it ended badly so many times I could always convince myself to believe that that this is the best I deserved. Even though like Sam Smith "I knew it never worked" I knew it wasn't true.

Imagine if that's not as good as it gets. Imagine a world that finds their freedom in committing, what would that look like? You know what I learned what I have come to realize. This picture that the song paints is not as good as it gets. For some of us that is a surprise, others might not buy it still, but imagine with me just a little.

A lot of us live in the world of the song writer because of the alternatives. We're afraid that to commit to other people is to sacrifice our freedom - that's why we say such weird things when people are getting married, or refer to spouses as the "Ball and Chain". It's why many people are afraid to have kids - it'll cost them their freedom. It's why we're afraid of following God... if I commit to God, I'll have to quit doing whatever I want. Commitment means laws. Rules. Restrictions. Freedom is the opposite of Law... right? We have to share everything. We bring two people together and we throw all these expectations on them and rules they didn't have before. Here comes the part where I have to give up who I am.

Commitment here is law and freedom is the opposite of the law right?

Wrong.

[Scripture Slide] If you have your bibles turn with me to Psalm 119 if you have one of our free bibles in the back it is on page xxx: While you are getting there I want to give you some back story on the Law and how the Jewish people viewed it and understood it.

The law for the Jews was not a rule book. Psalms is the Jewish songbook - it's the collection of the songs every Jewish kid grew up singing. And Psalm 119 is a love song... but it's not to another person. Psalm 119 is a love song to the Law.

I know how weird that sounds (could anything be LESS romantic than rules?), but the Law for the Jewish people wasn't a rule book... The law was so much more. Their word for Law was Torah, and it didn't mean rules. It meant something more like "Way" or "Instruction" or "Path". For them, the Torah was the map to freedom, to the good life. If we were to ask them what they thought of this Torah of the rules.

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The Jewish people would tell you of the privilege, the honor, and their love for it. Of all peoples in the world, God had chosen them to receive the Way to Life. They reveled in the idea of being chosen to be the bearers of this Torah to everyone else.

With that in mind let start in verse 41

LORD, give me your unfailing love, the salvation that you promised me. Then I can answer those who taunt me, for I trust in your word. Do not snatch your word of truth from me, for your regulations are my only hope. I will keep on obeying your instructions forever and ever.

I will walk in freedom, for I have devoted myself to your commandments. I will speak to kings about your laws, and I will not be ashamed. How I delight in your commands! How I love them! I honor and love your commands. I meditate on your decrees. -- Psalm 119:41-48

Wow it sounds like a love song. A love song to the Torah, to the rules, to commitment. That is a big change from what we have been hearing. It sounds actually beautiful. We can't be talking about the same thing can we? I mean it sounds like there is a lot of freedom here.

Let's jump down to verse 57

Lord, you are mine! I promise to obey your words! With all my heart I want your blessings. Be merciful as you promised. I pondered the direction of my life, and I turned to follow your laws. I will hurry, without delay, to obey your commands.

Evil people try to drag me into sin, but I am firmly anchored to your instructions. I rise at midnight to thank you for your just regulations. I am a friend to anyone who fears you— anyone who obeys your commandments. O Lord, your unfailing love fills the earth; teach me your decrees. -- Psalm 119:57-64

This is one giant love song. A giant love song about living into the identity of a people who loved the Torah. A beautiful relationship that seems to ground and pride itself in the living, with pursuing happiness, and enjoying it. What is so different about this picture "The way present vs Stay with me? The psalmist seems to have more confident, more stable, all the things we thought were part of individuality. The psalmist has found these in the Torah. We have a hard time believing that because we have been taught commitment and freedom are opposites. What if we were wrong?

Now, I know how bad the rules can be I have seen Christians, churches, governments, and authorities abuse the law my entire life. I have seen it first-hand. I have seen how the law can be used as a weapon to keep people out or away. I have seen how people use the law to keep people from freedom. I think we can all relate to that.

When I was younger this is the version of the law that I saw. I grew up in a house full of rules, in a church full of rules, around people full of rules. This drove me crazy. I had enough. I saw people carelessly throw people out of their lives because they didn't fit the mold or the rules. So much so that I packed my bags and left my house at 18. I knew better than all these rules so you can keep them and I will find my own.

I was running from friendship to friendship, relationship to relationship, church to church. Looking for who fit my needs at the time. Looking for anyone that would just stay with me. In a world of fleeting attachments we are all the leavers and the left. I thought this was a good as it gets. So I settled for this in

my life. I settled for a life of individualism. A life that put me before my commitments, a life that left me free. A life where the rules couldn't be used to hurt me anymore. A life that I didn't have to commit to.

The law, the rules I was running from those no one likes. By no one I mean God too. God hates the way we have used the law to exclude people. He hates the way we use the law as burden or a task to carry out. God hates the way the law has been acted out. Jesus himself corrected the Jewish leaders time and time again. He told them to remember the Torah. He told them to remember Shema. "Hear O Israel the lord your God is one blessed be his name and kingdom forever and ever. Love the lord your God with all your heart your soul and all your might."

Jesus reminded them in doing this all the rules are fulfilled. Jesus reminded him that this should always be their goal. He said that all the law, all the books of the prophets, and all the Torah are satisfied when we do this. Jesus continued on in that line of thinking and said love everyone as I have loved them. The bible isn't this book of laws and rules and regulations asking us to just follow. It is a story of a people that have lived in these moments and we see in it the stories that tell us what Torah is about. The Torah for the Jewish people was never thought of as a law or an obligation. For them the Torah was freedom.

When I turned 23 my life took a significant turn. I felt like my own Sam Smith I was on top of the world receiving what I thought was all the best awards. I thought I had it all at that point. I had a great job, house, new cars, pretty much anything I wanted. There came a moment though when that reminded me, it reminded me that I knew my life could be better and what I was doing wasn't working. A time that I realized my "freedom" my "individualism" wasn't fulfilling at all. I had believed I had reached the height of all the best the world had to offer. Deep down I was really craving and begging for commitment.

Teresa and I started to date and I knew it was different than any other commitment I had been a part of. I knew it was different because I was willing to give up all my freedom just to be a part of what we had. I was scared and I didn't honestly believe I would ever have what I have now. I often thought I was going to have to trade out parts of myself to join into this commitment. I was going to have to trade my freedom to be in this relationship.

It all started to change when what I thought I would have to give up morphed into better parts of me. My commitment to her allowed me to love deeper, more passionately than I ever had. In giving up my "freedom" I didn't find the chains, but I found an even better freedom. A freedom to fully embrace who I was. I became a husband, a father, and a best friend. A friendship that saw the good and the bad of both parties and didn't care. A commitment that allowed all the good parts of me to get better and all the bad parts of me to fade.

It didn't happen overnight, but my commitment started making me a better person. A happier person full of joy. It's like I became a better me or a new and improved version of me. A me that I could have never been or would have never been without my commitment. I've seen it change Teresa too. An independent woman that didn't have time for anyone in her life. Going to school full time and working full time had no time for commitment. I've seen her turn from independence and freedom to embracing commitment of being a friend, a mother, and a caring loving sister and daughter.

This changed my view my idea of the rules vs freedom. I actually found my freedom in the rules, in the commitment. The commitment that I used to run from. I spent my whole life running from. That commitment turned out to be what fulfilled my deepest cravings. I began to love the rules and

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commitments so much so that I have shared it with friends, family, and my children. I have learned to love and embrace the rules and I found freedom in my commitment. Freedom to be a better me.

What if we were a people that learned to stay? We could be a people that follows the Torah, that loves the law. We could be a people that loves others just like Jesus loved them. We could be a people that embraces the law, the Torah and considers it an honor to be able to bring this to the rest of the world. To ask people to stay with us. To be a community of stayers. There's this person in the height of their freedom that is alone. So alone he can't hear or listen. He can't or won't give himself to commitment. Even though he is crying and asking for the very thing God is offering.

God is asking us to be a people of the Torah. A people of commitment, a people of stayers. What if like I have learned with my commitment we became a people who loved to stay with God? How do we Stay with our Kids, our families, at Catalyst? Where this begins is in our c-groups. Where we connect whether we are a family, single, teen, or a child. Our C-groups are a place to say and build and learn how to commit to a better way of life. What if we could be a people that embraced our commitment? How much would it change us, our families, our friendships, and our lives?

Catalyst we are a community of stayers. How can we go out to our neighborhoods, jobs, friends, and family to help them become stayers. To help transform the world around us to a song like Psalm 119. A song that loves to stay.

### Prayer of Examine

Lets Pray:

Father I thank you so much for your guidance. I thank you so much for you showing us the way. For giving us the Torah. I thank you for showing us that there is freedom in commitment and that's good news. Be with us as we go out this week and help us to be a community of stayers. Stayers that help to transform others lives and show others how to stay the way we were meant to.

### Benediction

Catalyst As we go out this week Let us be a people that Stays and through staying God's love pours out of us to show others Commitment is freedom. Go in his grace and in his peace and we will see you next week.

**Commented [1]:** Write how you're going to set it up, as well as the four questions.

**Commented [2]:** This is a corporate prayer to close the gathering. Pray WE not I.

Other than that, this is GOLD. Well done.