

Obedient Faith

Lesson 9 in "More Like Jesus"

Lesson Aim: To show us that to become more like Jesus, we must receive God's Word in obedient faith. We must act upon it, trusting Him for the needed result or blessing.

Key Verse: And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Hebrews 11:6

Obedient Faith

If we are to become more like Jesus, we must receive God's Word in obedient faith. We must act upon what He has said, simply trusting Him to produce the result or blessing He promised.

Often there is a gap in our understanding or belief. We just can't see how things could work out right if we do it God's way. Or we do something out of obedience and nothing happens right away, so we assume it didn't work. For example:

- We see no practical reason to love those who despitefully use us.
- We ask someone to forgive us, but they are still unkind toward us.
- Dying to self-rule feels like ultimate death.
- Being "anxious for nothing" seems irresponsible.
- We give sacrificially because God nudged us to, but our own need continues.

These gaps must be filled with obedient faith, which recognizes that:

- God's ways may be mysterious at times, but they are best!
- Evil may seem to prevail for the moment, but His sovereignty guarantees that He will have the final word.
- His ways may not satisfy the demands of my flesh, but they are life giving.
- I may not see it now, but his Word *will* produce fruit, as Isaiah 55:9-13 says.

Obedient faith then, follows God's Word in a given situation and quietly waits for the outcome. It rests in a confidence that is firmly rooted in His person and character. The question is, do we believe and trust God enough to simply obey Him?

Gain Without Pain?

How do we grow in patience, forbearance, forgiveness, love, servanthood, humility or other virtues unless we're thrust into a situation where such virtues are needed and we learn them there?

You can learn a certain amount about swimming, in the classroom, but if you really want to be a swimmer you must get into the water! If we are to learn to forgive as Jesus forgave, God will probably allow situations to arise where we find it difficult to forgive. As we seek Him in that place, He will teach us forgiveness. If we want to be more patient - - - !

Isn't meekness in the face of false accusation difficult, but isn't it a foundational part of Christlikeness and something that we can only learn in the workshop of life?

We need to know that the difficult times are full of potential to advance us in our pursuit of Christ.

In each case we are called to obey God and conduct ourselves according to His Word and the example of Jesus. By doing so we come into the place of blessing; the place where a sovereign God works on our behalf to fulfill the promise of His Word. It may be “later” rather than “sooner,” but it will be!

Often there is need for a deliberate choice to follow Jesus; to refuse the demands of the flesh; and to humbly choose God's way. Sometimes that causes terrible agony in our innermost being as we wrestle with pride and our desire for self-rule. However, moving in obedient faith, we obey. The result is wonderful; the most precious blessing a man or woman can have. It is the joy and peace of righteousness!

And it is not only righteousness, peace and joy for the moment. It is another step in our growth experience and leads to even greater righteousness, peace and joy in the future as we continue to develop these Godly patterns.

Is there any other way to move beyond theory and become a functional Christian?

We know that sinning in some way makes it easier to sin in the same way again, because we develop sinful patterns. But we also need to understand that choosing righteousness once, makes it easier to choose it the next time! We develop patterns of *righteousness* in our heart. Consider Romans 6:19b:

“Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.”

Would you agree that sometimes when the heavens seem like “brass” to us, it is because God is waiting for us to obey something He has already told us to do? And might James 4:7-8 apply here?

Examples from the Scriptures

Let's consider some Bible stories that demonstrate the blessing of God upon those who obeyed Him. Some of these people moved in faith even when it seemed ridiculous. Consider the results!

- Exodus 14:10-22, Moses, parting of the Red Sea
- Joshua 6:1-20, the walls of Jericho
- II Chron. 20:1-30, Jehosaphat, delivered from the enemy
- John 2:1-10, Jesus, turning water into wine

Notice the six common components here:

1. Men and women walking with God
2. They come to a place of need
3. They seek God there
4. God speaks
5. His people obey
6. He meets their need!

There are more stories too. And probably some from *your* life. The point is clear; God is faithful to those who obey Him, and He moves by His power on their behalf. As we walk with Him we will come to places of need. As we seek Him there He will instruct us. As we obey Him He will act on our behalf!

Facing Our “Red Sea”

What “Red Sea” do you keep coming up to? Christians often experience unbelief and defeat at the same place, time after time! It may be a certain person, or kind of person you have a hard time getting along with. Or a fear, imagination or desire that comes up repeatedly. It may have to do with physical appetites or emotional needs.

Each of us has an all-too-familiar path that Satan has led us down again and again. Our “Waterloo” of sorts. From past experience, the end is predictable. Think about it!

However, if we step back and observe ourselves a bit, and if we are willing to be honest, we can soon see the kind of situation that repeatedly defeats us. God will help us do that, if we ask Him to!

A mark of spiritual maturity then, is to learn to recognize what is happening at an earlier point along the path. We then humble ourselves before God and His Word and become an overcomer!

We Need Each Other

Hebrews 3 speaks of the need to obey God through the difficulties of life. Verses 12-14 offer clear counsel and stern warning about unbelief. Consider this:

“See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.¹⁴ We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.”

This is written to Christians who are in the trials of life! It is not speaking of the unbelief of the unsaved who refuse to accept the truth that Jesus died for their sins. It is the unbelief of a Christian who refuses to accept the truth that God is trustworthy and His ways are best in the situations of life!

Verse 13 calls us to a scarcely practiced responsibility that Christians have toward one another. We are to encourage one another to trust God, and to obey His Word and walk in His ways even when it is difficult.

We must do this "today," that is, while another's heart is tender in some situation. If we don't, they will soon become dulled and hardened by the process of rationalizing and debating what to do. Little by little the old nature will take over

and they will walk into unbelief!

Too often we watch in self-righteous judgment as others writhe in pain before the trials of life, forgetting that God will hold us partially responsible because we did not offer encouragement when we could have.

If your church is like most, this is a sorely needed practice that is rarely applied. As humans who wrestle with the flesh, we desperately need words of exhortation and encouragement from each other!

This practice is to be followed among the brothers and sisters of the body of Christ. It is not speaking of discipline and correction for obvious sin, as much as a challenge to persevere and press on in matters of faithfulness in life. Usually this ministry will be expressed in gentle, kind words. Brief phone calls and little notes can be of great value to struggling saints!

Closing Thoughts

God wants us to view the needs and situations of life from the standpoint of what best fulfills His purposes in our life. He calls us to respond in obedient faith, on the basis that He is God and we are His people. He is the Master, we the servant.

Until we learn better, our response to difficult situations is based on self-interest, human resources, fear, and emotion. God wants to set us free from these patterns!

Christian faith is active. It propels us into life's situations; pushing us out to the growing edge and making us participants instead of observers. Sometimes you feel like you are dangling in space on the end of a rope. You feel terribly vulnerable, sometimes very foolish. It might feel like God gets you out there and then goes away for a while! The "blessing" seems pretty distant.

But that's all part of obedient faith. It's part of the process of growing into the image of Christ. It's the "testing and proving" of life that builds faith and character.

Sometimes we make mistakes. When we do, we learn from them and try again. As we grow in Christ the ways of God become patterns that replace the ways of the flesh. We think and act more and more like Jesus! The fruit of the Spirit is more dominant. And the world sees Jesus in us!

The growing Christian will capture one area of his life after the other for righteousness. He marches deeper and deeper into the territories of his heart that have been misshapen by ignorance; the sins of others against him; and his own sins.

Increasingly his passions in life are to commune with God; to live in a way that brings glory to Him; and to be used for His purposes. As he presses on he becomes more and more ruthless toward every fleshly obstacle within himself that would restrain his progress. The things of the world become less compelling and the interests of the flesh more disgusting.

Righteousness, peace and joy are growing realities. Obedient faith has become a servant that brings life's greatest treasures, without regret.

Prayer:

Father in heaven, I want to be one who walks with you in obedient faith. I confess that sometimes it is very difficult. Your ways seem foolish to me. My fleshly desires plead to be fulfilled. My pride and my selfish interests get in the way.

Please help me hear your clear call to obedient faith. Remind me of the saints of old who walked in this way.

Forgive me for the folly of thinking that my way is best. Release me from the power of self-rule.

I yield myself to you anew, to perform your work in me through the needs, situations and opportunities of life. Thank you, Father, that you will help me to respond in obedient faith!

Questions for Thought and Discussion

- 1) Does this "obedient faith" seem practical for the issues you wrestle with in the Christian life?
- 2) What are some occasions in the past when you chose to respond in obedient faith?
- 3) Can you think of some areas now, where obedient faith would make a difference?
- 4) How common is the practice of exhorting or encouraging, in your church?
- 5) What might be some preconditions to our being able to effectively exhort and encourage in this way?