

# DISCIPLESHIP AND OBEDIENCE



## *Obedience in the Life of the Believer*

### SCRIPTURE FOCUS

*“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’ For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.” Hebrews 3:12-19*

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.” John 12:24-26*

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### QUOTES

*“What is the last thing that God has told you to do that you have not done? Get up and run to this last thing and do what God has asked of you!” Anonymous*

*“The effective fulfillment of the Church’s mission is obedience to the Lord’s command, made possible only when the attitudes of availability, worship, and submission characterize the believer’s life.” John MacArthur*

*“Faith, as Paul saw it, was a living, flaming thing leading to surrender and obedience to the commandments of Christ.” A. W. Tozer*

*“One act of obedience is better than one hundred sermons.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

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“There is no justification without sanctification, no forgiveness without renewal of life, no real faith from which the fruits of new obedience do not grow.” Martin Luther

“We admit not faith to be justifying, which is not itself and in its own nature a spiritually vital principle of obedience and good works.” John Owen

“Our righteousness is in Him, and our hope depends not upon the exercise of grace in us, but upon the fullness of grace and love in Him and upon His obedience unto death.” John Newton

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### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As a result of the readings, discussion and activities in this session, it is our prayer that the candidate will:

- Have an understanding of the purposes of God found through a life of obedience.
- Understand the inseparable principles of faith and obedience.
- Examine his or her life completely and hopefully find any disobedient attitudes or behavior, and in this conviction find freedom from any stronghold of sin.
- Be able to articulate the gospel’s result in a person’s life: a life of obedience!
- Become committed to live a life of obedience in every area.

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### AN ATTITUDE OF OBEDIENCE

One does not have to read far into Scripture to find the necessity of obedience. From early in Genesis to Revelation one would have to ignore major portions of Scripture to avoid the subject.

In the beginning, man walked in perfect fellowship with God. Adam and Eve had a growing, vibrant relationship with their maker. They reflected His glory and lived a life that fulfilled His purposes. Of all that God gave to this first couple, there was one requirement – obedience. That sounds kind of harsh, but at the most, all God asked from them was to stay away from one piece of fruit – the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The consequences were grave, for God said: “In the day that you eat from this tree, you will surely die (Genesis 2:17).”

Of course, the enemy came along and rebuffed all of that truth. “You will not surely die!” was his response, “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:4-5).”

Of course, we all know what happened. The word says that when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate (Genesis 3:6-7).

In one moment, God’s glory departed and man was left empty because of his disobedience. In an attempt to cover their sin, they made loin coverings and hid from the presence of God.

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Banished from the garden, the curse of a disobedient life began — toil and sweat for the man's labor and pain in childbirth for the woman.

But God had a plan. In the course of time, God would send “the seed” of a woman who would crush the head of the enemy (Genesis 3:15). This seed is Jesus, who came to redeem man from the power of sin.

Instead of disobeying, Jesus would become “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). This obedience would cause “him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).”

The lesson for the church and for those she sends is the necessity of a “new life” attitude — the same attitude which was also in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5). This attitude is the attitude of the righteous (Luke 1:17). It is the attitude of obedience.

This attitude of obedience is essential for the fulfillment of God's purposes in your life as a believer and as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- It is where your faith in Christ becomes known to a lost and dying world.
- It is where your relationship with Christ moves you from one glory to the next.
- It is where your light shines as men observe your good works and glorify the father who is in heaven.
- It is where your marriage thrives as you follow the principles of life together as a husband and wife.
- It is where your ministry soars as you learn the promptings of the Spirit and His power to obey.
- It is where you truly find the joy of the Lord and the joy of serving Him.

*Trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.*

### REFLECT #1

1. What was necessary for Adam and Eve to remain in fellowship with God?
2. What were the consequences of their disobedience?
3. Did God have a plan for these consequences? What was His plan?
4. What is the “attitude of Jesus Christ?”
5. What did this attitude accomplish for you?
6. How does this attitude manifest in a believer's life?
7. Read the following verses and write down your thoughts about obedience.

John 3:36 *“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”*

Hebrews 5:9 *“And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.”*

1 Peter 1:1-2 *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.”*

Acts 5:32 *“And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”*

Isaiah 1:19-20 *“If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*

## CASE STUDY: BUILDING A LIFE OF TRUST AND OBEDIENCE

We who are “vocationally called” to ministry have a great desire to be effectively used for

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Christ. Some of us, at one time or another, have had visions of being known for our *effective* ministries. This was the case in my life.

From a very early age, I knew that I would preach and become a pastor. The first suggestion of a life in ministry came as a ten-year-old on a Sunday morning as I listened to our youth minister preach. For me, it was one of those defining moments that you remember all of your life. A few years later, another youth pastor took an interest in my life. For three years, he disciplined me. At the age of seventeen, I publicly committed myself to this life called ministry.

When you grow up in an evangelical church and become known as one who was *headed to the ministry*, a lot of nice people say a lot of nice things about you. Before long, you begin to believe what they say is true and you are going to be a somebody. And that is what I believed.

After high school, I was invited to be part of a youth staff in a church in Houston. It was an innovative church that sought different ways to reach people. At the time of my graduation from college, I became the full-time youth pastor, where I served for the next two years. My service there was moderately successful and if the truth be told, I thought I was going places.

I left Houston to attend seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. My plans were to finish seminary and plant my life in some metropolitan area to start and grow a church. Visions of success and of being known filled my heart and mind.

Eighteen months into seminary, I was asked to fill the pulpit of a small rural church some 75 miles southwest of Fort Worth. The church was a typical, rural Southern Baptist church. Three miles from a small town, the church stood off the road next to a 100-year-old cemetery. The church ministered to about 30 people. Sunday school saw an average attendance of 15 and about 25 attended worship on a good Sunday morning.

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WHAT ARE THE RESPONSES OF YOUR  
LIFE TO GOD THAT GOD WOULD  
DEEM AS PARTIAL OBEDIENCE?

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To my surprise, the five deacons who represented ten couples asked me to become their thirtieth pastor. When I returned the next week, I told them that my wife and I had prayed about it. We decided to accept their offer but warned them that we would finish seminary in eighteen

months and would be moving to the city after graduation. They agreed and said eighteen months was about “how long our pastors stay anyway!”

Eighteen months later I graduated from seminary but felt that we were supposed to hang around the church a bit, weighing our options. A few months later I experienced a great move of God in my life that drove me to the question, “*Would you die to your dreams of a large, effective, suburban ministry and settle here in the middle of no-where and be a pastor to these 30 or 40 people the rest of your life?*”

God was asking me to stay in rural central Texas and lead this traditional Southern Baptist Church — this church on a 21 mile stretch of highway between two small towns; this church where there is an average of one and a half homes per square mile; this church with no children, a few youth and a lot of senior adults; this place with no reasonable potential for growth. This is where God asked me to spend the rest of my life.

## PANORAMA

That was 1987. I have served as pastor of this church for all these years. It was indeed and still is an act of obedience. It is also a part of discipleship in my life.

Discipleship is simply taking up your cross and following hard after Christ. It is a death to self, dreams, visions, attitudes, and agendas. It is a death to sin, pride and entitlement. Discipleship is obedience.

I am forty-eight years old as I write this piece, and I can tell you that although it has not always been easy, God has been faithful to the act of obedience I made many years ago.

Our church, for all practical purposes, is still in a rural central Texas county where there has been no growth, yet the church has experienced growth through the years. One area of growth has been in the area of cross-cultural ministry.

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*OBEEDIENCE IS KEY IN THE MISSIONAL  
WORK OF GOD.*

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Today we have a family, a couple and a single woman serving in China among an unreached people group. We have a family on the island of Zanzibar working with Muslims. We have adopted the Tarahumara people of Mexico and are currently training a couple from our church to go and plant their lives there. We have families in Botswana, Africa, and Singapore. On short-term mission projects, we have sent over 150 people to China, 130 to Mexico, several to east Africa and southern Africa and about 220 to the Navajo reservation in Arizona.

Sunday mornings find us worshipping in two services where people come from six counties to be a part of what God is doing here. We have an intentional ministry to the homeless, within the prison system, with the housing authority, and to our local Mexican neighbors.

Much more than the outward signs of success, there is a spiritual culture of “yes” in our midst. We see people increasing in faith and increasing in obedience. We continue to see many who are surrendering their lives to a life of discipleship and obedience!

Over twenty years ago when God asked me to stay and pastor those 30 or 40 people, I asked God to do two things. First, I asked that He would satisfy me with His presence. I knew that effectiveness and efficiency in ministry do not bring ultimate fulfillment in one’s life. Somehow I knew that God’s presence in our midst would. Second, I prayed that He would bring us to a place where we truly loved one another because I didn’t want to spend my life with forty people who did not love one another.

I can confidently say that God has indeed answered these two prayers of mine. Obedience to God will always bring about a new, fresh experience of God’s presence. In His presence is fullness of joy!

Watch the video [A People Called Cottonwood](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJZrdV4XetY)  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJZrdV4XetY>).

REFLECT #2

1. What visions have you had of effective ministry for Christ?
2. Is there anything in your life that you might need to die to?
3. Is there a part of your story that speaks to obedience, death, and discipleship?

THE INSEPARABLE PRINCIPLES OF FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

You are no doubt familiar with the Great Commission found at the end of the book of Matthew. *Go Ye Therefore*. . . Some of us learned this as children. There are some of us who grew up hearing this week after week as we were admonished to “Tell someone about Jesus.”

Is it true that one can successfully tell people about Christ in a witnessing venue and still not have a relationship with Christ? In Matthew chapter 7, Jesus speaks to a group of people who are sure of their relationship with Christ by the “ministry works” they performed. Notice what Jesus says:

*“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”* Matthew 7:21-23

Christian workers who are not Christian? These were careful practitioners of the Great Commission. They prophesied, cast out demons and performed miracles, all in the name of Jesus, but to their surprise were not of Jesus. Notice how they are described – as practitioners of *lawlessness*. The bottom line is these people were disobedient to God. They were not true believers in Christ.

The Scriptures speak much to the role of one’s faith in life. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8 that we are saved by grace through faith. It is not of ourselves, it is God’s gift. Nor is our salvation a result of works. Therefore, we have nothing to boast about as it pertains to us.

Paul goes on to say that we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. These good works were prepared by God Himself that we would spend our lives walking in them (Ephesians 2:10).

Notice that our works which are prepared by God do not save us. Our faith in Christ saves us. It is faith that will produce an obedient lifestyle to the word of God, a lifestyle that God intended for us to live from the foundation of the world.

James speaks of this in his epistle to the church. He addresses those who believe that their faith does not have to produce obedience. There are those who would have you believe that faith stands completely alone. Yes, we are saved by faith alone, but our faith does not stand alone. There is an ethic that is anticipated in a believer’s life.

Notice what James says:

*“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in*

*peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.' (James 2:14-26)*

**REFLECT #3**

1. James gives two descriptions of faith without works. What are they?
2. What is the illustration James uses to describe a working faith?
3. What does James say is the result of faith?
4. Paul says that we are saved by faith alone and James says that we are saved by faith with works. What does that mean? How do you separate faith from works?
5. How have you seen your faith at work in recent days?
6. One day you will present the gospel to a people who might have never heard of Christ and His power? How will you teach the relationship between faith and obedience?

## YOUR FAITH AND YOUR OBEDIENCE

**Biblical Example: Partial Obedience of King Saul**

King Saul, Israel's first king was a man who began his reign in humility. Scripture says that he was little in his own eyes. This was a man who physically stood head and shoulders above everyone in a crowd. God chose him as king and gave him strict orders in an impending battle. We find the story in the book of 1 Samuel.

*"And Samuel said to Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'" (1 Samuel 15:1-3)*

Samuel, God's prophet, was very clear in his instruction to Saul to go and administer God's discipline on Amalek. Saul was to go and utterly destroy, to put to death both man and woman, child and infant, and all animals. It cannot be any clearer than this!

Often when Israel went into war and won decisive victories, it was customary to go through the defeated camp or city and plunder it. To the victor go the spoils. They were permitted to go in and take animals, gold, silver, furniture, anything of value. There were other times that they were commanded *not to plunder*. God would call all that is valuable "under the ban." If this was the call, no one was to bring anything out of the defeated camp.

Apparently, in Saul's case, everything was under the ban. They were to destroy everything. That was the word and Saul was to obey.

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*“And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.” (1 Samuel 15:7-9)*

Did Saul obey the voice of the Lord? No, he did not. And Samuel had some very choice words for this king.

*“And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, ‘Blessed be you to the Lord. I have performed the commandment of the Lord.’ And Samuel said, ‘What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?’ Saul said, ‘They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction.’” (1 Samuel 15:13-15)*

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*MAKE SURE YOU ARE NOT  
SUBSTITUTING SACRIFICE FOR  
OBEDIENCE, BECAUSE TO OBEY IS  
BETTER THAN SACRIFICE.*

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From all outward appearances, it seemed that Saul had won a mighty victory for the Lord. There was much to celebrate. In short, Saul and his army slaughtered the Amalekites. Yet, this was not the case. Saul partially obeyed the Lord and, in God’s economy, partial obedience is disobedience.

Saul was impressed with the victory and when Samuel shows up, Saul says so. *“Blessed be you to the Lord. I have performed the commandment of the Lord.”* Samuel is not impressed and says so. *“What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?”* In this camp, the bleating of sheep and the lowing of oxen are the sounds of disobedience.

Did you know that you could be very prosperous in your mission but be a complete disappointment to God because of disobedient attitudes in your life? Are there certain things that God has told you to do or not to do that have gone unheeded in your life? If there are, what would be the “bleating of sheep and lowing of oxen” in your life? What are the responses of your life to God that God would deem as partial obedience?

You can travel to the ends of the earth and set up shop and be very effective but stand before God one day and hear the words, “Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!”

You can be a part of seeing an unreached people reached for Christ and still have an attitude of disobedience!

WHAT HAS GOD TOLD YOU TO DO THAT YOU HAVE NOT DONE?

Has God said, “I want you...”

- to leave that unproductive job and focus on your purpose.
- to forgive that person.
- to give the whole tithe.
- to teach that class.
- to work with those students.



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- to get connected to the church body.
- to get rid of that habit.
- to get that out of your home.
- to sell all and follow me.
- to quit worrying about money.
- to love your wife / love your husband.
- to enrich your marriage.
- to serve Christ full-time. I have a call on your life. Quit running.
- to serve Christ among people on foreign soil.
- to give me your entire life, not just a convenient part of it.
- to commit your marriage to me. You have not given me your marriage.
- to clean up your language.
- to daily study my Word.
- to meet me daily in prayer.
- to say yes when I call you. I want you ready to obey.

What is the bleating of sheep and the lowing of oxen in your life?

- Bitterness
- Unforgiveness
- Lust
- Pornography
- Greed
- Selfishness
- Division
- Critical spirit
- Grumblings and murmurings
- Worry
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Filthy thoughts
- Addictions
- Unhealthy habits

Things like these are everywhere – in the church, in places of ministry, in people's lives. **You are not immune.**

### REFLECT #4

In view of the biblical illustration of King Saul, take the next few minutes reading the Scriptures and answering the questions.

Galatians 6:7-8 *“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”*

1. What does this passage say about the consequences of sin and the rewards of obedience?

2. What did Saul sow to his flesh?

3. What are you sowing to the flesh that would hinder you from pleasing God?

1 John 3:7-10 *“Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of*

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*God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”*

5. In this passage, what does it mean to be deceived?

6. Could it be possible that Saul was deceived?

7. Does a deceived person know he is deceived?

8. Who are the righteous?

9. Who are the unrighteous?

10. For what purpose did Jesus appear on earth and then in your life?

11. How are the children of God and the children of the devil distinguished?

12. Is there anything in your life that you are practicing that would cause a new believer to question whether or not you know God? What is it?

*“But Samuel said, ‘What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?’”*

13. Read this story of Saul and Samuel to your spouse or a close friend and then ask, “Do you hear the bleating of sheep and the lowing of oxen in my life? What do you see in my life that I need to deal with? Am I deceived in any areas of my life?”

## BIBLICAL EXAMPLE

### **Obedience and Missions: Philip’s Influence on Ethiopia**

**Acts 8:25-40**

*“Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.*

*Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Rise and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ This is a desert place.*

*And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.*

*And the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over and join this chariot.’ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’*

*And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.*

*Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:*

*‘Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him; who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.’*

*And the eunuch answered Philip, ‘About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’*

*Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.*

*And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ [And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he replied, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’]*

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*And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.*

*And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.”*

Obedience is key in the missional work of God.

Philip’s obedience led him to an influential man, a “man of peace” who would bring this good news to a whole country.

Be willing to go to the unusual places of God and watch Him bring the people of peace that will influence their world for Christ!

### REFLECT #5

Philip was on his way with the other disciples, preaching to people in many Samaritan villages when suddenly the Holy Spirit told him to go to the desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza. And Philip obeyed. In doing so, he literally came upon the country of Ethiopia. In a chariot was an official of Ethiopia, a noted and very influential man. The Holy Spirit then told Philip to move toward the chariot. From there, Philip began a dialogue with the man, preached Jesus to him, led him to the Lord, baptized him and then was snatched away as the eunuch headed back to his country!

1. What would you think if God told you to go to a place that was known to be desolate?
2. What if you were being successful where you were, would you still go?
3. How sensitive are you to the Spirit’s leading and prompting? How so?
4. Think about a time when the Spirit led you to a person with whom you shared Christ. What happened?
5. If you went to a desolate place where you knew God told you to go, how patient would you be if “your Ethiopian” was delayed in showing up? Would you be willing to wait?
6. What would you do while you were waiting in that desolate place until God gave you new directions?

## THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

If we continue the story of King Saul, we notice that his answer to the question of bleating sheep and lowing oxen was, “We have spared the best for sacrifice to the Lord your God!” Samuel responded with these words:

*“Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king.” 1 Samuel 15:22-23*

*To obey is better than sacrifice.* You are in the midst of a training process that is to contribute to preparing you for cross-cultural ministry. You are sacrificing much. You will leave family for extended times. Your parents will miss major moments in your children’s lives. Some of you have given up much in way of wealth, money, and comforts. You might end up in a place without running water or electricity or in some of the most impoverished places on earth. You will sacrifice.

**Make sure you are not substituting sacrifice for obedience, because to obey is better than sacrifice.** To heed the word of the Lord is better than the “fat of rams” (ministry success).

**And what is the word?**

Jesus was asked one day what was the greatest commandment. In Matthew's account, Jesus answered and said, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."* (Matthew 22:36-40)

The greatest commandment is to love God and to love your neighbor. Do this and you will be keeping the entire Word. Every word, every command, every principle is hinged on these two commandments.

Paul speaks of loving God and neighbor in 1 Corinthians 13. The first three verses speak of love and sacrifice.

*"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."* 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

The reason why the Great Commission is not the most important commandment is because one day there will be no need for this commission. As one author has commented, there will be no more need for missions.

The Word says that you can have the gift of languages, prophecy, and knowledge. You can have faith to remove mountains, but if you do not have love, you are nothing. And you can sacrifice your possessions to feed the poor and give your body to be burned but if you do not do it in love, it will profit you nothing. One day there will be no need for languages, prophecy, knowledge or even faith. Love, however, will abide forever!

To obey the greatest commandment means that you will forgive and you will not covet what another has. It means that you will not commit adultery, because you love God, your spouse, and your neighbor. It means that you will not lust, steal or lie. To obey out of love will also free you from legalism and a works-based salvation.

Do you see what the extent of obedience is? If your obedience comes from faith, you will find yourself loving your neighbor as yourself!

**REFLECT #6**  
 Read these Scriptures and note what the verses say about obedience as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

1. John 13:35 *"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*
2. John 15:12 *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."*
3. Galatians 5:22-23 *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."*
4. Ephesians 1:15 *"For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints. . ."*
5. Colossians 1:4 *"Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints. . ."*
6. 1 Thessalonians 4:9 *"Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another."*
7. Hebrews 6:10-11 *"For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end."*

8. Hebrews 13:1 *"Let brotherly love continue."*  
9. 1 Peter 1:22 *"Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart."*  
10. 1 John 2:10 *"Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling."*  
11. 1 John 3:23 *"And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us."*  
12. 1 John 4:7-8 *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love."*  
13. 1 John 5:2 *"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments."*

### EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW:

#### **Jim Elliot**

Jim Elliott paid the ultimate price for his obedience. He was martyred on a river bed beach with four other men, trying to reach a savage tribe called the Aucas.

He was another one of those talented men that the church thought would be better used at home. In a letter to his parents who felt this same way, Jim wrote,

"I do not wonder that you were saddened at the word of my going to South America. This is nothing else than what the Lord Jesus warned us of when He told the disciples that they must become so infatuated with the kingdom and following Him that all other allegiances must become as though they were not. And He never excluded the family tie. In fact, those loves which we regard as closest, He told us must become as hate in comparison with our desires to uphold His cause. "Grieve not, then if your sons seem to desert you, but rejoice, rather, seeing the will of God done gladly." Remember how the Psalmist described children? He said that they were as a heritage from the Lord and that every man should be happy who had his quiver full of them. And what is a quiver full of but arrows? And what are arrows for but to shoot? So, with the strong arms of prayer, draw the bowstring back and let the arrows fly — all of them, straight at the enemy's hosts."

A very famous quote comes from Jim's journals as a freshman in college that expresses the call to obedience.

**"He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."**

#### **Hudson Taylor**

Hudson Taylor is known as the first Protestant missionary to serve in inland China. He sailed from England to Shanghai in September of 1853 and was the founder of the China Inland Mission in June of 1865.

His life was marked by prayer and full obedience and commitment to the will of God. He felt that Christ should be preached and lived out in order that those he ministered to might see Christ in His life. Taylor's obedience is illustrated in many ways:

- He answered the call to China as a teenager. Hudson vividly heard God telling him, "Go for Me to China." He immediately began to make plans for this life-long work. He was committed to this call until the very end of his life.
- He broke with traditional missionary methods and adopted Chinese dress. Those

from the West severely disapproved and saw him as a disgrace. They felt it was below his status as an Englishman to dress like the Chinese. However, Hudson was determined to follow the Lord in obedience and felt that his work was extremely successful as a result.

- He practiced the principles of a simple lifestyle. Taylor's obedience led him to live by faith. Regularly short on funds, he would always see God's provision even if it was in the eleventh hour.

### **James O. Fraser**

The call of God brought a young man named James O. Fraser to China in 1910. He had a passion to reach the Lisu People of the Yunnan Province.

His obedience to God for this tribal nation stunned many at home who felt that his talents and gifts were a waste to the mission field. He was a linguist, engineer, preacher and concert musician. Yet obedience to the call of God brought him from the comforts of England to a primitive lifestyle in Southwest China.

Through obedience and prayer, God used Fraser in a mighty way to reach this tribe for Christ. The Lisu, with a demon-worshipping worldview, came to Christ in droves! By 1916 the Spirit moved upon these people resulting in over 60,000 conversions in just two years.

No doubt, James Fraser was taught obedience to the call of God from his parents. Before he boarded the ship for China, his mother had given him a note to read. "Today I am the happiest woman in England," he read after the ship had set sail. "I could not anoint Jesus' feet with my tears as did Mary. But I gave Him my son."

### **The Moravian Church**

Through a man by the name of Count Zinzendorf, the Moravians became a part of the first Protestant movement to take the Great Commission seriously.

In 1732, Moravians Leonard Dober and David Nitschmann landed on the West Indian island of St. Thomas to make known the Gospel. Colin Grant, former chairman of the Evangelical Missionary Alliance, writes that "over the next twenty years missionaries were dispatched to Greenland, North American Indian Territories, Surinam, South Africa, and the Samoyedic peoples of the Arctic, Algiers, Sri Lanka, China, Persia, Abyssinia, and Labrador. In the first 150 years, the Moravians sent out no less than 2,158 of its members overseas."

In an article on the Moravian church, Grant goes on to highlight the characteristics of the Moravian missionaries:

- Missionary obedience of the Moravian Brethren was essentially glad and spontaneous.
- Missionaries had a deep, ongoing passion for and love of Christ and faced the most incredible difficulties and dangers with remarkable courage.
- They showed a tenacity of purpose that was of a very high order. For example, Moravian missionary David Zeisberger served among the North American Indians for 63 years. (Smithers)

### William Tyndale

William Tyndale's obedience to the doctrines of the Word and God's call to translate the Scriptures to the masses cost him his life.

During those days people were sold indulgences for forgiveness by clergy who in turn became "fat" on the money. In response, Tyndale preached salvation by faith alone and that only God could forgive sins. His desire was to "see that the boy behind the plow would know more of the scriptures than the day's clergy."

In obedience to the call of God, it was his desire to translate the Bible into a common language. He believed that the English clergy were hiding the true meaning of salvation from others.

His translation work was bitterly opposed by the church and on May 21, 1535, Tyndale was captured as he was innocently walking to dinner. William, betrayed by his "friend" Philips, was arrested and hauled off to prison for sixteen months.

He was condemned and burned at the stake as a heretic in 1536. It is said that as he burned at the stake he cried out, "Lord! Open the King of England's eyes!"

By his obedience, William Tyndale put the word of God into the hands of common people, translating the Greek Bible into English.

#### REFLECT #7

*"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another."* John 15:13-17

As you think of the examples given above, and the Scripture selection in this section, consider:

1. How did each man and woman lay down his/her life for his friends?
2. What are the characteristics of a people who love one another?
3. What about you? What are the areas of your life that lack in your love for others? Where do you see yourself gaining in this walk of love?

## SELF-AWARENESS, SURVIVAL, AND SOLUTION

The Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew chapter 7. When Jesus comes to the end of the message He declares that there are two ways and two kinds of people in this world.

### Two Ways of this World

**Matthew 7:13-14** *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."*

First, there is the narrow way. This way has a small entrance, it leads to life and according to Jesus, only few find it. This is the way that appeals to the Spirit of God in our lives. Second, there is the broad way. This way has a wide gate and it leads to destruction. The Bible says that many are on this road. It is the way that appeals to the flesh.

**Two choices** – Eternal and abundant life or death and destruction. Two choices – obedience to the word of God or disobedience. Two choices – yes to God or no. Scripture is laced with examples and exhortations on this very point.

**John 10:10** *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*

**Galatians 6:7-8** *“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”*

### **Two Kinds of People**

**Matthew 7:16-19** *“You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”*

In this passage of Scripture, Jesus says there are two kinds of trees in this life. The good tree bears good fruit and the bad tree bears bad fruit. A person who truly is good will live a productive and loving life that will bless others. An evil person will influence others for harm and will contribute to their destruction.

**Galatians 5:16-24** speaks of the two kinds of fruit. *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”*

List the deeds of the flesh.

Are there any of these deeds that are characteristic of your life?

Would you confess these to the Lord?

Would you ask Him to forgive you for walking in these sins?

In Deuteronomy 30:11-20 we read Moses' final message to the Israelites. He speaks of the necessity of obedience for the welfare of their lives and nation.

**Deuteronomy 30:11-20** *“For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.”*

Remember this is an Old Testament passage of Scripture in which Christ had not come, the



## PANORAMA

Holy Spirit had not entered the individual life and the blood of Christ had not been spilled for their forgiveness.

How difficult is the commandment of God?

Where is this word of obedience in your heart?

**Deuteronomy 30:15-20** *“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”*

What does God set before you?

What is His command?

How do we choose life?

What is our life and length of days?

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## IN CONCLUSION:

Paul instructs the Colossian church to walk in the way of their call.

**Colossians 2:6-7** *“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”*

How did you receive Christ?

What were the elements of your salvation?

Did you believe?

Did you obey?

Did you repent?

**As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.**

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LEARNING ACTIVITIES ~ BEFORE YOU GO

**Imagine**

If you are married, think about your wedding day. If you are not married, imagine your wedding day. Think about the vows you have made or will make to your spouse. Can you imagine what it would be like if you made a decision not to fulfill your vows? Can you imagine telling your spouse that you are making a commitment, but you were not sure that you would carry it out? You believe in marriage, you're just not sure you can walk it out.

**Lifestyle**

The success of your marriage is based on how well you walk out your promises. If you are married, you choose to be obedient to the decision you made to love your spouse. The Christian life is a covenant. God likens your life with Him to a marriage. God has made promises to you and you have made promises to God. The success of your life with God is based on how well you walk your promises out. Thus, the Christian life is a walk.

**Formation**

What are the promises you have made to God? To the Church? What has God called you to? Your walk with Christ is formed and matured as you trust and obey Him. He who is faithful in little will be faithful in much.

**Language and Customs**

Scriptures say that it is the little foxes that destroy the vine. Make it a custom that you will be obedient in the little things. Practice immediate obedience as you read the Word and as you hear the initial promptings of God.

**Stretch Life-on-Life**

Do you have a small group of people to whom you are accountable? Do you take the time to share weaknesses, struggles, and victories with a few people? Life on life means that you become transparent in your walk with God to others. It means letting people know who you are and allowing them to speak into your life in the area of keeping your promises to God and to others! Begin now to ask God to form the community you need to walk out this life of obedience.

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AUTHOR

**Mike Fritscher** has been pastor of Cottonwood Baptist Church near Dublin, Texas since 1986. His obedience to serve faithfully where God has called him has resulted in that small country church of less than 50 people growing into a regional church of 750 members who have a truly worldwide mission outreach. Mike is a graduate of Houston Baptist University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife Jon Anne have three children.

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