

ving this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 1:4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. 1:5 If any of you lack wisdom
n ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. 1:6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the
n with the wind and tossed. 1:7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. 1:8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. 1:9 Let the brother of li
e rejoice in that he is exalted: 1:10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. 1:11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning he
withereh the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. 1:12 Blessed is the man that endur
tation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. 1:13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God:
cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: 1:14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. 1:15 Then when lust hath conceived
eth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. 1:16 Do not err, my beloved brethren. 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down fr
ather of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. 1:18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creature

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: 1:19 The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. 1:21 Wherefore I
all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and desire that ye should have peace and good conscience, as ye have loved the word, and not hearers on
ving your own selves. 1:23 For if ye have peace and good conscience, let yourselves love, one another with pure hearts, and with a good

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and straightway forgiving one another, as the Lord hath forgiven us, through the word of peace, which ye have heard, and which ye have loved, and which ye have kept, that ye may have peace and good conscience, and be found to love one another, and to be diligent to fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: 1:27 Peace
, this man shall be blessed. 1:28 For if ye have peace and good conscience, let yourselves love, one another with pure hearts, and with a good
on and undefiled before God and the Father is this. To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep yourselves undefiled from the world. 2:1 My brethren, have not
of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. 2:2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a pe
n vile raiment; 2:3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under
tool: 2:4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? 2:5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, a
of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? 2:6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seat? 2:7 Do
stipulate that worthy name by the which ye are called? 2:8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: 2:9 But if ye ha
ct to persons, ye contradict the law of liberty, which shall make you free. 2:10 For whosoever shall offend in one point, he is guilty of all. 2:11 For



out creed, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness. 2:12 Therefore shall every man be judged according to his works. 2:13 As Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? 2:14 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith with
s is dead also. 3:1 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. 3:2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word,
is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. 3:3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. 3:4 Behold also t
, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. 3:5 Even so the tongue is a lit
ber, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth
z body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. 3:7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath be
J of mankind: 3:8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 3:9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are ma
the similitude of God. 3:10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing: which ought never to be. 3:11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place both
water and bitter? 3:12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. 3:13 Who is a wise man and endued w
ledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. 3:14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not again
uth. 3:15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. 3:16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. 3:17 But the wisd

Sara Dormon

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- 1 -

OBEDIENCE

“And this is love: that we walk in obedience to His commandments.”

2 John 6

When the idea for this book came to me there was one word I kept hearing, and it was the word “obedience.” For some reason, I felt that this word was at the root of many of the problems that we face within the Christian community. I certainly know it is a word that I have personally had a few head-on collisions with over the years. So I decided to look the meaning of the word up in the New Oxford American Dictionary. And, guess what I found?

What Is Obedience?

“Compliance with someone’s wishes or orders or acknowledgement of their authority: submission to a law or rule.” (NOAD, page 1,173)

Interestingly, a notation after this definition says, “Children and animals may be expected to obey, but nowadays obedient is seldom used to describe adult human beings without a suggestion that they are allowing someone else to assume too great a degree of authority.”

As I sat there looking at these words, I wasn’t sure if I

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wanted to be a pet or a child, and then I realized it didn't really matter as far as my obedience was concerned because it stated that I "may be" expected to obey. Actually, I think cats have it pretty good overall. In any event, seeing these words and this definition in print answered many questions that I, and many others, have had for quite some time. "How on earth did we allow things to get so bad?" This question is not just directed at the world at large; it is directed at those of us who call ourselves Christians, followers of Christ, those of us who pride ourselves on our moral compass, our integrity, our compassion, and our obedience.

Obedience Doesn't Always Feel Good

In an absolutely wonderful book, *What Happens When Women Say Yes to God*, my friend, Lysa TerKeurst, says, "You may be surprised to discover that radical obedience is not really that radical. It is really biblical obedience—but we have strayed so far from biblical obedience that it now seems radical" (TerKeurst 2007 page 18). To that I say amen! I am not sure if we have strayed, because that would mean we have actually, at one time, embraced biblical obedience, and for whatever reason we have stepped away. Drifted may be more accurate. I don't think anyone wakes up one morning and says, "Okay, enough of this obedience-to-Christ stuff." I think we are deeply affected by outside influences and inside influences and we move away slowly and imperceptibly, until we suddenly see God from a distance we never dreamed possible.

Here's an interesting footnote that, in my opinion, demonstrates how the word "obedience" may be offensive to some. When I called Lysa to ask her permission to use her quote, she told me that the book had been given a new title. Its previous title was *Radically Obedient, Radically Blessed*. The new title is *What Happens When Women Say*

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Yes to God. Now, I admit the essence of the two titles is the same: obedience to God is saying yes, in word or action. She said since the title changed, the book has been selling much better. I guess obedience is hard enough—let's not make it radical. If changing the title will get them to buy the book, I say, go for it. Maybe, we should change the title of the Bible to Handbook for Humans.

There is another book out by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend entitled *It's Not My Fault*, which runs the following line on the cover: "Who's to blame? People, circumstances, or DNA?" I have great respect for these two men and have read nearly everything they have written, so please understand that my criticisms refer to the title, not the content of the book. A title is what gets people to pick up the book, and with this title they could have put this cover on the yellow pages and people would buy it. We live in a society where no one is to blame for anything. Why? Well, how much time do you have? Obedience to God or anyone else is just too hard and wouldn't we all like to blame our DNA, mother, husband, and children for the mess our lives have become? I am a recovering alcoholic and drug addict and I have been trying to determine who "forced" that first drink or pill on me...ooops! I did! Yes, I am responsible for my choices. I do believe there are predispositions to certain behaviors, but that does not mean they are predetermined. We should treat sin like an allergy to peanuts; the world has transformed to accommodate children for whom peanuts are harmful. Wouldn't it be nice to transform the world to help one another avoid sin? It can be done, if we want to do it.

In a decidedly anti-Christian and anti-God book, *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins, the author writes about hearing a story as a child that deeply impacted his idea of obedience and religion. A group of soldiers were

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commanded to march forward and when their leader was distracted by something, they kept marching into an oncoming train, because they were being obedient. Sometime ago, I remember hearing a story of a young man who was walking through the forest with his father, and his father turned around and saw a snake hanging from a tree about to attack his son. He said, "Get down on the ground and crawl to me as fast as you can." The boy obeyed and escaped the snake; the soldiers obeyed and they died. God calls us to be obedient to His word but He does not ask us to leave the brains and common sense He gave us at the door. But, the truth is we do have common sense, though most of us don't trust it.

I have often said if common sense were truly common more people would have it. However, we do have it. Again, the problem is that we don't trust it

Obedience Requires Knowing God's Word

Being obedient to God's word first requires that we know what God's word says. And then, once we know what it says and what God expects of us, we must step forward and actually live out His teachings. Ouch! That is the part of obedience that most of us can't seem to get a firm and lasting grip on. For me, obedience often feels like trying to nail Jello to the wall. Why? We are flawed human beings for whom compromise feels better than actually being obedient to what the world tells us are narrow-minded, moralistic, intolerant views. If there is no call to obedience, then all things become tolerated. Tada! And, that ladies and gentlemen, is the world we know today. As Christians, we tend to tolerate those things we shouldn't and be intolerant of those things we should.

A question central to the issue of obedience is:, do we obey God because we know Him or do we know Him

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because we obey Him? In 1 John 2:3–6, John says:

It is only when we obey God's laws that we can be quite sure that we really know Him. The man who claims to know God but does not obey His laws is not only a liar but lives in self-delusion. In practice, the more a man learns to obey God's laws the more truly and fully does he express his love for Him. Obedience is the test of whether we really live "in God" or not. The life of a man who professes to be living in God must bear the stamp of Christ.

(Phillips NT)

St. Augustine said, "Wicked men obey from fear; good men from love." Those of us with children would love to think that our children do as we say out of their deep love and respect for us. We want to think that our children wake up every morning thinking: How can I please and obey my parents today? How many ways can I show them I love them? I hope I have time to spend with them in order to know them better so that I can obey and please them more. Most (not all children and all adults) obey when it is either convenient for them or the consequences of disobedience are beyond anything even remotely reasonable, even in their minds. In order for us to be obedient to God's word, it has to become an integral part of our lives. His word must abide in us.

I did a word study one time on the word "abide." Abide means "to accept or act in accordance with a rule, decision, or recommendation." (New Oxford, page 3) What does it mean for the word of God to abide in us? What does it mean for us to abide in Christ? My favorite translation of the New Testament is that of J. B. Phillips. I have a copy that was given to me one month after I accepted the Lord. His translation of 1 John 2:6 is my favorite explanation of the word "abide." "Obedience is the test of whether we

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really live 'in God' (that is, abide) or not." There is that pesky word again: "obedience."

Being Obedient Is Hard

We have all heard that people are basically good. My response to this claim is always skeptical. If this were, in fact, true, then who taught them how to lie, cheat, steal, and be mean and cruel with little or no regard for another person's feelings? I don't know about you, but these "basically good" qualities came quite naturally to me, and often still do. I live as if I really don't want to be obedient to God. Jesus said, "If you love me you will obey my commandments." Of course, I love Him, as many do. The problem comes in translating that love into living our lives bearing the stamp of Christ.

Why is being obedient to what God teaches us so difficult? We know He loves us more than we ever dreamed possible. We know He has the power and desire to forgive our sins. We know He is slow to anger, compassionate, and wants what is best for us more than we want it for ourselves. Aha! There is the answer. He wants what is best for us. Now if we are honest with ourselves most of us don't even know what is best for us. We know what we want and we know when we want it—now. That's about it. God knew what was best for Adam and Eve, but no, did they listen? One parent, two children...chaos! And, of course, this was the beginning of the blame game. Why would we think we would be any better? Adam and Eve really did live in the Garden of Eden; we just pretend. Someone once said if sin doesn't feel good you haven't found the right one yet. Laughable on one level and very sad on another. It is like medicine—if it is good for us it will taste bad. There is great freedom that comes with obedience. It is our responsibility to be obedient and the outcome of our obedience is God's job. I repeat: that's

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God's job, not ours.

The book of James is my favorite of the Bible, and I have often thought that if James and I had lived at the same time we would have been good friends. James was the brother of Jesus and tended to be direct in his words. But, the words he spoke were not his, but the words of his brother Jesus. The way he describes the life we should live is the life Jesus did live. On the surface it may appear to be a moralistic monologue, but in reality he is telling us that to have the life we want and the life God wants for us there are certain things we are expected to do. In James 1:22 he says, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." Obedience does not always look good to others or feel good to us, but it is what Jesus requires of us.

I believe, as Christians, we have a tendency to compromise our belief system. We do this in order to not only give others the benefit of the doubt, but in the sincere and earnest hope that they will give us the same. Our willingness and desire to be obedient to the teachings of Jesus is, I believe, at the heart of our entire faith walk. There is no twelve-step program to learn how to deal with our disobedience addiction. It just is what it is. As Paul said in Romans 2:13, "It is not familiarity with the law that justifies a man in the sight of God, but obedience to it." So, we have all heard it all, over and over again. On paper it looks good and in our heads it makes perfect sense. So, exactly where is the disconnection? In what part of our brains, hearts, and souls does our constant and seemingly blatant disobedience reside? It resides in our old sinful, human nature.

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do...For I desire to do what is good but I cannot carry it out. (Romans 7:15, 18b)

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I recently faced an incident with my son, who, through tears, said, "I knew it was wrong when I did it, but I did it anyway." We may not face situations through tears, although we probably should, but as we walk closer to the Lord our sensitivity to sin increases and the time between sin and confession gets shorter and shorter. Our desire to be obedient increases especially when we see the result of it. But, should we have to see results, or should it just be our desire to be obedient out of our deep love for the Father? "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teachings and we will come to him make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey me" (John 14:23–24).

I believe, as simple as this sounds, getting this truth to travel from our head to our hearts can be a lifelong journey, one that is often derailed and never easy.

Each and every day we begin our walk with the Lord with a clean slate, a tabula rasa. Each and every day we are given God's grace and mercy, His forgiveness and His joy. We are asked to love Him, obey Him, bear fruit, and live our lives with the stamp of His image upon us. We are to be light in the darkness of a world that is lost. We are to be salty enough to make others thirst for Him. We are to be the hands and feet of Jesus in a hurting and broken world. This begins with our willingness and desire to be obedient to the one who knows us best and loves us most; Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The Blessings of Obedience

No one is going to tell you that being obedient is easy because it is not. Scripture teaches that. "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure..." (Jeremiah 17:9). This is one of the reasons that the blessings of

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obedience are so great. In Romans 6:16, it says, “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey as slaves, whether you are slaves to sin, which lead to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?” Now, death or righteousness...okay, I choose righteousness. And, that is just the first of many blessings that come from obedience.

David, one of my favorite scoundrels of the Bible, was referred to as a man after God’s own heart and the apple of His eye. As a boy, he spent time alone tending the sheep. David was obedient to God when no one was watching—that is character. And, he was rewarded for his obedience; he became king, although not without a few speed bumps. He trusted His Lord, and killed Goliath when the odds were against him. He was willing to be a fool for Christ. He obeyed God.

Abraham was blessed as were his offspring. “Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies and through your offspring all nations will be blessed, because you have obeyed me” (Genesis 22:17).

There are many examples of the blessings one receives as a result of obedience, but, as Christians, we are called to be obedient because Jesus says, “if you love me you will obey my commandments.” To obey the Lord and his teachings is an acknowledgement that we not only love Him, but believe that He knows what is better for us than we do. The blessing is in the knowing that our lives are pleasing to Him. He showed His love for His Father by being obedient, even unto death, which is the blessing we have received from Him, the blessing of eternal life. He will not, however, force His beliefs on us, and if we choose to make our own way, fine, just don’t call yourself a Christian. As Andrew Murray said: “Let us care for the obedience, God will care for the blessing. Let my one thought as a

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Christian be, how I can obey and please my God perfectly.”(Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Obedience*, page 12)

We, as Christians, can easily get discouraged with our seeming lack of progress in the obedience department. But, if you look at it this way it may help. We did not get into this mess overnight, and we aren't going to wake up tomorrow with an uncontrollable desire to be obedient in all things. Each day brings us many decisions, and each one will pull us toward obedience and God or away from Him. The decision is ours each day. It may be two steps forward and one away, but hopefully, you are at least heading in the right direction. And, the blessings will begin the minute we begin to obey. (1John 1:7)

How Does This Work in My Everyday Life?

Let's just get this out of the way right now. The contents of this book are designed to guide us in our Christian walk, and to know how things should be. So please don't think if you find yourself struggling with obedience, or any of the other issues I will discuss, that you are failing as a Christian. You are not! You're a human being who tries everyday, with God's help, to be the most obedient person and very best version of yourself you can be. And, guess what? We all fail over and over. But, the measure of our success is not how much we fail, but how often we get back up and move on. Even when we fall on our faces we are moving forward.

My belief is that if we aren't willing to be obedient to what we know God demands, then the rest of this book will be of little use. Obedience is the foundation upon which our Christian faith rests. As I stated, Jesus said, “If you love me you will obey me.”

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Obedience is a conscious act of our wills. It is doing what we know God wants us to do. We must know God's word in order to obey it, and so obedience begins with the reading and study of the Bible. Scripture should become such a part of our being that when we are faced with a decision we just know what Jesus would do because we know Him. I'm sure you know what your husband, children, or wife likes best: all their favorite food and TV shows, for example. Why? Because you spend time with them, you know them, and you want to please them. This is the same way we need to know God, and we will then find obedience much easier, though never easy.

Obedience

Reflection Questions and Advice

1. Is there a particular area of your life where you struggle with being obedient? What is it, and why do you believe it is such a struggle?
2. Ask God's forgiveness for this act of disobedience, and also ask Him for insight as to how you can take steps toward becoming more obedient. He wants to help us and He wants us to ask for His help.
3. Write in a journal about this area of struggle, and share it with a close and trusted friend. Ask this person to hold you accountable in your struggle; however, you must be willing to accept this person's role in this journey knowing you may not like his or her interference into your life.
4. Commit to memory the scripture verses that deal with obedience. The first one should be John 14:15: "If you love me you will obey what I command."
5. Is your desire to be obedient born out of a love for Jesus, or out of the fear of possible consequences?