

Obedience – The Key to Knowing God's Will

Bill Bright, edited by James George

Step 6: Obedience

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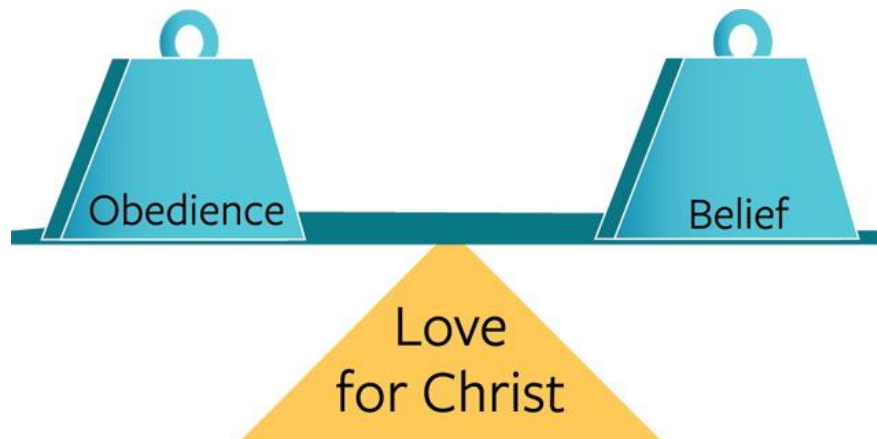
Have you ever wondered what God's will is for your life? Have you needed to make a difficult decision and wondered what God wanted you to do in that situation?

We all struggle with questions about our future. Questions like: How can I know God's plan for my life? Which job should I take? Is this the person God wants me to marry? Is this a good investment to make? Should I share the gospel with my boss? You probably have questions you could add to that list.

The greatest discovery I have ever made concerning how to know the will of God involves the following:

- Fully surrendering my life to the Lordship of Christ
- Living a life of obedience in the power of the Holy Spirit
- Maintaining my first love for our Lord

Many Christians are trying so hard to discover the will of God that they lose the joy of the Lord and leave their first love for Him.



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But all we need to do is abide in Christ, maintain our first love for Him, and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, and we will be in the will of God. So, as you continue to walk in the Spirit, He will guide you in making the most important decisions of life. He will also guide you in the daily, moment-by-moment decisions and actions of your life.

Speaking of the Holy Spirit, Jesus says, "When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth...and he will tell you what is yet to come" (John 16:13). So, the key to knowing God's will is to be obedient to the guidance of the Holy Spirit of truth. If you are willing to trust and obey God and live a holy life, God will reveal Himself to you and direct your steps as a way of life.

Satan is the enemy of our soul. His mission is to keep us from being effective and fruitful in our witness. But although he wields great power, Satan can never defeat us if we are completely yielded and obedient to Christ

Some people are reluctant to trust God completely with their lives, fearing that He may want to make a change in their plans. Yes, He will change our plans. His plans are infinitely better than the very best we could ever conceive.

Is it not logical that the One who created us knows better than we the purpose for which we were created? And since He loves us enough to die for us, is it not logical to believe that His way is best (Romans 8:32)?

Obedience is the true test of our love for Christ and the secret to discovering God's will for our life.

Disobedience of King Saul

Read I Samuel 15. What was God's command to Saul through Samuel?

Describe how Saul rationalized his actions. Was his repentance sincere?

The main principle illustrated is stated in verse 22. What is it?
What are some ways that Christians rationalize disobedience today?

Obedience of Paul

Read Acts 9:1-22. What was God's command to Paul (here called Saul)?

How did he comply? Why was Paul's obedience so important at this particular time?

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How do you think Paul's obedience illustrates the truth of the principle in I Samuel 15:22?

Obedience of Anannias

Read Acts 9:10-22. What was God's command to Anannias?

What was Anannias' reaction? How did he finally respond?

Why was his obedience so essential at this time?

How does his obedience indirectly influence you?

Life Application

How would you have felt in Anannias' place?

What is the most important thing this lesson teaches you about obedience?

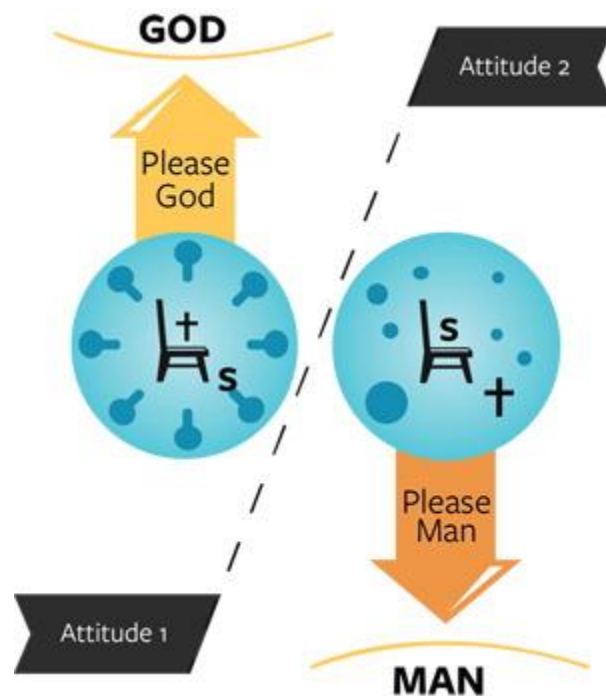
What specific area of weakness in your life do you need to bring into obedience to Christ? What steps will you take to become obedient in this area?

Insincere Obedience

At a high school graduation recently, one student was heard to make these remarks: "Yeah, I finally made it. It's a good thing, too. If I had blown it, my parents would have killed me!"

In contrast, during the ceremony one of the student speakers, a foreign exchange student declared through her tears, "I want to express my deepest appreciation to my parents for loving me and for giving me the opportunity to get an education in this great land. I want to do everything I can to show them how much I love them and to make them proud of me."

What a difference in motivation between these students. The first obviously lived in fear of his parents, while the second understood and appreciated what her parents had done for her.



The epitaph of Amaziah, a king of Israel, reads, "He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a loyal heart" (2 Chronicles 25:2, NKJ). Obedience involves attitude, not merely outward actions. What is your motivation when you obey Christ? Do you serve Christ out of fear and self-serving ambition? Or from a loyal heart because you understand and appreciate God's love and what He has done for you?

An Example of Insincere Obedience

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Read Acts 4:32-5:11. At one time, Jerusalem Christians held goods as common property. Each Christian put his funds into a common treasury, which then supplied the needs of the Christian community. What made them willing to give up personal possessions (verse 32)?

One writer has said that many today view the local church as if it were a restaurant where all kinds of people meet for a short time, sit down together in the same room, then part, not knowing or caring anything about each other.

What is your estimation of the fellowship in our churches today compared with the fellowship of the Jerusalem Christians? What kind of attitude did the early Christians display?

Do you think this is true in your church? What can you do to improve the fellowship in your church?

When Barnabas sold his land, which was probably valuable, and gave the money to the church, no doubt other Christians praised his devotion. How do you think Barnabas' action might have influenced Ananias and Sapphira?

What do you suppose motivated Ananias and Sapphira to sell their possessions and give money to the church? How did their motive differ from Barnabas' motive?

Importance of our Christian Testimony

How can it be possible to study the Bible, share Christ with others, or attend Christian meetings, and yet be committing sin when you think you are pleasing God?

What did Christ say was wrong with the people of His day (Mark 7:6)?

Why is your heart attitude just as important to God as your outward action?

Attitude in Giving and Prayer

Each of us has a tendency to do things for the approval of our friends. When this desire becomes our sole motivation, our attitude is wrong. Think of a person you know who has a godly attitude toward giving.

How do his actions differ from those described in Matthew 6?

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List some ways you can help keep your giving sincere.

Public prayer is not wrong in itself. when you pray aloud with others, to whom are you talking? How can you make your public prayers a testimony to how much you love God?

Life Application

Read I Corinthians 13:1-3. In terms meaningful to you, paraphrase these three verses.

On the basis of this passage, what would you say is the relationship between love and sincere obedience? What action or activity in your life needs a change in motivation?

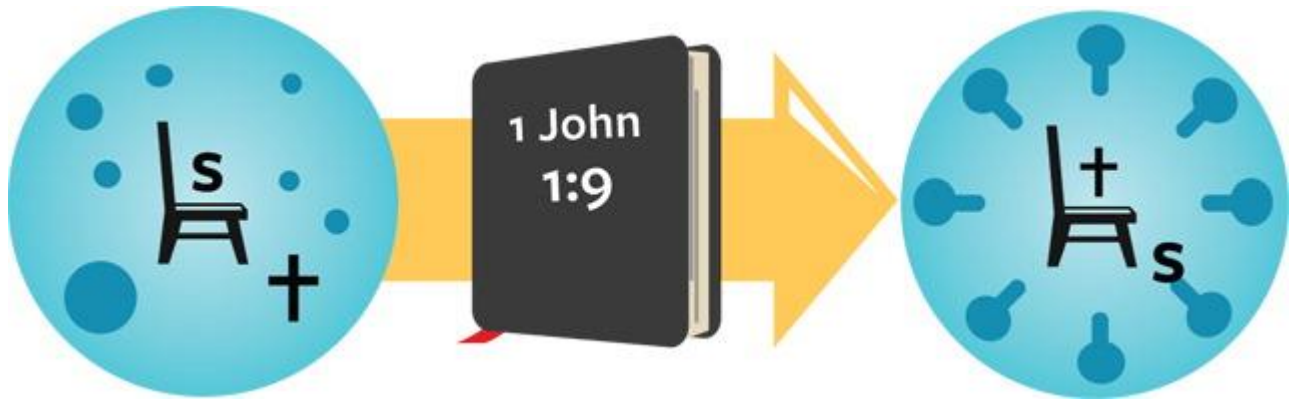
How do you expect that change to affect other people with whom you come in contact? How do you expect that change to affect your life?

Personal Purity

Few areas of life are more important than our relationship to the opposite sex, and few areas are so exposed to temptation.

Some time ago, my heart was grieved as I learned of a respected Christian leader who had fallen into a life of sin. He had obviously not intended to do so, but when the temptation came he gave in - and as a result his wife, his family, his friends, and fellow Christians suffered tremendous heartache.

Most tragically, his testimony and witness for the Lord Jesus Christ suffered untold damage, and the overall cause of our Lord was ridiculed and rejected by many because of his sin.



As Christians we are called to live lives that are holy. We are to set aside the evil ways of the world and honor Christ by living in faithful obedience to His commandments.

God's Word tells us, "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:14-16).

As you study this lesson, consider these principles:

Immorality originates in the mind, and God must give us victory there by His Holy Spirit.

The Bible gives a healthy outlook on sex. God's Word teaches that the sexual relationship can be a source of enjoyment and blessing when confined to the proper area - marriage. The Bible never pictures sex as sinful, distasteful, or dirty. Just as fire may be a great boon to man but can bring havoc when used improperly, so sex is a great blessing, but can ruin a life when abusively indulged.

Our gracious God forgives and cleanses in this area as He does in all others, so that we need carry no unnecessary load of guilt. David repented of his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. He said, "I acknowledge my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord' - and you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Psalm 32:5).

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In all our conduct toward the opposite sex, we must set the highest example and give no occasion for others to doubt our testimony.

Purity and the Mind

What does God say of impure thought? (Matthew 5:27-28)

List the things on which we are to think. (Philippians 4:8) Why does the human mind not want to think on these things? (Romans 8:7)

What are some things in our modern lives and homes that naturally lead to impure thoughts? How do we gain victory over impure thoughts? (Galatians 5:16)

What can we do to avoid impure thoughts? (Romans 13:14, II Timothy 2:22)

Apply these verses to the things you listed above. How will you handle each temptation?

Note: Temptation in the thought life is not the same as sin. Evil thoughts may pass through the mind, but sin comes from dwelling on the thought.

Purity and the Opposite Sex

What does the Bible say about the sexual relationship in its proper place? (Hebrews 13:4)

When tempted by immorality, what is the Christian to do? (I Corinthians 6:18)

List some things you can be certain will help you when you are tempted. (I Corinthians 10:13)

Write in your own words the warnings against immorality in the following scriptures:
Proverbs 6:26, Proverbs 6:32, I Thessalonians 4:3-8

Purity and Forgiveness

Write in your own words what the following verses say about God's forgiveness:
Psalm 103:12, Isaiah 43:25, I John 2:1-2

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What must we do to obtain God's forgiveness? (I John 1:9)

Life Application

What area of impurity in your life do you need to face and deal with?

What are you doing or have around you that increases the temptation?

Choose an appropriate verse or passage from this lesson, apply it to your situation, and write the result you expect to attain.

No Matter What Others Think

William Carey, an impoverished English shoemaker born late in the 18th century, had to overcome great odds to obey the call of God to become a missionary in India. In opposition to his work, the Directors of the huge, influential East India Company presented this resolution to the English Parliament:

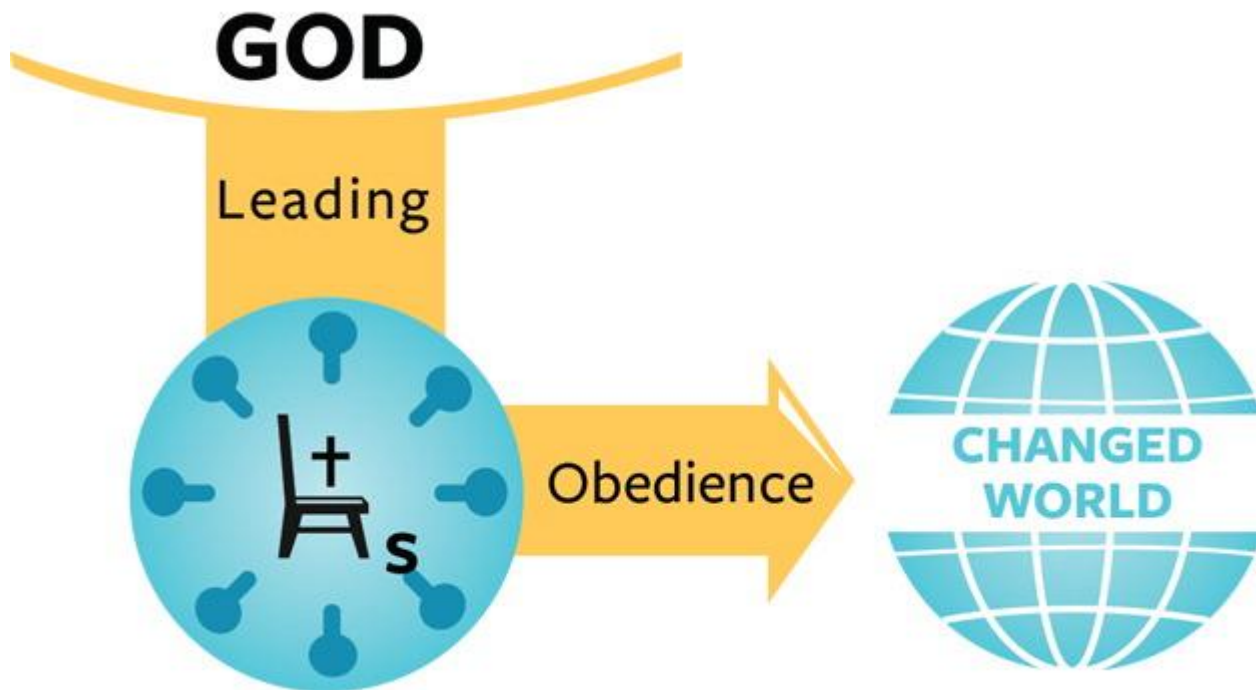
The sending out of missionaries into one Eastern possession is the maddest, most extravagant, most costly, most indefensible project which has ever been suggested by a moonstruck fanatic.

Then in 1796, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland passed the following resolution:

To spread the knowledge of the gospel amongst barbarians and heathens seems to be highly preposterous.

One opposer - a speaker in the House of Commons - said he would rather see a band of devils let loose in India than a band of missionaries.

But despite all this antagonism, Carey persisted. "Why is my soul disquieted within me?" he wrote. "Things may turn out better than I expect. Everything is known to God, and God cares."



William Carey stood the test and became the father of modern missions.

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A sincere, committed Christian will always take his stand for Christ regardless of opposition, popular opinion, or peer pressure. If we yield to the fear of man, Satan may ruin our testimony substantially. If we obey the leading of the Spirit of God, men and women will be won to Christ.

I encourage you to take your stand for Christ and be a fruitful witness for Him no matter what others think.

Peter's Renunciation

Read Matthew 26:57-75 carefully. Peter knew and loved Christ in his heart, but when it came time to openly identify himself as a follower of Christ, what did he do (verse 58)?

Note the contrasts between Christ and Peter:

- Who accused Christ (verse 59)?
- Who accused Peter (verses 69,71)?
- How did Christ answer His accusers (verse 64)?
- How did Peter answer his accusers (verses 71-74)?
- What happened to Jesus because He told the truth (verses 67,68)?
- What was the result when Peter told those lies (verse 75)?

Some have said that Christ's teachings are only for weaklings, cowards, neurotics, and those who need some kind of crutch. As you look at the examples here of Christ and Peter, how would you evaluate such a statement?

Describe what Jesus' example means to you in facing your peer pressures.

Peter's Restoration

After Christ's resurrection, what did the angel announce to the women in Mark 16:7? Why did the angel single out Peter's name from all the rest?

Upon what basis can Christ restore you even though you have denied Him?

Peter's Transformation

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Less than two months later at Pentecost, Peter stood up from among the disciples to give a bold defense of the Christian faith to a ridiculing crowd (Acts 2:13-15).

What shocking thing did Peter fearlessly tell the crowd (Acts 2:36)?

What made this dramatic difference in Peter's life (Acts 1:8, 4:8)? And what resulted (Acts 2:37-41)?

Compare the actions of the disciples during the crucifixion (Luke 22:47-62, 23:49; Matthew 26:56) and during this account in Acts. What part does Christian fellowship and unity play in standing up to peer pressure?

Life Application

How do you think having natural courage and boldness compares to being filled with the Holy Spirit?

Write Proverbs 29:25 down in your own words.

If we know and love Christ in our hearts, why must we also take a bold and open stand for Him (Matthew 4:19, 10:32, 16:24)? How do these verses relate to your present attitudes?

To whom do you particularly need to confess Christ and take a bold stand for Him (Romans 10:13-15)? Why?

Taming the Tongue

We've all met people with a sharp, critical tongue. Picture this scene. A couple from your Bible study group are having problems, and they have chosen to confide in you.

The man is big, a real outdoorsman, and works hard on a construction job. The wife is petite and frail. But she is as skilled with her tongue as David was with his slingshot against Goliath.

You're not with them long until the man bristles at his wife's verbal jabs.

"I just can't stand it when Karen puts me down in such a sarcastic way!" he complains.

"Oh, great big Mac," she digs, "can't take care of himself!"

Mac purses his lips and shakes his head. "I don't think I can take this much longer. I love my wife, but she's killing me with her tongue!"

Often the hostility in our hearts reveals itself through our words and actions. The word "tongue" is mentioned ninety-three times in the Bible, often referring to its destructive power:

The lash of the tongue (Job 5:21).

Your sin prompts your mouth; you adopt the tongue of the crafty (Job 15:5).

Though evil is sweet in his mouth and he hides it under his tongue (Job 20:12).

A deceitful tongue crushes the spirit (Proverbs 15:4).

Their tongue is a deadly arrow (Jeremiah 9:8).

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell (James 3:6).

No man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison (James 3:8).

Poisonous Words

James goes on to say, "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be" (James 3:9,10).

Few things are more self-contaminating than poisoned words that spring from the depths of a bitter heart.

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If we are to please God and maintain a testimony that brings glory to our Lord, we must learn to control what we say. James says, "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless" (James 1:26). How often through an unkind word have we borne unfaithful witness to God's love and forgiveness!

A Test of Love

A test of our love for God comes in the manner of our speech. Can we say with the psalmist, "His praise was on my tongue" (Psalm 66:17), "My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long" (Psalm 71:24), or "May my tongue sing of your word" (Psalm 119:172)?

Will we follow the wisdom of Solomon who said, "The tongue of the wise brings healing" (Proverbs 12:18) and "The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life" (Proverbs 15:4)?

And can we say with Samuel, "His word was on my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2)?

The words of Peter hold good advice for us today: "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech" (1 Peter 3:10).

This takes self-control.

Key to Self-Control

Self-control is vital to a fruitful Christian life. After counseling with thousands of people through the years, I am convinced that an undisciplined Christian cannot live a victorious, abundant life or be an effective witness.

The key to self-control is being filled with the Holy Spirit. The reason most of us fail in self-control is that we try to do it in our own strength. You and I know from experience that, apart from God, self-discipline in our tongue is impossible. But "when the Holy Spirit controls our lives he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace...self-control" (Galatians 5:22, TLB).

We must develop and exercise self-control through daily dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ and the power of His Holy Spirit. I encourage you to study this lesson carefully. Prayerfully apply the principles you will learn to your everyday life, and invite the Holy Spirit to take control of your tongue that you may bring blessing to those around you and be a fruitful witness.

Effects of the Tongue

Read James 3:1-13. Though we may study our Bibles faithfully, attend Christian meetings regularly, and even talk to our friends about Christ, one thing marks us as really mature Christians. What is it?

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When you control your tongue, what else will happen (verse 2)?

James compares a wicked tongue to an incorrectly handled steering mechanism on a ship. What would happen if the ship were an oil tanker in rocky water? How does this relate to the damage of "spilled" words?

What does it take to start a forest fire in a drought? What does it take to put out a forest fire? What damage can be caused by just a few words of gossip that you pass on?

Give an example from your own life in which you suffered from the "fire" of someone's destructive words. How did you respond? How would you respond today? Why?

Sins of the Tongue

Name the sins of the tongue that are condemned in the following references in Proverbs 6:16-19; 11:13; 15:1; 17:9; 27:2. Give examples of how you may have been hurt by or how you may have offended another in each of these areas.

Read Ephesians 4:29.

How does this apply to profanity, obscene language, off-color jokes, and so on. What else can you name that could be included here? What does this verse say we should do instead?

Significance of the Tongue

Read Matthew 12:33-37. For what shall we give an account to God?

What illustration does Christ use to explain good and bad words, and how does He apply it?

What is the real source of an evil tongue? How does this relate to attitude?

What is the only solution to taming the tongue for the believer? (Galatians 5:16)

Life Application

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How will you obey the instructions indicated in James 1:19 in your own life?

How about James 1:26?

Think about the attitudes expressed through your words in the past week. Ask yourself these questions, and answer them honestly.

What attitude do I need to confess and make right with God? To whom do I need to go and ask forgiveness because he or she has been affected by my words?

The Key to Inner Security

Obedience to our Lord in every facet of our lives is the key to inner security and experiencing the presence of Christ.

I recall one wealthy and influential businessman in California who sacrificed everything he had to care for his dying wife. Eventually he spent his fortune seeking to find a cure for her disease.

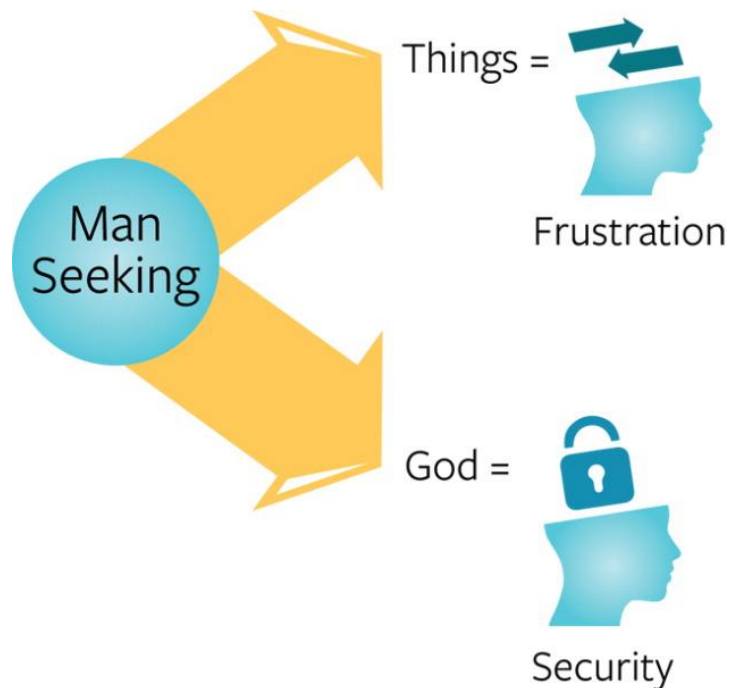
By the time I learned of their situation, they had lost their entire fortune including their palatial home. They were living in modest circumstances in a little trailer on a parking lot in Hollywood.

I went to see them with fear and trembling. How in the world could I, a healthy, young Christian businessman, identify with this poverty-stricken husband? He had already lost his large fortune and was about to lose his most precious friend and mate of nearly forty years.

The trailer was neat as a pin. When I stepped into their humble home, it was as though I were entering a corner of heaven. There, sitting beside his dying wife, was this man holding her hand. Both of them had radiant faces. The joy of the Lord filled the place.

I had come to minister to them, but they ministered to me instead. They were trusting God with their lives. Like Job, they were saying of their Lord, "Though he slay me, yet will I hope (trust) in him..." (Job 13:15).

I will always remember the peace of heart and mind that this couple enjoyed because they had learned to trust and obey the will and ways of God even in the midst of tragedy.



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Many people hope to find security in their possessions when only a right relationship with God can bring abundant life.

Through the years, I have become increasingly convinced that there are no unhappy obedient Christians. Furthermore, I have never met a person living a disobedient life who can honestly say that he is happy.

I have observed many Christians like the businessman and his dying wife, however, who have found peace and blessing in tough times because they were walking with God in faith and obedience.

We can find no lasting security in a life apart from God as the Lord of our lives. God alone is the owner of all that we possess and the total source of our supply.

Are you experiencing the joy of Christ in your life? His love? His peace? The sense of His direction? If not, could it be that you are not obeying His commands?

When you withhold the resources that God has entrusted to you for His work, He has little with which to bless you, and your life becomes unfruitful and unhappy.

We are not our own anymore; we have been bought with a price, the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Giving Him control of our time, talents, and treasure is our way of expressing gratitude to our great and glorious God and Father for all that He has done to fill us with His presence.

The Rich Fool

Read Luke 12:13-34. What was foremost on the mind of the man in verse 13?

Why did Jesus deny his request? In light of this, why do you think He denies some of our requests?

Why was the man in the parable a fool? How do people today make the same mistakes this man made?

Name some illustrations Jesus used in verses 24-28 to show the uselessness of worrying about material things.

Give some examples from recent events that show how true verse 34 is. How does this parable help you put your priorities in order?

A Follower of Christ

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Read Philippians 4:10-19. How did Paul react to the lack of money?

Where did Paul obtain the strength to face adverse circumstances?

Is it easier for you to handle humble circumstances or prosperity? Why?

How does having your priorities straight affect material changes in your life -- whether for the better or worse?

Study verse 19. Why do you think God promises to supply our needs, but not necessarily our desires?

Read I Timothy 6:17-19. How do these verses compare with the world's view? Be specific.

Against what things did Paul warn the rich in Philippians 4:10-19? What did he exhort them to do?

How would your obedience to these verses affect relationships in the following: Your family, church, neighborhood?

Christ Himself

In your own words, describe what Jesus Christ did for us according to II Corinthians 8:9.

Read II Corinthians 9:7-8. Because of what Jesus Christ has done for us, we should be willing to invest part of our income in His work. When we give toward His work, that should our attitude be? (verse 7)

Note the use of the words "all" and "every" in verse 8. Why can you be cheerful even though you may give sacrificially to God's work? When have you done this, and what has been the result?

Life Application

Think about the circumstances of your life. What part do they play in your search for security?

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In which areas of your life do you feel greedy or materialistic? How have these affected your spiritual well-being?

List your most important possessions. Prayerfully yield each one to God. Then write down one way you can show that it belongs to Him.

Recap

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The following questions will help you review this Step. If necessary, reread the appropriate lesson (s).

Complete the following statements:

True obedience to God is not...

True obedience to God really is...

How is your obedience expressed in the following:

Your attitude toward God's will?

The sexual purity of your life?

The degree of satisfaction you find in your possessions?

Your courage in witnessing for Christ?

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Your speech?

The true motivation for your actions?

Describe the result of a young child's obedience to his parents. Compare it to a Christian's relationship with his Heavenly Father.

How has your obedience to God benefited your life?

Life Application

List the area from this study that concerns you the most.

Review the verses that pertain to that area, then write down at least three ways you can grow in that area.

Commit this area to the Lord. Ask Him to fill you with His Holy Spirit and to help you grow in this area. Write down any comments after your prayer.

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