







A Guide To Obedience

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Introduction

If you are longing to do something for God, but don't know how to get started. If you want to obey God, but question whether or not it is His voice you hear, and you are afraid to obey because it may be wrong. If you want to step out in a new avenue for the Lord, but every time you do, all you can see is your weaknesses and past failures. If you want to do something, but you are afraid that if you do, it won't work. Then this book is written for you. No one can obey God for you, but you. Obedience is a major requirement in being a child of God.

Jeremiah 7:23, "But this thing commanded I thee saying, Obey my voice, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you." Romans 6:16 tells us, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourself servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." We must have a relationship with God. We must have faith in Him and trust Him. We must love Him with our whole hearts. We show this by our obedience. We show our faith by our works, but faith without works is dead. Works won't get us to heaven. We on our own can't be good enough to earn heaven. We would have to be perfect to do that, and there is no way we can. But we do need to show God our love and trust by being obedient to Him. I teach school. The children in my class show their appreciation and love for me by being obedient. Should we give God any less? In a world where every where I go people are either caught up in a tail-spin of meaningless activity that seems to mean so much to them, or in a complacent attitude where nothing at all matters to them, it is hard to find those who are obedient.

Especially those who are obeying God with all their hearts. I see many that are doing something, many are doing anything at all. That is they are doing anything just to say they are doing something, but they are so far removed from God that they have no idea what He wants them to do. It's little reason that the majority of God's people are full of complaints and doubt instead of the joy of God's victory. God's Word tells us in Joshua 1:8, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous and thou shalt have good success." How do we find prosperity? We don't find it by giving all our money away to preachers who tell us that is the way to find prosperity. That is only the way to get more in debt. The scripture tells us plainly, lay up the Word of God in our heart and then obey it. That is how we find prosperity. How do we find health? By keeping the principles of the Word of God. III John verse 2 tells us, "Beloved I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." For the principles found in God's Word to work in our lives, we have to first find out what they are. We then have to obey them. If the doctor gives us a prescription to cure our ills, and we never take the pills, how can they help us?

We must obey God. It is my prayer that God uses this book to release in you the power of obedience. The devil works overtime to keep us bound so that we can't obey God. I pray that God anoints this book to release all who read it, those who are hungry to obey.

We know that obedience is very important. Because of this, we also know that old satan will work overtime to keep us from being obedient. Every where I go I see people who really want to serve God, who really want to step out in greater obedience, but old satan has them bound up.

He has confused them, hurt them, wrapped them up in all kinds of grave clothes, so that they can't be resurrected by the power of God to step out in obedience. It is my prayer that this book will help to show you what tools satan uses and how to overcome them.

I hope this book will help to establish truths in your heart that will help you to endure with the power of the One who strengthens you. God promises that we can do all things. *All things*. Not just some of the easy things, but all things. It is my prayer that you read this book and you are strengthened in your resolve to obey God. In these pages, I hope to speak to you personally, to encourage you, and gather you for battle. The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. It is my prayer that this book strengthens laborers, that it strengthens supernatural workers for the harvest, for the hour is late. Be encouraged in your labor.


If you desire to work for the Lord, you are blessed and very special indeed. You may feel that there is nothing for you to do, because your talents and abilities are so few. In these pages I hope that you find someone that you can relate to whose weaknesses may have been the same, but when God turned them into strengths, what great things they accomplished. I can't wait to see what the Lord will do with you. A willing vessel is what He needs. Not a perfect one. Commit your weaknesses to His hands. Obey Him. Keep His plan. You can turn around your world.



Chapter 1. But God, I Can't

Many times it is easy to answer God with an “I can’t. “I’m not big enough, strong enough in God, wise enough, perfect enough, holy enough, righteous enough, smart enough, or educated enough to obey You, God.” We forget that when God asks us to do something, no matter how small or great, He does so knowing that we can do it, either because we already have the abilities we need, or because He is getting ready to give them to us. God knows us better than we do ourselves. He knows our innermost weaknesses and strengths. He will not require us to do something we would only fail at. Why would He do that? As a teacher, I would never give Algebra tests to one of the Kindergartners and fail them because they couldn’t do it. God is wiser than we are. He will never require you to do something you can’t do. He will push you to your limits to cause you to grow. He will add talents and gifts so that you can do far more than you would naturally. He will give you the ability to do what He asks. But He will never, never ask you to do something you can’t do, just to see you fail. He loves you.

It is wonderful to be able to trust God’s great love that He has for you. Many times people hurt us, and the devil sees to it that we are hurt. If we allow it to, these hurts cause us to have things inside of us that separate us from trusting God’s love. Also many times, because we have failed to obey God, there is a barrier that causes us to be separated from Him. I can remember many times as a child, I would do something wrong. I would cover it all up carefully hoping no one would find out so that I wouldn’t get in trouble. Do you remember those times? But then that guilt came. It was worse than punishment. Punishments lasted for a short time then they were over. This guilt went on until we were found out and forgiven and it was made to be right. What a relief it was to finally be forgiven.



Sin and disobedience can cause these kinds of barriers to separate us from being able to know God's love. We need to ask Him to tear away anything in our life that stops us from being able to receive His love. When we do receive it, and we understand its depths, we will know that nothing can separate us from His love. Romans 8:38 tells us, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Only our own sin and desires of our heart can separate us. When we know this for sure, we can then begin to trust Him. That trust allows us to know that whatever He asks us to do, we can do, if we try with all our hearts.

Some of my best spiritual teachers have pushed me to every ounce of my strength. They always had new things for me to try, new heights to climb in God. I would never have been able to reach for those heights if I had never trusted their guidance and their knowledge that I would be able to do what they asked. I knew when they asked me to do something that even though it would be a great challenge, they were asking me to do something they knew ultimately that I could do. I could trust them in that. We can trust God in that, also. He doesn't put on us more than we can bear or handle. He is wise. He loves us. We can trust Him with our very soul's salvation. Don't hesitate to do what He asks you to do. Never say God, I can't. Never come up with excuses with why you can't. If He asks you to, you can, and you will, if you try with all your might. He already knew the outcome before He asked you. He will answer a multitude of excuses with just a few words. He will simply say, "I am with Thee."

Here are stories of several people in the Bible that God used. These are people who had all kinds of excuses.

But God said that they could. They did. These are also the stories of what they accomplished when they did.

Jeremiah is the first such person we'll look at. We don't know exactly how old he was when the Word of the Lord came to Him, but Jeremiah 1:4-5 tells us, "Then the Word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." God told Jeremiah how well He knew him. God said, "Even before you were formed in your mother's womb I knew all about you." When you are asked to do something by God, how well does He know you and your weaknesses and abilities? Even before He formed you, He knew you. God isn't looking for perfect people to serve Him. Jeremiah thought of his greatest weakness (at least in his opinion). He answered God in verse 6, "Behold I cannot speak: for I am but a child." God answered Him in verse 7, "Say not I am a child; for thou shalt go to all that I send thee and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak."

It didn't matter about Jeremiah's weaknesses, he was just to go where God sent him and speak what God gave him to speak. Then in verse 9 God added the finishing touch. "Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, behold I have put my Words in thy mouth." What happened to Jeremiah's excuse? What happened to his weakness? When we listen to God and obey Him, we can do things that are far greater than anything we can even imagine.

When God gets in the arrangements, we can do great things. We may not even understand the impact we will have on those around us. We just follow the Leader, the One whose very thoughts are so far above ours that we can't comprehend them. Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My

ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” He makes a way where there seemeth none. If we walk in the paths He makes for us, do what He says, speak what He puts in our mouths, it will astonish us what we can accomplish in Him. Where are our excuses? Where are our weaknesses?

How about Jeremiah? What did God use him to accomplish, just by getting him to follow what He said to do? Verse 10 tells us, “I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.” God used Jeremiah to change the courses of whole nations. Verse 18 and 19 says, “For behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land, and they shall fight against thee; but they shalt not prevail against thee; for I am with thee saith the Lord to deliver thee.” In the course of one conversation with a child, God changed the history of nations. He spoke and gave Jeremiah His Word, which had the power to make happen what was spoken. Then He touched Jeremiah’s lips and gave him the words that he would need. He spoke the victory Jeremiah would have, that his enemies would not prevail against him. Throughout Jeremiah’s life he would have many enemies, but not one prevailed against him. This child, because of God’s plan and His Word, became a miracle man. What can you do for God when He asks you? Can you stand before Him and tell Him that you can’t do what He has asked?

Now consider the story of Joshua. The first time we read of Joshua, he is a young man among many. He was chosen in Numbers 13:17 to go with 11 others to spy out the land of Canaan for Israel. You probably know the story.

The children of Israel were at the edge of the long awaited for Canaan. Moses sent 12 spies to "...see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds" (Verses 18 and 19). It was such a wonderfully rich place that they found one grape cluster so big that it took 2 people to carry it on a staff. (Verse 27). But when they returned, doubt crept in, negatism stole in, flesh came and gave its opinion. "And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land and the cities are walled, and very great..." (verse 27 and 28).

Flesh is an enemy to God. No matter how hard we try we cannot please God in the flesh. We cannot see the truth in the flesh. We cannot help someone or help God's cause in the flesh. We have to get into the Spirit. In other words we have to forget ourselves and hook up to God's Spirit. We have to think His thoughts, feel His feelings (the fruits of the Spirit), become submersed in Him so that what comes out is Spirit instead of flesh. When flesh begins to rule, chaos can happen in a few minutes. Caleb had the right idea when in verse 30 he stilled the people and said, "Let us go up at once and possess it for we are well able to overcome it." These words were from the Spirit of God. These words were the spoken Word of God Who was speaking through him. Just like the powerful Words spoken to Jeremiah, they had life in them. The Word of God has power. If we listen to the Word of God, let it sink into our brains and hearts, it can transform not only us but also the circumstances around us. God's Word can give us the power to win, and to overcome whatever situations we might face. Not everybody in a crowd will see it that way.

Not everybody in your church will see it that way. Have you ever noticed that if you believe the report of the Lord and obey Him, you will not be in a big crowd that agrees with you? That doesn't mean you are wrong. Joshua and Caleb were outnumbered 2 to 10, but they had the truth. In verse 31, flesh rose its ugly head again. "But the men that went up with him said. We be not able to go up against the people for they are stronger than we." Flesh will always bring out your weaknesses, and make God's strength appear less. What will flesh create? Only sorrow, only defeat. Chapter 14 verse 1 says, "And all the congregation lifted up their voice and cried, and the people wept that night."

To get the full picture of what has happened, let's look at what these people had been through up to this time. They had wandered through this desert for a long time, looking for this moment, longing for it. Each dusty, rocky mile they trudged was for the sole purpose of coming to this land. It was the reason for their existence. They had made it. They were finally there. Their dream had come true. They were waiting to take the land God had promised them. As far as the land went, it was all they had dreamed that it would be. They only had to wait on the report of these 12 spies to walk in to their promise.

Now there were 2 reports that were faithful to God and His Word, there were 2 who believed and declared what God could do. The people could have listened to these two and the course of their lives for 40 more years would have been changed. But Chapter 14:2 tells us "And all the whole congregation said unto them, "Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt, or would God we would have died in the wilderness." They wanted to elect captains to lead them to return to Egypt. Flesh always leads you to go back, not ahead into the promises God has for you. In verse 7-9 Joshua and Caleb spoke "And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, the

land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not.” They spoke the Word of God to the people. “But all the congregation bade stone them with stones” (verse 10).

Now we know that when you listen to what God tells you to do and you do it, when you hear what He says to say and you say it, you will be in a minority and you will definitely have the attention of the majority. They may not want to hear it. They may even come against you because you tell it, but that is not an excuse to keep silent and not warn them. In the scripture, God tells us that we are like watchmen. He sets us as leaders to establish what should be done. If those we tell do not hear, and do not act on what we tell them, it is not our fault. When we obey Him whole heartedly, it is His business to deal with the results. If we fail to tell them, then we are held accountable.

Someone pointed out in a sermon that really touched my heart, that the harvest is God’s. In the parable of the talents, Matthew 25, the man with the one talent in verse 24 said about his master, “...I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown and gathering where thou has not strawed.” The Lord uses us as the servants that labor. We sow and we straw, but it is the Lord of the harvest that is responsible for the gathering and reaping. He doesn’t sow, but he gathers where he has not sown. We are the sowers. When we obey God, the harvest is His. He is responsible for that. We can put it in His hands, whether they hear or not, that is not ours. If they don’t hear, even if they come to stone us, we like Stephen will see God. In verse 10 in this chapter, “...the glory of the Lord appeared

in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.” God rose up and stood for the few who had stood for Him. What was the outcome? Numbers 14:32 and 33 tells us that forty more years of wandering was pronounced on all of them. Only two would live to inherit the promises of God—Joshua and Caleb.

Don’t look at the circumstances and think that you can’t. Don’t look at your weaknesses and fail to even try. If God says you can conquer the land, get ready to conquer it. Don’t look at the fact that you may be the only one that hears God and wants to obey. Don’t think no one will hear what you have to say. If God says do it and you know this beyond any shadow of any doubt, do it, no matter if the entire world around you says you can’t, do it anyway. If God gives you a Word, let His Word cause you to win. Get a vision from God. His Word says if we fail to have a vision, something to do, something to keep going for, something to believe in, something to drive us and press us on, then we will perish. What is the difference in Jeremiah, Joshua, Caleb, and you? Only you can decide whether you will say yes to God, or like the other ten spies on the edge of the promised land, “No, God, I can’t.”

Chapter 2.
But God, How Do
I Know This Is You

Picture this scene in your mind. A young man is threshing wheat to hide it for his family. Times are very hard. The Midianites, a fierce people, had “Encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number; and they entered into the land to destroy it.” (Judges 6:4-5) This young man was a very ordinary man. He was of a poor family and the least in that house (Verse 15). He had probably never accomplished anything great. He had no riches to boast of, no special talents. He didn’t even have a lot of self-confidence.

As he was working there, a man came to him and said, “The Lord is with thee mighty man of valor.” He argued with the man. “If the Lord be with us, where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of?” He was saying if God is with us, why hasn’t He delivered us? I know He can do it. I have heard of His miracles. But he hasn’t delivered us. If we want to be used in a supernatural way for God, it isn’t important that we have never been able to do anything supernatural on our own. It isn’t even important that we have seen Him do miracles. It is just important that we walk with the miracle worker and we know Him. It is just important that step-by-step we obey His voice. Then we will see the supernatural happen, we will see His miracles, and we will be part of them. In the natural, it doesn’t matter what we consider ourselves to be. We may think of ourselves as being the least of the least, as long as we know how God sees us, as long as we know His love for us.

It is important that we stand steadfast in that love. If we want to serve God and change the world around us, it doesn't matter about our weaknesses, just that we know how to find His great strength. It doesn't matter who we are, just that we know Who He is and what He can do in and through us.

Gideon's greatest asset was his recognition of his limitations. His greatest strengths were his weaknesses. In II Corinthians 12:9 we read, "And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." That's why God knew He could trust Gideon to finish the job at hand, because He knew Gideon wouldn't trust in his own strength and might, but in God's. It doesn't take greatness to obey God. These are the kinds of people that God chooses to use. Do you feel that you fit somewhere in one of these categories? If you do, then God says by His Word that you are a prime candidate to be used by Him.

We read in I Corinthians 1:25-29, "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence." If you feel like you are foolish, weak, base, despised, you meet the qualifications that God has given for His work. James 4:10 tells us, "Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up." When God lifts you up, you will be lifted up. When you lift yourself up, you will surely fall.

By now you know who this young man was. You also may know how God used him to change the history of nations. Gideon asked his special visitor to show him a sign that he had found grace in the sight of the Lord. This shows us something about Gideon's heart. He could have desired a great number of other things, but he wanted to know that he had grace in the sight of God. When we come before the Lord we may ask for all kinds of things: finances, material things, better houses and cars, but Gideon asked that he find grace in the sight of the Lord. What greater thing can we ask for or find. Grace to do what we need to accomplish, grace to be forgiven when we fail, grace to cause us to be recognized in the sight of the Lord, grace to feel His wonderful love and forgiveness, grace to keep our hearts and minds stayed on Him. We think we need so much, but if we have His grace, what more can we ask for.

Gideon prepared the man a meal. It was then that he found out that this was no ordinary man. The man took his staff, touched it to the meat and fire consumed it, then the man disappeared into thin air. Gideon knew then that he had talked with an angel. God and His heavenly host do not need our physical things that we have. They don't need anything in our flesh that we offer them. We can't feed them with our natural bread. We have to feed God with our praise, our love, and our obedience to Him. We strengthen even the angels themselves when we do these things. We can advance the battle of the angels against God's unseen enemies by our obedience, our prayer, and our praise to God. We create an atmosphere around us and around the things that we pray for that enables God's Spirit to work in a more powerful way. We strengthen the power of God on their side. This angel didn't need what Gideon had in the natural. He needed his obedience to God.

Gideon knew that the man was an angel of the Lord.

That was evident to him. Now we can think without having been there that all this would have convinced him that he was called, and that he would be given the talents, strength, or whatever he would need for the job. But he turned around and asked God for another sign to confirm that God really wanted him to do what the angel had asked. When he received this one, he asked for another. He spoke face to face with an angel and still asked for two more signs.

In one respect Gideon acted wisely. We are supposed to discern the spirits. Even if an angel asks us to do something the Word of God doesn't, then it isn't an angel of God. There is so much of a concentration among Christians on angels lately. I have noticed that the people who have a close relationship with God are not following after that. I wonder if all this obsession with angels is of God at all. The scripture bears out that God, Jesus, the Holy Ghost, and the heavenly angels all bear witness with one another. They all submit to God and to one another. Even the Holy Ghost will not lift himself up and speak for Himself. When I see angels singled out and lifted up I know that this doesn't bear witness with God's Word. I know that this is not God's way. If it isn't God's way, then satan himself is behind it and he is paving the way for people of God to be deceived. Gideon was right to try the spirits, but he could have tried them just once. Does this sound familiar to you? How God do I know this is really you? I have watched this simple sentence hinder more people from obeying God and accomplishing anything for Him than even the sentence "I can't". I hear saints of God say constantly, "I wanted to come pray for you in the service, but I was afraid it wasn't God. I wanted to get blessed in the service, but I was afraid it wasn't God. I wanted to go visit someone but I was afraid. I wanted to lead someone to the Lord, but I was afraid it wasn't God leading me to do it. I wanted to witness to this person, but I was afraid to do so.

I was afraid it wasn't God. I wanted to believe for my healing, but I was afraid it wasn't God's will. I wanted to believe for my financial miracle, but I was afraid that it wasn't God's will." Now read those things again that I listed. How in the world would God not want you to do those things. Would Satan want you to do them? Certainly not. Is it God's will to do these—sure is. How do I know? I read His Word and He tells us. We get so caught up in thinking we have to hear His voice to lead us to do all that we do, that we forget the things that His Word has already told us to.

How do we know His Word? We have to study His Word out for ourselves. We can't depend on what outside sources tell us. We can't depend on what other people tell us. They help us gain understanding, but we need to get personal with God when we study His Word and let His Spirit reveal it to us. We have to study it out and know it in our hearts. We have to have a relationship with the Author to be able to do that.

This thing goes two ways. We can get so caught up in listening for God's voice that we neglect to obey His Word. Sometimes we get so caught up in doing what His Word tells us to that we neglect to hear the still small voice of the Spirit leading us. Some things we are obligated to do by His Word. Some things won't work unless we obey His voice and do it the instant He leads us to. I remember one day I was helping clean the church. I found a Bible that belonged to a friend of mine. I knew he hadn't been to church for years and he must have left it there when he was a small boy. The Lord impressed my heart to take it to him then at that moment, and not wait. When I walked in the door, this young man started crying. He told me, "I have started to realize the mess my life is in. I can't fix it. I had decided to kill myself this very night. I had made my plans. I had decided how to do it and had gotten what I needed.

I had forgotten God. Can God help me? Does He still love me. Will He help me? Does He still love me enough now to help me?" When I told him the story of how I found his Bible and how God had told me to bring it and not wait, he knew God still loved Him. He remembered the Word of God that the devil had stolen out of his heart. He remembered the days when he was young and God showed him the way back to Him. He committed his life to the Lord. I talked to him not long ago, over 25 years later, and he is still serving God. It is important to obey the Spirit-quickened voice of God when you hear it. Who knows how God can use you when you submit your will to His and let His voice move you. But we can't forget to obey His written Word either. The Word of God can keep us busy. We need to listen and obey both. One will always go along with the other. If you hear the voice of God telling you to do something that is against what the written Word of God says, or against what the Spirit of God bears witness with in your spirit, then it is not the voice of God you hear, but satan trying to deceive you. We need to listen and obey both.

So many people everywhere we go want to be able to hear the voice of God and obey it. I think the first step in being able to do that is to clean up your heart before God. Make sure there are no sins hidden or plain. Make sure you have nothing separating you from His love. We have to fall in love with Him. We have to let Him love us. We have to get close to Him and make Him our number one priority. Then we have to submit to that love and make obedience, because of that love for Him, a top priority in our life. So many people silence the voice of God by not doing what He says. Why should He speak to you when you don't listen or do it. When you don't do what He asks? We can silence the voice of God when we refuse to hear or respect those that He may send to speak to us.

I know someone who rebels against the people that God sends to speak to them. Every time God sends someone, a preacher, or anyone that He is using, this person gets an attitude and doesn't want to hear what they are saying. This has silenced the voice of God in his life. If you don't treat the ones God sends to help you with respect, then He won't continue to speak to you.

Giving up our self-will isn't easy, but if we want God to do it with all our heart, He can put us through the refiner's fire and then we can serve Him. Malachi 3:3 tells us, "And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." We have to be willing to go through the refiners fire and be purged so that we can be a Levi and minister for the Lord. Many go to the edge of the furnace, but aren't willing to go any further. We have to be willing to go all the way. When we are in love with Him and He is number one to us, when we are broken and refined, then it is easier to hear His voice. Being obedient is a state of being. Sometimes we see it as something we do every once in a while. Obedience is a condition of our heart and mind. Obedience is a way of life, every day, every minute.

Gideon was in a state of obedience when the angel spoke to Him. He was ready. We have to stay ready to obey God. He looked at his weaknesses and at the overwhelming job that was before him, and he wanted to be sure it was God whose voice He had heard. He asked for three signs to confirm it. I once saw a bumper sticker that said something like this, "Christians shouldn't follow signs. Signs should follow Christians". We can literally silence the voice of God by asking for signs if we aren't careful. We need to have such a close relationship with God that when He speaks, we know it's His voice and we go forward in Him. Then people see the signs and miracles that come.

These come because of our following God and obeying Him.

When Gideon got his signs and he knew in his heart for sure, nothing stopped him. He didn't falter when God told him to tear down the grove at Baal's altar, even though he knew he and his family might face death. God will gradually give us greater things to do. He starts training us with the small things. When we do these with a whole and obedient heart, we are ready to do greater things. Gideon had to do something as simple as tear down the groves before he was ready to lead the army in battle. I have known people who wanted to have a great ministry. Someone would ask them to clean the church or work under someone else as their helper. They didn't want to do these small things. God never used them. Make yourself available to do whatever He asks and more. If it is cleaning the church, do it praising Him. Do all that you do as unto the Lord. The lesser things are needed too. Do them with the confidence that all you do is needed for the kingdom of God. God will see the intentions of your heart and add to what you do. He will use everything you do to grow you to be able to do even more. No matter how simple a thing He puts before you to do, do it with all your heart.

Gideon didn't falter at obeying God even when he told him his army of 32,000 was too big to go against the Midianites' army that covered the valley, whose numbers were as great as grasshoppers. He didn't falter when he told him his downsized army of 10,000 was too big. I think though that he faltered a little when God left him only 300 men. God sent him on a faith journey. He told him to go into the Midianite camp. He did. He listened outside one of the tents just as this conversation in Chapter 7 verse 13 and 14 was happening. "And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo a cake of

barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, this is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host.” Gideon became encouraged in his heart. His faith had become a little weak. He obeyed God on a faith walk, and God showed Him circumstances to encourage his faith. When our faith is weak, God can take us on a faith walk to cause us to remember the things He has done, to show us His picture instead of the picture our flesh may have, to remind us that He, the Lord of all, is with us. Gideon knew that God was with Him and that would be enough. The battle belonged to the sword of the Lord and of Gideon.

Maybe what God has told you to do has as great odds as those Gideon faced. At least to you it may seem so. Walk close enough to Jesus to step when He steps. Clear your mind and know His voice. Let God clean out of your heart and life anything that would separate you from Him. Get it settled in your heart that this is His voice and that you understand what it is that He wants you to do. Don't be double minded because “a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.” (James 1:7 then 6) When you make up your mind, then obey God. The hosts of satan's army will fall before you strike against them. They will consume themselves. Mountains will fall and crooked places will be made straight. Isaiah 45:2 says, “Behold I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron.” What are the rewards of obedience? Exodus 19:5 says, “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people.....” What more can we ask?

Chapter 3. ***But God, I Can't Believe***

So many times I see people who genuinely want to step out and obey God in a supernatural way, but they lack the faith to be able to do it. Faith means believing God and knowing that He will work. The Bible defines faith as being "...the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1) Another way it can be defined is, *Forsaking All I Trust Him*. We have to know that God is big enough. Most of us know that God is able to do what we need. Faith also means we trust Him to do it *for us*.

The kind of trust that comes with faith can only come through an up close and personal relationship with God. Faith from a distance says, "God, I know You are able." Faith from the feet of Jesus says, "God, I know You will." The closer you get to God, the more you understand His Word, the more you walk in His miracle footsteps, faith comes easier. You know Him and what He is like. You know His love for you. You *know* He will.

One condition of having this trust is being obedient and right in your part of the relationship with Him. If a husband isn't faithful to his wife, can he trust her? If we aren't faithful in our part of the relationship, if we aren't sure of where we stand with God, can we trust Him for real? Our trust wavers, not because of Him, but because of our part. If we aren't obedient and guilt rides our shoulder every time we turn to Him, then our trust is shaky. Also, if we aren't obedient and we are going places with our lives that He hasn't sanctioned, then we jeopardize our own well being. Our trust isn't complete then either. When we are striving to do our part, we are forgiven, and wholeheartedly following Him, then we know where we stand. Our trust is complete in Him. Our faith is whole.

If we don't spend time in prayer and fellowship with God, or in His Word renewing our minds, our trust can waver. We allow the world and its negativism and those around us who don't believe, to pull at our minds. Our trust will waver. Just like in any relationship, trust is a two way street. We must do our part. We have to work at our trust and not let anything come against it. Satan will attack it and try to destroy it. We have to actively stand and hold onto it. The Bible tells us to "...hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." (Hebrews 3:6)

Another way satan attacks our faith is by attacking us. First he condemns us for every small mistake we make. Everything we do that isn't perfect he brings up. Every part of our personality or attitude he attacks, and when we react, he condemns us. He causes us to feel condemned and unworthy. We feel like how could God love us, let alone use us? When we start to obey Him, satan comes into our minds and criticizes our every move. We back away and stop obeying. He can condemn us into disobedience and defeat.

To overcome this, we have to identify our enemy. God sent His Son to die to forgive us. Why would He condemn us? Condemnation does not come from God. His Word tells us in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Condemnation comes from satan who tears up our trust. We have to submit to God and tell satan off when he brings this against us. James 4:7 tells us, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." If we listen to condemnation and let it become a part of us, it even can eventually destroy us.

Trust is needed to obey God. One example of trust is found in Genesis chapter 12 through chapter 23.

This is the story of Abraham. God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 12:1 “Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy Father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee.” Genesis 12:4 starts with these words, “and Abraham departed.” Abraham left everything to go. God didn’t even tell him where he was going. What a wonderful faith and trust. What came from His obedience? Verse 2 tells us what God promised him. “And I will make of thee a great nation and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing...in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. “ The nation of Israel today stands as a tribute of God’s faithfulness to Abraham. How were all the families of the earth through time blessed by his obedience? Check out the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew chapter 1. It doesn’t start with Adam. It starts with the one that God made a promise to thousands of years before Jesus was born. It starts with faithful Abraham. Why did God choose Abraham to bless? Genesis 18:17-19 tells us, “And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.”

Another example of trust in the life of Abraham is found in Genesis chapter 22. You know the story. God asked Abraham to give Him the thing dearest to his heart, his son Isaac. Isaac was God’s promise to Abraham made flesh. The miracle boy born in their old age confirmed that God would keep His promise. In Genesis 22:2 God said “...Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I

will tell thee of.” Verse 3 starts with these words. It says, “and Abraham rose up”. He obeyed God as he had before. In verse 5 Abraham tells those with him “...abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.” He tells the men in this passage, “I and my son will be back”. He knew he was going to obey God. There was no question about that. He wouldn’t have traveled three days to get there if he hadn’t intended to. He wasn’t double minded in his relationship. But somehow he knew they both would return. In verse 8 when Isaac asks where is the lamb, Abraham answers prophetic words that would ring down through time, to the cross and to us. “...my son, God will provide himself a lamb”. In verse 10 he took the knife to slay his son. An angel’s voice stopped him. In verse 13, Abraham saw the ram. Just as he had spoken in verse 8, God had provided a lamb. Not only is this a beautiful example of faith and trust in God and obedience to the point of sacrifice, it is also a picture of the greater sacrifice God Himself made later. He provided yet another Lamb. One Who would take away the sins of the world, Jesus, His own Son.

To obey God we must trust Him. God can take away the hindrances that stop us from complete trust. He can cause us to rise over them all. We just have to want to. When we lack faith, He can increase our faith. Hearing God’s Word can also increase our faith. Romans 10:17 tells us, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Faith also works by obedience and love. All these things can increase our faith. Living at the feet of Jesus is the only thing that can renew our trust.

Chapter 4.
But God, I Can't
My Life Is A Mess

If you were to meet Saul before his conversion, I wonder what your opinion of him might have been. He was a Christian killer. Not only did he deliver them to their deaths, he was righteous in doing so, he just knew that he was obeying God. I'm sure that God had tried many times before the road to Damascus to turn him around. He must have been hard headed. It took a blinding light, a loud voice, and days of blindness to turn him around. His life was a total disaster before God spoke to him. If he were to have put in an application for pastor to your church before his conversion, would you have hired him? Would you have even hung around with him? When he first announced his decision to follow Jesus, I wonder what the reactions of those who knew him best were. I can just hear it now. "Saul, a Christian, you have got to be kidding." Even the Christians shunned him. But this mess turned into a blessing. I'm sure that many times after his conversion satan reminded the apostle Paul about his past and the mess of his life. In Romans 8:1 he wrote, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Let these words echo in your spirit. There is therefore now no condemnation. Before we come to know Christ and the power of resurrection, all of us are a mess at our best. Our righteousness is filthy rags when compared to His perfection. Isaiah 64:6 tells us, "We are **all** as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags...." Philippians 3:9 tells us, "And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Ephesians 2:10 tells us, "For we

are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” You may have been your own workmanship, but now you are God’s. You may have made a mess in your life, but now you have given it to God. It is His business to help you put your life together, and He has a plan and a purpose for you. He can fix your messes. The worst messes are those that never come to Him because of condemnation or pride. They never find out the miracle God can make of their mistakes.

Another mess that became a miracle is found in Matthew 9:9-11, “And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?” Matthew was not a righteous saint of God. He was a tax collector, one of the most hated groups of people there were at that time. The Romans employed Jews who would collect the taxes for them. The Roman tax was hated and was the destruction of many who could not pay. The tax collectors, to make things worse, would add to the burden by cheating the people, pocketing the difference. The righteous-in-their-own-eyes Pharisees lumped them along with publicans and sinners and spoke to the disciples in verse 16, “How is it that He eateth and drinketh with sinners?” They couldn’t understand why Jesus would even fellowship with this group of people at all. Matthew knew why he did. He caught a glimpse of the love of God in the eyes of the One who called him. He left all he had to follow Him and never looked back even until the day of his death as a martyr for the One that chose Him, the one that greeted him home and said “Well done.”



Our past and who we were before we let Christ be formed in us doesn't matter. It's what we allow Him to make of us that does. When I think of messes that became miracles, my favorite story is the lady that came and washed the feet of Jesus in Luke 7: 36-50. It is the story of a prostitute that crashed a Pharisee's dinner party that he had for Jesus. She began to weep and washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. The Pharisee told him, if you were a prophet, you would know what manner of woman this is, and you would have nothing to do with her. Oh how righteous we can sometimes get in our own eyes. Jesus answered him with a parable. If a debtor owed five hundred pence, and another fifty, and the one they owed forgave them, who would love the creditor the most. Of course the one that was forgiven the most would have the most love for the one who had forgiven them. Jesus answered these words that echo to every sinner He ever forgave, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much." Those that are forgiven most will love the most. Many times I have seen those that Jesus forgave the most become the most dedicated workers for the kingdom of God. Their love for Him for what He has done for them was so great it was easily the number one priority in their life. If God has forgiven you of much, don't let the sins of your past stop you from thinking that you can serve God in a great capacity. Turn loose of yesterday, and love Him much for the great love He has shown you.

When your life is a mess, we may be closer to being able to obey God than someone whose life is together and they are depending on their own self instead of God. Paul wrote in II Corinthians 12:9, "And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." He actually thanked God for His weaknesses. Why?

Because he knew that the only course left for him was not to trust in his own strength, wisdom, or abilities. He knew he had none. He knew the only thing left to do was to trust in the inexhaustible supply of the strength of God.

When I was first starting to sing and work for the Lord, I knew all my weaknesses. I had just a few years before that left a life full of sin. I had all the baggage of condemnation that comes with that. I had my own condemnation plus what the devil had loaded on me. I had not discovered any strengths of my own but I was painfully aware of all my weaknesses. I wasn't schooled or practiced in understanding how God's Word worked, nor was I used to hearing God's leading. As I saw it, all I had was weaknesses. I was afraid because of all this that God couldn't use me. It was then someone told me this illustration that I have never forgotten. If two singers are standing up to be used by God. One is polished, talented, sure of himself in his own eyes. The other is very unsure, but has the prayer, "God I am nothing. I can't do this on my own. I need Your help, Your anointing to make a difference for these people. I commit my weaknesses to You. Anoint me to do what it is You would have me to do." Which of the two could God use the most? When you admit your weaknesses and commit them to God, when you ask for His help, His anointing, His gifts, His strength, you can walk on water. Put yourself in His hands. Commit yourself to Him. He will use you.

Once when I was afraid I couldn't do something that God had asked me to, He answered me that He had created the world by His Words. If He wanted me to do this thing He would cause me to be able to do it. I was able to. Another time He told me that He could use a mistake better than He could use my doing nothing. A mistake He could fix. What could He do with my doing nothing because I was afraid of messing up? He looks at who we are.



He looks at our potential in a whole different way than the way we do. He sees our potential and adds to it what He is going to give us to enable us to overcome and do what He has called us to do.

It may be that coming from a mess better qualifies us to be able to obey God. If we came from perfection, we might never seek His help. Only God sees our lives for real. Trust Him. Give Him your mess. Commit it to Him. II Timothy 1:12 tells us, "...I know Whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." Commit your past and your sins to Him. He is able to keep it. Everyday accept from Him a new start. Don't let satan or anyone else condemn you back into your mess. Accept God's deliverance and His promises. Get a strong and real relationship with Him so that you know His opinion of who you are. Let Him clean you up, and put you through the fire. Let Him use you. He'll make your mess a miracle.

Chapter 5. But God I'm Not Educated Enough

Not long ago I met a young man who was called to the ministry. He was excited. He made plans to do it right, all in the flesh. He totally forgot about seeking the guidance of the One Who had called him. According to this world's wisdom, he went to college to prepare himself for the ministry. The college's teachings were not Holy Ghost filled or led. They took the Word of God and warped it, changing it to fit their own purposes. This young man became filled with these teachings. His heart also was filled with thoughts of prestige and money, which, sad to say, is the reason a lot of the world's preachers stand in pulpits. He drew further and further away from the One Who can make a difference. The devil stole his ability to reach God's people before he even got started.

I thank God for my opportunity to attend a seminary school, one of the most recognized in the state. That is because after I attended there, I understood that God, His will, His Holy Ghost, and His Word are not what is taught in most seminaries. Man's ways, his interpretation of the Word, and his flesh are what is found in most pastor schools. Yet it is a common thing for young ministers who receive the call of God on their lives to think that they must go to these schools.

But God, I just don't have enough education and knowledge to obey You is a common thing I hear. I know that it is an awesome responsibility to hold in your hands people's minds and souls. Leadership in any ministry is not to be taken lightly. God's Word Itself says in Matthew 18:6, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." We recognize the need for training.

We recognize the need to learn more. That is all true. But we first need to seek God's guidance and His teaching. We need to recognize the "Supreme Teacher". We need to recognize the God-sent teacher available to all of us. I John 2:27 says, "But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him." The Holy Ghost of God was sent to instruct us in God's ways. Without Him, it is impossible for us to understand God's Word because His Word is spiritual and has to be understood in a spiritual sense. The Holy Ghost of God was sent to instruct us in God's ways.

In the flesh we can't understand anything about God. We can try. We can take what little we can see and build on it. That sometimes leads to our twisting and turning it around. How many times have you seen people who misinterpreted God's Word? This is what causes this. When we twist it, it no longer can save, heal, deliver, and strengthen anyone, because it is no longer the truth. Only the truth can set us free. (And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32.)

Now, I am not against education. I have taught for the past 25 years. Our ministry operates New Life Bible College and Seminary. I do know that the number one place to look for our education is at the feet of Jesus. Then we need to look other places to reinforce what we have learned from the Spirit of God.

If we want to see God's Word as it is, number one, we have to clear the sin out of our life and look at His Word through a pure heart. Sin can cause us to pervert His Word and twist it to do away with our guilt. We have to get a real and right relationship with the One Who wrote the Book to be able to understand It's pages. We also have to be willing to let go of our way and accept His will for our lives.

God's Word won't always be our way. It won't be flesh's way. If we aren't submitted to Him, we will try to change His Word to make it be our way, whether we mean to or not. We must desire the pure truth of His Word, with His understanding, with all our heart. We have to know that it is the only thing that can make a difference in the lives of those around us that we have a burden to reach. We also have to open up our heart to His love. God is love, and to be able to understand His Word we have to understand and accept His love. When we open up our hearts to His love, then, no matter what happens, we have to hold onto it. Even those we are trying to reach may often hurt us. We cannot waver in His love, or we will lose a great part of His Word. Then we have to seek the Teacher that He has sent. We have to submit to God's daily working in our lives to keep His truth alive. We have to know that if we really want to learn and understand God's Word, we will have to submit to It's power and what It can work in our lives. Hebrews 4:12 tells us, "For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Then we have to live it. How can we tell someone about it if we have never been tried in it's fire. We have to know what it means to trust His Word completely, with nothing else to lean on, before we can declare it to His people. The only way people will believe it, is if they see it working in our own lives.

How can a college do all that in our lives? How can man's knowledge or teaching get us ready for a real ministry? If you want a supernatural ministry, get in touch with a supernatural God. Then *if* He were to choose to send you to a college then make sure that it is one that meets His approval. Seek His face and go with the understanding that you listen to His voice as you go.

The greatest school I have ever known pastor's to go to was the school of affliction. This may sound strange. But hear me out. This is the school where God takes you all the way down where you have no one to lean on, nothing but Him to hold to, nothing to rely on but His Word. At this school, He strips away your flesh, and leaves you standing in Him. Who can try you, shape you, ready you, but God? Only He can train you. Only He can really teach you. Only He can get you ready for what you will face.

Then, after you have sought God's face, do like Paul in Galatians Chapters 1 and 2. He tells how he went alone, sought God's face, and then came back to seek the counsel of men. Take what God has shown you before God's people. Let it be tried and proven. You will never be given a truth that God's real people won't recognize. There is safety in council. Proverbs 11:14 tells us, "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety." (Make sure that the council you take it before is Holy Ghost filled and led by God, and real and right in their relationship with Him.) The Holy Ghost in one of God's people will agree with the Holy Ghost in another. If it is right, you will be able to bear witness or find a peace with what someone is saying, because God's Spirit in you will be at peace with it. Also, the spirits of others will agree and have a peace with what you are saying if it is God's Word. There is a peace and safety in knowing this.

The Bible tells us in II Timothy 2:15, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth." Learn His Word. Don't just learn it from someone else's interpretation. Go to God and seek His face. Let Him speak its pages to your heart. He was there when it was written, right on scene, thousands of years ago. He can reveal it to you in a way you can understand and write it on your heart.

A big part of any ministry is reaching out to meet the needs of people. Only God knows their hearts and needs. Only He knows what they need. Only He can reach out and help through you. Most of the time people “act out”, they do the opposite of what is happening on the inside. That flesh is all we see. God can see their innermost feelings and thoughts. Our flesh is all we have to give them on our own. But with God’s help, He can see into their hearts and He can use us to reach them, if we submit to Him and seek His help.

As a teacher working with troubled young people, I have had my students bring in other young people for me to help them. There have been several times when I had never met these young people before this, but I could tell that they seriously needed my help. Often I have known that they were considering taking their lives and whether or not they did so could be based on what I said or did. I didn’t have a chance to consult my notes or handbook on counseling. I didn’t have any room for mistakes. I had to do it right. I did, because I prayed, submitted myself to God, and accepted His guidance. He knew their heart and what they needed. He knew the perfect words to say. He knew how to love them, through me, with that God love that breaks chains. His anointing broke the yoke.

We have nothing to offer. No amount of education will really change that. If we don’t have the Holy Ghost and allow Him to work through us, we will just make a mess. If we submit to Him, He can work a miracle through us. Study to show yourself approved. Study, study, study, and study some more. Learn all you can from those around that God will use to teach you. By all means go to college and learn. But always recognize the supreme teacher. Submit to Him. Learn from Him. Let Him use you. After all, it’s His business we are about.

Chapter 6.
But God, My Circumstances
Are All Wrong

“I would serve God more, but right now there are circumstances in my life that won’t let me. I have conditions that are wrong. When these conditions are better, I’ll do something for God.” This is another thing that stops people from serving God. (When I hear people say this, I think of what I have heard Bishop Goad say, “It’s time to get off your conditions and do something.”) If ever there was a need to serve God and obey Him it is now-not later. God is not a fool. He calls people with knowledge of how He is going to use them. He doesn’t call us just because He wants to recruit as large a number as He can. He calls us with a purpose. Romans 8:28 tells us, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called ***according to His purpose.***”

God calls people with a pre-set plan to fit them. This plan is filled with things to do, people to reach and needs that you will meet. If you are called, God knows next year who you will reach, how you will obey Him. Three years from now He knows what your talents will grow to be. Ten years from now He knows how wisdom and experience will increase your ability so that can do much more. He sets in His knowledge things for you to do, people you will sew seeds to, seeds that others have planted that you will reap, stands you will make that will change circumstances around you, battles and fire that will try you. God is not limited by time in His knowledge. How else could He have inspired the book of Revelations? He has foreknowledge and can predestinate our lives. In other words He can fix our destination ahead of time. He knows all things. He sees all things, now and in the future all at one time.

He can do this because of that knowledge and power that He has. He doesn't go by chance. He has a detailed plan. Ephesians 1:11 tells us, "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will."

Now a lot of people get that predestined thing all messed up. They think that their entire life is predestined and preplanned so that it is even predetermined for them whether or not they will go to heaven or hell. They think that what they do here on earth doesn't make any difference. They believe that their final destination, whether heaven or hell, is preset by God and there is no way that they can find out what that is until they die. Sounds like an excuse to be able to sin to me. Wonder what they do with the rest of the Bible? The way people twist the Word of God to meet their needs will land them in hell.

God's Word says we are created with a free will to choose the course of our lives. It says we are judged by those choices. Hebrews 2:3 tells us, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him." Matthew 7:21 says, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." God sets a destination and plan before us that is tailor-made, perfect in His knowledge. But sad to say few people ever lay down their self wills to find it, let alone follow it. Matthew 7:13-14 says, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat, because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

Many start down the right road of His perfect plan, but they turn and run away from being totally committed.

At the first sign of needing to commit something, they turn around or make up their own path and say, “I believe I have found God’s accepted will in my life”. (This means they are making it up as they go along, and are doing what they can get by with. That is such a dangerous way to live, always walking on the edge of their salvation. If I were going to gamble with something, I surely wouldn’t gamble with my eternal destination.)



I hear a lot of teaching about the good, the acceptable, and the perfect wills of God. This is taken from the scripture in Romans 12:2. This scripture talks about the “good and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” Some people teach that this is actually three wills of God. They say there is a good will, not the best but it is OK to go there. Then there is the acceptable will of God, a little better than the good will of God, but still not the best. However, it is OK to go there too. Then there is the perfect will of God, and they say that is the best, but don’t worry if you don’t go there. I am here to tell you that is all a lie of satan. That is made up by people who don’t want to do it God’s way. There are many, many times in my life where if I would have settled for less than what God told me to do, I would be dead, I would be spiritually destroyed, or I would have let others be spiritually destroyed. There is one will of God and that will of God is good, perfect, and acceptable. There is one will of God and all those words are adjectives to describe that one will of God. All other things are just plain and simple disobedience. The opposite of obedience is disobedience. You are either doing one or the other.

Some start down His path, but when it starts to rub against their self will, they throw it down and stomp off. Some may go for miles and years, but an unconfessed and unrepented of sin that they have hidden in their hearts stops them. Sin is like a rope that is tied around our neck. We can only go so long before we come to the end of it.

When we do, it chokes the life right out of us. Some travel on God's planned road until they allow others to hinder them. They allow others around them, relationships they have put before God, to sidetrack them. Some get tired and quit, because they have traveled in the flesh, not in the Holy Ghost and they run out of strength. Some let their steps get off by degrees and never reach God's destination for them. Many allow circumstances to block their travel. But it is no fault of the Master Planner that they don't reach their destination. It is their own choice.

It will be our own choices that land us in hell. God has a perfect plan for us, but if we fail to follow it, we bring about our own judgment. God has sent His Son, His Word, His Spirit to guide us, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and others. Everyday He woos our hearts. If we get sidetracked, He forgives and draws us back. If we, however, choose to ignore His perfect plan for our lives, stop trying and quit, there is nothing He can do for us. If we justify our wrong choices and excuse disobedience, we have to face the outcome of that. We cannot reach heaven without keeping God's Word and obeying. Revelations 22:14 tells us, "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Ephesians 5:6 says, "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."

Knowing all that, it is easy to make up our mind that we are going to serve God, find His will, and walk in it. When we do, we will find that those circumstances that were stopping us are not so great after all. Are there really any circumstances we can't slam through with God's help, when we get determined? Even the worst things will be turned around and used for our good. Romans 8:28 promises, "And we know that all things work together for



good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.” We must get determined. When you do, then the worse circumstances won’t stop you, you will watch them turn out for your good. Many times we can have walls around us that block us. They look solid enough to stop us. They are put there by the devil to prevent us from obeying God. When we get determined that we are going on, and we walk in the Holy Ghost and obey God, we will find that these walls were only paper walls after all. Don’t let circumstances stop you, or even slow you down.

God is Lord of your circumstances. Believe me, the more you do for God, the more circumstances the devil will put in your way. But as you break through each one, you will understand that they can only cause you to grow and build your relationship with God. When the devil sees something that is working, that will stop you, he is smart enough to do it over and over and over again. Break through those walls, step out in faith and obey God. After all, from God’s viewpoint, they are only paper.

Chapter 7.
But God, What Will It Cost?

We live in a generation of complacent people. Everywhere I go, I see people who have become content in giving God only a little corner of their lives. They do not want to rock their world. They have a set routine and they are not willing to get uncomfortable for anyone, not even God. They do not want to change their life or sacrifice anything. They say with their mouth that the Lord is coming, but they do not act on that belief. If we really in our hearts believed that Jesus is coming soon, if we really believed that those that are not an obedient part of Him and a part of His body will be doomed to face the pain of tribulation, if we really believed that those that do not accept His salvation and obey Him are doomed to an eternal hell, we would be busy doing something about it.

Throughout the scripture we see that anyone who made a difference paid a price. Serving God is not always easy. We have to make sure that He is Lord and Him only do we serve. We have to endure persecution and trials, but we know that "...we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." (Romans 5:5) We have to face battles from satan, but through it all we are made overcomers. Romans 8:37 tells us, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." I John 5:4 tells us, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." We also know that all things work together for the good of those that love the Lord and are called according to His purpose. If we back up on paying a price, we often settle in compromise.

In the halls of faith in Hebrew, we see that these people achieved honor with God because of their suffering, not because they were always comfortable. If you want to get God's attention, you have to be willing to be uncomfortable. You have to wake up from the slumber of complacency, get real, and obey Him. Our flesh does not want to obey. It has its own set of rules. God has to break our wills to be able to do God's will. Most people are not willing to do that. If you are willing, God will use you. That's guaranteed.

When we think of someone in the Bible who suffered for Jesus, we think of Stephen. He was the first recorded martyr of the New Testament. His story is found in Acts, Chapters 6 and 7. We first meet him when the disciples chose 7 men to oversee the daily ministrations of the church. They were to see to the day-to-day duties that were, before this, being neglected. They were the first deacons. In verse 5 we see that they chose Stephen "a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost." Stephen was ready. He had faith in what God could do, not faith in himself, but faith in what God could use him to do. He was full of the Holy Ghost, not full of flesh. He was submitted and immersed in God's Holy Ghost to the place of being full. He had the Baptism or fullness of the Holy Ghost.

One of the keys to being able to obey God is having the experience the Bible refers to as the Baptism or filling of the Holy Ghost complete with speaking in tongues. It is an experience that God has provided to give us added power we need to overcome spiritual battles, and to have the boldness to stand. It comes as a gift to those who seek it and believe. References to it are found in Matthew 3:11, Luke 11:13, Acts 1:8, Acts 8:17, Acts 10:44, Acts 2:4, Acts 4:31. If you have not received the gift of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost and prayer language that comes with it, speaking in tongues, ask God to give it to you. He surely will.

It is a gift, and you can receive it. (If you don't understand about this, a good book to read is my book titled, *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost*. This and all my books can be downloaded for free at www.freechristianonlinebooks.com and many can be ordered on Amazon.com.)



Stephen was full of the Holy Ghost. He made a difference wherever he went. We can try to do things for God on our own. Until we submit to His Spirit, and get filled up with it, we will never be able to make a difference. Stephen was full of God. People noticed that he walked with God. In verse 8 we see that "Stephen full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." In verse 10 we see that, "They were not able to resist the wisdom, and the spirit by which he spake."

Now you can not have this kind of an effect on those around you if the only time that you think about God, talk to Him, submit to His Holy Ghost and let His power revive you, is when you are in church. You are only in church 1 to 3 times a week. That isn't enough to keep revived in God. When we have Holy Ghost services I see two kinds of people in the church. There are those who haven't been in touch with God all week. It takes until the end of the service for them to get their minds on God, pray through all the spiritual garbage they have collected around them during the week, pray through and repent for their weekly disobedient attitude, and get in an attitude that God can bless. It takes until the end of the service for them to get free enough for God to reach. Then there are those that from the first prayer are ready to receive something from God. They have been in touch with their Master constantly during the week, rejoicing in Him, receiving orders, tuned in to Him and obeying. They have been in touch with the Holy Ghost and submitted themselves to Him and allowing Him to bless them during the week. They are what we call "pumped up and primed up and ready to go up".

One of the greatest things about a Holy Ghost blessing is that the Holy Ghost is a person that you can take home with you. He will bless you in your home. He will bless you every day. Not just on Sunday. That is one way to keep a household strong, let the Holy Ghost move in. Let Him move into your home. Let Him take charge of your home. Don't let spoiled children, or unsaved husbands, or wives, or disobedient children take charge of your home. Let God be in charge. When you do you will find that the same victory you feel at church, you will start to feel at home. Stephen didn't just have a Sunday, in church, relationship with God. He was in touch with God every day. He was able to influence those around him.

One of the reasons we know Stephen made a difference is that he made enemies. When you have walked with God and you have obeyed Him, you will have enemies. The devil will get stirred up against you. But just like Stephen, the only thing he can ultimately do against you is to further the cause of Christ in your life. Jesus is Lord. You may not understand how even the very things that satan brings against you can be worked out for your good, but God's Word says it can. God's Word isn't based on what we feel or think. It is the truth. Satan may have thought that he had Stephen just where he wanted him. God's plan was just beginning to unfold. Aren't you glad God has the last say so?

Many in that crowd had pure hatred in their heart. I am also convinced that many of them hated him without cause, without personally knowing him or what he stood for. They just reacted to the spirits that satan sent against them to influence them. They may not at first have known what Stephen stood for, but when he got finished, they knew. He preached one of the most powerful sermons in the New Testament. The Holy Ghost that he was filled with used him and God had His say. God had a plan.



His plan worked. When the people looked on him they “saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.” (Acts 6:15). They saw no hatred, anger, or fear, or anything else our flesh brings against us. They saw the countenance of an angel. Only the power of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost can strengthen us in the face of persecution. Only the power of the Holy Ghost and the Word of God can cause us to endure, and reach out even to our enemies with God’s Word.

We know that it was God’s Word because verse 54 tells us, “When they heard these things they were cut to the heart.” The Bible, the Word of God written or spoken, is like a two edged sword. “For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12). It will divide the good and cut out the bad of the very depths of our soul. It will chastise us like nothing else. It will bring us a rebuke. The Word of God is true. It can’t be changed to fit our likes or wants. So many try to do so. It will consume us and break us. It will refine us. I praise God that His Word has this power. It has endured for thousands of years. It will endure through eternity. We have to submit to its truths and accept them. We have to believe it is God’s Word totally in our hearts. We have to submit to God’s Holy Spirit who will write the Word of God in our hearts. When we do we will change every time we allow His word to work in our hearts and minds.

Because the Word of God is so powerful, it will bring a reaction. These people around Stephen heard the Word of God that he brought to them through the anointing of the Holy Ghost, and they refused to accept it. In doing so, they rejected Stephen. If you are rejected because someone around you has rejected God’s Word, rejoice.

Don't put yourself down because they didn't accept it. The part of accepting or rejecting is up to the individual you are trying to reach. If you have submitted to God's Spirit and in a right attitude have kept God's Word, if you have allowed Him to speak through you, then they are not rejecting you, they are rejecting Him. Now here is one thing to think about. If you are not living God's Word, if you are being hypocritical and double minded in your own walk before others, then if they reject you because you are telling them about God's Word, then that is your problem and you are a stench in God's nostrils.

When you speak God's Word, you may not be liked by those around you, but you will have their attention. Sometime or other, in one way or another, they will have to respond to your words. I have had people come back to me years after I had witnessed the truth to them to tell me that they were sorry they had reacted to what I had told them in the way they did. It had taken years, but they had finally responded to God's Word that I had given them. They had given their heart to the Lord. They had come back to tell me that I was the first person they wanted to tell, because I had really influenced them. When I had first talked to them, you sure couldn't tell that they had gotten anything out of it. God's Word won't come back void. Isaiah 55:11 tells us, "So shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Don't take at face value instantly what God's Word has accomplished. Give what you have spoken to Him. Trust Him for the results. Witnessing is a partnership between you and God. He leads you, you follow, He takes over and is responsible for the results.

In Acts 7 verse 55 and 56, the people there that day reacted to the Word of God, "When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with

their teeth.” What was Stephen’s reaction? “But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him....And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” (55-60) He died forgiving them with the same love His Lord had. The same love that Jesus showed as He hung on the cross. Only the Holy Ghost of God can enable us to have that kind of love.

What was the miracle of Stephen’s death? Maybe nobody there that day noticed the young man who held the coats for those that threw the rocks. But God knew him. His name was Saul. The Bible doesn’t exactly spell out the impact Stephen’s victorious entrance into heaven had on Saul, but not too many chapters later Saul was converted. God used Stephen’s death. His suffering had a great purpose. How many others were encouraged in their walk because he had faith and obeyed, we do not know. His story still encourages hearts today, thousands of years later. Stephen could have said, God I have a headache today. I don’t feel like going down there with all that crowd. I don’t like crowds. I could hear some of us responding to God’s request today. We sometimes won’t even allow ourselves to be made uncomfortable, let alone allow ourselves to be martyrs. The greater the discomfort, the greater the impact. Obedience costs. Are you willing to pay a price? Are you willing to have a life that makes a difference? Will anyone benefit from your life?

Jesus was Lord of all. He lived in heaven and reigned with God. He gave it up to be born as a baby.

He came to earth to live a life of suffering and die on a cross for **you**. Philippians 2:6-8 tells us that Jesus “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” John 3:16-17 tells us why He would give up so much, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son in the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” Love will cause you to become uncomfortable. Love will enable you to pay a price and not even notice that you have paid it. Get so close to Him that His wonderful love rubs off on you. Turn and love those around you with His love. You will want to sacrifice. You will long to be made uncomfortable. Love is the key for obedience. Get filled up with His Holy Ghost, draw near to Him and fill up with His love, and you will be able to forget about yourself. He will use you. Just like Stephen, you will turn around your world.

As a reminder, what kind of discomfort will those find that do not want to be made uncomfortable enough to obey God? Deuteronomy 11:27-28 tells us, “Behold I set before you this day a blessing and a curse. A blessing if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day. And a curse if ye will not obey....” Jeremiah 7:23 tells us, “But this thing commanded I them saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.” II Thessalonians 1:8, “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is not a game to play when you choose.

Chapter 8.
But God, That's Not What I Want

I want to tell you the story about someone. She grew up in a Christian family. She had lived a very restricted life because of parents who loved her and wanted to shield her. She grew tired of the restrictions. She wanted to be free to do what she wanted to do. She had kept all the rules, but it had never really been in her heart to do so. The rules weren't bad, but she had always wanted to do things her way. She could hardly wait to get out on her own so that she could do everything she wanted to. She forgot that in rebelling against everything else, she was also rebelling against a God Who loved her and wanted her best interest. Because of that she found herself in a lifestyle, involved in things that were destroying her. She wanted her way, so she wouldn't listen to anyone, no one could help her. She died because she wanted it her way. She is spending eternity in hell because she wanted it her way. The ultimate end of wanting our own way and refusing to let God break and mold us is hell. This story like many people, young and old, that I have known. This story is about someone who was a Christian but turned away from God because ultimately she wanted her own way. There are many, young and old who find themselves in this same state.

The story of the next character that we want to study is found in the book of First Samuel. He first appears in I Samuel: chapter 9, verse 2, "And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier, person than he; from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people." The story of Saul is one of the greatest stories of obedience. In it we can find a lesson of who not to be.

One particular thing that we notice about Saul is this. He had God's Word. God sent to him a faithful prophet.

Samuel was a prophet that always spoke God's Word to guide Saul. I Samuel 3:19-20 says, "And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord." From the very beginning Samuel was a key figure in Saul's life. Saul could not plead ignorant. In every major decision he had to make, Samuel was there to guide him. He knew which way was the best way to go. I was in a courtroom several years ago. A man approached the bench to hear his sentence. The judge asked him, "Sir, how do you plead?" The man replied, "I plead ignorant." Needless to say that wasn't one of the right answers. Needless to say that got a laugh from everyone there. That man's sentence was no different than if he would have answered guilty.

We cannot plead ignorant before God. God has sent us someone to lead us that is more powerful, more sure, more dependable than faithful Samuel was to Saul. He is the Holy Ghost of God Himself that comes to live in us when we accept Jesus in our hearts. We can have as much of Him as we will let into our lives. He will lead us, and guide us into all truths. "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak...." God didn't leave it there, but He set aside His church, His body of believers, to obey Him, flow in His Spirit, operate in His gifts, and reach out to His people. He also set aside preachers and apostles to speak the truth, to strengthen and lift us up. We have His Word that has power to make us over comers.

When all things are taken into account it is harder to fail than it is to win. But why, you ask, are there so many who fail. Even though Saul had all the knowledge of how to do right, he was not conditioned to obey. I have watched a lot of people and learned from them.

I have watched people who from the time they were small were conditioned to rebel. Parents, we have no idea of the eternal damage that we can do to our children when we refuse to discipline and we allow them to rebel. They may never unlearn this. If we cannot obey those around us and we are conditioned to rebel against them, how do we expect to be in an obedient attitude toward God. Obedience is an attitude. It has to be a part of us. If it isn't a part of us toward the people that are in authority in our life, then it won't be a part of our relationship with God. I was a very rebellious child growing up. It took years after my salvation for God to work this out of me so that I had a humble and obedient heart toward Him. If you have this type of nature, ask God to break this out of you so that you can have an obedient nature.

One thing that can help you not to fail in serving God is studying those that do fail, learning from their mistakes. We not only can learn from those that are victorious in God's Word, those who overcome, but we also can learn from the mistakes of those that lost. One of the mistakes that Saul made we find in I Samuel 15:2. Here he says to Samuel, "...I have sinned for I have transgressed the commandments of the Lord and Thy Words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice." It is so sad to see the young people especially that fall away from God because it isn't popular in their crowd to serve Him. Just as sad as the pastors, preachers, and teachers who compromise on God's Word and fail to declare His full counsel to the people they minister to because they are mindful of people's opinions. Saul lost out on serving God because he placed the opinions of the people above the opinions of God. We don't know for sure, but I wonder if He didn't lose out on God forever. Only God can give us eternity. Only God is perfect and worth serving. We can follow people to hell if we aren't careful, and if we compromise.

I have seen so many people young and old forsake God for a relationship with someone. After they did, they found out the one they had forsaken Him for was far from perfect and even more times then not trapped them. They trapped them in a life of despair. Don't put anyone before God. I have even seen people put family above God, when it was God's will that they have that family, they just got priorities out of line, and placed them above God. Even good things can be made to be bad if we don't allow God to be number one and obedience a principal thing.

Another mistake we notice that Saul made is that he had God's Word, but he stopped listening. I'm sure that the incidence recorded in Chapter 13:13 was not the first time that he failed to hear God. It is important because it was the worst. It brought about his judgment. "And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee."

What does it cost us when we fail to obey God? Many of us could answer that. How many of you know the pain that has come from disobeying something God told you to do or not to do? Sometimes we pay for things the rest of our lives. Even though God forgives us, we still have to face the consequences and then later the scars. Galatians 6:7 tells us, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." We live in a world that preaches if it feels good do it. Thousands and thousands of people, young and old alike, are reaping the disaster of that message. It doesn't work. What you sow in your life will reap consequences.

These will be consequences that you will have to pay for. I heard someone say, “God is a loving God. How can He judge those that disobey Him?” He will and does. He is also a faithful and just God. He loved us enough to send His own Son to die to give us eternal life. If we fail to accept His gift and honor Him, then we will cause ourselves to be judged. Continued disobedience can eventually lead to our souls being doomed to hell for eternity. II Thessalonians 1:8 tells us, “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Don’t stop listening. When you hear God’s voice speak, treat it as the number one priority in your life. Obey Him at all costs. Nothing else will work out as well. This is another mistake that I think Saul made. Saul started thinking for himself. He became wise in his own eyes. In his eyes he was wiser than God. He had an answer or an excuse for his disobedience. God told him to do something; he wanted to do something else, so he did. We can’t have it all our way. What God wants for our lives is best. Here is a verse I have mentioned lots. Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” We don’t understand our own selves and our own lives most of the time. Yet we want to try to tell God, Who created it all, how it should be, what we want to do, and when we want to do it. If our children treated us the way we react to God when He speaks with something for us to do, we would stay angry with them. Does God, our heavenly Father, deserve less? Listen. Put yourself in neutral gear and obey.

I can’t help but believe that somewhere along the line Saul lost his love for God. When we are in love with Him and we walk close enough to Him to really see Him

like He is we don't want to lose sight of Him. We hunger to draw even closer. He is that wonderful. We want to do everything that we can to please Him. Obedience at whatever cost, is a joy. When we pull back and let other things come between us, that's when it becomes hard to obey. That's when we start to become number one. We are number one instead of Him. That's when we can't hear Him.

So many people tell me this. I just can't hear God's voice. God used this illustration to teach me about listening to His voice when I was young in Him. I was scared, because sometimes I would hear what I thought was God, but it turned out wrong so I knew it wasn't Him. I learned that there were three voices that I would hear in my heart: my own thoughts, God, and the devil who is always sneaking around to trip you up. I asked Him to show me how to tell who was who. He showed me a picture of me being upstairs in my house. Someone came in downstairs whom I had never met. I could hear their voice, but I didn't recognize it. Later they came back. I wasn't sure who they were. The more often they came, the easier it began to recognize them. Then the day came that just by the sound, I recognized them easily. The more we talk and fellowship with God, the easier it gets to identify His voice. The more we obey Him, the easier it gets to be able to obey Him instantaneous, with joy, because we know our Lord and Master. John 10:4 tells us, "...and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice." Get close enough to Him to know His voice. Fellowship with Him, get to know Him.

Saul had gotten farther and farther away from God as time went on. Most of the account of his life tells us not of the great things that he did for the country that he loved or the God that he served, but of his obsession with David. David had done no wrong to him, but Saul became obsessed with finding and killing him. This controlled him.

He allowed a jealous and bitter spirit to control his life. This kind of obsession seems a bit extreme, but over and over I meet people that are allowing other things to control their lives, except for the love of God. It may be bad attitudes like jealousy and bitterness, doubt, fear, or being negative and full of doubt. More often than not it is obsessions with things or activities, the pride of life, or what other people think, or other people other than God. These are often things and people that they have placed in a priority in their life over God. If we let other things control us what will be our end? We can only have what those things offer us. Jesus is Lord. God is supreme. If they aren't number one in our lives then a relationship with them doesn't really exist. How can we say we know God if He isn't Lord in our lives. The closer I grow to Him, the more He pushes out the lesser things. He is just that wonderful. I don't mean that we become obsessed so that we forget our jobs, our lives, and our families. I mean that when He is first, He enhances all the other, bringing them into focus, putting priorities where priorities should be, and turning everything around us into a much better life.

I recently asked someone dear to my heart to go with me to a ladies retreat. They had been suffering from a mysterious illness for years. I really believed that if they went with me this could lead to their healing. They answered me that they couldn't go, because their children had an activity planned and right now their priority was on their children. Oh, how sad to see those who have other things in their lives before God and obeying Him for real. Only God can make a life whole. So many times I see parents catering to their children to make sure they are involved in all the right things. They push out obeying God in a day-to-day walk to get it all done. Their children grow up to be disobedient and don't respect God. The parents, who intended to be the best all along, wonder why.

Don't put other things in your life before obeying God. Don't influence your children to do the same. What you live before them will be how they live. No matter if it isn't what you tell them is right. Also be sure that you don't allow your children to control you, no matter how small or big they are.

How does the story of Saul end? In I Samuel 31:4 we see that he takes his life at his own hands. Let God be a priority in your life. Let serving Him be number one. Let Him break your will and make you into His likeness. Choose His will instead of your own. Both of the people in this chapter began with their own self-will as a number one priority. God has to break our will before we can serve Him. I have watched for years the people who never let God break their will. They haven't committed all their desires and thoughts to Him. The things that they refuse to commit about themselves are the things that the devil uses to destroy them in the end. It may be something small, but it is enough for him to use to take them to hell. Our self-will can destroy us. Jesus is like a rock. When you fall on Him, He breaks you, when He falls on you He crushes you. When you fall on Jesus and you find His love for real, you will be broken. You will no longer live for your self. You will no longer be the number one priority in your life. You will no longer want to direct your own paths. But you will want to live for Him and to obey Him. He will become number one in your life.

He is Lord and He is the one we have to worship. His will is number One. Mainly because He is so much wiser than we are. We don't even know what is right for ourselves let alone what we really want. We think we do. We even become right in our own eyes. What He wants for us is so much better. When we allow Him to break our wills He can use us. When we become broken and allow Him to clean out our hearts and minds, then He can use us.

When we allow ourselves to become broken and His Spirit can move us, we can even do the supernatural, because He is a supernatural God. If we are stubbornly trying to serve God on our own, we will quickly run out of strength, wisdom, love, long suffering, faith. If we are broken and allowing Him to work through us, we will have His strength, wisdom, love, long suffering, faith, because we will be tapped in to an inexhaustible supply. Don't be full of yourself like Saul. Let God take your self-will and break it. Let Him work in you and break you.

Let God mold you into a vessel that He can use. In Jeremiah 18:2 and 3 Jeremiah was told to go to the potter's house. We all need to go from time to time to a potter's house. He watched there "and the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it." If you really want to be used by God, let Him break your self-will, so that you can be molded into a new vessel, "as seemed good to the potter", the Master potter. Let Him mold you, move and flow in His Spirit, reach out when He reaches out, speak with His Words, go where He sends you. You will then be able to make a difference in the lives around you.

Chapter 9.
But God, I Have
Too Many Other Things

Solomon is first Mentioned in II Samuel 2:24. "... and she (Bathsheba) bare him a son and he called his name Solomon: and the Lord loved him." Not we all know the story of David's marriage. David paid for this sin many times over in his life. What we sow, we reap, and sin reaps heartache and misery. But God doesn't hate us when we sin. When we repent and make it right with God, His love does not fail us. Solomon was a child that was born out of a relationship that was created by sin. Nevertheless in this verse, we see that the Lord loved Solomon. People will make us pay for our mistakes and our sins for a lifetime, shun us and withdraw their love from us on a whim. God does not. Even on the day he was born, God loved Solomon. There must have been something very special about him. We know that as he grew older, he had a heart to want to please God. We know that he had a humble and meek spirit. In I Kings 3:5-14, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream. God asked him what he wanted. Solomon answered, "And now, O Lord, my God, Thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father. And I am but a little child...give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people." In verse 11 God is pleased with Solomon's answer and in verse 13 He gives him great wisdom, and also riches, wealth beyond imagination.

Something to remember about Solomon is that by man's rules, he wasn't supposed to be king. He had an older brother, Adonijaah (I Kings 2:15). Solomon was not the oldest and in those days that meant he was by birth right, nothing. God had a wonderful plan for Him. We may feel like we are nothing with nothing going for us.

We may be convinced that we will never get any better. God can turn it all around. His Word promises in Deuteronomy 28:13 that if we trust and obey Him we will become the head and not the tail. “And the Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the Lord thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them.” Somewhere along the line Solomon got God’s attention. Through these scriptures about Solomon we see that his relationship with God was serious, and a priority.

Solomon became known world over, and even down through history, for his wisdom. God kept His promise. Solomon had looked at his weakness and asked God to compensate. God kept His Word. God also blessed him with the riches that Solomon didn’t ask for, just because his answer pleased Him. II Chronicles 2 tells us the details of the temple Solomon built for the Lord and the details of his own house. Further details of his riches are found in II Chronicles 9. His entire kingdom amazed the richest rulers of his time. God kept His Word.

Then problems began. In Solomon’s own words we see a change beginning. When we read Ecclesiastes 2:1-10 we see that Solomon started to concentrate on his riches and his heart was stolen away from God. To understand this read the scriptures. In I Kings 11:1-4, 6 and 9, we see that his wives also turned Solomon’s heart away from God. How could this happen to one that loved God and had tried to please Him so, one that had so much of the favor of God in His life? I believe that Solomon allowed other things in his life to become a priority and this eventually led him away from His love for God. Other things crept in slowly. They became number 1. He began to be consumed with his own day-to-day affairs, and his mind was stayed less on God. The Bible tells us to keep our minds stayed on Him.

Isaiah 26:3 tells us, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in Thee.” Just like Peter who took his eyes away from Jesus and sank, Solomon turned his eyes and heart away from the one who had picked him up and made him what he was, the One Who had given him all he had. Solomon forgot God. God was no longer first in his life. Now I am sure that Solomon did not mean this to happen purposefully. I believe that each day, little by little, this change took place in his life. I see so many today that do the same thing. They become involved in many things that cause their hearts to be drawn, little by little, away from God. They don’t realize until it is too late what has happened.

I was talking with someone the other day that hadn’t been in church for years. At one time they had been dedicated in their service to the Lord. I asked them what had happened. They answered honestly that they had no idea. Things happened, circumstances came up to keep them out of church. They got too busy in their day-to-day routine to serve God. Gradually, they weren’t even sure when, they gave up on their relationship with God entirely. That is how satan works. Little by little, bit-by-bit, he will wear you down and steal your relationship with God. He will bring things into your life that will become a priority over serving God. The Bible tells us that God is a jealous God. The first commandment tells us that we are to have no other God’s before him. We are only to serve Him. We may not worship idols today, but there are many things that we can let become Lord of our lives.

The worst thing that we can put before God can be our own self-will. We want to do things our own way. We don’t want to submit to God. Our way can only fail. Our way can only lead to destruction. His leads to eternal life. We could let money, jobs, and the pride of life separate us from God. I have seen so many lose out totally.

They lose out on their relationship with God because of a Sunday job. It was made a requirement at their work to come in on Sunday, which caused them to miss church. It is better to lose out on a job, and get another one, than to miss heaven. It could be other people, family members or someone we love. The saddest thing I have seen happens when someone leaves God for a relationship with an unsaved person they love, and they go to hell with them. If you love someone don't let them go to hell. Make God a priority in your life. Show them that you have made a priority by keeping a right and strong relationship with Him. Then they will know that God is worth serving, because they see your dedication to Him. If they serve God for real, not because they are serving God to get you, then consider a relationship with them.

God says not to be unequally yoked. He has a reason for putting this in His Word. When we get to heaven, I wonder if Samson's friend Delilah will be there. Even the best of friends or loved ones, when put before God, will turn out wrong. He is Lord. If we don't allow Him to be Lord of our lives, number 1, then we do not really have a relationship with Him at all. If our lives are built on other things, then they will only fall apart. He is the glue that holds our lives together in proper perspective.

I know that no one intends to let God take a second place in their life. If you had gone to Solomon not many days after God first spoke to him and told him how his life would end, he would probably have been very angry with you. When people turn away from God it happens so gradually. Little by little other things take priority. It may be a job that requires working on Sunday, but is needed to be able to keep the life style that we've chosen going. It may be a boy or girl friend or friend who isn't a Christian. It may be an unsaved spouse that gradually wears you down or an acquaintance you have at work.

(One of my favorite testimonies of unsaved spouses being won to the Lord by persistence is that of a friend of mine. For years her husband fought against her walk with the Lord. Through it all she stayed faithful. They now have their own ministry together both of them share the Word of God with others. This is a story that I have heard happen time and time again.) It may be a sport or activity that requires most of our free time and energy. It may be a rat race life that leaves us no time to spend in fellowshiping with God. It may be a way of thinking that steals our mind away from believing His Word. It may be bitterness, anger, or other things that creep into our heart and steal our love for Him. Nothing else is worth losing His love for. We could gain the whole world and lose our soul and what would that profit us.

Not long ago I heard someone that had narrowly escaped death say that they were so grateful for that experience and how it had changed their life and how they thought. It had caused them to rearrange their priorities. What they had thought was so important wasn't and the things they had neglected were the more needful. Who is number one in your life? If the Lord comes tomorrow, will He find you in love and sold out to Him. When He was on the cross, we were number one to Him. Does He deserve any less from you?

Some may ask why did God give Solomon those riches if he knew it would cause him to turn away from serving Him. The riches weren't the reason Solomon failed to serve God. It was his choice. The Bible tells us that God doesn't tempt us. James 1:13-14 says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." We are drawn aside because of weaknesses in our flesh that we refuse to commit to God.

We are drawn aside because we fail to obey Him. We are drawn aside because we refuse to keep Jesus as a number one priority and the things that we hold onto above Him draw us aside.

In light of this, is there a king in the Bible who had a lot of the same things Solomon had that did not allow those things to turn his heart from serving God and doing what was right? In II Kings 22 we see the story of a young king who turned his world upside down. King Josiah came to rule at a time when there had been a long secession of evil in rule. King after king before him had done evil in the sight of the Lord. The temple had been allowed to fall to ruin. God's Word was forgotten. God raised up a king to change all this. When Josiah was appointed as king he was only 8 years old. He only reigned 31 years. We don't know how old he was when he made the biggest difference to his kingdom, but we know it had to have been when he was very young. I know there were probably many times when he thought he wasn't old enough, experienced enough, or wise enough. I'm sure those that were older than him constantly reminded him of that. He didn't listen to them, but to the voice of the One Who had commissioned Him to do a job. He allowed God to help Him change his entire kingdom. He kept His heart on God, not on his kingdom, obeyed Him, and turned His nation around. II Kings 23:3 tells us "And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant." His riches may not have been as great as Solomon's, but riches are riches and power is power. I am sure that he had to overcome both. He made a stand in the middle of evil generations. His commitment made a difference. So can yours.

Chapter 10.
But God, Why Do It Today

Several years ago I talked to a young lady about accepting the Lord into her heart. She let me know that she wasn't ready, that the decision to serve God wasn't one she wanted to make right then. There were other things that she wanted to do first before she settled down to a commitment. There were other things that she had in priority over her eternal life. At the age of 19 she was killed in a car wreck. The circumstances of her accident all pointed to an instant death. She died while drinking. The life style she had chosen above serving God led to her death and most probably an eternity in hell.

I recently was talking to someone very close to my heart who knows that they are called to serve God on a total, full-time basis. When I first met them, 16 years ago, they told me that they knew without a doubt they were supposed to do so. For the last 16 years I have watched them make a priority out of everything in their life that the devil hangs in front of their nose. They have yet to obey God in their calling. They grow and change very little in their relationship with God. Condemnation because of not obeying has all but silenced the voice of God in their life. When asked about their plans, they answer, one day I will when all the circumstances are right. The devil works overtime to make sure these circumstances are never right and to make sure barriers exist. I wonder how long they will be able to fight condemnation and the circumstances the devil is bringing before they give up on their relationship with God entirely.

Procrastination is one of the most dangerous sins we can commit. Procrastination tells God that we aren't going to obey Him right now, because we have better things to do and we don't at present have time left over for Him.

Procrastination is bred by a life style that has everything else as a priority, except serving God. God says that He will direct the path of the righteous man. Psalm 37:23 tells us “the steps of the good man are ordered by the Lord.” If we fail to walk in these steps when He tells us to walk in them, how can He direct our paths? If we put off doing what He tells us to, we wind up not obeying Him at all. Or we wind up running away from His blessings and headlong into destruction. How many times a day do you say, I want to do more for the Lord but I don’t have time. Stop and think. Why is it that you don’t have time?

I can remember a time when three carloads of us were traveling to a tent meeting a good distance away. I was in the first carload. We had a feeling to hurry up and left a little earlier than planned. The carload behind us was delayed. After we’d traveled a while we stopped at a store just long enough to run in for some soft drinks. The second car pulled in as we were getting ready to pull out. They asked us if we had seen the plane that had crashed on the highway. Just minutes after we had come through and minutes before they did, a small plane had crashed on the highway we were traveling. Don’t put off what God tells you to do.

Don’t take a chance in putting off what God directs you to do in reaching out to those around you. I never will forget someone telling me that they were at a gas station when God directed them to witness to someone there about their soul’s salvation. They didn’t do it. A few miles past the station they ran into a terrible wreck. Later they found out that the person they were supposed to witness to had died in the wreck.

I once was led to witness to a man that lived near me. I passed by his place every day on the way home, but put off witnessing to him every day. I dreaded talking to him because I knew that he was a hard man to talk to.

One day he had a stroke and lay for days in a coma hanging between life and death. During that time, I knew for real what it meant to face one day going to heaven and standing before Jesus with the guilt that this man had gone to hell maybe because of my disobedience. I prayed for that man's soul like I had never prayed before. God did a work, and he came out of the coma. I later talked to him and he told me that while in the hospital he had an experience that changed his whole life. He had met God, knew He was real, and accepted Jesus as His Savior. Don't put off obeying God. He may not need your obedience tomorrow. Tomorrow may be too late.

We are individuals. God made us that way. He called and chose us to do individual works. There are people that nobody but you will be able to reach. You have unique experiences, abilities, and life that God has created in you. There may be gifts and talents God has chosen for you to have and only you can fit in a particular place using these gifts, the place that He has ordained, or set for you to have. When you fail to instantly obey Him, a gap is left that no one else can fill.

One of the greatest dangers of procrastination, especially in today's generation is found in I Corinthians 15:52, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." The Lord will return in a twinkling of an eye. There will be no time to change from a disobedient state to an obedient. I am not sure that those that are consistently disobedient will be in the rapture. How many undone things are now cluttering your life? If the Lord returns can He say to you, well done thou good and faithful servant? Let's get real with God, be obedient, and submit your plans and your life to Him. Make Him a number one priority. Let Him be in control and use you. Don't put it off.

Chapter 11.

My Testimony

I believe that one of the greatest encouragements to our faith can come from the testimonies of those who have walked in the places that we are walking in. I want to share my testimony in walking in obedience with you so that you can be encouraged in your faith in your walk. I have shared spots of it through the book, but I want to share more. In other chapters, I have included other testimonies that will build your faith as well.

The first time that I knew that I was supposed to serve God was a time when I was middle school age. Parent don't even think that your children at that age are too small to take serving God seriously. An evangelist that was a friend of our family gave me a Word from the Lord. He told me that I had a calling on my life. He told me that I would one day serve God and that I would serve Him full time in a ministry. Years passed by after that day. During that time I wandered around in the world and succeeded in destroying my life in the things that this world offers. God never let go. And His Word, during that time, never let go of me. Neither did His promises for my life. When I gave my heart and life back to God, those promises were there for me. I knew that full well the day that I went to share with my grandmother, who had prayed for me during those empty years, the news that I was going to be working full time with a ministry. Much to my wonderment, as I walked into her house to share this news with her, who was there visiting? That same evangelist who had given me that Word from God all those years before. I had not seen him since I was little. God showed me that His promise had not left. That was over 20 years ago. I am still here where He put me. Sure there have been times when it has been hard. But how hard would it have been if I weren't in His will.

Sure there were times when it seemed like all the gates of hell were broken loose and the devil was pounding me with everything he had to keep me from going forward in those promises. During those times, I just keep to the vision that the Lord put in my heart. And I remember the power of that promise that He made. You can rest your life in the fact that God does keep His Word.

One of the things that God used to get me going in the right direction was a pot of spaghetti. Believe me, He can use anything. I hadn't been back to the Lord but for a couple of years when I happened to go to a tent meeting in our town. I didn't understand all I knew about this crazy tent preacher, but I knew that there was something about the services there that drew me like a magnet. I had not been around the anointing of God much before that day. There was something going on there that was life changing and I became hungry to be a part of it. I had been really hurt by previous ministries that I had been a part of. God had taken me on a tour to see what other types of ministries were like. As part of that education, I carried a few scars. That's why God used a pot of spaghetti to show me that this ministry was one that He would bless, and if He would bless it, then I could trust it. We had taken a pot of spaghetti to the tent crew before the meeting that night. We all ate a lot. There was only a little left in the pot before the service. I was at a tent meeting, and Bishop Goad was preaching. That night he spoke about how churches needed to lay down their divisions and fellowship together so that they could work together for the Lord. He invited the congregation to stay for spaghetti and fellowship. That was the first time that I wondered about that crazy tent preacher. Flesh doesn't understand Spirit. When someone is walking in the Spirit, what they do will not be comprehended by those who are walking in the flesh. God told him to do what he did, but I wasn't listening to that voice. I didn't know about that.

I was listening to the voice of flesh, not to the supernatural voice of the Spirit. I was listening to the voice that was saying that we only had about enough left to serve just a very, very, very few people. We all prayed that night that nobody would stay. Guess what? I think about 30-40 people stayed to fellowship. They all were fed. Spaghetti grows just like fishes and loaves when the need arises. That's when I knew that these people were to be trusted. I knew that God had done a miracle. I had been teaching in a public school. I had made a pretty good salary. Much to my family's dismay I walked out of that job and left everything I had to obey God. I didn't know these people, but I knew that God did. I knew that I was hungry for His Spirit. I knew that I wanted to obey God more than I wanted anything else in my life.

My life, since then, has never been the same. Many times I have wondered what my life would have been like if I had not obeyed God. I am glad that I am here wondering what that would be like, instead of walking in disobedience wondering what it would have been like to obey God's voice. I have had my heart's desires. I have been blessed. Sure, sometimes it has been rough sailing. When you obey God, it is not guaranteed to be easy. Matter of fact, like I have mentioned before you will have a storm because of the enemy that will try to stop you. You will have a storm, but you will be in the right ship when it comes. The ship that has the One that can speak and calm the storm. The ship that has the One that can see you through to the other side and to the glorious victory that lies there.

One of the greatest stumbling blocks that can stop people's faith from reaching out and obeying God is finances. I had a great job teaching in the public school system. When I walked away from my job, I left the town I was living in. I packed up all my furniture and stored it in a friend's house. I had an old Volkswagen van at that time.

I fixed it up like a little apartment with a bed and dresser. If I had to live in that van, I was going to obey God. Guess what? I didn't have to live in that van. I was given back a hundred times more than what I ever gave up. We now have two homes. One is rental property. The last time I moved I had to give away furniture because I had too much. I would hate to think that I had to pack up my clothes and move them. That would be a job. I can say that in the last 20 years we have not gone without. Every time you give, God will bless it, and return it in abundance. There have been times when the ministry, like many ministries that are following God, has had financial difficulties. I can tell if a ministry is sincere and obedient to the Lord by the size of the battle that the enemy sets against it. Ours has certainly been fought. But even through the lean times, God has provided for us. We are blessed. It didn't matter how much we had in our pocket book or checkbook. It didn't matter that on paper we were financially sunk, God would come through. It might be at the last minute after we sweated for more than what seemed to be a reasonable length of time. It might have been after our faith was stretched to the limit, but God came through just in time.

Yes, it has at times been a battle. Yes, at times I have thought that I couldn't make it through another day. The enemy hates an obedient child of God. But there has been many, many more victories than there has been battles. When the battles came, the victory was even sweeter. Do I have any regrets? The only regrets I have are about the days of my disobedience when I wandered around in the world trying to find the place that I was to fit in. Only regrets about the time that I spent filled with emptiness, feeling like I didn't belong anywhere, and not knowing where to go next. It may be hard sometimes to step out in faith. I am, however, here to tell you that it is much, much, much harder to walk in disobedience.



In Closing

Let go and let God. What is it that God has for you to do if you will step out and obey Him? How will He use you if you present yourself to Him completely, trusting Him, and obeying Him? You may have started obeying God. How can you grow in that relationship of obedience? One day, I would love to read your testimony about how you obeyed, and where that led you. God can use you in a mighty way if you make yourself available.

If God has already been using you, hold onto that status. No matter how long you serve God, the enemy is always there trying to spy out chinks in your armor, places where he can sneak in and steal your victory. He is no respecter of persons. Make sure your defenses are strong. Sometimes as time goes on we let down our guard. We begin to get tired and a little complacent. That is just the opportunity that he looks for. Never look at your relationship with God or at what you are doing for Him and get the attitude that you have arrived. Don't do that until the day when God calls you home.





