

## Prayer

Open our ears, O Lord,  
to hear your word and know your voice.  
Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills,  
that we may serve you today/now and always. Amen

## The importance of being obedient

In 1966 in the USA, psychiatrist Charles Hofling conducted an experiment within a hospital. A person would telephone a nurse, saying that he was a doctor and giving a fictitious name, ask the nurse to administer 20 mg of a fictitious drug named "Astroten" to a patient, and that he would provide the required signature for the medication later. A bottle labelled "Astroten" had been placed in the drug cabinet, but there was no drug of that name on the approved list. The label clearly stated that 10 mg was the maximum daily dose.

Hofling then selected 22 nurses at a hospital for the actual experiment. They were each telephoned by an experimenter who identified himself as Dr. Smith, who asked them to administer the drug and said that he would write up the paperwork as soon as he got to the hospital. Nurses who followed the instruction were stopped at the door to the patient's room before they could administer the "drug".

By rights the nurses should have refused "Dr Smith's" instructions because

- The dosage they were instructed to administer was twice the recommended safe daily dosage;
- Hospital protocol stated that nurses should only take instructions from doctors known to them; they should not have followed instructions given by an unknown doctor over the phone;
- The drug was not on their list of drugs to be administered that day, and the paperwork required BEFORE drug administration had not been done.

The nurses were thought to have allowed themselves to be deceived because of their high opinions of the standards of the medical profession. The study revealed the danger to patients that existed because the nurses' view of professional standards succeeded in persuading them to suppress their good judgement.

Obedience can be a challenge, obeying your parents or guardians, obeying the law, obeying your boss at work, even obeying God... Exodus 19: 5-6

*'Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'* ....

As we grow in our walk with the Lord, **obedience becomes the avenue by which we come to know Him better**. When we obey Him, He pulls us closer to Himself and teaches us more about His general rules, what the Bible often speaks of as *precepts*, and His love.

Quite often our view towards obedience can be something like this... 'Lord I'll do whatever you tell me as long as I agree with your plan...and it needs to be sensible and realistic as I don't want to come across as fanatical or extreme...' whatever one calls that –it is NOT obedience.

In his earthly guise Jesus demonstrated ultimate obedience, He also sometimes expected it and at other times challenged it.

If I may, I would like to draw our attention to a few seemingly insignificant moments that move to highlight the kind of obedience and submission God calls us to...

...a wedding was taking place in Cana in Galilee, at a point in the celebrations it was noted that the wine running out (and, as some believe, it had actually run out) – this was seen a social disaster in the eyes of that culture in those times. Jesus' mother, Mary's makes the point to him that they have no more vino. Her observational statement elicits a response of 'Woman why do you involve me?' from her grown up son. It's not hard to imagine in our modern day context Mary replying to him "*don't you talk to your mother like that*" - instead she gives some instructions to the servants "*Do whatever he tells you!*"

Jesus's mother leaves her request in His hands to deal with as He sees fit – she trusts and obeys He might not tell the servants to do anything. Yet, if He does tell them to do something—anything—they should obey, for then it is for His good pleasure and done in His time.

Jesus instructs them to fill some big pots with water... in line with Jewish customs, these pots would have contained water that would be used for ceremonial cleansing...so imagine the servants hearts being in their mouths when Jesus asks them to draw some of this water out and present it to the head Steward who is responsible for the food and drink at the wedding...

As we may know this act of obedience on behalf of the servants resulted in the first of the recorded miracles of Jesus where ordinary water suddenly became the equivalent of 'chato noof doo pap'.

The wedding hosts reputation was saved and even elevated as the guests found this to be the very finest of wines, the kind usually opened at the beginning of the celebrations.

Another often underplayed, yet significant moment is a part of the account found in Matthew, Mark and John's gospels. When the disciples are instructed by Jesus to get into boat quite possibly late in the evening and set off over the Sea of Galilee, renown for it's unpredictable weather conditions where a ferocious storm would whip up the relatively shallow waters in a very short space of time.

Why would the Son of God do this to his loyal followers? ..Could it be because it is in the **storms** of our lives that we most clearly see the **power** of Christ **at work** in our lives?

Jesus required them to be in this place, at this moment in order to display His Glory when he walks over the waters...

Ever the one for speaking before fully realising what the implications might be... Peter says:

Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water."

Jesus' response to Peter's appeal was not to give permission, but a command: .... "Come!"

He gives Peter no verbal assurance that he would, indeed, walk on the water. The disciple must draw his assurance solely from Jesus' command. That command was given to inspire Peter with assurance, and to prompt him to obey. **Peter's faith was tested by his obedience....**

That is frequently the way God acts with us.

Often He does not go into much detail when He calls.

### **In Genesis...22 :2**

"Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you"

In these words there is only enough information for Abraham to know what God wanted. Nothing more.

### **In the book of Matthew...4: 18 & 19**

"As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men'" (Matt. 4: 18, 19).

That was it...no explanations, no assurances.

In 2004 Lynda and myself believed we heard God's call to trust in and follow him... our understanding was that he wanted us to sell our home and our graphic design business - and that was it!!...

There was no indication of where we would live or how we would exist and pay the bills...and you know, I can't actually recall us ever sitting down and working out any back-up strategies... I just remember us believing that this was of God...

Over the next six months we prayed with a number others, both in our church and elsewhere, people gave us pictures and words that seemed to affirm what we were feeling and doing so we set about preparing what we began to call the Year of Obedience. The church elders and many people supported us, but just as many questioned our decisions and even our grasp on reality. Without going into the myriad of details that also included various dead-ends and disappointments, God led us to Lichfield and eventually to where He wanted us in order to bring us into the work he us to do. I would be lying if I

said that we were never fearful, anxious or worried, because those are very human reactions to uncertainty but we were kept focused by the awesome sense of peace God placed on us and the ease with which many things happened which may normally have seemed unlikely or even impossible

You see God loves us and is committed to us. He commands our obedience, not because He is a strict taskmaster, but because He knows the devastating effects disobedience and sin will have on our lives. Disobedience inevitably has negative repercussions—feelings of guilt, shame, and worthlessness, broken lives, destroyed marriages, and bitter disputes, among other things.

While sin can never change God's eternal love for His children, it certainly can disrupt fellowship with the Saviour and alienate us from His blessings. In times of disobedience, we become spiritually weak and unable to discern right from wrong. We can sink deeper into sin's grasp and find it impossible to reverse this trend on our own.

### **There is a need for submission**

To claim to be surrendered without yielding obedience is a contradiction in terms. Surrender means to be totally submissive to the will of the One to whom surrender is made, in our case, to God himself.

In several of the Indian languages of Mexico there is no difference between the words for *to believe* and *to obey*. And the people who speak those languages are surprised by the distinction that we make between the ideas. Yet that concept, which those Indians take for granted, but which is likely to surprise us, is precisely the Biblical idea of belief.

In the biblical understanding of the closeness of these two concepts, the strong challenge confronts us where we may well conclude that **if we do NOT obey God, we really do NOT believe.**

*So then we are faced with the challenge :*

Do we stand next to our pots of water, too paralysed, too fearful to make the next move?

Do we stand in the boat, uncertain, frightened and doubting?

Obedience to Jesus' call never lies in our own power. We will never be able to walk on water on our own. Nor does the call come on that basis. It comes on the basis of our trusting in Him to provide the resources to obey the command.

Our faith is tested by obedience, because God requires a kind of obedience only faith can supply.

In his writings on *The Cost of Discipleship*, the German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote "Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes."

This can be summed up as: all the responsibility to obey rests on us, but all the power to obey comes from God.

Shall we pray?

Lord Jesus Christ, fill us with your Holy Spirit, that we may be less of what we used to be,  
and that we may become more of what you want us to be.

Amen”