

THE JOURNEY

BECOMING MORE LIKE JESUS



UNIT FOUR – TO OBEY HIM

LEADER'S GUIDE

THE JOURNEY

DEAR LEADER,

Thank you for your willingness to invest in the discipleship of your people. We hope that The Journey will be a valuable resource for you. Just a reminder, we need your feedback to help make improvements. Please submit your feedback to thejourney@iphc.org.

In this document, you will find:

1. Unit 4 Commitment Forms

- Hold your people accountable to their commitments to show up, participate, and care for others in the group.

2. Eight lessons of Unit 4: To Obey Him

- Each lesson contains scripture, discussion, content, conversation starters, and At-Home scriptures and exercises.
- We suggest devoting 15-20 minutes to teaching the content, which allows for 20-25 minutes of discussion among the group. The conversation starters will be great at the end of class.
- For some of the discussions, we included possible answers that may help you start the conversation. Otherwise, scan the content of that section for helpful leads.
- In each lesson, there are At-Home scriptures and exercises. These are included to help participants carry the lesson into their week.
- Some of these exercises are simple and some may require more thoughtful scheduling, but please encourage your people to commit to the At-Home section. It is during this time At-Home that you will see the greatest growth in their lives with Jesus.
- Don't feel obligated to use all of the At-Home exercises. These are suggestions. You know your group and what they need better than we do. If these exercises fit your needs then please use them.

THE JOURNEY

- With any of the content or At-Home components, please feel free to alter, add to, and take away what doesn't fit your particular group.
3. At-Home Exercise worksheets and description sheets
 - At the end of this document, there are supporting documents for the At-Home component.
 - The worksheet can be completed each week. This allows the participants to make commitments and hold each other accountable.
 - Some of the At-Home exercises teach spiritual disciplines which might need more explanation. For those, we have included printable description sheets and worksheets.
 4. Be sure to also download the Participant Guides for your group as well!
 - The Participant Guide is a simplified front-and-back document that allows your people to stay engaged in the lesson, while also providing them with a take-home component.
 - Encourage them to bring a notebook and a Bible.
 5. For additional resources, check out our website at iphc.org/thejourney.

We want to help you in any way that we can. If you have questions, feel free to contact us. We want you to have success in discipling your people. Our prayer is that The Journey can play a small part in that.

In Christ,

YOUR DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES FAMILY

Email us: thejourney@iphc.org

Call us: 405-792-7171

BEFORE YOU CAN START A JOURNEY

IT'S ALWAYS BEST TO KNOW WHERE YOU ARE

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AS A STARTING
POINT FOR YOUR JOURNEY.

HOW OFTEN ARE YOU CONSCIOUSLY AWARE OF GOD IN THESE SETTINGS?

RANK YOUR ANSWERS ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10.

WORK	HOME	CHURCH	RELATIONSHIPS
_____	_____	_____	_____

WHERE DO YOU MISS GOD THE MOST IN YOUR LIFE? WHY?

MY COMMITMENT

- 1) Will you commit to participating in The Journey the next eight weeks to continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18)? _____
- 2) Will you commit to set aside time so that you can do the At-Home Exercises? _____
- 3) Will you commit to check on a friend in the group each week to see how they are doing with The Journey? _____ Who will it be?

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Please sign and date and hand in to your Journey leader.

MY COMMITMENT

- 1) Will you commit to participating in The Journey the next eight weeks to continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18)? _____
- 2) Will you commit to set aside time so that you can do the At-Home Exercises? _____
- 3) Will you commit to check on a friend in the group each week to see how they are doing with The Journey? _____ Who will it be?

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Please sign and date and hand in to your Journey leader.

THE JOURNEY

DEAR FELLOW TRAVELER,

Welcome to The Journey. We are so glad you are here. We believe that discipleship is a journey of becoming more like Jesus, and we want to come alongside you on this adventure. Perhaps you are new to following Jesus. Or maybe you've been following Him for many years. Regardless of your place on the path, we believe The Journey is for you.

The Journey is a versatile resource designed with the church and home in mind. The content will contain foundational, biblical teaching presented in an interactive format. It's intended for use in community with other believers. We also have built At-Home Exercises into the content for you to engage in at home throughout the week. We hope that these exercises help to strengthen your understanding of Jesus and hold you accountable for meeting with Jesus daily.

Our lives are radically changed by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit through salvation, but our journey with the Lord shouldn't stop at our salvation experience. We must then embark on a journey of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. By digging deeper into this relationship, The Journey will help you extend discipleship beyond Sundays. By immersing yourself into God's Word, prayer, and worship, you will fall more in love with the One who loves you most. Remember, there is always more to learn, still room to grow, and always support available for you on the journey.

We have been praying for you. We have had you in mind as we have been preparing this study. Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit would work mightily in your life as you commit to this personal and communal discipleship journey with the Lord.

With you on The Journey,

YOUR DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES FAMILY

THE JOURNEY

Table of Contents

UNIT FOUR: TO OBEY HIM

1. The Obedience of Jesus
2. Keep My Commandments
3. Obedience in the Covenant
4. Hearing God's Direction
5. Daily Obedience
6. Obedience vs Disobedience
7. Obedience as the Church
8. Obeying the Great Commission

THE JOURNEY

Table of Contents

UNIT FOUR: TO OBEY HIM CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

1. Kristi Cain
2. Dr. Harold Dalton
3. Dr. Ryan Jackson
4. Russell Board
5. Whitney Davis
6. Kevin Sneed
7. Karen Lucas
8. Whitney Davis

THE JOURNEY

Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT BIBLE TRANSLATION ARE YOU USING?

All scriptures used in The Journey will be the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

HOW IS THE JOURNEY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER BIBLE STUDIES?

The Journey is an invitation to say yes to Jesus in every part of your life. Centered around weekly class experiences, the focus of The Journey is on the 6 days you aren't with your group. We want you to grow in knowledge, as all Bible studies do, but we also want you to be transformed by the power of God and become more like Jesus. By connecting, growing in knowledge, daily intimacy with Jesus, and participation in community, we hope that you will experience transformation.

WHY IS THERE SO MUCH DISCUSSION?

We believe that the discussion of the lesson with one another is a vital part of learning. It teaches us to think critically about what we are hearing, to be dependent on one another (someone else may have an insight that we need to hear), and to build trust and relationships in the group.

DOES THIS WORK FOR SMALL AND LARGE GROUPS?

Yes! We believe that the flexibility of this resource allows it to function in both settings. It can be easily adapted to fit the needs of any sized group!

THE JOURNEY

LESSON ONE:

THE OBEDIENCE OF JESUS

INTRODUCTION: One thing we don't talk about much in the church is the high cost of discipleship. While it is true that we can do nothing to earn God's forgiveness, Christ calls believers to a radically different life than everyone else. The day we accept Christ as our Savior, we begin a new journey. It is a journey of becoming like Jesus.

In this lesson, we'll explore a variety of scripture passages that consider God's demands of those who commit to following Him. But before we look at those, it's important to ask, "Have I made Christ the Lord of my life?" There is a vast difference between asking Jesus to forgive your sins and committing to follow wherever He leads.

But here's the wonderful news: He loves you. He is the very definition of love (If you're curious about what "love" looks like, read 1 Corinthians 13:4-10. These verses describe Jesus). Because He loves you with an everlasting, all-encompassing, perfect love, you can trust Him. And if you can trust Him, you can follow Him, regardless of where He leads.

I. WHO DO I LIVE FOR?

READ ALOUD: 2 Corinthians 5:15: And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): In this passage, how does Jesus differentiate between the way someone lives before versus after they become a Christian?



- Before Jesus, we live for ourselves.
- After Jesus, we live for Him.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): The message of the gospel is good news. It proclaims that Jesus has come to rescue us from the consequences of and slavery to sin and give us eternal life. He does for us what we could never do for ourselves. However, that does not mean authentic Christianity will provide us with an easy life and that everything will go smoothly. Unfortunately, false preachers and teachers tend to water down and manipulate the call of Christ to make it sound overly comfortable and desirable. In fact, the Bible teaches that we should expect difficulties and suffering simply because we are Christians. The famous 19th-century preacher Charles Spurgeon summarized it this way: “They gave our Master a crown of thorns. Why do we hope for a crown of roses?”

II. SHOULD I EXPECT TO SUFFER?

READ ALOUD: John 15:20: “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”

Matthew 7:24-27: “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): If Jesus teaches that following Him will include suffering, why are we surprised when we encounter it? How does Jesus describe the foolish man?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): One of the primary ways we fulfill our calling as disciples is by following God’s commands obediently and

faithfully. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus compares two houses. One was built on the rock while the other was constructed on the sand. The Lord says the person who is sustained despite storms and trials will be the one founded on something solid. John 15 and Matthew 7 confirm that hard times will come, but we also find that there is a recipe for surviving: being deeply rooted and committed to the Truth: Jesus and His Word.

The Apostle Paul also prepares us for suffering, and he experienced it himself for most of his post-conversion life. It is clear from reading his epistles that he expected that all believers would suffer purely because of their relationship to Christ. For example, in 2 Corinthians 4:8-12, Paul highlights this fact while also encouraging us that it is in the suffering that we encounter new life:

“We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you.”

III. HOW DOES DEATH BRING LIFE?

READ ALOUD: Luke 9:23: Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What do you think it means to “carry our cross”? Why do you need humility to follow Christ?

- Carrying your cross is to die to yourself.
- Humility is the first step to full dependence on Jesus.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): The cross is more than a symbol of suffering; it represents death. So, when Jesus calls His disciples to take up

their crosses daily, he says that every day we will have to decide again and again to choose ourselves or choose Him. This all-encompassing, dying daily to self is one of the greatest challenges we face, but that doesn't mean it isn't worth the challenge.

This total life reorientation has a beautiful goal: to bring us to a place where we aren't just acting holy and righteous. Instead, the Holy Spirit uses our obedience, in ways we don't understand, to actually make us holy and righteous. God wants our hearts—our true and whole selves—and as we've seen, that road requires humility. But He does not ask us to go anywhere He has not gone.

IV. IS THIS GOOD NEWS?

READ ALOUD: Philippians 2:4-11: Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What encouragement for the journey do you receive from this passage? How does this other-worldly, all-consuming love of God make discipleship worth the hardship?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): If there is a key virtue that describes Jesus and thus should describe us, it is humility. What a challenge, right? But remember, we don't have to leave feeling overwhelmed and discouraged.

First, God is with us! He sent the Holy Spirit to help us become more like

His Son, and He created His Church so we could cheer one another on and speak truth to each other. We are not alone.

Second, Jesus is praying for us. The Bible makes it clear that the One who suffered the most also loves us the most, and He is sitting beside our Heavenly Father pleading our case.

Next, while Jesus expects us to follow Him with all of our hearts, becoming more and more like Him can take a lifetime. Be devoted but patient too.

Finally, remind yourself regularly why you have chosen to follow Jesus. At the end of this Philippians passage, we find the reason for our faith. It is because Jesus is the only One worthy of our devotion and worship because He was exalted (honored) by God Himself.

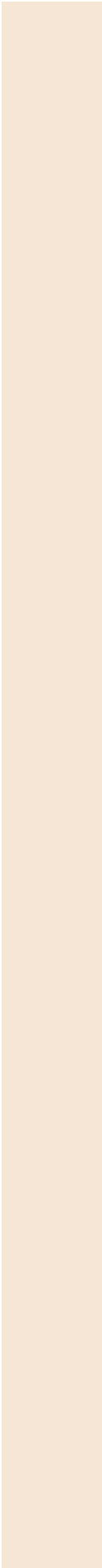
CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) In what ways do you still live for yourself instead of for Jesus?
- 2) Define humility in your own words. Why is humility so hard?
- 3) In addition to John 15:20 can you think of other passages from Scripture that should help prepare us (mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually) for suffering?
- 4) What is different about a discipleship based on duty and one based on love?

AT- HOME SCRIPTURE: Luke 9:1-27

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study Luke 9:1-27. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.
- 2) While it's common to think of scripture memory as something reserved for children, the book of Psalms gives all of us a compelling reason to make this practice a personal habit: "I have stored up your word in my heart, that



I might not sin against you...I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word" (See Psalm 119:11-16). Choose one of the Scripture passages we studied in this week's lesson and commit it to memory this week. To make this discipline easier, use one of the many Bible memory apps available, use a dry erase marker and write the verse on your bathroom mirror, or write the verse out on a notecard and keep it in a place you'll see often. Storing God's truth in our hearts will boost our confidence in God, help us follow Him more closely, and draw us closer to His Son.

3) Reading and understanding God's Word in community fuels love for Him and others. Consider a specific area where you have been fighting to get your way. Then, ask God to examine your heart and make it clear where you need to exercise humility. As you do, prayerfully discern if you need to respond in one of the following ways:

- Remind yourself who the real enemy is (and it's not other believers). Move from criticism and judgment to prayer and loving reconciliation.
- Consider whether God is asking you to let go of the fight. Ask God to show you if what you're fighting for is about Him or you. If it's about you, it's probably time to move on.



THE JOURNEY

LESSON TWO:

KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever thought about the many challenges a baby faces in his first year of life? Just think of how often he falls in the process of learning to walk. What if a newborn could think, reason, and talk immediately upon being born? After considering the challenges of the growing process, he might conclude that life is too hard and wonder if managing all the pitfalls ahead would be possible or even desirable.

First, the baby would learn about eating different foods—some things would taste good while others would be delicious. Touching certain things would feel good (soft); others would hurt (burn or chaff). Day by day, month by month, the baby would learn that some experiences are pleasant and others are unpleasant or even disgusting. “Do this,” “Don’t do that,” and “No!” would become familiar sounds. He must deal with all this and much more before even starting to walk.

I. FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS

READ ALOUD: Matthew 9:9: 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.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Growing up, were you told “no” a lot? Were all those negative communications really for your good? Is it possible to make following Jesus more difficult than it needs to be?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): In the beginning, Adam and Eve had an important learning experience in the Garden of Eden. God instructed them



concerning what they were permitted to eat and what was not allowed. There was good reason for both the do's and the don'ts. All the fruit in the garden was pleasant to taste, while only one, in particular, was forbidden because eating it would lead to death.

The reason Jesus tells us to keep His commandments is also the difference between life and death. The only good choice is clear—choose life!

Have you ever read or heard these famous words, “Read Directions First”? If you ignore these instructions, you might live to regret it. When opening a new purchase, the directions are usually tucked inside the package. These are given for good reasons. First, they explain the product and make the object easier to assemble and operate, to name the most obvious. The directions also include safety precautions. Not following these warnings can lead to frustration, malfunction, and perhaps even injury.

Jesus made keeping His directions simple. He began by calling His disciples with two words: Follow me. In other words, He was saying, “I am giving you the perfect model. Watch me; do what I do.”

There is no better way to know what pleases a person, and what does not, than to spend time with him or her. Watch what they do, listen to what they say, see where they go, and with whom they spend time. Jesus was saying this very thing to His disciples: Follow Me, and you will learn everything you need to know about Me. He spoke those same two words to other individuals, and He gives us the same invitation today.

Consider once again a baby growing up: suppose he is now grown and has his eye on a young lady he would like to pursue. How does he know what will and will not please her? The best way to discover her likes and dislikes is to spend time with her, thus getting to know her. That is exactly what Jesus was telling His followers.

II. KEEP CHRIST'S COMMANDMENTS

READ ALOUD: John 14:15: “If you love Me, keep My commandments.”
Luke 6:46: “But why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and not do the things which I say?”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Yes, there are commandments we must obey as we follow Jesus. If there are do’s and don’ts, what are they?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Jesus simplified all the law into two commandments (Matthew 22:37-40): Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.

Besides the positives, the New Testament also includes lists of don’ts, specific sins that must be avoided. For example, Jesus emphasized the importance of forgiveness (Matthew 6:15). He repeated several of the Ten Commandments to the inquirer in Matthew 19:18-21. And the Apostle Paul gave us a list in Galatians 5:19-21, as well as other passages.

A ruler of the Jews named Nicodemus came to Jesus one night asking questions. Instead of answering him directly, Jesus gave a command that surprised him: “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Jesus went on to explain to Nicodemus that being born again means having a new heart. After all, following Jesus is a matter of the heart. Obeying the commands of our Lord begins with a love for Him that makes pleasing Him the most important thing.

This new heart that the Scriptures speak of is a heart of love for Jesus and, therefore, a desire to obey Him. A heart of love focuses on knowing and pleasing the person one loves.

III. CONFESS, FORGIVE, & TURN AWAY FROM SIN

READ ALOUD: John 3:3: Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

I John 1:9: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our

sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): When a baby falls, a parent does not stop loving the child. Instead, the parent reaches out to help. Our loving Father does the same for us. He invites us to confess our sins, find forgiveness, and continue to grow. Do you see confession and forgiveness modeled in your life? Are these graces modeled in your church?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): As a baby matures, he will encounter many failures, setbacks, and injuries. At times, the child may not know what to do; at other times, he/she will refuse to listen and, in turn, learn some lessons the hard way. The child must admit failure and continue to improve, thus learning the lesson quickly.

The same is true in our spiritual life. The goal is always to obey and please our Lord even though we may fail at times. As followers of Jesus, we must learn to confess quickly, ask for forgiveness, turn our back on sin, and learn.

It is not enough to know right from wrong. Obedience must follow knowledge. Too many people spend their time focusing on knowledge, memorizing talking points, and debating the finer points of doctrine while ignoring the obedience factor. We must study to show ourselves approved unto God (2 Timothy 2:15), yet it is possible to have expert knowledge of the Bible and still live in disobedience. James (ch.2) reminds us we must have both knowledge and obedience at work in our pursuit of following Jesus.

Of course, rebellion is always a possibility. Anyone can choose to disobey our Lord's commandments. It happens when an individual makes the same choice Adam and Eve made in the Garden of Eden. He or she will suffer consequences as they did. Disobedience still brings grievous consequences. The wise decision is to not only know the truth but also to obey it.

CONCLUSION: The benefits of obedience are twofold: First, we are following God's directions for our life. The plan He has designed for each of us is to bless and not curse, a plan to prosper and not harm (see Jeremiah 29:11).

Second, and more importantly, obeying the commands of Jesus is to give Him glory. It is a witness to the world. Just as a city set on a hill can be seen from afar, our lives should bring glory to God for all to see (see Matthew 5:14).

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) What challenges do you face in keeping God's commandments?
- 2) Are there times when your obedience to what Christ commands flows more out of duty than love? Why do you think this happens?
- 3) What things help you focus on and prioritize your love for God? Do these things then impact your obedience?
- 4) Talk about a time when a decision to obey was hard but ultimately beneficial for you.

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE: 1 John 5:1-12

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Develop the habit, if you have not already done so, of reading the Word of God daily. Establish a consistent time, place, and pattern. Make this habit a high priority this week.
- 2) This week, pass on to others some of the things God has been teaching you. This kind of personal sharing is always a benefit to others. Do not worry about it being wise or intellectual enough, simply share what God is doing in your life, and watch others warm up to the good news.
- 3) A Christian writer once wrote, "The Lord's chief desire is to reveal Himself to you." This week, pay close attention to the different ways in which God makes Himself known to you.
- 4) Be careful in both your conduct and your conversation this week. Be mindful of the fact that others are watching to see if your faith has truly set you free.

THE JOURNEY

LESSON THREE: OBEDIENCE IN THE COVENANTS

INTRODUCTION: If you spend some time reading the Old Testament, you will realize that much of the story of the people of God seems like a ride on a spiritual roller coaster. That story may sound familiar if you have ever struggled in your walk with the Lord. In this lesson, we will take a closer look at how God deals once and for all with the problem of our disobedience.

I. THE INSUFFICIENT OLD COVENANT

READ ALOUD: Jeremiah 31:31–34 (ESV): “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Why was the old covenant insufficient to solve the problem of disobedience?

- The Old Covenant placed demands and requirements that hinged upon an individual’s obedience.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): It is important to understand that a covenant is different from a contract. A contract is a legally binding agreement between



parties. A covenant is a binding agreement, but it includes God as a witness and seal of the agreement. In the biblical covenants, God becomes not only the witness but also one of the covenant parties. In the old covenant, God promised to bless His people and to offer them a pathway for fellowship with Himself.

God is perfect. People are imperfect. God is completely holy and pure. People are basically unholy and impure. The only way imperfect people could be in relationship with an absolutely pure and holy God would be if He provided a means for them to navigate through the relational estrangement caused by their sin.

The old covenant was conditional upon the obedience of the people. If they obeyed, they would be blessed. If they disobeyed, they were subject to the curses and punishments stipulated in the covenant agreement. These blessings and curses, as part of God's covenantal agreement with His people, are clearly articulated in Deuteronomy 28.

By the prophet Jeremiah's time, God's people had demonstrated a disastrous relationship with the covenant God had given them. Despite many warnings, they continually betrayed the Lord and pursued relationships with other gods. Jeremiah speaks of these idolatrous pursuits in the language of sordid extramarital affairs. In a heartrending description of their unfaithfulness, Israel's idolatry is compared to a person who has exchanged his marital vows for prostitution (Jeremiah 3:1).

Given the Old Covenant stipulations, the people deserved punishment for their actions, and that punishment came in the form of the unthinkable—exile from the Promised Land. Throughout their history, Israel often had been unfaithful, and God had shown them mercy. Their disobedience and idolatry reached such a point that God chose to deal with them by sending a foreign nation to destroy their beloved religious institutions and deport them into captivity.

While the sixth century BC Babylonian exile was the climactic moment in the story of sin, it was part of a perpetual cycle evidenced throughout the Old Testament. God's people would sin. God would send judgment.

The people would cry out in repentance. God would forgive them and send deliverance. The people would recommit themselves to the Lord for a season. Then the whole process would begin again—sin, judgment, mercy, deliverance.

This repetitive cycle is what precipitated the need for a new way of dealing with people. That is why Jeremiah's prophecy promises a new covenant that will not be like the first one. The new covenant would have new guarantees and new promises. Instead of being written on tablets of stone, it would be internalized on the human heart. It would bring a lasting solution to the problem of sin and separation from God. The new covenant would include a new outpouring of God's Spirit intended to empower the obedience it required (Ezekiel 36:27).

II. A BETTER COVENANT

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 9:13–15 (ESV): For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What is the basis of the new covenant?

- The new covenant is based upon the death and sacrifice of Jesus Christ that cleanses us without need for future sacrifice.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Nowhere is the new covenant described more powerfully than in the book of Hebrews. Written particularly for a Jewish audience, the book highlights how Jesus fulfills the promises of the Old Testament. The old covenant required the blood of sacrificial animals to sanctify the unholiness of God's people. So, the writer of Hebrews argues, if God can accept the sacrifice of animals to do that, how

much more powerful would be the sacrifice of His own Son!

The writer indicates that Jesus' sacrificial death "purifies our conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Hebrews 9:14). In other words, whereas the old covenant had dealt with the external consequences of sin, the new covenant would go much farther and deeper. The sacrifice of Jesus would not only cover the external impacts of sin; it would also do something deep within the human heart. It would cleanse the conscience itself and even transform the hardened heart into a heart that was fully alive and sensitive to the Spirit of God (Ezekiel 36:26-27). The old covenant, mediated by Moses, never brought the people fully into the promises God wanted for them. The new covenant, mediated by Jesus, would help people receive the ultimate promise of eternal life.

The old covenant was based upon the faithfulness and the obedience of the people. The new covenant is based on the faithfulness and obedience of Jesus. None of us is perfect. Yet, Jesus provided the pure and perfect sacrifice that was powerful enough to redeem us from the deadly effects of sin. His sacrifice was so pure and perfect that He didn't need to offer sacrifice continually as the priests of the Old Testament were required to do.

The sacrifice of Jesus was a once-for-all-time action (Hebrews 10:12). In His perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God paid the eternal price of our sin. He fully accomplished our redemption, took the full work of our salvation upon His holy, perfect shoulders, cried, "It is finished," and "sat down at the right hand of God." Jesus is not in heaven fretting over our future or over whether or not His purpose will be accomplished. He finished His work and sat down on the seat of power and authority. He sat down on the throne of God Almighty.

Our will power could never be enough to accomplish the relationship God wanted with us. Our obedience wasn't powerful enough to secure a right standing with God. So God sent Jesus to establish that for us so that we might be in relationship with Him. Our obedience flows from His grace; His grace does not flow from our obedience.

III. OBEDIENCE—A WAY OF BECOMING LIKE JESUS

READ ALOUD: Romans 5:19 (ESV): For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Romans 8:29 (ESV): For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

1 Corinthians 1:30 (ESV): And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What is the ultimate goal of the Christian life?

- The goal of our life with God is to become more like Jesus.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): The ultimate goal of the Christian life is not to go to heaven. That statement may shock some people, but the biblical evidence for its validity is abundant and clear. The final goal of the Christian life is to be like Jesus. God has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son. That is, He intends for us to be transformed into His likeness.

Paul longed for people to mature until "Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). Scripture indicates that we are being transformed into His likeness in our experience of His Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18). And, the Word of God promises that at the end of our lives, we may not fully understand everything about the final state, but we can be assured that we will see and understand and know Jesus as He is, and we will be made like Him (1 John 3:2).

CONCLUSION: As we were identified with Adam in His disobedience and death, we have been united with Jesus in His perfection and life. Because of Adam's disobedience, we live in a broken world full of chaos, sin, and death. Adam's sin and our sins have terrible consequences for our lives and our world. But, just as Adam's disobedience introduced death and destruction, Christ's obedience brings righteousness, life, and peace.

Because of God's mercy and grace towards us, our disobedience and sin needn't separate us from Him. The truth is, none of us can deposit enough of our righteousness to pay the debts we owe due to our sin. But, thank God, the Father credits us with the righteousness of Christ! On my own, I am bankrupt and bereft, but in Jesus, I have a wealth of righteousness that I didn't earn (Philippians 3:9). I have the righteousness of Christ by faith in Him.

The closer I get to God, the more I want to be like Jesus. Rather than being the source of grace for me, my obedience comes as the result of grace in my life. The Holy Spirit empowers me to live like Jesus so that I become like the one who became sin for me (2 Corinthians 5:21).

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) What does it mean to you to know that our God is a God of covenant and not contract?
- 2) Talk about the statement, "Our obedience flows from His grace; His grace does not flow from our obedience." How would you explain this statement?
- 3) Are there areas of your life where you struggle wanting to be like Jesus? How does understanding the new covenant help you in this struggle?
- 4) In what ways do you find yourself operating like you live under the old covenant rather than the new and better covenant?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:12-25

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study Hebrews 10:12-25. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.
- 2) Many people live on a treadmill of guilt and shame because they don't feel like they live up to the standards of holiness. How does the good news about the righteousness of Jesus liberate us from that cycle? What is a practical way you can apply this to your life?

3) Spend some time thinking about your efforts at obedience. Ask whether your efforts to obey are “from grace” or “for grace.”

4) Do you really want to be like Jesus? Why? Why not? Are there any areas of your life where you struggle with that? What would people who really know you say about that?



THE JOURNEY

LESSON FOUR: HEARING GOD'S DIRECTION

INTRODUCTION: As we embark on our journey of following Jesus, we encounter some difficulties not faced by His first-century disciples. Back then, to follow Jesus was basically a straightforward matter of walking along behind Him as He hiked from town to town along the roads, hills, and valleys of Palestine. Followers of Jesus had the opportunity to listen to His teaching, observe His actions, and obey His instructions.

For us, matters are not so simple. Like the early disciples, we want to learn from Jesus' teaching, imitate His life, and do what He tells us. But He isn't here! He isn't sitting in our living room, walking the streets of our neighborhood, or riding along with us on our commute to work. How do we know what He wants us to do? How can we listen to His voice?

On occasion, God speaks directly with an audible voice, sends angels to deliver messages, or uses dreams and visions to communicate with people. But we don't have to wait for such extraordinary visitations to hear from God. He has provided the means for us to hear from Him every day.

I. HEARING GOD THROUGH SCRIPTURE

READ ALOUD: 2 Timothy 3:16-17: All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Hebrews 4:12-13: For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and



marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

Psalm 119:130: The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Has God spoken to you personally through the Bible? Can you give an example of when the words of Scripture spoke directly to your specific situation or need?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Many people today dismiss the Bible as an obsolete book for another time and place. But for more than two thousand years, the Bible has stood the test of time as a repository of eternally relevant truth applicable across cultures. Historically, the Bible far surpasses any other book in effecting positive changes in societies and individuals, leading to higher levels of freedom, justice, virtue, and human flourishing. The Bible is a miraculous gift from God to us, a precious treasure that has been preserved and transmitted from generation to generation at the cost of much blood, sweat, and tears.

So if we want to hear God’s voice, we naturally turn to the Bible. The eyewitness testimony of the gospel writers makes it possible for us to encounter Jesus, not in the same way as His first-century followers, but in a way that is no less real and life-transforming. And beyond the gospels, we discover that Christ is the unifying theme that ties together all the disparate books, both Old Testament and New.

We might wish that God would supply us with a specific set of instructions or a detailed map for our discipleship journey. But that is not what we find in the Bible. To be sure, the Bible offers us several commandments clearly distinguishing right and wrong paths. But far more than this, the Bible consists of historical narratives describing God’s dealings with a stubborn and wayward people; biographical vignettes of people who encountered God; songs and poems of praise and lament; prophetic warnings of judgment and promises of redemption; and letters addressed to churches and individuals explaining God’s plans and purposes and their implications for our lives.

As we read the Bible, we can see parallels between our lives and the characters introduced in its pages. We hear God addressing us in the echoes of His words to others. We learn what God is like, and come to understand His hopes and expectations for His people. Our faith is stirred, our motives are revealed, and our hearts are opened. We perceive more clearly how God is working in our lives here and now, drawing us into His story. And we understand better how to conform our lives to His will.

II. HEARING GOD THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

READ ALOUD: John 14:16-17: “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”

John 14:26: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”

John 10:27: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Jesus describes the Holy Spirit’s ministry as one of teaching us and leading us into the truth. How have you experienced this in your life?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus talked at length with His disciples about what life would be like for them when He was no longer on the scene. Despite the many times the disciples had failed to understand His teaching or missed the point of what He was doing, Jesus was not worried that in His absence, His disciples would flounder or wander off the path. He had great confidence that the Holy Spirit would be a more than adequate replacement to tell them all they needed to know and do.

Indeed, in Scripture, the Holy Spirit is also called the “Spirit of Christ.” Though Jesus is now in Heaven, He is still present among and within us

through the Holy Spirit. Jesus continues to communicate with and lead His followers through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit speaks to us in a number of ways. Through gifts of prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, and tongues and interpretation, the Spirit addresses God's people to deliver timely direction and encouragement. This often occurs in a meeting where believers are gathered for worship (See 1 Corinthians 12:4-10; 14:3).

The Holy Spirit does not speak only to missionaries, preachers, and others involved in public ministry. Every believer enjoys the privilege of receiving direction and instruction from the Holy Spirit. How does this work?

Picture Jesus walking along the road with His disciples. He knows them well. He can tell if they are fatigued, angry, hopeful, or fearful. He understands the challenges and hardships they will encounter in the next village. He speaks appropriate words of correction or comfort, admonishment, or encouragement. He offers forgiveness, warning, or instruction. He helps them process what they have just experienced and prepares them for what lies ahead.

This is what the Holy Spirit does for us, within our minds and hearts. The Spirit often brings to mind the words of Jesus, or other passages from scripture, at just the time they are needed. The Spirit may "check" us, deterring us from a particular action or direction (see Acts 16:6-7). He may convict us for wrong thoughts, feelings, or actions, leading us to repentance and change. The Spirit may give us appropriate words for a particular situation (see Luke 12:11-12). He may guide us to a place or a person through a thought or an impression (see Acts 8:29).

In these ways, the Holy Spirit communicates to us the personal presence of Jesus as our Shepherd and Guide. We follow Jesus by "walking in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25), continually looking to Him for counsel and direction.

III. HEARING GOD THROUGH PRAYER

READ ALOUD: Psalm 55:17: Evening and morning and at noon I will

pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice.

Romans 8:26: Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Romans 12:1-2: I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Matthew 11:15: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): People often think of prayer as a one-way transmission from us to God, in which we share our concerns, hopes, fears, and requests. Is this accurate?

- Prayer requires us to listen as well

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Prayer is not actually a separate and distinct means by which we hear from God. In reality, prayer and Scripture and the Holy Spirit form an interactive network through which God speaks to us.

The Holy Spirit, who inspired the texts of Scripture, also gives us an understanding of their meaning and brings them to our remembrance at the right time. We pray most effectively when our prayers are informed by Scripture, which offers a wealth of models to guide us and teaches us about the nature and will of God to whom we pray. The Holy Spirit also helps us in our prayers, communicating what is in our hearts even if our words are inadequate, and making possible a genuine link between a transcendent God and a human creature.

To think of prayer as our attempt to get in touch with God is completely backward. God is always the initiator in prayer. Whenever we reach out to God, we may be sure that He is drawing us to do so. Prayer may be defined as our response to God.

We may feel that God is silent at times, but this also communicates something important. The problem is usually not with the transmission, but with the reception. To a large extent, prayer involves tuning our hearts and minds to the proper frequency. There is static and distraction from competing broadcasts and a lot of interference from the barriers we build to hide and protect our hearts. It can take time and effort to clear out the clutter.

If God chooses to be truly silent for a time, it is never the passive silence of indifference. On the contrary, He is actively stimulating in us a deeper awareness of our need for Him, a deeper hunger for His presence, a deeper appreciation for His words of life. The silence is merely a prelude to deeper communion with Him.

We can and should bring our needs and desires to God in prayer. But to hear from Him, we must also listen. Prayer is not about dropping off a laundry list of petitions for God to take care of. Prayer is about drawing near to God, seeking His face and His heart, learning to see the world as He does, coming to value what He values. Prayer is about offering every aspect of our lives for Him to examine and purify and direct. Prayer is about coming before God with a readiness to hear and obey.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) How have you experienced hearing the voice of God in your own life?
- 2) Have you been intimidated or overwhelmed with how to listen and hear God speaking? Explain.
- 3) What practices or practical methods do you use to help you hear from God?
- 4) How does knowing that God wants to speak to you personally impact your obedience to Him?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE: Psalm 116

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study Psalm 116. Bible

study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.

2) Use a notepad, notebook, or mobile phone to record every time the Holy Spirit brings a verse of Scripture to mind this week. This will help you to develop the habit of listening for His voice. At the end of the week, review what God has been saying to you.

3) Set aside a special time for prayer every day this week, in which you pray through a psalm and listen for God's response. Don't rush, take time to wait and listen and meditate. Write down what you hear from God (suggested psalms: 1-5, 8).



THE JOURNEY

LESSON FIVE: DAILY OBEDIENCE

INTRODUCTION: Ezra Taft Benson said, “When obedience ceases to be an irritant and becomes our quest, in that moment God will endow us with power.”

Throughout The Journey, we are learning to know who Jesus is. Knowing Him leads to loving and trusting Him. We can walk successfully in obedience to Jesus out of a heart of love and trust. This foundation causes the believer to obey not out of duty or fear but out of a heart full of love, faith, and devotion.

In this lesson, we will explore some Old Testament and New Testament examples that will help us see how important it is to make obedience in our daily living a quest of our faith.

I. THOUGHTS ON OBEDIENCE FROM SAUL

READ ALOUD: 1 Samuel 15:3, 9, 19-22: “Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.” But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed. “Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?” “But I did obey the Lord,” Saul said. “I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal.” But Samuel replied: “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the



Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Have you ever heard the phrase, “obedience is greater than sacrifice”? What does that saying mean to you?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): In 1 Samuel 15, we find the story of King Saul choosing to offer a sacrifice to God over obedience to Him. At the beginning of the chapter, the prophet Samuel gave a specific message to Saul. God wants him to destroy the entire Amalekite nation because the nation had opposed Israel.

So, Saul gathered an army and killed them all, except for the Amalekite king, Agag, whom they held captive. Only the worthless livestock was destroyed, and the lives of the best animals were spared. God became angry with Saul, and Saul’s justification was that he had saved the best livestock to offer as a sacrifice.

While this may seem noble, Saul wasn’t obedient to the original command. Any sacrifice Saul could offer would not be an adequate substitution for obedience. The root of sacrifice is obligation, but obedience is rooted in love. Sacrifice may check off some box on a list we have created ourselves, but we have to watch our motives.

Sacrifice and obedience reveal two different heart conditions: one tends to result from a sense of duty, and the other flows out of a heart of love and trust. Sacrifice tends to be self-focused, while obedience is God-focused. Partial obedience is not obedience.

The more we know Jesus, the more we love Him. It is out of this love for the Father that our obedience follows. There is only one sufficient sacrifice: the death of Jesus on the cross. Our obedience is far better than sacrifice because it reveals a heart that is in love with Jesus.

II. THOUGHTS ON OBEDIENCE FROM PAUL

READ ALOUD: Romans 6:16: Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Why should Christians choose not to continue to sin once we have been declared righteous through our faith in Christ?

- We are no longer slaves to sin which leads to death, but we can live in true freedom to Christ.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Paul, whose original name was Saul, first shows up in the Bible at Stephen's stoning (Acts 7:58). Initially, he was known for persecuting the church. Saul encountered Christ on the road to Damascus and had a dramatic transformation, even a name change from Saul to Paul. Paul became a champion of the gospel after his conversion. His teaching proclaimed that we are no longer under the law of Moses, and that God's grace will always cover our sins.

So why should Christians not indulge in sin and disobedience? In Romans 6, Paul explains that we are not slaves to sin anymore because our old self has been crucified (vv. 17-18). He suggests that we still have a daily choice: will we walk in obedience and not let sin reign in our bodies or continue in disobedience and sin? Our old habits and ways of thinking still come naturally to us, but Paul urges us to stop giving ourselves over to that evil nature instead of surrendering to God. If we are alive in Christ, we should not live like sin still owns us.

Continuing to walk in disobedience leads to a life of voluntary slavery. Instead, we should live as slaves to righteousness. Sin always leads to death, while walking in obedience to Christ leads to freedom.

Paul went on to be so radically changed that instead of stamping out Christianity, his mission became to see the gospel spread throughout the Roman world. Despite having once been a slave to sin, Paul now walked out

a life of obedience. His story gives us hope. The poor choices we have made in the past do not have to rule our lives anymore. The transforming work of Jesus makes us new. We choose obedience from a heart of love for Christ, and that leads to righteousness.

III. THOUGHTS ON DAILY OBEDIENCE

READ ALOUD: Titus 3:1-7: “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Why is obedience hard for us?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): We know that Christ considers our obedience greater than our sacrifice. We also know that living a life of obedience to Christ leads to righteousness. So, let’s explore how this knowledge impacts our daily lives. To obey Jesus, we must know what He expects of His followers. It is impossible to live a life of obedience without spending time in the Word of God. We must be committed to a lifetime of learning to know Jesus more and more. When we discover what He commands, we must not be “hearers” only, but also “doers” of what is instructed.

In Titus 3, Paul relays instructions for godly living. We are reminded to live obedient and kind lives, showing respect and humility to all people, including those in authority (v. 1). We are told to be ready for every good work and to speak evil of no one.

We know that we ourselves were once disobedient, deceived, foolish, living

in hate and envy, and serving selfish pleasures. But, praise the Lord, we are now free from that bondage by the kindness and mercy of our Savior. The same grace that has been extended to us, we then must extend to others. We should avoid foolish controversy and arguments because they are not beneficial. The truth of God's mercy is profitable and will spur us on in doing good.

We are even cautioned to guard our thought life. We are to "pull down strongholds, cast down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-6).

Walking in obedience every day means dying to our sinful nature, thoughts, and actions, and choosing to walk in obedience. It means laying aside our selfish desires and fixing our eyes on Jesus. It means spending time every day in prayer, worship, and study of the Word. Our homes, our work, and our relationships with others should all be impacted by our commitment to walk in obedience. To obey Jesus out of a heart that loves and trusts him leads to righteousness.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) How would you define obedience to Christ?
- 2) Are there times you have perhaps chosen sacrifice over obedience? Explain.
- 3) What does actively choosing to obey God look like in your day to day life?
- 4) Relationships can be difficult. How can we demonstrate obedience in our relationships with others even when it's a difficult situation?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: Luke 16:1-14; Psalm 119:145-152

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study this week's scriptures: Luke 16:1-14; Psalm 119:145-152. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.
- 2) Take some time this week to reflect on how you demonstrate obedience to the Father. Write out your thoughts on what you learn through this reflection and what you can improve?
- 3) Learn to be faithful in the little things, as Jesus said in Luke 16:10. Make good use of your time, redeeming the moments by taking advantage of your opportunities to share your faith, to pray, or to read scripture.

THE JOURNEY

LESSON SIX:

O B E D I E N C E V S D I S O B E D I E N C E

INTRODUCTION: The human condition is characterized by disobedience. It comes naturally to us. Yet this was not always the case. Disobedience was not part of our original condition. We were created and called to represent God in His creation, but that calling was forsaken. As a result, humanity consistently rebels and resists God. We deny Him as our Creator and defy Him as an enemy. Yet God has provided a remedy to our chronic disobedience and a real possibility for us to become who we were created to be.

I. THE ROOT OF DISOBEDIENCE

READ ALOUD: Genesis 3:1-7: Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What is the significance of humanity being created in God's image? Why did God do this? How does this element of creation



influence our behavior towards God and others?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): To understand the root of disobedience, we must examine the first act of disobedience committed among humanity. Genesis 1-2 describes the creation of the world. All creation was intended to declare God's glory (Psalm 19:1-3; Romans 1:20) and to facilitate life.

Humanity was the pinnacle of God's creation. Adam and Eve were made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-17) and received the breath of life directly from the Creator (Genesis 2:7). Being made in God's image was less about how they looked physically and more about their behavior. When God spoke of creating humanity in His image, He did so in the context of humanity ruling over God's creation (Genesis 1:26) and increasing life in creation (Genesis 1:28).

Genesis 1 makes it clear that God has absolute authority over creation and is the ultimate life-giver. However, in making humanity in His image, He bestowed upon them authority as God's special representatives to carry on His work. Jeffrey Niehaus summarizes that truth: "God made humans in his image and likeness to represent himself both formally and functionally on the earth."

A further demonstration of humanity being made in God's image is seen in Genesis 2, when God presents two fruit-bearing trees (Genesis 2:9, 15-17). The "tree of life" bore fruit which Adam and Eve were invited to eat. However, they were denied the fruit of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Both trees were physically available, but one was off-limits.

God was not forbidding Adam and Even from obtaining knowledge of good and evil. Instead, being made in God's image naturally included the ability to distinguish good from evil. They knew it was good to obey God and evil to disobey. Until the serpent came along, they consistently chose to obey their Creator. We know their choice was genuine because the possibility of not choosing God was always with them.

This first act of disobedience involved a serpent (identified as Satan in Revelation 20:2). His method of temptation reveals a structure for understanding the nature of sin and rebellion.

Satan began his deception by planting a seed of doubt concerning the word and nature of God. He was hoping Eve and Adam ultimately would lose trust in God's word and character. Did God really say...? Can you really believe Him? Is He really concerned about you? Is He holding out on you? Before the act of disobedience was even carried out, the seeds of doubt and mistrust had been sown. Once this doubt and suspicion had taken root, the serpent introduced pride into the conversation. "God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). Notice how the enemy appealed three times to selfishness: 1) Your eyes will be opened; 2) You will be like God; 3) You will know good from evil.

Suddenly Eve and Adam saw the forbidden tree in a different light. What God had described as evil was now viewed as "good," "pleasing," and "desirable" (Genesis 3:6, NIV). Thus, they gobbled up the fruit and immediately felt the consequences. The seeds of doubt and mistrust grew into a vine of pride and selfishness, which quickly produced the fruit of disobedience.

II. THE RESULTS OF DISOBEDIENCE

READ ALOUD: Genesis 2:15-17: Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Why are the results of our disobedience sometimes delayed? Does this delay influence our response to disobedience? How and why does our disobedience affect others?

- The delayed effects of disobedience cause us to assume that our sin has no consequences, etc.
- Sin is never personal. There are always unintended effects that reach beyond us.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Although the results of the fall are numerous (Genesis 3), they all flow from the initial warning God gave humankind in Genesis 2:17. Disobedience brings death. The serpent convinced them otherwise: “You will not surely die,” he declared. Was he right? Adam and Eve continued to exist, and God did not strike them dead immediately. Though they did not immediately die physically, death was felt in several ways after their disobedience:

1. Humanity was cut off from the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:23-24). This tree seemed to be a means for God to extend His gift of life to His creation. By eating from this tree, Adam and Eve would extend their lives as long as they chose to obey. Having been cut off from the tree, they now can expect physical death.
2. Their relationship with God was severed (Genesis 3:8). Adam and Eve were no longer able to enjoy open fellowship with God. The action was just the tip of the iceberg. Underneath the surface was a level of mistrust in God and pride in themselves that drove a wedge between the Creator and His creation. Living outside of God’s presence is also being severed from the source of life.
3. Humanity is destined for dust (Genesis 3:19) as they gradually decay and return to the dust from which they came.
4. Diminished quality of life—The various consequences (ch. 3) reveal that quality of life among the disobedient will be much lower than what they enjoyed while living in obedience. The totality of the fall’s effect on humanity affected every aspect of human existence: physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually.

Despite the serpent’s promises, disobedience to God did not correct a deficiency. It caused our deficiency. Further disobedience, which became the pattern of human behavior after the fall, only brought more devastation to humanity.

III. THE REMEDY FOR DISOBEDIENCE

READ ALOUD: Philippians 2:5-11: Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Does obedience begin with outward effort? How can our understanding of Jesus' temptations help us overcome our temptations and disobedience?

- Obedience must always begin in the heart or the effects will be temporary. We can not maintain our commitment.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Obedience is not the remedy for disobedience. The whole course of human history demonstrates that we cannot will ourselves to be obedient in any meaningful way. The Prophet Isaiah (64:6) and the Apostle Paul (Romans 3:9-20) made this clear. If we simply attack our own or another's disobedience and mandate obedience, any positive change will be temporary. Like disobedience, obedience flows from the heart.

The disobedient have doubt and mistrust in their hearts toward God. Obedience grows from a root of faith and trust in God, the opposite of doubt and mistrust. Rather than pride and selfishness, deeply-rooted faith and trust produce humility: the ability to see beyond ourselves and towards the things of God. Only when a person is rooted in faith/trust and thriving in humility can he produce the real and lasting fruit of obedience. True obedience is the manifestation of faith rather than works.

This change in the root system of the human heart has been made possible

by the obedience of Jesus, who is described as the second Adam (Romans 5). Jesus succeeded where Adam failed. Shortly after Jesus launched His earthly ministry, Satan came to tempt Him (Matthew 4:1-11). Rather than finding Jesus in a beautiful garden, Satan found Him in a desert place. The first temptation of Christ was similar to the first temptation of Adam—eat this food. The second temptation was also like that of Adam—exalt yourself. The third temptation was also familiar to Adam’s—find success in a way contrary to God’s plan. In each case, Christ withstood the temptation and chose to obey. The achievements of His obedience delivers us from the consequences of our disobedience when we trust in Christ.

The rejection of faith produced the first act of disobedience, and it lies at the root of all disobedience. When a sinner turns to Christ in faith, believing His Word and trusting His work, the Holy Spirit uproots the fallen nature of Adam and reverses the curse. Jesus calls this being born again by the Spirit (John 3:1-8). When we come alive by the Spirit before we die in our bodies, we will live eternally with our Creator as He originally intended.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) Do you think roots of doubt, mistrust, or unbelief lead to disobedience? Explain.
- 2) What practical ways can we choose obedience over disobedience in our daily life?
- 3) How and why does our disobedience affect others?
- 4) This lesson stated, “obedience is not the remedy for disobedience.” Talk about what this means to you.

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE: Romans 3:9-20

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study this week’s At-Home Scriptures: Romans 3:9-20. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God’s Word speak to your life. Don’t rush as you read. Take your time.

2) Rather than identifying the acts of disobedience that need to be corrected, examine your heart for any roots of doubt, mistrust, or unbelief. Where do you lack trust in the word or work of God? Remember, doubt itself is not sinful. Doubts still arise in all who profess faith in Christ. Our prayer is often like that of the man at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration who saw simultaneously the glory of Christ and the destruction of his child and cried out, "Lord, I believe! Help me overcome my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Uprooting doubt and cultivating faith and trust is the best way to prune disobedience.

3) Take a personal assessment and determine if your endeavor to obey is propelled by faith or works. Trying to will ourselves to be obedient is actually an indication of pride in ourselves and doubt in our hearts. Rather than exhausting ourselves trying to be good, let us expend our energy on building our faith. What are some practical ways we can do that?

THE JOURNEY

LESSON SEVEN:

OBEEDIENCE AS THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION: Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the great American civil rights activist, once famously declared, “I have a dream!” King dreamed that his children would one day be judged by their character rather than the color of their skin. In Western culture, the meaning of the word dream is comparable to the word vision. King did not mean that he was sleeping and dreamed about his children. Instead, he meant he could imagine what life would be like for them under such circumstances, and he believed such a future was a worthy and attainable goal. For King’s dream to become a reality, it required a large-scale community response.

Likewise, God’s vision for humanity is so grand that it also requires a large-scale response from the Church—God’s community of faith. This lesson will explore what it means to be obedient to God as a Church.

I. KNOW GOD’S VISION

READ ALOUD: Matthew 22:34-40: But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

John 14:21: He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”



DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): How does the creation story reveal God's communal nature? How would you summarize God's vision for humanity?

- First person plural language reminds us that all members of the Trinity participated in the creation
- Loving God and loving people is God's vision for humanity

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): We must return to the beginning before we can talk about obeying God as a community of faith. Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden was evidence of broken trust between them and God. This was a serious problem because, to God, love is evidenced by trust and obedience. However, Adam and Eve wanted to know the difference between good and evil for themselves.

The creation story reveals God's communal nature. Genesis 1:26 states, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." Did you notice that terminology? God talked about Himself in the plural sense by using the words us and our. So, if God is plural and communal, it takes more than one human to reflect His image fully. Perhaps that is why right after creating Adam and Eve, God instructed them to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:26-28).

Community, fruitfulness, and mutual trust were at the heart of God's original vision for humanity. He wanted humans to have the same relationships with each other and with Him that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit enjoyed. He didn't create humans only to reflect His appearance. He wants them to mirror His character and behavior.

Jesus spent a lot of time explaining and demonstrating God's vision for humanity. During the week before His crucifixion, the religious leaders tried to trick Him into saying something incriminating to have Him arrested. Meanwhile, Jesus was teaching His followers as much about the Father and God's vision for humanity as He possibly could.

In Matthew 22:34-40, an expert on religious law asked Jesus what He believed to be the most important commandment. Jesus referenced scripture

in His reply, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” When He said this, Jesus confirmed that God’s vision for humanity could be summed up as loving God and loving people.

To fully apply God’s two greatest commandments, we must do so in community. We cannot love God without obeying His commands, and we cannot obey His commands without loving people on both a personal and a practical community level. The Old Testament contains many community laws and public prophecies to explain how God expected Israel to treat marginalized people, such as immigrants, foreigners, slaves, servants, the poor, criminals, and even their enemies. The New Testament shows that Jesus and the apostles both taught and demonstrated how Christians should treat outsiders and each other with love and respect.

II. MAKE IT PLAIN

READ ALOUD: Deuteronomy 6:1-9: Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the LORD God of your fathers has promised you—“a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Habakkuk 2:2-4: Then the LORD answered me and said: “Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry. “Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): How was the Christian faith passed on to you? Have you ever been part of a great team? What made it work?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): When an organization clearly communicates expectations, purposes, and goals, success often follows. Symbols, slogans, and strategic teaching to clarify the vision of a church, non-profit ministry, or even a family, can also help ensure that core beliefs and ministry goals are accepted and passed along.

Jewish tradition has always involved the use of symbolism to help each generation remember their faith beliefs. They have also carefully recorded the story of their people’s interaction with Jehovah. Christians also have used symbolism and have passed down the story of Jesus by written and spoken word. The cross, the sign of the fish, boat anchors, and the dove are examples of early Christian symbolism.

Two of the most meaningful symbolic ordinances (orders) of the Christian faith are baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Holy Communion). Jesus commanded that we observe these Christian acts of worship to help us understand God’s vision for the Church and humanity. Both are symbols of divine grace that should be celebrated in community.

Baptism symbolizes spiritual rebirth through the forgiveness of sin (John 3:1-21). In the early Church, new Christians had to be able to explain their faith, and they were required to renounce Satan before their baptism. When they emerged from the water, they were anointed and given a new garment before receiving the Lord’s Supper for the first time. The very act of baptism, when done with sincerity and understanding, is a gateway into that new life and into Christian evangelism.

The Lord's Supper symbolizes the privilege and necessity of receiving forgiveness from sin and grace from God. Jesus is understood to be the Bread of Life (John 6:35) and the Word of God in human form (John 1:14). Drinking from the cup reminds us that we share in Christ's suffering as we follow His teachings and take on the label, "Christian" (Mark 10:38). The cup also reminds us that Jesus' blood was shed for the remission of our sins (Matthew 26:28).

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 10:19-25: Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Matthew 25:31-46: "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me

no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What are the main ingredients for being able to run a race well? How can this be applied to God's vision for the Church?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Once a vision is established and made clear, it is of no benefit to anyone until it is enacted. Perhaps that is why before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His disciples to run with His vision. In some Christian traditions, evangelism or worship receive a lot of focus while discipleship or ministry to the poor may go lacking. In other traditions, acts of service may be a congregation's priority, but they may neglect to learn to trust God's guidance or dwelling in His presence. This is why churches need to continue to make God's vision clear. This can be done by making regular church attendance for worship and study of the scriptures a priority. The writer of Hebrews urged, "Do not give up meeting together as some have done."

When the church regularly comes together to learn and encourage one another, they are sure to be more successful in keeping their priorities right about sharing the gospel's good news in their community. A healthy church that understands God's vision will echo that vision for their function and mission. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and the imprisoned, welcoming the stranger, and sharing the gospel in love is part of that vision. Run with it!

CONCLUSION: The meaning of the word Christian is "little Christ." The meaning of the word Christ is "anointed one." God marked Jesus, the Anointed One, with the authority to fulfill His purposes in the earth. Jesus was, in effect, God's vision in the flesh. The true Church is also marked by

God's authority to fulfill His purposes in the earth. Primarily, that comes down to loving God by trusting Him enough to learn His commands. It also means loving people because this is God's second greatest command.

Loving God, loving people, and sharing the gospel is sometimes easier said than done. Learning to be like Jesus requires humility, education, planning, and counter-cultural, self-sacrificial service that originates in love. It also requires spiritual rebirth and the ongoing help of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26, Acts 1:8). John teaches that the Holy Spirit produces greater love and is a sign that we belong to God (John 13:35).

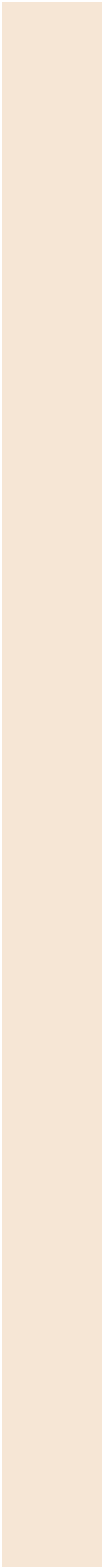
CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) How does your involvement in the local church and other ministries demonstrate obedience?
- 2) In what ways can churches and other Christian ministries and organizations obey Christ and fulfill His purposes?
- 3) It is important to remember that the difficulties we face in churches are often attempts by the enemy to divide the body of Christ. What challenges have you faced when you've been involved in church community?
- 4) How do you think partnering with the body of Christ through obedience impacts the Kingdom of God for the sake of the gospel?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE: Matthew 23:1-36

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study this week's At-Home Scripture: Matthew 23:1-36. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.
- 2) Consider your local church's vision for ministry. Is there a way that you can become more involved with that vision? If so, determine to do so today. Can you volunteer to help create a clear vision and opportunities for the people in your church to run with God's vision for the church and the world?
- 3) Learn to be faithful in the little things, as Jesus said in Luke 16:10. Make



good use of your time, redeeming the moments by taking advantage of your opportunities to share your faith, to pray, or to read Scripture. It might be helpful to write down things that distract you from this.

4) As you listen to a sermon this week, strive to be a good listener. Do not merely hear the words, but listen closely with an ear to how you might apply some of the principles to your life. Ask the Spirit to give you “ears to hear.” Write down what you hear and reflect on how it affects your life.



THE JOURNEY

LESSON EIGHT: OBEYING THE GREAT COMMISSION

INTRODUCTION: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). This commonly-referenced passage of Scripture is known in Christian circles as the Great Commission. It is often committed to memory but perhaps seldom applied in our lives.

In this lesson, we will seek to gain a greater understanding of Jesus’ command to go into all the world and make disciples. The Matthew 28 passage contains the words of Jesus to His disciples after His resurrection and before His ascension to heaven. Therefore, we must understand how important and essential these final instructions were (and are) to His disciples.

I. THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

READ ALOUD: Matthew 28:18: “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): In Matthew 28:18, Jesus spoke about having been given “all authority in heaven and on earth.” What do you think “all authority” means?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Before Jesus issues the call to the disciples in this passage, He focused attention on His authority. We know that a person of authority is one with power and control. The Word declares that Jesus rules over all nations, all people, all days, and all things. As we read this passage, we must pause and reflect on the magnitude of Jesus’ dominion. As His disciples, we understand



that any power and authority we have comes from Jesus. The command Jesus issued is not a suggestion for followers of Christ, but rather a mandate that was given out of His authority. This commission is a command that we are to carry out through the power of Jesus Christ.

In this passage, Jesus conveyed to the disciples that wherever they went, everything was subject to His authority. Recognizing this power, we then should act on what follows in this passage. We obey out of the overflow of our heart in reverence of the One we love and trust.

II. THE CALL TO GO

READ ALOUD: Matthew 28:19: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): How do you define the word disciple? What does discipleship mean to you?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): If Jesus commands us to go and make disciples, that statement presumes that we are disciples ourselves. After being transformed by our salvation experience, we begin a lifelong journey of growing in understanding and becoming more like Jesus. It is our charge to make more disciples of Jesus. The Bible tells us that Christ’s disciples are recognized by their love. “By this, all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Therefore, we must allow love to lead us in the relationships and efforts we make to advance the gospel. Our love for those who are lost and need Jesus should compel us on the mission of seeing lives changed through salvation.

We are commissioned to be disciples who make disciples. We trust the Holy Spirit to do the transforming work of salvation, but we are the willing instruments that allow God to use us to spread the message of hope.

The gospel is not exclusive but rather inclusive. We are not to share the

gospel with only those who look and think like us. Jesus calls us to spread the gospel message to the world. This witness could be in other nations, or in the country, state, city, community, or neighborhood where you live. Begin to ask the Lord for opportunities to share and serve the gospel message right where you are and abroad.

READ ALOUD: Matthew 28:20: "...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What do you think it looks like to teach others to observe what Jesus has commanded? What teaching methods communicate best to you?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): The instruction Jesus gave in this passage does not stop at the salvation and baptism experiences. Jesus then told them to teach the things He had commanded. The Apostle Paul lays out the need for discipleship in 1 Timothy 3:15: "...but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

We must focus on sharing the gospel message with others to see them come to salvation; however, teaching and discipleship must also occur. Paul is teaching the church how to conduct themselves as Christians. That is discipleship in its purest form. We need to walk alongside new believers in this growing process. We should be studying the Word continually to become more like Him. How do we know what Jesus has commanded? We have the Bible, His Word, as a guide. As we receive new understanding through Scripture, we are then to teach others.

IV. THE COMPANION PROMISED

READ ALOUD: Matthew 28:20: "...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): After Jesus issued His Great Commission, He gave the disciples a promise to be with them always. What does it mean for Jesus to be with us? How does that assurance impact our mission?

- We are not alone!
- We can participate in God’s work knowing that Jesus will be with us.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): After giving the command to make disciples and teach, Jesus doesn’t leave us hanging. He knows and understands our human nature. He knows that the task given in this Scripture can seem overwhelming. He knows that we are not able to fulfill this mandate in our strength. Because He knows us so well, He follows up the Great Commission with a promise of His presence. We are not alone.

Yes, He asks us to give up everything to follow Him. His desire is for us to share the gospel with others, teach, and disciple them to a greater understanding of His Word. But Jesus doesn’t ask these things of us and leave us on our own to figure it out. From John 14:26, we discover the answer to this dilemma: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” It is empowering to know that we aren’t left to our own ability to learn and understand. As believers, we have the Holy Spirit, who helps us to understand the scriptures for ourselves. We also find encouragement in John 14:16: “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever.” We have a Helper, the Holy Spirit, to help us learn and understand and to abide with us.

We recognize the power and authority of Jesus, who asks us to take part in the salvation story of the world. We are obedient to His call to share the gospel, not only to see lives saved but also to teach others what He has commanded—growing to become more like Jesus every day. We trust and rest in the promise of the Holy Spirit to help us as we heed the call. We take ownership of our part in the Great Commission out of a heart of obedience to our Savior.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) We know that Jesus has all authority. If you lived every moment with this knowledge, how might your life be impacted?
- 2) Where do you need the most help or support on your personal discipleship journey with the Lord?
- 3) In what places do you feel the Lord leading you to make disciples (ex: work, community, world)?
- 4) Talk about what you think prevents people from making disciples.

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE: Acts 2

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study this week's At-Home Scripture: Acts 2. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.

2) How can you make disciples this week?

Suggestion: Write out your testimony. Make it a priority to share your salvation story and how the gospel has changed your life with someone this week. Your story doesn't have to be lengthy- about three to five minutes is ideal.

3) How can you begin teaching? This week, share something you learn through studying the Bible with someone.

AT-HOME EXERCISES

WEEKLY WORKSHEET

COMMITMENT: Setting an expectation and commitment will help in holding yourself accountable to follow through on The Journey. Share this with someone else in the group.

- I commit to do an At-Home Exercise _____ days this week for _____ minutes.
The best time of the day for me to do this is: (circle one) **Morning Noon Night**
- I commit to check on _____ to see how they are doing and to share about my own experiences.

1ST DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

2ND DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

3RD DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

AT-HOME EXERCISES

WEEKLY WORKSHEET

4TH DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

5TH DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

6TH DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

7TH DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

AT-HOME EXERCISES

BIBLE STUDY DESCRIPTION

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

S.O.A.P. METHOD OF BIBLE STUDY:

S.O.A.P. stands for Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer.

FOUR STEPS:

1) SCRIPTURE

Choose a passage of scripture to do a focused reading of. Start by reading the passage and by physically writing it out. This simple act adds to your focus on the passage. As you write, ask the Lord to speak to you through His Word. Pay attention to anything that catches your eye.

2) OBSERVATION

Write down what you see in the verses. Who is the audience? Is there any repetition in the passage? What words stand out to you?

3) APPLICATION

This is when God's Word becomes life-giving and alive in our lives. Ask yourself, "What is God saying to me today? How can I apply what I just read to my personal life? What is Jesus asking me to change or give up? Is there an action I need to take?"

4) PRAYER

Pray God's Word back to Him. If you sense that God is speaking to you or has revealed something to you, take this time to pray about it. Ask Him to keep it on your mind throughout the day. Humble yourself and confess anything that needs to be confessed.

When we study God's Word with a focused approach like the S.O.A.P method, it can take as little or as long as you have time to give. You may notice that some days take a shorter time while others take a longer time. The most important thing is that you are consistently exposing yourself to the truth of God's Word with humility and surrender.

AT-HOME EXERCISES

BIBLE STUDY DESCRIPTION

FOUR STEPS

Bible Study works best if you intentionally carve out time to be alone with God. It's important to find a place that is quiet, comfortable, and free from distractions. Then, begin by asking God to speak to you through His Word and to help you notice what He has for you in this moment. Don't forget to use the Bible Study description sheet for help with the S.O.A.P. method.

1) SCRIPTURE

- Write down the passage you will be reading: _____
 - Start with silence. Quiet your thoughts and wait patiently to let distractions go by. Ask Jesus (The WORD) to speak to you in His written Word.
 - Read the passage. Don't forget to read a few verses before and after for context.
 - Write the verses down as you read.
 - Pause here. Think about what you just read. Did anything jump out at you?

2) OBSERVATION

- Ask yourself these questions:
 - What do you see in these verses?
 - Who is the audience?
 - Is there any repetition?
 - What word(s) stand out to you?
 - What do I learn about God in these verses?
- Making a bullet-point list is also a good way to write down your observations.

3) APPLICATION

- After you have reflected on the passage, prayerfully respond to what God has shown you in His Word.
- Ask yourself these questions:
 - What is God saying to me today in His Word?
 - What is the Holy Spirit inviting me to pray after what I've just read?
 - How can I apply what I just read to my personal life?
 - What secrets of my heart has this passage exposed? Is Jesus asking me to give something up?
 - Are there any actions I am being called to take?

4) PRAYER

- Give yourself a few moments to sit with what you just read.
- Pray God's Word back to Him.
- Thank God for speaking to you in His Word.
- Ask God to keep these truths in your mind throughout the day.
- Confess what needs to be confessed.

Don't forget to complete the At-Home Exercises Worksheet as well!

AT-HOME EXERCISES

BIBLE MEMORIZATION DESCRIPTION

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Psalm 119:105

While it's common to think of scripture memory as something reserved for children, the book of Psalms gives all of us a compelling reason to make this practice a personal habit: "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you...I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word" (See Psalm 119:11-16).

When we take the time to memorize scripture, we are filling our minds and our hearts with God's truth. When we need encouragement, these memorized passages will come back to us as a source of strength. Storing God's truth in our hearts will boost our confidence in God, help us follow Him more closely, and draw us closer to His Son. Memorized scripture can also be used to evangelize and disciple others around us. This is truly being a ready witness.

HOW TO MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE:

1. Select a passage.
2. Give yourself a time frame to memorize it.
 - a. It's a good idea to have someone you can share your memory practice with.
3. Choose the method that works best for you.
 - a. Not everyone memorizes things the same way. It's important to use what works for you!
 - b. There are many Bible memory apps and websites.
 - c. Use a dry erase marker, and write it on your bathroom mirror.
 - d. Write the verse(s) on notecards and stick it in various places around your house, job, and car for easy practice.
 - f. Repetition will be helpful.
4. Once you have memorized your scripture passage, try to use it often. As much work as it takes to remember things, it's far easier to forget them.

Don't forget to complete the Weekly At-Home Exercises Worksheet as well!