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7. Obedience – Running to Win

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7. Obedience – Running to Win

In John 15, Jesus tells us that an abiding life is essential if we are to produce fruit for Him. Jesus also tells us that the only way to abide in Him is to be obedient to His commands.

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10).

If you are truly running to win the prize God has for you, then aim to please Christ by obeying His commands. Jesus said, “If you love me, obey my commandments” (John 14:15).

Jesus is not saying that we are saved by obedience. Neither is He saying that we will lose our salvation when we disobey Him. Many people think that God loves us more when we obey Him than when we disobey Him.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

However, just as a loving parent disciplines a disobedient child, God will discipline us when we disobey. His love is expressed by discipline, not rejection. He wants the best for us, and that means He wants us to trust and obey Him.

The entire Christian life is to be lived by faith, not works. Other religions give lists of rules to follow. But when we see how much God loves us, and that Jesus paid the ultimate price for our sins, we will want to obey Him. Trusting the Holy Spirit with your life will result in a life of obedience to his Word.

Don’t be disappointed when progress in your Christian walk doesn’t happen as quickly as you want. Christian growth is a lifelong process. God is patient with you, and will never take His love away from you. Remember, the Holy Spirit will give you victory any moment you choose to obey Him.

Many Christians say they trust God with their lives but refuse to obey His Word. James calls their faith “dead.” The abiding life, however, is to be lived by faith, trusting in God’s promises even when we are going through trials and don’t understand how God is answering our prayers. Remember the two circles we looked at earlier?



Self-Directed



Christ-Directed

Q. Which circle represents your life?

If Christ is directing your life, it will result in a transformation of both your walk and your talk. In other words, your character will become more like Christ's character, and your words and actions will sound and look like Him.

The Walk

We have already seen that a life of obedience to Christ is based upon faith in His Word. You and I are totally unable to live the Christian life in our own strength. However, by faith in His promises, the Holy Spirit gives us the power to overcome trials and temptations. As we surrender our lives to Him, He conforms us into His likeness.

Jesus is totally unlike us. Let's take a look at just a few of the differences:

JESUS IS:

- Holy
- Loving
- Humble
- Forgiving
- Obedient

MAN IS:

- Sinful
- Unloving
- Proud
- Unforgiving

- Disobedient

In spite of the differences, the Holy Spirit is continually conforming us into Christ's image.

Q. What does Paul tell us in Galatians 4:19?

Personal Holiness

One of God's attributes is holiness, which means He is morally pure and righteous, set apart from any unclean thought or deed.

The Holy Spirit is working in our lives to remove all filthiness and lustful thinking.

Nancy DeMoss writes, "True holiness starts on the inside—with our thoughts, attitudes, values, and motives—those innermost parts of our hearts that only God can see. It also affects our outward and visible behavior: 'Be holy in all your conduct.'"

Q. What does Peter say in 1 Peter 1:15-16?

Q. What does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20?

Love for Others

The Holy Spirit is actively at work in giving us His supernatural love for others. His love is forgiving rather than judgmental, patient rather than irritable, and compassionate rather than easily angered and embittered towards others. Corrie ten Boom was only able to love the prison guard who demeaned and abused her when she made the choice to love him by faith.

Many Christians are able to put on a good front, which appears loving while holding deep grudges and resentments inside. Christ's love is totally different; it begins on the inside.

Since it is impossible for us to simply improve our sinful natures, our act of obedience is to surrender our lives to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to make us like Christ.

Q. What does Paul say in Galatians 3:3?

Q. What is Paul's solution in Galatians 2:20?

Q. What does a Christ-centered life look like in Galatians 5:22?

Q. What areas of your walk with Christ have changed to become more like Him?

Q. What areas have not changed that still need to be surrendered to Him?

Your Greatest Investment

Have you ever thought of your life as an investment? Jesus did. He continually compared your life with an investment of money. Jesus wants you to invest your life for the greatest possible return. He wants you to help build His Kingdom.

Q. How are you currently investing your life?

The Three Servants

Jesus told the story (in Luke 19) of a prince who had left his three servants a huge amount of money to invest for him. He would settle with them when he returned years later. When the time came to settle, and reward them for their faithfulness, the prince asked them for accounting. The first servant said, "Master, I doubled your money."

The prince was elated, and said, "Great job! Because you've earned me so much on that small investment, I'm going to put you in charge of ten cities!"

The second servant said, "Master, I made a fifty percent return on your investment." The prince said to him, "I'll put you in charge of five cities."

The third servant said, "Master, here's your money, safe and sound. I kept it hidden in the basement since I was afraid to lose it. I know you ... don't put up with fools."

The prince was extremely disappointed... and told him, "You're right that I don't put up with fools...and you have been a fool! Why didn't you at least invest the money in savings so that I would have gotten a little interest on it?"

Then turning to the others standing nearby, the prince ordered, 'Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one who earned the most.' They objected, and said, 'But Master, he already has double...'

The prince then said, “That’s what I mean: Risk your life and get more than you ever dreamed of. Play it safe and end up holding the bag” (Luke 19:12- 27, *The Message*).

Jesus told His disciples this story to give them the picture that God expects a return on our lives. In other words, He wants our lives to “count” for Him.

Life on earth is short. Soon it will be over—then it will be too late to invest your life for Christ.

The Judgment Seat of Christ

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that when your life is over, you will have the great honor to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and receive rewards for your faithful service to Christ. (See 2 Corinthians 5:10.)

All believers will give an account of their walk with Christ, but unfortunately, not all will receive rewards.

Q. What does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15?

Jesus wants you to invest your life for the greatest possible impact for His Kingdom. Like the prince who rewarded the first servant who doubled his investment, Jesus greatly desires to reward you.

Expand Your Territory

In *The Prayer of Jabez*, author Bruce Wilkinson relates how a relatively unknown man from the Old Testament, Jabez, asked God for “expanded territory” (1 Chronicles 4:9-10). Jabez wanted to be special for God. He wanted to invest his life for the greatest return. (This book will greatly challenge you.)

D.L. Moody was a man who asked God to expand his territory. He made this statement: “The world has yet to see what one man who is totally sold out to Jesus Christ can accomplish. By God’s grace, I want to be that man!”

Q. What 'expanded territory' are you asking God to give you?

Ambassadors for Christ

In the same passage of Scripture that Paul tells the Corinthian believers about the Judgment Seat of Christ, Paul tells them another important fact:

“We are Christ’s ambassadors” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

A country selects an ambassador to represent them in the highest manner to another land. Great care is made by the King or President to select the finest representative.

Your King has selected you to represent Him. You are God’s choice to reach others for Him. You are Christ’s “witness.”

Your witness for Christ takes two basic forms:

- Witness by your “walk”
- Witness by your “talk”

Walk Before You Talk

One reason to grow in your relationship with Christ is so others can see Christ in the way you live. This can have a huge impact on others. Jesus said: “Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father” (Matthew 5:16).

Q. Write down your thoughts on being Christ’s Ambassador

Work in Progress

Don’t let the fact that you are a “work in progress” stop you from sharing Christ with others. Satan would love for you to keep silent about your new relationship with Christ.

However, if you are not living for Christ, that behavior will be obvious, and sharing Christ will appear hypocritical to others.

Q. Is there anything holding you back from sharing Christ with your friends and others?

Telling Others the Good News

Have you ever thought about how many people you know, or rub shoulders with, who are hurting ... and are disillusioned with life? In fact, some get so despondent that they consider ending it all.

Q. Can you think of some people you have the opportunity to share Christ with?

How to Share Christ with Others

You don't need to be an expert in the Bible or have years of experience with Christ to witness for Him. There are several ways you can verbally share Christ on a daily basis.

Informal Sharing

You don't have to make a complete presentation of the Gospel to make an impact for Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to someone who is open to hearing more about Christ:

- Invite a friend to church or a study group which you attend.
- Give your personal testimony.
- Ask someone to join you at a Christian event.
- Introduce a friend to other Christians.
- Give out a Christian book or tract.
- Refer someone to Y-Jesus.com or another Christian website.

The key to informal witnessing is to be available ... and to ask God to lead you. He will! He has been waiting for you to ask Him!

Presenting Christ's Claims Directly

Everyone needs an opportunity to hear the complete story of how much God loves him/her personally. Once you have established a relationship with a person, and "earned the right to be heard," pray for an opportunity to share Christ with them.

We recommend you read, "[Is Jesus Relevant Today?](#)" and take time to print it out. You might want to give an extra copy to the person with whom you are sharing Christ. This article emphasizes the fact that Christianity is a relationship with Jesus Christ rather than a set of rules to follow.

Most people reject Christianity because they really don't understand what it is all about, or they misunderstand and think it is just "religion." They don't realize that it is a relationship with their Creator ... Jesus Christ! The best way to witness ... so that people really understand what the Bible says ... is to make a concise presentation of the Gospel with your testimony and biblical references.

Q. Write out your testimony about how you received Christ, and how He has changed you.

Here are some additional ideas on preparing and sharing your faith with another person:

Pray

Go to God about your friends ... before you go to your friends about God. Ask God to prepare the person's heart and to control you by the Holy Spirit.

Use a Gospel Tract

In order to be concise and not get side-tracked, use a good Gospel tract, such as *The Four Spiritual Laws* by Bill Bright (New Life Publications), or *The Bridge* (Navpress).

Use a Bible

Carry a small Bible with you that has key verses underlined. It's best to use a modern translation, such as the *New Living Translation*. Try to memorize the key verses for each point of the Gospel.

Share Your Personal Testimony

Write out your personal testimony, and review it with a friend until you can present it naturally in 3 to 5 minutes. Keep focused on how Christ has changed your life ... and how much He means to you. Be enthusiastic ... but not phony. Be transparent ... and let them know this is real for you.

Stay Focused

You fight a spiritual battle when you share Christ with an unbeliever. There may be unusual interruptions ... or the person might try to evade the real issues and get you off track. Pray, and keep focused on Christ's love ... and His death for them on the cross. Emphasize how important they are to God.

Ask For A Decision

When you have shared Christ with someone, and he or she is open to the message, don't be afraid to ask for a decision. As the Holy Spirit leads, expect God to be working in their heart. Ask one of the following questions:

- “Does this make sense to you?”
- “Would you like to accept God's Gift?”
- “Would you like to make sure?”
- “Would you like to ask Jesus into your life?”

If the person you are sharing with is ready to receive Christ, pray with him or her, using the prayer in your tract, or the one that was included earlier in this booklet.

The Next Step

Once a person has come to Christ, it is vital that you share with them how they can grow in their relationship with God. Schedule a time to go through this booklet with them.

It is also vital that they immediately get connected with other Christians ... preferably people with whom they can relate.

Passing the Baton

When you lead a person to Christ, you are “passing the baton” to them. Teach them from God's Word the discipleship principle Paul taught Timothy, so they will pass it on to others: “Teach these great truths to trustworthy people who are able to pass them on to others” (2 Timothy 2:2).

For those who take God's Word seriously and want to be discipled, it is strongly recommended that you schedule regular meetings (at least every other week), to get deeper into the Bible. Both a small group Bible study and one-on-one discipleship are recommended for a new believer.

Run to Win!

Your race goes on ... and there are many miles to go!

Marathon runners often get weary during the long race. Some quit. Those who finish strong are focused on the finish line, the satisfaction of doing well, and the prize ahead.

God's Word tells you how to finish strong:

"Let us strip off every weight that slows us down ... And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish" (Hebrews 12:12).

Q. What weight is slowing you down?

Q. What changes have you made to ensure a well-run race?

Q. What's the most important thing you have learned in this study?

When Christ is the center of your life, everything will be different. Your life will be full of joy and peace. You will want to please Him. God will give you love for other people, even your enemies. He can take ordinary people and make our lives purposeful and fruitful.

"By His mighty power at work within us, He is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope" (Ephesians 3:20).

Are you ready to risk it all for Christ? He is completely trustworthy ... and will be with you in every mile of your race ... even when you are weary and feel like quitting. Memorize these verses and hold on to God's purpose for your life!

"But those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

"It is the will of God that you keep on running. Run well, and receive the prize!" (1 Corinthians 9:24-26).

"I know what I am planning for you," says the LORD. "I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future" (Jeremiah 29:11).