

Obedience To God

(appropriate for High Schoolers and older)

Michael R. Daily, February 2017

Other youth bible studies by Michael Daily available at: <http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

Let's fast forward 25 years into the future. You are married and have children and your oldest child, your daughter, is now an adult. One day your daughter comes over to visit. She has exciting news about a young man she wants to marry. This is how she describes him:

"Mom and dad, he's really nice. He doesn't drink or smoke or take drugs. He's not addicted to anything and he has never committed any crimes. He has not been sexually immoral and he doesn't steal or lie or cheat and he gets along with his parents. He is the perfect man and I want to marry him!"

What would you think about this young man? What things about him do you like?

What things might you be concerned about? What's missing?

There is nothing in this description that talks about what he does - nothing about his vocation or if he does spiritual things. In fact, this description could be equally said of some Buddhists or atheists. We don't even know if he is a Christian!

Matthew 19:16-22

And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" 17 And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." 18 Then he said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; 19 Honor your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 20 The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" 21 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22 But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

The young man was incomplete in God's eyes because he was defined by the sins he did not commit. But he was disobedient to God because he refused to follow Christ and do the works God wanted him to do.

When you were a child, your parents spent a lot of time trying to protect you from the destructive power of sin, and rightly so. What most parents did was focus much of their efforts on helping their kids not do bad things. That was good. But you will soon be an adult and its time to take things to the next level.

Notice what Jesus did with the young man. He started him with a list of bad things he should not do. The young man stated that he had completed those. Jesus then took him to the next level. What was that? Following Christ. Its not enough to just not do bad things. It about going beyond that and committing to following Christ and doing the positive things He wants us to do (Jesus also mentioned selling his possessions and giving to the poor because this was the first barrier this particular young man would have to address in following Christ).

Matthew 19:27-29

Then Peter said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" 28 And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.

Following Christ is more than just the things we don't do. It's a personal relationship with God that always results in our putting more and more of His will into action as we look forward to the reward we will receive from Him. Because of the rewards, will never regret any sacrifice we made in doing His work on the earth.

John 4:33-36

So the disciples were saying to one another, "No one brought Him *anything* to eat, did he?"³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."³⁵ Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and *then* comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.³⁶ Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.

Jesus said that His food was to do the will of God and accomplish His work. Was His work not doing bad things? Was Jesus saying, "I came from heaven with a mission and my mission is to not do a lot of bad things"? No. God had work for Him to accomplish on the earth. What about you? Is your mission on earth to not do lots of bad things or has God planned out work for you to accomplish?

Ephesians 2:10

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

It turns out God has work planned out for you to accomplish!

Religion is about not doing bad things.

But having a personal relationship with Christ is much more than that. Its about going beyond not doing bad things and instead actively accomplishing the work He wants done!

Accomplishing His Work

But it is not possible for us to be faithful in accomplishing God's work on Earth by ourselves. It can only be done by God's power.

John 15:4-5

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me."⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

Unfortunately, there is a belief in the church today that trying to obey God in our own strength is useless (true). Instead, we should wait for God to move within us and use us (false). The problem is that many have concluded that this means they should not do anything unless God "moves" them to do it, or in some way gives them an overwhelming compulsion to do it. The result of this false belief is we have people sitting in the pews for decades still waiting for God to move them – and nothing's happening!

What the Bible teaches is that God's Word reveals the work He wants us to do.

Psalms 119:105 - Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

We then, by faith, act in obedience to what He has told us in His Word, asking Him to give us the grace we need to accomplish His will. As we continue to act in obedience, God releases His grace (divine assistance that we do not deserve) to enable us to accomplish what we otherwise could not. There are two types of grace that the Bible talks about. One is the divine assistance God gave us, that we do not deserve, that enabled us to be given eternal life as a free gift (e.g. **Ephesians 2:8-9**). The second is divine assistance God gives us, that we do not deserve, that enables us to live the Christian life in obedience to His standards. Both of them are grace but they are not identical. We will talk more about the second type of grace.

For a detailed study on the second type of grace please see the study, "Grace for Living – It Might Not Be What You Think It Is", available at: <http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

II Corinthians 9:8

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

II Corinthians 9:8 is the “no excuses” verse. We need to be careful about making excuses for why we did not obey God in doing His work. I didn’t have time to finish my Bible study because of _____. I forgot my giving this month because of _____. etc. But wait, according to this verse you have been given supernatural power to always have all sufficiency in everything, resulting in an abundance of good deeds. In other words, because of God’s promise of divine assistance, you don’t have an excuse!

But notice, grace does not come first.

Luke 9:23

And He was saying to *them* all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

Does denying yourself sound like you’re going to get a compelling feeling to do what God wants you to do? In fact, it’s just the opposite. God is going to reveal to us what He wants us to do in His Word, and often we are not going to feel like doing it. So, we deny ourselves and obey God anyway, even though we don’t feel like it.

(James 4:8)

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

As God reveals His will to us, we obey in faith, by exercising discipline (self-control).

I Timothy 4:7

But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;

II Timothy 1:7

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

As we continue in obedient action, then the grace of God comes to help us. But if we don’t start, the grace does not come.

Matthew 14:16-20

But Jesus said to them, “They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!”¹⁷ They said to Him, “We have here only five loaves and two fish.”¹⁸ And He said, “Bring them here to Me.”

¹⁹ Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed *the food*, and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples *gave them* to the crowds,²⁰ and they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets.

In the miracle of the loaves and fish, what is the first action that is taken? Does Jesus miraculously generate a pile of bread and fish by God’s grace? Followed by the disciples’ inspection that validates that the pile of food will, in fact, be enough to feed all the people? No. Instead Jesus says to his disciples, “You feed them. You take the first action. I’m going to stand over here and watch”.

At this point the disciples had a choice to make. They could decide that it was obvious that the fish and loaves were wholly inadequate and that they would be better off disobeying Jesus and not giving them to anyone instead of feeding only a few of the people. Or, by faith, they could obey Jesus and start distributing the food. When it was over and they gathered the leftovers, then it became obvious that God had provided grace (divine assistance) that enabled the need to be supernaturally met. But notice that the grace came later, after obedient action was underway. This pattern is common throughout scripture. If you look for it you will see it everywhere.

Joshua 3:14-16

So when the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant before the people, ¹⁵ and when those who carried the ark came into the Jordan, and the feet of the priests carrying the ark were dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of harvest), ¹⁶ the waters which were flowing down from above stood *and* rose up in one heap, a great distance away at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan; and those which were flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. So the people crossed opposite Jericho.

The people needed to cross the Jordan river. So, what did God do? Did He say, "Sit on the ground while I make the river dry for you. Then after you have inspected it and decided its safe to cross, then you can take action and cross"? No. The first step was for the people to take obedient action in faith. Pick up the ark and enter into the water. Once they had taken obedient action and were in the water, then the grace of God showed up and parted the waters, enabling them to cross the river.

James 1:22 - But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

Delude: *to mislead the mind or judgment of, deceive, trick*

So, if we respond to God by obeying Him, we will then see His grace come to help us. On the other hand, if we don't respond with obedient action, we don't see His grace and instead we end up deluding or deceiving ourselves. We think we are doing fine when we are not - we can't tell. So, order is important. Obedient action first, then God's grace shows up to help us.

Colossians 1:28-29

We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. ²⁹For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Do I live the Christian life by my labor or by God's power? Both. God has set it up as a partnership. He didn't have to do it that way, but He did. So, I labor, even when I don't feel like it, then God's power helps me.

I Corinthians 15:10

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

Does success come from my labor or God's grace? Both. I am to work hard and do my best in obedience to God, and His grace comes to enable me to be effective in accomplishing the work He has given me to do.

Application

We hear far more Bible messages than we can apply at any one time. We hear a message where God reveals something He wants us to work on but its going to take more than a week to build it into our lives. But by the end of the week we hear another message with more to do. Many times people feel that its too much. So, instead of obeying God they do nothing. They live their lives the way they have always lived it. Forty years later nothing much has changed. A more effective approach is to pick one thing God wants you to work on, say, having a regular time of prayer and Bible reading. Spend a year working on building that into your life very effectively. By the end of the year it has become a habit and is relatively easy to maintain. Then look for God to point out something else to work on the next year. Maybe its witnessing. Focus on that for a year and build that into your life. Work on one new thing a year every year and go deep in applying it. If you do this for forty years your progress will be significant and real and you will be like the Christians in the church at Thyatira.

Revelation 2:19

'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.

This continual growth in applying God's word in real life action is the pattern you see in Christians who invest in having a personal relationship with Christ through His Word.

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Obedience To God*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Matthew 19:16-22 & 27-29*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *John 4:33-36*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Timothy 4:7, II Timothy 1:7*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *James 1:22*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Colossians 1:28-29*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Revelation 2:19*

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