



LIBERTY HILL

— Baptist Church —

*Where the Church is Edified, Believers are Purified,
and God is Glorified*

DISCERNING THE

*Voice
of God*

Bible Study Lesson & Workbook
Month of October

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Month of October

- Lesson 1 The Plan: To Do God's Bidding
Lesson 2 The Cost: To Receive God's Best
Lesson 3 The Time: To Respond to God's Voice
Lesson 4 Hiding in Plain Sight

Month of November

- Lesson 5 Hearing the Holy Spirit
Lesson 6 Checks & Balances

Month of December

- Lesson 7 Freedom to Hear God
Lesson 8 Persistent: A Light Unto My Path
Lesson 9 Personal: He Knows My Name
Lesson 10 His Word: A Lamp Unto My Feet
Lesson 11 Peace

THE PLAN:

TO DO GOD'S BIDDING

"I know the Lord is speaking to me when I have an impression during prayer that is consistent with His Word and supported by wise counsel."

—CHRISTINE CAINE

Obedience can be an intimidating word. Depending on our upbringing and other influences from our early life, it may invoke different emotions. For some, it conjures up odious thoughts of harsh, seemingly pointless regimens of rules and regulations that are stifling and oppressive instead of life-giving and fulfilling. For others, it seems oddly devoid of intimacy and relationship, more of a never-good-enough attempt at measuring up. And for even more of us, the word itself feels like a threat to our innate desire for independence. It bristles against the fabric of our self-reliance and autonomy.

In the paragraph above, underline any perceptions about obedience that you've felt or experienced before.

What other kinds of defining sentiments do the word *obedience* and its ramifications immediately bring to your mind or bubble up in your emotions?

What things, people, or life circumstances have been contributing factors to this thought process?

Obedience—at least the kind that our good, loving, sovereign God requires—is neither legalistic nor lacking in affection. Although it places needed boundaries and demands on us—as in, "*If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross*



and follow Me" (MATT. 16:24)—each bit of instruction He gives is born out of the tenderness of His heart toward us and His desire to steer us toward His best for our lives. Obedience is not a *no*; it is actually His best yes. It swims in oceans of grace and leads us to freedom, wholeness, and health. It opens us up to His unbridled blessing and abundance.

Obedience is not a *no*; it is actually His best yes.

In the paragraph above, underline any sentiments about obedience that you've seen to be true in your experience.

The irony of obedience is like a delicate dance of trust. It may require real sacrifice from us, while somehow leading to blessing and incomparable abundance.

"If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."
JOHN 13:17

- It binds us while concurrently loosening us.
- It holds us tightly while also letting us go.
- It redirects us only to replenish and renew us.
- It restrains us while simultaneously releasing us.
- It limits us while also opening up spacious possibility.

Without our intentional surrender to the former, we cannot experience the benefits of the latter—benefits that are so important and hold so much incredible promise, we can hardly afford to leave them to chance. We must plan and intentionally strategize to pursue them, to pursue obedience. If left to our flesh's tendencies toward rebellion, we will live in a consistent state of resistance toward God and His ways. But if we (literally) *plan to obey*, we put ourselves in position any day of the week to hear what He wants us to do next, and then to have Him bless us with the supernatural joy of following Him.

HOUSE RULES

My three sons and I have a morning routine. Maybe you do too, whether you're wrangling toddlers or teenagers or just trying to get your own self out the door in one piece. For my brood, our morning plan typically involves a strategic engagement of assignments for which each person, or at least somebody, is responsible—bed making,



bathroom cleaning, dishwasher emptying, taking out the trash. You get the picture.

Now listen, I'm not saying it comes off without a hitch every day. Don't ask me to take this illustration too far, unless you're willing to come over and help me sort some laundry. And I mean the sweaty, stinky, back-to-back nights of basketball practice variety. The only thing I'm trying to say is, I don't come up with this list of chores on the fly. It's not a random, hope-this-works-out sort of expectation on a busy morning in the Shirer household. That would never work.

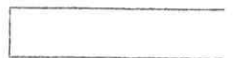
Know how I know? Because I've tried that before. And trust me (or say a firm, confident, head-bobbing *amen* with me), it's a recipe for chaos and frustration. It's absolutely essential to work through a plan that's been organized ahead of time if we are to have any hope of success. I need a blueprint that's been prearranged, tried, and adapted through many dangers, toils, and snares. Despite my own affinity for spontaneity and impulsiveness, I learned a long time ago that nothing—and I do mean *nada*—is accomplished during our mornings without a *plan*. Spur of the moment, flying-by-the-seat-of-our-pants operations invite complete mayhem. Only a predetermined commitment to a plan is able (or, again, at least *potentially* able) to hold our mornings together.

Let's pivot here and apply this same logic to something even more important than mama's sanity on an average weekday. Let's talk about that *key* we shared a conversation about yesterday—the key of surrendered obedience that leads to actually hearing from God and being able to live with the pure satisfaction of doing His will. Is anything really more important than that?

No?

Then what's your *plan* for doing it?

We aren't haphazard and arbitrary with a lot of the things we deem important in life: our health, our retirement plan, our monthly calendar of appointments. We even enlist others to help us stay on track with some of those things—help we're sometimes willing to pay for! So, what about our commitment to being spiritually aligned with the God of the universe and with how He wants to direct our hearts? If we don't put an intentional resolve and strategic course of action for following



Him in place, we're basically leaving it up in the air, susceptible to the flighty whims of our circumstances and feelings. There's simply too much eternal treasure at stake for that.

But don't take my word for it. We go to *God's Word* for instruction. In the story of the patriarch Abraham, we find both the value and profitable results of making *plans* to obey. (We'll start considering Abraham's story today and continue it throughout the rest of the week.)

"[God] said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.' So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him."

GENESIS 22:2-3, ESV

LOOKS LIKE A PLAN

Read Genesis 22:2-3 in the margin. Look for the following words, then fill in the blanks by writing what the verse says Abraham did in response to God's instruction. ("Saddled his donkey," for example, is the first one.)

Saddled _____

Took _____

Cut _____

Went _____

Old Testament sacrificial rituals were quite laborious. The process was painstakingly detailed and time-consuming, not to mention messy (what with all that slaying and dismembering going on). But in reading a short, concise record of it, like we see here in Genesis 22, appearances can be deceiving. The succinct summary of Abraham's activity in verse three, outside of the emotional torment invoked by verse two, makes the whole thing sound rather easy.

Yet the assignment Yahweh gave to Abraham could not have been accomplished on a whim. No haphazard spontaneity would enable Abraham to follow through on this mission. It was too arduous and meticulous of a task to accomplish without adequate preparation, strategy, intentionality, accountability, and dedication to detail. Each of these would be required in order to fully obey God's directive.

For each word on the next page, lookup the accompanying verse. Ask the Lord to give you clarity as to how the principles behind these elements might become a more strategic part of your plan of action to be obedient to His will. Jot down anything that really stands out to you.



Preparation (Neh. 2:7-9,13-15)

Strategy (Eph. 6:11-13)

Accountability (Eccl. 4:11-12)

Intentionality (Col. 3:1-2)

Dedication (Dan. 1:8)

Consider the following as it related to Abraham's plan of obedience.

1. **PREPARATION AND STRATEGY:** The journey to Mount Moriah in Jerusalem required *three* days (see Gen. 22:4). This meant gathering supplies ahead of time for overnight camping as well as measuring out rations for food and drink, all in order to sustain the entourage as they made their trip to the place of sacrifice.
2. **ACCOUNTABILITY:** Abraham's choice to bring two servants along may have been to provide help in carrying enough wood to build an altar. But, perhaps he brought them along for companionship as he carried out this difficult assignment.
3. **INTENTIONALITY AND DEDICATION:** Along with the wood, "glowing pieces of charcoal or other embers would have been carried in small pottery containers and carefully nursed along until a fire was needed."³



In each of the previous facts, what do you observe about Abraham's commitment to intentionality in his obedience?

1.

2.

3.

See how he refused to leave anything to chance? He didn't just *hope* to carry out God's instructions. He put measures in place to be certain of it—certain he would arrive at his destination, certain he'd be equipped with appropriate supplies to carry out the task, certain of having suitable accountability in place to make sure the job was done with precision. Every step along the way, Abraham's plan put him in position to hear what God would say or do next.

Now this may not be what we prefer our obedience to *feel* like. But this is what obedience *looks* like. This is what obedience *does*. When Abraham lived out his trust in God by making plans to obey what he'd been told, his faith was rewarded with the miraculous appearance of a substitutionary animal and the subsequent salvation of his son Isaac.

So what about you? What about me?

Will we, like Abraham, prepare to be obedient to God?

- Will we commit to align our actions and attitudes with the direction of obedience?
- Will we take the necessary precautions to cut out people or pastimes that influence us toward disobedience?



- Will we fortify our resolve by intentionally surrounding ourselves with influences that encourage us toward godliness?
- Will we humble ourselves to remain accountable to other mature believers who have our best interests at heart?
- Will we commit to shifting our attitudes or actions the moment we realize they are out of alignment with God's will?
- If you say "Yes, I will," what kinds of plans would help you turn these noble desires into real resolutions? Especially in areas of your life where obedience is the most difficult?

Our answers to these questions will determine the extent to which our spiritual ears are primed to hear God.

If you haven't already, on the inside of the front or back cover of this book, make a list of personal circumstances troubling you. As you work through this Bible study, focus on these circumstances and how God is speaking to you concerning them.

God will undoubtedly be giving you new directives and insights as we journey together through these pages. The question is: What can you do today to strategize a lifestyle of obedience? So when He speaks, you're there—with plans to obey?

Here's one suggestion: If you're doing this study within the context of a group, take full advantage of the relationships you'll develop within this community. See every person as a partner in your journey of spiritual growth and you for them. Each of them has been divinely chosen by the Lord to walk this road with you, at least for the weeks you're sharing this study. Be intentional and strategic about your commitment to obedience *together*. There is strength in numbers!



THE COST:

TO RECEIVE GOD'S BEST

"Our spiritual ear will never be sensitive to his voice if we have a personal agenda to which we are already committed. God leads and speaks to the humble who have surrendered their plans and want to do His will. With an 'open heaven' and a surrendered will, we will be able to clearly hear God's voice in our hearts."

—JIM CYMBALA

My son Jude was only three years old the day I saw him walking around our backyard with his hand stuck in a mason jar.

I'd been nearby reading, looking up every now and then to check on his well-being while he played with his toys. But the sound of his whimpering piqued my attention, and the sight of this new development made me too curious not to investigate.

"Come here, honey, what's the matter?" Drawing closer, he told me in broken toddler language what I already knew: he couldn't get his hand out of the jar. But the best I could tell, the only reason he couldn't was because he had his hand balled up into a tight fist. "Just open up your hand, and it'll come right out."

Ah, but there was the problem—inside that grubby fist was an acorn he'd seen at the bottom of the jar—a treasure he didn't want to let go of. No matter how reasonably I tried to explain that he could get both his hand *and* the acorn out if he'd only listen to me, he refused to release his grasp. He spent the rest of his playtime that day wandering around the yard, still wearing that jar on the end of his arm.

How much fun could that be?

But, who of us hasn't done the same thing? We're all prone at times to hold on too tightly to our own ambitions, relationships, expectations, and even our successes, long after God has instructed us to let them go. In the moment, letting go doesn't make sense. Releasing them doesn't seem worth the alternative. We insist on carrying them around for awhile—maybe for a lifetime—no matter how they may limit or short-circuit the benefits we could otherwise enjoy.

But hearing from God and enjoying the freedom that comes from doing what He says often requires us to empty our hands, trusting He will fill them with something better. And if we haven't prearranged our allegiance, if we haven't preplanned our strategy, if we haven't enlisted suitable accountability—all in a determined commitment to obedience—our wayward emotions will betray us into clinging to things out of rebellion and personal comfort, out of fear and insecurity. We'll miss living in the "*spacious place*" God desires for us (**2 SAM. 22:20, CSB**).

We must be willing to pay the cost that leads to His best.

Is there an area of your life in which you are currently resisting obedience because of the cost involved in "letting go"? List the perceived cost below.

LETTING GO

Yesterday, we looked at the planning required for Abraham to obey God's instructions. Read Genesis 22:2-3 again today:

"[God] said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.' So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him."

GENESIS 22:2-3, ESV

Talk about "letting go"! Consider the emotionally traumatic toll that God's directive placed on Abraham. We ain't talking acorns here. By



any standard, God's instruction was *brutal*—a gut punch to the tender heart of a loving father—not to mention a seeming contradiction to Yahweh's own promises.

I'm sure you've read and heard enough of this story to be familiar with all the irrationalities implied in what God was saying. He had promised Abraham a great nation from Abraham's offspring. And now it seemed He was asking Abraham not only to sacrifice this son he loved but also the future God had promised. A new nation? Descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky? Sort of impossible without Isaac, right? And yet Abraham had clearly heard what seemed an unreasonable, unimaginable command from God: *Let go!*

What does a person *do* with that? With an unthinkable assignment? No one would have faulted Abraham for running away from it. The cost of obedience seemed unreasonably high. While we're familiar, of course, with Abraham's story, we know our own stories even better, which leads me to ask you (as I ask myself):

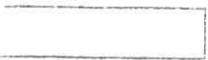
How has your response to God, regarding whatever He's asking you to release, been similar or different from Abraham's reaction at the beginning of verse 3?

Perhaps one reason Abraham could do the unthinkable here was because costly obedience wasn't new to him. This concept of "letting go" had become an ongoing experience in His relationship with the Lord. Consider his track record:

Turn to Genesis 12:1-3, and answer the following questions.

1. What was Yahweh's instruction?

2. What would Abraham need to "let go of" in order to obey?



3. If Abraham submitted to God's directive, what was the promised outcome?

Seriously, almost from the first time we meet Abraham to the very end, everything God required from him seemed to necessitate a radical level of expense—his home, his family, his heritage, his comfort. Yet, Abraham was willing to pay it. Situations in which he could have easily answered with a vehement *no*, instead he responded with a valiant *yes*. His stance was sure. His compass had been set to march toward God's purposes. *No matter the cost*. He might not have been crazy about what God was telling him. But one thing's for sure—

He was hearing from God.

Because he didn't let the cost frighten him into disobedience, Abraham received the outlandish benefits of God's grace—not only astounding, personal miracles but also a firm foundation for the beginning of a new nation founded firmly on trust and faith in Yahweh as *Jehovah Jireh*, "The LORD Will Provide" (**GEN 22:14**).

RISK AND REWARD

So Abraham's costly obedience resulted in abundant blessings, not only those that buoyed him and his family for years to come but also those that extend to you and me even all these millennia later. Among the clearest takeaways is a lesson that each of us wanting to hear from God must learn.

Expect to pay a price.

Only an errant, misguided theology would present bouquets completely devoid of thorns. Because, listen, there is sacrifice involved in your commitment to God. And yet from age to age, from one faithful follower to another, from testimonies that pile up behind us into mountains of indisputable evidence—the benefits far outweigh the costs. Believing this truth is essential.

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

ROMANS 8:18

When we refuse to follow God's direction, it's usually because we're convinced that whatever He's asking us to give up is greater than what we'll gain.



By obeying, we'll see some of these benefits in a physical, visible, tangible way on earth, while other blessings will be reserved for us as treasures and rewards of heaven. But no matter here or there, then or now, God's benefits and blessings will always be far more valuable than whatever it is we feel so resistant to release. Ask Abraham and many others—or simply ask yourself.

Name some clear blessings you can trace back to a decision you made to obey, even when it seemed costly at the time.

In disobedience, we miss God's blessings, invite His necessary discipline, and break the intimacy that allows our spiritual ears to hear what He is saying to us.

If only we'd understand the advantage we're gaining in the exchange.

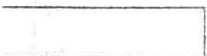
Look up at least two of the following examples, and outline the cost of obedience to each individual.

Esther (Esth. 4:14-17)

The Disciples (Luke 18:28-30)

Paul (Phil. 3:4-11)

Jesus (Phil. 2:8-10)



We all have to lay something down in order to receive God's best. And when we do—like Paul, we come to know Christ *"and the power of his resurrection,"* even as we *"share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death"* (PHIL. 3:10, ESV).

Like Esther, we eventually come to know days of *"light and gladness and joy and honor"* (ESTH. 8:16).

Like Jesus' disciples, we come to experience Jesus' promise to them: *"Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come eternal life"* (LUKE 18:29-30).

As you have launched into this study, what modifications do you already suspect you'll need to make in the following areas in order to be obedient to God's directives?

Ambitions:

Beliefs:

Expectations:

Relationships:

Traditions:

Other:

Which of these would you consider to be the greatest costs to you? Costs that at one time you might not have been willing to pay?



THE TIME:

TO RESPOND TO GOD'S VOICE

Have you ever met someone whose relationship with God is so full, robust, and real that his or her life seems more like a spreading wildfire than a quietly contained religion? *I have.* Through the years, I've crossed paths with many people whose passion for God and their continued optimism about life with Him have stirred my soul.

They fascinate me, these individuals who are radically unique even among other Christians I know. There's just something deeper and more substantial about their walks than the rest of ours. They have a firm, unshakable resolve in God, and their experiences with Him are as mind-boggling as they are flat-out beautiful.

Whenever I meet people like this—those whose spiritual fires ignite my own—I always take time to ask them what they'd pinpoint as the main reason behind their ongoing fervor. And without fail, their answers are remarkably similar. (It always makes me wonder: if the secret is really so evident, why aren't we all doing the same thing?) Here's the repeated theme: *their walks with God aren't centered primarily on knowledge; they hinge on a relationship experience.* These people are dedicated to studying the Bible, yes, but they're also dedicated to aligning their lifestyle with it. The knowledge they acquire from delving deeply into Scripture only whets their appetites for knowing its Author more intimately and for seeing Him at work amid the regular rhythms of their everyday living.

In response to my question, one person made a statement that sums up everything I've ever heard anyone say on this subject. "I decided a long time ago," she said, "the only appropriate response to God is my complete and immediate obedience. I am committed to obeying His leading no matter how absurd, difficult, or unpopular His directive may seem. If He said it, I'm doing it. Immediately."

You want to hear God's voice? Really? Let this woman's answer become the beat of your own heart. Because this—*this*—is what



separates the passionate and fervent from the critical and skeptical. This is what separates those who know *about* God from those who actually experience Him, encounter Him, and hear His voice. When the Spirit leads, they heed and follow.

Immediate obedience creates the needed margin for God to invade our everyday lives, to stir up supernatural activity, to cause our hearts to pound with anticipation, and to ruin us for "church" as usual. Seeing God, hearing His voice, sensing His presence near us, and watching Him working through us will make our obedience worth it.

IMMEDIACY

Let's turn our attention back to Abraham. He seemed to understand not merely the blessing of obedience but of *immediate* obedience. He knew the importance of responding to God without delay. He knew there were blessings to be found in a lifestyle of righteous, and right now, obedience.

When the Lord told Abraham to leave his homeland, giving him no further information on where he was to go, he obeyed immediately with nothing more than God's word for security (Heb. 11:8). On another occasion, when God instructed him to circumcise every male in his household, Abraham did it the very same day (Gen. 17:10-14,22-23).

Now Abraham wasn't perfect, okay? The Bible is honest enough to reveal some of his bobbles in character, many of which were quite serious. In fact, Genesis 15:6 says Abraham's "*righteousness*" came from the same place ours does: "*He believed in the LORD.*" (You may remember reading about this in the New Testament—Paul often references Abraham's faith story in his New Testament letters.) Abraham was faithful, not flawless.

But, Abraham was good at being immediately obedient. He consistently did what God said, and he did it without delay.

In the passage we've been studying this week (Gen. 22:2-3), how did Abraham follow a pattern of immediate obedience?

The only appropriate answer when we hear God speaking is, "Yes, Lord."

"If you love Me,
you will keep My
commandments."
JOHN 14:15

"Abraham rose early
in the morning. . ."
GENESIS 22:3, ESV



What do Abraham's actions tell us about:

1. His internal posture of obedience toward God
2. His readiness to make quick adjustments
3. His lack of concern for conflicting opinions

Put yourself in Abraham's shoes, how might your response have been different from Abraham's especially given the weight of God's instructions?

Would the ram have been caught in the bush if Abraham had delayed his obedience? No one can know for sure. But consider the perfectly-timed intersection of the ram and Abraham on top of that mountain.

When the Lord gives me instructions that I don't particularly like, sometimes to the point that I'm afraid to carry them out, the last thing I want to do is get up "early in the morning" to start putting them into action. It's usually easier to do anything other than what God has said to do. Instead I'll often—oh—think about it, pray about it, or talk to my husband and friends about it. Sometimes I'll even try to ignore it. I can think of times, for example, when the Holy Spirit has convicted me to get up and leave right in the middle of a movie or to back away from a conversation that's becoming unhealthy. He's nudged me to close the cover on a book that, while intriguing, well-written, and perhaps even recommended to me as a couldn't-put-it-down page-turner, is starting to show signs of taking me places I don't have any business going. Yet far too frequently, my obedience is not as quick as it should be. What about yours?

Abraham didn't wait a couple of days or weeks to make sure God was certain about what He wanted him to do. He gave the Lord instant, unquestioning obedience, despite being given some unbelievably difficult instructions.

Has the Lord given you instructions this week that you've been slow to respond to Him about? If so, what were those instructions?



What was the reason for your delay? What talked you out of acting on it? What kinds of rebuttals have you been listening to and leaning on?

Delayed obedience is disobedience.

And disobedience always yields consequences.

We find another illustration of this truth in Numbers 13–14: the record of an event in Yahweh's relationship with Abraham's descendants (the children of Israel). After being freed from Pharaoh's rule, the Hebrews wandered the sandy, desolate landscape of the Sinai Peninsula. Finally, God instructed them to send spies into the promised land to survey the territory that He planned to give them.

Let's be clear on their mission here. They weren't being sent out to determine whether or not the people should take the land. This was more of a scouting trip, a preview of coming attractions concerning what God had already promised them. And yet the sight of the land's inhabitants and the potential problems in trying to occupy it sparked fear in the hearts of the spies, fear that spread like wildfire throughout the rest of the nation. Except for two strong, faith-filled men—Joshua and Caleb—the rest of God's people determined they should *not* do what God had told them to do, *not* claim what He had given them to claim. In fact, they were so frightened that they even wanted to return to Egypt (Num. 14:1-4).

God's anger was kindled against His beloved people because they refused to trust Him despite all He had accomplished on their behalf. God's anger opened their eyes to the consequences of not obeying Him. By not responding with immediate obedience, they cost themselves the opportunity to take the land right away.

Read the people's action and God's response in Numbers 14:39-45. Record your observations.



Is there any way that Israel's actions mirror your own actions right now?

How can you proactively shift your response toward God in this area of your life, so that you're obeying Him immediately?

DELAY

I'm riveted by Paul's explanation of the armor of God in Ephesians 6. This passage has not only given me insight into the defenses at my disposal to help me stand firm, but it has also shined a spotlight on the tactics our common enemy uses to keep me (and all of us) from experiencing victory.

Turn to Ephesians 6:14, and identify the second piece of armor listed there.

How would you define the spiritual virtue that correlates with this piece of armor?

If *righteousness*—right living—provides a defensive mechanism against a full frontal demonic attack (and it does), your enemy's goal will always be to steer you toward *wrong living* (and he will). He'll employ any enticements he can lay in your path to persuade you toward disobedience and rebellion. He wants you exposed, your breastplate unused, your life laid bare and available to every threat and deadly scheme he's planned.



And if he can't get you to *disobey*, he will at least try convincing you to *delay*. The enemy knows that when we as believers align our lives to God through immediate obedience we have a clear means of defense against him—our breastplate of righteousness. And since this piece of armor will always prove too strong for Satan to infiltrate, he conspires to keep it lying at our feet, left at home, or off for the weekend, anything to keep it out of place as long as possible—hours, days, weeks, months, years, a *lifetime*.

Go back to the first lesson this week, and look at the things you circled on page 11 that have kept you from obeying God in the past. Write several of the most frequent ones below.

How can you clearly detect when the enemy may be scheming against you, perhaps using this particular device to delay your obedience?

I'm not saying the enemy is the only reason behind things we may be struggling with. (He isn't always. Sometimes it's just us.) But, when I suspect he may be the source of it, I don't know about you, but it causes a holy indignation to rise up inside me. It makes me want to stand firm and no longer allow him to snatch God's best away from me. Sometimes he doesn't even have to snatch it—I just hand it over.

Well, no more.

Breastplate is on. Resolve is firm.

I will honor God's Word immediately, refusing to let procrastination keep me from being able to deflect the attacks of the enemy. I want to receive all the benefits that come to a person whose life honors God.

Let's make this commitment together, okay?

Delayed obedience is disobedience and leaves us exposed to the enemy's advances.

If the enemy can't get you to disobey, he will at least try convincing you to delay.



transformed

HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

"God makes His desires known to those who stop at His Word, look in with a sensitive spirit, and listen to others. When we go to His Word, we stop long enough to hear from above. When we look, we examine our surrounding circumstances in light of what He is saying to our inner spirit (perhaps you prefer to call this your conscience). And when we listen to others, we seek the counsel of wise, qualified people."²

—CHARLES R. SWINDOLL

My father was always very playful. He'd often toss us down on the bed, grab hold of our ribs or anywhere else that he could get under our skin, and tickle us to high heaven. We'd gasp for air and scream for mercy.

In the fall, whenever he raked the leaves, he'd set aside a pile for the sole purpose of our jumping pleasure and usually jump in right along with us.

And then there was hide-and-seek.

He was never too good at hiding. We could always find him easily. He could never be quiet enough or stay concealed enough to keep us from discovering him with little effort. "*Da-ad, we can see you!*" we'd yell at the first sign of his foot or shirttail sticking out from behind the furniture. "*You're terrible at hiding!*" He'd laugh, let us find him, and then throw us to the floor and tickle us again.

As a mother with children of my own now, I realize what my sweet father was doing. I can see why he selected such prominent "hiding places," leaving hints and traces of his whereabouts. He wasn't hiding from us, seeking to frustrate and confuse us. He was hiding for us, giving us the joyful blessings of discovery.

Your heavenly Father does this too. He loves you so deeply that even when He seems elusive and distant, He's not. His affection for you

compels Him to leave hints of His holiness and faithfulness to help lead you to Himself. You can be sure He will show you glimpses of Himself that will leave you marked forever.

He wants to be discovered.

HE SPEAKS

Throughout the Bible, God always made sure His children could discover Him and know His will. He was lovingly intentional about it. Deliberately strategic. While His primary *method* of communication shifted from one age to the next, His *purpose* did not.

The primary _____ God uses to speak to His children has changed, but His _____ has not.

How would you summarize God's goal in speaking to His children?

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”

MATTHEW 7:7

Our Father's goal has always been to reveal Himself in every age. In each time period, He has chosen the best method of communication to facilitate this glorious purpose. People in the Old Testament relied on prophets, signs, visions, and other external factors. With the coming of Jesus Christ followed by the Holy Spirit, God's primary method of speaking shifted in New Testament times.

In the previous paragraph, underline some of the primary ways God spoke in the Old Testament.

Below, you'll find specific examples of times when God revealed Himself and His plan in the Old Testament:

- Angels (Dan. 8:15)
- Burning bush (Ex. 3:4)
- Casting lots (Jonah 1:7)
- Cloud (Ex. 13:21)
- Dreams and visions (Num. 12:6)
- Fire (Deut. 5:25)
- Handwriting on a wall (Dan. 5:5)
- Theophany* (Judg. 6:12)

*"Theophany" refers to moments in the Bible when God Himself appeared in a physical manifestation.



- Urim and Thummim (Ex. 28:30)
- Visible signs (Judg. 6:40)

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”

JOHN 16:13

Turn in your Bible to Hebrews 1:1-4. Read it through carefully. Below, record the primary way God chose to speak, beginning with the Gospels?

Now read John 16:13 and Romans 8:14 in the margin. How do these verses suggest God began speaking primarily to His people beginning in the book of Acts until the present?

Ah, the Holy Spirit.

“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

ROMANS 8:14

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was only given to specific people for a specific period of time in order to achieve specific tasks; this is also known as *selective indwelling*. Old Testament followers of God needed external means as the primary method of hearing Him (prophets, visions, and such) because they didn’t have continuous access to the Holy Spirit.

Think back to Saul whose downward path as Israel’s first king was marked by the chilling verse that said “*the Spirit of the LORD had left*” him (**1 SAM. 16:14, CSB**). Remember Samson—shorn of his hair—thinking he could overpower his enemies as he had always done before, “*but he did not know that the LORD had departed from him*” (**JUDG. 16:20**). Remember David appealing to God for forgiveness from adultery and murder, asking God to not “*take Your Holy Spirit from me*” (**PS. 51:11**). God’s people in the Old Testament would’ve given their left arm for the 24/7, whole-life access to the Holy Spirit that we as believers in this age enjoy.

How does John 14:16 describe our relationship with God’s Spirit? How is this distinct from that of Old Testament believers?

How does Ephesians 1:13-14 confirm the constant presence of the Holy Spirit within those who've been redeemed?

Direct, personal access to God. Not selective. Not intermittent. Internal. And permanent. He loves you so radically, so graciously, that He has given you the promise of His presence. Access to the Holy Spirit is not an inferior, substandard alternative to prophets, signs, visions, and miracles. It is better—it is awesome.

Notice this: People in the Old Testament had no doubt that God had spoken to them. They weren't confused as to what He was asking them to do. The Father's intention remains the same today. He's not hiding from you now, same as He wasn't hiding from them then.

I admit I've often felt as though God was hiding from me. It seemed to me if He really wanted to be heard, He'd be more conspicuous and clear. I mean, He is after all—*God*. He can do whatever He wants. When I needed to hear Him, I would sometimes secretly wish for (and even pray for) a visible sign, like the cloud that led the children of Israel by day or the pillar of fire by night. I wanted a dove to supernaturally descend from the heavens at a particular time on, say, Tuesday if He was answering my request a certain way. Physical signs seemed to be the most unmistakable way of knowing God's voice.

But, alas, I saw no doves. No lightning strike from the skies. Why? Because He has provided a far superior means for us to be engaged in relationship with Him than our forefathers experienced. He has given us Himself, *permanently and internally*, in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

If you've come to this study discouraged because God always seems difficult to hear, remind yourself of His intention. Trust His heart. He's not hiding *from* you. He's hiding *for* you. He is leaving traces of His glory and glimpses of His grace like bread crumbs for you to follow. Remember, even the crumbs are important and intended to nourish you in a necessary way. Seeking is not worthless but rather a valuable part of your journey. The process itself is a way in which God can and does speak to us—maturing, molding, and strengthening us for His purposes.

In your group discussion time, consider how the need for external signs may correspond to a weakened faith. Conversely, consider how spiritual growth and maturity lead to a deeper reliance on the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. The following Scriptures will help facilitate your conversation.

- John 20:26-29
- Hebrews 2:3
- 2 Peter 1:16-19

SIGNS AND WONDERS

Let's be clear: Our God still works miracles and manifests Himself in tangible ways when He so chooses. He works signs and wonders even in this age. God still does the unusual, acting in supernatural ways whenever He wants.

I don't say this based solely on testimony I've heard from others. I've literally seen the jaw-dropping evidence of it for myself.

Yet, in hearing God, I haven't normally heard Him in miraculously visible ways. I've never heard an audible voice, for example, or seen a donkey open his furry mouth and speak the English language to me. (Thank the good Lord.) But I'm not arrogant enough to tell you what God would *never* do. I will not let my experience represent the full measure of how He is capable of acting. He alone can choose how He speaks to us. In any area of theology, unless the Scripture clearly teaches otherwise, we must leave room for God to be God.

However, when He does choose to speak in *sensational* ways today, I can say with a fair amount of certainty on the authority of His Word—it will not serve as the foundation for us to hear from God but as confirmation of the Holy Spirit's leading and the message of Scripture.

Underline the two highlighted words in the last paragraph. Describe the difference between the two.

When I use the word sensational, I'm referring to ways that can be detected through the five physical senses.

Why do you think it's critical to keep these two features distinct when attempting to accurately hear God? What kinds of faulty directions can occur if they're switched?

Answer the following statements as true (T) or false (F).

- T | F 1. God can speak using any method He chooses.
- T | F 2. God usually speaks today through visible signs.
- T | F 3. God chooses to speak to me predominantly through His Spirit and His Word.
- T | F 4. If God uses some sensational means to speak, I should rely on them above what the Spirit has revealed in Scripture.
- T | F 5. If God uses sensational means to speak to me, they will only confirm what His Word and Spirit say.

One of the biggest challenges and joys of my life was being cast in a little, as yet unknown movie called *War Room*. I'd never considered acting on the big screen, and I was extremely intimidated by the idea when they called me completely out of the blue. In fact, when the producers called, I gave them several suggestions for qualified actresses who could play the role of Elizabeth Jordan much better than I. Still, they asked me to prayerfully consider it and at least look at the script. What I read on those pages sealed my decision. This wasn't a *movie*. It was *ministry*.

None of us involved in the film could have predicted it would climb to the number-one slot in the box office or become one of Sony's top-grossing films that year. Even more incredible was how the strength of this movie made the power of prayer a topic of national conversation. To this day, people still send me photos of personal prayer rooms they've created in their homes. People still tell me of their renewed emphasis on prayer after seeing *War Room*.

He has not promised to lead us in a way that appeals to our senses; rather, He has promised to lead us in a way that appeals to our spirits—the leading of the Holy Spirit within us.

Months later, I remembered something that made the hair on my arms absolutely stand on end.

I was flipping through my journal, looking back at some notes from a Bible study I'd attended nearly eight years before the movie filming. The first day of the study, the teacher (who I'd never met before) looked my direction and said, "I just feel compelled to tell you that the Lord will do something through your life that will compel people to recognize and utilize the power of prayer." Then he added this: "It won't be only a few people who are affected. Many thousands will be inspired to pray."

I had no idea what he meant. Likely neither did he. All I know for sure is that in that moment my heart burned within me. His words resonated with the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. I knew for sure the Lord was speaking to me.

You'll never hear me say God doesn't speak in miraculous ways today. I've seen the proof of it more than once. I've seen His providential hand at work in circumstances, aligning events and orchestrating divine encounters. But hear me: I've learned not to *rely* on these instances. Miraculous occurrences don't replace God's Spirit as the chief means I depend on to hear His voice. He has not promised to lead us in a way that appeals to our senses; rather, He has promised to lead us in a way that appeals to our spirits—the leading of the Holy Spirit within us.

When God shows up in a tangible, surprising way, enjoy it, celebrate it, and thank Him for it. Then, turn your attention inward again, look to the Spirit and the Scriptures, and thank Him for giving you the most miraculous means of all for hearing His voice.

FIRST MONTH REFLECTION

Almighty God, in this hour of quiet time, I seek communication with you. I want to turn away from the worry and fever of today's work, from the world's jarring noises, from the praise and blame of other people, from the confused thoughts and fantasies of my own heart, and instead seek the quietness of your presence.

There should be an ongoing prayer request that frequent your conversations with God. NO matter the specific details you are verbalizing, you should always land with:

“LORD REVEAL YOURSELF TO ME”

More than anything else that might define or characterize your circumstances, you should want to hear his voice, detect his fingerprints in your life, and see Him moving within it all. No matter how many times, you make an appeal to him in prayer, and no matter how many different combinations of words you use, God's response should always echo this verse:

“The person who has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me; and whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and will show myself to him.”
John 14:21

In other words He says, if you really want to see me, then get busy being radically obedient to me. His word tells us to plan on it. On obeying. Whatever it may seem to cost. And not to wait another second before we start. As backward as it may seem at first, what we do in preparation before we hear from God is just as important as how we choose to respond to God after we hear from Him. God doesn't just speak to be heard; He speaks to be obeyed.

So today, there is nothing for you to look up. You are only asked to *look up*. At Him. Use this time to of seeking Him (and seeking to hear Him) as an opportunity to commit yourself to up-front, proactive obedience – before He even says a word.

Reflect on what you heard God saying to you this month, whether it was through His Word or His Spirit, reflect on how it felt in your spirit. Then rest in Him a while. Marinate on what He has been leading you to consider and act on it. Interact with Him through prayer and do what you normally do to remember something important. Write about how this month has affected your relationship with God.

