



DEEP
roots

W e e k # 4 :
obedience

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Devotional ~ Grape Vines and Obedience

Written by Noreen Sevret

The grape vines cover the whole side of the farmhouse my aunt and uncle inherited, and every year I go there for picnics I enjoy looking at and standing under the shade of the grape vines. I admire the grapes that grow so beautifully on the vines that cling to the old homestead that has sheltered the family for many generations. I remember the story my aunt told me this summer about how she and my uncle had to get a ladder and climb way to the top of the house to prune the grape vines. She said when they were done pruning them she thought they would never grow again because they looked so cut back and barren. When we came for a picnic it was the middle of July this year. The whole side of the house was covered, and the lush grapes were growing from top to bottom.

As I stood and took pictures of the clusters of grapes, I thought about my aunt and uncle's obedience to prune the vines every season without fail. It took a lot of work and effort and climbing up high, but their obedience paid off in the season of growing that was just around the corner. Their feeling like the grapes would never grow again wasn't accurate. They grew and became fruitful in this season. My aunt and uncle followed God's call on their life way back when they were young and had little children. They felt God calling them to go to Africa as missionaries. They became missionaries with Wycliffe Bible Translators; my uncle became a Bible translator, my aunt (a nurse) worked with women in Togo, West Africa with income generating ideas, teaching them to read, and teaching them about health care for their children. Their obedience to God then was over 30 years in that place. I think that it probably was easier to obey in the pruning of the grape vines because they had seen God provide all those years on the mission field. They saw God work in ways I have never seen in their travels and living life there.

I think when we root ourselves in God's Word and learn to obey and step where He wants us to go, something changes inside us. I think it gives us more courage to step forward in the future, even when the future seems unknown, when we have seen God provide in the past. Our obedience does not need to be out of fear but out of knowing who God is and that He will provide. If we need to step up on a ladder to prune grape vines, we know that is the process by which the grapes will grow and thrive in the future.

As you spend time this week with your family, read John 15:1-17 together. Buy a bunch of grapes at the grocery store and eat them together as you answer the following questions about obedience:

1. Read and discuss John 15:1-17 together.
2. Talk about the significance of the True Vine and the branches.
3. Look up how grapes are pruned and watch a video about the process. Watching a video may give you insight into this chapter and be able to envision it in a different light.
4. What does it mean to “remain in me, and I will remain in you?”
5. Read verse 10 and 11 again – talk about obedience and joy.
6. Read verse 13 again and discuss what it means then and now.



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Taking a Faithful Step

By Kathy Hicks

Have you ever been pushed outside your comfort zone: Did you get queasy, uncomfortable, irritable, scared, did it feel daunting? Imagine taking that first step without your faith in God.

The Bible gives us examples of many individuals that have taken steps of faith. I always think of Abraham when confronted with stepping outside of my comfort zone. Abraham is the Father of Faith (Galatians 3:7). Abraham set his life course by faith, setting a strong example by which every believer should follow.

Before discussing Abraham's journey, let me ask, what is faith? Faith is the confident assurance that what we desire will happen. (Hebrews 11:1) With certainty the very thing we hope for will be waiting for us, even if we cannot see it in the future.

God requested Abraham to take huge steps of faith in the book of Genesis. I strongly encourage you to read the entire book. I will highlight just a small portion of Abraham's faithful journey.

Abraham lived in the affluent city of Haran. He lived in a comfortable home with many riches, a great job, and his family surrounding him. Abraham was 75 years old when his journey with the Lord truly began. The Lord asked Abraham to leave Haran and travel to an unknown land with his wife Sarah (Sarai) and his nephew, Lot. (Genesis 12:2-3). God promised to make Abraham a great nation. Do you think Abraham's decision to leave his comfortable home for the land of the unknown may have been met with some opposition, criticism, and scrutiny? Proverbs 3: 5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart: do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will show you which path to take." Abraham did not rely on his own logic or understanding he did as the Lord asked of him and packed up his possessions, his wife and his nephew and set off for the unknown. God had a great journey planned for Abraham, this journey would not be easy.

Abraham endured a famine in Canaan, was banished from Egypt after lying to the king, which brought terrible plagues to Egypt, and then returned to Bethel only to find his herdsmen arguing with Lot's over shared land because it simply could not sustain both groups.

After dividing the land, Abraham headed on to Canaan, where once again the Lord spoke, promising that Abraham would have many descendants, even though he and Sarah had been unable to have children. (Genesis 15: 2)

Abraham built an altar for the Lord in Canaan and waited on God's promises. During their waiting, Sarah encouraged Abraham to have a child with her slave, and he became the father of Ishmael. But that is not what God had in mind.

Again the Lord appeared to Abraham. The Lord assured Abraham that he would be blessed with a son. Sarah overheard this and laughed in disbelief because she was far too old to bear children. The Lord responded saying, "is anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Genesis 18: 14) When Abraham was 100 and Sarah 99, Sarah became pregnant with a son named Isaac. They had waited 25 years for God's promise to be fulfilled!

Following the birth of Isaac, Abraham met many other challenges that required the act of stepping in faith. Many of the requests from God were difficult. Why would God cause a faithful servant like Abraham to suffer a difficult journey? Our journey with God shapes us for the future. A journey filled with many peaks and valleys forges a magnificent adventure with the Lord Almighty. When it is filled with both struggle and joy, it gives us time to become aware of convictions that we need to develop. It provides a testimony of our faith to be shared throughout our lives.

The book of Genesis follows the history of Abraham and the four generations after him. Each of the generations had its epic failures that were paired with God's promises to rescue and bless each descendant of Abraham. Abraham's story and his constant faithful journey and testimony gives believers a beautiful lesson in faith. When we step out in faith, we can expect God to step in with great power. As we take our first difficult step that God requires, we can be assured that He will be right by our side ensuring that the steps that follow fall right into place, and the journey of building an everlasting relationship with our Father begins. First steps are the hardest, but ours to make.

Trust in the will of the Lord and not on your own understanding and be rewarded on your journey.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the opportunity to be stretched to step outside my comfort zone. I pray as your children we continually step in faith towards the journey you have created for us, to share your gracious, and everlasting love.

In your name I pray. AMEN.

To do:

1. Read the whole story of Abraham in your Bible (Genesis 12-25) or here (<http://www.biblestoryguy.com/bible15.html>) with your family. Talk about the challenges of taking steps of obedience.
2. What are some of the things that keep you from stepping in obedience?



Obedience to God - - Book of Daniel

By Joe Pangia

We live in a world where there is an enormous amount of pressure put on people to conform to the ever-evolving social norms of the day, regardless of how contrary they may be to God's Word. While we may tend to think this is unique to modern society, it isn't. The Apostle Paul spoke of it in Romans 12:2 and numerous examples appear throughout the Old Testament.

Sometime around 600 BC Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon and a vast number of the surviving Jewish people were deported to Babylon. Various prophets had carried God's warning to his people that if they continued their rebellious ways and their idol worship, they would be punished. Despite these warnings, the people continued to disobey the Lord.

Among the exiles brought to Babylon were Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (better known to us by their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshack and Abad-Nego). We are told in the book of Daniel, that these four young men (hardly more than boys at this time) were men who were serious about their faithfulness and obedience to God.

It was not long before they encountered their first challenge. I won't go into detail about this first challenge of their obedience to God, although I would encourage you to read about it in Daniel 1. It wasn't long before Shadrach, Meshack and Abad-Nego were faced with a decision that could cost them their lives. King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold and declared that whomever refused to fall down and worship the idol would be thrown into a blazing furnace.

These three faithful and obedient servants of God refused to worship this golden idol. When hauled before the furious king, they were given a second chance to worship this idol and save themselves from death in the furnace. Their reply to the king was, "we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." Daniel 3:16-18.

Can you imagine the courage and faith it took to defy the king of Babylon and remain obedient to God. While they firmly believed that God could save them from death in the furnace, they certainly didn't know if God would save them. As we read on in Daniel 3, we soon learn that God not only protected them from the fire, but God used the situation to demonstrate his power and glory to King Nebuchadnezzar. The king was so in awe that he himself praised the "God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who had sent his angel and rescued his servants!....." (Daniel 3:28)

This is only one example of people who stood firm in their obedience to God, even when the penalty was death. While we may never face the choice of obedience to God or face death, we are faced with many choices throughout our life to obey God or rebel.

Challenge:

List some of the situations you have encountered where you faced the choice to be obedient to God or not. What choice did you make, and would you make the same choice today?

Read about another wonderful example of obedience to God in Daniel 6, where Daniel is faced with the choice of obedience to God or being thrown into a den of lions, and how God uses Daniel's obedience for His glory.

Prayer:

Father, give us the wisdom and courage to be faithful and obedient to you as we walk through our day. Use our obedience so that others may see your power and glory and they too will believe and follow you. While we may never face the consequences that were faced by Daniel and his friends, help us to choose to obey you no matter the cost. We pray this in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen

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Fear In Obedience
By Lydia Schooley

Have you ever been in that situation where you felt like God is telling you to do something but fear was holding you back?

A woman named Esther was in a similar situation. If you aren't familiar with this story, Esther was put into the position of queen where she was faced with a choice to save her people, the Jews, or continue in comfort. In order to save her people, she had to ask the king to change the law. The problem was that if a queen went to the king uninvited, it could mean persecution or death. Even if Esther did make her request to the king, he might have turned her down, and that would mean failure to save her people.

Let's stop there for a second. Isn't that like our situations sometimes? We feel God tell us to do something but we are afraid. We are afraid of what others might think. We are afraid of persecution. We are afraid of failure. We overthink and come up with excuses. We get comfortable. But our "no" affects other people. Esther saying "no" to what God is telling her to do could mean the suffering of her people, but saying "yes" could mean saving her people!

You see, it's not about us. It's about us allowing God to work through us to reach other people for Him. That's hard. That's scary. That isn't comfortable. But God doesn't call us to comfort, He calls us to obedience.

Continuing in the story, while Esther was thinking about whether to make the big request to the king, her uncle was advising her and said,

"And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Esther 4:14 NIV

God had placed Esther in the position as queen for this moment and reason. God places us in certain situations because He knows we can make a difference there. Maybe God has you here for a reason. Does that make it easy? No. Does that mean it won't be scary? Not always.

Sometimes, we get into a scary or hard situation and don't do what God is telling us because we are fearful. But fear can't be the reason we don't step into what God is calling us to do. Be afraid and do it anyway because I promise that what God is telling us to do is so much greater than what we have planned for ourselves.

Moving is scary. Going to sit by that kid in lunch is scary. Sharing the Gospel can be scary. But we can do them knowing that we are making a difference for the kingdom, big or small.

Back to Esther. She did go to the king. I'm sure it was scary. I'm sure it wasn't easy but she did it anyway. Esther's courage freed her people! And even if her courage didn't save her people, she knew that she was doing what God told her to do. Actually right before she went to make her request to the king she said,

"I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."
Esther 4:16 NIV

She didn't know the outcome but she trusted, knowing that whatever the outcome, she would be obedient. We may never know the power of what God is telling us to do but we can stand in confidence that even when people go against us, even when it seems like we have failed, God is sovereign over it all. Our "yes" is enough.

Dear God,

I pray that your will be done in our lives. I pray that you would give us courage to step into obedience in the situations you have placed us in. Whatever that looks like, I trust that you are over it all. I thank you for your grace as we have and continue to walk this out imperfectly. Thank you Lord!

Amen

Here are some challenges for you this week!

-Read the story of Esther (it's pretty short) and look at Esther's obedience and how that affected everyone around her.

- What is something right now in your life that fear is holding you back from doing? Pray about what that could look like to step into obedience there.

Jesus replied,

"Anyone who loves me
will obey my teaching."

John 14:23

