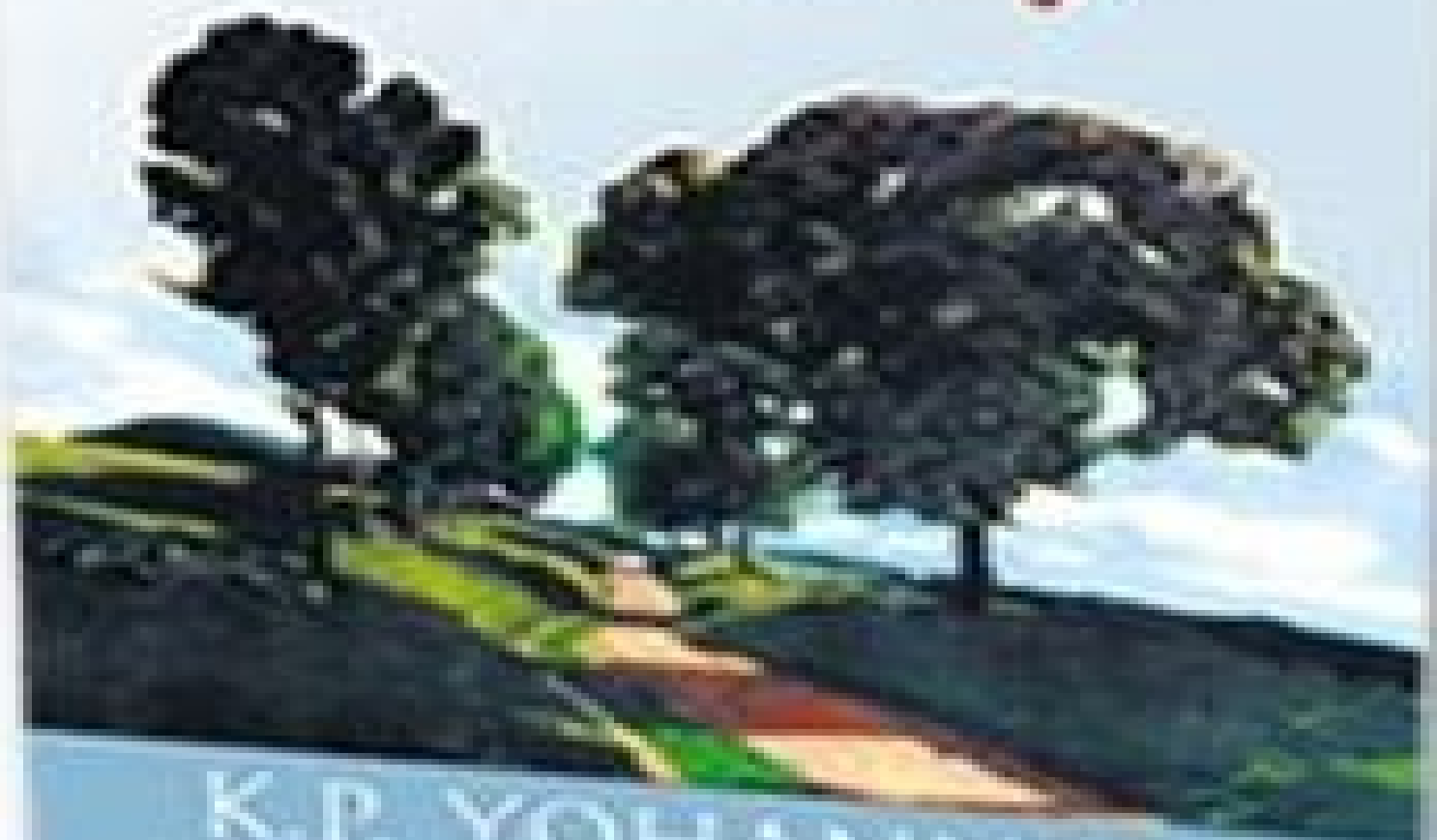
THE WAY OF

The True Blessing

LESSONS IN OBEDIENCE



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"Friendship with the Lord is reserved for those who fear him. With them he shares the secrets of his covenant,"

Psalm 25:14, nlt

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Introduction

There are plenty of books that tell about "how" to receive God's blessings and how to obtain material blessings for a more comfortable life on earth. Yet we see through the life of Abraham that true blessing is much deeper than the material and comes only through a holy fear and love for God.

So often our Christianity starts with us and ends with us. It is all centered around ourselves. Even when obeying some Scriptures (like "giving") we are focused more on what we can get from it! May the Lord bring us to the place at which we obey

Him because we love Him and do all for His sake because He is Lord. May our comfort, joy and peace not be the issue, but what our Lord wants. And only out of a life lived in the fear of the Lord and in love with Him will we find that our lives are blessed and we are a blessing.

CHAPTER ONE

Friend of God

Like most young kids, my son, Danny, loved to play at the playground when he was young. Oftentimes, after being at the playground for only 10 minutes, he would come running back over to me, excitedly asking, "Can me and my friend go play together on the swings?!"

"What friend?" I would reply, knowing I had only brought him and his sister to the playground.

"That one!" as he turned to point out a boy he had just met. After a couple swings together on the monkey bars, they were "friends."

But true friendship runs much deeper than that which marks childhood. It is not just happy cozy feelings. True friendship is in no way self-centered. It is laying "down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). Consider the following example of true, costly friendship:

Out of the furnaces of war come many true stories of sacrificial friendship. One such story tells of two friends in World War I, who were inseparable. They had enlisted together, trained together, were shipped overseas together, and fought side-by-side in the trenches. During an attack, one of the men was critically wounded in a field filled with barbed wire obstacles, and he was unable to crawl back to his foxhole. The entire area was under a withering enemy crossfire, and it was suicidal to try to reach him. Yet his friend decided to try. Before he could get out of his own trench, his sergeant yanked him back inside and ordered him not to go. "It's too late. You can't do him any good, and you'll only get yourself killed."

A few minutes later, the officer turned his back, and instantly the man was gone after his friend. A few minutes later, he staggered back, mortally wounded, with his friend, now dead, in his arms.

The sergeant was both angry and deeply moved. "What a waste," he blurted out. "He's dead and you're dying. It just wasn't worth it."

With almost his last breath, the dying man replied, "Oh, yes, it was, Sarge. When I got him, the only thing he said was, 'I knew you'd come, Jim!'"[x]

One of the true marks of friendship is that it is costly. Friendship, by nature, involves sacrifice.

Give Me Jesus

There's a well-known song with lyrics proclaiming, "Take the world, but give me Jesus . . ,"[2]For most, this song remains a matter of emotion and feeling. But for one young man I met on the mission field, this song had a deeper, more

intimate reality.

Ram grew up in a prestigious Hindu family as part of the high Brahmin caste.

He lived with the many benefits of being a Brahmin and was denied nothing in his life. But he grew up never knowing anything about the Savior, Jesus. It wasn't until he received a Gospel tract while studying in college that he learned of the Lord Jesus Christ. Convicted of his sin and moved by Jesus' love for him, Ram soon made a definite commitment to follow Christ and become a child of God.

As he learned about being a disciple of Jesus, one of the first steps he took was to be baptized, making public his declaration as a follower of Jesus. When his family heard of his baptism, they became outraged, for the act of baptism was a public announcement that he was walking away from his previous life. In the Eastern cultures, religion is tied into every aspect of life—family, job, relationships—everything. It is not like changing the political party you are associated with. For Ram to walk away from Hinduism meant he was turning his back on the belief of his parents, his whole family and his village. And being from a respectable, high-class family, this had huge repercussions and brought shame upon his family.

Ram's parents and relatives tried their best to persuade him to come back to Hinduism. But when their gentle persuasions, tears and pleading failed, his family gave him an ultimatum: deny Christ or leave home, never to be part of the family again.

The reality of walking away from the parents and the sister he loved dearly, including all extended family and the inheritance entitled to him as the son, was a tremendous sacrifice that flashed before his eyes. But a choice must be made.

Walking away from everything he had, Ram left his home with only the clothes on his back to an unknown future. He had chosen Christ.

In God's mercy and grace, Ram ended up in one of our Bible colleges with the determination to prepare himself to become a servant of God. This is where I met him and heard of his tremendous and difficult testimony. When asked if he regretted leaving his family and wealth behind, he gently responded with absolute confidence and humility, "They can have the whole wide world. All I want is my Jesus."

He went on to explain about the pain and sadness in his life when he thinks about his parents and sister he left behind. But he said, "My greatest sorrow is that they do not know the Lord Jesus Christ the way I know Him. If they knew Him and could see His face, they too would walk away from everyone and everything else. That's the price that must be paid to know Jesus and to be His."

Ram's story reminds us a lot of the life of Abraham, who, having heard the voice of God, left his home and all familiar circumstances in Ur of the Chaldeans to follow his God.

Many people, when they hear the name "Abraham," immediately think of "father of many nations" or how, in a miraculous manner, he and his wife, Sarah conceived Isaac in their old age. And of course, it is impossible to forget about his incredible act of obedience as he prepared to sacrifice the son of promise. What a man Abraham was! Our minds easily classify him as a saint, and rightly so. But what makes all of this even greater is the fact that Abraham was nothing special. He was an ordinary man just like you and I. Raised in an idolatrous home, Abraham grew up knowing nothing about the living God. In between the stories of the incredible things that happened in his life, you'll see a man who was fearful and weak, lying to protect himself and his family. Abraham was no superstar.

Yet the living God called Abraham to come and walk with Him, inviting him to enter into a covenant and to know Him. "Now the Lord had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing' " (Genesis 12:1-2).

And when all was said and done, Abraham was blessed and called a "friend of God" (James 2:23). If Abraham was just an ordinary man, how was it that he became a friend of God? It is friendship with the Almighty, intimacy with Him, that was the true blessing in Abraham's life.

True Blessing

Thousands of sermons are preached today on the blessings of Abraham and how we, too, can lay claim to the very things promised him. But much of these teachings refer exclusively to material blessings and how it is possible to achieve material prosperity in this world. Have we forgotten that he who was blessed (Abraham) gave up everything, walking away from the material blessings afforded him by his family? Ancient history tells us that the Chaldeans, of which Abraham was a descendant, were by no means frugal sheepherders. They were a luxurious people, eating and drinking from golden spoons and cups and all the finest of ancient culture.

This is what Abraham left behind— an established family and luxurious circumstances—to follow the living God in total obedience. This was the way of blessing. Throughout his life, Abraham lived in tents, not in mansions (see Hebrews 11:9). Hebrews 11:10 (niv) tells us that "he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

Abraham was not looking for the blessing of things in this world and material possessions as the end and reward of his obedience. But he looked for and saw something most preachers and shallow Christians are not able to see today.

If you were to ask Abraham what he would consider the greatest blessing in his life, he would surely echo Brother Ram: "to know the living God and be known by Him and to have Him as my friend." This is the blessing of Abraham and the most incredible honor in life: to be called the friend of the Almighty God.

We too are given the same invitation to friendship as was given to Abraham. And if we are truly seeking to have intimacy with the living God and not being satisfied with the things of this world, we, like Abraham, will know the friendship of God.

God longs for that intimacy, that fellowship with us. He wants to share with us His intimate feelings and concerns. Our relationship with Him cannot be based just on the fact that now we are saved. We cannot just have the attitude that says, "Praise the Lord. Now I am saved. Now I am born again." No. There is more! We must grow to the place where the Lord can say to us, "Tom, Lucy, John (whatever your name is),

I just want to talk to you." Then we answer, "Lord, what do You want to tell me? What do You want to say to me? What do You want me to do?" That kind of close relationship is what He wants—a friendship. He wants that friendship with us because He loves us and wants to share Himself with us.

What an incredible honor!

Do you truly long to have this kind of intimate and close friendship with God? If the Lord were to make a statement about you, would He be able to say, "He or she is My friend"? Think about it.

The invitation the living God gave to Abraham is extended to you as well. Friendship is offered. But this friendship and intimacy do not come instantly or without a price. If Abraham was a man just like us and he became a friend of God—and God is no respecter of persons (see Acts 10:34)—then it must be possible for us to become the friends of God as well. How does this happen?

CHAPTER TWO

The Road to Friendship

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.

"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me" (Genesis 22:1-12, 15-18, niv).

There's a wonderful hymn that declares, "But we never can prove the delights of His love until all on the altar we lay; for the favor He shows, and the joy He bestows, are for them who will trust and obey. Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."[1] How true this is.

When God called Abraham, He absolutely promised that He would bless him and make him a blessing. But none of this happened overnight. The journey was long, and many tests came along, as well as many failures. And in the ultimate

test, Abraham's absolute confidence was found in the character of God as he laid the son who would fulfill God's promise on the altar.

Imagine the scene the night before. Every time I read this passage about Abraham,

I cannot help but think about my two children. I wonder if Abraham could sleep that night. I wouldn't have slept. Maybe he tried to sleep, but memories from the previous years filled his mind—like the moment he first heard God tell him and Sarah that they would have a son and they both chuckled as they thought about the silliness of a promise like that in their old age. And then that day when Sarah was indeed pregnant and no one could believe it. Or Isaac learning to walk and the first time he said "daddy." What memories must have filled his mind?

Perhaps Abraham spent that night in Isaac's room, watching his son as he slept, trying to freeze that moment in his mind forever. After looking at his son dozens of times, he wiped the tears and tried to go to sleep once more. Imagine how difficult it must have been for Abraham to even think about sacrificing his own son and the promise that God had given him. I am sure he would have gladly died in Isaac's place if he could. But Romans 4:17 gives us a glimpse of how Abraham was able to obey the Lord, even in such a difficult request. It says that Abraham believed God, "who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did."

The road to friendship was the road of trust.

The dictionary defines trust as the "firm belief or confidence in the honesty, integrity, reliability and justice of another person or thing."[2] Abraham trusted in the character of the God who called him and took care of him from the moment he first left Ur.

He trusted that God was able to fulfill the promise He had given him even if his son was dead. It was only Abraham's absolute trust and confidence in the sovereignty and nature of God that caused him to follow at all costs.

I am sure that if God had asked Abraham to sacrifice 10,000 sheep or 5,000 bulls, he would have surely done it. That type of sacrifice would have been easy and mean very little to Abraham. It would have been a sacrifice that cost him nothing. David echoed

Abraham's attitude concerning this in 2 Samuel 24:24 (niv) saying, "No ... I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." Abraham chose to obey God even when it was very costly.

As a result, in Genesis 22:16-18, we hear God telling Abraham,

'By Myself I have sworn,' says the Lord, 'because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the

stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, *because you have obeyed My voice'* (emphasis added).

The road to friendship was the road of obedience,

This truth is paralleled in the New Testament as well. "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.

You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15: 10, 14-15).

The more we understand the nature and character of our Lord and His absolute love, compassion and mercy, the more we will be able to abandon ourselves at His feet, obeying whatever He calls us to do. Through the life of Abraham, we see how obedience and trust precede friendship and blessing.

How was Abraham able to trust and obey the Lord in such a great way? Surely the sacrifices in his life were already great.

He gave up his homeland, his riches, everything that was familiar to him—wasn't that enough? I'm sure a lot of us could talk ourselves out of such a difficult request, especially after already sacrificing so much. But Abraham did not do that. What kept him in obedience and in a tender walk with God was his fear of the Lord. For "by the fear of the Lord one departs from evil" (Proverbs 16:6).

CHAPTER THREE

The Fear of the Lord

Psalm 111: 10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." More often than not, the "fear of the Lord" is just a vague spiritual term. But the way to become a friend of God and to have our lives built on the correct foundation is to understand what it means to walk in the fear of the Lord.

In Genesis 22:12, God says to Abraham,

" 'Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.' " This passage is the first time in the Bible that the fear of God is mentioned.

For most people, when we hear the word "fear" it brings a negative connotation. But to fear the Lord is not to be afraid of Him. Rather, it is to have a deep reverence for Him, to realize that He is God—all-knowing, all-powerful, all-encompassing. A.W. Tozer said, "If there is one terrible disease in the Church of Christ, it is that we do not see God as great as He is. We're too familiar with God. I think we ought to remember who He is. 'He is thy Lord; and worship thou him.' And though he comes down to the lowest point of our need and makes Himself accessible to us as tenderly as a mother to her child, still don't forget that when John saw Him—that John who had lain on His bosom—he fell at His feet as dead."[1]

The fear of the Lord is not a happily received message in today's Christianity. We like to hear about the joy of the Lord, His blessings and grace and how much He loves us. And although all these things are true, the blessings of God come through the fear of Him.

Did you know that three-fourths of the Bible is Old Testament and only one-fourth is New Testament? The principal theme of the Old Testament is the fear of God, while the principal theme of the New Testament is the grace of God.

Please don't misunderstand me. I am not against the grace of God. But in today's Church we hear so much of the grace of God and so little of what it is to fear the Lord.

The way to distinguish between false grace and true grace is by finding out whether the grace being taught has incorporated into it a fear of God. If the grace of God preached does not include the fear of God, it is false grace. For how can we really understand grace unless we know what grace has done for us?

The grace of God is preached in the New Testament to a people who knew the fear of God—the Jewish people. The Jewish people were established in Old

Testament teaching; they knew the fear of God. Then came the revelation of grace in the New Testament. Grace was not given as a replacement for the fear of God. The revelation of grace was meant to build upon the Old Testament understanding of the fear of God. Grace is a completion, a culmination, of the Old Testament teaching of the fear of God. You can't know grace without also knowing something of the fear of God. But today, we preach the grace of God to a group of people who don't understand about the fear of God.[2]

That is so sad because we cannot walk with God as Abraham walked—in sacrificial obedience and as a friend of God—without the fear of the Lord. Many of today's Christians desire all the blessings but don't want to pay the price. We want to be God's friend and we want to serve Him, but we also want to skip over the surrender and obedience parts because they are hard.

Rather, we like to say, "If you feel like it, do it." I'm sure Abraham did not *feel* like sacrificing his son. But he was prepared to do anything, motivated by love and holy fear.

God tells us that this holy fear of Him is the beginning of all wisdom in our lives (see Psalm 111:10). "Nowhere in the Bible does it say that 'the grace of God is the beginning of wisdom.' "[3] Wisdom is practical knowledge of the Word lived out in obedience. To have wisdom is to understand. Our word "understand" comes from a root word meaning "to align oneself with or stand under." To understand, a person must "stand under" in obedience to God and His Word. The fear of the Lord helps bring this obedience.

So often we misunderstand obedience and call it legalism. We resist doing anything that we do not want to do and quickly cast off the guilt that comes from not obeying. Because of this, we miss the whole reason that God calls us to obedience—that we might know Him, be blessed by Him and be a friend of God. He is God and He is to be feared and obeyed, known and loved.

In Matthew 7:24, Jesus said, "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock." The wise man heard God and then obeyed. This must be the progression in our lives—acting on the things that we hear. This is how the fear of the Lord is the beginning—the foundation— of our whole Christian life. The fear of the Lord is like the ABCs; it is impossible to walk intimately with the Lord Jesus without it.

This is why we cannot downplay obedience and consider it something optional.

So often we make the mistake of treating God as if He were a nice little buddy we carry in our pockets, taking Him out when we need something and

praying, "Do this for me, Jesus." Then we put Him away and merrily go on with our lifestyle. We treat Him more like an equal, someone we consult for an opinion when we cannot figure out what to do on our own. And we only take His advice if it seems good and is not too difficult. There is no cross. There is no pain. There is no sacrifice. There is no true obedience.

We are those who call Him, "Lord, Lord!" but do not do what He says (see Luke 6:

46). Brothers and sisters, please be aware of the horrible consequences of this type of lip service. Jesus Himself warns us, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21, niv).

It is only as we fear Him, obey Him and trust Him that He will continue to lead us deeper into Himself.

Have you ever heard God calling you to hard and difficult tasks like He called Abraham? Moses, David, Esther, Paul and so many others heard God calling them to hard things. Or do you only hear God comforting you with promises all the time? Oswald Chambers asked, "Have you ever heard the Master say a hard word? If you have not, I question whether you have heard Him say anything."[4] Abraham had ears to hear hard words. He had a heart that was willing to obey difficult requests. I pray that the Lord would give each of us ears to hear and hearts to obey difficult requests.

CHAPTER FOUR

Precious in the Sight of God

The fear of God is greatly treasured in heaven. It is a mark of one who is special in God's eyes. Listen to what God says of His servant Job: "There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man *who fears God* and shuns evil" (Job 1:8 niv, emphasis added). Job was well-off and had many things to be proud of. But God didn't mention anything about how amazingly wealthy, wise or strong Job was. He didn't talk about his good looks, his good deeds or his many children. Even though these are things that we value, God mentioned none of these. More than anything else, God valued Job's fear of the Lord.

Over and over again we see this is the case. When God had Moses select leaders,

He said, "But select capable men from all the people—men who *fear God* ..." (Exodus 18:21, emphasis added). In the Psalms, it is made clear that those who fear God are promised blessing upon blessing: honor (Psalm 15:4), salvation (Psalm 85:9), love (Psalm 103:11), security (Psalm 112:8) and friendship (Psalm 119:63).

But even if we did not receive blessings from fearing Him, He still is worthy of the utmost respect and honor. He still is to be feared and obeyed. In the book of Leviticus, it states over and over again, "Do this . ..

Do not do this ... I am the Lord . . . Fear your God" (see 19:14 and 25:17). God tells His people to do all sorts of different things without explanation, simply because, "I am the Lord. Fear your God."

Our obedience is not some favor to God. Who He is should be reason enough to obey—no further explanation is needed. We are told to do things simply because God is God. He is the Master. He is the Lord.

Do we fear Him like that today? Do you fear Him? Do His completely blinding purity and love cause you to tremble in awe and reverence before Him? Do you shake before His holy perfection? He is holy holy holy Even the angels cannot look upon Him. If you saw Him, as He really is—all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving, timeless and perfect—you would fear Him.

Let us remember Abraham—an ordinary man who became the friend of God by fearing and obeying Him. This is the way of true blessing, for "to partake from the divine nature we too must fear God. It may seem strange to us today, but the foundation of all that we are in Christ is based upon a holy and reverent fear of God."[1] You could do a million great things for God, but it is holy fear and reverence that are so precious in His sight.

Even though obedience is the way of true blessing, it does not guarantee that

life will be easy. Following the Lord does not mean we will never face difficulties, persecution or martyrdom. In fact, the disciples who heard Christ call them His friends all lost their lives for the sake of the Gospel. And throughout history, many who have walked intimately with the Lord have faced similar plights. Consider Watchman Nee as just one example of many. During the 1930s, he "relentlessly encouraged the Shanghai Christians to share their faith. His words were hard to ignore: 'Because you are not witnessing, many have not heard the gospel. They will be eternally separated from God. What a consequence of our apathy! . . . This is my challenge to you. Witness to at least one person a day. Witness to whomever you meet... It is time for us to put feet to our faith.' "[2]

Because of his passion to preach Christ, Watchman Nee faced incredible persecution. Many times he was urged to leave mainland China to save his own life. But he refused.

He saw the call that God gave him to be a shepherd to His people, and he could not run away from that, no matter what it cost him.

Then, on April 10, 1952, Watchman Nee was arrested and placed in prison.

He would spend the next 20 years there, his days "divided into three 8-hour segments: hard labor, 'reeducation,' and solitary confinement."[3] He was allowed no communication until his 20th, and last, year in prison, in which he learned that his wife had also been arrested and died years earlier. After spending 20 years in chains for the Gospel, Watchman Nee died in prison on June 1, 1972.

The life that Watchman Nee lived was not easy. But the life he lived was precious in the sight of God, for it was one of commitment carried out by holy fear and love. His life became a blessing to millions during his lifetime and even after. May our lives be marked by the same commitment and blessing as we walk the way of true blessing in the fear of the Lord.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Way of Blessing

Unless we are careful, we can be deceived by the Enemy's whisper that tells us, "This obedience stuff is too hard. Abraham was only able to do what he did because God was showing such extraordinary favor to him. You're just an ordinary, struggling human being with a lot of problems. You could never achieve that kind of life. Maybe Abraham could do it, but not you." If we believe this lie, we are sure to remain spiritually stagnant, never walking any closer with the Lord. We need to remember that

Abraham was no superstar—he had the same struggles and emotions as you and I.

You see, whenever God invites us to make radical commitment, He always does it with the promise that His grace is sufficient for us to obey whatever He tells us to do.

God always seeks to do the most impossible things through weak, struggling people. The only requirement is that we come to the place of total surrender and absolute trust in Him, just as Abraham did.

The truth of the matter is that God has people in every generation who walk with Him and know Him intimately, just like the great saints of old—Abraham, Elijah, the apostle Paul and many others. All over the world today, there are humble, broken saints who quietly walk with God and experience the same blessing as Abraham experienced. And the living God calls each of them His friend.

You and I are given the same privilege, the same opportunity and the same invitation that God gave to Abraham. But this will never become a reality in our life without our willingness to sacrifice.

The life of Adoniram Judson is a classic example of an ordinary man who made a significant impact upon his generation because of his love for the Lord, his obedience and his sacrifice.

Adoniram Judson was the first missionary to go to India and then on to Burma. He was born and raised in an average family and as a young man he had the call from God to leave his familiar surroundings and go preach the Gospel in those faraway nations that had never heard of Jesus.

It was in 1810, as he was getting ready for his departure, that he met a young girl named Nancy Hasseltine. He fell in love with her and wanted to marry her, so he sought permission from her father.

In his book *How Saved Are We*? Michael Brown tells the Judsons' story, including this excerpt from the letter Adoniram wrote to Nancy Hasseltine's father:

insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this, for the sake of Him who

left His heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion, and the glory of God?

Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with the crown of righteousness, brightened with the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Saviour from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair? [1]

To Nancy's surprise, her father allowed her to make the decision. No doubt, she decided to marry Adoniram, and with full understanding of what lay ahead —leaving home and country with a one-way ticket for the sake of the Gospel, maybe never to return again. She was willing to make this commitment, in absolute obedience following the living God. Brown continues to write:

In spite of some fears, she knew she could rest in the faithfulness of God, although, as she said, "no female has, to my knowledge, ever left the shores of America to spend her life among the heathen; nor do I yet know, that I shall have a single female companion. But God is my witness, that I have not dared to decline the offer that has been made me, though so many are ready to call it a 'wild and romantic undertaking.' "

The Judson's labored for almost seven years before winning their first convert. After nine years they had baptized only eighteen. . . . Their first baby was stillborn during their initial voyage from Calcutta to Burma.

Their second baby Roger died before reaching his ninth month. Adoniram himself was brutally imprisoned for seventeen months during a crackdown against all foreigners, barely surviving the horribly inhuman treatment. One night, while his raw and bleeding feet were hanging in elevated stocks, swarms of mosquitoes settled on his bare soles, producing excruciating torture.

Then, not long after his release from prison, Adoniram's beloved wife Nancy died. Her constant life of sacrifice and service had finally taken its toll. Just a few weeks later little Maria, their third baby, was suddenly taken from this world. Judson was left utterly alone in a hostile Buddhist land, almost shattered with pain and grief.

Before him lay the prospect of tiger infested jungles, bat infested houses, and a fever infested climate— for life. Behind him lay an almost unimaginable trail of hardship and loss. But he did not leave off from his work. He did not abandon his Bible translating or his preaching and teaching labors. How could he? Eternal souls were at stake. Who else could reach the Burmese as well as he? So he remained for over 20 more years, returning to America only once—and that for necessity, not by choice.

. . . Adoniram Judson's devotion for life was not in vain. On one occasion, during the great annual festival held at the towering golden Buddhist pagoda in

Rangoon, he recorded that he had distributed "nearly ten thousand tracts, giving to none but those who ask.. . .

Some come two or three months' journey, from the borders of Siam and China—'Sir, we hear that there is an eternal hell. We are afraid of it. Do give us a writing that will tell us how to escape it.'. . . Others come from the interior of the country, where the name of Jesus Christ is little known— 'Are you Jesus Christ's man? Give us a writing that tells about Jesus Christ.' "

For Judson, it was worth it all. Today there are more than one million Burmese believers.[2]

Can you imagine what would have happened if Adoniram had not obeyed the Lord and followed Him? What a loss that nation would have suffered! What millions of souls would have never found their way to heaven! But because of his sacrifice and obedience, his life was blessed and he became a blessing to millions.

My friends, this is the way of true blessing: walking in the fear of the Lord and following Him at all costs. By His grace, may we all walk His path of life, living our lives for His glory and offering our bodies "as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1, niv).

Conclusion

Let us look forward to the day spoken of in 2 Corinthians 5, where Paul reminds the believers to live in the fear of God because we all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. This is not a punitive judgment; it is not as though we are being tried for a crime that was committed. Rather, it is like the Olympic games, where one receives the gold medal, another the silver and another the bronze. We will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and He will evaluate the life we have lived—our words, our attitudes and motives, the way we obeyed, how we spent the resources He gave us, the things we did and the things we did not do. "Therefore we make it our aim ... to be well pleasing to Him" (2 Corinthians 5:9).

This is what Abraham did. In total obedience he walked away from everything comfortable and familiar and lived his life for the purposes of God. And he could only do this because within him was a reverent fear of the Lord. Because of that fear, he was blessed and became a blessing, being the father of many nations.

In fact, when we open the New Testament, the first words we read are: "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the *son of Abraham:* Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers ..." (Matthew 1:1-2, niv, emphasis added). Everything began with Abraham. He is the starting point of all of God's purposes and of His plan of redemption.

Abraham was called out of terrible darkness and idolatry and given the call to follow the living God. And because he obeyed, he was changed and his life became a blessing to the many who came after him. This is the same call of blessing the Lord extends to us today. May we follow in the footsteps of Abraham.

To do so, we must let the fear of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ lead us into this kind of obedience. We will never be sorry for it, for "friendship with the Lord is reserved for those who fear him. With them he shares the secrets of his covenant" (Psalm 25:14, nit).

If this booklet has been a blessing to you, I would really like to hear from you. You may write to Gospel for Asia, 1800 Golden Trail Court, Carrollton, TX 75010.

Or send an email to kp(S?gfa.org.

Notes

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Chapter 5

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