

# SPIRITUAL FITNESS: OBEDIENCE

*(Psalm 1 and Matthew 7.24-29)*

## Introduction

Today we are going to consider Spiritual Fitness in terms of our Obedience.

Robert Benchley wrote an interesting line on obedience: *"A boy can learn a lot from a dog: obedience, loyalty, and the importance of turning around three times before lying down."*

In truth our dog, Schubert is anything but obedient and didn't provide any inspiration for this short talk.

What then is Obedience?

One of the Greek terms for obedience conveys the idea of positioning oneself under someone by submitting to their authority and command.

Another Greek word for obey in the New Testament means "to trust."

According to *Holman's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* a succinct definition of biblical obedience is "to hear God's Word and act accordingly."

My understanding then is that Obedience to God is about both hearing what God is asking us to do, and then doing it!

Hearing is then the first step of obedience. In our Gospel reading this morning we heard the words of Jesus when He said, 'Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock'.

## How Do We Hear God's Instruction?

There are a myriad of ways in which God speaks to you and me day by day. I would like to take a brief at just 4 possible ways of hearing God. You might experience others.

## *The Bible (His Word)*

In the Psalm read earlier we hear these words “Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers.”

There are many explicit commands we read about in scripture that give us instruction on every aspects of our day to day living including our attitudes towards wealth, money; relationships, and sexual conduct to name but a few.

In Matthew chapter 22 we read the words of Jesus: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Therefore, we can conclude that obedience to God involves loving Him with all our being and loving those he has placed around us as we would ourselves.

## *Other People*

This can itself take many forms. It might be a direct instruction from someone God has placed in authority over us or perhaps a prophetic word from a friend or even someone you may not even know. (*Personal story re: Eagle House*)...

## *Dreams*

God speaks to us in dreams and many people have received instructions through dreams and visions.

Some time ago, Pam and I took part in a dream interpretation course and it was amazing just how much God was communicating to that group through our dreams.

A great example of someone who clearly heard God in his dreams was Joseph. Matthew 1:20 “an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife”

Matthew 2:13 – “an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

Matthew 2:19-20 – “After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

Joseph’s obedience to the instructions he received was a crucial party of God’s plan for the redemption of mankind.

*An Inner Small Voice* – God speaking to our spirit. For me this often means being led by peace. What about you?

### **Examples of Obedience**

Having thought about how we might hear God’s instruction for us it will be good for us to consider two great examples of not just hearing, but doing.

#### *Abraham*

In Genesis chapter 22 we read about Abraham hearing God’s instruction to take his son to the Land of Moriah and sacrifice him there.

This was the son that had been promised and who the fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham rested. I suspect I would have had a very sleepless night in which I would have questioned whether or not I had really heard God speaking to me. I might have convinced myself that it was a bad dream or reasoned that this couldn’t possibly be God asking such a thing of me. Did God really say sacrifice?

Not Abraham - early the very next morning he saddled up his donkey and started the journey with Isaac and two young men. We read that Abram got to the very brink before the angel of the Lord spoke to him and stopped him from harming Isaac. We don’t know what Abraham might have been thinking. May be that his faith was such that he believed that God would raise Isaac from dead. Whatever his thoughts Abraham was severely tested and was found to be obedient.

In his book “The Good Book”, Deron Spoo considers Genesis 22 in a chapter aptly entitled “When God asks too much”. He poses the challenge, “Are you willing to

obey God even when -especially when- you don't understand what he is doing? He goes on to conclude that only "when our answer is wholeheartedly yes can we begin to experience the true essence of faith".

### *Jesus*

In this time of Lent we take time to look at the journey Jesus took to the cross. In the Garden at Gethsemane we read about the agony that Jesus experienced. In the Gospel of Luke 22:41-43 it says "He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.' An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him."

Philippians 2:8 – "And being found in appearance as a man, *he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!*

God in his Grace tested Abraham but stopped him from harming Isaac. God the Father however did not spare His only Son, Jesus, because of His love for you and I.

### **The Challenge for Each of Us Today**

Perhaps the challenge for us today is to be more like our Lord Jesus Christ. Are we willing to hear the voice of God, however He chooses to speak to us. When we hear will we be obedient?

### **Ending**

To close, a short time of reflective prayer...

- What is God by His Spirit saying to each one of us today about our obedience to Him?
- Are there things that God would have us individually to lay down as a sacrifice to Him?
- Is there something you or I have been closing our ears to?
- Are we willing to follow His instruction today?
- By God's Grace may we be both hearers and doers of His word. Amen