

Obeying God Brings Blessings

All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God (Deuteronomy 28:2).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 28:1-14

Song: “Trust and Obey”

As our children were growing up, certain advantages came with being a family member: music lessons, weekly allowance, vacations, and pizza nights. We also had household rules, and there were consequences for breaking them: forfeited allowance, loss of privileges, or extra chores. Some rules, such as fireplace safety and respect for the neighbor’s fenced-in bull, protected our kids from actual physical harm.

God established rules for Israel. Obedience identified them as His special people, and there were blessings if they obeyed, including good crops and healthy families, but consequences if they did not, including famine and military defeat.

In a fallen world, life isn’t always easy. But even in difficult times, as we obey God, we have the blessing of His peace and presence. We also enjoy fellowship with other believers. And at times, we may even experience miracles of healing or unforeseen financial provision. On the other hand, we forfeit that peace if we habitually disobey without seeking His forgiveness and restoration. Some disobedience has severe consequences. God’s laws, given in the Bible, are intended to bless us; our part is to obey.

Father, I want to receive the blessings that come with walking in obedience to Your Word. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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 March 18–24. **Cindy J. Thomas** lives in southwest Missouri with her husband, a band teacher. She enjoys writing for faith-based publications and a local paper. She also likes gardening, reading, and spending time with family.

Our Behavior Reflects Our Beliefs

In everything set them an example by doing what is good (Titus 2:7).

Scripture: Titus 2:1-8

Song: “I Will Follow Thee”

When training as a Marine in World War II, my dad learned to represent his country and the United States Marine Corps well by following orders, taking initiative when necessary, and focusing on the job at hand. In combat, these practices could save his life or someone else's. Even after the war, my dad carried these values into his job at a factory, consistently earning awards for quality work. He expected me to follow his example by behaving properly at school, respecting and listening to my teachers.

In Paul's letter to Titus, the apostle outlined behavior for both older and younger Christian men and women. Paul's instruction reflected the doctrine taught by Jesus and the other apostles. Those outside the faith might oppose Christians and Christianity, but if believers live according to these guidelines, nothing bad can truthfully be said about them or about the God they serve.

Many things in today's culture encourage self-centered or even destructive behavior. As followers of Christ, however, it is important that the way we live gives no reason for anyone to reject Him. Rather, our way of life should cause people to want to know more about the kindness and love we show. Even when setting appropriate boundaries about behaviors prohibited by the Bible, we can find loving rather than harsh ways to communicate truth.

Father, in everything I do, I want to represent You well so that others might want to know more about who You are. In Jesus' name, amen.

Wisdom Is Worth the Effort

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7).

Scripture: Proverbs 1:1-9

Song: “Speak, O Lord”

I had great intentions when I picked up my phone to open my Bible study app. (I like to set my alarm 20 minutes early to allow for some quiet time before tackling the day’s schedule.) Before I got started, though, I saw a text message notification from someone I’d tried to reach the day before. *Oh, that’ll just take a minute, and then I’ll know how to plan*, I thought. But my friend had a question, and answering it meant an email. Then I saw another email I’d been expecting. Before I knew it, the 20 minutes was gone, and I hadn’t opened the devotional app or my Bible!

Even without today’s media and messaging distractions, the writer of Proverbs likely knew how easy it is to get sidetracked from spending time seeking God’s wisdom and instruction. Today’s passage reminds us that understanding about God doesn’t just happen. It requires intentional effort.

For Christians, the fear of God doesn’t have to do with the threat of punishment. Rather, fearing Him means regarding Him with awe and respect. As today’s technology increasingly encroaches on our time, fearing God might translate into some practical actions, such as adjusting our phone notifications or simply rethinking our priorities. God is worthy of our reverence, our time, and our efforts to know Him.

Father, knowing You is more important than anything else. I will make necessary changes to prioritize my time with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Bodies Wear Out, Souls Don't

We make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it (2 Corinthians 5:9).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:1-11

Song: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

It wasn't news I wanted to hear: "You have colon cancer," my doctor said. "We need to discuss treatment." The word *cancer* struck fear in my heart; several close relatives had died after debilitating treatments and severe pain. As I faced surgery and follow-up treatment, though, I realized that even cancer could not take away my relationship with God. Looking to Scripture like today's passage, I prayed for healing and recovery but was also inspired by people who had stayed strong in faith even as their physical health failed.

The apostle Paul expressed a dilemma. He could continue preaching the gospel and nurturing faith in Christ during his life on earth, but he looked forward intensely to eternity in God's presence. Even during suffering, persecution, and imprisonment, he knew pleasing God is what counts. So Paul would continue serving Him faithfully.

Like Paul, we can determine to share our faith and obey God's commands, whether we are strong and healthy or imprisoned by frail bodies due to illness or injury. The Holy Spirit can work through us and help us live lives that please God and point others to Him.

Father, give me courage to face any physical challenges that come my way. I will focus on You, look forward to eternity in Your presence, and take as many people along with me as possible. In Jesus' name, amen.

Real or Counterfeit?

Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene (2 Timothy 2:16-17).

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:8-21

Song: “How Firm a Foundation”

The jeweler examined my deceased mom’s jewelry. Holding each piece to the light as he peered through a special eyepiece, he sorted them into two piles. Pointing to the first pile, he said, “Wear these for fun, or let your granddaughter play dress-up. They’re decent synthetics but not real gemstones.” Then he pointed to the second pile: “You have a nice ruby here and an amethyst.” To my untrained eye, it all looked similar, but an expert saw the difference.

In today’s passage, Paul warned Timothy about false teaching creeping into the early Church. We aren’t given details, but maybe altering the gospel a bit made it easier to interact with pagan neighbors or lessened the risk of persecution. In any case, Paul cautioned Timothy to be disciplined, to handle the gospel correctly, and not to tolerate untruths.

Today, false teaching is a problem just as it was in the early Church. Like the inexpensive jewelry my mom bought for fun, some things look good to the untrained eye, but on close examination, they don’t measure up to the standard of God’s Word. But unlike fun and harmless costume jewelry, aberrant teaching can cause serious and eternal damage. Through prayer, Bible study, and guidance from the Holy Spirit, we can discern the difference.

Father, I want to be diligent in discerning truth from error. Help me perceive when something isn’t the real deal and to turn away from it. In Jesus’ name, amen.

An Effective Worker for God

Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them (Acts 6:3).

Scripture: Acts 6:1-6

Song: “Take My Life and Let It Be”

My friend’s disappointment was evident. “I can’t go with you,” she said. “An employee didn’t show up this morning.” She and her husband own a popular business and hoped to semi-retire once good managers were trained, but post-pandemic, they had trouble finding help. Some new hires really wanted to learn, but others just didn’t take their work seriously. My friend frequently had to cover a shift, and this particular morning, we had planned to attend a ladies’ meeting together.

In Acts 6, part of the Church community felt overlooked. Scripture doesn’t say exactly what went wrong, but food distribution was obviously part of the community life, and the apostles couldn’t cover all the work. Something needed to be done, and it was important for those who were chosen to be wise and led by the Holy Spirit. Being able to count on them freed up the apostles to teach and preach.

An effective faith community often has many facets, such as child-care, a food pantry, and Bible studies. Some are more visible than others, but when one worker isn’t faithful, the entire group may suffer. Each of us has individual talents, and we can pray for wisdom and the Holy Spirit’s guidance to find our place and serve well.

Father, fill me with Your wisdom and strength to be faithful at home, at work, and in Your Church. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Godly Wisdom Is Irrefutable

They could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke (Acts 6:10).

Scripture: Acts 6:7-15

Song: “Be Thou My Vision”

On September 8, 2022, when Great Britain’s Queen Elizabeth II passed away at age 96, something was apparent in the news coverage. By all reports, the Queen was genuinely likable and a positive influence during her more than 70-year reign. She handled even hostile situations with grace. For example, once when anti-royalty protestors threw eggs at her procession, she quipped that she generally preferred her eggs for breakfast.

In today’s passage, Stephen—one of the men chosen to help oversee the food ministry to widows—was performing great signs and wonders. Some people weren’t comfortable with this, and when their arguments failed against Stephen’s God-given wisdom, they resorted to false witnesses, twisting Stephen’s words. Even as he was being killed, becoming the first recorded Christian martyr, Stephen remained confident and kind, perhaps recalling that Jesus had told His followers not to expect an easy time of it.

As today’s followers of Christ interact with unbelievers, we may encounter opposition. One need look no further than social media feeds for examples. When highly visible Christian leaders make public comments, they are often criticized or quoted out of context. When we speak boldly for Christ, people may be uncomfortable and twist our words. But if our witness is rooted in Scripture, we can rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance in what to say and how to say it.

Father, help me speak Your truth wisely, boldly, and irrefutably, even when others oppose me. In Jesus’ name, amen.