

God's Good Instruction

[God instructed Moses to tell the people,] “Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am the LORD”
(Leviticus 19:37).

Scripture: Leviticus 19:30–37

Song: “Thy Word”

When delivering constructive criticism, it's helpful to mention a few positive observations first. Then, after describing what needs improvement, it's good to follow the criticism with one or two more positives. Sandwiching correction between words of praise and encouragement helps create a healthy environment for growth.

In today's passage, God provides a balance between the “do not” commands and the positive action verbs: *observe*, *stand up*, *show respect*, *revere*, *love*, and *[be] honest*. God ends this string of instructions with the positive command found in today's verse.

There are many people who view God as a “cosmic killjoy,” believing the Bible is full of prohibitions designed to rob us of fun and enjoyment. Those who hold this view don't understand that the Bible is a gift of love, helping guide us into a life filled with God's peace and provision. If we are willing to trust God's desire to protect our hearts and lives, we will experience both the encouragement and the correction we need from God's Word as we walk in it.

Father, open my eyes to see that Your instruction is good, protecting me from harm and providing Your peace. Thank You that ask I keep in step with Your Spirit, I can walk steadily in Your life-giving ways. In Jesus' name, amen.

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June 16–22. **Mark Williams** is a pastor, college professor, and freelance writer who lives with his wife and children in York, Pennsylvania.

A Double Blessing

The babies jostled each other within [Rebekah], and she said, “Why is this happening to me?” So she went to inquire of the LORD (Genesis 25:22).

Scripture: Genesis 25:19–28

Song: “Count Your Blessings”

At special times throughout the year, stores will offer a “buy one, get one” sale on certain items. Customers are drawn in by this kind of offer, as the idea of getting twice as much for the price of only one item is very attractive. Who can resist a good deal?

When Isaac married Rebekah, he never imagined that she would not be able to have children. No couple ever dreams of struggling with the painful reality of infertility. In his distress, Isaac cried out to God in prayer on behalf of Rebekah. The Lord answered Isaac’s prayer, and Rebekah became pregnant . . . with twins! As these two brothers grew in Rebekah’s womb, they were apparently quite rowdy, causing Rebekah to cry out to God. In response to her prayer, God gave her insight into the future of her sons.

In a world of 8 billion people, some have speculated about God’s ability to hear the prayers of so many and have surmised that surely God is busy with more important things. God’s response to the prayers of Isaac and Rebekah should be an encouragement to us that not only does God hear and respond to our prayers, but He is also able to bless us beyond what we imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

Father, strengthen my faith today to bring my requests to You, trusting that You hear my cries and have blessing in store for me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Greener Grass

The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham” (Genesis 26:2–3).

Scripture: Genesis 26:1–11

Song: “Trust and Obey”

Driving along a rural highway, occasionally a cow can be seen with its head and neck stretched through a barbed-wire fence as it desperately tries to reach grass on the other side. Sometimes we humans do something similar: unable to find contentment with our current situation, we long for things that are forbidden or just out of reach.

During a famine, Isaac traveled to Gerar to seek the help of the Philistine King Abimelech. From Gerar, Isaac planned to travel to Egypt, a land that seemed to promise more and better. God didn't approve of this idea and promised to bless Isaac and his descendants if he would stay and flourish in the land of his ancestors, rather than running off to Egypt (where the grass appeared greener).

At times, we may experience the longing to seek after something more than we have. When faced with conflict or difficulty, it may seem easier to run away than to work to find God's way forward. But as we follow His guidance and life-giving instruction, God can use our present circumstances for His purposes.

Father, I will be content today in Your provision. In Jesus' name, amen.

Through, Not For

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me
(Philippians 4:13 *KJV*).

Scripture: Philippians 4:10–19

Song: “Christ in Me”

In the secular world, working harder, putting in more hours, and giving 110 percent appear to be keys to getting ahead in life and achieving success. For those who embrace this approach, no sacrifice is too great, if the rewards follow. Working through dinner and missing family activities are just part of what it takes. Because this approach often produces results, it can be tempting to believe that it can be applied to our spiritual lives as well—to our relationship with Christ and our efforts in His kingdom.

In today’s passage, Paul contradicts this way of thinking. For him, growing closer to Christ comes not from what he can do for Christ but rather from what Christ can do *through* him. Surrendering to the leading of God’s Spirit is far more effective than having a long checklist of things we are doing for God.

Maybe you’re feeling tired and burned out from working hard for Christ. It’s more than okay to set aside any lists or ambitions and to experience the peace of surrendering your will to Christ. Rather than working hard for the Lord, we can allow His Spirit to work through us instead. In prayer, we can begin each day by asking, “Father, how do You want to work through me today?” Then He can lead us to ministry opportunities that will make a difference for His kingdom.

Father, through the power of Your Holy Spirit, I want to serve You today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Long-Awaited Peace

[Isaac] moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, “Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land” (Genesis 26:22).

Scripture: Genesis 26:12–23

Song: “Peace like a River”

At the announcement of the end of World War II in Europe, spontaneous celebrations broke out all over the world. As the news spread, thousands of people filled the streets of New York, London, Paris, and other cities in the allied nations around the world. With hearts overflowing with joy, people celebrated the long-awaited peace after the recent years of bitter suffering. Singing, dancing, hugging, and kissing, these crowds couldn’t hold back the joy they felt with the wonderful news of peace.

Isaac longed to live at peace with King Abimelech and his people. However, no matter where Isaac and his clan moved, quarreling would break out over possession of the different water wells in the region. Finally, after relocating several times, Isaac dug a well for which no one contested ownership. Isaac and his people had finally found peace, and he named this well *Rehoboth*, which means “broad places” in Hebrew.

Few people desire to fill their days with quarreling, arguments, and strife. God created us to live at peace with each other. If our lives are filled with conflict, we can follow the example of Isaac and work to eliminate the source of the conflict and seek to live at peace with the people in our lives (Romans 12:18).

Father, lead me to live at peace with others as much as possible. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Word of God

Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope (Romans 15:4).

Scripture: Romans 15:1–13

Song: “Word of God, Speak”

In 1905, writer and philosopher George Santayana wrote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Then, in a 1948 speech to the British House of Commons, Winston Churchill put his own spin on Santayana’s quote when he said, “Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” Over the course of time, this perspective seems to have been tried and proven correct.

As Christians, the Bible is our source of instruction, inspiration, truth, and hope. God gave His Word to provide help and encouragement for us as His people, and it’s an indispensable guide for us as we navigate life. To claim to be a Christian but to not be spending time in God’s Word is like a contradiction of ideas, and if we ignore God’s instruction, we’re doomed to repeat the same errors over and over again.

Today, we have freer access to the Scriptures than any generation before us. There are translations of the Bible in nearly any language, and there are countless Bible study aids to assist our learning. Yet in many homes, the Bible simply gathers dust. As God’s people, we can commit ourselves to reading God’s Word and also being faithful to walk in it.

Father, give me a hunger to read and study the Bible and to live according to its truth. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Indisputable Evidence

[Abimelek and his men answered Isaac,] “We saw clearly that the LORD was with you; so we said, ‘There ought to be a sworn agreement between us’—between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you (Genesis 26:28).

Scripture: Genesis 26:24–33

Song: “Shine, Jesus, Shine”

In 1850, while working as a physician in Austria, Ignaz Semmelweis hypothesized that the death toll of his hospital could be lowered if doctors would thoroughly wash their hands before interacting with patients. His ideas were summarily disregarded. Although he died in obscurity, he was vindicated when Louis Pasteur presented his germ theory some 20 years later. Today, handwashing is standard practice, not only among medical professionals, but in households all over the world. Indisputable evidence finally revealed that Semmelweis had been right all along.

Over a period of time, King Abimelek also witnessed some indisputable evidence. Even though he had previously forced Isaac and his clan to move away from Gerar, the king continued to watch from a distance. It was obvious to him that God was blessing Isaac and was with him and his people. This evidence caused King Abimelek to pursue an alliance between the two people groups. Seeing was believing!

When people watch us from a distance, can they see Christ at work in our daily lives? If they watched us over time, could they find “indisputable evidence” of our faith in Christ? Let’s seek to live in ways that honor God and bring glory to His name, for all the world to see.

Father, may others see You working powerfully in my life today. In Jesus’ name, amen.