

Do Whatever He Tells You

His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” (John 2:5)

Scripture: John 2:1–11

Song: “Trust and Obey”

This month marked my forty-eighth wedding anniversary. I remember the stress and decision-making involved in planning what I hoped to be a perfect day. While it was an exciting and joyful day, I certainly understand why many brides-to-be opt for a wedding planner.

Jesus’ first public miracle occurred at a wedding. The organizers of this John chapter 2 wedding could have used a good planner. Imagine the embarrassment of running out of wine! Thank goodness Mary, perhaps the one who understood her son best, knew what to do: talk to Jesus, then follow His directions. Though Jesus’ instructions may have sounded strange and taken some time and effort to fulfill, the servants willingly obeyed. The festivities resumed, with even better wine than before. Jesus not only met the need, but He exceeded it.

While a wedding planner helps a bride make decisions regarding her romantic day, Jesus is our ultimate life planner. When I follow Mary’s example of talking to Jesus and following His directions, my days are less stressful and more abundant. When it seems peace and joy are running low, we can prayerfully ask for wisdom, open our Bibles, and “do whatever He tells you.”

Father, thank You for being a God who hears and answers prayer, even beyond our expectations. Help me trust and obey. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

May 18–24. **Barbara Gordon** is a retired school teacher who lives with her husband in Missouri. Her favorite pastime is playing with her grandchildren.

Promises, Promises

Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. (Genesis 21:1)

Scripture: Genesis 21:1–8

Song: “Standing on the Promises”

As a little girl, I made lots of promises. I pledged the scout’s honor and made cross-my-heart guarantees. These did not compare, though, to the serious pinky promise. Somehow connecting our little fingers caused the vow to take on a more sincere meaning. When the matter at hand was crucial, only a pinky promise would do.

God’s promises are all the pinky-promise type. They are not merely empty words. Therefore, when Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah had been barren her whole life, God kept His promise to give them a son. It took a long time for this promise to come to pass, but God fulfilled this impossible-sounding pledge. The Bible is full of realized promises. If God speaks it, He will do it. We can trust God’s promises because of His faithfulness in keeping His word throughout history.

Even though our sins separate us from God, God promised to send a Savior, and He did. When we put our faith in Jesus, we are guaranteed eternal life. We can have unwavering confidence in that truth, because God did for Sarah what He vowed, and He will likewise do for us what He has promised.

Father, thank You for being a God who keeps Your promises. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

The Good Old Days

“The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.” (Zechariah 8:5)

Scripture: Zechariah 8:1–5

Song: “This World Is Not My Home”

My granny loved to talk about the good old days. Outhouses, washing clothes by hand, and the small pox pandemic didn't sound so “good” to me. But when she described homemade dolls, playing hoop and stick, and family checker nights, her excitement was contagious, and I'd find myself wishing I'd been born in 1890 too.

The people of Jerusalem surely longed for the good old days. They had been scattered because of their sin, and their city was in ruins. Jerusalem's walls had been torn down, and God's people felt insecure. The streets were not a safe place for old folks—or for children. But Zechariah introduces a theme of hope and restoration, describing a future of peace and prosperity because of God's love and faithfulness to His covenant. The desolation of their city was a result of disobedience, but God used their despair to bring His people to repentance. It would take time, but a transformation was coming.

God remembered the people of Zechariah's time as He remembers His people of every generation. As believers, we await the coming of the New Jerusalem as described in Revelation 21. We too will experience peace and prosperity—this time for all eternity.

Father, thank You for security and hope because of Jesus. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Do Not, Do Not, Do Not

Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules? (Colossians 2:20)

Scripture: Colossians 2:16–23

Song: “In Christ Alone”

In 2020 when COVID-19 was declared a pandemic and national emergency, daily life changed for most of us. Disruptions came with government-mandated stay-at-home orders and business lockdowns. Face masks, at-home testing, quarantining, and social distancing became commonplace. The restrictions made sense to some but caused resentment and confusion to others.

Paul cautions readers not to be caught up in manmade regulations that hold no spiritual value. He confronts false teachings that elevate human traditions above the teachings of Jesus. Certain teachers were misleading believers by emphasizing religious rules associated with food and drink, holy days, and Sabbath. These commands were replacing simple faith in Jesus. Paul’s question to the Colossian believers was powerful, “Why do you keep on following the rules of the world?” He pointed out that they were behaving like unbelievers, obsessing over human regulations.

I sometimes forget that my spiritual growth comes when I walk by faith in Jesus. I obsess more over what I don’t do (living according to human standards) than what I do (putting my faith in Christ alone). Self-denial and following strict manmade rules won’t draw me closer to God. Living by the teaching of Jesus does that.

Father, remind me that Jesus is enough. Guide me through Your Word. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

It's All About Jesus

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, “He has a demon.” The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, “Here is a glutton and a drunkard.”
(Matthew 11:18–19)

Scripture: Matthew 11:7–11, 16–19

Song: “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”

I started playing the flute when I was in fifth grade. At first I produced only a fuzzy, airy sound, but with time and the help of patient and proficient teachers, my playing became smoother and brighter. Over time I learned that by changing tones and dynamics, songs convey different emotions. I could make the listener feel joy or melancholy by changing my musical style.

John the Baptist and Jesus evoked varied emotions by using different ministry styles. John lived a solitary and disciplined life in the wilderness, stressing the need to repent. Jesus lived like others, associating with people from all social classes, delivering a gospel of love and acceptance. In today's reading, Jesus describes listeners who rejected both messengers and the truth they proclaimed. It didn't matter the style, both truth-bearers were criticized.

Today's verses remind me there will always be critics. God has uniquely gifted us to serve Him, whether it's publicly like Jesus, or in a more remote setting like John the Baptist. While following Jesus' commission to tell the world about Him, I may encounter criticism. When I consider the influence of Jesus and John, though, I am encouraged to keep sharing their message of salvation.

Father, give me courage to serve You in both good and bad times. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Gladness and Joy

“Then young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.”
(Jeremiah 31:13)

Scripture: Jeremiah 31:10–14

Song: “Love Lifted Me”

When I was 12 years old, I made a life-changing decision. To the lyrics “When nothing else would help, love lifted me,” I asked Jesus to forgive my sins. I began a love relationship with God and received the promise of a home in heaven. I exchanged my life of guilt for one of God-given joy.

At the time of today’s reading, Israel knew guilt. They were exiled because of their disobedience. In captivity, they endured much sorrow, mourning, and hardship. The theme of Jeremiah’s warning to God’s people up to this point had been punishment. Now Jeremiah’s message changes. He brings encouragement. He tells God’s people they will return to the land of their ancestors. The prophet assures the Israelites that God loves them despite their rebellion. Instead of mourning and sorrow, a time would come when they would experience gladness, comfort, and joy.

Hebrews 13:8 assures us Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. God still loves us, despite our sins, and wants to bring us back into a right relationship with Him. He still restores those who are lost. I am so thankful for the gladness, joy, and comfort God gives those who choose Him.

Father, thank You for exchanging my guilt for Your peace. Help me renounce all my rebellious ways and follow only You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Lesson from a Wineskin

“And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.” (Mark 2:22)

Scripture: Mark 2:18–28

Song: “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

Almost every spring, I collect tadpoles from a nearby pond. I keep them on my porch in a container of pond water. Soon hind legs form, followed by front legs. When their tails get shorter, it won't be long until they transform into frogs. The life cycle of the small amphibian is fulfilled when it becomes a fully formed frog.

Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament law of rituals and sacrifices by ushering in a system based on grace. He used the illustration of new wine in old wineskins to illustrate the change. Putting new wine in old wineskins would cause them to burst, as the old skins would not be able to contain the new wine as it expanded with fermentation. No one can keep the Old Testament law perfectly. Only Jesus, God's perfect Son, could fulfill the law's requirements. The old covenant of strict rule-following is not compatible with the new covenant of faith in Christ.

Jesus is the new wine, the only way to God. Jesus fulfilled the law, replacing it with something new. Thank God for a new covenant no longer based on effort but instead on the mercy and grace of Jesus.

Father, as I reflect on Your kingdom today, I thank You for new life in Christ. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.