

Easier

"It's always easier to ask forgiveness than get permission."

How many times have you heard that line? As amusing as it may be, and as enticing, it runs completely contrary to God's intention for our relationship with him. He tells us throughout his word that while he is quick to forgive, his desire is loving obedience from us. On top of that, he offers to us the best life possible, one characterized by inexpressible joy. We have trouble understanding how this is possible because we relate most closely with our human relationships, relationships which are fraught with mistakes and which repeatedly need repair. But with God, the repairs have already been made for all our mistakes; on top of that, he's the one who paid the bill!

This week, we'll read about God the Father's desire for us to obey and to live joyously, and how Jesus – God the Son – fulfills that desire in us and for us.

Monday – Obedience, not Sacrifice

"Wicked men obey from fear; good men, from love." Augustine, 4th-5th c. North African theologian

1. This week we look into Psalm 40, a messianic psalm. Please read Ps. 40:6-8. What is it that God did *not* require from his servant? What condition was the psalmist in that caused him to consider God's desires?
2. According to Psalm 51:17, Isaiah 57:15 and 66:2, what does God desire? How can you give him this?
3. Now look at Exodus 21:2-6 regarding the practice of piercing a servant's ear. Essentially, a slave who was eligible for freedom would instead voluntarily devote himself to lifelong service to another. How does this image help us to understand a life of devotion to God?

Making it Personal: The slave expressed his devotion to his master by piercing his ear. How have you expressed your devotion to Christ? How can you?

Tuesday – Heartfelt Law

"The golden rule for understanding in spiritual matters is not intellect, but obedience." Oswald Chambers, 19th-20th c. Scottish educator and military chaplain

1. Please read Psalm 40:6-8. What is the psalmist's heart desire? How does this coincide with God's desires?
2. Psalm 119:9-16 helps us to understand the heart of someone who loves God and his word. How does this Psalm describe such devotion? How do you view the Bible? Why?

Text Insight: When we call Psalm 40 a messianic psalm, we are saying that Psalm 40 pertains not only to the psalmist's life but it is also prophecy about Jesus, the Messiah.

3. In Luke 24:36-48, what did Jesus say that supports Psalm 40:7-8? How did his disciples respond? What did he do for them in verse 45?

Making it Personal: Pray, asking God to open your mind so that his word is planted in your heart also.

Wednesday – A Shadow of Things to Come

"God is not silent. It is the nature of God to speak. The second person of the Holy Trinity is called 'The Word.'"

A.W. Tozer, 20th c. American pastor and writer

1. Please read Hebrews 10:1-10. What contrast is drawn between God's law and God the Son, Jesus?
2. In verses 1 & 9, how is the role of the law compared to Jesus?
3. In Ephesians 5: 1-2, how is the work of Jesus characterized? What do verses 3-20 say our response to what Christ has done? How does such a response acknowledge the place of the law in Hebrews 10:1 & 9?

Making it Personal: Are you still trying to please God through following a list of rules or achieving some moral standard? Ask God to guide you into a loving relationship with Jesus instead, a relationship that leads to loving obedience.

Thursday – Perfect Obedience

"Unless he obeys, a man cannot believe." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 20th c. German theologian

1. Please read Hebrews 10:7. What difficulties have you experienced in following Jesus' example?
2. According to John 5:19-30, what was Jesus' purpose? To whom did he reveal that purpose according to Matthew 11:25-27?
3. Now look at Philippians 2:1-11. Where did Jesus' obedience take him from? Where did it lead him to? According to this passage, what is our obedience supposed to look like? Why?

Prayer Focus: Pray that God's purpose will be carried out in the actions of all those who belong to Jesus.

Friday – Blessed Assurance

"Love is the fulfilling of the law." Romans 13:10

1. Please read Hebrews 10:14-23. What is our future as a result of Jesus' obedience? Do you look forward to this future? Why, or why not?
2. What assurances are we given about God in verses 14, 22 and 23? What promises are we given about God's work in our lives in verses 16-17? How does verse 18 tie these all together?
3. In John 10:24-30, what assurance does Jesus give about his ability to follow through on his promises?

Digging Deeper (optional): How does John 1:1-5 & 9-18 support Jesus' claim to be able to carry out the promises of God?

For the Weekend: Read Hebrews 10:26-39, and consider whether your relationship with God is more akin to following a list of rules or enjoying a loving relationship with Jesus.