

Russell Kelfer

Joyful Obedience

516-B

Series: Obedience

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

Joyful Obedience

Obedience is responding to knowledge by following instruction. We have been dealing with a five-part study concerning obedience. We have looked at the perspective of obedience, the practicality of obedience and portions of the performance of obedience. We will conclude with the principles of obedience and the portraits of obedience.

In the last lesson, we learned the four questions God asks of us when He tests our obedience. Do we obey immediately? Do we obey completely, that is to the letter? Do we obey to the finish? Do we finish what we start? God is a finisher. He is the author and finisher of our faith. He completed everything He ever began. Do we? Are we consistent in our obedience in terms of character?

This brings us to the question we are asking in this lesson. Do we obey joyfully? This is the topic of this lesson and the key to it is this: Are we obedient on the inside or on the outside? The question I want to ask you now is, “If you are not obedient on the inside, should you still be obedient on the outside or should you wait until you feel like it?” This is really the crux of this lesson. Do you obey because the Word says to, or do you wait to be moved to obedience?

Now all of us intellectually know the answer to this question. However, practically speaking, we do not obey in the realm of implicit obedience apart from feeling. That is what this lesson is all about. What is joyful obedience? We will deal with six principles concerning joyful obedience.

THE PRINCIPLES OF JOYFUL OBEDIENCE

Principle 1- Joy is not a feeling; it is a fact. Neither is joy a cause, but an effect. It is not a cause of your obedience.

Joyful Obedience

You do not wait for joy to obey. Sometimes you do not obey because you are joyful, you simply obey because God said to.

What is joy if it is not a feeling? We must first recognize Galatians 5:22-23 which, says that the fruit of the Spirit is joy. If joy is a fruit of the Spirit, it means, in essence, that it is a part of the character of God transmitted freely by God to every Christian. So then, joy is produced by God. You cannot produce joy. If this is true, an unbeliever or a non-Christian cannot have joy. He can be happy. He can imitate joy, but he cannot reproduce joy. Neither man nor Satan can reproduce joy. This is why man works so diligently and desperately to reproduce happiness in an effort to pretend that he has found joy. Joy is the essence of the Spirit, and only the Spirit can produce joy. It not only is produced by God, but it is produced in the spiritual realm. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit; therefore, it cannot be a product of the flesh. Nothing you can do in the flesh or in the soul can produce joy. The soul can respond to joy, but it has been produced by the Holy Spirit through the human spirit.

I can find no place in Scripture that we are told to obey based upon feeling. The Scripture says,

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,
(Ephesians 5:25 NKJV)

Now, most of the time, most husbands feel love for their wives, but not always. The question is, "Do we show love to our wives just when we feel like it?" That is not godly love if that is the only time we do. The Scripture says,

but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.
(Philippians 2:3b NKJV)

Do you feel like doing this? Not most of the time. The Scripture says,

Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake,
(I Peter 2:13a NKJV)

Does this mean that you drive 55 M.P.H. when you feel like it, and you drive 85 M.P.H. when you feel like it? It depends on how you feel moved. You will get moved over if

Joyful Obedience

you don't obey the speed limit.

Scripture says

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth,
(Joshua 1:8a NKJV)

This means that we lay the Word on our hearts and meditate on it day and night. Many of us made a commitment 8 weeks ago that we would begin to do that. I would say that if we are going by the law of averages, many of us haven't been faithful to do that. If we would ask ourselves why we haven't been faithful, we might answer, "Well it just hasn't worked out. I haven't felt like it. But, I'm going to start some day." If we wait until we feel like it, we probably never will. The point is that joy is a fruit of the Spirit. It is produced by the Spirit and has nothing whatsoever to do with how we feel. Obedience is responding to knowledge by following instruction. Knowledge is the response of the thinker, our minds, not the thumper, our hearts.

What if, as a parent, you got up in the morning and told your children, "I would like for you to go to school today." The little dears look up at you and say, "Well, I don't feel like it today." Would you respond, "Perhaps tomorrow," and let them play in the backyard all day instead of going to school. The next day you go up to their room and ask, "Do you feel like going to school today?" They respond, "No, I'm just not moved to do so. I haven't done my homework." That night you say, "There is a football game, would you like to go?" They respond, "Yeah! I would love to go." They feel like doing that and obeying the opportunity to go to the football game, but not to go to school.

Why is that? It is because we almost always choose according to the flesh when we have the choice. The reason is that we have more exposure to doing that. Try an experiment this week. Men, only go to work on the mornings you feel like it. Next week we will get together and try to help each other find new jobs. Women, only cook this week when you feel like it. Obviously, both your job and your marriage would be somewhat troubled. The problem is that we don't do these things because we feel like it, we do them because we are

Joyful Obedience

commanded to do them. We have a responsibility and assume a commitment to do them. That, indeed, is what obedience is all about. It is responding to knowledge by following instruction. So then, if joy is not a feeling, and obedience is no where tied to any inner emotional or spiritual drive, then I think we must conclude that obedience is an act of the will in response to the Word.

Principle 2- The heart of God has at least two levels of pleasure in response to our obedience. This is a hard concept to figure out, but I want to try to explain it. First of all, God has a perfect will, that is, outer obedience followed by inner joy. In other words, He wants you to do everything He has told you to do. He also wants you to come to the place where you have the “want to’s.” But until you get the “want to’s” you still have the “got to’s.” It is that simple. The whole concept of obedience is that as you move along, you obey first and allow the Spirit of God to bring you to a place where you want to be in your heart. Jonah never wanted to obey, but he still did fulfill at least 2 of God’s 3 goals for the expedition God sent him on. You will fulfill a part of the plan of God for your life simply through obedience. Unless you obey, you will never get to the point where you desire to obey.

You can apply this to any level of your life that you like. God is partially pleased simply because you obey, even as a hypocrite. He is overwhelmingly pleased when you reach the stage whereby, in the freedom of the Spirit, you have that continuous desire to be obedient. But in some areas of our lives, because our computers are programmed on the wrong scale, it takes years to get to the point where we want to be. God would rather have reluctant obedience than none at all. This is my point.

I want to give you some quick illustrations. I want to give you the four steps of obedience. You can apply them to any problem in your own life or anything that God is calling you to do. We will use the concept of submission as an illustration.

The first step of obedience is an awareness of the appropriate principle for that situation. In the case of submission, let’s suppose that you go to a seminar, and you

Joyful Obedience

realize as a wife that you are supposed to be in submission to your husband. Maybe you have never realized this principle before. You went to the seminar and became aware of the principle. This is the first step.

Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. (James 4:17 NKJV)

You realize all of a sudden what you need to do.

The second step of obedience is when you become aware of your own position. This is when it gets painfully personal. You are going about your business. You have been to the seminar, and you understand the principle of submission. So all of a sudden you realize, “That applies to me.” Let’s suppose you want to invite some friends over for dinner. Your husband responds, “I don’t think I feel like doing that this week. I’ve got too many other things to do. I would appreciate it if you would wait until next week.” All of a sudden you say to yourself, “Wait a minute. Is this what the seminar was talking about? Do you mean I’m supposed to not invite them because I want to be in submission to my husband?”

The third step of obedience is obedience to instruction. This step is the most important. You realize the principle, you are aware of your position, and you do it. You don’t call your friends rather; you talk to your husband about another time to invite them. You have accomplished level three, which is really the first step of obedience. But, inside you are seething. Friday night comes and as you look at your dining table, you could picture your friends there. Instead, your husband is propped up in his chair with his smelly shoes on the floor, the television blaring and he’s got the newspaper all crumpled around him. As far as you are concerned, it is a wasted evening. There are your friends sitting at their home doing nothing wishing that they had plans to go out to dinner with someone. You think, “That character of a husband that I have.” Your mind thinks many negative thoughts. You are obedient, but you don’t want to be.

The fourth step of obedience is when you obey long enough and spend time enough with God that you begin to get excited about how God can work through submission. You

Joyful Obedience

ask your husband if you can invite some friends over and he says, “I don’t believe so.” Your response then is, “That’s great. God has something special to teach us. It wouldn’t be the right time to have friends over, or God would have prompted my husband to respond that way. I know now that God has something great in store for me. I’m excited about it, and I wouldn’t want company for anything in the world.” And you mean it.

The point of the matter is that this is obedience carried to its ultimate. We are not to wait until we feel like obeying. This is true in our marriage, at our places of work, in the area of obeying the law and many other areas. The point is that obedience has four steps. The first is the awareness of the principle. The second is the awareness of the position. The third step is the actual process of obedience. Hopefully, eventually the fourth step is achieved, which is the concept of joy entering into that behavior.

You can apply this to any area of your Christian life in which you are being called to be obedient. You may take the area of Scripture memory. You say, “I have committed myself to memorize the Word. I am aware that we are supposed to memorize the Word. I have made a commitment to do it, but I don’t enjoy it. It is just like pulling teeth. It is just like work.” Yes, sometimes it is. You may say, “Well, I’m going to wait until I feel like I am led to do it.” You may never be. The principle is that if you continue to be faithful to that which you have committed yourself to do, in due time, the joy will come. In the meantime, just do it.

The same thing is true of the other areas we have talked about in the last few lessons. These areas were lying, gossiping, spending, judging and obeying the law. All of these things that we have talked about, we begin by obeying. You may say, “What if I’m just obeying in the flesh.” Well, at least you are obeying. God will honor that. In due time, you will come to a place where you can, in the Spirit, be joyfully obedient.

Principle 3- The differences between joy and feelings must be understood. Joy and feelings are not the same. Feelings

Joyful Obedience

are emotional responses to people or circumstances. Your emotions are affected by your individual sensitivity or gift. Some of you can get emotional at a sunrise. Some of you can get run over by a tank and not become emotional. Some of you can have your best friend get run over by a tank and not get emotional. It all depends upon your sensitivity factor.

Physical sickness affects your feelings. If you get up in the morning with a bad cold, you may not feel like reading the Word. You don't feel like spending time with God so you don't do it. Circumstances affect our feelings. The car door closes on your finger, and you don't feel like being happy or joyful. Emotional factors that cause us to be discouraged or depressed affect our feelings. Spiritual experiences affect our feelings. Some of us make commitments based upon spiritual experiences without waiting on the Word of God to verify and clarify it. Later, we go back and wonder how we are to complete something we don't have a peace about. The weather, people and memories all affect our feelings. *Our feelings are often inconsistent and controlled by the flesh.* Therefore, the spirit cannot be led by or motivated by feelings.

On the other hand, joy is a constant inner attitude of spiritual excitement. What is its source? The source is spiritual excitement over the character of God. That is what you get excited about, not circumstances, not the weather and not people. Your excitement comes as you study the character of God, which gives meaning to circumstances and people. Joy is an inner attitude of spiritual excitement over the character of God that is not affected adversely by adversity. In other words, even though problems come, it will not affect your joy negatively.

QUALITIES THAT JOY BRINGS

What are some qualities that come along with joy?

Quality 1- Joy is a gift from God. You cannot earn it. You cannot manufacture it. You cannot contrive it.

Ecclesiastes 2:26a teaches us that,

For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy... (NKJV)

Joyful Obedience

It is a gift. Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that a fruit of the spirit is joy. I Corinthians 2:10-16 tells us it is a product of God. And verse 14 says,

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

(I Corinthians 2:14 NKJV)

It is a gift from God and can only be received by the spirit in the life of one who has the Spirit.

Quality 2- Joy is permanent. It is positionally permanent. We build walls between God and ourselves. We are not as aware of the joy on many occasions, but it is a permanent source given to us by God. John 16:22 teaches us that.

Quality 3- Joy comes from the presence of God. It is a permanent gift, and its development comes from the presence of God. You can look up Psalms 16:11 and Luke 24:52. I want to read you this verse,

You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.

(Acts 2:28 NKJV)

If you want the joy of the Lord, you can spend more time in the presence of the Lord, and you will have it. All of the character qualities of God are transmitted by a relationship. The more time you spend with Him the more joy, the more peace, and the more love you will possess.

Quality 4- Joy comes from the Word.

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;

(Psalm 19:8a NKJV)

John 15:11 and 1 John 1:4 both say,

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full [to overflowing].”

(NKJV)

Quality 5- Joy comes through tears.

Those who sow in tears
Shall reap in joy.

He who continually goes forth weeping,

Joyful Obedience

Bearing seed for sowing,
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
Bringing his sheaves with him (Psalms 126:5,6 NKJV)

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various
[different times of] trials [and temptations],

knowing that the testing of your faith produces
patience. (James 1:2,3 NKJV)

Get joyful. Luke 6 says,

Blessed are you when men hate you,
And when they exclude you,
And revile you, and cast out your name as evil,
For the Son of Man's sake.

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!
For indeed your reward is great in heaven,
(Luke 6:22,23b NKJV)

Joy comes through tears, so remember that you are
asking for weeping which is a means to produce joy.

Weeping may endure for a night,
But joy comes in the morning. (Psalm 30:5c NKJV)

Quality 6- Joy comes from faithfulness. We see this in
Matthew. It tells us that the more faithful we become the
more complete is our joy.

“His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful
servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make
you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your
lord.’” (Matthew 25:21 NKJV)

Quality 7- Joy comes from answered prayer. John 16 says,

Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask,
and you will receive, that your joy may be full.
(John 16:24 NKJV)

This is where joy comes from, and it is not the same as
feelings.

Principle 4- The difference between the leading of the
Spirit and feelings must be understood. Simply understand
that the goal of the Spirit is to reveal the Word, to amplify
the Word, and to personalize the Word. In other words, the

Joyful Obedience

goal of the Spirit is to make the Word known, to make it understood and to make it practical. It is never the goal of the Spirit to contradict the Word, question the Word, confuse the Word or depersonalize the Word. Also, remember that the goal of the Spirit is to glorify the Son, never to glorify the saint. Therefore, when you are seeking the leading or direction of the Spirit, always be careful that you are first in total harmony with the Word. Secondly, be sure that the glory gives maximum glory to God, not to you.

Remember that the Father reveals His glory always through the Son. We see this in Hebrews 1:1-3 and Colossians 2:9-10,

For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;
and you are complete in Him,

(Colossians 2:9,10a NKJV)

The Son, meanwhile, always reveals His glory through the Spirit. We see this in John 16:2-13. The Spirit, meanwhile, always gives the glory back to the Son as we read in John 16:14. The Son, in turn, always gives the glory back to the Father as we read in John 5:19-30. This is called the perfect circle of glory in the Spirit. The Father gives the glory to the Son who gives the glory through the Spirit. The Spirit, in turn, always gives the glory back to the Son, never keeping it for Himself. The Son, in turn, always gives it back to the Father. The Son acknowledges,

“I can of Myself do nothing.” (John 5:30a NKJV)

In other words, we need to ask if the discourse of action brings the maximum glory to God or to ourselves.

Principle 5- The Scripture is full of examples of external obedience. I want to deal with just one right now. We want to look at Jonah. Jonah was a part-time evangelist. He was at home one day when his telephone rang. It was the Department of Evangelism. They had a revival meeting to be held in Nineveh. They asked if Jonah would be available to get on the first available plane to go down there to preach. Jonah grumbled and moaned, but he then decided to do it because he didn't have much choice. He called a cab and went to the airport to buy his ticket. While he was standing in line to buy

Joyful Obedience

his ticket, he saw a big poster that said, “TARSUS! Get Away From It All!” He thought that sounded like a great place to go and determined that he could evangelize Tarsus as well as he could Nineveh. He thought, “It doesn’t matter where you are, it just matters who you are. I’ve got some tracts I can hand out in Tarsus. I can do more good for God in Tarsus than I could ever do in Nineveh.”

Jonah traded his ticket and headed to Tarsus. Along the way, they hit a storm and Jonah was thrown out. He landed in the ocean. There was a Red Snapper that did. He ended up inside the fish. After three days, God stuck His finger down the fish’s throat. The fish threw up Jonah. He reluctantly dried out and caught another plane to Nineveh. Through divine discipline, Jonah became the reluctant evangelist.

Positionally, at this point in time, Jonah was in the will of God. God had three goals. The first was that He wanted to save Nineveh, and He did. The second goal was that He wanted to use Jonah, and He did. The third goal was that He wanted to change Jonah’s heart. This didn’t happen because Jonah wouldn’t give Him the key. This was a secondary objective, but it was missed. However, God still fulfilled the first and second goals He had. His goal was to save Nineveh. Positionally, Jonah escaped further divine discipline by overtly obeying the will of God. Jonah freed himself of divine discipline by going to Nineveh but remained in bondage to his own hostility. I contend that a man with a bitter spirit may be used of God but will not be blessed in the process. This is what happened to Jonah.

The end of Jonah’s story is that he complained the whole time. Chapter four tells us that there was a big revival meeting. Most of the city came to the Lord. Jonah was very angry. He had a lot of follow-up to do, and he didn’t want to do it. The Scripture says that the events displeased Jonah, and he was very angry. He said to God, “This is just what I told you would happen. You are a gracious God. You are merciful and slow to anger. I just knew if I did what you told me to do that all of these people would be saved. I told you so. If this is the way it is going to be with all of these people saved, kill me. I would rather die than live.” Don’t laugh.

Joyful Obedience

This is our attitude sometimes. The Lord replied, “Jonah, why are you so angry?” Jonah went out of the city and made himself a tent to sit under to pout. In verses 10-11 the Lord told Jonah, “You had pity on the gourd for which you didn’t labor or make grow. It came up in a night, and it perished in a night. Should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, where there are more than 6,000 who do not know between their right hand and their left?”

This is the end of the story. How would you like your story to end like that? Jonah did his thing. God used it, and that was it. Jonah never really knew what happened. He never enjoyed the joy of the Lord. The concept is that a nation was saved and a man was used and obedience was illustrated. Partial obedience is far better than none. Had Jonah submitted to the mind of God, the obedience would have led to joy. None of us want our life story to end like that.

What kept Jonah from having joyful obedience? Why didn’t he enjoy what he was doing? Why wasn’t he happy? To oversimplify it, I contend that the problem was one of simple perspective. Jonah was looking out for himself. His “self” was never crucified. He was not looking for the will of God to be done. He was looking for Jonah to be happy. He was obeying God out of fear, but his heart was not with God so his self was not crucified.

THE PROCESS OF LIVING IN OBEDIENCE

I want to ask you, “What about you? Are there areas of obedience that you have been struggling with for a long time?” Some of them we have mentioned, some of them we haven’t. I want to give you five basic principles that I believe are the process whereby we need to consider living in the area of obedience.

1- Obey implicitly whether you feel like it or not. I want to give you a verse that spoke to me this week for the first time. It is from Proverbs and it says,

Commit your works to the Lord,
And your thoughts will be established.

(Proverbs 16:3 NKJV)

Joyful Obedience

Do what God is telling you to do, and your heart will come along in due time. This is a good verse to claim. So we need to just do it.

2- While obeying and afterwards, never cease dealing with your attitude. In other words, don't accept the absence of joy as a license to disobey, but neither accept the absence of joy as God's ultimate will because it is not. God wants you to be filled with the Spirit and filled with the joy of the Spirit, which is constant. Having this spirit of joy will result in an excitement over the person of God regardless of what the world throws your way.

3- Ask God and expect Him regularly to produce within you a spirit of joy. It is there, but we must ask expectantly. Wisdom is there, too. James 1 says,

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, [If he asks in faith, believing.] (James 1:5,6a NKJV)

We are to ask God for joy. Remember that the process that produces joy is sometimes tears, but the ultimate effect is joy forever.

4- Do a study and learn what joy is so that you will recognize it when it comes.

5- In the process, spend time meditating on the Word of God and the subject of joy. Do you remember what meditation is? It is the characteristics of man viewed in the light of the character of God with an eye to change. This is meditation. You need to look at the Word, meditate on it, apply it and then wait on God to transform your life into His character until joy comes.

God has told us from the Word and we have gleaned in the past 3 lessons, that our response to God is being tested to see if we will obey immediately. He is testing us to see if we will obey completely, that is to the letter because God is a god of detail. We must also obey to the end because God is a finisher of what He starts. He tests us to see if we will obey

Joyful Obedience

continuously. Lastly, He tests us to see if we are willing to be faithful regardless, but we are to obey joyfully. Ultimately, this is where the joy of the Lord is.

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