

5 Reasons to Obey God When Life Hurts

Are you in the midst of a financial crisis? Grief-stricken over the death of a loved one? Trying to revive a crumbling marriage? Dealing with a negative medical report? Facing the loss of your job? The trials of life can deal you a real blow. Some can momentarily render you frantic.

But I have good news for you. You can release the miraculous power of God into every difficult situation you are facing through obedience to His Word.

I am speaking from experience. At a certain point in my life, I was in despair because I was faced with a series of critical situations that shook me and interfered with the flow of the Spirit in my life. Being a “take charge” person, I thought I had to come up with the answers. I found myself making major decisions before waiting in God’s presence for direction.

A red flag went up several times, but my flesh didn’t want to relinquish the control I thought I had to have in the decision-making process. As I moved in my own strength, I began to feel helpless and alone. The negative emotions I was fighting depleted my physical energy level.

Then early one morning, the Lord awakened me and directed me to a powerful passage I had read many times: 1 Kings 17:1-24. This time I was impacted as never before.

Obedience During Despair

The passage tells about two very different individuals who met in a city called Zarephath. Both were in the midst of despair. One was the prophet Elijah; the other was an unnamed widow woman.

The prophet Elijah, a Tishbite, had approached King Ahab and reproved him for the idolatry and wicked ways he had adopted due to the influence of his pagan wife, Jezebel (v. 1). Because of the idolatry, God told Ahab through Elijah that it would not rain for a certain number of years (3 1/2, according to Luke 4:25).

The anger of Ahab was fierce against Elijah, so God commanded the prophet to flee. He first sent him to the brook called Cherith (1 Kings 17:3). There God commanded the ravens to feed him day and night. He drank from the brook until the brook dried up (vv. 4-7).

Then the word of the Lord came again to Elijah: "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you" (v. 9).

When Elijah arrived in Zarephath, there was indeed a widow woman at the gate of the city. She was wandering in the streets, gathering sticks for a fire to prepare her last meal before she and her son died. She was poor and in despair. But God had prepared both hearts to encounter one another.

Elijah immediately called for her to get him some water in a vessel (v. 10). He also asked her to "please bring [him] a morsel of bread" (v. 11). The widow explained that she had only a bit of flour and that she needed it for herself and her son, but Elijah assured her that if she served him first, she would not run out of provisions (vv. 12-14).

The widow obeyed the prophet. As a result, "She and he and her household ate for many days. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah" (vv. 15-16).

When you consider the despair Elijah must have been experiencing because of his run-in with Ahab, you can imagine how humiliating it was for him to travel to a pagan city to be taken care of by a widow woman. But he humbled himself and

obeyed God.

Undoubtedly, it was difficult for the widow to obey, also. Whether her husband was really dead or had just abandoned her, we don't know. But either way she was forced to assume the responsibility of providing for her family—and had reached the end of her supply.

At this tragic point in her life, the prophet came along and boldly commanded her to give him the last of what she had. Her challenge was to obey and serve him or to continue gathering enough crumbs for her own last meal.

The decision she made was providential. In the midst of her trial, God remembered her obedience and sustained her.

Elijah stayed in Sidon for 2-1/2 years. He returned to meet with King Ahab at the top of Mount Carmel. God sent down fire, and the prophets of Baal were put to death. The drought ended with a great storm at the command of the prophet.

You see, God orchestrates events that can come about only through His divine intervention. Our obedience gives Him full control in our lives so that He can “[work] in [us] both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

Benefits of Obedience

During my time of despair, the Lord reminded me that the essence of a real relationship with Him is obedience. I began to take a fresh look at the place of obedience in the believer's life, and I saw several benefits.

1. God's faithfulness is unceasing when we obey Him. “Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments” (Deut. 7:9).

None of us will ever fully understand the “whys” of the troubles and issues we face. But God is faithful in responding to our love and obedience to Him.

2. Obedience unlocks the door to prosperity and the pleasures of life. “If they obey and serve Him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures” (Job 36:11).

3. Those who obey Him become His special treasure. “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine” (Ex. 19:5).

4. We have His protection when we obey Him. “But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries” (Ex. 23:22).

Remember this: Only those who are sensitive to the love of God can submit to the peculiar ways of God. Not everyone will understand or appreciate the anointing on your life. But praise God—no weapon formed against you will prosper! (See Isaiah 54:17.) And when the enemy does attack, God will raise up a standard against him (Is. 59:19).

5. There is a marvelous freedom in walking in total obedience to God. It releases you from being concerned about the outcome. You just walk in faith and trust God to handle things.

Learning Obedience Through Trials

Though none of us likes to go through hard times, the truth is that suffering is the very thing that teaches us obedience. Even Jesus had to learn obedience this way: “Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:8).

His words to the Father when He was facing the cross reflect

the agony He endured: "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39). In spite of the pain, He surrendered completely to the Father's will.

Times of despair are tough and trying. But don't let these seasons destroy you. Allow them to refine and prepare you to fulfill your purpose and destiny.

Disobedient resistance prolongs the tough times. Listen carefully to what God is saying. Daily strengthen your walk in obedience to His Word. Stay focused. Remain rooted and grounded in the faith.

You will not be disappointed, for, as Paul says, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed" (Rom. 8:18).

It has been said that in God's economy we can't skip grades, no matter how capable or mature we think we are. God has a lesson for us to learn in each stage of life. But His Word promises that "tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope"—and that hope does not disappoint us (Rom. 5:3-5).

Lessons in obedience are a part of our daily walk as we "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). They are the key to finding victory over despair.

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