

Principles of Faith and Obedience

by C. Stacey Woods

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith and obedience in the life of a Christian, using Abraham as an example of trusting and surrendering to God's will, even when it doesn't make sense.

Duration: 34:04

Scripture: Hebrews 11:8

Topics: "Obedience", "Faith"

Description

C. Stacey Woods emphasizes the intertwined principles of faith and obedience in the Christian life, illustrating how true faith necessitates obedience to God's will, as exemplified by Abraham's journey of trust. He discusses the importance of surrendering to God's authority, highlighting that obedience is a response to faith, not merely a command. Woods encourages believers to embrace a life of faith that may seem contrary to common sense, trusting that God's plans are ultimately for their good. He challenges the congregation to commit themselves fully to God, just as Abraham did, and to live as pilgrims in faith, looking forward to the promises of God. The sermon concludes with a call to trust and obey God in all aspects of life, including relationships and vocations.

Transcript

A number have been asking concerning the way in which we may be sure or we may know God's will for our lives. And in thinking about that I felt perhaps tomorrow morning we should try to deal with that subject from God's word. But this morning I'd like us to think of the principle of obedience in the life of the Christian, in the life of the believer.

We've considered the principle of faith that we walk by faith and not by sight. We've tried to think together of some of the implications of the lordship of Christ. That if he is our lord, he is the one in authority, he is the one who takes the initiative, and our responsibility is to obey him and to follow him as he directs.

Would you turn in your Bibles please to the epistle to the Hebrews chapter 11 reading from verse 8. Hebrews 11 verse 8. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed. And he went out, not knowing whether he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, and in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.

For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and the sand which is by the seashore innumerable.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims of the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly if they had been mindful of that country, country from which they came out, they might have had opportunity to a return.

But now they desire a better country that is in heavenly, wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city. By faith Abraham, when he was tried or tested, offered up Isaac. And he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called, accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure.

We begin the life of faith and obedience the moment we commit ourselves to the Lord Jesus, and put our trust in him, and are born again. And from then on our life may be defined as Christians in just two words, the words of the hymn we have just sung, trust, which means to believe God, obey, that is to follow him wherever he may lead us, in obedience and in submission. This is not an oversimplification.

We believe and keep right on believing. When we put our trust in Christ we don't say, well that's finished and done with. It is true that we have every confidence that the Lord will keep us and present us blameless before his presence with exceeding joy.

But we believe and keep right on believing. We trust and keep right on trusting. And as we are gathered here this morning we are still trusting and depending upon the Lord Jesus on the ground of his finished work at Calvary for the forgiveness of sins and salvation.

We go right on trusting him. When we put our trust in Christ that was our first real act of obedience. For don't forget the gospel is a command to be obeyed.

For God commandeth all men to repent and to believe or obey the gospel. You know sometimes I think we fail to understand the full content of the word believe. In one or two translations of the Bible it has been put this way, obey.

For in essence, in content, in that word believe, it is not merely to say yes I believe the facts that they're true. But in a biblical sense it also means to obey, to submit as we lay hold of God by faith. So when we put our trust in Christ that was our first real act of obedience to God in Christ.

And then we keep right on obeying. You cannot separate faith and obedience because of the one in whom we exercise faith namely the living God. Because God is God.

He's not the neighbor over the back fence. He is God over all, the creator, the sustainer as we were reminded last night. And we cannot treat with God as we would treat with men and women and boys and girls around us.

We are with them as equals. But when we deal with God, God is in high heaven and we are on the earth even though Christ dwells in our hearts by faith. And there must be reverence and there must be holy awe

and there must be obedience.

You cannot possibly think of trusting God without obeying God because God is God. I sometimes think that in some of our popular hymns and choruses we have lost our sense of reference and awe and wonder. And I believe we always need to have the sense of joy and love and fellowship mixed up with a kind of fear and trembling because God is God.

It seems a contradiction, doesn't it? But it isn't. He's nearer than hands and feet yet He's in high heaven. He even calls us brethren.

He is flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone but He is the Lord from heaven. And therefore there must always be that sense of reverence and respect and godly fear. And that doesn't mean you're scared in a sense.

But you're aware of the greatness of God. And I think that even in our singing we should not be familiar in a disrespectful way when we sing about the precious blood of Christ and when we sing about the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. I think in the life of Abraham we have a wonderful picture of what it means to trust and obey the principle of obedience.

You know there are two principles of existence. The people who live by sight, what they can see, feel, smell and understand and experience. And those who live by faith in the terms of God's promises.

Or to put it another way, those who live by faith and those who operate on the basis of common sense. Now common sense is an awfully good thing. Some people call it horse sense.

But if that's the only principle by which we live, we're not living as Christians. Common sense suggests to us we've got to be concerned about our prosperity. We've got to be concerned about our prestige.

We've got to be concerned about our reputation and so on. You know there are some people who debate with God. When God tells them to do something they begin to argue and say well what about this and what about this.

And is this wise and is this common sense. In one sense if you start to argue with God you're guilty of blasphemy. Because you're questioning God's wisdom.

You're questioning God's knowledge and understanding. You're questioning God's power and you're questioning God's love. Remember God is all powerful.

God is all knowing and God is all loving. He only wants our good. Sometimes we're scared that God will ask us to do something or go somewhere and we'll lose out.

And we'll miss the best of life. But how ridiculous. God loved us enough to die for us.

Why can't we trust Him? Why can't we believe that He only wills our good. Even though it seems to be contrary to common sense and the standards of this world. The thing that God's asking you to do is the best possible thing an all-knowing, an all-powerful, an all-loving God could conceive.

Why do we miss God's best by turning to our own way? Why can't we trust God? And yet you know it is sometimes hard to trust Him. I think the most difficult thing I had to trust Him about was the matter of marriage. I found it easier to trust God for my salvation than to trust God to choose a wife for me.

I rather imagined He'd choose someone. I won't try to describe what I imagined it would be like. As though I'd be in a kind of a ghostly straightjacket all my life.

Why can't we trust God? He knows what's best. All those of us who are younger and have got most of our life before us don't miss God's very best by trusting common sense and the world's standards. Leave it to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I'll never forget what my boss said to me when I was in business in Australia. In the goodness of God I had quite a good position and was doing very well in the firm. That firm has since become the largest steel merchandising firm in all of Australia.

And I suppose if I'd continued with it because it was a small firm then and I was in the ground floor, I would have had a little bit more than I have now. But when it seemed clear that it was God's will to give up business and to begin to prepare to serve the Lord in a particular way, although as Mr. Van Ryn was saying, one can be just as active serving the Lord in business as in what one sometimes calls full-time service. I don't like the expression.

But I went to see the boss to tell him I was going to leave. He said, what are you going to do? And I told him. He looked at me and said, Woods, I've only got three fools in my employment and you're the three of them.

But, you know, it's better to trust God and to walk with God. Now Abraham is an illustration of someone who really trusted God. Before we think of Abraham I want you to notice verse 13, which is one of the most wonderful verses in Hebrews chapter 11.

May I read it to you? These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off and were persuaded of them and embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. What's this mean? It means that these great patriarchs of old, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, lived their lives out and they never actually saw the fulfillment of God's promises. God promised them certain things.

God promised that certain things would be true. Now what did they do? They believed what God said. They received those promises, even though they were in the dim and misty future.

And they embraced them, and listen to me, they ordered their entire life, the way they lived, where they went, what they did, all of their life was based upon the fact that they believed God was not a liar, but God was speaking the truth. That when God promised a thing, He really would fulfill it. It had come to pass.

And they lived their whole life on that basis. So much so that when the people around them saw it, and saw them, their lives were a confession. That they weren't living like the other people settling down, they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, but even though it all seemed crazy, they believed God.

And the wonderful thing about those patriarchs is this, that God promised them certain things. They never actually lived to see them take place, many of those promises. They actually were fulfilled literally.

But what tremendous faith, they believed God, they lived their life on the basis of the promise of God, the truth of God, that God would keep His word, and therefore they were a witness to all around them that they belonged to God. And God did fulfill His word literally. Now God has promised you certain things, and He asks certain things of you and me, and He wants to say, Yes the Lord, I believe you.

I believe you speak the truth. I believe that everything you've promised, you're going to fulfill to the absolute detail. Therefore I'm going to commit myself to you, I'm going to obey you, I'm going to follow you, even though it seems crazy, even though people will tell me I'm crazy, even though it's contrary to common sense, even though the world will laugh and say you plumb crazy, I'm still going to do it, because I believe God, and I'd rather believe God than the world.

I'd rather believe God than the world. I'd rather believe God's promises than men's promises, and therefore I'm going to live my whole life, lived out on the basis that God speaks the truth, and everything God's promised me will be mine, therefore I'm going to obey Him. And if you and I can live that way, then my what blessing really will be ours.

Now briefly and quickly, let's turn to Abraham. Abraham lived in a big populous, cultured city called Ur. As far as we can tell, he was quite well to do.

He came from quite a well-known wealthy family. There are even inscriptions on the ruins of Ur referring to Abraham. Another evidence corroborating the statements of Scripture.

One day God spoke to Abraham. He said, Abraham, I want you to leave Ur forever. Now the world outside those big cities was a howling wilderness, full of brigands, wild animals, danger and death.

You can't imagine anything more primitive. Abraham didn't argue. He started to prepare to obey God.

Well, he put his house up to soil, had to dispose of his furniture, couldn't take his library of clay tablets around with him. He had to get rid of everything. Just that when he could carry on a few camels and so on.

And the neighbors evidently dropped around. They must have done that and said, Abraham, or Abram as he was then called, we understand you're leaving Ur. Is that so? Yes.

By the way, where are you going? Oh, said Abraham, I don't know where I'm going. Oh now, Abraham, let's be sensible. You don't know where you're going? No, I don't know where I'm going.

Well, where will you live? I don't know. But look, you've got a wife to take care of. People don't treat their wives this way.

You can't go out there and not know where you're going. Tell me what are you going to do anyway? I don't know what I'm going to do. What do you think the neighbors thought of Abraham? He was leaving a comfortable home, wealth, prosperity, business, everything the world could ask.

And God said, I want you to get out. And God's word said, Abraham went out not knowing where he was going. It doesn't make sense, does it? But Abraham decided to obey God because he believed in God.

And he went out, he didn't know where he was going, where he was going to live, what he was going to do. Girls and fellows, if you're going to go on with God, there's got to come a time in your life when in your spirit, mentally, emotionally, volitionally, you will do exactly what Abraham did physically. Physically, God said to Abraham, leave Ur, go out, and I'll lead you and provide for you.

And Abraham went, and he never went back to Ur. If you mean business with God, are you listening to me? If you mean business with God, you've got to say, Lord, I put my life, myself in your hands. There are absolutely no conditions.

I don't say, I will follow you if. I will obey you but. There are no conditions.

I say, you say, Lord, I'm in your hands. I'll go wherever you want me to go. I'll do whatever you want me to do.

I'll be whatever you want me to be, regardless of the cost. Now, God may never ask you to live, to leave California. But in spirit, you've reached the position where you put yourself in God's hands and you say, I'm yours 100%.

You can only do that if you really believe in God, in God's providence, in his love, in his sufficiency, in his wisdom. Of course, you put your trust in him or talk to one another as Christians. You can only do that if you're ready to obey him.

But you'll never get anywhere with the Lord until you come to the position of putting yourself in the Lord's hands just as Abraham did. As Abraham went out from Ur physically. So, so far as the world is concerned, money, marriage, prosperity, all that the world offers, you say, I'm prepared to leave that and to follow you if you want me to.

And so in spirit, you take this step of faith and obedience and you leave yourself in God's hands. As we were reminded this morning, if you do that, God is going to come to you and he is going to lead you. May, will you forgive me speaking personally again? I remember when I was in my teens, I was at a camp, a boys camp in Australia.

I was a Christian, but I've never fully really understood God's claim for my life. It wasn't that I was refusing him, I just hadn't understood. And I remember sitting around a campfire and they sang a hymn, the verse of it was this, Just as I am young, strong and free, to be the best that I can be for truth and righteousness and thee, Lord of my life I come.

And without raising any hands or throwing faggots in the fire or standing in my head or doing anything like that, I quietly bowed my heart before the Lord and said, yes Lord, I'm yours. Well, nothing happened. I went back to school.

There was university and there was business. And I sort of wondered, well I gave myself to the Lord, so what? But the time did come when the Lord said, very well, now I want you to do something for me. It so happened that it meant leaving Australia.

I never went back there to live. It so happened that in my case, it meant leaving my mother and father and family and I never really lived with them again. I'd never thought that would take place.

We saw one another two or three times, but that was about all for visits when they came over here. But if you and I really mean business with the Lord, there will come a time when He will say, very well, now I'm ready for you. Please do this.

And oh, how wonderful if we have confidence in God sufficient that we rise up and obey Him. Then there came another test in Abraham's life. He went out into the wilderness and God prospered him materially.

He became very, very wealthy and the nephew Lot who followed him likewise became wealthy. There was a dispute between them over watering places and grass. And there again we find Abraham's resignation.

He said to Lot, you choose whatever part of the land you want. I'm prepared to leave myself in God's hands. I know of some foreign missionaries, not many, but I do know of three or four.

And they've gone out to a foreign country and they saw there was a tremendous economic opportunity. And they have just a little money and they were able to buy certain pieces of land and put up certain houses and so on. And I know of one who on the side went into business and actually they became very wealthy people.

But you know what happened? They lost their ministry. They didn't lose their faith. They didn't cease to be Christians.

But even though they'd gone out and started to work for the Lord, they saw the main chance of making money as servants of Christ. They made money, but they lost out spiritually and lost their ministry. This was Abraham's temptation.

Lot yielded to it. He'd been down to Egypt in the time of Abram's deflection. And when he saw the rich valley of the Jordan, it reminded him of the lush Nile Delta.

He saw markets. He saw everything he wanted for himself and his family. And he chose him, the plain of Sodom.

And we referred to this the other night. What did Lot get? He did get wealth. He did get fame.

He may even have been mayor of Sodom. He sat in the gate of Sodom. But he lost everything, including his own boys and girls.

And again, I want to repeat what I said before. The love of money is the root of all evil, and riches can be deceitful. It's not wrong to be prosperous.

It's not wrong to become wealthy. But it is very, very dangerous. Oh, what a sad thing if we should put the things of this world before God's will, and we not only lose out ourselves, spiritually we penalize our children, and that could be a reason why they never come to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lot got eternal disgrace. We won't go into the detail. But what about Abram? He didn't yield to that temptation.

He remained up in the bare, sparse, windswept hills of the upland. But God was with him, and our wonderful God blessed him. God did give him wealth.

God did give him prestige. As a matter of fact, I don't think there ever has been a man who's ever lived, who's honored as much as Abraham. For not only is he honored in the Christian world, but in the Jewish world, and the great Mahometan world, all look back to that great man of faith, Abraham.

But then came the final test of his life, and again we can only just refer to it by way of illustration. God had promised Abraham an heir. Not Ishmael, but one who would be the child of Sarah.

There'd been many failures in Abraham's life, and while we talk about these high standards, we're not talking about perfection. God doesn't expect us to be perfect. But he does expect us to accept his goals, his principles, his standards.

We hold those always before us. I have set the Lord always before my face. We may fall, we may fail, but that doesn't mean we lower the standard.

That's the goal. And we move on and live on, in spite of sometimes some periods of failure, trusting God, confessing our faults, and looking to him for enablement. And there had been serious failure in Abraham's life.

And then in Genesis 17, God appeared to him and said, Look Abraham, you've lived an up and down life, most of the time, in the big matters you've followed me. But there have been some big failures. The failure every time Abraham has been, because you weren't willing to trust me, you trusted yourself.

I am El Shaddai, I am Almighty God, walk before me and be thou perfect. I can meet every need in your life. And Abraham said, Yes Lord, I will, I'll trust you.

And he did. And then came the birth of Isaac. Abraham 100 years old, Sarah 90 years old, and that miracle baby came into that home.

Was ever a baby loved as much as Abraham loved Isaac? He was the fulfillment of years and years and years of God's promises, years and years of sacrifice, years of a life of faith, years of a life of obedience, and here was this little bundle of life. It represented the complete fulfillment, in one sense, of that man Abraham. And then there came a time when Isaac was a young man, and God spoke once more to Abraham.

He said, Abraham, you believe me, do you? You trust me, do you? You say you'll obey me, do you? You've accepted me as El Shaddai, the God who was enough, the all-sufficient one. I want you to go up to Mount Moriah, and if I am really first in your life, you take your son, the son of promise, and offer him up on an altar to me. Now let's remember this.

Abraham really believed he was going to slay his son, and lay that body on an altar of wood and burn it. He believed that God would raise the boy up from the dead. But can you imagine the agony of soul that he went through? God's command was contrary to natural love, that a father should slay his only son.

God's command was contrary to divine promise, because in Isaac shall thy seed be called. God's command was contrary to God's law, for it was taking a life. It seemed utterly inconceivable that God would say such a thing, but God did.

And Abraham went on and followed him. Do you ever think of that walk up the mountainside together? When Isaac said, Father, we have the fire, and we have the wood, but where is the lamb? Did you ever stop to imagine conversations there may, or probably were, between Abraham and Isaac? When Isaac learned that God had told his father to slay him, what do you think that boy felt like? Do you think he turned to his father and said, Father, if you really love me, how could you do such a thing? Did you ever think that Isaac may have doubted God and God's love? How could God love him, if God would take his life? Did you ever think of Abraham having to say, My son, this is something I don't understand. It's against everything I feel and everything I seem to know, but all I know is this, that I believe God.

I've committed myself to El Shaddai. I've got absolute confidence in Him. It's going to work out, and therefore I must obey Him.

Do you ever think of the doubt that may have come to Abraham's heart and mind? Did God really say this? Have I imagined it? God couldn't ask me to do this thing, but God had. And so they went on, father and son together, on the altar of stones. The wood laid in order, and Isaac bound and laid on that altar, and Abraham with a knife in his hand to slay his only son, and then God spoke.

Abraham believed God. Abraham obeyed God, and God provided the ram caught in the thicket. Now this is but an illustration of the essential principle of Christian living.

If we say we believe in God, if we exercise faith in God, then we must obey Him. There's no other possibility. Let me ask you a question as we close, for time's gone.

Have you committed yourself to the Lord absolutely, as we are reminded in that glorious 23rd Psalm? Are you prepared to trust and obey? Girls, listen to me. Fellows, listen to me. Are you prepared to trust God in the matter of the fellow you're going to marry, or the girl you're going to marry? God brought Eve to Adam.

Are you prepared, fellows, to wait until God brings your Eve to you? Girls, are you going out on a husband hunt? I'm quite serious. Or are you willing quietly to leave your life in God's hands, who knows best, who never makes a mistake? What about your vocation? Are you going to decide whether you're going to be a butcher, a baker, or a candlestick maker? Or is God going to choose, and are you going to obey Him? And remember, as you get on in life, the cost and the test doesn't end. Abraham's greatest test came after years and years and years of walking with God.

And for us who are a little bit older, some of our greatest spiritual tests yet may lie in the future. But oh, the principle of faith. Oh, the principle of obedience.

God grant that even while we're here at this conference, we'll settle this matter with God. We'll say, yes, Lord, I want Your will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Are you prepared today to commit yourself unreservedly to the Lord and say, Lord, I want Your will? I will trust You.

I've got absolute confidence in You. And I'm prepared, You giving me strength, to obey You. May it be so.

For Your own good and blessing, and for the sake of the Lord Jesus, shall we pray.

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