



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### *EXPERIENCING GOD* [Part 7]:

#### OBEDIENCE? UGH!

Scriptures: John 14:15-17, 21

I Samuel 15:22 (1-22)

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#### RECAP and INTRODUCTION

Summer has flown by, hasn't it? We've been focusing for the last 7 weeks on *Experiencing God*. It's been a good series. In the Sunday morning teaching & preaching, Matt and I have been zeroing in on 7 realities, 7 affirmations [listed below; also see BULLETIN INSERT]. . .

1. God has always been at work in our world. He is now at work where you are—in ways beyond your human (physical) ability to see or know.
2. He pursues you with a relentless love. He desires a relationship with you that is real and personal.
3. God wants you to be involved with Him, in what He is doing in the world and all around you. At some point, He will reveal to you what He is doing or about to do, and invite you to join Him. I hope you will RSVP ASAP.
4. He will reveal Himself by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the ministry of the church. We just need to get out of the “dead zones” so we can hear.
5. When He does speak to you, it will inevitably lead to a “crisis of belief”, a turning point, a fork in the road that will call upon you to make a decision. You must decide what you believe about God. Either He is able or He is not!
6. Then you must make adjustments in your life so He can accomplish His will through you.
7. There is one remaining response that is necessary to experience Him at work in & through you:  
**YOU MUST OBEY HIM!**

So we end with OBEDIENCE. What a downer! It's a word that makes many of us go “*UGH!*” When you hear that word, what's the first word that comes to mind?

Following orders  
Fulfilling something required  
Compliance  
Conformity  
Respect (for authority)  
Responsibility  
Duty

What you have to do  
Fear of punishment  
Obligation  
Un-(opposite of) Freedom  
Love-Honor-Obey (marriage vow)  
Subservience  
Submission

Why does this word conjure up such negative images?

Why do we react so to the mention of obedience when it is so good for us?

Promises are attached to so many of the commands in the Bible. For example. . . . .

- 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment: *“Honor your father & mother. This is the first of God’s Ten C’s that ends with a promise: that if you honor your father & mother, yours will be a long life, full of blessing”* [Eph. 6:1-3, TLB]
- Deuteronomy. 30:15f: *“I have commanded you today to love the Lord your God, to follow His paths and to keep His laws, so that you will live and become a great nation, and so that the Lord your God will bless you and the land you are about to possess.”*
- Exodus 15:26: *“If you will listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and obey it, and do what is right, then you will not suffer the diseases brought on the Egyptians.”*
- Matthew 7:24f: *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”*

## I. OBEDIENCE IS A “HEART” ISSUE

I believe the answer comes down to this: WHO’S IN CONTROL?

We all want to be in control. We don’t want to have anyone “over” us / “controlling” us. College students love the freedom from restraint. There’s a streak in us that says: *“Nobody’s going to tell me what to do (or not do).”*

JESUS sets us straight on this issue. He tells us over and over in the GOSPEL OF JOHN that obedience is a **heart** issue more than it is a **control** issue. . .that obedience comes out of **love**, not out of **fear** of the one who has the power. Let’s read **John 14:15-17,21**. . .

*“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. . .Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”*

**A.** Love is more than lovely words spoken in prayer or worship.

It is commitment. it is conduct. If you love Christ, then you show it by obeying what He has said in His Word (i.e.: teachings, commands).

**B.** By the same token, obedience is more than slavish adherence to a set of rules.

Obedience comes out of a heart of love. . .a desire to serve, to please. . .a profound respect for the one in authority. . .a deep trust in the one leading.

The best visual I could give you is that of a DOG BEING WALKED ON A LEASH:

- Sure, there is a leash that connects them, so there is limited freedom.
- Sometimes I let my dog off the leash. And then I’ll call her back to me.
- She may not understand; she may even wonder if she’s being punished. [Sometimes obedience feels like restriction or discipline, especially to kids & youth.]
- Truth is, I know more. . .I see more. I know there’s a road just up the way that could pose some danger.
- If my dog trusts me, then obeying the command to come back to the leash will be no big deal (i.e.: she probably figures I know what is best ☺).

You know all those commands in the Bible? They were all given for our good. . .for our safety and protection. [For example, physical love inside the bonds of marriage.] When we live life on God’s terms, it doesn’t mean we’ll be free of stress & strain. But it does mean – well, let’s let God speak for Himself:

*“Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you. . .that you may go forward and not backward.”* [Jeremiah 7:23f]

So, obedience is not such a bad thing. It's an expression of love. Next. . . . .

## II. OBEDIENCE IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO GOD

It would be hard to overestimate the importance of obedience to God. Over and over the Bible says:

- *“Obedience is better (far better) than sacrifice”*
- *“God doesn't want sacrifices and offerings, but a desire to do His will”*

A “have to” won't work. It needs to be a “want to”.

Without that, our “sacrifices and offerings”—whether giving money, spending time in ministry, showing up on Sunday mornings, or leading something—become mere formalities, routines, rituals—void of life, void of joy—done out of a sense of obligation and drudgery. Not very satisfying to us; not very pleasing to God!

If God is going to use you to make a lasting impact for Christ on your family, workplace, neighborhood, etc. . . . If you are going to experience that lingering sense of satisfaction that comes with knowing God is working through you:

- Your heart, your motives, your attitude need to be right!
- You need to be obeying the things He already has told us to do.

There are some things you don't need revelation on; it's already been given:

- God gave the 10 Commandments. Are you obeying?
- Jesus has told us to love our enemies. Are we doing that?
- Jesus commissioned the church to make disciples of all nations. Are we doing all we know to carry this out?
- God tells us in His Word how to treat one another (both within and beyond the Body of Christ). How are we doing?

You see, if our life is out of line or out of control, then how can He use us to accomplish His purposes? We can't be faithful & obedient in some things and not others. We can't pick & choose what of God's law we're going to observe—and expect God's poured-out blessings.

There's a great example of all this way back in the Old Testament in I Samuel 15. . .

- Samuel goes to Saul: *“I am the one the Lord has sent to anoint you king over his people Israel. Now listen to the message from the Lord. This is what the Lord Almighty wants you to do.”*
- He proceeds to command the utter and complete destruction of the Amalekites, a band of terrorists who lived by attacking other nations and carrying off their wealth and their families. In fact, they were the first to attack the Israelites as they entered the promised land. Their corrupt, idolatrous religious practices were a threat to Israel's relationship with God.
- The only way to protect the Israelites—both physically & spiritually—was to utterly destroy this warlike nation and all their possessions (including their idols).
- You see, God's commands are ultimately for our protection!
- Well, Saul went in and wreaked havoc on the Amalekites. EXCEPT, he spared Agag, their king, and brought back some spoils (i.e.: the best of the sheep & cattle, the fat calves & lambs).
- So Samuel goes to confront him. . .

SAUL: *“The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions.”*

SAMUEL: *“Oh? What is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle I hear?”*

SAUL: *“Oh, those? Well, the soldiers brought them from the Amalekites. They spared the best of the sheep & cattle to sacrifice to the Lord. But we totally destroyed the rest.”*

SAMUEL: *“STOP! Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night.”*

SAUL: “Sure! Tell me!”

SAMUEL: “Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. And he sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and completely destroy those wicked Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.’ Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?”

SAUL: “But I did obey the LORD! I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers brought back the best sheep & cattle to sacrifice to the LORD our God.”

Do you catch the rationalization? “I thought what I did was good enough. . . I didn’t think any more was necessary.” We call our kids on such excuses. Should it surprise us when God calls us on some of ours?

Then SAMUEL replies (v. 22):

“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”

Could it be clearer the high premium God places on complete & full obedience?

Sure we will fail in “obeying in every point”, but that’s not the point. God’s love-mercy-forgiveness is always available to us. He just wants us to walk in all the light He has given us—so that He can give us more. He will help us—especially if our heart is in the right place. And He will help us get our heart in the right place—because He is vitally interested in building character into each and every one of us.

Here’s what I’d like you to do this morning:

- Ask God to reveal to you any area of disobedience or lack of obedience in your life.
- Whatever God shows you, will you confess it (i.e.: agree with Him about it) and surrender your life afresh to His lordship?
- Will you covenant with Him to obey no matter what the cost—out of love, not out of compulsion (i.e.: force, pressure, coercion).

If God is asking you to dedicate more time or financial resources to Him + His work . . . to make a change of some sort (maybe an attitude or a viewpoint or a some aspect of your lifestyle). . . to forsake something that has been alienating you from full fellowship with Him or others—will you do it, by His grace and with His help? Maybe He’s challenging you to step out in faith and you’ve been holding back. Now’s a good time to EXPERIENCE GOD THROUGH OBEDIENCE.

### CONCLUDING PRAYER

Let’s ask God to show us where He wants to work in each of our lives. LORD. . .

We acknowledge that we are not our own; we have been brought with a price.....

We would follow the very example of Christ who did not consider equality with You something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing. . . became a servant. . . humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Help us to likewise count the cost of obedience → surrender our all to You.

Teach us how to relinquish our will, our ego, our control until You have completely had Your way within us, and accomplished all that You want to in & through us.

Bring to completion all that you have started