

ABCs of Obedience

By Lindsey Carlson

“Obedience does not guarantee a life free from troubles.” God planted this seed of truth in my life back in September, when I wrote the blog post, [“Par for the Course.”](#)

Today, seven weeks later, the more temporary IV in my hand has been exchanged for a more permanent PICC line through my arm, creative and exciting homeschooling exchanged for survival homeschooling, home-cooked meals exchanged for friend-cooked or frozen meals, and “normal” life exchanged for a day-to-day grace-drenched life.

This was not in the book “What To Expect When You’re Expecting.”

Throughout the craziness God has been faithful to water and cultivate the seed He planted seven weeks ago: “Obedience does not guarantee a life free from troubles.” I have realized how often I expect the combination of my attitude and my behavior to equal my comfort.

A (attitude) + B (behavior) = C (comfort)

We all do it. Parents discipling and disciplining their children expect them to grow up and follow the Lord. We expect righteous (yet loving) confrontation of a friend caught in sin to end in repentance and not in estrangement. We believe if we lack anything but petition the Lord in faith, with a joyful heart, that he will provide it. When we don’t get what we want, we stomp our feet like small children and shake our fist at God.

Sometimes our discomfort comes in the form of crisis. The unexpected loss of a loved one. Infertility. Years of unemployment. Childhood cancer.

A (attitude) + B (behavior) = Crisis

“Why is this happening to *me*? After all, I’ve trusted the Lord to provide. I have been obedient. What have I done to deserve this, Lord?”

The truth is, sometimes it doesn’t have anything to do with what we’ve done. Job was well acquainted with tragedy and we are told that he was blameless before the Lord. He hadn’t done anything to warrant suffering, but he did suffer, immensely.

We’ve all had *that* friend - the one who gets the flu and ends up in the hospital, and while they’re at the hospital their house burns down, and their insurance happened to lapse the day before... Job was that friend. He wasn’t being punished.

When Job suffered loss, we’re told that he fell to the ground and worshipped the Lord. I think I’ve fallen to the ground with loss, but it wasn’t in worship.

First Peter 4:12 reminds us not to be surprised *when* we suffer, “as though something strange were happening,” but to rejoice insofar as we share in Christ’s sufferings.

We are told we will suffer. Job suffered - blamelessly. Eleven out of twelve apostles were martyred after obediently serving their master. And of course Jesus himself suffered innocently, shedding his blood on a cross for our sins.

So why is it that we expect a sovereign God to look upon our lives and reward all of our attitudes and behaviors with a life of perfect comfort?

Oswald Chambers, in “My Utmost for His Highest,” writes:

The first thing God does is get us grounded on strong reality and truth. He does this until our cares for ourselves individually have been brought into submission to His way for the purpose of His redemption. Why shouldn’t we experience heartbreak? Through those doorways God is opening up ways of fellowship

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with His Son. Most of us collapse at the first grip of pain. We sit down at the door of God's purpose and enter a slow death through self-pity. And all the so-called Christian sympathy of others helps us to our deathbed. But God will not. He comes with the grip of the pierced hand of His Son, as if to say, "Enter into fellowship with Me; arise and shine." If God can accomplish His purposes in this world through a broken heart, then why not thank Him for breaking yours?

In the past seven weeks, I have been trying to replace the old equation with a new one:

A (acceptance) + B (belief) = C (contentment)

I must accept my circumstances, knowing that they are in the bounds of God's sovereign plan. I must believe that even in my suffering God is present, and he is good. Through this acceptance and belief, I will find contentment in the knowledge that He is breaking my will and my dependence on myself, all the while deepening my fellowship with Him.

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." -Philippians 3:8-11