

DAWN TREADER

EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLISHIP

A KEEPING THE FAITH RESOURCE

ISSUE 1.7



The *Dawn Treader* is navigating the rapids this month — dealing with one of the trickiest and yet most important issues in discipling children: obedience. Biblical obedience is rooted in gratitude to God, and closely connected to a right understanding of duty, respect, and civility or good manners.

Dawn Treader Moments

FOCUS OF THE MONTH: OBEDIENCE

Dawn Treader Moments are purpose-driven opportunities to engage children in important topics. We offer one key question per week, the answers to which parents can then explore with their children throughout the week.

OBEDIENCE TO GOD AND FREEDOM FROM SIN

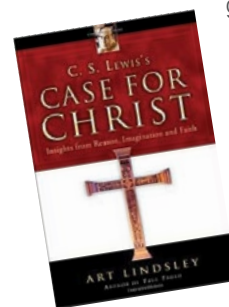
Our modern culture really pushes freedom, to the point of self-contradiction. As long as you accept anyone's authority over you, we are subtly and not so subtly told, you are not really free. It is therefore very important to counteract this false idea of self-autonomy with the recognition that true freedom, freedom from sin, is only found in obedience to God, which includes honoring and obeying parents. Take time this month to discuss, as a family, how our fallen nature, in rebellion against God, falls under the control of temptations, worldly cultural influences, and selfish desires—this form of "freedom" is the greatest slavery of all! *For week one, ask the first question over an unhurried meal. Let the children think about it and then offer their own answers. The children should talk more than the parents. Throughout the week, offer the different reasons highlighted and let the children discuss them. (Parents, read through the relevant Bible passages in advance.) Challenge the children to look up other verses addressing the question. Do the same for the following questions each week for the month.*



Resource of the Month

C.S. Lewis's Case for Christ – Art Lindsley

This engaging but provocative book provides an excellent cornerstone for anyone who wants to read and understand Lewis's works and his overall approach to the Christian faith, and would like to have an outline of what they are looking for. Through a combination of dialogue amongst a projected study group, and clear expositions of the particular issues dealt with by Lewis in his work, Dr. Lindsley offers a concise and helpful guide to both newcomers to Lewis, and those who have read him for a long time, and would like to probe deeper into the implications of his work for followers of Christ today. This book would be an excellent resource for high school and college students, and their parents, who



have already read one or more C.S. Lewis books, e.g., *The Chronicles of Narnia* or *Mere Christianity*, and who would like to know more about Lewis and his Christian faith.

Dawn Treader Moments

FOCUS OF THE MONTH: OBEDIENCE (CONT'D)

Week One: Why does God want us to obey Him? (Genesis 2:16-17, Deuteronomy 5:1-24 and 28:1-14, 2 Corinthians 10:3-8)

Only God knows perfectly what is best for us and our happiness; when we try to do things our own way, we invariably make mistakes and fall short of the goal. Obeying God is the only way to know we are doing the right thing, that will work out the best for everyone, including ourselves, in the end.

Adam and Eve, our first parents, rejected God's authority and fell into sin. After the Fall, the original state of perfect communion between God and man was broken, meaning that we can no longer know what God wants for us without being told. Even if we don't immediately understand all of God's commands, we must trust in His Wisdom and obey.

Obedience is connected to trust and respect. It actually comes from a Latin word meaning "to hear." When we obey God, it is a sign that we really trust Him and are listening to what He is saying, and truly believe that He knows best. If we don't obey God, we are essentially saying, "I know better than You do," which is precisely what happened in the Garden of Eden.

Week Two: What is obedience? (1 Peter 1:13-25)

Listening to what God says in the Bible

Following Jesus as His disciple

Serving others, not putting ourselves first

Being polite and following the rules of good society to show our consideration and respect for others

Trusting that God's way will be best for us, rather than our own or the world's way

Week Three: How is obedience to parents connected to obedience to God? (Ephesians 6:1-4, Colossians 3:20-24, Hebrews 12:9)

By thanking Him in prayer and song and through attending church.

By remembering and discussing the great things He has done — Jesus left us the memorial of His death and resurrection in the Lord's Supper, which is a very special form of worship.

By celebrating His gift of salvation and other blessings in this life — in church, during religious holidays such as Christmas and

Easter and Thanksgiving, and rejoicing in God's love all the time.

Worship demonstrates both our closeness to God and our respect for God — when we pray or attend worship services, it is a time to "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). But at the same time, God expects us to enjoy the time we spend with Him — He enjoys spending time with us!

Week Four: How does obedience make us free from sin? (1 Samuel 15:22, Romans 6:16-18, Philippians 2:5-13)

Obedience shows our thankfulness to God for His Salvation. If we have truly repented and accepted His Salvation in faith, our new freedom from sin displays itself in obedience.

When we obey God, we learn the distinction between righteousness and sin without having to go through painful experiences first to show us the consequences of sin in our own lives. We do not have to guess what is right and what is wrong, often making mistakes in judgment, because God always tells us in His Word exactly what we need to do, to keep us from falling into sin.

Obeying God makes sense, because His way is always better in the end — when we try to disobey and do things our own way, we always end up more miserable and mixed-up. We can't see the future, but God does; His instructions take all the circumstances into account, which we can't do, so naturally His way would make more sense!

But at the same time, temptation can sometimes be very strong and seem as if it would work in the present situation; but if we are accustomed to obeying God in the little things, we will be better able to resist temptations and obey Him in the large situations where disobedience could be very hurtful and dangerous and deadly. In the same way, if we are used to obeying our parents when they tell us to do our chores, we will be more likely to obey them immediately when they warn us to get out of the way of a speeding car.

Dawn Treader Moments

FOCUS OF THE MONTH: OBEDIENCE (CONT'D)

Obedience creates closer relationships — we obey those whom we trust, and when we obey them, they know that they can trust us with great responsibilities and freedom to carry them out.

Obedience lets us have more fun — when people listen to and respect each other's wishes instead of quarrelling and everyone insisting on having our own way, we can all work together in a proper social order that allows us to arrange very special occasions, like putting together a big fair or Christmas party or church supper that requires lots of people to work together and listen to the leaders in charge of the event. (If we don't obey them, we won't have the event at all — the people who obey instructions are just as important as those who give them!)

Obedience allows us to be creative. Obedient people can carry out the missions they are given in multiple ways. Loving one's neighbor, for instance, can be done differently by people with different talents and ideas.

Obeying God allows us to really get to know Him and ourselves, as we were created by Him, and He will bless us for it in Heaven with Him forever, freed from sin and temptation and trouble.

Theologian Theodore

QUESTION OF THE MONTH: HOW CAN I BE OBEDIENT AND FREE AT THE SAME TIME?

Theodore: Why, Freesia! I wasn't expecting to meet you here. How are you doing?

Freesia: Oh, pretty well. I actually wasn't expecting to be here, either; I only came to this evening Bible study class because my parents want me to.

Theo: Well, that's a good enough reason to come, I suppose.

Free: I don't know. At my age, Theo, don't you think I ought to be making up my own mind?

Theo: Certainly; but you did, didn't you? You had to decide whether or not to obey your parents. Everybody makes their own decisions as to whether or not do the right thing (hard though it might be) or to do the wrong thing and bear the consequences. We all have that free choice, but it doesn't change the truth of the duty of obedience or the necessity of consequences to our actions.

Free: Ye-es. But sometimes I wonder whether I can genuinely consider myself a Christian when I didn't decide to become one on my own. My parents brought me up this way, and I know I'm supposed to obey my parents because the Bible says so, but if I only believe the Bible because I'm obeying my parents . . . I feel like I'm reasoning in a circle.

Theo: Well, Freesia, we don't believe the Bible just because our parents taught us to, but because the Bible is true. As we carefully look at the Bible and its history, claims, and impact, we realize that it is the True and Living Word of Jesus Christ Himself.¹ Similarly, we don't become Christians just because our parents brought us up that way, but because we ourselves make the decision to accept Jesus as our Savior.

The fact that we may have been influenced by our parents, or others, doesn't mean that we haven't made our decision freely. Our culture, unfortunately, has a confused understanding of how we make decisions freely. We are taught that unless we



¹ In Issue 1.5 of the *Dawn Treader*, Theologian Theodore has a discussion about the question "How Do We Know the Bible is Always Right?"

Theologian Theodore (CONT'D)

QUESTION OF THE MONTH: HOW CAN I BE OBEDIENT AND FREE AT THE SAME TIME?

make up our mind on something without any outside influences or pressure, it isn't our own decision; we can blame it on our parents or society or circumstances or our personalities or even God. But the fact is that to step outside of everything and simply pick and choose our decisions in life, apart from any influence or consequences, is impossible. Everybody obeys something. Those who insist upon doing everything "their own way," carefully opposing everything their parents taught them or any other form of "authority," are really just obeying the modern culture — and the devil, since rebellion is his entire scheme against humanity, and has been since the Garden of Eden.

Free: That sounds alarming. But isn't freedom a good thing? It doesn't necessarily have to be rebellious.

Theo: Whether or not freedom is a good thing depends on what you are free from. The Bible teaches us that God has freed us from our sins — that is true freedom. We are no longer under the control of evil desires and bad tempers and uncontrolled impulses that keep us from being, not only the kind of people *God* wants us to be, but the kind of people *we* really want to be. However, that doesn't mean that we can now do just whatever we feel like doing, because "we are not our own," as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:19.

Free: What does that mean?

Theo: It means that we were created to be in *God's* service, not sin's. And as *The Book of Common Prayer* puts it, "His service is perfect freedom."² People who are free are free to be themselves. And we were created by God to be the kind of people He intended. So when we obey Him, we are really being our truest selves, and so are at last truly free. C.S. Lewis said: "The more we get what we now call 'ourselves' out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become... It is no good trying to 'be myself' without Him. The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more... what I so proudly call 'Myself' becomes merely the meeting place for trains of events which I never started and which I cannot stop... It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own."³

Free: But how does this connect with obeying my parents, or any other form of authority?

Theo: True authority always upholds God's. When the Bible commands us to obey "the higher powers... [f]or there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1), it is because this obedience to created authorities will help to shape us into the kind of people God created us to be, in obedience to Him. But whenever *any* kind of authority tries to set itself up against God's and force us to behave differently from the way we were created, then, as followers of Christ, we have the freedom to say, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). You can't get away from obedience; freedom just means that you only ever obey the right commands, the best ones for everyone! And so if you are obeying God by obeying your parents in coming to Bible study class, then you are a truly free and truly obedient person; and that's two good things at once!

Free: You make it sound like fun!

Theo: Obedience is fun when you obey God, since His plans for us are always directed toward the final end of eternal joy!

Ask your children: What do you think about Theo's answers to Freesia's questions? Do you have any other questions of your own that this dialogue has brought up for you? Challenge them to think up more responses they could give, if someone asked them a question like Freesia's.

² *The Book of Common Prayer*, Morning Prayer Service, "A Collect for Peace." Church Publishing, Inc. (September 1, 1979).

³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 50th Anniversary ed. (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2002), pp 225-226.



What is Keeping the Faith? The Keeping the Faith program is a unique study-plus-fellowship experience featuring the Aslan Academy Small Group model centered around the Keeping the Faith guidebook. It is designed to equip parents, grandparents and other caring adults for intentional discipleship of their children and teens. Dawn Treader is a monthly newsletter filled with activities and ideas geared to help you to disciple the children in your lives from preschool through the teen years. To learn more about the program, go to: www.cslewisinstitute.org/KTFResources

Prayer of the Month

CONFESSION

This month, our prayer is a confession. The Bible teaches us to confess our sins regularly and ask God to forgive us for all the mistakes we make and disobedient acts toward Him that we do regularly, even if they don't seem very big to the world. It helps us to draw closer to God when we confess and recognize that anything that does not follow His plan for us in completely willing obedience is hurtful to us and others, and something we need to be freed from. Because we will not be completely freed from sin until we get to Heaven, it is a good idea to confess our sins regularly, to remind ourselves that we have been saved and that God is always ready to forgive and help us, every time we go astray.



Dear Lord,

You have said in Your Word that we are like sheep
that have gone astray.

We want to do things our own way and the world's
way, breaking Your commandments.

I often do things I shouldn't do,
And don't do the things I should do.

Please come and find me every time I leave Your
paths of righteousness.

Give me an obedient heart, so that I will always turn
and follow You back again,

For only Your service is perfect freedom.

And thank You for forgiving and restoring me every time I
disobey,

Because Jesus died for me.

In His Name I pray,
Amen

Activity of the Month

LEARNING TO HEAR



The first step in obedience is hearing — really hearing, understanding, and absorbing — what it is that we are supposed to do. Many of God's commands in Scripture begin with the words "Hear, O Israel" (Deuteronomy 5:1, 6:4, and 9:1). Take some time this month to have either a family gathering or a one-on-one

meeting with each of your children, and talk about what each of you is hearing from God right now, or thinks you would be hearing from Him if you were listening. Also tell your children what you want them to hear from you — at a separate time from disciplining for individual infractions — explain to them what some of the overall issues are that your family needs to overcome in order to grow in Christlike behavior. Discuss how obeying in the small matters will lead to great advances in our discipleship and spiritual gain in virtue. It could be as simple as saying, "We're all becoming far more absorbed in the Internet than we are in each other. We need to remember that people, especially our family, are more important than mere technological devices. This is part of loving our neighbor as ourselves. So, when I ask you to get off the computer and come be with the rest of us from now on, you need to do it immediately, without making excuses." Having *heard* and understood what is expected of them, children will be more likely to obey immediately.