

LORD, TEACH US YOUR WAYS

Part II

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In part one of this teaching on learning God's ways, we contrasted God's acts (what He does) with His ways. I define learning God's ways as knowing His person and character so intimately that His pleasure or displeasure may be sensed - though no word is spoken. To illustrate, in a healthy marriage, after 30 or 40 years of living together, either spouse can often sense not only the pleasure or displeasure of the other, but even the other's thoughts. They know one another's ways.

We noted that Moses asked of God, "...if you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor in your sight...." (Ex 33:13 NIV).

We noted that because of Moses' faithfulness to his heart's cry to learn God's ways, Psalm 103:7 tells us "...he (God) made known his ways to Moses...."

We also explored our human will and our flesh's reaction to God's ways. We must let our self-will die and become yielded to God's will and His purposes for our lives. It takes a strong, unyielding determination in us to stay committed to a continual dying to self-will. It includes a crucifixion of our will and personal desires.

Now let us examine how God teaches us His ways.

How God Teaches Us His Ways

What are some of the means that God uses to cause us to die to our own will and surrender our own ways for His?

1. God Promises to be With Us - Then Disappears

At the outset let me assure you that I know the Bible says, "he will never leave you nor forsake you." (Ex 31:6 NIV). Yet during times of great stress and hardship in our Christian walk, most of us conclude that God has somehow forsaken us. He is nowhere to be found! We pray, we fast, we beg, we plead and cry - and God does not come. He cannot be found anywhere. There is a sense of absolute rejection by God. We even quote Scripture to Him reminding Him that He will not forsake

us...all to no avail. "Where are you, God? You promised you would never leave me! God! Where are you?..."

The fact is of course that God has NOT forsaken us. His word is always true. God has merely withdrawn our awareness of His presence. We no longer sense His presence. Thus, we think He is gone. And we are devastated.

Question: Why does God do this?

Scripture has our answer: "...without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." (Heb 11:6 NIV).

This withdrawing of our awareness of His presence is an early step in knowing God's ways. He wants us to mature to the point that in the midst of our crisis - even though we don't feel His presence we lift our voice to Him saying, "God, you see what has happened in my life. You also know that I don't feel your presence, that I feel abandoned by you. But God, I know my feelings are lying to me because your Word says you will never leave me nor forsake me. I choose to believe your Word, for heaven and earth shall pass away but your Word will never fail. Therefore, because your Word says you are with me in this trial I believe you are. Thank you, Jesus, for going through this awful trial with me. Thank you for your presence and comfort.

I believe David was experiencing this as he graphically penned these words of the 23rd Psalm:

Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me. (v4 NIV).

I believe that last statement, "for you are with me" was a statement of David's faith made quite probably at a time when David did not "feel" God's presence. Don't we sometimes feel we are walking through the valley of the shadow of death? When we learn to act as David did in this Psalm saying, "I will fear no evil, for you are with me," we are indeed beginning to learn His ways.

QUESTION: So what is the lesson to be learned when the Lord "deserts" us in the midst of trouble?

ANSWER: He wants us to learn to walk by faith in Him, His goodness, His word and His ways. He truly never leaves us nor does He ever forsake us. He is always present whether we feel it or not!

2. He Leads Us to do the Impossible at the Worst Possible Time.

In the Book of Joshua when God commanded Israel to cross the Jordan River to enter into the promised land, the river was overflowing its banks with flood waters! Normal human reaction to such a command is, "God, why did you wait until the river flooded? Why didn't we go over last week when the water level was manageable?"

That's a very good question, isn't it? Why did God wait until the flood water rose so high before He commanded the Israelites to cross?

In Luke's gospel we see the time in Jesus' ministry when there were five thousand people in a remote place who needed food. The disciples said to Jesus, "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here." But what did Jesus tell them? He replied, "You give them something to eat." (Lk 9:12-13 NIV).

There, He's done it again! He asked the impossible at the worst possible time. Why did Jesus lead the disciples to where there were no restaurants or food stores and then tell them to feed the multitude?

The Lord wanted to teach His Disciples (and us) another of His ways. Man's ways always involve reason and logic coupled with the provisions of this world. God knows we are not citizens of this world and in order to know Him and His ways, we must break our dependency on this world and its systems. God's ways are higher than our ways. He wants to teach us that when the world says "Impossible!" God's way says, "It's a simple matter."

God wants us to learn to walk in the absolute assurance that God can at any time override the world's limited system. We must learn that when God directs us to do the impossible He always has in mind supernatural provision at the precise moment it is needed. Our only task is to obey. Notice the key here is that God must **direct** us to do something. If we direct ourselves, we will

fail. Then it is not God's failure, it is our presumption.

Remember Joshua. He instructed all Israel to mount up and begin walking into the swollen Jordan because God had instructed him to do so. As the priests who were bearing the Ark of the Covenant placed their feet in the flood waters, the waters began to recede. As the disciples obeyed Jesus and began to give the little food they had to the multitude, it began to multiply until all ate their fill.

QUESTION: What is Jesus teaching us when He asks the impossible of us?

ANSWER: He is teaching us not to rely on the world's system for our provision or for the solution. He is our source, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Phil 4:11 NIV).

3. God Leads Us to do the Irrational.

In the sixth chapter of Judges we read of Gideon and his victorious army. God told Gideon He wanted to use him to deliver Israel from their Midianite oppressors. Scripture says that there were so many Midianites that no one could number them (Judges 6:5). Gideon called for an army to stand with him. Eighty-two thousand men responded to the call. Then God told Gideon that he had too many men - he had to reduce the size of his army. Seventy-two thousand men went home leaving Gideon with only ten thousand soldiers!

In God's mind, even the ten thousand were too many. By the time God was through trimming Gideon's army he had only three hundred men left! Yes, on occasion God does lead us to do the irrational.

Which of His ways is the Lord trying to teach us here? This one is easy to see - no matter how large or oppressive a set of circumstances, it is no match for the Lord and His wisdom. No power on earth is able to stand against the might, power, and wisdom of the Lord. When the Lord leads us to do the irrational, rest assured that He has already made victorious plans for us. Again, all we must do is obey - and wait.

QUESTION: What is the lesson to be learned here?

ANSWER: When the Lord leads us to do the irrational, His wisdom and power overrides our finite reasoning. We need not understand, we only need to trust and obey.

4. At Times He Leads You Out on a Limb!

Yes, at times God does lead us out on a limb. Then it seems that He hands the devil a chain saw! Let's look at an event in the life of Abram (Abraham) to illustrate this.

The LORD said to Abram,
"Leave your country, your
people and your father's household
and go to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great
nation and I will bless you; I will
make your name great, and you will
be a blessing. I will bless those who
bless you, and whomever curses you
I will curse; and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you." (Gen
12:1-3 NIV).

Let me be transparent with you for a moment. If God spoke those words to me I would be beside myself with sheer joy and all kinds of expectations. I would be looking forward to absolute happiness in my life from that moment on! I would think, "Hallelujah, all my problems are solved. No more pain and suffering. No more problems...God has spoken His blessings on me!"

But let's look at what happened to Abraham. He obeyed God, left his homeland, and went to the land to which God led him. But verse ten says, "Now there was a famine in the land..." That sure doesn't sound much like the fulfillment of the Lord's Word to Abraham, does it? In fact, it sounds just the opposite! To a cattleman, which Abraham was, famine means disaster.

Did God really lead Abraham to that land? Is that really where he was directed to go? It appears that God promised one thing and delivered the opposite. Yes, Abraham was indeed led out on a limb in the process of obeying the Lord's leading.

Though the Bible says nothing about Abraham's thoughts in this matter, it takes little imagination to see that his expectations, as would be mine, must have been very high after that powerful prophecy. This is what I have come to call the "expectation syndrome." This syndrome occurs when we look into our future, especially with God's promises still ringing in our ears, and generate false expectations from those promises. We erroneously fix in our imagination how things are going to be.

Often God directs us to a certain place and when we arrive we find it very contrary to what we expected. But His approval can be found no place else on earth other than where He has directed us. When we find ourselves in such a situation at the Lord's leading, we must have faith that He knows perfectly well what He is doing and that He has not made a mistake. We must let our own human expectations die. As we do so, our hearts are purified and our wills are yielded more fully to Him. And that is what God is after. Standing in faith no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, we will enter into His approval.

QUESTION: What is the lesson the Lord is teaching us here?

ANSWER: God's ways do not necessarily coincide with our expectations. We must focus on Him and His eternal purposes, not on whether or not our expectations are fulfilled.

The Blessings of Entering Into His Ways.

We have examined four real life sets of circumstances through which God teaches us His ways. From our analysis it may seem as though we Christians must simply endure one trial after another and that a life centered on God must be hard. But not so! The blessings and benefits of such a God centered life far outweigh its difficulties.

We noted in Hebrews 3:10 and 11, quoting Psalm 95, that God said of the Israelites: "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.... They shall never enter my rest." We can conclude from these verses that those of us whose hearts **do not** go astray and who **do** know God's ways shall enter into God's rest. What an incredible blessing that is! I am convinced that a life centered on God and His ways is a life of enormous and unshakable inner peace and joy. It is also a life of great power in the spirit realm. It can demolish the enemy's strongholds. It can move mountains.

Remember Daniel! We noted in the first part of this teaching that Daniel was highly esteemed in Heaven. "He instructed me and said to me, 'Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. (Dan. 9:22,23 NIV).

This passage tells us that not only was Daniel highly esteemed, but that an angel came to

him to give him insight and understanding. In addition, as soon as he began to pray, an answer was given! Thus we see that one who follows after God's ways not only knows God and continues to find favor in His sight (Ex 33:13), but he is highly esteemed in the heavenlies, gains insight and understanding, and has his prayers answered!

Speaking through Isaiah, the Lord gives us a loving father's encouragement when we find ourselves in the process of learning His ways. He gave us no road map - He simply gave us these words to point us to the right path:

"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Is 55:9 NIV).

As long as we grasp the reality of this powerful concept, as long as we are willing, as best we know how, to yield our will to His ways, we shall dwell in the shelter of the Most High, and we shall rest in the shadow of the Almighty! And yes, even we, like Daniel, can be counted among those who are highly esteemed in the heavenly realm! Lord, may it be so.

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