

The Difficult Journey to Obedience, Faith and Love by Mary Ferrill



I've been struggling a lot lately, perhaps due to some sort of midlife crisis. I keep trying to figure out God's plan and His purpose for my life, but without success. I thought I knew what He wanted of me and what my life was all about, but now I'm not so sure. It's not as though He hasn't been trying to communicate with me. In His graciousness, God has been sending me messages embedded in devotions and songs. The messages are easy to understand but difficult to live out. One such example is a story told by Tim Tebow in a *Proverbs 31 Ministries* daily email devotion (October 26, 2016). He started with an honest statement about the day the NFL informed him that he was fired. Tim thought he was following a direction laid out for him by the Lord, so what happened? He had spent his whole life serving the Lord, and he and his family were widely criticized for it by the media. Tim believed that the Lord wanted him to shine a light through football... and then bam! The rug was pulled out from under him (he termed it a "sucker punch"). Can you relate? He cried out in desperation to the Lord, "I thought we had this. I thought You had a plan in mind! What's the deal?" He understood that getting fired was not the worst thing that could happen in a person's life, but it made him question his identity, and it became a storm that turned his "world upside down." And then he wrote, "You many not relate to football, but I bet there was a time, or two, in your life when you faced a storm that turned your world upside down. Maybe a dream you worked so hard to fulfill flopped. Or your once rock-solid marriage started to crumble. Or the cancer came back. Or something you were positive God put on your heart to do but it didn't quite turn out the way you expected." The insight he provided about how to handle these types of situations was the title of the devotional: "Knowing Whose You Are Changes Everything." We must fight to stay grounded in Christ and not let the disheartening things of this fallen world define us. Because we belong to Christ, we can endure the toughest of times. We must choose over and over again to trust God. It is a daily, never-ending struggle that we face, as flesh in a fallen world, with the devil who "prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8, NIV).

I've never been one to make new year's resolutions, as I have always been reluctant to

make promises that I can't keep. But this year I vowed to intentionally focus on three things to help me remember Whose I am: **obedience, faith and love**. My type A controlling nature makes obedience a difficult challenge for me, but the Lord tells us that obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22). Our inward trust in Him means more than anything we might accomplish. It's easy for me to counsel others to trust in the Lord during difficult times; but in reality, I find it hard to follow my own advice. Tim Tebow thought he was doing what the Lord wanted him to do, and yet it didn't work out as he had hoped. Fully understanding God's will is beyond our grasp. To use a football analogy, we are like players on the field, with a very narrow perspective of the game. The Lord is the coach in the skybox who can see everything happening on the field. The players need to trust that God sees things which they cannot.

Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV) says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." This chapter in the NKJV translation of Hebrews is titled, "By Faith We Understand." I don't know if I totally agree with that statement, since we cannot possibly know or understand everything about God, no matter how much faith we have... but we must trust that His plan is perfect, even when we don't understand it. It does not mean that things will necessarily turn out as we would prefer, but rather that if we are obedient and have faith, He will use us for His purposes and bless us with eternal life. Believing and receiving are all we have to do to obtain eternal life, but we are also told that what we do here will be judged in heaven. The thief on the cross who believed in Jesus was told that he would be with the Lord in paradise (Luke 23:43), but he would be expected to account for what he did here on earth.

Obedience and faith are not easy to achieve, but for me, the most daunting challenge of the three is love. I'm not referring to the type of love we have for those who love us – anyone can handle that. Scripture tells us that we are to love our enemies as well (Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-35). That might sound easy when you read it superficially. You can pray for others, tell them "God bless you," and be polite to their faces... but then gossip about them behind their backs or treat them poorly. Such contradictory behavior might explain why so many people consider Christians to be hypocrites. I'm afraid I would have to put myself into the Christian hypocrite category. We are supposed to turn the other cheek and

readily forgive others, but how many of us are able to do that when it really matters? Instead we usually write our enemies off, or worse yet, engage in passive-aggressive behavior toward them. This is a command that Jesus gives us, but it is a daily struggle for me... and I suspect I'm not alone.

I've heard it said that the best way to accomplish something is to tell others about your plan in order to instill a sense of accountability. So here I go. I'm openly professing to the CPFI membership that I need to focus more attention this year on obedience, faith and love... rather than focusing on my problems, my disappointments, and my anguish. I will certainly continue reaching out to God and asking Him for answers. But when the answers that I seek are not forthcoming, I must faithfully obey whatever the Lord brings my way, and do my best to show the love of Christ to EVERYONE, no matter who and no matter what. That is a tall order, to be sure. And alone, we will fail. But in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37 NIV).

We are so blessed to serve a God who walks with us through the wilderness times in our lives. Are you walking through a wilderness time right now? If so, I pray that God will bless you with the courage to obey His call... a greater faith in His sovereignty over every aspect of your life... and His abounding love which you can demonstrate to others.

And who knows... maybe God has something much bigger in mind for Tim Tebow to serve Him in the world of baseball, as he now plays for the New York Mets!

Dr. Ferrill completed her Pharm.D. at the University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Pharmacy and then two ASHP accredited residencies in Drug Information and Clinical Pharmacy at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She spent 10 years in California as a professor at the University of the Pacific School of Pharmacy. The Lord called her and her husband to Palm Beach Atlantic University School of Pharmacy in 2001, to Wingate University School of Pharmacy in 2003 and back to Palm Beach Atlantic in late 2005, early 2006. They feel blessed to be able to work jointly to help with the spiritual growth of pharmacy students. Dr. Ferrill was on the Board of Directors of CPFI for 6 years and was the Editor for the CPFI publications, Christianity and Pharmacy Journal and the Faith Script newsletter for five years and is the current Editor for the Journal.