

Obedience School

[The Lord said to Joshua,] “Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go” (Joshua 1:7).

Scripture: Joshua 1:1-9

Song: “Step by Step”

Last summer, I took care of my friend’s dog while she was on vacation. I didn’t want my dog to be surprised by a new roommate, so we scheduled a meet and greet. On my way to her house that morning, I accidentally made an illegal turn. Flashing lights from a police car appeared in my rearview mirror. When the officer gave me a ticket, I swallowed my pride and resolved to do a better job of being attentive to and obeying traffic laws.

After Moses died, God called Joshua to lead the Israelites into the promised land. Joshua faced many obstacles, so God instructed him to be courageous and careful to follow His laws.

Thankfully, when God gives us an assignment, He doesn’t expect us to fight our battles alone. He remains with us and equips us with His Word. In a world full of obstacles and distractions, it’s important to keep our focus where it needs to be. As we are careful to apply God’s instruction to our lives, He will be faithful to lead and guide us into spiritual victory.

Father, I look to You and Your Word to guide me today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

February 3–9. **Sarah Cole** lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with her dog, Zoe. She enjoys dog sitting, nature walks, travel, and meeting friends at the local coffee shop.

Timely Words

[Jesus said,] “When they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matthew 10:19-20).

Scripture: Matthew 10:16-30

Song: “Spirit of the Living God”

Preparing for a stage play requires actors to memorize lines they’ll eventually perform in front of an audience and with no script for reference. Major roles in theater require hours spent committing dialogue to memory, perfecting execution of timing, and rehearsing where to be on the stage at any given time. With so much pressure to keep so many things straight, performers occasionally draw a blank during a performance, unable to deliver their next lines. “Drying,” as the industry calls it, is an anxiety-producing experience—a risk inherent in stage acting.

As Jesus prepared the disciples to carry His message of hope and truth to the world, He reassured them that they wouldn’t be at a loss for words. After Jesus’ resurrection, the Holy Spirit would fill them and be their constant help. Jesus also knew the disciples would suffer persecution, so He encouraged them not to be afraid. Their lives were in God’s hands.

Sharing our faith doesn’t have to be intimidating. When we rely on God’s Spirit to speak through us, we can be confident that He will provide what is needed for each situation. And as we deliver the gospel message, our fear of persecution is eclipsed when we remember we’re safe in God’s hands.

Father, thank You for equipping me to speak about You without fear. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Reward for Encouragement

[Jesus said,] “If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward” (Matthew 10:42).

Scripture: Matthew 10:31-42

Song: “Make Me like You”

My small group has earned a reputation for serving an excellent Sunday-morning pancake breakfast. Our teamwork and culinary skills ensure that everyone enjoys a delicious meal before the service begins. And our gifts have, at times, been put to use beyond these breakfasts. For example, when her sister died, our ministry leader asked us to help with serving a meal after the funeral. We were happy to provide assistance, and the family gave us gift cards to show their appreciation.

Near the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus told His disciples that they would face significant opposition for their allegiance to Him as they served Him. He also said that anyone who treated them well by receiving them and ministering to them, in even the smallest way, would receive a reward. Later, as the disciples carried the gospel message to the world—even laying down their own lives for the sake of Christ—there were those who encouraged and supported them with hospitality, provision, and even protection.

Providing support and encouragement to those who serve in God’s kingdom brings refreshment to them. It also honors Christ, and He promises that such kindness will one day be rewarded.

Father, grant me grace and strength to serve You faithfully today and to encourage others who are ministering for Your sake. In Jesus’ name, amen.

God Defends Us

I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother (Psalm 35:14).

Scripture: Psalm 35:1-14

Song: “Not by Might”

My friend Lydia’s recent death left a void in our church family. At her funeral, we celebrated her love for everyone around her, releasing purple balloons into the sky and sharing our memories over a delicious meal. Part of my own grief journey has included continuing her legacy by following her example.

In today’s psalm, David was grieved by a personal loss. His, however, was a relational loss due to wrongful persecution by his former friends. Though hurt deeply, David knew that in the wake of this betrayal, the right path forward was not in retaliation but in seeking God’s protection, trusting God to defend him. When we look to God in our relational challenges, we learn the wisdom of surrendering to Him in all situations. As we do so, we can be confident that He will deal with what concerns us better than we ever could.

Jesus never promised that following Him would be easy. As His disciples, we can expect opposition in a world that hates the truth. Yet as we serve Him, instead of lashing out when people hurt us, we can pray for God’s truth and righteousness to prevail. By walking in love and forgiveness, we leave justice in God’s hands and trust that His sovereign plan will succeed.

Father, I’m grateful You defend me when people mistreat me. I lift up my relational pain to You right now and entrust myself to Your care. In Jesus’ name, amen.

God's Protection Program

How long, Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their ravages, my precious life from these lions (Psalm 35:17).

Scripture: Psalm 35:15-28

Song: "I Will Call upon the Lord"

Lions are known to be savage hunters, but few people in modern history know the lion's destructive potential more than Lieutenant Colonel John Henry Patterson (1867–1947). In 1898, while supervising the construction of the Ugandan railway over the Tsavo River, Patterson faced mutinies, material shortages, and unreliable workers. But none of these was as daunting as a pair of male lions that, over a period of time, brutally attacked and killed dozens of people. As these man-eaters continued their ravages, Patterson hunted them and eventually was able to dispatch them both.

As God's anointed king over Israel, one of David's goals was to uphold God's justice and to eradicate evil from the land. His enemies hated him and hunted him down for no reason. Their unjust accusations and threats to his safety prompted David to ask God to protect and vindicate him. Despite his ordeal, David's faith endured, and he promised that he would thank God publicly for delivering him.

As we shine God's truth in this dark world, we will inevitably face opposition. However, instead of being vengeful, we are called to forgive and pray for our enemies as we depend on the Lord's protection. When we ask God to fight our battles, we experience His victory. He may wait to rescue us, but His ways and His timing are always perfect.

Father, when I am opposed for my faith, I will look to You and wait for Your victory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Wisdom Is Sweet

Eat honey, my son, for it is good; honey from the comb is sweet to your taste. Know also that wisdom is like honey for you (Proverbs 24:13-14).

Scripture: Proverbs 24:8-22

Song: “The Law of the Lord Is Perfect”

At the 1905 World’s Fair, the town of Uvalde, Texas, was named “Honey Capital of the World.” Ever since, Uvalde’s commercial beekeepers have shipped their unique honey all over the globe. The bees thrive around the native shrubs and honey mesquite trees. These local sources of nectar and pollen provide what the bees need to produce the rare and delicious commodity customers crave. However, it wasn’t until 2019—more than a century after receiving its distinction at the World’s Fair—that Uvalde held its first annual honey festival.

In today’s passage, King Solomon compared the goodness of gaining wisdom to the sweetness of honey. From personal experience, the king could instruct his son, assuring him that knowing, understanding, and applying God’s Word is surpassingly sweet to the soul.

God’s Word calls us to value wisdom. It teaches us how to escape the entanglements of sin and to grow in what is right, good, and true. As we seek to walk according to His wisdom, we will enjoy the sweet benefits of righteousness and peace (James 3:18, Hebrews 12:11). Be assured that to live in the blessing of God’s wisdom is far better than the sweetest-seeming thing on earth (Psalm 19:7-14).

Father, I want to grow in wisdom and know the sweetness of peace and righteousness. I will look to Your Word to produce in me a sweet harvest for Your kingdom. In Jesus’ name, amen.

God's Better Plan

As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see?" (Matthew 11:7).

Scripture: Matthew 11:7-15, 20-24

Song: "Jesus Is the Answer"

I live within walking distance of one of Minnesota's beautiful lakes. One afternoon, I went there to sit on my favorite swing in prayerful solitude. While there, a man asked if he could join me. Moments later, a woman greeted us and sat on the grass. She began calling to one of the chipmunks and started to feed it peanuts. It was a delightful experience, and I realized God had a better plan than I did that day.

When Jesus asked the multitudes whom they sought in the wilderness, He testified about John the Baptist. John was one of the most extraordinary men who ever lived, and his work of introducing the Messiah was more significant than any of the prophets who had come before him. However, John did not exalt himself but pointed others—including his own followers—to Jesus.

As Christ's followers, we must not look to the world—not even to spiritual leaders—for significance or fulfillment. Jesus is the one who meets our deepest needs and desires and provides satisfaction and joy. Through the work and witness of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we can be part of God's plan to draw people to Him and bring glory to His name—a better, more meaningful plan than any we might have in mind.

Father, I yield my plans to You today so that I may be led into what You have in mind. In Jesus' name, amen.