



God at the Center: Habits for Spiritual Growth – #4
Practicing Obedience to God – Experiencing God's Forgiveness

I would like to engage you in a Lenten Series – one inspired by the author Luis Palau as part of the *Discovery Series of Our Daily Bread*. In this Lenten Series, we will be challenged but mostly encouraged to establish or strengthen some spiritual habits that will materialize into a closer relationship with God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Journey with me and find yourself in a time of renewal leading to a lifetime of healthy habits.

While there's no formula that delivers the ultimate faith-filled life, God has given us ways to daily strengthen our faith. *God at the Center: Habits for Spiritual Growth* outlines clear steps we can take to build the fundamentals of faith to spiritual maturity: Talking with God in Prayer, Reading God's Book, Cultivating Dependence on God, Practicing Obedience to God, Serving God and Others, Becoming God's Ambassador.

The Old Testament prophet Micah raised an important question: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8) Jesus, when "tested" about the question of eternal life, his response was, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" (Luke 10:25-37)

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus as tested again: "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with

all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matt. 22:36-40)

So, how are you doing in light of these expectations from God? Do you feel as if you are falling short? I am sure you do – and that's okay since we cannot on our own strength or ability fulfill every command of God. That is why we have grace and the God we serve is forgiving...slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. (Ps. 103:8)

Now, scripture tells us that in order experience such amazing grace, we need to confess that we have fallen short of what is expected of us. Confession is a prerequisite of God's forgiveness and this confession involves repentance and when necessary restitution.

God freely forgives those who confess their sins. Manasseh, one of the most wicked men to serve as king of Judah. He overturned Hezekiah's reforms and served false gods with more zeal than the nations God had destroyed (2 Chronicles 33:1-9). But after being captured by the Assyrians, Manasseh greatly humbled himself before the Lord and God forgave him!

A more popular example of the richness of God's mercy is captured in life of King David after his spring-fling with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12). David's life was never the same prompting him to write the penitential Psalm 51.

My friends, God never intended for us to live under the punishment of sin; that was why the laws were designed – to create and maintain order in communities but since we are not perfect human beings, Jesus had to be sent to save us – freeing us to experience the forgiveness of God.

I think reformer Martin Luther summed it up well, "Be a sinner and sin boldly; but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly."

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