

A Beautiful Sound by Kelly Kershaw

Have you ever been to a concert at an elementary school?

The metal chairs have all been arranged and filled with a group of uncertain, yet energetic children dressed in their most prized hair bows and collared shirts. It's a sweet sight to behold.

And then they begin to play.

You struggle to keep your mouth from curling as the "music", which sounds suspiciously like a rather large, distressed animal, hits your ears. Struggling to hit both notes and timing... the little band trundles it's way to the song's merciful conclusion, as each instrument gives one final blurb and screech.

By objective standards this band is bad. They've missed just about every mark.

But what happens when the last horn is tooted and over-zealous cymbal crashed?

The crowd roars with applause!

Cheers and shouts filled the air. Why? Because the audience is full, not of harsh judges, but of proud parents. Parents who delight not in the perfect playing of each instrument but in the kids who sit in each seat. It's never been about playing perfectly. It's always been about who's playing and who's listening.

When I think about obeying God, sometimes I think about this picture of an elementary school concert.

I think about how my own obedience is a bit wobbly and misses the mark many times. But I also know that as I "play the notes" of obedience, with uncertain awkward fingers, it is translated into a beautiful sound in the ears of my heavenly Father, who delights in me, and who has given me a Helper to enable me to grow in and through it (John 16:13).

You see, obeying God is a lot like learning to pick up the instrument He's given you and listen as His holy spirit whispers the notes. Slowly, you begin learning the part He wants you to play, a part in *His* great symphony. You'll fumble along at first, and always a little bit on this side of Heaven, but you can rest in the knowledge that, as you offer it up to Him in gratitude and surrender (and maybe with a little bit of humor), what he hears is made beautiful through Christ, and He delights in displaying his glorious symphony... one player at a time.

Verse to Meditate on:

“Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
as much as in obeying the Lord?
To obey is better than sacrifice,
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”
1 Samuel 15:22

- How can you live today in the knowledge that God is a loving Father (not a harsh task master) whose delight is to see you humbly obey him?

He knows you're weak. He sees your burdens. He is patient, and has fully equipped you to obey him even at the most difficult times (2 Peter 1:3). Place all your fears and doubts in his hands today, then faithfully “play your notes” for His delight alone!

Shalom, Shalom **By Kristen Engelman**

Truth be told, I'm an Old Testament nerd. There's something about the Israelites that I find so relatable to my own life. They mess up, God comes in with a miracle and saves the day. They turn away from Him, He continually pursues a relationship with them. They don't trust Him, He proves to them He's trustworthy. It's this repetitive cycle that reveals God's desire has always been to have a relationship with us and He never gives up. Not just an average relationship either, a deeply rooted, trusting relationship like a child is dependent on a parent.

But have you ever found it difficult to trust God amid something hard happening in your life?

I know I have. I'm a fixer, I hate conflict and strife, I do not like change. I'm a fan of calm waters and smooth sailing, can anyone relate?

What's your first instinct when trouble comes? Do you immediately turn to the Lord in trust, or do you get overwhelmed by a sea of emotions and try to fix things on your own?

Almost four years ago our family went through a really hard time with one of our daughters. She got caught up in a bad relationship and began making unfavorable life

decisions which ultimately drove her to move out of our house at 18 years old. This happened the day before Easter 2019. I didn't understand why God was allowing these circumstances we faced to happen. My faith was shaken, my thoughts were scattered, I felt anxious and confused with no idea what we were going to do, let alone how this situation was going to be resolved. I couldn't understand how a Jesus-loving girl could walk away from her family and her faith in an instant. I woke up every day and went down to my living room and cried out to God, feeling so desperate for relief from the sadness and confusion that overwhelmed my heart. God spoke to me one morning through His Word in Isaiah 26 and these verses became the beginning of a transformation in my life.

"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal." Isaiah 26:3-4

Immediately I realized that all the anxiety, confusion, the feeling of loss of control, it all came from a lack of trust in the Lord. I wasn't fixing my mind or my thoughts on God and what He could do. I was fixing my thoughts on my circumstances and what I could or couldn't do. If I'm being brutally honest, my lack of trust in the Lord was rooted in feeling betrayed that God allowed us to go through what we were going through. I was very bitter toward Him and even though I was still coming to Him every morning, that bitterness fueled my lack of trust and obedience. Obedience was not going to happen; I was going to figure out a way to fix this problem rather than wait on the Lord to move.

Have you ever felt betrayed by God that led you to a lack of trust and obedience?

When God spoke these verses through the prophet Isaiah it was during a very dark time for the Israelites. They had every reason to feel anxious and discouraged. There were wars going on constantly, the nation had been split into two separate kingdoms, the people had not been faithful to hold up their end of the covenant made with God to worship Him only and they were feeling the oppression of their wandering ways. But God is so good that He still pursued them. He still gave them this promise that if they would fix their thoughts and minds on Him and trust in Him fully, He would give them peace. He would be their Rock that holds things steady in times of insecurity. And He doesn't just promise any peace, He promises perfect peace. In Hebrew the word that is used to translate into perfect peace is, "Shalom, Shalom." Same word used twice together implies the intensity of the peace God is offering. It's a completeness that only the Creator of all things can offer to the ones He created, that is why it's perfect peace.

I love one translation of this verse that reads the action in v.3 as, "the steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace" meaning when we are persistent to lean into God with our mind and place our complete trust in Him that's when the promise is fulfilled for His perfect peace. We are called to trust in the Lord ALWAYS. Even when it's hard or when we don't know the outcome of a situation.

Jesus offers us similar instruction in Matthew 11:28-30. Read these verses and keep in mind the similarity to the promise in Isaiah.

He tells us to come to Him with our heavy loads and He will give us rest. Then He tells us to take His yoke on us, to let Him teach and lead us. Why? Because He is gentle, humble and worthy of being trusted and obeyed. This instruction isn't hard because His yoke is easy and His burden is light. It's not hard to be obedient when we trust and follow Him. Do you see the similarity in these scriptures? Trust, surrender, and obedience = rest and peace. When we trust in Jesus, He exchanges our problems for His peace and rest. Trusting and surrendering to follow Jesus is the living instruction to receive the promise of perfect peace. After all, Ephesians 2:14 says, "For He Himself is our peace."

Ladies, we have a God who can be trusted with all things. He knows every single thing going on in our lives. When hard times come and we don't know what the outcome of our situation might be, He still offers us peace when we place our trust in Him. We must fix our thoughts on Him, not on ourselves or on our problems. He is our Rock, He is faithful to keep His promises, He is so good to share His perfect peace with us!

When God spoke this promise to me about my daughter that chilly spring morning, I realized that God had not betrayed me. He was offering an opportunity to trust Him and to strengthen my faith while reflecting on the past to show us His faithfulness to His people. I had to trust that He can and is able to do far more than I could ever imagine, and He was building her testimony...and mine. The moment I surrendered the situation to Him completely I was flooded with His perfect peace. God did not move immediately, our circumstances with our daughter didn't change right away. In fact, the problems got worse before they got better. However, I walked each day with peace as I trusted and obeyed the Lord.

Learning to trust and obey God is an ongoing process. Our sinful nature is always creeping back in trying to get us to control our own lives. We need to give ourselves grace as we learn to be dependent on Him. It's the sanctification process of becoming more like Jesus to trust whole heartedly in our Heavenly Father. Being truly dependent on the Lord comes from a repetition of recognizing our lack of trust when it happens, repenting, and fixing our minds on Him as we navigate the storms of life with Him as our guide. As we confess our sin and begin to meditate on Him and His goodness, we will find our lives will have, "Shalom, Shalom".

Trust and Obey in God's Character By Carrie Brooks

There's a beautiful hymn I used to sing as a child...

*Trust and obey
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus
Than to trust and obey*

As a child, that was an easy song to sing, but as I've grown older, it's been harder to live out. For most of us, we want to trust God. We want to follow Him with reckless abandon, believing that He's got all the answers, all the knowledge, and he'd never steer us wrong. But, as women, we've also got the keen ability to think of everything that could go wrong, to believe we've got it all under control, and to allow our desire for independence to cloud our judgment. Before we know it, our trust is in ourselves and our obedience is non-existent... or worse, we're *explaining to God* how our way is better.

And I don't know about you, but in those moments, I'm not usually left feeling "happy in Jesus."

Trust and obey... for there's no other way... How do we even do this?!

I can't say that I've "arrived" in this area, but I can share something that has helped me along the way: **Trust and obedience is much easier when you focus on God's character.**

Allow me to explain.

The very definition of trust is **assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something**. When we apply that definition to pretty much anything in life, we can find ourselves disappointed. People let us down. We fail ourselves. Circumstances are rarely what we hope they'll be. Looking for anything to have **assured reliance** in is a tall order.

Yet, here's what the Bible tells us about God:

Deuteronomy 32:3-4

*I will proclaim the name of the Lord;
how glorious is our God!
He is the Rock; his deeds are perfect.
Everything he does is just and fair.
He is a faithful God who does no wrong;
how just and upright he is!*

Perfect. Just. Fair. Faithful. Innocent. Upright. That is how our God is described... and that's only ONE verse. The Bible is full of descriptions of God's character, goodness, strength, faithfulness and sovereignty. While everything else in the world, including ourselves, will eventually leave us unsatisfied, God is someone we can *assuredly rely on!*

When we understand the character of God, it becomes much easier to trust Him. But it doesn't stop there; we can obey Him too.

Obedience is simply **following commands or guidance**. When we focus on God's character, we understand that it's impossible for Him to lead us astray. Remember, "everything he does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong."

Obedying his ways may not always lead us into comfortability, but it will always lead us into what is best for our souls. Obedience is the true sign of trust in God's character, and will always cause you to be "happy in Jesus" because your faith will grow each time you are willing to trust Him, without knowledge of the outcome.

We have a choice, ladies. We can keep putting our time, energy and faith in our own skills or the things around us; or, we can trust and obey the One who will never fail us.

*Trust and obey
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus
Than to trust and obey*

Trust in His Timing by Allison Treubig

For me the obey part of "trust and obey" comes naturally. Give me a rule, task, or guideline and I will obey the parameters. On the other hand, trusting is out of my control and requires so much more of me. I have struggled over the years to give my hurts and problems to God without rescinding it days later. God's Word reminds us in Psalms 37:5, "Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you."

So why do I doubt His help for me?

Control. In those moments of trust, we are placing our faith in the one we are fully confident in, but we are also relinquishing control in that step of obedience. This lack of faith became very apparent about 18 years ago. My husband and I began the journey to

become parents. We did not realize how long that journey would be. After several years we sought medical help. Over the next five years we went through tests, medications, and monthly procedures. Despite our years of heartache and loss, we continued on. Despite being emotionally and physically exhausted, we continued on. We finally came to the end...end of mental endurance...end of insurance...end of our own understanding.

It is not that we spent those years not trusting God. Our hope was fully resting in Jesus. We continued to hope, but knew we could no longer stay on that path. Proverbs 3:5 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding."

Our trust needed to deepen. We needed to fully trust in our Miracle Worker with more than just words while we feverishly worked toward our goals.

Over the next few months we took time to heal and to seek God. We noticed a difference in ourselves during those months. Our healing was not without hope. We focused on what God had already given us; a loving marriage, supportive family and friends. Maybe our future would look different than our plans.

We **trusted** that what God had already done was enough. It was resting in those thoughts that brought the most peace. It was the release of me, my dreams, my goals, and my plans that brought me to His purpose and His plans for our future.

Oh what a future it was...a beautiful baby girl arrived nine months later. The complete shock we received with that positive test is still enough to bring me to grateful tears. I'll never know why we had to walk those years of desperation, or why so many stories continue to end in heartache.

What I do know is that I can trust His faithfulness. Who He was yesterday is who He is today, and no matter what, He will be faithful tomorrow.

Jeremiah 17:7 reminds us that, "But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence." His faithfulness is always able to be trusted because His love for us is unending. May He find us faithful as we trust and obey!

Trusting Through Change

By Alicia Desrosiers

There comes a point in every life when change begins to emerge. Sometimes slowly, sometimes jarringly. And whether it forcibly takes us by surprise or we excitedly anticipate it's arrival, it's never a picture-perfect event in a tidy little package.

I remember the day when my husband said that he felt God leading us into another season, which would include a significant move. I was quite happy right where I was, so I listened politely, all the while my mind furiously compiling all of my arguments why I couldn't, shouldn't or wouldn't. But as the weeks went by, I couldn't shake the feeling that he may have actually heard from God, even though I was selfishly doing everything I could NOT to hear that still, small voice from where my comfortable little self stood.

There finally came a pivotal moment when I knew that I couldn't ignore the inevitable. I agreed to fast and pray for one week, intentionally focusing on asking God to speak to me, to give me a confirmation that would make the decision undeniably clear.

I asked for one confirmation that week. He gave me seven. Seven reminders that He was there, paving the path ahead.

And I decided to trust and believe that God loved me so much and had such wonderful plans for my life that he would speak directly to me about taking another step forward into the unknown. I had already moved across the world a few years before. I had already responded yes to a season that led to loneliness, questions and doubts. I had already walked through doors that made no sense and were, if I'm completely honest, incredibly hard. And now he was asking even more of me...and I still didn't feel capable or ready.

I had to come to a deeply vulnerable place where I had an unshakeable belief in God's sovereignty and faithfulness. I've been asked many times since: "But how did you actually KNOW it was God that you were following?" I chose to trust what Isaiah 30:21 says: *Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, "This is the way you should go," whether to the right or to the left.*

That voice is astonishingly clear when we allow it to be.

Trusting isn't always easy. Actually obeying is even harder. For me, it meant saying a lot of gut-wrenching goodbyes... again. It meant leaving a place of contentedness, happiness, financial security, and a season I had poured so much fully-lived life into. I didn't understand, but I knew that He did. So I took that first shaking but confident step forward. And then another. And the steps got bolder and more firm with each stride.

It wasn't about me. It was and always is about God working in the world in ways we can't even imagine. But if we don't trust His long-term plan and obey His prompts, we don't get to experience the miracles along the way.

So I allowed His wildly beautiful and unbelievable plans to become part of my story.

And life has never been the same.

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope. - Romans 15:13