

## Moving from Teaching to Obedience

Leaders must live a life worth imitating.

*Cindy Miller* | posted 11/12/2000

A life reflecting biblical obedience could be described as one who loves God with his whole heart, soul and mind, and loves his neighbor as himself. By definition biblical obedience is submission or adherence to biblical principles. To obey one must first have some knowledge of those principles. Yet simply knowing a truth does not necessarily affect behavior. Have you ever been in a situation where you *knew* the right thing to do, but chose not to?

Obtaining biblical knowledge is a great pursuit. But how do we move from teaching that results in biblical knowledge to biblical obedience? Recently a small group leader was telling me about the study her group was doing on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Now, don't get me wrong. Knowing about the Tigris and Euphrates is not a bad thing. But what I need to know, and what I believe most spiritually growth oriented individuals want, are more practical concepts, such as how to better love my husband, how to obey my boss, how to care for parents who live almost 500 miles away, and how to be a godly influence on my four little nieces that I see only a few times a year. And if I ever want to know about the Tigris and Euphrates I'll go find a map!

I owe a great deal of my spiritual growth to participation in small groups. Soon after becoming a Christian in 1991 I entered my first small group - Class 101, Basic Christianity. Later, when my husband and I joined a couples group we saw first hand people striving to have a God-honoring marriage. By no means were they perfect, still, our marriage was strengthened.

Since that time I have worked in a variety of capacities with small groups and currently work as pastor of small groups and discipleship. I do this because I truly believe it is in the context of a small group that life change, biblical obedience and spiritual growth happens best. This is where knowledge gets put into practice.

Small group leaders, the caregivers and shepherds of the Church, need to live lives worthy of imitation. Throughout the Bible believers are called to a higher standard of living. In 1 John 2:6 we are exhorted that "whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did." Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4:16, "therefore, I urge you to imitate me." The material used in a small group is only partially responsible for spiritual development. Small group leaders mentor as much, and possibly more, by their actions as they do by the depth of their lessons. For teaching to result in biblical obedience it must be observed, experienced and applicable and include accountability.

Small group members may use the leader's actual behavior to rationalize their own actions, good or bad. Therefore, observable learning occurs as a result of the leader's actions. Think about what your group members learn just by watching you. Does your walk and talk match? Are there inconsistencies that plant seeds of cynicism or doubt in the hearts of group members?

Experiential learning brings conviction and commitment. For example, groups that take on a community project experience servanthood first hand. Not to mention that gratitude for one's blessings (home, safety, job, family, friends and good health) is more deeply felt following an afternoon spent at a children's home or a women's shelter. Life change occurs with experiential teaching.

Relevant teaching with life application reinforces biblical principles. An illustration from the leader's personal experience, whether of success or failure, is beneficial. Nothing speaks to the heart of the group member better than hearing about an encounter with God and how it changed a life for the better. When I learned that one of my small group leaders had made some of the same mistakes as I during her pre-Christian life, I did not feel like such an outsider. I not only learned about God's character, forgiveness and becoming a new creation, I began to *believe* I was loveable in spite of my flawed past. Facts about forgiveness and character do not have the impact of real life examples.

And finally, teaching that leads to biblical obedience must have an element of accountability. What is truth good for if we do not, in love, ask the tough questions? Accountability is a natural follow up when a person admits their need for change. And in the safe environment of a small group, accountability should be a natural occurrence.

As small group leaders, we will be reproducing ourselves. Question: Are you living the life that you are asking group members to live? Are you living a life that you would want imitated? What they need to see is a life of authenticity being lived out, real and honest.

Biblical obedience comes when people are brought to a place where they express, "as best I am able, I will follow Jesus," and then look for ways to accept and act on what God is teaching them. You can tell this is happening when they are willing to set aside their own agenda and allow God to reveal his plan.

---

*Cindy Miller is Pastor of Spiritual Development at The Bridge, a contemporary Christian church which launched January 16, 2000. Her responsibilities include the oversight of small groups and discipleship, adult teaching and periodic preaching on Sunday mornings. She writes a weekly devotion which is sent via email to attenders and friends of The Bridge and will also be posted on our web site ([www.thebridge.to](http://www.thebridge.to)). She can be reached at [ceymiller@primary.net](mailto:ceymiller@primary.net).*