



Listen and Obey

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The Finley family had the privilege of attending the Western Region Conference meetings last week in Richmond, Missouri. The Western Region really brings a sense of family togetherness to their bi-annual conference meeting as they have an obvious love for one another and it's evident when they gather together. Grace Church Richmond, pastored by Justin and Laura Beth Meier, were wonderful hosts and added much to the time of fellowship, learning and business.

Author

The weekly eNews is provided by CGGC Executive Director Lance Finley



On Saturday morning pastor Heather Boss, from Firehouse Outreach Community in Moore, OK, led us in a community service project. The instructions were simple: 1) Divide into small groups of 4-5. 2) Pray that God would lead you to someone with whom you can share God's love. 3) Leave the building and go love somebody. 4) Try to be back in the next ninety minutes.

I'll be honest, I probably didn't have the best mindset when this experience started. I was tired. It was hot. It was the very end of the conference and I was ready to get on the road to our next destination. I'm a firm believer in experiential learning and discipleship opportunities like this, but there was also fear: what if God doesn't lead us to anyone over the course of the next hour?

My children were energized by this new opportunity (probably something about childlike faith) and I didn't want to lose face in front of my kids, so we prayed and went. There had been a big storm in Richmond the night before and lots of people were doing clean up around town. I fully expected to find a resident near the church and help with storm cleanup but that's not where we landed. We end up at the local Walmart, walking around, praying that God might send us someone to love and serve.

After a few laps around Walmart, no one had emerged. I was getting anxious and frustrated. Internally, I was probably getting whiny: "God, please show up and lead us to someone, please. Please let us get this over with." We circled up and talked for a minute. We've been here for a while, has anyone sensed God leading us to a particular person here? My wife Brenda is typically much more sensitive to the Spirit's voice and to people in general. She noted that there was a Walmart employee sitting out on one of the benches in front of the store enjoying a smoke break, perhaps that's who God wants us to serve? The kids agreed and thought a gift card to Subway might be the best way to demonstrate God's love to this lady.

I purchased the gift card and we proceeded out the doors to the bench and found the woman enjoying her break. We approached her and explained that we sensed that God had wanted us to bless her with the gift card because He wanted her to know that He loved her and cared for her. The lady received it with gratitude and shared that she would probably give it to her sons who both had lost vehicles in the storm the night before. We asked her if it would be okay to pray for her and her sons and she welcomed our prayer. After we prayed with her she thanked us and we were on our way.

A couple of takeaways as I've reflected on the experience this week:

- 1. I need more practice listening for God's voice and acting on what I hear.** This following Jesus business isn't rocket science, but it does take practice. It's like any other skill, the more you practice it, the more adept you become. It requires intentionality to ask God to tune my ears and heart to His heart and to help me hear His voice clearly. Each time I put my faith into action after hearing His voice, I build my "faith muscles" and become more able to respond in obedience in the future. I need to practice listening and obeying.
- 2. I'm grateful for the gifting of the body of Christ and what each person brings to the table.** Left on my own, this experience would have looked much different. I'm grateful for Brenda's sensitive heart in both noticing the lady on the bench and sensing that God was wanting us to bless her. I'm grateful for my children's zeal and creativity in finding a small way to bless someone else, their faith encouraged me to exercise my faith. There's a reason why God gives us apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers – no single gifting is able to do all the work God has for His church. We're at our best when everyone is bringing their unique gifting to the table. As North Americans, we tend to interpret our faith through an individualistic lens rather than a community lens. We need each other in order to experience the fullness of what God wants to do in and through us.
- 3. I often miss the opportunities that are before me every day.** This was my main takeaway. The experience in Richmond was good, but it's an artificial experiment: it's in a place 13 hours from where I live, it's only an hour and I'm not likely to have an opportunity to meet or bless this person again. Here's what the Lord brought to me pretty strongly as I reflected upon my experience in Richmond; it was my missed opportunity from a couple of days before. We were in a hotel and I was having breakfast in the self-serve dining area when I witnessed another patron berating one of the hotel employees who was taking care of the breakfast items. I felt a gentle nudge to respond, to speak an encouraging word, to show my appreciation and thanks for her good work and service to so many. I sensed I should do something to bless this lady who had been treated so poorly and unjustly. I knew I should bless her, but I didn't. Why? I don't know. Fear? Being in a rush and wanting to get on to the next thing in my day? Maybe it was the lack of confidence—did I just hear from the Lord or was that the biscuits and gravy messing with me?

I missed the opportunity. I failed to bless this woman who was having a difficult day. I could have offered an encouraging word. I could have thanked her of doing such a good job of providing a meal for me and the other patrons of the hotel. I could have offered prayer. I missed my opportunity. I'm prone to miss opportunities like this every day.

Our patient Father was reminding me that He's more than willing to speak and offer opportunities to put His love on display, but too often I miss them. It was as if He was saying open your eyes and ears Lance, I'm working ahead of you all the time and inviting you to join me more often than you seem to notice.

Listening and obeying. Hearing and putting faith into action. This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. I'm asking for His grace and power to both hear His voice and respond with obedient action.

What is God saying to you today? What opportunities are before you? How will you respond?

Christ's Peace,
Lance