

Foreword

Leadership in a society bent on relativism is difficult. Christopher Shaw has written a refreshing devotional for those in today's church called to this responsibility, whatever their positions. Using Scripture, he gently and consistently brings out straightforward truths so easily overlooked in the rush of a pressing culture.

In this challenging book, Christopher points out the limitations and pitfalls of human solutions—including increased programming, overbearing authority structures and exhausting efforts to please individuals. He exhorts leaders to look instead to the Source of help and guidance, Jesus Christ. Warmly and realistically, these daily meditations emphasize that only Christ—living in you—will produce the character necessary for fruitful service.

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Overcoming Faith

January 1

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. Genesis 22:3

Faith should be a distinguishing quality in the life of a leader. Much confusion exists, however, about the real meaning of faith. For many, faith is little more than a vague desire that things turn out all right or hoping that circumstances may be favorable. We are often told to live with more faith or sing our songs with greater faith—which reveals how often faith is used as another word for enthusiasm.

Abraham's response to the Lord in Genesis 22 gives a clear idea of what faith is all about. God instructed Abraham to take his only son, Isaac, and offer him as a living sacrifice to the Lord. There is no doubt that these words must have precipitated a profound personal crisis for the patriarch. As the long night dragged on, he must have experienced excruciating agony as he fought to reconcile himself with this unbelievable request. How could God ask him to offer up his long-awaited son, his promised heir?

Abraham did not allow his feelings to interfere with his decision. He knew that obedience is absolutely crucial to our relationship with God, even when the Lord's commands make no sense whatsoever. If we walk with Him, our call is that we be "slaves to righteousness" (Rom. 6:18).

Note the abundance of verbs in today's verse: He *got up* early, *saddled* his donkey, *took* two of his servants and *cut* wood and *went* to the place God had told him about. Despite the depth of his anguish, Abraham started very early in the morning to carry out God's instructions, revealing to us the essence of faith. Faith is the certainty that we can only taste God's faithfulness by walking in His Word. It is the assurance that, no matter how difficult our path seems, the Lord will walk with us every step of the way. In this particular situation, "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death" (Heb. 11:19).

We live in times in which God's people are constantly faced with trying circumstances. If we expect those we lead to live by faith, we ourselves must show the same steadfast confidence in God that Abraham demonstrated. The most powerful evidence of our trust will be not be found in our efforts to inspire with eloquent words, but rather in the strength of our obedience.

May the Lord grant that the description of our faith contains an abundance of verbs!

Food for Thought _____

How often do you feel uncomfortable with God's Word? What reaction does His call to absolute obedience produce in you? What steps can you take to make your faith more active?

But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." Genesis 50:19–20

It is easy to make sacrifices and endure trials for worthy causes. But when we are victims of injustice, we struggle with deep feelings of pain and betrayal, especially if the wound is inflicted by someone we love. This agony is expressed by the psalmist: "If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God" (Ps. 55:12–14).

Mature leaders must deal with injustice. If they don't, bitterness will slowly steal their joy and peace and eventually end the effectiveness of their ministry. Joseph's brothers provide an example of the poison that can develop from unresolved conflict. Despite the 44 years which had passed since they had mercilessly sold Joseph into slavery, they were still tormented by what they had done, terrified of revenge. They were haunted by something done almost 50 years before!

We don't know exactly when Joseph recovered from the devastating consequences of being sold by his brothers, but today's text contains two principles which helped him get over this crisis. First, Joseph understood that he was not in God's place; therefore, it was not for him to judge his brothers. Our judgment will always be blurred by the limitations of our humanity. Only God can judge according to the truth; that's why this responsibility is not given to men. Even the Son of God abstained from evaluating others, as He pointed out to the Jews: "You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one" (John 8:15).

Second, Joseph maintained a profound conviction that God was behind what had happened to him. This is fundamental for God's people. All too often our initial reaction to injustice is to question God's goodness, asking why He has allowed such a thing to happen. Years passed before Joseph was able to see God's purpose in allowing such a tragedy to touch his life. But the conviction that God can transform the worst evil into blessing never left him, and this protected his heart from bitterness and animosity.

Food for Thought

Notice the beauty of the scene presented today. Joseph, who had been so unjustly treated by his brothers, was moved to tears by their anxiety. Then he spoke fondly to them and promised to provide for their future. This is the most convincing evidence that God had been at work in his life: The injured party was able to minister to those who had hurt him. This truly is a gift from on High!