

Small Group Guide: A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker

Icebreaker Question: Share about a journey or trip that changed you in some way. What made it memorable?

Sermon Overview

This week we began a new series exploring what it means to be disciples of Jesus—followers engaged in "a long obedience in the same direction." We're starting a journey through the Psalms of Ascent (Psalms 120-134), the songs ancient pilgrims sang as they traveled upward to Jerusalem, to discover what authentic discipleship looks like in our daily lives.

Key Scripture Passages

- Jeremiah 12:1-5 - Jeremiah's honest struggle with obedience
- John 14:15-23 - Jesus connects obedience with experiencing God's presence
- Isaiah 40:28-31 - God renews the strength of those who hope in Him
- Hebrews 12:1-3 - Running the race with eyes fixed on Jesus

Discussion Questions

1. Examining Our Pursuit

The sermon opened with the question: "What are you pursuing in your life?"

- Take a moment of honest reflection: What would your calendar, bank statements, and screen time reveal about what you're actually pursuing?
- How does what you're pursuing align with (or differ from) pursuing Jesus?

2. Understanding Discipleship

The early disciples spent every waking hour with their rabbi, learning to become like him.

- What does it practically look like to "spend time with Jesus" in your daily life?
- In what areas of your life (work, family, finances, relationships) do you find it hardest to filter decisions through what you know about Jesus?

3. Instant Results vs. Long Obedience

The world disciplines us to expect instant results, but God calls us to a long journey.

- Where do you most feel the tension between wanting instant results and walking a long road of obedience?
- Can you share a time when God was forming you through a difficult season, even though you wanted immediate relief?

4. Jeremiah's Honest Prayer

Jeremiah brought his anger and confusion directly to God, asking hard questions about why the wicked prosper.

- Do you feel permission to bring your honest struggles, anger, and questions to God? Why or why not?
- What does Jeremiah's example teach us about authentic prayer?

5. Running with Horses

God's response to Jeremiah was essentially: "If you're worn out running with men, how will you run with horses? I'm preparing you for something greater."

- Have you experienced a time when you wanted relief, but God wanted to give you transformation instead?
- What might God be preparing you for through your current challenges?

6. Obedience and God's Presence

Jesus said three times in John 14 that obedience is connected to experiencing His presence.

- How does this change your view of obedience—from obligation to invitation?
- When have you most tangibly experienced God's presence in your life? Was obedience part of that experience?

Key Takeaways

1. Discipleship is a journey, not an event. Christianity isn't just a decision you made once; it's a way of life—a long obedience in the same direction.

2. The world is discipling us too. We're constantly being shaped by advertisements, social media, and cultural values that often point us away from Jesus.
3. God wants formation, not just relief. When we ask God to remove trials, He may be using those very trials to transform us into people who can "run with horses."
4. Obedience is where we experience God. Every command is an invitation to discover God's presence, not earn it.
5. We're not alone on the journey. We have the Holy Spirit within us, Jesus beside us, and the church family around us.
6. Focus on Jesus. The secret to completing the race is fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge:

Choose ONE of the following practices to implement this week:

Option 1: Daily "Running with Horses" Reflection

- Each evening, journal briefly: Where did I want relief today? What might God be forming in me instead?

Option 2: Obedience Experiment

- Identify one area where you know Jesus is calling you to obedience but you've been resisting. Take one small step of obedience this week and notice what happens.

Option 3: World vs. Jesus Audit

- Pick one area of your life (finances, relationships, career, social media use). Ask: "Am I being disciplined by the world's values here, or by Jesus?" Make one concrete change.

Option 4: Honest Prayer Practice

- Following Jeremiah's example, spend time in honest, unfiltered prayer. Bring your real questions, frustrations, and struggles to God.

Option 5: Focus Reset

- When you feel weary or distracted this week, pause and literally say out loud: "I fix my eyes on Jesus." Do this as many times as needed.

Group Prayer Time

Prayer Focus Areas:

- Pray for endurance in the journey—that we wouldn't grow weary or lose heart
- Pray for eyes to see where the world is discipling us away from Jesus
- Pray for strength to obey even when it's hard or doesn't make sense
- Pray for a fresh experience of God's presence through obedience
- Pray for those in the group facing particularly difficult trials right now

Closing Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on us sinners. Give us strength for the journey. Help us to fix our eyes on You. Renew our strength so we can run and not grow weary, walk and not be faint. We want to follow You with everything we have. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Looking Ahead

Next week we'll begin exploring the Psalms of Ascent, the songs that pilgrims sang as they journeyed upward to Jerusalem. Come ready to discover how these ancient songs can strengthen us on our journey toward God.

Additional Resources

- Book: *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* by Eugene Peterson
- Reflection: Read one Psalm of Ascent (Psalms 120-134) each day this week as preparation for the series