



*In February 1831, Joseph Smith arrived in Kirtland, Ohio, walked into Newel K. Whitney's store, and said, "I am Joseph, the Prophet. . . . You've prayed me here; now what do you want of me?"*



## Obedience: “When the Lord Commands, Do It”

*“Live in strict obedience to the commandments of God,  
and walk humbly before Him.”*

### **From the Life of Joseph Smith**

**F**rom December 1827 through August 1830, Joseph and Emma Smith lived in Harmony, Pennsylvania, the Prophet traveling periodically to New York to attend to Church business. In September 1830, Joseph and Emma moved to Fayette, New York, to join the Saints living in western New York. The following December, the Prophet received a revelation that would require the Church members in New York to make great sacrifices. They were to leave their homes, farms, and businesses and gather to Kirtland, Ohio (see D&C 37). There they would join with converts living in that vicinity to build up the Church and, as promised by the Lord, “be endowed with power from on high” (D&C 38:32). Joseph and Emma Smith were among the first to obey the Lord’s command, leaving New York at the end of January 1831. They traveled over 250 miles to Kirtland by sleigh, in the middle of an especially severe winter, Emma being pregnant with twins.

Kirtland resident Newel K. Whitney was one of the first to welcome the Prophet, as described by his grandson Orson F. Whitney: “About the first of February, 1831, a sleigh containing four persons, drove through the streets of Kirtland and drew up at the door of Gilbert and Whitney’s mercantile establishment. . . . One of the men, a young and stalwart personage, alighted, and springing up the steps, walked into the store and to where the junior partner was standing.

“ ‘Newel K. Whitney! Thou art the man!’ he exclaimed, extending his hand cordially, as if to an old and familiar acquaintance.

“ ‘You have the advantage of me,’ replied the [storekeeper], as he mechanically took the proffered hand—a half-amused, half-mystified look overspreading his countenance—‘I could not call you by name, as you have me.’

“ ‘I am Joseph, the Prophet,’ said the stranger, smiling. ‘You’ve prayed me here; now what do you want of me?’

“Mr. Whitney, astonished, but no less delighted, as soon as his surprise would permit, conducted the party . . . across the street to his house on the corner, and introduced them to his wife [Elizabeth Ann]. She shared fully his surprise and ecstasy. Joseph said of this episode: ‘We were kindly received and welcomed into the house of Brother N. K. Whitney. I and my wife lived in the family of Brother Whitney several weeks, and received every kindness and attention that could be expected.’ [See *History of the Church*, 1:145–46.]”<sup>1</sup>

Orson F. Whitney declared: “By what power did this remarkable man, Joseph Smith, recognize one whom he had never before seen in the flesh? Why did not Newel K. Whitney recognize him? It was because Joseph Smith was a seer, a choice seer; he had actually seen Newel K. Whitney upon his knees, hundreds of miles away, praying for his coming to Kirtland. Marvelous—but true!”<sup>2</sup>

By May almost 200 more Saints from New York had made their way to Kirtland—some by sleigh or wagon, but most by barge on the Erie Canal and then by steamboat or schooner across Lake Erie. In this move to Kirtland, as in the many other challenging circumstances of his life, Joseph Smith led the Saints in following God’s commandments, no matter how difficult the task.

Four years later, in the midst of the many pressures of leading the growing Church in Kirtland, the Prophet expressed the conviction that characterized his life: “No month ever found me more busily engaged than November; but as my life consisted of activity and unyielding exertions, I made this my rule: *When the Lord commands, do it.*”<sup>3</sup>

## Teachings of Joseph Smith

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**When we seek to know God's will and do everything  
He commands us to do, the blessings of heaven  
will rest upon us.**

“To get salvation we must not only do some things, but everything which God has commanded. Men may preach and practice everything except those things which God commands us to do, and will be damned at last. We may tithe mint and rue, and all manner of herbs, and still not obey the commandments of God [see Luke 11:42]. The object with me is to obey and teach others to obey God in just what He tells us to do. It mattereth not whether the principle is popular or unpopular, I will always maintain a true principle, even if I stand alone in it.”<sup>4</sup>

“As a Church and a people it behooves us to be wise, and to seek to know the will of God, and then be willing to do it; for ‘blessed is he that heareth the word of the Lord, and keepeth it,’ say the Scriptures. ‘Watch and pray always,’ says our Savior, ‘that ye may be accounted worthy to escape the things that are to come on the earth, and to stand before the Son of Man.’ [See Luke 11:28; 21:36.] If Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and the children of Israel, and all God’s people were saved by keeping the commandments of God, we, if saved at all, shall be saved upon the same principle. As God governed Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as families, and the children of Israel as a nation; so we, as a Church, must be under His guidance if we are prospered, preserved and sustained. Our only confidence can be in God; our only wisdom obtained from Him; and He alone must be our protector and safeguard, spiritually and temporally, or we fall.

“We have been chastened by the hand of God heretofore for not obeying His commands, although we never violated any human law, or transgressed any human precept; yet we have treated lightly His commands, and departed from His ordinances, and the Lord has chastened us sore, and we have felt His arm and kissed the rod; let us be wise in time to come and ever remember that ‘to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.’ [1 Samuel 15:22.]”<sup>5</sup>



*“When the Lord commands, do it,” Joseph Smith declared. The law of tithing, like all commandments given by the Lord, brings great blessings to those who obey it.*

“When instructed, we must obey that voice, observe the laws of the kingdom of God, that the blessing of heaven may rest down upon us. All must act in concert, or nothing can be done, and should move according to the ancient Priesthood; hence the Saints should be a select people, separate from all the evils of the world—choice, virtuous, and holy. The Lord [is] going to make of the Church of Jesus Christ a kingdom of Priests, a holy people, a chosen generation [see Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9], as in Enoch’s day, having all the gifts as illustrated to the Church in Paul’s epistles and teachings to the churches in his day.”<sup>6</sup>

“Any man may believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and be happy in that belief, and yet not obey his commandments, and at last be cut down for disobedience to the Lord’s righteous requirements.”<sup>7</sup>

“Be virtuous and pure; be men of integrity and truth; keep the commandments of God; and then you will be able more perfectly to understand the difference between right and wrong—between the things of God and the things of men; and your path

will be like that of the just, which shineth brighter and brighter unto the perfect day [see Proverbs 4:18].”<sup>8</sup>

*Wilford Woodruff, while serving as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, reported: “President Joseph . . . read the parable of the vine and its branches [see John 15:1–8], and explained it, and said, ‘If we keep the commandments of God, we should bring forth fruit and be the friends of God, and know what our Lord did.’ ”*<sup>9</sup>

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**God gives laws that will prepare us for celestial rest  
if we obey them.**

“God will not command any thing, but what is peculiarly adapted in itself, to ameliorate [improve] the condition of every man under whatever circumstances it may find him, it matters not what kingdom or country he may be in.”<sup>10</sup>

“The law of heaven is presented to man, and as such guarantees to all who obey it a reward far beyond any earthly consideration; though it does not promise that the believer in every age should be exempt from the afflictions and troubles arising from different sources in consequence of the acts of wicked men on earth. Still in the midst of all this there is a promise predicated upon the fact that it is the law of heaven, which transcends the law of man, as far as eternal life the temporal; and as the blessings which God is able to give, are greater than those which can be given by man. Then, certainly, if the law of man is binding upon man when acknowledged, how much more must the law of heaven be! And as much as the law of heaven is more perfect than the law of man, so much greater must be the reward if obeyed. . . . The law of God promises that life which is eternal, even an inheritance at God’s own right hand, secure from all the powers of the wicked one. . . .

“. . . God has in reserve a time, or period appointed in His own bosom, when He will bring all His subjects, who have obeyed His voice and kept His commandments, into His celestial rest. This rest is of such perfection and glory, that man has need of a preparation before he can, according to the laws of that kingdom, enter it and enjoy its blessings. This being the fact, God has

given certain laws to the human family, which, if observed, are sufficient to prepare them to inherit this rest. This, then, we conclude, was the purpose of God in giving His laws to us. . . . All the commandments contained in the law of the Lord, have the sure promise annexed of a reward to all who obey, predicated upon the fact that they are really the promises of a Being who cannot lie, One who is abundantly able to fulfill every tittle of His word.”<sup>11</sup>

*Joseph Smith taught the following in April 1843, later recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 130:20–21:* “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.”<sup>12</sup>

“All blessings that were ordained for man by the Council of Heaven were on conditions of obedience to the law thereof.”<sup>13</sup>

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**Those who are faithful to the end will receive  
a crown of righteousness.**

“Live in strict obedience to the commandments of God, and walk humbly before Him, and He will exalt thee in His own due time.”<sup>14</sup>

“How careful men ought to be what they do in the last days, lest they are cut short of their expectations, and they that think they stand should fall, because they keep not the Lord’s commandments; whilst you, who do the will of the Lord and keep His commandments, have need to rejoice with unspeakable joy, for such shall be exalted very high, and shall be lifted up in triumph above all the kingdoms of this world.”<sup>15</sup>

“In the 22nd chapter of [Matthew’s] account of the Messiah, we find the kingdom of heaven likened unto a king who made a marriage for his son [see Matthew 22:2–14]. That this son was the Messiah will not be disputed, since it was the kingdom of heaven that was represented in the parable; and that the Saints, or those who are found faithful to the Lord, are the individuals who will be found worthy to inherit a seat at the marriage supper, is evident from the sayings of John in the Revelation where

he represents the sound which he heard in heaven to be like ‘a great multitude,’ or like ‘the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: For the fine linen is the righteousness of Saints’ [Revelation 19:6–8].

“That those who keep the commandments of the Lord and walk in His statutes to the end, are the only individuals permitted to sit at this glorious feast, is evident from the following items in Paul’s last letter to Timothy, which was written just previous to his death,—he says: ‘I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.’ [2 Timothy 4:7–8.] No one who believes the account, will doubt for a moment this assertion of Paul which was made, as he knew, just before he was to take his leave of this world. Though he once, according to his own word, persecuted the Church of God and wasted it, yet after embracing the faith, his labors were unceasing to spread the glorious news: and like a faithful soldier, when called to give his life in the cause which he had espoused, he laid it down, as he says, with an assurance of an eternal crown.

“Follow the labors of this Apostle from the time of his conversion to the time of his death, and you will have a fair sample of industry and patience in promulgating the Gospel of Christ. Derided, whipped, and stoned, the moment he escaped the hands of his persecutors he as zealously as ever proclaimed the doctrine of the Savior. And all may know that he did not embrace the faith for honor in this life, nor for the gain of earthly goods. What, then, could have induced him to undergo all this toil? It was, as he said, that he might obtain the crown of righteousness from the hand of God. No one, we presume, will doubt the faithfulness of Paul to the end. None will say that he did not keep the faith, that he did not fight the good fight, that he did not preach and persuade to the last. And what was he to receive? A crown of righteousness. . . .

“Reflect for a moment, brethren, and enquire, whether you would consider yourselves worthy [of] a seat at the marriage feast with Paul and others like him, if you had been unfaithful? Had you not fought the good fight, and kept the faith, could you expect to receive? Have you a promise of receiving a crown of righteousness from the hand of the Lord, with the Church of the First Born? Here then, we understand, that Paul rested his hope in Christ, because he had kept the faith, and loved his appearing and from His hand he had a promise of receiving a crown of righteousness. . . .

“. . . The ancients, though persecuted and afflicted by men, obtained from God promises of such weight and glory, that our hearts are often filled with gratitude that we are even permitted to look upon them while we contemplate that there is no respect of persons in His sight, and that in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is acceptable with Him [see Acts 10:34–35]. . . .

“We can draw the conclusion that there is to be a day when all will be judged of their works, and rewarded according to the same; that those who have kept the faith will be crowned with a crown of righteousness; be clothed in white raiment; be admitted to the marriage feast; be free from every affliction, and reign with Christ on the earth, where, according to the ancient promise, they will partake of the fruit of the vine new in the glorious kingdom with Him; at least we find that such promises were made to the ancient Saints. And though we cannot claim these promises which were made to the ancients, for they are not our property, merely because they were made to the ancient Saints, yet if we are the children of the Most High, and are called with the same calling with which they were called, and embrace the same covenant that they embraced, and are faithful to the testimony of our Lord as they were, we can approach the Father in the name of Christ as they approached Him, and for ourselves obtain the same promises.

“These promises, when obtained, if ever by us, will not be because Peter, John, and the other Apostles . . . walked in the fear of God and had power and faith to prevail and obtain them; but it will be because we, ourselves, have faith and approach God in



*Paul testifying before King Agrippa.*

*“No one,” Joseph Smith said, “will doubt the faithfulness of Paul to the end. . . .  
And what was he to receive? A crown of righteousness.”*

the name of His Son Jesus Christ, even as they did; and when these promises are obtained, they will be promises directly to us, or they will do us no good. They will be communicated for our benefit, being our own property (through the gift of God), earned by our own diligence in keeping His commandments, and walking uprightly before Him.”<sup>16</sup>

“We would remind you, brethren, of the fatigues, trials, privations, and persecutions, which the ancient saints endured for the sole purpose of persuading men of the excellency and propriety of the faith of Christ, were it in our opinion necessary, or if it would serve in any respect to stimulate you to labor in the vineyard of the Lord with any more diligence. But we have reason to believe (if you make the holy Scriptures a sufficient part

of your studies), that their perseverance is known to you all; as also that they were willing to sacrifice the present honors and pleasures of this world, that they might obtain an assurance of a crown of life from the hand of our Lord; and their excellent example in labor, which manifests their zeal to us in the cause which they embraced, you are daily striving to pattern. And not only these examples of the Saints, but the commandments of our Lord, we hope are constantly revolving in your hearts, teaching you, not only His will in proclaiming His Gospel, but His meekness and perfect walk before all, even in those times of severe persecutions and abuse which were heaped upon Him by a wicked and adulterous generation.

“Remember, brethren, that He has called you unto holiness; and need we say, to be like Him in purity? How wise, how holy; how chaste, and how perfect, then, you ought to conduct yourselves in His sight; and remember, too, that His eyes are continually upon you. Viewing these facts in a proper light, you cannot be insensible, that without a strict observance of all His divine requirements, you may, at last, be found wanting; and if so, you will admit, that your lot will be cast among the unprofitable servants. We beseech you, therefore, brethren, to improve upon all things committed to your charge, that you lose not your reward.”<sup>17</sup>

## Suggestions for Study and Teaching

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Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- Read the final paragraph on page 160, focusing on the rule Joseph Smith adopted for his life. Think about specific commands you have recently received, through words of the living prophet or promptings of the Holy Ghost. How have you been blessed when you have obeyed these commands without hesitation?
- Review the first paragraph on page 161. Why do we sometimes have to “stand alone” to “maintain a true principle”? In what ways are we *not* alone at such times? (For some examples, see pages 161–63.) How can we help children and youth stay true to gospel principles even when it is unpopular to do so?

- Study the section that begins on page 163. For what reasons does God give us commandments? Why should we obey His commandments?
- Review Joseph Smith’s teachings about Matthew 22:2–14 and 2 Timothy 4:7–8 (pages 164–68). Ponder how you would feel to be admitted to the marriage feast. What kind of people must we be to be worthy to be admitted? What do you think it means to fight a good fight and keep the faith? Think of someone you know who has fought a good fight and kept the faith. What can you learn from this person?
- The Prophet Joseph encouraged us to remember that the Lord has “called [us] unto holiness” (page 168). What does it mean to you to be called to holiness? How might our remembrance of this “calling” make a difference in our lives? in the lives of our family members and friends?

*Related Scriptures:* Exodus 20:1–17; John 7:17; 1 Nephi 3:7; D&C 58:26–29; Abraham 3:25

### Notes

1. Orson F. Whitney, “Newel K. Whitney,” *Contributor*, Jan. 1885, p. 125; punctuation and grammar modernized.
2. Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, Apr. 1912, p. 50.
3. *History of the Church*, 2:170; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book B-1, p. 558, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
4. *History of the Church*, 6:223; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Feb. 21, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards.
5. *History of the Church*, 5:65; from “The Government of God,” an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, July 15, 1842, p. 857; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
6. *History of the Church*, 4:570; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Mar. 30, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Eliza R. Snow; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
7. *History of the Church*, 5:426; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 11, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
8. *History of the Church*, 5:31; from “Gift of the Holy Ghost,” an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, June 15, 1842, p. 825; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
9. *History of the Church*, 4:478; capitalization modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Dec. 19, 1841, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
10. Letter from Joseph Smith to Isaac Galland, Mar. 22, 1839, Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri, published in *Times and Seasons*, Feb. 1840, p. 54.
11. *History of the Church*, 2:7–8, 12; from “The Elders of the Church in Kirtland, to Their Brethren Abroad,” Jan. 22, 1834, published in *Evening and Morning Star*, Feb. 1834, pp. 135–36.

12. Doctrine and Covenants 130:20–21; instructions given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 2, 1843, in Ramus, Illinois.
13. Discourse given by Joseph Smith on July 16, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Franklin D. Richards, in Franklin Dewey Richards, *Scriptural Items*, ca. 1841–44, Church Archives.
14. *History of the Church*, 1:408; from a letter from Joseph Smith to Vienna Jacques, Sept. 4, 1833, Kirtland, Ohio; Sister Jacques's last name is also sometimes spelled "Jaques," as in *History of the Church*.
15. *History of the Church*, 1:299; from a letter from Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps, Nov. 27, 1832, Kirtland, Ohio.
16. *History of the Church*, 2:19–22; punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from "The Elders of the Church in Kirtland, to Their Brethren Abroad," Jan. 22, 1834, published in *Evening and Morning Star*, Mar. 1834, p. 144.
17. *History of the Church*, 2:13; paragraph divisions altered; from "The Elders of the Church in Kirtland, to Their Brethren Abroad," Jan. 22, 1834, published in *Evening and Morning Star*, Mar. 1834, p. 142.