

IMMEDIATE

OBEDIENCE

THE ADVENTURE OF TUNING IN TO GOD



R O D L O Y

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT *IMMEDIATE OBEDIENCE* . . .

“And they straightway left their nets, and followed him” (Matt. 4:19, KJV). I relish and cherish Rod Loy’s book as a skillful meditation on the significance of that word *straightway*, and an exciting unveiling of a theology of obedience. Read this book to find out why the secret of a vitalizing relationship with God is hidden in the etymology of that word *obedience*, which comes from the Latin verb “obediere” which means “to hear into heeding.”

Leonard Sweet

Best-selling author, professor (Drew University, George Fox University), and chief contributor to sermons.com

This is the sort of book that should be read by every follower of Jesus. With personal vulnerability and strong biblical teaching, Rod Loy directs minds and hearts to the wonder of having a powerful and personal relationship with the living God. No one will read this book and come away untouched. Rod’s message of listening and responding to God convicts us—because we all fall short—and inspires us—because we long for this kind of connection with God. The concluding 90-Day Challenge provides clear and accessible guidelines as to how to relate one’s faith to immediate obedience.

Robert E. Cooley

President Emeritus, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Rod Loy has done it again—provided a practical, no-nonsense approach to living out the Christian life. In *Immediate Obedience*, Pastor Rod removes the mystery surrounding obeying God and challenges us to join him in the adventure of immediately acting on the small prompts God gives us every day. Get ready to grow!

Donna Hill

Vice President of Student Affairs, College of the Ouachitas

Rod has unlocked some practical and challenging insights that are essential for every Christ follower! He walks the reader through practical ways of learning to hear God's voice and the importance of saying yes immediately. This book has challenged me to listen and obey on a daily basis. I want to be in a position for God to use me in every arena of my life, and Rod in *Immediate Obedience* has helped me get there! Great book—a must read!

John McKinzie

Lead Pastor, Hope Fellowship Church, Frisco, TX

Rod Loy is an incredibly insightful writer. He stirs your intellect . . . grips your imagination . . . empowers your resolve . . . excites your emotions. You, the reader, are drawn into his understanding. The game is changed when you read what Rod writes. So, enrich yourself as you explore Rod's thought processes in this book. The mundane will vanish as you dismember "delayed obedience" from your usual response to truth. Read on and admit it: it's time for a transformation. Priceless!

J. Don George

Founding Pastor, Calvary Church, Irving, Texas

God has not merely called us to action. He has called us to obedience. In his book, *Immediate Obedience*, Pastor Rod Loy captures the essence of what it means to be obedient to God, not just with our church life but with every moment of every ordinary day. Grounded in Scripture and illustrated beautifully with stories from Rod's personal journey of immediate obedience, this book will challenge both the new believer and the veteran minister of the gospel. Rod brings a new depth of understanding to the concept of being obedient to God. Reading our Bible, praying over our meals, and going to church are not enough to please God with our obedience. Obedience requires sensitivity to God's voice, compassion for others, generosity, immediacy, and discipline. I plan to challenge every person in my church to read this book and break the habits of disobedience in their own lives.

David M. Wigington

Lead Pastor, Cornerstone Christian Fellowship

Rod Loy has acute spiritual insight. In his new book, he cuts through the haze of spiritual concepts and captures the heart of a relationship with God: listening to His voice and responding in obedience. No excuses, no delays. Rod's message is the most freeing and challenging one I've ever heard!

Dr. George O. Wood

General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God

Immediate obedience. It sounds like a challenge, and it is. In Rod Loy's book, he outlines the essence of a life of faith. It's not enough to go through the motions and look like a good Christian. True spiritual life

is a vital connection with the God of the universe and a heart to obey Him—no matter what the consequences and whatever the blessings God gives. Rod’s insights thrill me and terrify me . . . which I imagine is how Jesus’ disciples felt every day.

Dr. Alton Garrison

Assistant General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God

I recommend *Immediate Obedience* to every believer. There are hundreds of good books out there, but few writers and teachers have the pulse of God’s heart like Rod Loy. He invites us to listen to God’s shouts and whispers, and he challenges us to obey whatever God tells us to do. Buckle up when you read it. It’ll blow you away!

Bryan Koch

Lead Pastor, Glad Tidings Church, Reading, PA

The essence of following Christ is obedience, yet there is a huge chasm between knowing that truth and effectively living it out in everyday life. That’s why I am so excited by the message of *Immediate Obedience*. Drawing from firsthand experience and a fresh perspective from Scripture, Rod Loy shares valuable lessons for those of us desiring to be disciples on whom God can depend.

Dr. Kermit Bridges

President, Southwestern Assemblies of God University

I’ve had a front row seat for Rod’s adventure of obedience. He’s not just writing about it, he’s living it! Pastors, this principle in action will change your church. But, the principle works for more than just pastors.

Business leaders, stay-at-home moms and dads and students will all benefit for listening for God's voice and immediately obeying. Take the challenge. You'll never be the same.

Larry Moore

District Superintendent of the Arkansas Assemblies of God

No matter who you are, you will find yourself in Pastor Rod's book. The simple and daring Christian discipline of immediate obedience is a truth presented in a way that will convict, challenge, and give you hope.

Imagine a world where people say yes to Jesus before they know the question. It would be a world with less hunger, less poverty, less pain, and most important of all, less spiritual darkness. If all Pentecostal believers would anticipate the Holy Spirit's voice and be immediately obedient, we would change our world. When called to tribes hostile to the gospel, to the last reached, to the dangerous places, we would not stop to count the cost. The cost would not matter. We would simply find a way to go and tell them about Jesus.

I wonder who is depending on me to practice immediate obedience. Who needs me to ease their pain? Who needs me to help them make it through their day? And the most haunting question of all: Will they be eternally lost if I don't?

Greg Beggs

Africa Regional Director, Assemblies of God World Missions

Rod Loy doesn't just stand back and instruct people to follow Jesus. He lets us know he's down in the trenches with us. In *Immediate Obedience*, he shares the joy of seeing God work in and through him

as he learns to respond to God's voice, but he is also bluntly honest about his struggles and failures. We need someone like Rod to show us the way, someone who combines lofty hope with realistic patience. His book will inspire you like nothing you've ever read before.

Dary Northrup

Senior Pastor, Timberline Church, Fort Collins, CO

God never intended life to be boring. His plan is to use each and every person in their context to be strategic partners with Him in touching lives. Rod Loy challenges each one of us to a life of significance and adventure as we listen and obey. It isn't something that only occurs for spiritual giants. It is possible for everyone if we will only take the time to listen and obey. I loved the book! It challenged me to tune my heart moment by moment to God's direction so that I can be used by Him whenever, wherever.

Scott Hanson

*Strategic Leader — Unreached People Groups in Africa,
Assemblies of God World Missions*

Inspiring . . . motivating . . . challenging . . . and practical! Rod's personal journey and insight moves me to listen better to God's heart so I can be His hands. Every believer needs to read this book to learn how to listen and obey—so simple and yet so difficult!

Pastor Darius Johnston

Lead Pastor, Christ Church Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX

Rod gives us a perfect definition of what success looks like in the kingdom of God: immediate obedience. All of us who are serious about living for Jesus want to be successful in being His disciple, but don't always know how to do it. Rod gives us practical insights on how to live "naturally supernatural" in our everyday life. This book could literally change your life.

Scott Wilson

Senior Pastor, The Oaks Fellowship, Dallas, TX

Oswald Chambers once said, "All God's revelations are sealed for us until they are opened to us by obedience." In this inspired book, *Immediate Obedience*, Rod Loy presents anew the tremendous benefits of prompt obedience to God by sharing personal experiences, illustrations, and a biblical perspective. The book also sparked a childhood memory—and I am not sure who coined this phrase, but my mother used to say, "The key to deliverance is instant obedience." Many biblical examples and my own life experiences substantiate this truth. Thank you, Rod, for this book, a gift to the Christian community that reignites our heart's desire to obey the Lord immediately.

Dr. Greg Mundis

Executive Director, Assemblies of God World Missions

Rod nails it with *Immediate Obedience* and helps make something so supernatural, feel so normal and so user friendly. Too many Christians struggle with hearing and obeying God and *Immediate Obedience* will

bring clarity and direction to these areas. Read it right away, study it, and make it part of your life. *Immediate Obedience* is the tool you need to help clarify the voice of God and the prompts we all should obey!

Rob Ketterling

Lead Pastor , River Valley Church, Apple Valley, MN

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Note: In some of the stories in this book, the names and details have been changed to protect anonymity.

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This book is dedicated to my wife, Cindy, and to my church family at First Assembly of God in North Little Rock, Arkansas.

It was Cindy who first challenged me to write this book. She is making the obedience journey with me. It's awesome to have a life partner who is committed to obey God without questioning the cost!

Hundreds of people at First NLR took the "immediate obedience" challenge. Their stories are exciting and their experience is life changing. To all of you, thank you for putting your obedience into action and sharing your stories. I love you, and I'm so proud of you. I can't wait to see how God uses your continuing obedience!

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Finally, thank you to the staff, campus pastors, and board of First NLR, for making space for me to write, dream, and to share what God puts on my heart. There's no team I'd rather share life with.

INTRODUCTION: WHO'S LISTENING?

“Prayer is not monologue, but dialogue; God’s voice is its most essential part. Listening to God’s voice is the secret of the assurance that He will listen to mine.”

—Andrew Murray

Busy, tired, and confused. That’s an accurate description of many people in our culture—including many Christians. As we react to the external demands we face each day, it’s all we can do to keep up with our priorities—and to be honest, we often choose the wrong things to put at the top of our lists. We’re incredibly busy, and everything seems equally urgent. At the end of the day we’re exhausted, yet we wonder if we accomplished anything meaningful at all.

As Christians, we want to stand before Jesus someday and hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant! . . . Come and share your master’s happiness!” (Matt. 25:21) But many of us live with a secret, nagging doubt. We wonder if our choices please Him, and we’re not sure our lives are making a difference.

There’s another way—a better way to live, a better way to connect to God, and a better way to be assured that our lives matter. It’s by making a commitment to obey God immediately, no matter what He tells us to

Every moment (no matter how ordinary) might be a “God moment,” and every encounter with someone (no matter how annoying) might be a “divine appointment.”

do. When we respond in active faith as soon as we hear His voice, everything changes! We become more in tune with the heart of God and more sensitive to the people around us, and we get a front row seat to watch God do incredible things in us and through us. We experience the abundant life Christ promised to those who truly follow Him.

When we learn to capture each moment, we live with a sense of expectant wonder. Every moment (no matter how ordinary) might be a “God moment,” and every encounter with someone (no matter how annoying) might be a “divine appointment.” Our priority shifts from accomplishing our selfish agendas to fulfilling God’s kingdom agenda.

A YEAR, A LIFETIME

People who know me say I’m a pretty disciplined and detailed guy. I think it’s the product of both nature and nurture. My father was a computer programmer and trouble-shooter for IBM. I have his genes, and I saw how he handled goals and problems.

Many years ago I developed the habit of setting goals in six different areas of my life at the beginning of every year—not just one goal, but several goals for each of the six areas. Then I created a detailed plan to fit them all into my schedule. However, by the third or fourth month

of each year, the mass and complexity of all those goals proved to be overwhelming . . . even for someone who is naturally disciplined and focused. After several years of frustration, I decided to narrow the next year's goals to one in each of the six areas. Even that proved to be too many, so I pared my focus down to just one goal that would be my focus for the entire year.

I asked myself, "What's the one area of my life that, if I grow and change, will make me a better person and a better leader?" To narrow the range of options (and there are always many), I used three filters: prayer, self-awareness, and the input of others who know me well. I asked God to put one thing on my heart. I knew He could show me a million things in my life that needed improvement, but I asked Him to target just one for the year. I trusted Him to give me a big, clear mirror of truth so I could see what I do well and what areas needed work. Human beings have an almost limitless capacity for self-deception, so I don't take self-analysis lightly. As I prayed and thought, I asked my wife Cindy and a few good friends to give me feedback about what they saw in my life. I chose people who are perceptive, had my best interests at heart, and most importantly, had the courage to tell me the truth.

When I went through this process a few years ago, God put "quick forgiveness" on my heart. I didn't tell our church about it, and I didn't lead any campaigns to teach it. I realized that if it didn't first sink deeply into my own experience, I didn't have any business telling others to do it. For a year, I asked myself, *Do I forgive others the way God forgives me?*

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). That doesn't mean

God's forgiveness is conditional, based on our willingness to forgive. It's just the opposite. Our willingness and capacity to forgive those who hurt us is an overflow of our experience of Christ's complete, full, and instantaneous forgiveness of our sins. Paul picks up this connection in two of his letters when he explains, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32, cf. Col. 3:13).

Every day that year, I asked God to drive the power and beauty of forgiveness deeper into my heart until it spilled out into my relationships. Of course, when trying to forgive someone who has hurt or betrayed us, we experience the natural barrier of resentment. As I prayed, God reminded me of certain people I had excused and tried to forget, but hadn't really forgiven. It was a wonderful, cleansing year that drove me deeper into the heart of God and the gospel of grace. When the year ended, I was finally ready to share my experiences with others.

Another year, God put it on my heart to focus on "immediate obedience." At first, I wasn't sure what that meant. Wasn't I already obeying God? I thought responding to God's whispers, nudges, impressions, and shouts was a strength in my walk with Him. As I prayed and read the Scriptures, however, the Lord showed me some gaps—some big gaps—in my responsiveness to Him. I was responding, but sometimes slowly or even reluctantly. So every morning as I recited, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," my additional prayer was, "God, let me hear Your voice and sense Your leading so that I *immediately* obey You."

I didn't want to miss any "God moments" because of spiritual deafness or delayed responses. I asked God to clean out my spiritual ears, give me a receptive and sensitive heart, and provide the courage to act instantly on whatever He told me to do.

This was to be "the year of immediate obedience." My first act of obedience was to accept God's directive to make this commitment for the year. He had spoken, and it was up to me to instantly obey. I had no idea where all this was going, but I signed on for the ride. I felt a lot of uncertainty—and honestly, genuine fear. I also felt a little confused. After all, I was the pastor of a church. I shouldn't feel threatened by God's invitation to hear His voice and respond in faith, but I quickly realized this commitment opened new doors of spiritual experience. What would He ask me to do? Would I be embarrassed when I obeyed Him? Would I *look* weird? Would I *be* weird?

Every morning for a year, I asked God to make me sensitive to His voice so that I would take action and make His kingdom come more fully to the people I meet each day. I thought of the old song that says,

"I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,
Over mountain or plain or sea;
I'll say what you want me to say, dear Lord;
I'll be what you want me to be."¹

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS

Throughout the year, God kept reminding me of a passage in Paul's letter to the Philippians. He wrote, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not

looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:3–5).

Have the same attitude as Christ—what in the world was Paul talking about? Is that even possible? The apostle doesn’t leave us guessing. He says that Christ’s attitude was complete surrender to the will of the Father: “He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:8)

In the classic devotional, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers encourages us to listen to God no matter what He says to us:

“Get into the habit of saying, ‘Speak, Lord,’ and life will become a romance. Every time circumstances press in on you say, ‘Speak, Lord,’ and make time to listen. Chastening is more than a means of discipline—it is meant to bring me to the point of saying, ‘Speak, Lord.’ Think back to a time when God spoke to you. Do you remember what he said? As we listen, our ears become more sensitive, and like Jesus, we will hear God all the time.”²

One morning as I thought and prayed through the passage in Philippians, I realized, I wasn’t yet at that point. I concluded that I was *fairly* obedient to God. If someone put a gun to my head and threatened to kill me if I said I was a follower of Christ, I think I would have the courage to claim to know Him. But this was different. God was asking me to be so obedient that I was willing to die to my own agenda, schedule, and desires—not just once, but all day every day.

Plenty of people say they're willing to die for Christ, but if you don't live a life of obedience, there's not much chance you'll die a death of obedience. A life of obedience would be reflected, as Paul pointed out, in humility, kindness, truth, and generosity. My questions became: *In any moment of any day, what in me needs to die so that Christ may be exalted? Am I willing to be that radically obedient to God?*

I realized I needed to go back to the beginning and find a working definition of obedience. I couldn't obey if I didn't know what God wanted me to do, so the first necessary component of obedience is to hear His voice. God uses all kinds of ways to communicate His presence and His will to people—a burning bush, pillars of clouds and fire, a whisper after an earthquake, a donkey, a finger writing on a wall, appearances of angels, and voices from heaven, to name only a few. But the way God has chosen to speak most clearly and most often is through the Scriptures. If we soak our minds and hearts in God's Word, we can be sure He will illumine His truth and reveal Himself to us there. Our task then becomes responding with the attitude of Jesus and obeying to the point of death—immediately, fully, and courageously.

WHAT IF?

As God led me to make a commitment to focus for a year on immediate obedience, I wondered, *What if God has something for me that's far bigger than I ever imagined?* I wasn't thinking of positions or power or possessions. I was considering the adventure of walking hand in hand with the sovereign, mighty, and gentle King of all. Could any adventure be more thrilling (and threatening) than this? What if God had specific

assignments for me in the ordinary course of my day? What if I were sensitive enough to hear His whispers, and what if I were bold enough to act when I heard Him speak? Was it possible that I would experience the divine in the ordinary?

Through the course of the year—and every day since then—I have encountered God more fully than ever before. The commitment to listen and immediately obey has revolutionized how I view each day. My to-do list is no longer mundane; it’s infused with the possibility that God may do something spectacular and unexpected if I sense His directive at any point. My meetings with people—scheduled or random—always carry the possibility that God may break into the ordinary and tell me to do something that changes a life.

These divine encounters may only last for a few seconds or a few minutes, so it’s essential for me to respond instantly when I hear God’s

God doesn’t have to tell me what He’s up to before I act, and I don’t have to see definitive results after I obey.

voice. Of course, I miss some of those “God moments,” either because I’m confused about what I sense from God or because I’m too slow to respond. But I’m getting in a lot of practice! With each bold response, I become a little more receptive to hear Him, and I get a little more con-

fident that it’s worth it to have the attitude of Christ every moment of every day.

God doesn't have to tell me what He's up to before I act, and I don't have to see definitive results after I obey. God just asks me to do as He instructs and leave the results to Him. That's what Jesus did. Everywhere He went, He did exactly what the Father told Him to do. But the results were, to say the least, mixed: some adored Him, some feared Him, and some despised Him. When I hear God's voice and obey to step into people's lives, I can expect some to be grateful, some to be confused, and some to think I've lost my mind. I'm okay with that.

FIRST STEPS

After my "year of immediate obedience" to understand and practice the principles on my own, I taught them to our church. The response has been more thrilling than I could have imagined. I couldn't be more excited about what God has been doing in and through our people as their spiritual ears are opened and they respond instantly to God's directives.

But I don't want you to make any commitments yet. Wait until you finish this book and then I will give you a 90-day challenge as an experiment. For three months, you will read the Scriptures, pray, and expect God to lead you. Like any new habit or skill, obedience has a learning curve. You'll get some things right, and you'll miss the mark sometimes. I'm still learning, and I expect to keep learning for the rest of my life.

Your journey, though, isn't designed to end after ninety days. I hope you'll make it a central priority of your life to listen and obey. There are no guarantees that God will speak at a certain time about a particular person or situation. We simply open our hearts to the fact that God

longs to communicate His heart and intentions to us. If we listen and obey, a world of possibilities opens up before us.

People who practice immediate obedience are the ones we love to hang around. We listen to their stories and marvel at how God uses them. You can be one of those people. Give it a shot and see what happens. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

I have asked volunteers in our church to share their stories of immediate obedience. In every chapter, I will summarize how God has used them or let them tell their own stories. The first one is from a man named Phil.

Pastor Rod,

Last Friday my marketing director asked me to come to his office. He said he wanted me to take over a major account from someone who was retiring. It was a dream account. My commission would give me a big raise, and I would get to travel around the country. It was exactly the job I wanted!

The only problem was that the travel would take me away from home and prevent me from leading a ministry at the church. I told my boss I'd think about it over the weekend and get back to him.

At the time, I was one of the volunteer leaders of the high school ministry. Both of my sons were involved, and I loved doing something that had a direct impact on their spiritual development. I was really excited about seeing kids grow in their faith, but I would have to give up my time with them if I took the account. For that reason, I decided to turn it down.

When I told my boss, he told me that I was wasting a golden opportunity to advance my career. He told me, "You're going to close a lot of doors around here by not taking the job."

In the grand scheme of God's kingdom, my decision wasn't very big, but it was big to me. Before I told my boss about my choice, I spent most of Sunday night's sermon with knots in my stomach. I was on the verge of tears. It was the first time I had ever given up part of my future for the sake of ministry. It wasn't easy, and I didn't like it. I wondered if I was being a fool, but your message about immediate obedience rang in my ears. It was the right decision for a number of reasons.

It isn't a real sacrifice—like life or death—but for the first time I felt like I died to self in a big way.

Pastor Rod, that's my obedience story. Thank you so much for teaching us to respond to God.

Phil

I

IMMEDIATE OBEDIENCE . . . ARE YOU KIDDING?

*“If we examine our consciences deliberately, clearly,
and in the presence of God, I think we’re going to find out
that a whole lot of what we call ‘struggling’ is delayed obedience.”*

—Elisabeth Elliott

Every believer can have a vibrant, dynamic, expectant connection with God and participate in fulfilling His purposes. My friend Randy probably has the least exciting job in the world. He leads a crew cleaning offices in the dead of night when no one is around. When Randy discovered the commitment to obey God and listen for His voice, it changed everything for him. He had seen his work as drudgery, but suddenly every night was filled with the possibility that God might whisper to him to have a divine encounter with someone who works for him.

I’m not suggesting that every moment of every day will be full of burning bush experiences. Even Moses only had one of those. But Moses became sensitive to the voice of God and committed to obey

Him, no matter how absurd His directions seemed—in confronting Pharaoh, leading the people through the Red Sea, climbing up a mountain quaking with fire, and countless other ways during forty years in the wilderness. At the burning bush, something in Moses changed. He became committed to God in a new and different way. He determined to obey God immediately no matter what the cost, and God did incredible things in him, for him, and through him.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

In the same way, when we make a commitment to listen and obey, a world of possibilities opens in front of us. When I sit next to someone on an airplane or place my order in a coffee shop, I try to anticipate God's voice in each encounter. Sometimes I don't sense anything unusual, so I assume God simply wants me to represent Him with kindness and love. But I'm learning that sometimes God will give me special instructions. If I respond and do what He says, I get to participate in the supernatural event of God's using me to touch a person's heart. If I miss it for any reason, the moment passes and the opportunity is lost.

Being sensitive to God's voice and dedicated to respond immediately affects how I view every moment. Problems are no longer inconvenient hassles. Instead, they become open doors to connect with people I may not have met if the problem hadn't occurred. Routine activities are no longer boring because I realize God can turn any of them into something that changes a life. In a commitment to obey immediately, there are no mundane moments and no ordinary people. Every

second is infused with incredible possibilities because God may show up and do something miraculous.

The most miraculous thing is that God is willing to use someone like me (and you) to be His hands, His voice, and His heart to share with the people we meet each day.

The more I hear God's voice and see Him use me, the more I anticipate the next time He may give me directions. I don't want to miss a single time! I don't want any selfishness or impatience to distract from what God wants to do through me. For me, personal holiness isn't a demanding, oppressive commitment to rules. I simply don't want anything to interfere with the incredible connection I have with God! Holiness is much more about love than legalism (1 John 3:1-3).

When I was first learning the concept of immediate obedience, I was in a restaurant in Louisville, Kentucky, with three friends who are leaders in the Assemblies of God. Our waitress had tattoos on every exposed part of her body, and I would imagine she had a few others that were momentarily undercover. Her hair was dyed and spiked, and she had several piercings. Her physical appearance didn't bother me in the least. A number of people who look like her attend our church, and I want them to feel completely comfortable. The look on her face, however, sent a strong message that she was extremely unhappy. She looked angry . . . distracted . . . like she would rather be anywhere but waiting

Every second is infused with incredible possibilities because God may show up and do something miraculous.

on us. After she took our order and walked away, I sensed the Lord tell me, “I want you to give her \$100.”

I inwardly reacted, “Oh, not now . . . not her!”

Then I sensed the Lord say, “That’s not all. I want you to tell her why you’re giving her the money.”

Giving money wasn’t a new concept to me. My father modeled generosity, and he taught me to carry cash to give away. He said that if you have to write a check or go to an ATM, you will talk yourself out of it. He recommended carrying cash so you can pull it out and give it without engaging in self-doubt. So at the restaurant that night, I had the money in my wallet. That wasn’t the problem.

For me, the piercing question was this: How would it look to these three leaders for me to do something so out of the ordinary? I had known them for a while, but not that well. I didn’t want them to think I was stupid or foolish or strange. Or worse, they might think I was trying to act super-spiritual. None of those options looked attractive, so I tried to talk God out of it.

I thought about offering to pay for dinner and adding \$100 to the tip. I sensed God saying “No. That’s not what I told you to do.” I contemplated coming back to the restaurant after the four of us left to give her the money and talk to her then. Again, I knew God didn’t want me to do that.

She came back to the table to bring our food. As the others ate and talked, I was totally preoccupied with my fears and doubts. I barely touched my dinner because I was so upset. I wasn’t at all concerned about what she would think of me if I told her about the love of Christ,

but I was terribly worried about the label these three men might put on me if they saw me give her some money and tell her about saving faith. I tried to reason my way out of it, but I was absolutely sure God had a purpose for putting this young woman on my heart.

The moment of truth came when she brought the check. I told the others, "I've got this." Then I turned to our waitress and said, "I've got something for you, but first I want to tell you a story."

She rolled her eyes and cocked her hips like she knew she had to listen but was already bored out of her mind. Then before I could say another word, she looked over at the next table and said, "I've got to take care of these people. I'll be back in a minute."

In the minute she was waiting on the other table, three sets of eyes bored through me. The other guys looked at me like they wondered if I had just escaped from an asylum, but I was finally convinced that I had to obey God and speak up. When she came back to our table, she resumed her defiant posture. I didn't try to be eloquent. I thought I might as well be honest and kind. I looked up at her and explained, "This year, I've sensed that every time God puts something on my heart, I need to obey Him. When we sat down, I felt God told me to give you something and tell you why I'm giving it to you." Now *four* sets of eyes were looking at me like I had lost my mind. I gave her the money and said simply, "God knows you, He loves you, and He's interested in you."

I didn't give her an extended gospel presentation. I felt God only wanted me to make a personal connection and tell her that He loves her. When she realized I had given her \$100, her eyes lit up, and she almost shouted, "Oh, wow! This makes my day! It makes my week!

In fact, it makes my month!” After a brief pause, she announced, “I’m going to take this money to Vegas!”

I had done what God asked me to do, and I had to leave the response to Him. It would be a much better story if the spiked-hair waitress had fallen to her knees and said, “I’ve been waiting for someone to tell me about Jesus! I repent and turn my life over to Him!” But she didn’t. As far as I know, the money I gave her was converted to quarters and shoved into slot machines. That’s not my business. God only called me to listen and obey—and fight my fear that I would look stupid to the people watching me.

Amazingly, none of the three men with me said a word about my conversation and my gift to the waitress. I don’t know if they were embarrassed, if they thought it was cool, or if they wondered if I was a nut case. Actually, lost people often feel more comfortable with spiritual sensitivity than believers. Many Christians think they have figured out how to make life work, and adventure with God isn’t part of their equation.

COMMON FEARS

When I began this journey, I sometimes worried about “getting it wrong.” I would wonder, *Was that thought from God, or was that just me?* I don’t worry about that any more. I’m sure I get it wrong from time to time. Being wrong isn’t a surprise when finite beings try to relate to the infinite God. All people have limitations. I certainly have mine. If I take action and later realize it was my idea instead of God’s, it’s still a good

thing to be kind and generous to people. I'm far more concerned that I'll be spiritually insensitive and unable to hear God's voice. But even then, I'm certain that God delights to break through barriers and communicate with me, even when my hearing is becoming dulled (maybe *especially* when my spiritual ears are becoming dull).

My other concern is that I'll let my fear of what people think of me dictate my response to God. He is the Lord, not them. He is the King, not them. His agenda is far more important than theirs or mine. When people realize what I'm doing, many of them want to join me in learning to obey immediately after hearing God's voice. But others . . . not so much.

I was at a restaurant with a nationally known Christian leader when the Lord whispered to me to talk to the waiter about his life and show some kindness. As we talked, the leader sitting with me became visibly disturbed. As the seconds ticked by, his impatience grew exponentially. Finally, he interrupted my conversation with the waiter and blurted out, "I want some iced tea! Would you just get me some tea? I'm tired of waiting!" That man and I were running on two separate tracks. He was more concerned about getting his iced tea than showing God's love to the person God had brought into our lives at that moment. Before I criticize him for being selfish and insensitive, however, I need to ask myself how many times I've been more concerned about my petty wants than the people in front of me.

Hearing and responding to God's voice isn't a power trip. It doesn't give me license to be a jerk or be arrogant because "I've arrived" or "I'm

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an insider with God.” Just the opposite. The better I am in tune with God, the more I am blown away by His tenderness, kindness, and compassion for people. As I listen and obey, I get in touch with His incredible humility and grace.

IMMEDIACY AND AMAZEMENT

We live in a culture geared toward immediate gratification. Modern technology and conveniences promise we’ll get exactly what we want, and we’ll get it now! Immediacy, though, isn’t just a modern phenomenon. In Mark’s gospel he uses the terms “immediately,” “at once,” and “at that time” about forty times. His message was that Jesus was completely dedicated to the Father’s mission, and He let nothing get in the way. Jesus had a sense of urgency. Even for the Creator of time, there was no time to lose: no reluctance, no excuses, and no delays.

Time wasn’t the only thing Mark wanted to highlight. He identifies a common response of those who saw Jesus obey the Father instantly. They were often “amazed” (Mark 1:22, 27, 6:51, 10:24). In the same way, when you practice immediate obedience, at least two people will be amazed—you, and the person to whom you show the love and power of Christ.

Immediate obedience almost always provokes genuine amazement at the glory, kindness, and presence of God. People aren’t used to seeing Christians really living out their faith. Their concept of Christianity is a

bunch of people who are *against* all kinds of things and *for* almost nothing. Sadly, we have given them plenty of reasons to have this perception of us! British philosopher and theologian G. K. Chesterton famously quipped, “Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.”³

Christianity is difficult precisely because it asks us to have the attitude of Christ, to live in humility, and to die to our selfish desires all day every day. Those are not easy things to do. But when someone has the courage to live that way, the world sits up and notices. It’s truly amazing!

Obedience to God always involves other people. God asks us to take a minute to show kindness to someone who has been overlooked, to give money to a person in trouble, or to surprise someone with an act of radical love. Even when God tells us to stop some behavior that is self-destructive, our response becomes a public display of obedience because people notice. Obedience always amazes those who observe us.

WAIT A MINUTE!

Does the idea of listening for the voice of God with a commitment to obey Him immediately make you more than a little nervous? Join the club! I understand. I’ve been there. In fact, I spent a year immersed in this concept before I was willing to talk about it to anyone but Cindy and my closest friends. The inherent questions that are part of the package include:

- What in the world will God ask me to do?
- How can I be certain it’s His voice I hear?

- What will it cost me?
- What changes will I have to make to be able to listen more intently?
- Is this really possible? (After all, I don't hear a lot of others talking this way.)
- Am I going to look like a certified nut?

In my own experience, and now in the lives of those who are learning to apply this principle, I've noticed that our fears are often misplaced. We're afraid of what we might lose if we obey God, but we should be more concerned about what we'll lose if we *don't* obey! For some strange reason, many people assume that their dedication to obey God gives Him permission to make their lives miserable. But that's Satan's goal, not God's. Jesus explained how Satan's motives contrast with His: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:10–11).

How do parents respond when their children say, "Mom and Dad, I love you and I trust you so much that I'll do anything you want me to do"? After they pick themselves off the floor, the parents shower their kids with love. God is the perfect parent. He's infinitely wise, and His plans are far bigger and more complicated than we can ever fathom, so sometimes we simply won't understand what He's up to. But when we begin to grasp the depth of His love and the extent of His power, we will realize our commitment to obey Him positions us right in the middle of His will, His love, and His blessings.

EYES TO SEE

Most of us like guarantees, but two risks of obeying God's voice are not having answers and not being able to predict outcomes. Most of the time, when God whispers to give me directions I have no clue what's going on in the person's life, and I certainly don't know what his or her response will be. Sometimes the person's heart melts on the spot, and I realize this was the perfectly prepared divine moment to meet that person's need. But more often, the recipient thinks I'm odd or takes the money to Vegas! There are no guarantees with immediate obedience, but there are plenty of thrills.

As people in our church have practiced listening and responding to God, they've seen encouraging results. I love to hear their stories—and sometimes I hear “the other side of the story” from the recipients affected by their sensitivity to God. Every Sunday I go to our welcome center to greet people who are attending our church for the first time. I often ask how they heard about our church. One week I met a lady who had a puzzled expression on her face. I introduced myself, and she told me, “I was at the gas station yesterday. A man came up to me and said God had told him to buy my gas. I was stunned. No one had ever done anything like that for me before. I asked him where he went to church—I wanted to know what kind of church produces people who are so generous . . . and so strange. He told me about your church. I wanted to come this morning to see what had happened in his life.” I smiled and told her I was glad to have her join us.

As God gives us eyes to see—really *see*—the people around us, He often directs us to give one of two things (or both): kindness and

money. The most common emotion attributed to Jesus in the Gospels is compassion. Again and again, the writers tell us Jesus was moved with compassion for those who were hurting and hopeless. It's only logical that when His Spirit moves us, we will express Jesus' compassion and kindness to people in need as we encounter them.

Similarly, the topic of money was important to Jesus. He talked about it more than almost any other subject—not because He was obsessed with the possessions, positions, and the power money can bring, but because *we* are! In His most famous sermon, Jesus told the crowd, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:19–21).

As you look at advertising and listen to friends, you quickly realize that money plays a central role in the hearts and minds of most people on the planet. When we give away what most people pursue and hoard, they're shocked, and they want to know what makes us tick. They realize we're serving a different Master. Generosity is the perfect platform to talk about God's most generous gift: His Son's sacrificial payment for unworthy sinners.

Quite often, compassion and generosity go hand in hand. When the weather forecast predicted an ice storm headed for Little Rock, Kenny Brock took three gas cans to be filled up so he could run his generator if the power failed. As he was pumping the gas, he noticed a woman who seemed to be in distress. She was filling up her car, but she was weeping.

Kenny went over and asked if he could help. She asked for directions to the hospital. Kenny told her how to get there and then said, “If you’ll wait a couple of minutes, I’ll let you follow me.” But before he knew it, she took off down the road. At that moment, Kenny sensed God telling him something totally implausible: “She needs help. Take your gas cans home and go find her.”

Kenny finished pumping the gas and took the cans home. When he arrived and opened the garage, his daughter and his wife were having an argument and wanted him to resolve it. He told them, “I’ll have to come back to that later. Right now, I’m on a mission! No time to explain.” He got back in his truck and sped down the highway. He knew the direction the distraught woman had gone, but he had no idea if she had made it to the hospital—especially in her emotional state.

He didn’t see her on the five-mile trip to the hospital, but he soon found her near her car in the parking lot. He could tell she was confused. Kenny took her to the emergency room and waited with her until the nurse called her back. As they waited, she told him she wanted to tell a friend in California that she was sick. Kenny got her friend’s number and called to inform her.

Kenny sat in the waiting room until the lady came out. She still looked very confused, so he made sure she had a place to stay. He gave her some money for food, and wrote down his number in case she needed any more help. Kenny had quite an adventure that night. It happened because he was sensitive to God’s voice and moved with compassion to care for a stranger.

DECIDE IN ADVANCE

Early in my year of immediate obedience, I realized I couldn't wait to decide if I would obey after I heard God speak to me. If I made a habit of waiting, I would waste a lot of time trying to determine if I had heard correctly and if I even wanted to respond, so I would miss many opportunities. Jesus' attitude was a predetermined commitment to obey the Father's will no matter what He said to do or where He said to go. I had to make a predetermined commitment, too. No matter what God told me, my answer was going to be "Yes!" I took "No," "Wait a minute," and "Let me think about it" off the table.

Jesus' attitude was a predetermined commitment to obey the Father's will no matter what He said to do or where He said to go.

Before we hear God's voice, we decide that everything we are and everything we have is entirely His. This is "open-handed living." We don't own any of it; we're just taking care of it so it'll be ready when God says He wants to use it. Our schedule is God's, our money is God's, our possessions are God's, our talents are

God's, our free time is God's, and our reputation is God's. If we don't make this decision in advance, we'll resent it when God tells us to give generously, and we'll argue with Him when He instructs us to go out of our way to help someone.

Thankfully, Jesus didn't resent going to the cross to pay the ultimate price for us. He stepped out of the glory and beauty of heaven with the clear knowledge that He wouldn't just be *inconvenienced* for helping us,

but He would be *tortured and killed* for our sake. He often predicted His death, but He “set His face like flint” to suffer and die for us (Isa. 50:7, Luke 9:51).

This may seem like a grim mindset, but it’s not. Jesus was the happiest person who ever lived. He delighted in seeing lepers healed, the lame walk, the dead raised, and all kinds of people experience His forgiveness. As He followed the Father’s path, He endured betrayal, plots, and misunderstanding, but His obedience to the Father wasn’t based on the responses of people. It was determined before the incarnation. No matter the individual reaction of people to Him and His message, He focused on the Father and trusted and obeyed.

The writer to the Hebrews reminds us, “Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1–2). “The joy set before him” was us! To Jesus, you are worth more than the stars in the skies and all the gold and diamonds in the world. Jesus delighted in doing the Father’s will and showering His love on people. In the same way, when your heart is aligned with His, you’ll delight in doing His will—fully and immediately—and seeing Him use you to touch the lives of those around you.

NO LIMITATIONS, NO EXCEPTIONS

Some Christians conclude that the invitation and challenge to immediate obedience must be only for pastors, missionaries, desert fathers, monks, and super-spiritual saints. They’re wrong. God wants

every one of His children to enjoy this kind of closeness, this kind of excitement, and this kind of wonder in seeing Him work in and through them. The joy of immediate obedience is available for those who have been wandering through each day, wondering if their lives matter at all. They're tired of living an empty, confusing, meaningless existence. At some point, they wonder, "God, do You really have a purpose for me? Is there something more than what I've been experiencing?"

A life of intimacy, joy, and power through immediate obedience to God has no boundaries regarding race, culture, age, gender, personality, career, or socioeconomics. God's invitation is open to everyone. Quite often, God uses the obedience of a few to break down the barriers of an entire culture. Whites reach out to African-Americans, Hispanics are generous to whites, cautious people have a word of love for entrepreneurs, and poor people step in to comfort rich people in distress. God is incredibly creative. I think He smiles as He leads people to do things they would never have dreamed of doing on their own. All it takes is a willing heart, a listening ear, and a predetermined choice to obey whatever God whispers to us.

God is waiting for ordinary people to sign up for the adventure of a lifetime: to know Him more intimately, hear Him more clearly, and step out to do whatever He directs. Immediate obedience is for:

- The teacher who has been annoyed by a problem student, but realizes God may have put that child in her classroom for a purpose.

- The businessman whose flight is delayed, who prays, “Lord, forgive me for griping about the inconvenience of the plane being late. Do You have something for me here and now?” He realizes the delay just may be part of God’s plan for him to have a meaningful conversation with the guy in the next seat.
- The high school student who gets up in the morning and prays, “Lord, speak to me today. I’m listening, and I’ll obey You.” When she walks into the cafeteria at lunch, she notices a girl sitting alone—and suddenly realizes she has been sitting alone every day for the past month or so. She hears God say, “Go over and sit with her. She needs a friend.”
- The stressed-out single mom who feels overwhelmed by all the pressures of work and caring for her kids but begins to see every day at work and at home infused with opportunities for “God moments.” Her life and her goals suddenly become meaningful.
- Ordinary people who have trouble keeping up with their bills, but discover the joy and wonder of responding to God’s directives to give generously to those in need. At first they’re afraid God will let them down and they will go broke, but they soon realize that being sensitive to God and generous with people puts them in touch with God’s unlimited resources of blessing.
- Poor people and rich people, slow and smart, plain and beautiful, the down-and-out and the up-and-coming, every person who has failed miserably and wants another chance, and everyone who thirsts for God.

The Bible is a series of accounts of ordinary people who heard God's voice and responded in faith to whatever He told them to do. They weren't Supermen and Wonder Women. They were normal people with the same hopes and fears we have, but they answered when they heard God speak—and amazing things happened.

In fact, there are no amazing stories in the Bible that don't include immediate obedience. Of course, there are plenty of examples of sin,

failure, rebellion, betrayal, selfishness, and foolishness. Some people closed their ears to God and refused to respond in faith to His voice. But don't be misled: the heroes of the Bible were just like you and me. Abraham lied about Sarah being his wife when he got in a tight spot.

There are no amazing stories
in the Bible that don't include
immediate obedience.

Moses murdered an Egyptian and then had to go on the lam. Peter swore allegiance to Jesus but denied Him three times before morning. Yet God used these imperfect people to accomplish great things. Other countless men and women through the ages have put their mistakes and weaknesses behind them, eventually emulating the attitude of Jesus by becoming obedient to the point of death. They swapped their selfish agendas to grab God's agenda of intimacy and immediacy.

Do you want an amazing life? Make a commitment to immediate obedience. Your life will never be the same. I guarantee it.

Sue discovered that God's whispers are sometimes confusing, but always right on target to touch a heart and meet a need.

Pastor Rod,

A few years ago I had a close friend who was pregnant. As Christmas approached and I was praying, I felt God impress on my heart that I should bless my friend with money to spend on maternity clothes. Instantly, I assumed the idea couldn't be from God. It seemed weird for God to ask me to give money for a friend's clothes. In my mind, if God was going to impress my heart to give money, it should be something big and spiritual, like missions, a church plant, or to care for a starving family. So as quickly as God put the thought on my heart, I let it leave me.

Only the thought didn't leave. I saw my friend many times during the next three weeks—far more often than our paths usually cross. Each time I remembered God's whispered message, but each time I chose to ignore Him. Still, I had this nagging feeling . . .

After three weeks I couldn't take it anymore. One Sunday morning I went up to her and handed her some cash. I blurted out, "God told me to give this to you. And as weird as it is, I think He wants you to spend it on you. He wants you to use it for maternity clothes, and He wants you to know He is taking care of your every need!"

Big tears welled up in her eyes. I only gave her about ten seconds before I followed with a big apology. I told her the backstory about how God had spoken to me weeks ago, but I hadn't listened to His voice. She was my friend, so I wanted to be honest. I admitted my disobedience and told her I was sorry I had missed the opportunity for God to use me to reach out to her.

For both of us, it was an amazing moment. That day we both learned to trust God in different ways. I don't think it had anything to do with money for either of us. It was about God speaking and me listening. It's a day I'll never forget.

Just



At the end of each chapter, you'll find some questions to stimulate personal reflection and group discussion. Don't rush through these. The goal isn't to fill in the blanks quickly. It's to think deeply and invite God to work in your heart.

CONSIDER THIS . . .

1. How would you define and describe "immediate obedience"?

2. Read Philippians 2:1–11. What is the attitude Paul describes in the first four verses? How does Jesus exemplify this attitude in verses 5 through 8?

6. What do you hope God does in your life through this book?

LISTEN AND OBEY

It's simple, really, but these two words transformed Rod Loy's relationship with God. He wondered what

would happen if he became more sensitive to the voice of God and immediately obeyed whatever God told him to do.

In this book, Rod describes the thrill and the challenge of walking hand in hand with the King of the universe. God gives us specific assignments in the ordinary course of every day—even, and especially, in the mundane and the frustrating events. When we grasp that truth, every moment becomes infused with the possibility that God may do something unexpected and spectacular at any moment.

Jesus delighted in doing the Father's will and showering His love on people. In the same way, when your heart is aligned with His, you'll delight in doing His will—fully and immediately—and seeing Him use you to touch the lives of those around you.

GET READY TO HEAR GOD CLEARLY AND TO OBEY IMMEDIATELY.



Rod Loy has been in full-time pastoral ministry for twenty-eight years. He is currently senior pastor at First Assembly of God in North Little Rock, Arkansas. In the last thirteen years, under Rod's leadership, the church has grown to over 3,800 in average weekly attendance on six campuses. First Assembly gives over one million dollars to missions every year and has helped plant more than 1,100 churches in sixty-three nations.

He is the author of *3 Questions: A Powerful Grid to Help You Live by the Grace of God*. He and his wife, Cindy, have two sons, Tyler and Parker. They live in North Little Rock, Arkansas.



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