

The key to your success is **Small steps of Obedience**

By Dave Batty

In 2008 Teen Challenge marks 50 years of ministry to drug addicts and other troubled youth and adults. Across this nation and around the world there are literally tens of thousands of young men and women who are living drug free today—dramatic testimonies of transformation—modern day miracles.

Some came out of gangs—Johnny Melendez was in his early twenties, and because of his involvement with the Dragons gang was almost shot to death. God radically changed him and put him on a path to success.

Enrique Lopez was so caught up in his addiction that he would steal from drug dealers—they finally caught up with him and shot him, leaving him to die, but God spared his life and brought him to Teen Challenge, where he experienced a miracle.

Others had been addicted to drugs for years, some over 20 years. Canzada Edmonds stood before a judge, fearful that she would be locked up for life—28 years of addiction and crime. In the days immediately preceding this court appearance she had attempted suicide—and failed. She was

*What will be the long
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you do not take small
steps of obedience
today?*

sentenced to Teen Challenge, and though it was a rocky process, eventually she turned her life over to Jesus and experienced a total transformation.

More than a prayer

Today thousands of young people are in Teen Challenge programs, all around the world, working through this process of change from being a loser, an addict, a no-good failure, to becoming a successful, joy-filled, hope-filled person.

And what is the key to their success—whether they came in two weeks ago or 50 years ago?

It is more than a simple prayer.

When Dave Wilkerson first came to New York City in 1958, he met up with gang members and drug addicts. Early on, some of the drug addicts prayed to receive Christ into their lives. But two or three weeks later, they would be back to using drugs. When Dave asked them why, they said, “We don’t know how to be Christians.”

What brought Dave Wilkerson to New York City was a passion for evangelism—to introduce young people to Jesus. And he was successful in this, and many prayed to receive Christ. But many soon returned to their old lifestyle of addiction—this became the driving force behind the beginning of the residential program now known as Teen Challenge—a setting where young men and women can learn how to be Christians.

Key to success

The key to success as a Christian has not changed—it requires small steps of obedience on a daily basis. This is not just for drug addicts—it’s true for every person.

The fact that Dave Wilkerson came to New York City in 1958 is itself a clear example of small steps of obedience. God used a two page article in Life magazine to speak to him—“Go to New York and speak to those 7 teens on trial for murder.” Had he not taken that first small step

- ❖ **What place does prayer have in one’s success?**
- ❖ **What happens when God lets go of your hand?**
- ❖ **What’s the difference between quitting bad habits and living in freedom?**

of obedience, how different his life would have been, and for thousands of others as well.

Teen Challenge exists today because one man was obedient to the voice of God 50 years ago. But it's not just one dramatic act of obedience that fulfills our life's

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quota. The kind of obedience God is looking for in our lives is a daily series of small steps of obedience. This is the key to freedom and success for every person, not just for drug addicts.

What has characterized the success of Teen Challenge has not

been drug education—the success lies in introducing people to Jesus Christ, and helping them establish a personal relationship with Him that transforms their daily living. The key is not just obedient actions—the key is developing a personal relationship built on love. And that love provides the motivation to obey—those daily small steps of obedience.

Learn from a child

If you have taken a three year old child shopping, you can easily relate to the challenge of trying to keep your child safe. When you have to cross a street, you hold their hand and don't let go. Why—because you want to keep your child safe from danger. What about those times when the child doesn't want to hold your hand? You insist, and since you are much bigger—you win.

Their tears and anger do not stop you from holding them tightly, in fact

the more they fight, the tighter you hold on.

How much easier it is when they willingly hold your hand, not once on a shopping trip, but every time you cross a street. They take your hand, they hold on tightly, they won't let go, they are in step with you.

Our deceitful hearts

God is looking for small steps of obedience every day. But like little children, we can easily resist holding on to His hand—resisting His “control.” After all, we are old enough to make our own decisions—we can handle our own freedom!

The reality is the same for all of us—whether we are a drug addict or the best person around—our heart is deceitful. When we listen to our own heart, our own desires, we are headed for big trouble. And that's not just new Christians—it's a danger any time in our lives.

King Saul in the Old Testament started out as a humble, self-controlled, modest leader, willing to obey God. But his success led him to a lifestyle of carelessness when it came to small steps of obedience to God. He began to pick and choose when he would obey God and when he would ignore God. It brought about his own destruction.

The same danger exists today—we can easily make a commitment to God, especially if we have been in big trouble. But once things smooth out, then what? “I know what is best for me!”

We deceive ourselves into believing that we know what is best for ourselves. One high school student wrote to Teen Challenge after a group had visited her school. She commended them for getting off drugs, but then she said, “Drugs help

When God lets go of your hand

There comes a time in our lives when we must take greater responsibility for our actions. With a small child, we make a lot of decisions for them, because we know they are not ready to handle the responsibility of certain decisions—we hold tightly to their hand when we cross the street, no matter how much they resist.

But when they grow up, we expect them to make responsible choices on their own—even when we are not present.

In our relationship with God, we need to have a lifestyle of obedience, willing to hold his hand

wherever he takes us. But sometimes he let's go of our hand. For whatever reason, Eve was all alone when Satan came to tempt her. Instead of running to God, she stayed and talked, and soon gave in to his temptations.

God has given you the power to choose—he will not force his will on you. He may back off to see how you will respond. What is in your heart? Will you turn to him for help, or will you ignore him and go your own way?

God is looking for those who hearts are wholly dedicated to doing his will.

me—if it weren't for drugs, I couldn't cope. So what is worse? Using drugs or suicide?" Often what we think is best for us is robbing us of success.

Quitting bad habits vs. Living in freedom

Others start out with lots of enthusiasm for change, but then this new life loses its appeal. It's hard work, surely there is an easier way to success.

When problems come, it's easy to fall back to the old methods of finding comfort and relief, whether it be drugs, gambling, shopping, food, or whatever.

One young man said, "It's easy for me to quit smoking—I've already

quit 10 times." Many dieters know how to lose weight, but it always comes back.

Living daily in freedom is a lot different than simply quitting a bad habit. This new lifestyle requires a commitment to obey God, and not just in the easy areas of my life—but my whole life. Some find it easy to compartmentalize—we serve God

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faithfully in one area of our lives, but then in other areas, we make our own choices—we know what is best.

That was King Saul 3,000 years ago. And today there are many more with the same mindset—I know what is best for me.

How different King David was from Saul. Even after he became a successful king and military leader, David often said before going into battle, "Let's consult the Lord first." He made it a lifestyle to take small steps of obedience on a daily basis. Yes he failed on occasion, and when he did, he admitted it. "Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me," was his prayer (Psalm 51:10, New Living Translation).

Sometimes we get caught up in focusing only on what we and others can see. We make the demand—you need to change this in your life! But maybe God is more concerned about what is going on beneath the surface. Maybe others can't see some of the problems in our lives—

but God does. We need to learn to listen to his voice, ready and willing to tightly hold on to his hand, willing to let him lead us. God what do you want me to do today?

Developing a lifestyle of obedience

This lifestyle of obedience is not always easy. Some struggle with issues—a simple prayer is not enough. Learning how to live out this new life is a huge challenge. Putting off the old lifestyle is often a struggle.

One day I was asked to speak to one of the students in Teen Challenge. The staff wanted to dismiss her from the program because she was lying, even after being in Teen Challenge for seven months. As we talked, she made it clear that she was grateful to be at Teen Challenge. She

Power to obey

It's easy to obey when things are going well. But when life gets difficult and the problems seem overwhelming, then is when obeying can be a lot more difficult. It's not enough to simply say, "You have to obey God."

We need God's power to help us through these tough times, and he has promised to do that. God says in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My power is made perfect in weakness." When we are weak, God has promised that he will provide all we need. Your willingness to obey, coupled with your power, weak as it is, along with God's power, which will always be enough, it's a sure solution to success.

The myth of accountability

We often hear of the need for new Christians and young people to be accountable to a mentor, a person with more maturity.

But a dangerous myth many live with is the belief that as we get older, and more successful, accountability is no longer that important—after all, look at how successful I am.

The more successful we become, the greater is our need to be accountable to someone who can speak honestly and forcefully into our lives. David had his Nathan. Who is the "Nathan" in your life?

quickly agreed that she still had a problem with lying. “How much did you lie before coming to Teen Challenge?” I asked.

Her response, “All the time.”

“And now that you have been here for seven months, how much do you lie?” was my next question.

She said, “About 10% of the time.”

That’s dramatic progress—from 100% down to 10%. The staff was frustrated with the 10%, but failing to see the 90% change.

When I asked this student if she wanted to stay at Teen Challenge, she was quick to agree. She did stay, and several months later she completed the program, continuing to make progress in her spiritual growth.

The danger of success

The key to success is not how perfect I am. It has everything to do with my attitude—my heart. Is it my heart’s desire to obey God? Am I like the little child willing to hold on to my parent’s hand, or am I stubbornly refusing, convinced that I know what is best for my life?

The Bible is filled with examples of those who started out with a desire to serve God, but then as they grew older and more successful, they began to change. No longer was there a desperation for God—they had learned how to be successful. And with that success comes carelessness—letting the little things slide—too busy focusing on the benefits of power and success.

Success can be the setup for disaster if we fail to keep a priority on small steps of obedience every day. We don’t know what is best for ourselves—only God does.

The key to your success is small steps of obedience

Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. Read 2 Kings 18:5-7a and 2 Chronicles 31:21.
 - A. What characterized the life of Hezekiah?
 - B. What was God’s response to Hezekiah?
2. Read Proverbs 16:3 and 16:9.
 - A. How hard is it for you to hear from God regarding His plans for you?
 - B. Can you share an example from your life where you have obeyed God or the opposite—you failed to obey God and the consequences?
3. What are the greatest challenges you face in obeying God?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 12:9.
 - A. What are one or two areas of your life where you know you are weak and need God’s power to help you?
 - B. How can you connect with God’s power and apply it in these areas of your life?
5. What are one or two small steps of obedience you need to take in your life? Perhaps these are in areas where you have been struggling with a particular issue.



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First printing 6/2008