

THE
INSANITY
of
OBEDIENCE



WALKING WITH JESUS
IN TOUGH PLACES

NIK RIPKEN

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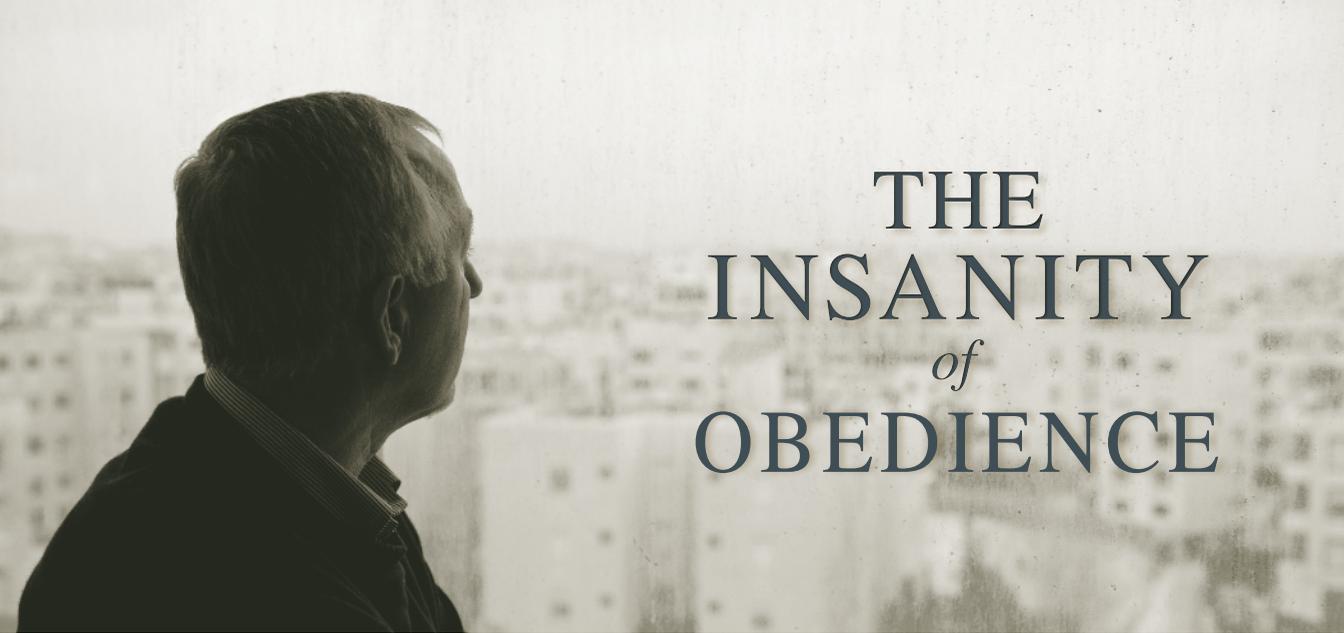
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THE INSANITY *of* OBEDIENCE

About the Author

Nik Ripken is one of the world's leading experts on persecution, especially in Muslim contexts. He is a missions veteran of 32 years, having served primarily in North Africa and the Middle East.

Nik is the author of *The Insanity of God* and *The Insanity of Obedience*. He and his wife have done extensive research on believers in persecution in approximately 72 countries.

*You can find out more about Nik and his ministry at
NikRipken.com and GodsInsanity.com*

Letter from the Author

It is our joy to greet you in the name of Jesus Christ. We are so grateful to God for you and that you have decided to take some time away from your busy schedules to participate in a small group fellowship that could have eternal consequences; both for you and for others you have yet to meet.

I have looked at every setting on this computer and I cannot find the one that will allow me to write to you with a southern accent! Our sons loved to tease me when introducing us to new people by saying, “This is our father who had to take ESL, English as a second language, when he went to college.” That is a blatant lie! I didn’t have to take ESL until I went to seminary.

I like to say that Ruth and I are both PK’s; she was a pastor’s kid and I was a pagan kid. Ruth cannot remember a time when she did not know Jesus. I can remember being 18 years of age and not knowing where I would go when I died. I came from such a rough family that, oftentimes, good church people would cross the street to avoid having to talk to us. I know what it means to be lost and not have anyone looking for us—for me.

This, perhaps, is at the heart of what we are about in meeting together for the next six weeks. It is our prayer that if you do not know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, this time together will assist you in giving your entire being to Jesus. Secondly, it is our prayer that being together will help you to cross the street with the Good News, as well as cross the oceans with whom you know Jesus to be. So you can see, Ruth’s and my ambition for this time together is extremely high.

About 30 years ago we took two boys, three and a half and five and half years old, to East Africa. There we started a grand adventure that included having malaria multiple times, serving in a harvest field, serving in a country where missionaries had lived for about 300 years, and eventually making our way to one of the toughest places on the planet—Somalia.

We know that Jesus sends out His followers as “sheep among wolves.” We just did not know how mean the wolves were, nor how unprepared we were as sheep. You see we had spent most of our lives as sheep among sheep.

THE INSANITY OF OBEDIENCE

We had little or no clue concerning how to share our faith where the wolves were in the majority. We do not want the same experience for you.

The problem was not that the places where we worked were hard places. The problem was that we had experienced little that prepared us to serve where the wolves were in the vast majority. We knew intellectually that serving Jesus across the street or across the oceans was based in a command found in Matthew 28 and Acts 1.

You will find in your time together and in your study that God “calls” people, usually in groups and usually as families. You will find that a call usually has to do with serving God for a specific period of time in a specific location. Yet, all of us are commanded to be in Christ and to go with Christ. No one gets a pass as all are commanded.

It is our prayer that we can assist you on your journey, whether it takes you across the road, to those who are without Christ, or across the oceans to those with little or no access to Jesus 2,000 years after the resurrection. Understand please, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you do not get to decide whether or not you are a partner with Him. What you can decide is whether or not you’re a good or a bad partner!

Ruth and I have PhD’s in mistakes—what not to do. It is not necessary for you to repeat our mistakes. Therefore, it is our intention to help you with your journey so that you can become wise sheep among the wolves—even in the hardest places on earth. Don’t worry, you will make mistakes. But they will be your own mistakes and you will make them much further down the road and at much less cost to others.

Over the years we have been allowed to worship and learn from some of the most faithful and daring followers of Jesus. Most of these we met in settings just like you are experiencing: small groups, seldom more than 30, changing the days of the week when they meet, moving from house to house, and changing the hours of the day when they met. Why? In China, for example, 40 percent of all pastors, evangelists, deacons, elders, and church planters have been imprisoned for three years. They suggested to us that prison is their “theological seminary.” It’s where they go for training. Prisons are where their leaders are formed.

Just like the disciples did with Jesus, we sat at their feet, breaking bread, singing, praying, and telling stories from the Bible—especially those about Jesus. We listened and recorded over 600 of their stories in 72 countries. They taught us that, in the Bible, persecution is normal. They modeled for us how they pass their faith from one generation to the next—from grandparents to parents to children and onto their grandchildren. They have a genealogy of faith that is astounding. Their main place of worship is in the home, led by their fathers.

It is their stories that you will watch, hear, and repeat. Their stories are a modern-day reminder of those in the Bible. They live a Bible that is in present-active-tense. They know that everything that God has ever done He is still doing.

We want to give you some tools for the journey—some ways of thinking and acting. What you do together for these seven weeks we hope you will keep on doing once these weeks together finish. We pray that what you do these seven weeks will enable you to break bread in the homes of those without Jesus—Americans, Muslims, Hindus, and atheists—wherever they are to be found. It is our prayer that those without Jesus will find their way to your home; a safe place to share a meal, to hear stories from the Bible, and from your own experiences. We pray that it will become normal for you to break bread and tell your story in the homes of Americans that do not know Jesus, as well as among internationals.

We pray that these six weekss will be life-changing as you eat together, pray together, laugh together, and cry together. The important thing is that you will do this together, and do so in the presence of the resurrected Jesus. Have a great time! We wish we could see your faces and hug your necks! We hope to hear from you and to learn how God blessed you through your time together, watching video clips of our experiences with Christians around the world, unpacking God's Word, all the while learning how to be faithful and confident sheep among wolves. We love you and pray for the opportunity to break bread with you somewhere down the road.

Blessings,

Nik and Ruth Ripken

INTRODUCTORY SESSION

Start

Start each week by sharing time with food and conversation.

A common way for Christians to meet with one another and to reach out to others in the community is to share a meal, build relationships while they eat together, talk about life, and share a story from Scripture. In order to identify with believers around the world and throughout history, your group session will follow the same format each week.

- Share a meal or snacks.
- Ask how everyone is doing. (This is a time to talk casually about life in general—work, family, activities, etc.)
- Ask group members for any updates about prayer requests.
- Watch a video clip from Nik and Ruth Ripken's life stories.
- Respond with discussion related to the video clip and to the week's personal reading from the Bible study books.
- Conclude your time together in worship and prayer.

Individuals will prepare before meeting together as a group by completing the pages in their Bible study books. Each week follows the same format:

- One story from the Old Testament.
- One story from the New Testament.
- A personal study including the words of Jesus and exploring other biblical content within the context of the two stories.

You will learn how to read biblical stories in a way that helps you:

- Recognize important details.
- Memorize a conversational summary of the story.
- Identify practical applications in your own life.
- Consider different circumstances in which you can tell the story to others.

A central component of your time as individuals and as a group will involve reading and telling biblical stories. Because this format may be new to your group, allow extra time for the “Respond” portion of each weeks session.

During the “Respond” portion of each session, group members will not only respond to the story shared by Nik and Ruth Ripken in the video clip, group members will also practice telling and discussing the biblical stories they studied and memorized during the week.

Even if the suggested format isn’t the normal routine of your time individually or together, allowing everyone the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in this experience will help them see the Christian life in a fresh perspective.

Watch

Each week, we will see a story from Nik and Ruth Ripken’s life as they join God’s work around the world. This opening video will provide an overview of what to expect during the next six weeks.

Play the promotional video for *The Insanity of Obedience*.

Respond

This section and the next will provide a guide for a simple routine of group discussion and prayer each week.

What’s your immediate response to the video?

What emotions did it evoke in you?

What statements were challenging or intriguing in the video?

What do you hope God will do in you over the next six weeks of this study?

Pray

Conclude each group session with a time of prayer. You may also choose to include a time of worship through a musical instrument or song. This type of worship experience reflects how Christians meet in house churches around the world.

Read Matthew 28:18-20.

Why are the phrases “All authority has been given to Me” and “observe everything I have commanded you” vital to our understanding of how to pray in our daily lives?

How is the phrase “I am with you always” vital to our prayers?

Use the space below to record names and contact information of group members. This will allow you to pray for each person by name and to personally connect with one another during the week outside of your time together as a group.

Pray that the next six weeks would be life-changing for each person in the group.

Week 1

MISSIONS

[Jesus] said to His disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

MATTHEW 9:37-38

Old Testament Story

ABRAHAM COMMANDED TO GO

*The LORD said to Abram:
Go out from your land,
your relatives,
and your father's house
to the land that I will show you.
I will make you into a great nation,
I will bless you,
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
I will curse those who treat you with contempt,
and all the peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.*

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated, and the people he had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan.

When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD appeared to him, saying, "I am God Almighty. Live in My presence and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you greatly." Then Abram fell facedown and God spoke with him: "As for Me, My covenant is with you: you will become the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Abram, but your name will be Abraham, for I will make you the father of many nations."

GENESIS 12:1-5; 17:1-5

Identify

Circle any key people in this story.

Draw a box around any key words or phrases in the text.

Underline promises, commands, or verses you want to remember.

What's the main point of this story?

How do you relate to a person or a circumstance in this story?

When could this story have been helpful to you or to someone you know?

What other situations may present an opportunity to share this story?

Why would the truth revealed in this story be particularly meaningful in the situations you have identified?

Reflect

No matter where you are, how old you are, or what you're currently doing, God is at work. His plan has always been to call people into relationship with Him and then to send them out as a blessing to the nations.

What encouragement, conviction, or application do you sense the Holy Spirit impressing on your heart?

Whom do you know that would benefit from hearing this story?

We'll see later in the study that going can sometimes be easier than staying. The challenge isn't merely to go but to model obedient and sacrificial faith among people who need to be blessed by hearing (and responding to) the gospel. What's required of you isn't a casual or temporary response to the command to go but a radical, lifelong commitment. The result of this kind of commitment is the gospel takes root deeply within the culture, wherever it may reside.

Pray

Close your time of reflection by praying for the courage to step out in faith and to be a blessing wherever God chooses to use you.

New Testament Story

JESUS' FOLLOWERS COMMANDED TO GO

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to view the tomb. Suddenly there was a violent earthquake, because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and approached the tomb. He rolled back the stone and was sitting on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his robe was as white as snow. The guards were so shaken from fear of him that they became like dead men.

But the angel told the women, "Don't be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here! For He has been resurrected, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead. In fact, He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see Him there.' Listen, I have told you."

So, departing quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell His disciples the news. Just then Jesus met them and said, "Good morning!" They came up, took hold of His feet, and worshiped Him. Then Jesus told them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see Me there."

The 11 disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. When they saw Him, they worshiped, but some doubted. Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

MATTHEW 28:1-10,16-20

Identify

Circle any key people in this story.

Draw a box around any key words or phrases in the text.

Underline promises, commands, or verses you want to remember.

What major events take place?

What's the main point of this story?

How do you relate to a person or a circumstance in this story?

When could this story have been helpful to you or to someone you know?

What other situations may present an opportunity to share this story?

Why would the truth revealed in this story be particularly meaningful in the situations you have identified?

Reflect

Jesus' instruction is compelling in its clarity. It's not a suggestion; it's a command. "Go!" He says. "Make disciples of all nations." You have the high privilege of joining Jesus' mission. But be absolutely sure about this: you go on His terms, not yours.

What encouragement, conviction, or application do you sense the Holy Spirit impressing on your heart?

Whom do you know that would benefit from hearing this story?

No matter what other tasks the church undertakes, going and making disciples are essential and defining tasks. The church is not doing as Christ commanded unless it is going and making disciples.

Pray

Close your time of reflection by praying for obedience to make disciples, knowing that Jesus is with you as you go.

Personal Study

HOW TO GO

This week's stories of Abraham's family and of Jesus' disciples revealed God's plan has always been to set a group of people apart from the world in order to bless the nations. Jesus' command to go make disciples was a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Through faith in Jesus, who came from the ancestral line of Abraham, people from every nation are adopted into God's family. Now that we have a greater context for missions, let's look at Bible passages that provide further insight into how we're to go.

Words of Jesus

Read Acts 1:1-11.

What actions and events are recorded as historical facts?

What's the importance of Luke's emphasis on proof and historical events?

Why is it significant that verse 2 uses the phrase "He had given orders"?

Missions

The Holy Spirit is repeatedly mentioned in this final moment with Jesus. In the account in Matthew 28, Jesus also mentioned the Holy Spirit.

**What's the role of the Holy Spirit in God's mission to go to the nations?
Record each action with which the Spirit is connected in Acts 1:1-11.**

In Jesus' command to go as His witnesses throughout local communities and to the ends of the earth, it's clear that this mission can be accomplished only with the direction, presence, and power of the Holy Spirit. This command isn't optional. But verse 6 reveals that even Jesus' disciples—now referred to as *apostles* (see v. 2), which means *sent-out ones*—had questions about what God was doing instead of how they could obey.

Summarize Jesus' words in verses 7-8.

The question about God's timing wasn't necessarily a lack of faith and willingness, but Jesus' response was clear that their only concern about God's timing should be their obedient response in the moment. The apostles were a lot like most of us today. We want to know God's plan before we obey His command. Like the apostles, and like Abraham before them, we must be willing to go whenever and wherever God leads.

The story concludes with angels essentially asking, "What are you doing? Stop standing around and do what Jesus said to do. Go now."

In what ways are you just standing around instead of going?

Testimony of Scripture

Read Hebrews 11:1-3.

Identify each element in this definition of *faith* and record the elements here.

The definition of *faith* in Hebrews 11 encompasses everything we've studied so far—reality, proof, hope, obedient people in the past, and understanding the power of God's command.

Which phrase in the description of *faith* did you need to be reminded of today?

Read Hebrews 11:8-16.

Though Abraham literally left his home—and you may be called to do the same—what does it mean to live for a better city and for a heavenly home?

What freedom exists in knowing that this world is temporary?

These definitions and examples of faithfulness provide a framework with which we can understand that responding in faith to God's call is not only a matter of our own salvation but also of God's mission.

Read 1 Peter 2:9-12.

What's the result when God's people—His holy nation—bears witness through a faithful lifestyle to a watching world?

Missions

Faith means more than believing these things in theory. That may come easily to you. Faith means doing whatever “good works” (v. 12) God commands.

You might think that the world does not want to hear the gospel of Jesus; that your neighbors, coworkers, family, and people you interact with daily do not seem interested; that there are not many people to witness to or who you can make disciples of Jesus.

Read Matthew 9:35-38.

According to Jesus, what group of people are too few in number?

The world is full of people who are weary and tired. Countless men, women, and children desperately need the gospel. Our compassionate Savior says people not only need the gospel but are also ready for it.

Just as the angels promised the apostles that Jesus would return and Peter promised that nations would “glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:12), Jesus promised that there will be a harvest. The faithful will be gathered.

Pray

Pray that you will answer Jesus’ command to be a worker sent out for the harvest. Now is the time to go. How? Go in the power of the Holy Spirit wherever and whenever He leads. Go in the freedom of knowing that this world and the things in it are temporary. God has prepared an eternal home for you and for all who follow Jesus.

For more about God’s command to go to the nations, read Part One (Chapters 1–8) in *The Insanity of Obedience* by Nik Ripken (B&H, 2014).

Group Session

MISSIONS

Start

Start each week by sharing time with food and conversation.

This group session establishes the weekly rhythm for this study. Everyone should have prepared for this session by reading, studying, and memorizing an Old and New Testament story. Because this format may be new to your group, allow extra time for the “Respond” portion of each session.

- Share a meal or snacks.
- Ask how everyone is doing. (This is a time to talk casually about life in general—work, family, activities, etc.)
- Ask group members for any updates about prayer requests.
- Remind everyone about the group format—read and study during the week, gather as a group for food and conversation, watch a video clip, respond to the story in the video, tell the stories studied during the week, discuss the truth of God’s Word and personal application, and then pray.

During this time each week, we will see a story from the Ripken family’s life as they join God’s work around the world. This week, we’ll begin by getting to know a little bit about Nik and Ruth Ripken and how they left everything they had ever known in order to follow Jesus.

Watch

Play the video for Session 1, “Missions.” As you watch, note anything especially meaningful presented in the video or in your response to the story.

Respond

This page and the next provide a guide for discussion and prayer. It models a simple routine for group discussion and prayer each week.

What's your immediate response to the video?

What have you never considered before?

Ask a volunteer to tell the story of Abraham from Genesis 12:1-5; 17:1-5 as everyone follows along in their own Bibles.

In what way is the Old Testament story of Abraham being commanded to go a key to understanding God's mission?

How do you relate to Abraham's story, even if it is a completely different circumstance?

Ask a volunteer to tell the story of Jesus' followers from Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20 as everyone follows along in their Bibles.

Why are the New Testament stories about the women at the tomb and the men on the mountain being commanded by Jesus to go essential in understanding God's mission?

Jesus' final words in Matthew are known as the Great Commission. What actions are mentioned as the essence of making disciples?

When would the biblical truths in the story of Abraham, of the women at the tomb, or of the Great Commission been helpful in your own life?

In what circumstances would these biblical stories and your own testimony be most appropriate to share with someone, Christian or non-Christian?

Before transitioning from reflection to prayer, leave time for other thoughts or questions about the week's focus—in this case, God's mission. This prioritizes the habit of intentionally creating an opportunity for the Spirit to move in the lives of unique individuals and their circumstances.