

This was a milestone year for me. Years of attempting, failing, agonizing, and praying finally culminated in the attainment of a long sought after, but heretofore unrealized goal in my life...I finally learned to enjoy getting up early in the morning.

For years I have been a consummate night owl, watching (or rather ignoring) the minutes tick away into the wee hours of the morning as I obsess over finishing this or that project. The tug to kick this habit had been evident for a while, but it finally hit me this summer that that tug was the gentle hand of God convicting me of the need to develop discipline and establish better priorities in my life. Since that realization, He has been most gracious in enabling me to make this difficult, but necessary, adjustment in my daily schedule. The change has certainly not come without the occasional relapses into old habits (I confess, I'm writing this at 2:30 in the morning.), but I am also experiencing numerous benefits and blessings that I never anticipated.

The message is not that the old early-to-bed-early-to-rise adage is the most spiritual practice, but that God gives grace and strength to change and grow when we, by faith, submit to Him and obey whatever He calls us to do. In her book, *Love Has a Price Tag*, Elisabeth Elliot states, "Jesus promised that to the man who loves and obeys, the Father will make himself known...True spiritual understanding is not an achievement of the intellect but the divine reward for love and obedience."

I have seen this same principle hold true in other experiences this year. From following through with spiritually intense speaking engagements, to publishing a book (*Pajama School – stories from the life of a homeschool graduate*), to writing and arranging music for special events, to dealing with the death of my Grandma, God has provided the strength to do what seemed impossible, the guidance to travel down a wholly unknown path, the creativity to develop and implement new ideas, and the grace to trust His goodness when my own faith gave way to unbelief.

As we all wrestle with difficult questions, painful experiences, persistent habits, and trying situations, may we allow God to change and direct us as He sees fit. For it is in obedience and submission to Him that we will experience the greatest joy and fulfillment in life! But that experience can only come by faith because the blessing always *follows* the obedience.

"Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:16, 23

