

Failing Your Way into Growth

Dr. Henry Cloud and John Townsend

“Obedience for obedience’s sake isn’t biblical. Following God’s commands always has a purpose. God gives us directives to help us mature and grow up. As Moses said in Deuteronomy, “Observe the Lord’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today *for your own good.*” God wants us to do the right thing so that we’ll grow up. You may have been taught that obedience is for obedience’s sake—that God wants to be obeyed because he’s some sort of control addict. That’s not God’s fathering style. His directives help us to learn his ways so that we develop into his image. Obedience is our response to the fathering of God.

Maturity is a cycle of trying and failing our way into growth. The cycle goes like this:

1. You try
2. You fail.
3. You receive grace and forgiveness.
4. You suffer consequences.
5. You learn from the consequences.
6. You try.
7. You do a little better.
8. You fail.

And so on. We learn by practice, says Hebrews 5:14. When we know that we won’t be condemned when we fail, we grow faster. We take more risks. Living under the “just do it” (because God says so) bondage dooms us to not learn from our mistakes. The “just do it” fallacy at its best interrupts and at its worst destroys the maturity cycle. Grace, on the other hand, protects us from loss of love as we mature through trying and failing.

When is the last time you backed away from a struggle with compulsive behaviors? Were you bound and determined to beat it through discipline, guilt, or self-shaming?

There’s a better way. When we allow ourselves to work through our inner motives and conflicts about situations, we are more free to be autonomous, to take responsibility for our behavior, and to be truly free in Christ.”

Excerpt from *12 “Christian” Beliefs That Can Drive You Crazy*, Chapter 11, “Assumption #11: Just Doing the Right Thing is More Important than Why I Do It” Dr. Henry Cloud and John Townsend, Zondervan, 1994

To recap: Obedience always has a purpose. If you are trying to stop a compulsion just out of obedience, your motivation is misguided and will quickly fail. Your compulsion is filling an old need or conflict. Identify that need. Be motivated instead to experience more of God’s love, grace and freedom for your needs. Focus on the rewards of being responsible. Develop a life style of growing and maturing every day. Connect with others. And stay humble. You will never be perfect. Only God’s grace is always perfect. Receive it every day as you try, fail, grow and follow him.