



HIGH Calling

July 2025

The *High Calling* is a publication of The Francis Asbury Society to serve as a link between FAS and its constituents, building loyalty and awareness so that the teaching and experience of Christian holiness may continue to be lived and proclaimed throughout the world.

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The Harness of God: Learning Obedience Through Discipline

by Bill Kierce



SOMEONE ONCE GAVE me a small tract entitled “The Harness of God,” which describes a man’s dream. It is a profound parable about the principle of God’s discipline in the

believer’s life, and I have used it often as a sermon illustration. It has also been a source of much ministry to me during those times when the Heavenly Father’s hand of discipline has rested upon my own life. The dream follows:

“On a dirt road in the middle of a fertile green field stood a beautiful carriage, carved in gold and pulled by six muscular chestnut horses: two in the lead, two in the middle, and two in the rear. I stood from a distance and watched the driver of the carriage working underneath on the spoke of one wheel, which was broken. Yet the horses stood at perfect attention. I wondered at the wisdom of this and the danger of this action, as just one of the horses could have lurched forward and crushed the driver.

“As I watched, out of the nearby field came two other horses who began to dance around the carriage and call out to the horses at attention. Apparently, they were old acquaintances. ‘Why don’t you come and run free with us?’ they taunted. ‘We are free. No one has us in a harness. No one tells us what to do.’ However, the carriage horses remained motionless, seeming not to even notice their tempters.

“A little while later I watched as these same two horses were captured and corralled, placed under severe discipline for the purpose of being trained

to pull a carriage. After some time had passed, one of them said to the other, ‘I have had all of this discipline that I can take. I am going to break out of the corral tonight. Will you go with me?’ But the other horse replied, ‘No, I am going to stay. I don’t like the discipline, either, but I feel that it is good for me. And I feel safe here. I will submit myself until it is finished. Somehow, I know that when the process is complete, I will be equipped for my purpose.’

“Later that night, the first horse jumped the fence and ran off into the fields to rejoin his old friends and resume his past life of playful liberty. Often over the course of the next few weeks he would run to the gate of the corral and urge his friend to join him. However, the obedient horse remained submitted to the process of his master’s discipline.

“Then the scene in my dream drastically changed. It was obvious that significant time had passed, and I saw again the same carriage stopped along the road with six healthy horses harnessed to it. However, the fields were no longer fertile. The ground was scorched by the sun and the streams had dried, the result of a terrible famine. I watched as a thin, sickly horse stumbled out the nearby field and approached the carriage. There, in harness, he noticed a familiar former playmate. The horse that had once jumped the fence to run free recognized that one of the horses pulling the carriage was his old friend.

“The horse that had rejected the harness, now obviously dying of malnutrition, spoke to his counterpart: ‘How is it that in this time of famine, when I am starving and all of our old

friends have died, you are so healthy and well cared for?’ The horse in harness replied, ‘Do you see these fields where we once ran and played? My master owns all of them. He knew that famine was approaching, and he gathered ahead of time. His silos are full of grain. And because I have been willing to submit myself to him, all that he has belongs to me.’”

This story needs little commentary, but let’s try by changing the metaphor from horses to humans. **Hebrews 12:7–11 (NIV)** speaks poignantly to the role of discipline in a believer’s life:

Endure hardship as discipline, God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

GODLY DISCIPLINE IS EVIDENCE OF LOVE

Someone famously said, “We all must suffer from either the pain of discipline or the pain of regret. The difference between them is this: The pain of discipline weighs ounces while the pain of regret weighs tons.” **Proverbs 22:15** states, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away.” I read an article recently in which a commentator¹ critiqued the concept of punishment, especially the practice of “spanking.”

1 McNeel, B. (2022 October 14). “Sorry, James Dobson, we can’t spank our kids to heaven.” *Sojourners*. <https://sojo.net/articles/sorry-james-dobson-we-cant-spank-our-kids-heaven>.

She describes traditional approaches to parenting as “the idea of parents and children as opposing forces. It frames parenting as a series of battles a parent must win to maintain authority from would-be usurpers.”

As cute as our children may be, they *are* usurpers. And they will attempt to get away with anything we will allow. This is why the wise parent keeps the cookie jar and the kitchen knives out of the kid’s reach. But the issue is not one of winning parental battles or establishing patriarchal or matriarchal authority. It is one of building character, whatever the appropriate manner of discipline. And according to **Hebrews 12:7–8**, godly discipline is not only an expression of love it is incontrovertible evidence.

My dad spanked me only once. I remember it well even 50 years later. Jim Kierce was my stepfather at the time and would later adopt me, marrying my mother when I was seven years old. After a few awkward first years together while he tested the boundaries of his authority with a new child, my sinful nature asserted itself and I got into some minor trouble. I was about 10 years old. He did two things in response. One, he gave me a “bend-over-and-hold-your-ankles” kind of spanking. But before that, he gave me a hug, sent me out to play all day, instructing me to have fun and return home at 5:00 p.m. to be disciplined. No, he was not a psychologist. He was a lawyer. What I remember most about that day was not the spanking. It was the long hours of anticipation beforehand. Many years later, as we reflected on that day, he said, “Son, I cried all night after I had to discipline you. That was the day I knew that I loved you like you were my very own child.”

DISCIPLINE DELIVERS US TO OBEDIENCE

The thought of breaking something usually has negative connotations, whether it’s a family heirloom, a colleague’s trust, or a lover’s heart. Yet the Scripture makes plain that brokenness is the way to blessing. As the angel of the Lord wrestled with Jacob in **Genesis 32** to subdue his prideful spirit, so the Lord must subdue our willfulness that we might be useful for his purposes. Jacob was left with a limp

to remind him of his own insufficiency and dependency upon Yahweh. So, we are left with “life limps” as reminders of those places and people God has used to break our dependence upon our own ingenuity. Even Jesus was trained to obedience through the things that he suffered (**Hebrews 5:8**). He was also left with scars (**John 20**).

To the reader who is not a Christian, this makes no sense at all. Much like the critic of corporal punishment, it all seems but an act of sadistic cruelty rooted in patriarchal power dynamics. But to the one whose will is being broken by the strong and loving hand of the Living God, the limp is a tender reminder that God has not left us to run free only to die of starvation in the end. The result of submitting to God’s discipline is participation in his holiness, which means that the character of the Holy One is formed in our lives. Like a broken horse, we are responsive to his commands, becoming one with him. Grace is not propositional or positional. It is relational.

OBEDIENCE IS A JOY, NOT A BURDEN

A horse cannot be forced to obey, nor can a person. A parent who attempts to control a child with the fear of punishment will lose both respect and obedience. A trainer who uses fear to control a horse finds that eventually the animal will find something that is more fearful and flee. Once we learn that obedience to God is the way of wholeness, we obey because we are fully convinced that we find our joy in submission to him.

I spoke with a horse trainer recently who said, “Once a horse has been fully broken, an owner could take down the fences and it will not run away. The horse knows where its home is. Once broken, the purpose of the fence is not to keep the horse in, only to keep the predators out.” In spiritual terms, the sanctified soul doesn’t obey God because we have to, but because we get to. In one of the traditional Methodist communion liturgies, upon confession of sin and surrender of the self to God’s grace, the penitent earnestly beseeches, “Free us for joyful obedience.” Only a broken soul can pray that and mean it. ✠

An Opportunity to Love

By Natalia Gober

DO YOU REMEMBER the last time your “check engine” light came on? Did you take your car to the mechanic immediately, or did you ignore it? I don’t know about you, but a lot of times, when the light on my car comes on, I tend to ignore it until I absolutely feel like I need to take it to the mechanic. It’s irresponsible—we know that—but it’s inconvenient. The problem with this, though, is that when we leave our car’s engine unattended and try to drive on without the mechanic’s input and care, we sometimes jeopardize our car—and even our lives—more than we would like to think.

This is what it’s like when we ignore God’s laws and precepts. We jeopardize our lives mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and eventually even physically. At my church, we’ve started a series about the Ten Commandments, and my pastor has said each Sunday that God’s “Ten Commandments are not meant to restrict us, but they are meant to explain us.” I was intrigued by this comment and have since realized that it is a simple way to explain one of the deepest truths. God made us as relational beings meant to worship him. I think this is why our first two commandments are to “have no other gods before” God Almighty and to have no idols (Exodus 20:1–6 ESV). These first two commandments are the foundation of not only the following eight commandments but the entirety of our lives! When we obey these first two commandments, we will want to follow the rest of the commandments and anything else God asks of us. Why? Because obedience is not an obligation. Obedience is a natural response of love for and adoration of the one whom we worship.

When we look at the dictionary and define “obedience,” we see that the root word “obey” is “to follow the commands or guidance of” or “to act in agreement with: carry out” (Merriam-Webster). It seems mechanical, like a checklist we just comply with. Maybe that is why we often relate obedience to *obligation*, which can sound a lot like restriction. Obedience as obligation can even sound a lot like slavery. But

Jesus says, “I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn’t confide in his slaves;” instead, he calls us his friends (John 15:14–16 NLT)! The word and title of friend show mutuality in the relationship—mutual love, mutual respect. We know God loves us (Romans 5:8). Have you ever considered that he respects us, too? He gives us a choice to say yes to him. He gives us a choice to love him. So, what if we began to consider how obedience to God is not a set of rules we are obligated to check off but rather as a means and opportunity to love him more and more?

When Jesus gives us the two greatest commandments in Mark 12, the word for “love” there is “agape.” That means that the first of the two greatest commandments is to “love the Lord our God,” with the same agape love with which he loves us. If you’re like me, you might be asking, “But Lord, how can I love you with the same love You love me with? I can’t!” And you’d be right, we can’t love God as he commands us to—not in our strength. But through Christ and his Holy Spirit, in his strength and his help, we can.

Remember that “check engine” light? Taking our car to the mechanic may sometimes feel like an inconvenient obligation. But it is actually a necessity for our car’s longevity and our safety, and it is also an opportunity to get to know our local mechanic more, and even to get to know our car better. Similarly, obedience may not always feel convenient. In fact, in our flesh, it will feel quite the opposite. But obedience to the Lord is a necessity for our life and safety (Proverbs 3:1–2). It is also an opportunity to get to know our Father more intimately, and in that, an opportunity to depend more on him. And it is always an opportunity to act and live in love with and for our Lord.

If you haven’t recently, would you ask the Holy Spirit right now, “Lord, please check my heart...”? And let him sit with you; let him work in you; let him love you; let him show you how to love him in return.

Read Psalms 139, especially verses 23 and 24, and let it be your heart’s cry:

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Also read 2 Corinthians 10:5, and “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” and Psalms 37:4–5 and Psalms 119 and “delight yourself in the Lord.” ✠

Introducing Fekadu Amanu



WE WELCOME A new member to our staff team at FAS. Rev. Fekadu Amanu is a recent Master of Divinity (M.Div.) graduate from Asbury

Theological Seminary after an award-winning career in nursing and public health leadership. Fekadu is a native of Ethiopia and will serve FAS as *Special Assistant to the FAS President and Director of Empower the Nations—Africa*. Fekadu is a gifted minister and has extraordinary networking skills, which he demonstrated while coordinating the FAS event in Ethiopia in January 2025. This conference brought together evangelical leaders representing 30 million Ethiopian Christians and was hailed by participants as one of the most important gatherings of leaders in many years.

He will continue to coordinate work in Ethiopia and throughout Africa, where God is opening many doors of opportunity to FAS. Fekadu has confirmed his calling as an evangelist while participating in multiple church plants in Africa and the United States. He is also a product of FAS’s initial Mentored Ministry cohort through Asbury Seminary in 2024. Rev. Amanu is ordained in the Vineyard Church. He and his wife, Mimi, have three children and reside in Wilmore, KY.