

Disobedience is one of the sins most frequently confessed by children. I'm sure no parent is surprised to hear that. Consenting to obedience is one of the dominant themes in any child's life. As they become more independent, children learn obedience either out of love for the parents they respect or out of fear of parents who punish.

The Letter to the Hebrews says Jesus learned obedience from suffering. Not from love of his Father, but from suffering. Hopelessly lost in the human condition, he cried aloud with tears to the One who could save him. He was heard because of his submission. God was not moved by the cleverness of his argument, nor by compassion for Jesus' agony, nor by the force of Jesus' will. God was moved by none of that except the reverent submission of Jesus to the divine plan.

Although disobedience is a hallmark of childhood, it also afflicts adults, though in a different way. Adults usually don't disobey parents or teachers or the rules of classroom etiquette. Instead, we withhold our submission to greater forces: the approach of death, ill health, past decisions which have jeopardized our future, unhappiness at home, our inability to achieve what we'd hoped for. We do not easily obey these forces. We rage against them. We deny they are there. We refuse to accept them. We bargain with God to change our lot in life. In short, we pray like Jesus at Gethsemane: "Father, let this cup pass from me." We pray in disobedience until we add the phrase that finally won for Jesus a peaceful heart: "Not my will, Father, but yours be done."

Suffering is a means toward making us complete. When we accept God's will in our life, when we accept our cross, we finally learn obedience and the peace it brings.