

Voices: Hymns of the faith: 'Trust and Obey'

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The old gospel hymn "Trust and Obey" was written by Presbyterian minister John Sammis, born in 1846 in Brooklyn, New York. Sammis was a businessman who answered the call to ministry.

Sammis entered the ministry in 1880 and served in Iowa, Indiana, Michigan and Minnesota. He also taught at The Bible Institute of Los Angeles.

Ira D. Sankey, a musical partner of Dwight L. Moody, tells in his biography, *My Life and the Story of the Gospel Hymns*, how "Trust and Obey" was inspired in 1886. Sankey [wrote](#):

"Mr. Moody was conducting a series of meetings in Brockton, Massachusetts, and I had the pleasure of singing for him there. One night a young man rose in a testimony meeting and said, 'I am not quite sure—but I am going to trust, and I am going to obey.' I just jotted that sentence down, and sent it with a little story to the Rev. J.H. Sammis. ... He wrote the hymn, and the tune was born."

Sammis is said to have composed the lines of the refrain upon receiving the letter.

*Trust and obey,
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey.*

The first verse reads:

When we walk with the Lord

*In the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way;
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.*

Often, the specific Scripture that inspired the writing of a song or hymn is unknown. Many passages of Scripture probably could be given credit for inspiring the hymn “Trust and Obey.” The theme of the hymn—taking God at his word and obeying him—is woven throughout the Bible.

This sounds so easy but is harder than it sounds. Why is it so hard to take God at his word and obey him? Why is it so hard to trust and obey?

Saul and Samuel

I am reminded of a story recorded in the Old Testament in [1 Samuel 15](#). The people of Israel wanted a king. They rejected the theocratic rule of God and wanted a human to rule over them.

Saul was anointed king over Israel and given a command from Yahweh through Samuel to wipe out the Amalekites. Saul summoned his troops to begin the campaign.

He attacked and struck down the Amalekites from the Arabian Peninsula to Egypt, but he didn’t obey Yahweh’s instructions completely. Saul spared Agag, king of the Amalekites, and the choice animals, unwilling to destroy the best of what the Amalekites had.

A side note to the story that shows how these things can play out: Agag would be an ancestor to Haman the Agagite, who would attempt to destroy the Jews while they were in exile (See the Book of Esther).

Yahweh revealed to Samuel how Saul disobeyed his commands. Samuel went to Saul. Initially, Saul told Samuel he had obeyed the commands of Yahweh. Then off in the distance, Samuel heard the sounds of livestock, and Saul's story changed.

One rule of leadership: Never blame the people under your authority like Saul did. He said the troops brought the best stuff back, so they could offer sacrifices to God.

Saul missed the point: Either his troops were unruly and rebellious against his commands, or he told them to spare these things against God's commands. Either way, it is poor leadership. Samuel pointed out Saul's leadership failure.

Saul didn't see it that way. As a matter of fact, he insisted he did obey Yahweh. After all, he was going to sacrifice all the plunder to Yahweh. Surely, it would please Yahweh to receive these sacrifices.

Samuel refuted Saul's error. God values worship and obedience. God wants trust and obedience. To worship without obedience is idolatry. To say, "I trust God," without obedience is rebellion. God expects his people to take him at his word and obey him.

Trust, obedience and faith

Why does pleasing God take both trust and obedience? Trusting God and obeying him is faith in action.

Faith is living as if something is real, even if it hasn't happened yet ([Hebrews 11:6](#)). Faith is choosing to trust, even when the circumstances are not clear.

This is why Paul said the Old Testament patriarchs were justified by their

faith in the promise yet to be seen ([Romans 4](#)). These Old Testament saints hadn't seen the object of their salvation yet, but they trusted in God's promise to provide it one day, which he did in Jesus Christ. They had to trust and obey.

Just like the patriarchs, the faith of a believer looks forward with hope to what is still not seen. The faith of a disciple of Jesus is not only in who Christ is and what he has done, but also in what he has promised to do.

Salvation is already and not yet. Christians are saved from the judgment of sin, but they also eagerly await the fullness of salvation when sin is completely conquered and when Christ finally redeems creation itself.

To trust and obey means to seek God earnestly. Luke records the parable about the woman who lost a piece of her heirloom necklace made of 10 silver coins ([Luke 15:8-10](#)). She was distraught when one of the coins fell off the necklace.

She searched for it and did not rest until she found it. Then, she called all her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her, because she had found what was lost. A life of trust and obedience is defined by seeking God with your whole heart.

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