

KIRBSTONES

ALONG THE NARROW WAY

curb-stone (kürb'stön') - *noun* - one of the stones or a range of stones forming a curb, as along a sidewalk or roadway. Historically, the curbstones were placed vertically along the edges of the roadbed and the paving material was backfilled against the row of curbstones. The curbstones served ⁽¹⁾to hold the material in the roadbed, ⁽²⁾to prevent the scattering of the material along the edges, and ⁽³⁾to define the road itself from all the adjoining areas.

¹³ "ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW GATE. FOR WIDE IS THE GATE AND BROAD IS THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO DESTRUCTION, AND MANY ENTER THROUGH IT.
¹⁴ BUT SMALL IS THE GATE AND NARROW THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO LIFE, AND ONLY A FEW FIND IT." - MATTHEW 7:13-14 - NIV

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How affirming it is to sit with someone after a very long absence only to rediscover that he has been there—in *your life and you in his*—all along. And, best of all, in the time we spend together—in *the right now*—we not only continue to learn from one another, but we begin to realize the depth of our mutual impact on each other over decades of being present and being absent.

Recently I was blessed by an opportunity to reconnect with a colleague and dear friend of nearly four decades. While we visited for a couple of hours over lunch, the time I spent with him had a profound impact on me. It was a comment he made to me that made all the difference.

Nearly three years ago as we connected in one of our few and far between phone conversations that have become fewer and farther between, he asked me about my choice to pursue my work several years after I had retired. In essence he asked why I continued to uproot my wife, turn my back on our permanent home near the ocean, and move every couple of years at the will of the bishops in our denomination.

My answer, which seemed so simple and right at the time, must have struck a chord with my long-time friend because he brought it up in our recent meeting over lunch. And, he has given much thought to my response on the phone several years ago, which was *so simple and so right!*

I had simply said to him that I was being obedient. God has proven to me over and over that when I am obedient to him—even *when I have no idea of the road ahead or the outcome*—he will meet my needs and the needs of my family to a far greater degree than I could imagine.

For most of my life—from *the age of twelve*—I have known God was calling me to the pastoral ministry. And for forty years I said, "Not now!" During

the summer of 2002, after decades of postponement, I conditionally yielded.

Conditionally meant that I would enter the processes that are required by my denomination for graduate school and ordination, and I would submit to their itineracy process. However, I did not want to become a missionary...*ever!*

The ministry to which God has called me now spans nearly two decades, and the direction and specialization that it took is nothing less than dizzying. Now in my eighth congregational setting and fourth annual conference, I find myself over five years beyond retirement and remaining in the continued service of my denomination in obedience to God.

I cannot deny the twists and turns of my journey. I cannot continue to be true to my *conditional* promise of rejecting the mission field. And, I can write in this column with a *straight face* that since I have been in service to God away from home, I am serving in the *mission field!*

The point here is that our preconceived notions of what God intends may not be valid, and for each of us to be faithful servants to God we must be obedient—even *to the point of inconvenience to our families and to our going beyond our own vision for ministry.*

A reading of Genesis 22 demonstrates to us God's command to Abraham and his instant, unambiguous response to God. God made his request clear. Abraham obeyed immediately!

While our obedience to God is always voluntary, and we are not programmed robots to do his bidding, obedience—in *the right here and the right now*—is a must for anyone seeking God's will.

Reflecting on the four decades of my *not now disobedience*, I can only ponder a similar response to God from Abraham.

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22 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

Genesis 22:2 — NIV