

The Necessity of Obedience  
1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21  
Psalm 16  
Galatians 5:1, 13-25  
Luke 9:51-62

From where did the phrase “skin in the game” come? Rick Lawrence in *Skin in the Game*, published in 2015 relates the following:

According to one story (which may be a legend), in the late 1960s, the now-iconic investor Warren Buffet pried seed money for his very first stock fund from eleven doctors who agreed to kick in \$105,000. Then, in a symbolic act of his own commitment, Buffet added \$100 of his own money to the kitty. No one knows exactly when the phrase “skin in the game” entered the American lingo, but many pinned it on Buffet’s willingness to plunk down his own \$100. The now common phrase captures the essence of an investment of heart and courage and risk, not the mere investment of money. The idea is simple: You have no business asking others to trust you with their money if you’re not willing to put your own resources at risk. If you have no “skin in the game,” no stake of vulnerability, then your engagement is distant and rhetorical rather than personal and visceral. We might play fast and loose with others’ resources but not with our own. Put another way, it’s one thing to *work for* an entrepreneur: it’s quite another to *be* the entrepreneur. The first involves little personal investment; the second demands our heart, our time, our sacrifice, our Commitment, some real “skin.”<sup>1</sup>

God has skin in the game in each of our lives as followers of Jesus. The more we are obedient to God’s will for us, which is to love God, love others, make, build, and support disciples, live the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25, we are being obedient to God’s will. We experience the skin God has in our well-being and growth as a follower of Jesus.

Being a disciple is all about heeding Jesus’ call to follow him. The texts in 1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21, Psalm 16, Galatians 5:1, 13-25, and Luke 9:51-62 speak to the value and necessity of being obedient. For in obedience to the will of God, we begin to speak to power, risk violent confrontation, discern the voice of God, and overcome

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Rick Lawrence, *Skin in the Game* (Kregel, 2015), 13.

moments of self-doubt. Being obedient to God's will requires critical reasoning and blind faith. Obedience to God's will demonstrates trust. And trust enables confidence that God is with us, protects us, and provides for us.

The story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19 demonstrates that critical reasoning equips us to give disruptive critique of social injustice and oppressive forms of power. Spiritual visioning assists us to see how evil is at work in the world. Elijah was commissioned to pass the prophetic baton to Elisha. 1 Kings 19:19-20 reads, "So he set out from there, and found Elisha son of Shaphat, who was plowing. There were twelve yoke of oxen ahead of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle over him. He left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, 'Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.' Then Elijah said to him, 'Go back again; for what have I done to you?'" It was difficult for Elisha to see the spiritual realm outside of the rational realm. But the call to follow God is heard and seen most clearly in the spiritual realm.

Psalm 16 asks us to consider the importance of trust in a more in-depth way than 1 Kings 19 does. The psalmist reveals that God is our refuge. The psalmist exhorts us to trust God and follow God into the world. To trust is to step out in faith. Psalm 16:1 and 11 reads, "Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge'.... You show me the path of life." God calls God's followers in for refuge and calls God's followers out to impact the world.

Galatians 5 challenges followers of Jesus to understand that salvation and sanctification are to represent the incarnation at work in a real world filled with social injustices, not for a privatized and individualistic expression of "me and God." Galatians 5:1 and 13 reads, "For freedom Christ has set us free.... Stand firm, therefore, and do not

submit again to a yoke of slavery.... For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.” God gives God’s people a vision for how things could be and will ultimately be. God’s people have the privilege of living the new life now, but not fully yet. In this way, we dare to live in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

And Luke 9 reminds us that Jesus would not be defined by the miracles he performed. Jesus used critical reasoning and spiritual visioning more often than miracles to teach and recruit followers. Prior to Jesus turning to Jerusalem, “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem,” Jesus was an itinerant minister. Now, Jesus would travel through Samaria on his way to Jerusalem and experience rejection, opposition, and suffering. God, however, does not allow Jesus to be shamed. Through it all, Jesus taught his disciples about realizing the itinerant nature of being disciples. Jesus taught them to keep their hand to the plow and not be diverted from proclaiming the gospel. Like in 1 Kings, Jesus reminds the disciples that going home can be a distraction to what the call of God is at the time. Stepping out of one’s comfort zone, to return to comfort later, is where obedience to the specific call is important.<sup>2</sup>

God’s unconditional love beckons each one of us to allow God to serve us and we in turn to serve others. Use critical reasoning and spiritual visioning to understand the

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freedom you have. Even with the societal issues of inequity, racism, aggression, and violence, we need to keep our faces turned toward Jesus. Follow, seek, and do the work of the kingdom hand in hand with Jesus. Being a disciple is all about heeding Jesus' call to follow him. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations)  
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