

I have a great dog, one of the greatest in the history of the world. She has a sweet disposition, obeys well (most of the time), and is a great companion. I wouldn't want any other dog.

Any yet, for all the affection I feel for her, there's one thing she does that drives me crazy. She stands at the fences and barks at almost everyone that goes by. I scold her and tell her "no" every time I catch her barking, but she still does it.

I've made enough progress that when I yell at her now, this is what happens: she stops barking, comes toward me slowly with her ears and tail sagging, and stops about 5 feet away. She knows I love her, and she's not going to get beaten. But she also knows she's done wrong, and is afraid of the consequences.

Doesn't that scenario sound eerily familiar?

Do we ever "drive God crazy"? Do we ever get told "no", but keep on doing something anyway? Do we ever come back to the master with our heads down and stop as far away as possible?

Hebrews 4:15-16 says, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

We are like dogs in God's kingdom. We were created for his pleasure, and to have fellowship with Him. We have the capacity to be trained to bring greater pleasure to our Master by being more obedient. Do we allow ourselves to be trained? Are we eager to learn so we please the Master more? Or are we like my dog, a sweet-natured companion that can never seem to complete the training, and get over those last few nagging disobedient behaviors? I suspect for most of us, we find ourselves more like my dog.

Can you imagine me beating my dog for barking? Or not feeding her for a few days as punishment? Locking her up in solitary confinement? None of these would

affect her basic character. It takes lots of time and effort to teach her to behave, and still she comes slinking to me every time as if I am going to punish her severely.

That image of her slinking to me becomes less galling when I think that I do the same to Jesus. The High Priest calls me to come “with confidence” (other versions use “boldly”—I like that idea better) into His presence whenever I need mercy and grace, and especially at the moment I need it. And what do I do (and maybe some of you, too)? I come slowly to Him with my head bent, standing as far away as I can to still claim to be in His presence.

We take this communion today as a reminder that we need our High Priest Jesus, who lived a sinless life, to forgive us our failures and wash us clean in the blood of His forgiveness. Lord help me, and each of us, to be more obedient to the direction and training of the Master who loves us beyond what we can conceive.

Prayer