

The Courage to Hope:
A Guide to Thrive in Turbulent Times

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Dr. Matthew Webster

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Section I: The Groundwork for Hope



“And through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on Earth or things in Heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross”
(Colossians 1:20).

¹www.images.squarespace-cdn.com/content/5910c9f3f7e0ab3b19a3fef9/1518715969731-76C3A861GEO5NMGHKZ5F/HRT0015-BlogImage-1-460x289.jpg?content-type=image%2Fjpeg

Introduction:

Matt Webster: Hopeless to Hope-filled



This photo was taken after the race where I had torn my plantar fascia.

I feel compelled to include a small part of my story among the stories of the men and women in the Bible who experienced miracles from God to testify that the same miracle-working power of God is available to you today in Jesus. I believe your story will be one of victory, of experiencing the supernatural work of God in and through your life as you trust God in your journey and you see yourself as God sees you in Christ. Consider your story then to be chapter thirteen of this book, a story to be told to encourage others to hope in God for their miracle.

After overcoming the pain and enduring persistent challenges over the years, I can now see a significant purpose in those trials. They served as a guiding force leading me to receive more of God's love and grace. This, in turn, enabled me to share what I've received with others who, like me, were on the verge of giving up hope. I experienced the truth of what Paul wrote to the Romans, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

Let's start by defining hope. Hope, derived from the Greek word "elpis," is to anticipate with pleasure, an expectation of good.² Hope is what we have when things are going bad. Placing your trust in the God of hope will result in the manifestation of joy, peace, and an abundance of anticipated pleasure of what you believe God will bring about in your future.

²www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1680/kjv/tr/0-1/

I am confident that the contents of this book will serve as a conduit for the Holy Spirit, guiding you towards a profound sense of hope—a confident anticipation of the positive outcomes that God will orchestrate from the challenges you are currently facing.

The world cannot offer you hope, but our loving heavenly Father can and will because that is who He is. I'm filled with anticipation (hope) for you, especially if it's been a while since hope has permeated your life. I believe you will soon experience a deep sense of hope, as you place your trust in God and relish in the thoughts of the marvelous plans He has in store for you.

My Story

In the depths of my struggles, hope seemed elusive as my health deteriorated amidst the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. What started as a battle against the virus evolved into a prolonged struggle of recovery, testing my physical, emotional, and spiritual endurance. I discovered very quickly that my strength, will, determination, and wisdom were not enough to overcome. I was in a losing battle and needed the physical salvation of the Lord.

The pandemic's early days marked my first encounter with the virus, a time when information was scarce, and fear was rampant. The subsequent months of recovering from the virus brought fatigue that lingered, a relentless companion as I navigated a new season of my life, one filled with wondering if I would ever fully recover.

I found reprieve from the mandate to shelter in place, allowing me to focus primarily on my rest and recovery. The relief from my initial isolation swiftly transformed into a feeling of loneliness and overwhelming depression. Aside from my closest family members and my counselor, no one was aware of the profound depths of my despair. Several months passed with minimal signs of recovery when, one night, I received a phone call delivering the heartbreaking news of my sister's death. The combination of mourning the loss of a loved one and grappling with a debilitating illness creates a sense that life is more than one can endure. Adding to the complexity, funeral homes imposed restrictions on the number of individuals allowed in a room simultaneously for a funeral service, citing COVID-related regulations. The number of family and friends who would want to attend my sister's funeral would greatly exceed the allotment of people who could be present together in one room. We did not know what to do.

Following extensive prayer, we decided to hold the visitation at the funeral home, with the intention of scheduling a memorial service at a later time in the hope that COVID restrictions would be eased by then (they weren't). I recall how tangible God's grace was at this point in my life. I had no strength but I leaned into His strength and He gave us wisdom in what to do each step of the way.

We opted to hold the funeral service at my home, despite being restricted to around 40 attendees—still a larger capacity than the funeral home allowed. We recorded the memorial service, and in total, approximately 1000 people watched on Facebook, where the Gospel of Jesus Christ was proclaimed.

After the memorial service was over, I began to deeply grieve the loss of my sister and I started to become overly fatigued. Initially, I attributed my health relapse to the efforts invested in organizing the memorial service and the exhaustion stemming from grief.

During this period of debilitating chronic fatigue, the count of COVID-19 hospitalizations had decreased, allowing for regular visits to the doctor. I underwent a halter monitor test, bloodwork, and several other tests, and all the results came back normal. The doctor indicated that I was likely experiencing Guillain-Barre syndrome, a disorder where the immune system attacks the nerves. This condition can arise after the body has fought a severe illness, such as COVID-19, and the doctor mentioned that it could last for up to three years.

Turning to the internet for answers, I delved into numerous circulating theories about the virus' origins. Multiple articles suggested that individuals with Guillain-Barre syndrome caused by the virus might face a recovery period lasting over three years. I was relieved to discover an online community support group for people enduring the long-term effects of COVID-19, commonly known as long haulers.

Initially, being part of a group of individuals who could relate to my experience was comforting. However, as time passed, the group's original aim to provide hope and answers for fellow long-haulers yielded no helpful information. Instead, it only fostered frustration, fear, misinformation, desperation, and despair.

I went back for further testing and to seek answers from my doctors but each doctor I met with was cautious in their communication, carefully choosing their words and recommendations for the next steps for COVID-19 long haulers like myself.

When the vaccine emerged as a beacon of hope, I eagerly embraced it. Having experienced the virus firsthand, the prospect of a vaccine that could reduce the severity of any potential reinfection was all the assurance I needed. I received a single dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and experienced no adverse effects.

I had recovered about 60% of my normal energy levels, and the idea of resuming running crossed my mind as a means to strengthen my body and gradually dispel any lingering fatigue. I started my exercise routine cautiously by going on brisk walks. What began as brisk walks gradually evolved into slow jogs. Faced with unfavorable weather conditions, particularly in Michigan, I utilized the COVID stimulus check to invest in a treadmill. Over time, my leisurely jogs transformed into full-fledged runs, progressing from half-mile workouts to covering a full mile. Along the way, I encountered a Facebook ad promoting a virtual 5k race, with proceeds benefiting various charities. Inspired, I enlisted my wife and son, and soon other friends and family joined in. After nearly nine months of training, I was ready to tackle the 5k.

The week preceding the race, I encountered an unfortunate incident. With my wife away at a bridal shower, I took on the task of raking leaves in our backyard, choosing not to use a chainsaw to deal with a fallen tree. Safer to rake than to cut I thought.

While engrossed in raking, I took a step back and felt a sharp pain, initially thinking I had been bitten by a snake through my shoe. To my surprise, as I looked down, I realized it wasn't a snake but a very long rusty nail that had pierced almost the entire thickness of my foot.

My drive to urgent care was an eventful one where I successfully managed to drive using only my left foot. After filling out paperwork in an unoccupied COVID-free patient area, I sat for a long time. My bleeding foot left a conspicuous mess on the floor beside my chair. The nurse who called me to a back room attended to the wound, bandaged me up, and administered a tetanus shot. Throughout the process, my mind couldn't help but dwell on the impending race. I took the rest of the week off from running because I needed the wound to heal.

On the day of the race, my foot was still sore. I ran differently to compensate for my injury and because of it at the very end of the race, (the last one-tenth of a mile) I tore my plantar fascia. I painfully limped to the finish line elated I had completed the race but worried about the extent of my injury. Tearing my plantar fascia meant that I would have to stop running all over again for several months. I didn't want to give up any progress I had made in strengthening my body from my long-term illness so I rode a recumbent bike during my rehabilitation.

I was just about all the way recovered from my injury, doing shorter runs again when I was qualified to receive a COVID-19 booster shot. I had no issue receiving the initial shot so I didn't anticipate having any issues from the booster shot.

The booster shot, intended to fortify my defense, instead rendered me bedridden exactly 24 hours after receiving the shot. This illness made my battle with COVID-19 seem like nothing.

Three days of lying in bed getting weaker each passing day led to a call to a Teladoc who was adamant that I go straight to the emergency room. The emergency room was the last place I wanted to go for several reasons so I pressed the doctor for a steroid prescription to give me strength to go in for testing at my doctor's office. Despite reluctance and a stern warning to go to the hospital, the doctor eventually wrote the prescription.

The prescribed steroids worked well, giving me enough strength to go to the doctor's office. I was both relieved and also fearful that in a few days, I was going to receive answers to my new health concerns. The doctor initially conducted a test to determine if my recent health issues were linked to the COVID-19 virus, but the results were negative. When I mentioned receiving the booster shot just 24 hours before falling ill, her demeanor noticeably changed. At this juncture, I had no knowledge that she was treating numerous patients facing similar issues as mine. This would be revealed during my next visit.

The subsequent conversation with my doctor revolved around the findings of my halter monitor, indicating sinus bradycardia with a nighttime heart rate of 32 bpm. It's worth noting that during my recovery from COVID-19, a previous halter monitor test one year prior had confirmed a healthy heart, with nighttime rates not falling below the 50s.

My doctor told me (off the record) that my recent health issues were likely linked to the booster shot. She mentioned that I wasn't the only patient she had encountered with a similar experience. The damage caused by the booster shot resulted in my heart rate staying below 40 bpm for long stretches of the night. It seemed a pacemaker was inevitable.

Curious to review my prior halter monitor test results again, I found that the test had been deleted from my patient portal. The doctor's office explained that they don't store halter monitor tests in the patient portal, (my current halter monitor test was there), and directed me to contact the halter monitor company to access my previous test result. However, when I called them, they stated they had no record of me as a patient.

Several months into my ongoing battle with sinus bradycardia and emerging neurological issues, I ended up spending a night in the emergency room.

Unfortunately, the care I received during this episode turned out to be the most subpar medical care I had ever encountered, whether as a pastor visiting parishioners or as a patient. In my moment of need, it became apparent that the medical community was overwhelmed and inadequately equipped to address my needs. I decided to check myself out after enduring a night without water, enduring an uncomfortably warm room set at 87 degrees, and receiving no assistance in unhooking myself to use the bathroom (a skill I had to learn on my own).

To make matters worse, the room I slept in was unsanitary, with the bed stained in blood from the previous patient, a discovery made only two hours before my departure. The room was untidy, with an overflowing garbage can, and the urine sample they had requested from me remained beside my bed throughout the entire night.

As the nurse escorted me for X-rays, my hospital bed kept bumping into the walls' corners, leading to discomfort and nearly tipping me onto the floor. The decision to prioritize X-rays before bloodwork was imprudent. While undergoing the X-ray, I was instructed to hold my breath multiple times, which elevated my carbon dioxide levels. Rather than giving time for those levels to return to normal, they immediately performed a blood test when I returned to the room. I was initially concerned to learn that I had an elevated level of carbon dioxide in my bloodstream, but thanks to researching it on my phone, I discovered it was the result of my blood being drawn right after my X-rays.

You might be wondering how one could receive such inadequate care. Did I not use the button to alert the nurses for assistance? I indeed clicked the button multiple times. The first time I needed assistance came about thirty minutes following my second blood draw and I noticed I had soaked my gown with sweat and sensed that something was amiss.

After a considerable delay, the nurse entered and inquired about my needs. I asked whether the room felt warm or if it was a manifestation of my condition. Despite being in the room for less than a minute, the nurse stated it seemed fine but agreed to check the thermostat. To my surprise, they discovered it was set at 87 and offered to lower it. I requested the temperature be lowered and also asked for some water. Strangely, this marked the last encounter I had with that nurse.

Much later, I pressed the button again, and a new nurse arrived due to a shift change. I requested water for the second time, and a few minutes later, I heard a disturbance from across the hall—it sounded like a patient throwing their tray. Perhaps they, too, hadn't received any water. Despite waiting through the night, the water never arrived. Faced with two options—either create a commotion by tossing my medical tray (they responded promptly to the other room) or check myself out and head home for water—I chose the latter. I did take something home from the hospital, I developed a nasty cough and chest congestion that I suspect to be the illness the patient one room over from me had. I had such little interaction with the nurses, that I don't think they transmitted it to me. I believe I picked the virus up from using the unisex bathroom. I'm uncertain about state laws concerning the number of bathrooms per hospital patient, but I can confirm that this hospital wing had only one shared unisex bathroom. Despite having only one bathroom in that wing to maintain, it wasn't cleaned all night and remained one of the dirtiest bathrooms I have ever used.

Perhaps you can relate to the frustration of receiving inadequate care and no answers. Don't let that experience diminish your hope. I do not blame the doctors and nurses. I can't even imagine the challenges nurses and doctors face daily and on top of that being thrust into the chaotic COVID-19 pandemic and the fallout from vaccine injuries too. Instead, I want to express my gratitude for those in the medical community, particularly the remarkable men and women whom God is using in incredible ways to care for those who are suffering. I am truly thankful for their service.

If you are in the medical community and are reading this book, I just want you to know that I am grateful for all you do for all the patients that you care for. I shared my negative hospital experience to convey that, surprisingly, all these circumstances were part of God's remarkable plan to bring blessings into my life. The underlying message was unmistakable – God was assuring me of His provision for my healing. When the medical community can not help us, there is One who can. I was now in a place like the Biblical woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:25-34) who spent all she had on doctors and only grew worse. Her deteriorating condition and lack of answers from the world positioned her ready to receive the healing touch of Jesus Christ.

With no improvement in my heart and the looming appointment with my cardiologist, a pacemaker seemed like a foregone conclusion. Through the haze of illness, the Lord spoke to my heart, redirecting my path away from a pacemaker and toward His divine healing.

Two nights before my appointment with a cardiologist my heart stayed above 40 bpm for the first time for the entire night. It was enough evidence for the cardiologist to not recommend a pacemaker.

While I continued to confront daily struggles, both physical and neurological, the Lord's guidance led me to the creation of this book. I started by studying men and women in the Bible who the Lord did incredible things in their lives. In the pages of Scripture, I discovered promises of restoration, strength, and salvation. I discovered a deeper level of His love for me and the grace that He promised to provide when life became more than I could handle.

My path to recovery was full of many days where I felt like giving up, but ultimately God was going to bring good out of the bad, joy and peace from the sorrow, and restore unto me even more than what I had lost. After all, He had promised it in His Word and I was willing to trust that what He had promised He was also able to perform (Romans 4:21).

What I found in a deep study of God's Word is that my healing/miracle would not be found in anything that I could do (exercise, supplements, medical procedures, resting, breathing apps, stretching/massage routines) but through the wholeness and health found in the life of Christ. This is something I could share with everyone.

My battle lasted for years. Not days, weeks, or months (cue the theme song to Friends). I hope this is speaking to someone who feels defeated, who feels like giving up because in some moments I was there too. At my lowest points walking from one point in a room to another felt like climbing Mount Everest- and

I didn't want to keep climbing anymore. But the truth is that I have the spirit of an overcomer, the Holy Spirit in me (2 Corinthians 6:16). In Christ, you are an overcomer. After getting clearance from my doctor. I got back on the treadmill and it hurt, and it was discouraging because I was nowhere near where I was before. A fast walk for a short bit seemed too much. Running again felt impossible.

After months of pressing through the pain, I finally started to run again. I set a goal to run another 5k on my birthday. With all that I had been through with my heart and my nerves, it would take a miracle to complete a 5k but I sensed that God was leading me to do this. I was progressing well and then I suffered a knee injury two months before the scheduled 5k race. Flashbacks to the nail injury to my foot all over again. I still did not give up hope and believed God would heal me and make it possible to run in this race.

My doctor's appointment was set for the week of the race, and I inquired about the potential harm to my knee if I decided to run. She advised against running, suggesting continued rest. However, she expressed the belief that running wouldn't cause any further damage. This marked another virtual race for me, and this time, the flexibility allowed me to run it at my convenience. I had set a goal to run on my birthday, and I had no intention of altering my plans.

During the race, I adjusted my speed at various intervals, uncertain of my projected time. I couldn't recall my previous 5k time before experiencing sinus bradycardia to use as a reference either. My pace varied throughout the race based on the level of pain

in my knee. My goal wasn't a specific time; I simply aimed to run to the best of my ability and finish the race without limping across the finish line. I recall praying during the race, asking the Lord for the strength to finish, and hoping that my story could serve as a testimony of His grace to others.

A miracle happened that day, with an injured knee and a damaged heart I finished the race two seconds faster than I did before I suffered a heart injury.

Two seconds doesn't seem like much, but to me, it was a miracle. I learned on the treadmill that God doesn't just bring restoration in our lives to get us back to where we were, He restores unto us even more. In the Lord's restoration, we come out ahead.

I wish I could tell you that after my victorious race my health story ended with, "And He lived happily ever after". However, happiness is dependent upon what happens to us. Happiness is unlike joy in that it depends upon favorable external circumstances. One minute you can be happy, but the next minute when something bad happens your happiness is nowhere to be found. Living happily ever after is reserved for fairy tales and we still live in a fallen world and experience hardships, trials, and tribulations that can take away our happiness. However, God offers us something so much better than happiness, and nothing and no one can ever take it from us.

A few weeks after my race my heart rate began to drop at night and my neurological system was twice as bad as it was before. To say that happiness left me would be understating my emotional state. However, when happiness is gone, joy can still be found.

The wonderful thing about joy is that joy is not dependent upon what happens to us. "The joy of the Lord is my strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). Joy is found in the truth that God is Sovereign. Our joy comes from and flows out of our relationship with God. The by-product of joy is peace. As I look to and spend time with Jesus, I enter rest. As I trust in Him, I delight in Him and my joy is found in superabundance.

After all of the miraculous and wonderful things that had happened along my path to healing, I found myself once more at one of my low points when I had a dream. In this dream, I was visited by Satan. He didn't come as a scary entity with horns and a pitchfork. He came masquerading himself as an angel of light which is what 2 Corinthians 11:14 says he does.

The reason he came was to tempt me by showing that he could take away my pain. What this revealed is that he was behind the recent attacks I was facing. It also meant that he was trying to prevent me from receiving what the Lord was bringing to me, the healing that was just around the corner. The Holy Spirit instructed me in my dream to start singing God's praises. When I began to sing, the devil did not like that. He tried to get me to listen to what he was saying but I sang louder and louder and he left. The truth is that I already have the victory over what has come against me, I don't need to hear a single word the defeated enemy has to say to me. His visitation was a revelation that I was getting close to experiencing my breakthrough.

During the Christmas Eve Service of 2023, the church prayed for my healing. My mother was in attendance that day and it pained her to see how bad my symptoms had become. I wasn't surprised that my

symptoms got worse after the Holy Spirit empowered me to resist the devil's temptation, it inspired me to believe that I was getting closer to being fully healed. A few days later when I got together to celebrate Christmas with my family (we celebrated Christmas on the Friday after that year) she told me she had been praying for me and that the Lord revealed to her that I was to eliminate all sugar from my diet for 14 days. Eager to receive my healing I cut sugar out the very next day.

One thing about eliminating sugar from your diet is it is a lot harder than you might think to do. I had done it many years ago for thirty days while on the *Whole 30 Diet*.³ Eliminating sugar means that you can eat meat, vegetables, and some grains (not bread as it has sugar added). Sugar is in everything and so your body is used to having it. When you eliminate sugar, you don't feel very good. My detox took me through New Year's which is the absolute worst time to not have any sugar. Eliminating sugar did not bring about my healing and instead, my heart rate at night dropped back down to 34 bpm with even more immobilizing neurological flare-ups than usual.

I truly do believe that God revealed this plan to my mother for me to eliminate sugar.

Why would God tell my mom to have me do something that only made me worse? The reason is so that when my healing would come, I would know that it was not by my strength, wisdom, or strong will to exercise or make dietary changes. The victory, the praise, and the glory belong to the Lord. This was the

³Melissa Hartwig Urban. Dallas Hartwig. *The Whole 30: The 30-Day Guide to Total Health and Freedom*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. April 21, 2015.

last piece of the puzzle to eliminate any crazy notion that the healing I would experience came from any other source than Jesus Christ. God's plan was not for the elimination of sugar to bring my healing, because the elimination of sugar might not and probably wouldn't result in your healing either. However, the physical salvation of the Lord is available to all regardless of what the need is.

Eliminating sugar as a means to reduce inflammation and bring about healing in my body reminded me of a story in the Bible of one's man healing. In John chapter 9 there is an interesting story of a time when Jesus healed a blind man's eyes by spitting on the ground and making mud and putting the mud over his eyes.

John 9:6-7: "After saying this, He spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," He told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing."

Jesus could have healed this blind man immediately, do you believe that? However, instead of instant healing, Jesus first put mud over his eyes, ensuring he really couldn't see anything. There are levels of blindness, and who knows, perhaps he had the slightest of vision before. Maybe the blind man could make out shadows, but now with mud over his eyes, he couldn't see anything that's for sure.

What was Jesus doing? Jesus was demonstrating through the use of mud that all our body parts come from the ground, "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground" (Genesis 2:7). What we know about creation is that it is fallen, and so the work of

creation (mud) cannot open a blind man's eyes. Removing sugar from my diet can not heal a damaged heart, and stop the vast neurological conditions I had. But the work of redemption can! That is why Jesus sent the blind man to the pool of Siloam. The word "Siloam" means "sent",⁴ referring to the sent One, Jesus. When the blind man washed his eyes in the pool of the sent One, he received supernatural healing for his eyes.

When we look to Jesus, the sent One who came to redeem us with the price of His blood, and we rest in His finished work, we too will receive the miracle we need. While adhering to diets and engaging in exercise is beneficial, natural methods have their limitations. Our extraordinary healing and physical well-being are attainable through the One sent to rescue us from the consequences of the fall of Adam, as stated in Galatians 3:13. He has redeemed us from sickness, pain, sorrow, depression, poverty, and even death. While some recognize Him as the Creator, we can now acknowledge Him as our Redeemer. Where the work of creation cannot save us, His work of redemption can and has!

I want to be clear that if you have serious medical problems you should go to the doctor. Sometimes God works through doctors and nurses to bring about our healing. Praise God for gifting men and women in this way. I went to see doctors multiple times and had many tests run. I went to see specialists too. What I discovered in my situation is that when the doctors

⁴www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4611/niv/mgnt/0-1/

were unable to provide any answers (outside the sinus bradycardia diagnosis) and low B-12 in bloodwork (common for all who suffer neurological disorders), my answer would come from the Lord. God would use the low points in my life to show me He was with me in the worst of times. He would teach me that He would provide for me His abundant grace as I trusted Him in the circumstances I had no control over.

Whenever my symptoms would come upon me, I used those moments as an opportunity to look to the cross. Recalling the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the face of Satan's temptations, I chose to sing praises to God. In moments of physical discomfort and the feeling of being imprisoned by my struggles, I emulated the example of Paul and Silas in prison, lifting my voice in praise. I desired to witness the chains of sickness breaking away from my body as I walked in the victory of the Lord. When the temptation came to doubt my healing, I would sing.

"Praise the name of Jesus,
Praise the name of Jesus.
He's my Rock, He's my fortress,
He's my Deliverer.
(My remix version added "He's my Healer")
In Him shall I trust.
Praise the name of Jesus."⁵

My physical conditions were real. I had years of Apple Watch data to prove it. You can't psyche yourself out to experience sinus bradycardia (extremely low heart rate) nor could you trick the halter monitors.

⁵Roy Hicks Jr. Praise the Name of Jesus. Latter Rain Music (Admin. By Capitol CMG Publishing) 1976.

Many times, I could hide my symptoms, sometimes I could not. When my nervous system caused me to fall or when I was unable to do anything other than lay in bed because my body was gripped by such tightness and pain, those around me suffered too.

While every single physical problem I had was real and unpredictable, the greater truth is that Jesus already paid for my healing as His body bore the punishment I so rightfully deserved.

Romans 8:2 says: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."

How could such a great law, the law of sin and death be overtaken? Because a greater law came, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ.

Everything on Earth is subject to the law of gravity. However, this law is broken every day at airports all over the world because there is a law that is higher than the law of gravity. Whenever an airplane takes off, the law of thrust and lift overcomes the law of gravity.

Likewise, there is only one law that is higher than the law of sin and death and the effects we experience from it such as sickness, disease, and death. The only way to be set free from the law of sin and death is when the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is released into your life. The greater law of the Spirit of life is released when you receive the gift of no condemnation into your life (Romans 8:1-2)!

The only way for people to be empowered in their lives, to walk in peace, joy, and faith, and to live the abundant life that Jesus came to give us—is to understand that there is now no condemnation in Christ.

Because Jesus paid such a high price for my healing and my righteousness, I knew that His victorious life would prevail over my situation. All that remained was the question of when. There would be purpose in the timing of my healing too.

Jesus arrived after Lazarus had died to show that He is the Resurrection and the Life. Nobody comes back from the grave after 4 days, but there was Lazarus as proof of what Jesus did and who Jesus was. God was glorified in the timing of the miracle and He will be glorified in the timing of your miracle too. Trust Him.

After my 14-day detox of sugar was over I started looking to the Word of God (Jesus) to see myself as healed and whole which caused me to begin to feel stronger internally which caused me to become stronger externally. I was training my body to be obedient to the Word of God (Romans 12:1-2). This was a grace that I was receiving, God's power made perfect in my weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). I still had challenging days to be sure, but I would not allow my symptoms to be my focus any longer. When people would ask how I was doing, I would no longer tell of what symptoms I was experiencing that day (my weakness) I would tell of what God was doing/ revealing unto me (His power). God is good all the time, and all the time God is good. I would focus on the healing and wholeness that was mine in Christ, and I would ask others to believe in prayer that I was being healed.

When a symptom came upon me, I would go back to what God's Word says about healing.

- "Heal me, Lord, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for You are the one I praise" (Jeremiah 17:14).

- “Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all His benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases” (Psalm 103:2-3).
- “Surely He took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered Him punished by God, stricken by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds, we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4-5).
- “I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you” (Exodus 15:26b).
- “Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven” (James 5:14-15).
- “The Lord sustains them on their sickbed and restores them from their bed of illness” (Psalm 41:3).
- “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people” (Matthew 4:23).
- “When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to Him, and He drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick” (Matthew 8:16).

- "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom and healing every disease and sickness" (Matthew 9:35).
- "He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering'" (Mark 5:34).
- "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free" (Luke 4:18).
- "But the crowds learned about it and followed Him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing" (Luke 9:11).
- "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil because God was with Him" (Acts 10:38).

I gained an understanding of the purpose behind my physical challenges. The deliverance from my physical struggles was ordained long ago so I might bring others hope in God's Word. Through the words inscribed on these pages, the Holy Spirit would lead others to experience the salvation found in Jesus Christ.

I believe that you are destined to witness a miracle in your life. May this book serve as a testament to the transformative power of faith. May you be inspired to trust in God's Word and His boundless love for you.

His unfolding plan will manifest the marvel of His healing in your life. The solution you seek is not within the confines of the world, it resides in the name of Jesus.

Chapter 1:

John: Diving into the Depths of God's Love for You



6

The starting point to receiving the miracle that you seek from God is to recognize the salvation that Jesus offers to you. Once you believe Jesus can heal you the next step is to know that He is willing and wants to heal you for you are the disciple whom Jesus loves.

I once held the belief that within the group of Jesus' 12 disciples, John held a special place as the Lord's favorite disciple. This belief stemmed from the numerous instances in the book of John where he identifies himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23, John 19:26, John 20:2, John 21:7, John 21:20). But then I realized that this phrase was not used in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is a phrase that John used only to describe himself. The remarkable truth is that John was actively receiving the personal love Jesus had for him. When you see yourself as beloved by God your entire perspective about everything you encounter in life will change including your belief in God's desire to bless you.

Were you aware that John's aspiration for us is to adopt the same endearing title for ourselves? This is why he writes the following:

1 John 2:7: "**Beloved**, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard."

1 John 3:2: "**Beloved**, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

1 John 3:21: "**Beloved**, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God."

1 John 4:1: "**Beloved**, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God,

because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

1 John 4:7: “**Beloved**, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.”

1 John 4:11: “**Beloved**, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

What does “beloved” mean? Agapētós: dearly loved, favorite.⁷ This is what you are in Christ. You are dearly loved by God and you are favored by Him. Reflect on the challenges you are currently encountering and consider the God who effortlessly brought everything into existence with His spoken word (Genesis 1:3). Contemplate the depth of His love for you and trust that He is actively working to bring about a solution to your situation—one that not only blesses you but also extends blessings to others.

Receiving your miracle happens through the revelation knowledge that Jesus paid the price for you to inherit everything that is His (Romans 8:17). Acknowledge God’s profound love for you as His child, and don’t hesitate to ask Him for what you need. Believe that what you ask for He is delighted to give to you.

John 14:13-14: “And I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask Me for anything in My name, and I will do it.”

⁷www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g27/kjv/tr/0-1/

“Whatever you request in My name, I am committed to fulfilling it.” It’s essential to recognize that this invitation isn’t an endorsement for pursuing personal gain, like winning the lottery, in Jesus’ name. The purpose behind your request should align with glorifying the Father through Jesus. When Jesus says, “In my name,” He emphasizes that the requests should seek His renown, reflecting His divine value and the boundless sacrifice on the cross. The key for us to receive what we ask is to filter every prayer through the lens of prioritizing His fame, His worth, His redemption, and His wisdom. Asking for healing aligns perfectly with this framework as God is glorified through your healing. Your healing was purchased through Jesus’ finished work. Answered prayers build your trust in your heavenly Father and provide all you need to carry out the works He did and even greater ones He is calling you to (John 14:12).

A practical key to receiving divine health and provision includes learning from the examples of the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian who received miracles despite being Gentiles which made them undeserving. Their blessings were manifestations of God’s grace, goodness, and kindness.

The widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16) and Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5:1-14) placed their trust in God and looked to the Savior, and they experienced salvation, healing, and divine provision.

Right believing leads to right victorious living. Contrary to common belief, it’s not sin that hinders people from receiving God’s healing and provision; grace surpasses sin, and if sin could impede grace, it would have never started.

The keys to embracing divine health and provision today involve:

1. Embracing the belief that Jesus' finished work has already made you righteous.
2. Confessing "I am the righteousness of God in Christ," leading to an effortless inheritance.
3. Regularly immersing yourself in the Gospel of Christ, recognizing that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

What else can we learn from John the disciple who learned how to receive the love of Jesus?

John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, the one who leaned on His chest and heard His heartbeat, wrote this:

"Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (3 John 1:2).

Being healthy and well-provided-for like John's prayer in 3 John 1:2 is God's will for us.

"Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.
But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5).

Isaiah 53 is a Messianic prophecy that tells us that Jesus fully paid for our healing at the cross.

The Hebrew word for “griefs” is “kholee,” which means “diseases.”⁸ And the Hebrew word for “sorrows” is “makov,” which means “pains”.⁹ This verse speaks of physical healing provided through Jesus’ atonement for us.

This is also proven in Matthew 8:17 where Isaiah 53 is quoted: “When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: “He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses” (Matthew 8:16–17).

Matthew 8:17 quotes Isaiah 53:4, making it clear that Isaiah’s prophecy is talking about the healing of our physical sicknesses that apply to us today.

So how might we experience all the wonderful blessings Jesus died to give us? Embrace the love of God as practiced by the Apostle John, who identified himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” Fix your gaze on God’s unwavering and constant love for you, finding peace and stability therein. God desires us to be occupied with Christ, not consumed by self. In moments when we miss the mark, God directs His gaze to your sacrificial lamb—Jesus—rather than focusing on you and your sin.

As a believer, you possess Jesus, the Lamb of God. The righteousness of the sacrificial lamb is imputed to those who believe in Jesus, and the sins of the person are transferred to the lamb, a divine exchange that unfolded at the cross (Romans 3:22).

⁸www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2483/kjv/wlc/0-1/

⁹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h4341/kjv/wlc/0-1/

At that pivotal moment, everything we deserved plunged into Jesus, and in return, we received Jesus' righteousness, along with the fullness of God's blessings and favor.

At Calvary, a divine exchange took place where Jesus took upon Himself all the negatives in your life caused by the effects of sin in this world, and gave you all that He is and has!

In the New Covenant of Grace, God takes all the initiative: He loves us first, He forgives us first (Colossians 2:13), and He accepts us first (Romans 15:7). And as we receive from the abundance of His love, we can love, forgive, and accept others.¹⁰ This is total well-being in our body, soul, and spirit.

My health challenges extended beyond the physical realm, encompassing spiritual and mental aspects as well. A fierce battle raged in my mind, pitting my beliefs against my feelings. While the symptoms, pain, and struggles were undeniably real, the unwavering truth of God's love and His promise of healing in His Word instilled in me the confidence that healing would come.

My symptoms shouted, "You are only getting worse. You'll never get any better. Look at all that you are missing out on." Over time, I discovered that I didn't have to heed the voice of doubt and despair; instead, I could embrace the good news and believe the report of the Lord that proclaimed, "By His stripes, I am healed." In moments of feeling my worst, gripped by fear and isolation in my struggle, I had my mind

¹⁰Paul Ellis. The Grace Commentary. www.thegracecommentary.com/1-john-4/#1john4v19

renewed in His Word, that I was not alone (Romans 12:2).

There will be times when you can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, but will you see the Light who is with you in the tunnel?

Lessons from John

Recognizing Jesus' salvation. The journey to receiving miracles begins with acknowledging the salvation offered by Jesus and understanding His willingness to heal, especially because you are the disciple whom Jesus loves.

John's revelation of love. John's unique description as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" reveals an active reception of Jesus' love for him that was personal. Embracing oneself as "beloved" transforms perspectives on life's challenges.

Asking in Jesus' name. John 14:13-14 underscores the effectiveness of praying in Jesus' name, emphasizing requests aligned with glorifying the Father through Jesus, focusing on His fame, worth, redemption, and wisdom.

Divine health and provision through grace. Learning from the examples of Gentiles like the widow of Zarephath and Naaman, believers are encouraged to trust in God's grace for miracles.

God's Will for health and provision and embracing healing as a promise. John articulates God's desire for believers in 3 John 1:2, praying for their prosperity and good health, in harmony with God's overarching Will.

This aligns with the understanding derived from Isaiah 53, emphasizing that Jesus, through His sacrificial act, not only bore our sins but also carried our diseases and pains, securing the promise of physical healing on the cross.

Believers are encouraged to embrace divine healing as a fulfilled promise through Jesus' sacrifice. Recognizing God's love as the driving force behind this promise, believers can effortlessly receive His blessings. The Hebrew words in Isaiah 53 specifically address physical ailments, reinforcing the certainty of God's redemptive plan for health and provision. Thus, aligning with God's Will involves acknowledging and confidently receiving His promised healing in every aspect of life.

Chapter 1: John: Diving into the Depths of God's Love for You Small Group Questions

How does recognizing yourself as being beloved by God impact your perspective on challenges and circumstances in your life?

How can adopting the nickname "beloved", as John encourages, influence our daily lives and interactions with others?

How does aligning our requests with the desire to glorify the Father impact the way we pray and the content of our prayers?

Consider the stories of the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian. How does their experience as Gentiles and undeserving individuals highlight the grace, goodness, and kindness of God in providing miracles?

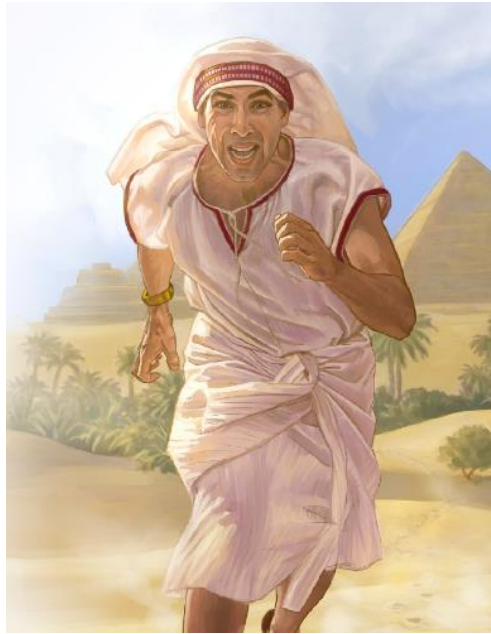
Reflect on the statement that in the New Covenant of grace, God takes all the initiative. How does understanding God's love, forgiveness, and grace influence our ability to love, forgive, and extend grace to others?

Explore the concept of the sacrificial lamb and the divine exchange that occurred at the cross for us. What does it reveal about our standing before God and whether we would ever be judged for our sins?

Discuss the idea of embracing divine healing as a fulfilled promise through Jesus' sacrifice. How does recognizing God's love as the driving force behind this promise impact our confidence in receiving His blessings?

Use the space below to write down a prayer request that you have. If you'd like you can share it with your small group to include them in praying for you. How does John 14:13-14 help you to have confidence that God will answer your prayer?

Chapter 2:
Moses: A Story of Deliverance, Redemption,
and Destiny



11

“Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son” (Exodus 2:1-2). That son wouldn’t be named until months later when he received the name Moses (Exodus 2:10).

In the heart of ancient Egypt, a realm governed by opulence and power, the birth of Moses emerges as a testament to the intricate tapestry woven by destiny and divinity. A Hebrew child is born against the backdrop of a decree condemning male infants to death.

“Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: “Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live” (Exodus 1:22).

“When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months” (Exodus 2:2b). Moses’ mother eventually could not hide Moses any longer and semi-follows the decree given to Hebrew males but instead of throwing him into the Nile “she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile” (Exodus 2:3b).

Moses from the very beginning had a special calling on his life. You also have a divine calling too. Ephesians 1:4 states, “For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.”

In the case of Moses, Moses’ birth was marked by divine intervention. His preservation in a basket on

the Nile and his adoption into Pharaoh's household were part of God's providential plan, allowing Moses to play a significant role in the liberation of the Israelites. Just as we were chosen by God in Christ, Moses was chosen for a specific purpose—to lead the Israelites out of bondage. God had set him apart for this role, and Moses' life unfolded according to the divine plan. The basket Moses was placed in wasn't what saved him but God's providential plan. Remember the Nile contains deadly spiders, crocodiles, hippos, snakes, and mosquitos (full of disease), none of which the basket offered protection against.

Miriam, the elder sister of the newborn Moses, watches with bated breath as her mother places the infant in a basket. Moses was laid into a straw-thatched basket and was picked up by Egyptian royalty. Jesus too was born without shelter, laid into a straw-filled stable, and was visited by Herodian royalty.

Moses' story foreshadows the coming Messiah in many ways. Pharaoh ordered the killing of Hebrew male babies, and King Herod ordered the slaughter of all male babies in Bethlehem to try to eliminate Jesus. Moses' mother took him to safety on the Nile, and Jesus' parents took him to safety in Egypt (Matthew 2:13-23). Moses freed God's people from slavery in Egypt, and Jesus freed God's people from the slavery of sin.

"Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank" (Exodus 2:5).

Should the reigning Pharaoh be indeed Rameses II, as I suspect, then his daughter emerges from a royal lineage comprising between 40 to 53 daughters.¹²

It is conceivable that she resided within the confines of one of the numerous opulent hunting lodges generously strewn across the sprawling delta region, a testament to the lavish lifestyle befitting the ruler of ancient Egypt. If this was the case, the basket Moses was placed in was right outside her royal residence.

“She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This is one of the Hebrew babies,” she said. Then his sister asked Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you” (Exodus 2:6-7)?

Did you observe the way God intervened through Miriam? She vigilantly observed the unfolding events concerning her brother. When the right moment presented itself, she engaged in conversation with the Pharaoh’s daughter, providing a solution. “Should I go find someone who can nurse the baby for you?”

“Yes, go,” she answered. So the girl went and got the baby’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.” So the woman took the baby and nursed him” (Exodus 2:8-9).

Moses’ mother was now compensated for nurturing her son. What a divine intervention. Amid a decree mandating the death of all male Hebrew children, God

¹²www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_children_of_Rameses_II

safeguarded Moses and ensured financial support for his family.

God orchestrated for Moses to be raised in the household of his mother and father. We don't know how long he stayed with his mother but scholars estimate it could have been anywhere from 6 months (making him 9 months old) up to the age of four.¹³ I believe it was long enough for Moses to gain a distinct understanding of his identity as a Hebrew, a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, affording him the opportunity to learn about the nature of God (Exodus 2:7).

"When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water" (Exodus 2:10).

Moses' name would tell the story of how God would save the Israelites out of Egypt. Just as Moses was drawn out of the water, God would later draw the Hebrew people out of the water—the Red Sea— to save them from the pursuing Egyptians.

Because of Moses' upbringing, he learned to read and write and the first five books of the Bible were written because of it. Moses grew up in the palace of Pharaoh, the highest place of esteem in his culture. Jesus grew up in the synagogues of Jerusalem, the highest place of esteem in His culture.

Moses carried the Law down from Mt. Sinai and pointed to the Gospel. Jesus fulfilled the Law and is the Gospel.

¹³www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/718270/jewish/At-what-age-should-a-child-stop-nursing.htm

Moses was royalty in Egypt but left his position of power to serve and save enslaved people. Jesus was royalty in Heaven but left His position of power to serve and save an enslaved world.

Moses was inconceivably both royalty and slave at the same time, being a prince but also a Hebrew. Jesus is inconceivably both God and man at the same time, being the transcendent Son of God (1 John 4:14-16) but also born of Mary and referred to as the "Son of Man" (Matthew 20:28, Mark 14:62, etc...).

Moses chose 12 spies and sent them to the Promised Land. Jesus chose 12 disciples and sent them to proclaim the truer and better-Promised Land, one not of earthly geography under God but one of spiritual restoration with God.

Moses first initiated the Passover Lamb to absorb the wrath of God. Jesus is the final and ultimate Passover Lamb who fully absorbed the wrath of God for sin once and for all.

From the moment sin entered the world, God made it clear that Jesus was the solution. He unveiled His plan of salvation through the story of Moses, a deliverer of God's people, to foreshadow Christ—the ultimate redeemer, a ransom for our sins.

Moses occupied an ideal role for God to employ him as the deliverer of His people, being both a member of Egyptian royalty and a Hebrew with genuine compassion for his people. Within the palace, he witnessed stark disparities between privilege and oppression, fostering a growing empathy that would ultimately mold his destiny. Moses had a firsthand experience of the oppression his people endured, and

as he matured, he confronted the harsh realities of their plight. However, Moses succumbed to sin.

“One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?” The man said, “Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and thought, “What I did must have become known.” When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well” (Exodus 2:11-15).

While Moses may not have addressed his people’s oppression appropriately, it doesn’t negate the fact that God was actively orchestrating a plan for Moses to emerge as the deliverer of His people. Our past mistakes, similarly, do not render us ineligible to receive the blessings found in Christ. Within the transformative grace of Jesus, our sins are forgiven forever and we are enabled to receive God’s blessings by faith. As the Apostle Paul beautifully articulates in Philippians 3:13-14. “Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

This verse underscores the idea that, in Christ, we are not defined by our past mistakes. Rather, we are

invited to focus on the transformative journey ahead, guided by the promise of God's calling and the heavenly prize awaiting those who receive His Son. Our past failures are forgiven and not remembered in Christ (Hebrews 10:17), and we find the strength to press on toward a future adorned with His blessings.

Moses' life apart from the palace

Shortly after fleeing Pharaoh, Moses intervened when the shepherds tried to drive away the daughters of the priest of Midian while they were attempting to provide water for their father's flock. Moses, acting as a defender, stood up for the women and helped them water their flock. The daughters later recounted the incident to their father, Reuel (also known as Jethro), describing Moses as an Egyptian (probably because Moses was still wearing his Egyptian garb) who rescued them from the aggressive shepherds. This event ultimately led to Moses being welcomed into the household of Jethro and played a role in shaping the subsequent chapters of Moses' life (Exodus 2:16-19). The lesson to learn from this moment in Moses' life is for us to not allow past failures to negatively influence and rob us of future opportunities. We are forgiven in Christ. Focus on God's great love for you in Jesus, the love that gave His Son to remove your sins. Allow the love of Christ to be displayed through your life toward others as you recognize the righteousness of God in Christ that you have. As you do you will be ready to respond in love.

"Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, "I have become a foreigner in a foreign land." During that long period, the king of Egypt

died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and He remembered His Covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them” (Exodus 2:21-25).

While significant events were unfolding with the Israelite people, we are told what was also happening in Moses’ life. “Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God” (Exodus 3:1).

In the wilderness, God was preparing Moses and His people to receive His deliverance. Moses’ experience as a shepherd played a crucial role in preparing him for his leadership role in guiding the Israelites through the wilderness. This period of shepherding, specifically in the service of his father-in-law Jethro in Midian, provided Moses with important lessons and qualities that would prove essential for his later role as the leader of the Israelites. Our wilderness experiences are opportunities for us to grow in our relationship with God, preparing us for what is to come.

As a shepherd, Moses was responsible for the well-being and safety of the flock. This experience honed his leadership skills and taught him the importance of caring for those under his charge.

Shepherding is often a patient and repetitive task. Moses had to endure the challenges of tending to a flock, dealing with the unpredictable nature of animals, and navigating the vast and often harsh wilderness. This fostered patience and perseverance in him.

The wilderness setting of Moses' shepherding years mirrored the environment through which the Israelites would later travel. His intimate knowledge of the terrain, coupled with his experience of relying on God in the solitude of the wilderness, became valuable when leading the Israelites through the desert.

Shepherding, a humble occupation, taught Moses humility. It also made him reliant on God for guidance and protection, reinforcing his dependence on divine strength and wisdom. God often uses seemingly ordinary experiences to prepare individuals for extraordinary tasks. Moses' time as a shepherd was a preparatory phase for the monumental task of leading the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness toward the Promised Land.

The years Moses spent as a shepherd served as a divine training ground, equipping him with the skills, qualities, and experiences necessary for the challenging journey that lay ahead.

"Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush" (Exodus 3:1-2). The Angel of the Lord is a theophany, a manifestation of Jesus to a person. Remember that every time the Scripture says, "The Angel of the Lord" it is talking about Jesus. We will discuss why this is in chapter nine with Gideon's story.

As Moses approached the burning bush, God called out to him from within it. This was an unexpected encounter, as Moses was not anticipating any divine intervention in his life. God identified Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3:15),

revealing His eternal nature and Covenant with Moses' forefathers.

God proceeded to commission Moses for a significant task – to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, their land of slavery, and into the Promised Land. Moses initially hesitated and expressed his feelings of inadequacy, but God assured him that He would be with him (the same thing Jesus said to Gideon) and guide him throughout the journey.

When God sends Moses on the mission to deliver His people, Moses in Exodus 4:10 said to the LORD, "I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since You have spoken to Your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." Moses did not see the giftings God had placed inside him for this very task. However, Luke testifies to what God had done for Moses. "When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action" (underlined emphasis is mine) [Acts 7:21].

God has a special calling on your life and He has gifted you for the things He has prepared for you to do just like Moses. Do you recognize your gifting and have you allowed God to use it for His glory? If you are unsure about what your spiritual gifting might be I published a book that will help you identify and use the spiritual gift God has given to you. The book is titled, "The 19 Spiritual Gifts of the Body of Christ".¹⁴

"He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of His

¹⁴Dr. Matthew Webster. The 19 Spiritual Gifts of the Body of Christ. Kindle Direct Publishing 2023.

own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time” (2 Timothy 1:9). “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

Moses’ story connected with me as I read Moses’ painful and devastating moments did not derail God’s plans for him. I can’t imagine what it would have felt like to have God orchestrate events in your life to become a part of Egyptian royalty while there was a mandate to have you killed at birth. After spending years living the palace life, Moses threw it all away in a fit of rage and found himself on the run for his life from Pharaoh. Moses stands up to the injustice he sees at a well (this time he handled conflict properly) and ends up married and a part of a new family as a result. Moses became a nomadic shepherd and things settled in for him. It would have been easy to believe this is all that God has for him, but God appears and tells him to go back to the place he has run from. The safety bubble he built for himself has burst but everything he has experienced has prepared him for this moment. Do you also see how God has prepared you through your time of adversity for divine purpose ahead?

What’s the purpose of my health battle? If I never needed to be healed, how would I have experienced the physical salvation of the Lord? If I was never brought to a point of weakness, would I have ever learned to trust God and receive the Lord’s strength? How could I relate to others and offer hope for those who are going through the valley of the shadow of death if I had not had countless nights unsure if I would live to see the morning? Adversity gave my

testimony weight and would be used to bring glory to God.

In Christ, believers are not only recipients of salvation but also bearers of a special calling and purpose, akin to the calling that Moses experienced in the Old Testament. Just as Moses was uniquely equipped by God to fulfill a specific role in leading the Israelites, Christians are endowed with special gifts and abilities for the purpose God has ordained for their lives.

Our God-given calling is not a random occurrence but a deliberate act of God's grace and design. As stated in Ephesians 2:10, believers are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared in advance for them to undertake. This underscores the idea that, just like Moses, individuals are designed with intentionality and equipped by God for specific tasks. Our lives have a divine purpose. Adversity is the crucible that refines our faith in God.

The gifts and talents bestowed upon believers are not arbitrary but purposeful, meant to contribute to the greater plan of God. In 1 Corinthians 12, the analogy of the body of Christ is used, emphasizing that each member has a unique function, and all are essential for the proper functioning of the Body. This diversity of gifts and callings illustrates the richness of God's plan and the need for each individual to embrace their unique role. Moses was gifted to deliver God's people, and we are gifted to edify the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 14:12) and be actively involved in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20). We are not left to fulfill this calling in our strength. The Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus in Acts 1:8, empowers and guides believers in carrying out their divine assignments. This special equipping ensures

that God's purposes are accomplished not by human might but by the Spirit's enablement.

In essence, the Christian calling mirrors Moses' calling in its divine origin and intentional design, and we also have the accompanying empowerment by the Holy Spirit. Christians, like Moses, are invited to recognize and embrace their unique calling, trusting that God has equipped them for the tasks He has prepared in advance. As they step into this calling, they become active participants in God's redemptive plan for the world.

"This encounter with the burning bush marked a turning point in Moses' life. It was a moment of divine intervention that redirected the trajectory of his life from being a mere shepherd in Midian to becoming the leader and deliverer of the Israelites. God's presence in the burning bush, along with His call and assurance, propelled Moses into a remarkable journey of faith. God met Moses in an unexpected place, (a burning bush), at an unexpected time in his life (living as a fugitive nomadic shepherd). It serves as a powerful reminder that God's plans and interventions can come when we least anticipate them, and His presence can transform ordinary moments into extraordinary life-altering encounters."¹⁵

Here is what is said of Moses' life:

"By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's

¹⁵Dr. Matthew Webster. Heavenly Conversations: How Hearing God's Voice Transforms and Blesses Our Lives. Kindle Direct Publishing. 2024.

edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned" (Hebrews 11:23-29).

Lessons from Moses

Divine providence and calling. Moses' birth and preservation amid a decree to kill Hebrew male infants illustrate divine providence and calling. Similarly, Ephesians 1:4 reminds believers that God chose them in Christ before the creation of the world for a specific purpose. This highlights the idea that our lives are not accidents but part of God's intentional plan. God's promises to protect and preserve His people echo throughout the Bible. Psalm 91:14-16 is an Old Testament proclamation by God to protect His people. A New Testament equivalent can be found in 2 Thessalonians 3:3, "But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one."

In John 10:10, Jesus promises abundant life to those who follow Him. This abundance encompasses not only physical protection but also spiritual well-being and fulfillment.

These promises assure believers that, just as God preserved Moses in the face of danger, He is committed to protecting and preserving His people today. The concept of abundant life goes beyond mere existence; it encompasses a life filled with purpose, joy, and the assurance of God's presence in every circumstance. The birth of Moses serves as a historical testament to God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises, encouraging believers to trust in His enduring commitment to their well-being and prosperity.

God's unconventional ways. Moses' mother took an unconventional approach to save her son, placing him in a basket on the Nile. God's plan often unfolds in ways that defy human expectations. The story of Moses emphasizes the importance of trusting God even when circumstances seem to be without hope.

Foreshadowing of Christ. The events surrounding Moses' birth foreshadow the coming of Christ. Both Moses and Jesus faced decrees aimed at eliminating male infants, and both were spared through divine intervention. The parallels between Moses and Jesus highlight God's overarching plan of salvation and redemption throughout history through Jesus.

God's faithfulness to His Word. Despite the oppressive environment and the threat to Moses' life, God remained faithful to His promises. This underscores the principle that God's faithfulness transcends challenging circumstances. His providence and protection are evident even in adversity.

God's preparation and redemption. Moses' upbringing in Pharaoh's palace equipped him with knowledge and influence that God would later use for the redemption of the Israelites. Moses' time as a shepherd also prepared him for the task of shepherding God's people in the wilderness. Similarly, Ephesians 2:10 emphasizes that believers are God's handiwork. God has created us for good works and those good works are part of His advanced plan. This highlights the notion that God prepares and positions individuals for specific tasks as a part of His redemptive plan.

Chapter 2:

Moses: A Story of Deliverance, Redemption, and Destiny Small Group Questions

Reflect on the significance of Moses' birth against the backdrop of the decree to kill Hebrew male infants. How does this narrative illustrate the themes of destiny and divine intervention? How does this relate to God's promises in Ephesians 1:4?

How does God's promise of abundant life (John 10:10) resonate in Moses' story, even in challenges and dangers?

Discuss the parallels between Moses' story and the life of Jesus. How do Pharaoh's orders and Moses' preservation foreshadow events in Jesus' life? What other connections do you see between Moses and Jesus?

Explore Miriam's role in the story. How does her faithfulness and quick thinking play a crucial role in God's plan for Moses? What can we learn from Miriam about being watchful and proactive in God's unfolding plan?

Reflect on the irony that Moses' mother was paid to raise her son during a decree to kill Hebrew male children. How does this showcase God's abundant provision even in adversity and challenging circumstances?

Consider Moses' years as a shepherd in Midian. How did God use this time to prepare Moses for his leadership role? What qualities and lessons did Moses acquire during his shepherding years that proved crucial in leading the Israelites?

Chapter 3: Abraham: Journeying into God's Promises



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¹⁶www.1.bp.blogspot.com/-RS1m6mpbllk/W0d2nbdO2-I/AAAAAAADJ0/bIRoT5b2L5snYf2EhrX1AEKHrgLXD9legCLcBGAs/w1200-h630-p-k-no-nu/abraham.jpg

“Now faith is the assurance of what we hope for and the certainty of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1).

Abraham’s journey into receiving God’s promises and the faith he displayed to inherit those promises is best summarized in Hebrews chapter eleven.

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered Him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore” (Hebrews 11:8-12).

One immediate observation is that Abraham’s faith narrative prominently features his wife, Sarah. She also played a role in the realization of God’s promise to multiply Abraham’s descendants as countless as the sand on the seashore. Similarly, as you embark on your faith journey and embrace the spiritual inheritance awaiting you in Christ through faith, your presence will be a source of blessing to those around you.

Let’s explore Abram’s journey into God’s promises including his name change from Abram to Abraham. “The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country,

your people and your father's household to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1).

Numerous people erroneously assume that Genesis 12:1 represents the first occurrence of God communicating with Abram. Although these are the first recorded words from God to Abram, it does not imply that God had not spoken to him before. Abram makes his initial appearance in Genesis 11, and there is no record of God speaking to him until chapter 12. To discover that God had spoken to Abram before this, one must turn to the New Testament, specifically Acts 7:2-4. This is significant because it demonstrates that when God beckons us to move forward by faith into an unfamiliar place, He will affirm His calling to us.

To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran (underlined emphasis is mine). 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.' "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living" (Acts 7:2-4).

When we come to Genesis 12:1- the place Abram is currently living is Haran discovered in Genesis 11:31-32: "Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran."

God already spoke to Abram to prepare him to move to a place He would show him and that place was not

Haran. Haran means dried up, parched.¹⁷ God's calling on your life is not to inhabit, and live in the dried up, parched place (Haran), it might be a stop in the journey, but God is leading you to the lowland which is what "Canaan" means¹⁸ represented by green pastures (Genesis 12:1).

Psalm 23 speaks to this, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leads me beside the still waters." Where is God leading you? He is leading you to the place He will show you, a place where you will find pasture and rest. But what about the dry parched season I am currently experiencing, a place of barrenness "Haran"? Psalm 23:4a says: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me". God who is with us will lead us through the parched land. The valley of the shadow of death that David wrote about isn't metaphorical it is a real place known as "Ge'Hinnom". David knew that as a shepherd to get to the grazing of the pastures, He had to lead his sheep through the place where the enemies of the sheep would dwell.

A simple truth about the valley of the shadow of death is that for there to be a shadow, there also must be a light in the darkness. And that light is Jesus, the great Light of the World. Jesus walks in the valley with us. "Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12b). Because Jesus is with us in our dark places, we do not have to fear evil (Psalm 23:4a).

In various junctures of our lives, we may question God, wondering why He doesn't reveal a more

¹⁷www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2771/kjv/wlc/0-1/

¹⁸www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3667/kjv/wlc/0-1/

panoramic view of the puzzling season of our life, rather than just the immediate next step. We desire a comprehensive map for the year ahead, believing that with more information about our role in His divine plan, we could more effortlessly navigate through the puzzling situation we face.

If God were to unveil the entire picture all at once, it would overwhelm us and we might miss the blessings and lessons to learn each step along the way. Sometimes, even taking the next step is challenging, as Abram experienced—he required God’s assistance. In Matthew 6:34, Jesus taught, “Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” As God directs us, as He directed Abram, “Go to the land I will show you,” we learn to trust and follow His guidance, and the next steps will begin to make sense over time. As the beautiful picture of our lives begins to unfold, we discover that we can trust God as our Good Shepherd. It may seem peculiar when we focus on individual steps of God’s leading, but as He works all things together for our good, each step of His leading forms a coherent whole picture of His grace. Abram obeyed God and journeyed to an unknown land.

In Genesis 12:1, God reiterates His call to Abram and introduces another element to Abram’s life story in verses 2-3: the promise to make him into a great nation and bless him. It’s noteworthy that Abram’s faith, although not perfect, is a key aspect of this narrative. In the same chapter, we’ll soon see instances where Abram forgets or doubts God’s words.

However, the focus here is not on Abram's faith but on the faithfulness of God to His Word. The promise articulated in verses 2-3 is unconditional—there are no stipulations attached. Despite Abram's imperfections and moments of doubt, this promise reveals the unchanging course of God's plan for him.

"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on Earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:2-3).

No conditions are imposed on this divine declaration. In the context of our lives, similar to Abram's many missteps, we might falter. Yet, in the grace of Christ within the New Covenant, our salvation remains secure. As we move forward in our lives by faith, even in moments of doubt or error, God is faithful to the promises He has made and we will be safely brought into the Kingdom of God.

What empowered Abram to embark on the journey into the unknown? It was the initiation of faith through the Word of the Lord. Romans 10:17 teaches us, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

During challenging times of confusion and uncertainty, the question arises: "How will I get through this?" If you've ever felt the need for more faith, yearning for breakthroughs in health, finances, or relationships, there's encouraging news: acquiring faith doesn't have to be a struggle.

The Scriptures highlight the contrast between the hearing of faith and the works of the Law (Galatians 3:2, 5). Since the works of the Law involve self-efforts, faith operates differently—it's rooted in trust rather than personal striving. In Psalm 23 what is our role as Jesus' sheep? Simply to trust the Good Shepherd.

As individuals become more self-conscious and rely on their efforts to receive from the Lord, their faith tends to diminish. God understood that what Abram needed was a Word from the Lord to spark his faith into action.

When our focus shifts to seeing more of Jesus and becoming increasingly aware of His sacrificial crucifixion on our behalf, faith ceases to be a hindrance to receiving God's promises. Why does this happen? The more we comprehend what Jesus has accomplished for us, the more we grasp the qualifications bestowed upon us through Him, leading to a surge of faith within us and the manifestation of miracles.

There's no need to wish for more faith to receive the specific miracle you're seeking from God right now. Simply fix your gaze on Jesus and His finished work, and the faith necessary to confront any situation or challenge will naturally infuse your life. Direct your attention to Jesus and His grace toward you. He is the originator and perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:2). The more you hear about Jesus and His love, the more faith will rise in your heart. Regardless of your present challenge, consistent exposure to the Gospel of Jesus

invariably fosters faith, peace, and love, guiding you toward lasting success.

“So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there” (Genesis 12:4-5).

During a famine in the land, we read that Abram went down to Egypt to reside there temporarily due to the severity of the famine (Genesis 12:10). This move foreshadowed Jesus Christ who is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. In Hosea 11:1 the prophecy is that God would call His Son out of Egypt and that is exactly what He did (Matthew 2:15).

It's intriguing to observe that once Abram arrived in the Promised Land, a famine struck, compelling him to leave the very land God had granted him. This must have been unexpected for Abram. While we understand that the move was orchestrated to reveal Jesus, it would have posed a significant challenge for Abram to leave despite the circumstances.

As Abram approached Egypt, his apprehensions surfaced as he spoke to his wife Sarai, saying, “I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me but will let you live” (Genesis 12:11-12). It's noteworthy that, despite God's promise to make Abram a great nation, he finds himself childless at this juncture and believes that without his deceptive plan, he will die childless at the hands of the Egyptians. In a moment of doubt, Abram urges Sarai to pose as his

sister to ensure their safety. Abram seemingly believes that unless he resorts to deceit, God might be unable to fulfill His promise. It's a stark reminder that God doesn't require our intervention to deliver on His promises. We encounter difficulties in life when we presume that God needs our assistance; in reality, we need His. This flawed logic resurfaces as much later as he is still childless, Abram sleeps with Hagar thinking this is how his promised child will come to be (Genesis 16:1-4). In these faithless moments of Abram, the narrative unveils that God remains faithful, even when we fall short.

How was Abram able to receive the promise of God to make him into a great nation? How might God bring you to hope in His promises when you face an extended season of barrenness?

"After this, the Word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward" (Genesis 15:1).

Something troubling must have happened to Abram for God to tell him not to be afraid. Genesis 14:14-24 says, "When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people. After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out

bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of Heaven and Earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself." But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of Heaven and Earth, that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share."

The temptation comes if you give the people over to the king of Sodom, he will enrich you. But Melchizedek reveals that the victory was given to you by the Lord. Victory is ours in Jesus. The way you receive your miracle might differ from the way I received mine, but the truth is that every good thing (miracles included) comes to us from God. Melchizedek draws attention to God's goodness. "God gave you..." And our righteous King Jesus, declares "You are blessed because God has given you Me." All of our blessings are found in Christ.

Melchizedek is the King of Salem. Melchizedek means right/righteousness¹⁹ and he is of Salem meaning peace.²⁰ It is Jesus' righteousness given to us that gives us peace with God. When you get to chapter 15 there is a bit of a spiritual battle happening in Abram's heart. His struggle will be revealed.

¹⁹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h4442/kjv/wlc/0-1/

²⁰www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h8004/kjv/wlc/0-1/

“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

What does it mean for the Lord to be your shield and your very great reward?

In chapter 14 the King of our righteousness Jesus Christ appeared to Abram and told him the victory was given to you by the Lord. Now here in chapter fifteen, God comes to Abram in a vision as Abram is battling fear. Even after the Lord gave him victory and Lot was rescued, the enemy still planted seeds of fear, doubt, and insecurity. Today we are given the shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16) to protect us against the attacks of the enemy. We raise the shield of faith as we listen to God’s Word (Scripture) just as Abram listened to God’s voice.

Abram’s response to God reveals what he feels that he is lacking but also the faith he has in knowing that somehow God will provide it.

“But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, what can You give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus” (Genesis 15:2)?

Abram uses the name “Adonay” which is a title of reverence to God only.²¹ Why is this important? This is a statement of faith, it is saying that God is the ultimate source of all power, authority, and everything that exists. God is sovereign over all creation.²²

The Word of God came to Abram in a vision and instilled faith in Abram to not be afraid. Faith would bring Abram to share his need with the One who has

²¹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h136/kjv/wlc/0-1/

²²www.ligonier.org/podcasts/simple-put/adonai

the ultimate power to act on his behalf (Genesis 15:1-2).

"And Abram said, 'You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir'" (Genesis 15:3).

At first glance, it would almost read as if this was a blaming statement, "You have given me no children", but it's not. The title "Sovereign Lord" acknowledges that every good thing that I could have in my life comes from You, this would include children.

Abram's life has unfolded differently than what he had expected. Faced with the absence of children, Abram maintains faith in God's promise, yet his mind grapples with the challenge of envisioning how this fulfillment might unfold. Abram's thoughts are on having to appoint an heir to his estate because he is advanced in age. "So a servant in my household will be my heir" (Genesis 15:2b).

He couldn't understand how the blessing of the covenantal promise God had made to him could come to pass that he would have many children, becoming a great nation, because even more time had passed and he still had no children. Maybe in your prayers, you have also been asking the Lord, "Lord, what will you give me? I am at a low place in my life where it seems impossible for a breakthrough?"

The Lord wants to give you a new vision for your life that is positive. God will restore unto you the visions in your heart the enemy has stolen.

"Then the Word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir" (Genesis 15:4).

Because Abram struggled to believe, God did something for him. "He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be" (Genesis 15:5).

"Count" is the word "sapar" in the original Hebrew, which can mean "count," but also means "to narrate or recount" something.²³

God's instruction to Abram wasn't simply to look at the stars only but for Abram to see the constellations too. The 12 constellations represent the 12 tribes of Israel, and begin with Virgo (a picture of a mother and child), which fulfills the first Bible prophecy:

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15).

This speaks of how our Lord Jesus would come by virgin birth (as depicted in Virgo by a mother and child). He would bruise Satan's head. Jesus has disarmed the king of terror, Satan. Satan's only power now is to go around deceiving us and trying to make us live in the realm of senses, appearances, and feelings.

The constellations end with Leo, which depicts Jesus as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5).

The constellation of the Southern Cross, which mariners lost at sea would look at to find their way, also represents the cross.

²³www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h5608/kjv/wlc/0-1/

Therefore when God told Abram, "So shall your descendants be," in Genesis 15:5, He was saying that his descendants would have a Christ-like quality. And it came to pass, as Galatians 3:29 says, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." We who are believers today are all Abraham's descendants.

When Genesis 15:6 says, "And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness," it refers to how Abraham believed the Gospel you and I believe today.

God was also prophesying about the number of Abram's descendants. So God had to first fill Abram's heart with pictures of the many children he would have and the belief that he was going to be a father—long before the children came.

Did you also know that the God who numbers the stars also heals the brokenhearted? This is where Abram was at this moment.

"He heals the brokenhearted. And binds up their wounds. He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name" (Psalm 147:3-4).

We then see in Genesis 17:5 and Genesis 17:15 that God changed Abram's name to Abraham and his wife Sarai's name to Sarah.

Abram meaning "exalted father"²⁴ was changed to Abraham meaning "father of many".²⁵ Within a year of changing their names, which changed their speech, they inherited the promised child, Isaac.

²⁴www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h87/kjv/wlc/0-1/

²⁵www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h1995/kjv/wlc/0-1/

Did you notice that God did not change Abram's name before changing his heart? God had to first change Abram's heart so that this would lead to a change in his speech. I went years without being healed. It was the promises in God's Word that changed my belief about my situation which led to a change in my speech about my condition and then my miracle came.

This demonstrates how we have to believe God's promises before speaking them. Faith is simple: believing God's Word in your heart and speaking it out.

When it comes to faith, there is usually a lot of focus on speaking forth what you want to see. However, Jesus said in Luke 6:45: "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

We are not meant to speak empty words that don't come from the heart. We have to change the image in our hearts first so that what we speak, the Word of God, is a proclamation of our faith. We believe it.

What you see in your heart is what you will see manifest in your life. Your heart is affected by your vision. So what vision are you keeping in your heart?

Abraham had a nephew called Lot, and Lot caused a lot of trouble for Abraham. Lot's name means "veil"²⁶ (something that prevents someone from seeing clearly) and it is only when Lot left Abraham that Abraham began to see what God wanted him to.²⁷

²⁶www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3876/kjv/wlc/0-1/

²⁷Jospeh Prince. The Year of Hazon Vision. January 3, 2021.

<https://gracerevonline.com/sermon-notes/the-year-of-hazon-vision/>

“And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever” (Genesis 13:14–15).

“All the land which you see I give to you” — God’s principle is this: Envision it first (faith) and then you will receive it. Faith inherits the blessings of God.

“The devil wants to trouble your heart with negative images that cause you to be pessimistic in your outlook. He knows that negative images will affect your heart, and once your heart is affected, your whole life is affected. That is why Proverbs 4:23 tells us to “Guard our hearts—because out of the heart springs the issues/forces of life.”²⁸

Abram’s name change to Abraham is a significant moment in the Biblical narrative, particularly because it reflects a transformation in his identity and serves as a declaration of God’s promise to make him the father of many nations. This name change became a powerful catalyst for Abraham to speak out by faith the promise God made to him. Every time Abram introduced himself as Abraham, he was proclaiming God’s divine pledge and stepping into the reality of the promise. It required a deep faith in God’s ability to bring about the seemingly impossible—a multitude of descendants from a couple who, at the time, were childless and advanced in age.

According to the Bible, Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born. Sarah, his wife, was 90 years old at the time of Isaac’s birth. This is recorded

²⁸Ibid.

in Genesis 21:5: “Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.”

I wrote *Overflowing Grace: 100 Blessings to Unleash Your Divine Inheritance and Unveil the New You*²⁹ as a way for New Testament believers to journey into God’s promises. I highly recommend using this book as a daily devotional to help you grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Lessons from Abraham

Faith initiates action. Abraham’s journey into God’s promises began with faith. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as the assurance of what we hope for and the certainty of what we do not see. Despite uncertainties and not knowing the destination, Abraham obeyed God’s call and embarked on the journey. The lesson here is that faith is the catalyst for taking steps into the unknown, trusting that God’s promises will be fulfilled.

Faith involves trusting God’s timing. Abraham and Sarah faced the challenge of barrenness, yet God’s promise of numerous descendants persisted. The lesson is that faith involves trusting God’s timing even when circumstances seem impossible. Waiting on God requires patience and the assurance that His promises will come to fruition in His perfect timing. “He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things” (Romans 8:32)?

God’s faithfulness despite our imperfections. Abram’s faith wasn’t perfect; he doubted and made mistakes. However, God remained faithful to the covenantal

²⁹Dr. Matthew Webster. *Overflowing Grace: 100 Blessings to Unleash Your Divine Inheritance and Unveil the New You*. Kindle Direct Publishing, 2023.

promise He made to Abram. Our imperfections do not nullify God's promises to us living in the New Covenant. In Christ, our salvation is secure, and God's faithfulness remains constant even when we stumble.

God's Word builds faith. Romans 10:17 emphasizes that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Abraham's faith was initiated and strengthened through God's spoken promises. The lesson is to immerse ourselves in God's Word, allowing it to build and sustain our faith, especially during challenging times when we need assurance. Fill your heart with beautiful word pictures from Scripture so you believe in the promises God has made to you.

Identity forever changed in Jesus. Abram's name changed to Abraham signifying a transformation in his identity in alignment with God's promise. The lesson is that faith precedes the transformation of our identity. In Christ, we became a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Chapter 3: Abraham: Journeying into God's Promises Small Group Questions

How does Hebrews 11:1 define faith, and how did Abraham exemplify these qualities in his journey?

How can we cultivate patience and trust in God's timing in our own lives, especially when waiting for His promises?

Explore instances in Abraham's story where he doubted or made mistakes. How does God's faithfulness shine through despite Abraham's imperfections? How does the concept of God's faithfulness in the New Covenant assure us today?

How can consistent exposure to the Scriptures impact our faith during challenging times?

Discuss the significance of Abram's name change to Abraham and how it reflected a transformation in his identity. In what ways can our understanding of being a "new creation" in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) impact the way we live out our faith?

Consider Abraham and Sarah's struggle with barrenness. How does God increase their faith to believe in the promises He made to them?

Chapter 4:

Ruth: Receiving a Grand Harvest in Fields of Grace



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³⁰www.michaelmannauthor.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ruth.boaz_.jpg.png

“In the day when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1). During the era when the judges exercised governance, a time marked by challenges and difficulties as depicted in the book of Judges, we encounter an Israelite family in Bethlehem. Elimelech, Naomi, and their sons, Mahlon and Kilyon, grapple with the hardships brought on by a famine. In a quest for sustenance, they make the difficult decision to relocate to the land of Moab, a historical adversary of Israel.

During this time, women were treated as commodities, bought and sold as property, abducted to fulfill the whims of warriors, and subjected to violence with little regard for justice. Despite the harsh backdrop, the protagonist of the story is a woman. What makes it even more remarkable is that she is not an Israelite and begins her story in Scripture as a widow. At first glance, Ruth seems to occupy a position of utmost vulnerability and weakness in the socio-cultural context of the time.³¹

In the foreign land of Moab, Elimelech, the father, passes away, and his sons, Mahlon and Kilyon, marry Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Tragically, the sons also meet untimely deaths, leaving Naomi, their mother, in the company of her daughters-in-law. Faced with the harsh reality of death and with no familial ties to anchor them, Naomi decides to return to her homeland. Aware of the challenges awaiting unmarried foreign widows in Israel, she urges Ruth

³¹J.D. Greear. The Weakness of Ruth is Greater than the Strength of Samson. August 31, 2015. www.jdgreear.com/the-weakness-of-ruth-is-greater-than-the-strength-of-samson/

and Orpah to stay behind. While Orpah acquiesces, Ruth displays extraordinary loyalty, declaring, “Where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God” (Ruth 1:16).

The two women journey back to Israel, and the chapter concludes with Naomi adopting the name Mara, meaning “bitter,” as she mourns the tragedies that have befallen her.

“In the natural, Ruth had everything going against her. But because she trusted in the favor of God, she not only became the wife of Bethlehem’s richest man when Boaz married her, but she also became the great-grandmother of David and had her name included in the genealogy of Jesus Christ even though she was not a Jewess. That is what God’s supernatural favor did for her. Ruth was at the lowest point of her life just before she met Boaz. It appeared that all-natural factors were working against her, but in the favor of the Lord, and through an answered prayer (Ruth 1:9), she became a part of the lineage of Christ.

Naomi’s prayer and desire for Ruth will be mightily answered by God. “May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband” (Ruth 1:9a).

Ruth put her trust in the Lord, who put her in the right place at the right time, and her situation turned around completely. The story of Ruth and Boaz happened about 1,100 years before Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem.”³²

³²Dr. Matthew Webster. Growing in Grace Small Group Book 5. Kindle Direct Publishing 2022.

Beyond being just a love story, Boaz her kinsman redeemer is a picture of our redemption in Christ, it is also a heartwarming story of God's amazing restoration.

When Ruth followed Naomi, her mother-in-law to Israel, she soon found herself in a less-than-ideal position. Ruth was a Moabite, a people who were in conflict with Israel and she had no husband to protect her. In the natural, it seemed as if the odds were stacked against her. This is what it will always feel like whenever something has been taken from you. But Ruth didn't dwell on her unfavorable circumstances. Her declaration of her faith in the God of Israel revealed her dependence on the Lord, whom she looked to for favor and divine opportunities.

"Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor," she said to Naomi one day (Ruth 2:2). Her trust in the Lord as she embarked on the ordinary task of finding work to support her mother-in-law and herself became her launching pad to God's incredible restoration in her life.

I know that Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:20) and He places me in the expansive fields of God's grace. Jesus has given such an incredible spiritual inheritance to all who believe in Him and we receive our inheritance by faith. From the instant I open my eyes, every breath I take is a manifestation of His grace—a precious gift. The moments spent with my family, irrespective of my emotions, are blessings that deserve to be cherished. All the positive good things in my life are owed to the grace of God.

As the Proverb says, "A cheerful heart is good medicine," (Proverbs 17:22), the more I recognize the abundance of blessings in Jesus, the deeper gratitude wells up within me and leads to my good health.

What did God do to bring restoration into Ruth's life? God gave Ruth favor to glean the barley harvest in the field of Boaz, a wealthy man who happened to be a close relative of her late husband. The connection between Boaz and Ruth's deceased husband, Mahlon, is established through the concept of the kinsman-redeemer. In ancient Israelite culture, the kinsman-redeemer was a close male relative who had the responsibility and privilege to act on behalf of a relative in need or distress, especially in matters related to property, family, or inheritance.

In Ruth 2:1, we learn that Boaz is described as a "kinsman" of Naomi's husband, Elimelech. Ruth, as Elimelech's daughter-in-law, then comes under the care and potential redemption of a kinsman-redeemer. Boaz is further identified as a relative when Ruth seeks permission to glean in his field, and he acknowledges her connection to Elimelech's family.

Boaz was extremely kind to Ruth, allowing her to gather more than enough grain in his field for both her and her mother-in-law's daily needs. But God had more in mind than mere survival for Ruth.

After laboring in the barley fields from morning to evening, Ruth was able to glean one ephah of barley (Ruth 2:17), equivalent to a ten-day supply. But when she rested at the feet of Boaz and did not labor, she received six ephahs of barley (Ruth 3:15), a sixty-day supply! And we know her blessings did not stop there. She received a marriage proposal from Boaz. How did that happen? Ruth had heeded the advice of Naomi,

her mother-in-law, to lay at Boaz's feet and allow him the opportunity to be her kinsmen-redeemer.

Boaz was qualified to redeem Ruth. "The kinsman-redeemer is a male relative who, according to various laws of the Pentateuch, had the privilege or responsibility to act on behalf of a relative who was in trouble, danger, or need. The Hebrew term (*go el*) for kinsman-redeemer designates one who delivers or rescues (Genesis 48:16; Exodus 6:6) or redeems property or person (Leviticus 27:9–25, 25:47–55).

What are the qualifications needed to be kinsmen-redeemer?

- He must be near of kin.
- He must be able to redeem. He must be free of any calamity or need of redemption himself.
- He must be willing to redeem. Boaz investigates whether a closer relative is willing to redeem her first (Ruth 4:1-8).
- Redemption was completed when the price was completely paid."³³

As long as Ruth rested, Boaz would not rest until he resolved her situation. What was the result? Instead of just getting a small portion of the barley from the fields, Ruth got the owner of the fields himself, as well as the entire yield of his barley fields! It is the same for us today. When we rest, Jesus, our heavenly Boaz, goes to work. When we choose to "work" by striving, fretting, and trying to make things happen by our might, He rests until we see our need for Him and invite Him into our situation.

³³ibid.

Rest for us doesn't mean idleness or laziness in our circumstances. If you're unemployed, take practical steps—send out your résumé, attend interviews—but do so with a heart at peace. Internally be at rest, firmly believing that our Lord Jesus has already fulfilled all your needs for every challenge you face. Go to the interview with confidence that God has promised to meet your needs whether you are offered this job or another one to come.

“Just as Ruth lay at Boaz's feet, the feet of Jesus is the place of redemption and blessings. Both Jairus the synagogue ruler (Mark 5:22) and the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:25–26) fell at Jesus' feet. And there at His feet, they received healing for their daughters.

When you take your place at Jesus' feet, looking to Him for help, expect to receive His blessings. There is nothing to fear knowing that as Boaz did for Ruth, Jesus, your heavenly Boaz, will do for you, all that you have requested!”³⁴

Despite seemingly insurmountable odds, Ruth's life underwent a profound transformation, transitioning from a condition of scarcity to one of abundant blessings. Having started with no family, Ruth received divine blessings in the form of a husband—Boaz—and a child named Obed. Obed, in turn, became the grandfather of King David, and his name found a place in the lineage of Jesus Christ. Remarkably, Ruth is explicitly mentioned in the genealogy of our Lord Jesus. The restoration the Lord brought to Ruth's life is truly awe-inspiring!

³⁴Ibid.

Lessons from Ruth

Trust in God's favor when unfavorable circumstances happen. Ruth's life teaches us the importance of trusting in God's favor even when faced with dire circumstances. Despite being a foreigner and a widow in a society where women faced significant hardships, Ruth placed her trust in the Lord. Her declaration of faith in the God of Israel demonstrated her dependence on divine favor. As believers, we can learn to trust in God's favor and look to Him for restoration in our lives.

Dependence on God in adversity. When Ruth found herself in less-than-ideal circumstances, she did not dwell on her misfortunes. Instead, she embarked on the ordinary task of seeking work to support herself and her mother-in-law. Ruth's dependence on God during her ordinary endeavors became a launching pad for incredible restoration. In our lives, believe God can and will turn our situations around for the better.

Divine opportunities can happen while performing ordinary tasks. By gleaning in the fields, Ruth not only secured sustenance for herself and her mother-in-law but also found favor in the field of Boaz, who would be her kinsman redeemer. In our daily lives, even seemingly mundane tasks can lead to unexpected blessings when approached with faith and trust in God.

Resting in God's work. Ruth's decision to heed the advice of her mother-in-law, and lay at Boaz's feet, symbolizes the importance of resting in God's work. Bring your situation to God and allow Him to work on your behalf. Oh, what good things the Lord will bring

into your life. Boaz, as the kinsman redeemer, took action to resolve Ruth's situation when she chose to rest. Likewise, as believers, when we choose to rest in faith, Jesus, our heavenly redeemer, actively works on our behalf. May we trust in God's provision and timing, rather than striving in our strength.

Taking our place at Jesus' Feet. The imagery of Ruth resting at Boaz's feet is paralleled with believers taking their place at Jesus' feet. Just as Jairus and the Syro-Phoenician woman found healing at Jesus' feet, we, too, can expect blessings when we come to Jesus for help. Understanding that Jesus, our heavenly Boaz, is willing and able to fulfill our requests encourages us to approach Him with confidence, free from fear, and with the assurance that He will meet our needs (Philippians 4:19).

Chapter 4: Ruth: Receiving a Grand Harvest in Fields of Grace Small Group Questions

In the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, Ruth placed her trust in the Lord's favor. How do challenging times help us cultivate trust and faith in God?

When faced with challenges, Ruth didn't dwell on misfortunes but took practical steps while depending on God. How do you balance taking practical steps while depending on God during tough times?

Ruth found favor in the field of Boaz while performing an ordinary task. Can you share an experience where a seemingly mundane task led to unexpected blessings or divine opportunities in your life?

The imagery of Ruth resting at Boaz's feet is connected with believers taking their place at Jesus' feet. How does this concept impact your approach to seeking help, blessings, or healing from Jesus?

Discuss the qualifications needed to be a kinsman-redeemer, as mentioned in the text. How do these qualifications parallel the role of Jesus as our heavenly redeemer?

Ruth's life transformed from lack to abundance. In what areas of your life do you need God's restoration, and how can you apply the lessons from Ruth's story?

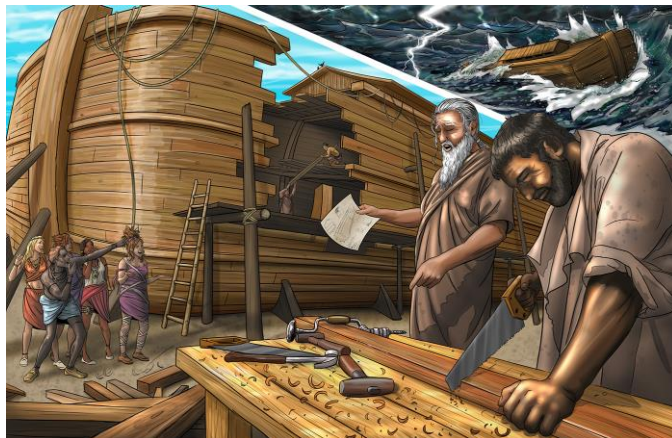
Section II: Anchored in the Storm
with God's Unfailing Truth



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“He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm” (Mark 4:39).

Chapter 5: Noah: The Floodwaters of Change, Ark of New Beginnings



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³⁶www.mir-s3-cdn-cf.behance.net/project_modules/1400/b30c5341297215.5606f646e01b9.jpg

In the Old Testament, the name Noah echoes through the corridors of time as a harbinger of change, a custodian of divine purpose amid the tumultuous floodwaters of transformation. It is a tale that unfolds across the annals of the Scriptures, bearing witness to the convergence of faith, ridicule, and a monumental task that defied the boundaries of human understanding.

In Genesis 6 we find Noah navigating a world enshrouded in moral decay and waywardness where the hearts of men are consumed by corruption. "The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the Earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5).

Yet, amidst this spiritual wickedness, there was Noah. "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8). This is the first mention of grace in the Bible and the name "Noah" means "rest".³⁷

"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7).

"Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God" (Genesis 6:9b).

Noah was not righteous because of his character, but rather from his faith in God and His redemptive plan. The sacrifice of Jesus (referred to as the Lamb of

³⁷www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h5146/kjv/wlc/0-1/

God), and our faith in Him is what gives us our righteousness before God. Noah believed and was pronounced righteous by faith.

The word, “blameless” in Genesis 6:9 is “tamim”, which means “unblemished”.³⁸ The term is applied to the unblemished sacrificial lamb. Noah served as a representation of this unblemished lamb, signifying his untainted nature untouched by the blood of fallen angels (Genesis 6:2,4). The devil tried to thwart God’s plan of Genesis 3:15 by corrupting the Messianic lineage (the offspring of women) by having the fallen angels take on the form of men and be with the daughters of men, producing “Nephilim”.

Why did God bring a flood? The necessity of the flood arose from God’s boundless grace and mercy—a means to preserve humanity and fulfill the prophecy that the Messiah would come and crush Satan’s head (Genesis 3:15). The deluge became a pivotal moment in the divine plan, ensuring the continuity of the human race and laying the groundwork for the fulfillment of prophetic promises. God would preserve the Messianic lineage through Noah and his family as the grace of God would keep them safe within the confines of the ark as He destroyed the creation of the Nephilim.

The Ark: A Vessel of Change, Able to Withstand the Storms of Life

Being in Jesus is akin to being in the ark, and when you are placed in Christ, He remains with you always.

In Mark 4:35-41 Jesus and His disciples were in a boat when a fierce storm arose.

³⁸www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h8549/kjv/wlc/0-1/

The disciples, fearing for their lives, woke Jesus, who then rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. Jesus' words not only stilled the physical storm but also conveyed the spiritual assurance that He has authority over the storms of life. In Jesus, we find a refuge and a source of peace that transcends the circumstances of life. Jesus stands as a constant anchor for those who place their trust in Him. With Jesus at the helm of our life's boat, what storm do we have to fear?

Building the Ark

"And this is how you shall make it. The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits (450ft long)" (Genesis 6:15a).

The number, 300, in the Bible stands for victory. In the story of Gideon to come, God whittled his army from 32,000 men down to 300.


If we continue reading Genesis 6:15 we discover more measurements are given. "This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high."


"In Genesis 6 the reference to the number 300 has to do with a divinely appointed instrument of salvation that is made of wood. Notice that the number 300 is also associated with two other numbers. Those

numbers are (ל 30) and (נ 50)

Noah's Ark's dimension intentionally directs us to three concepts found in three numbers.

( 300) – Victory over Death – Resurrection

( 30) – Blood Sacrifice

( 50) – Grace multiplied by Ordinal Perfection = Jubilee!³⁹

“You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above” (Genesis 6:16a). Why did God instruct Noah to build a window only at the top? God did not want Noah and his family to gaze out at the raging storm. He wanted them to look up to Him. As we are navigating change in our lives brought upon by the storms of life, keep your eyes on Jesus and God will provide for you (Hebrews 12:2). Don’t let your hearts be troubled by fixating on the trouble, look to the answer to your troubles, and let peace reign in your heart (Philippians 4:6-7).

“And set the door of the ark in its side” (Genesis 6:16b). The location of the door—on the side, represents how Jesus was pierced in His side by a Roman soldier (John 19:34).

“Just as Noah came into the ark through one door, along with his family and all the animals, there is only one door that we too are offered salvation. It’s through Christ alone, He is the door we must enter through to be saved.

The boat was big because it housed animals. But there was more than enough room to save people too. God wishes that none perish (2 Peter 3:9). 2 Peter 2:5

³⁹C.J. Lovik. Hebrew Word Study- The Number 300/Sheen.
swww.livingwordin3d.com/discovery/2017/02/27/hebrew-word-study-the-number-300-sheen/

hints at the fact that Noah preached about the Ark of Salvation but no one would listen. It says, "And did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, (underlined emphasis is mine) with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly."

The ark offered rescue from the flood back in Noah's day. Today, we have an infinitely greater Ark, the Lord Jesus Christ! Jesus offers us rescue from the flood of sin.

When you trace the Messianic line from Adam to Noah you find that the Ark of Salvation was constructed to preserve the Messianic lineage to Jesus. The Gospel message was declared through the Messianic lineage (Genesis 5) and also by God (Genesis 3:15) right after sin entered our world. The names of the Messianic lineage give the good news of Jesus.

The God Man (Christ) is appointed a mortal man of sorrow is born! The glory of God shall come down instructing that His death shall bring those in despair comfort and rest."⁴⁰

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
God	(The) God
Adam	Man
Seth	Is appointed,
Enosh	a mortal man,
Kenan	of sorrow is born!

⁴⁰Dr. Matthew Webster. Growing in Grace: Small Group Book 1. Kindle Direct Publishing 2022.

Mahalalel	The glory of God
Jared	shall come down
Enoch	instructing that
Methuselah	His death shall bring
Lamech	those in despair
Noah	comfort and rest

Noah's Ark points us to Jesus who is the Ark of our Salvation. For an extended period, my attention was fixated on unraveling the mysteries of the neurological conditions I confronted. It felt like I was captivated by the enormity of life's waves relentlessly crashing into the boat of my existence. Each tumultuous wave, one after another, drove me to a frantic quest for ways to mitigate their impact. My concentration on the "what" became so intense that I lost sight of the "who". Amidst the storms of life, I realized that Jesus is the ark in which I find refuge no matter how big the waves might be.

The more diligently I sought answers, consulted numerous doctors and specialists, and underwent countless tests, the more I sank into frustration and hopelessness. While it is prudent to seek solutions for our medical challenges, it is even wiser to reflect on how God constructed the ark. Like the window on top of the ark that guided Noah and his family to look upward and maintain their focus on God, we too are called to gaze upon the cross of Jesus during life's storms—a symbol of our victory.

What type of wood was the ark made out of?

Genesis 6:14: "So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out."

Though it doesn't state what type of wood the cross of Christ was made of, many Bible scholars believe, based on information passed down through the years, that the cross was also made from Cypress wood.

What was the ark covered in? "Pitch". The Hebrew word for pitch "kâphar" is the term used for atonement, and for covering your sins.⁴¹ "Pitch" was a covering, a seal, that was used to keep the vessel safe both inside and out. As believers, this is a powerful statement that points to the blood of Jesus over us. For the blood of Christ Himself has become our covering, our seal, under which we are always kept safe and secure. It is the blood of Jesus applied to our lives that washes us clean from sin and gives those who are in Jesus everlasting life. Through His blood that was shed and applied to our lives, like the pitch was on the ark, we are protected and saved by His blood.⁴²

"Then the ark rested in the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat (which means the curse reversed)⁴³" [Genesis 8:4].

"When Jesus said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life," what He meant was that He had come to reverse this curse. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). Jesus came to bear "our sins in His body on the tree that we might live to righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24). "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans

⁴¹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3722/kjv/wlc/0-1/

⁴²Dr. Matthew Webster. Growing in Grace: Small Group Book 1. Kindle Direct Publishing 2022.

⁴³www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h780/kjv/wlc/0-1/

6:23). Jesus only reverses the curse for all who will believe in Him. That's why Jesus says, "Whoever believes in Me, though he dies, yet shall he live."⁴⁴ Those who did not believe in Noah's day failed to enter into the Ark of their Salvation. "Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the Earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the Earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark" (Genesis 7:22-24).

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13a). This means that in Christ we now have peace with God. Genesis 8:11 reveals peace: "When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the Earth." The olive tree branch brought back by a dove (Genesis 8:11) signifies the Holy Spirit, which descended on Jesus like a dove at the time of His baptism by John the Baptist (Luke 3:22). The olive branch is a symbol of peace. Jesus is our peace (Ephesians 2:14a), reconciling us to God. As the Ark of our Salvation, Jesus Christ has reversed the curse and we now have peace with God and favor forever.

After the floodwaters receded, God made a Covenant with Noah and all living creatures, symbolized by the rainbow, promising never again to destroy the Earth with a flood.

⁴⁴Jon Bloom. Desiring God. Jesus Came to Reverse the Curse. www.desiringgod.org/articles/jesus-came-to-reverse-the-curse. May 3, 2013.

Genesis 9:13-16: "I have set My rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the Covenant between Me and the Earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the Earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember My Covenant between Me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting Covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the Earth."

In Noah's case, the floodwaters washed away the corruption and wickedness of the world, and Noah and his family were given a new opportunity to multiply and fill the Earth. Similarly, in Christ, believers experience a spiritual cleansing through the forgiveness of sins, and they are offered a new life and a restored relationship with God.

It's an undeniable truth that confronting a major storm in your life brings about lasting transformation. In Christ, this change is not only transformative but also reveals the goodness that God works through it. The challenges I faced served to strengthen my faith and dependence on God. The more time dedicated to prayer and immersing myself in the Word, the more the Holy Spirit unveils God's love and grace in Christ.

The church today is washed by the Word of God. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word" (Ephesians 5:25-26).

Some who are reading this book are in anticipation of God's healing touch. Find encouragement in the

assurance that God has already provided for your healing at the cross! The completed work of our Lord Jesus on the cross has fulfilled every need, including our restoration. Healing is a gift that God desires us to accept willingly and freely. The greater our exposure to the preached Word and our immersion in the waters of Scripture, the more we will encounter the healing presence of the Lord in our lives. Let the Word of God strengthen and encourage you and grow your faith as you wait expectantly for your healing and restoration!

Lessons from Noah

In a generation where corruption prevailed, Noah walked with God. Noah's story becomes a profound reflection on the transformative power of walking with God in a world engulfed in moral decay. Today, we live in a world much like it was in the days of Noah. "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away" (Matthew 24:37-39).

Noah's life was a living testimony to the grace he found in God. Noah, as a preacher of righteousness, called his contemporaries to repentance and pointed them toward the grace of God, the ark. Likewise, we are tasked with proclaiming the boundless grace found in Jesus, offering hope and redemption during life's storms, protection, and life found within the Ark of our Salvation. Through our words and deeds, we can echo

the call for those who are lost to receive the saving grace that flows from the cross.

Redemption through faith. Noah's righteousness wasn't based on his character but on his belief in God's plan of salvation. This underscores the principle that salvation and righteousness come through faith in Jesus. Noah was declared righteous by faith.

God's boundless grace and mercy. The necessity of the flood, as depicted in Noah's story, is a testament to God's boundless grace and mercy. The flood served as a means to preserve humanity, fulfilling the prophecy of the Messiah's coming to crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15). God's plan, rooted in grace, ensured the continuity of the human race and laid the groundwork for the fulfillment of prophetic promises.

God's plan of salvation. Noah's obedient construction of the ark serves as a representation of Christ, the ultimate Ark of salvation. The meticulous details of the ark's construction, including the use of specific wood and pitch, point to Jesus as the divine provision for salvation. The ark's measurements symbolize victory over death through the blood sacrifice and multiplied grace leading to our jubilee.

Fix our eyes on Jesus in life's storms. The analogy of being in Jesus as being in the ark underscores the idea that, in life's storms, Jesus is our refuge. The account of Jesus calming the storm in Mark 4:35-41 illustrates that, when we keep our eyes on Jesus, He brings us peace even in turbulent circumstances. Jesus becomes the constant anchor for those who trust in Him, offering a source of peace that transcends life's storms.

Chapter 5:

Noah: The Floodwaters of Change, Ark of New Beginnings Small Group Questions

In what ways can we navigate and express our faith in today's world, which often mirrors the moral decay of Noah's day?

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. What does the concept of grace mean to you? How does Noah's experience of grace parallel our understanding of grace in the New Testament?

The dimensions of the ark symbolize victory, the blood sacrifice, and grace being multiplied unto us. In what ways can the symbolism of the ark's dimensions deepen our appreciation of Christ's redemptive work?

Discuss the analogy of being in Jesus as being in the ark. How does Jesus serve as a refuge and source of peace in the storms of life? How can we, like Noah, share the assurance of salvation found in Christ with others?

Why did such a large ark have only one door, what's the message? Why was the window only placed on the top of the ark?

Reflect on the symbolism of cypress wood and pitch in the ark. How do these elements connect to the cross of Christ and the covering of sins?

The dove brought back an olive leaf, symbolizing peace. How does the dove's action foreshadow the peace found in Jesus?

Explore the significance of the ark resting on the mountains of Ararat. How does the concept of "curse reversed" resonate with the message of salvation in Christ?

Chapter 6:
Daniel: A Roaring Victory Sheltered in Protection



45

Daniel is an important Biblical character to study when it comes to finding the courage to hope in God when things seem hopeless. Daniel had trusted in God and followed God's plans and still, he ended up in a perilous situation inside a den of hungry lions. Mike Tyson said before his fight with Tyrell Biggs, "Everyone has a plan until they get hit the first time."⁴⁶ Daniel's life was dealt many body blows but each time he trusted in God. "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are His. He changes times and seasons; He deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; He knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with Him" (Daniel 2:20-23).

Just because you might be experiencing trials and persecution it does not mean that you are not following God's leading. Often following God's plans for your life will bring persecution but also the opportunity for God's glory to be revealed (Matthew 5:11-12). Rejoice in Jesus in the persecution because your reward in Heaven is great and your testimony of what the Lord did in your life will bring Him glory and be used to encourage others.

Who was Daniel?

Daniel was a prophet and advisor in the Babylonian Empire during the 6th century BC. He was known for his wisdom, faithfulness to God, and ability to interpret dreams.

⁴⁶Mike Tyson. Associated Press. August 1987. Everybody Has Plans Until They Get Hit for the First Time. August 25, 2021.
www.quoteinvestigator.com/2021/08/25/plans-hit/

Daniel was taken captive to Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, conquered Jerusalem. Despite being in a foreign land at a young age, Daniel remained faithful to his God.

Daniel refused to eat the king's food, choosing instead to follow a diet in accordance with his religious beliefs, showing a commitment to God's Laws (Daniel 1:8). Daniel who was given the gift by God to interpret dreams did so for kings multiple times (Daniel 2:19-23, Daniel 4:19-27, Daniel 5:10-17). Daniel always gave God glory for his ability to interpret dreams.

There are two instances in the Book of Daniel where a king rewarded Daniel for interpreting his dreams: "After Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the large statue, the king was so impressed that he fell prostrate before Daniel and acknowledged the God of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar then promoted Daniel to a high position in the province of Babylon, made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon, and placed him in charge of all its wise men" (Daniel 2:46-49).

In Daniel 5:29 Daniel interprets the writing on the wall during Belshazzar's feast. "For many years skeptics did not believe Belshazzar existed. But they changed their minds when, in the late nineteenth century, cuneiform tablets were published that clearly referenced him."⁴⁷ Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was so impressed with Daniel's interpretation that he clothed Daniel in purple, placed a gold chain around his neck, and proclaimed him the third-highest ruler in the kingdom.

⁴⁷The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry Inc. Israel My Glory. Daniel and Darius. September/October 2004. www.israelmyglory.org/article/daniel-and-darius/

In both instances, Daniel's faithfulness and ability to interpret dreams led to his elevation in the Babylonian hierarchy. The kings recognized the unique wisdom and insight that Daniel possessed, and they rewarded him accordingly.

When we come to Daniel 6:28 we learn the following: "So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian." The concept of prosperity often diverges from conventional teachings, presenting itself in unexpected forms—prosperity within the lions' den, prosperity amid trials and tribulations.

The book of Daniel is one of the few places where it is written in Aramaic and the Aramaic word "prosper" in Daniel 6:28 is "tsēlach" which means to cause to prosper.⁴⁸ True divine prosperity doesn't shield one from persecution; rather, it manifests abundantly during challenges, much like the way Daniel's ordeals positioned him for blessings. Experiencing God's favor doesn't translate to an absence of difficulties but rather a promise that all things, even trials, are orchestrated for our ultimate good.

But how does Daniel in the lion's den relate to our lives today?

"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

I've encountered the roar of a lion up close only once, and it happened at Disney's Animal Kingdom, where I felt secure and well-protected. The lion's roar was

⁴⁸www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h6744/kjv/wlc/0-1/

formidable and intimidating. Even from a distance, the sheer power of the sound sent shivers down your spine, making the hairs on the back of your neck stand up.

Isn't it fascinating, in the passage above, that the devil must actively seek out those he may devour? Devour "katapínō": to destroy.⁴⁹ This implies that not everyone is susceptible to his attacks. You can become "undevourable" like Daniel was to the devil, and the key lies in the preceding verse: "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). The secret to being undestroyable is to live carefree, unburdened by anxieties and worries. Laugh a lot, enjoy your abundant life full of God's favor, and don't worry about tomorrow.

To the legalistic mind, this might sound irresponsible. Yet, in God's perspective, your primary responsibility is to rejoice in the Lord always and not be weighed down by past failures, present circumstances, or future challenges. Why? Because of what God's grace has already accomplished for you. The One with power over all including death is currently caring for you and watching over you. Surrender every oppressive thought, worry, and care into Jesus' loving hands. Believe wholeheartedly that He cares for you, and you're not alone in your journey. You have a constant companion in Jesus, you have been given the Holy Spirit, and God the Father hears your prayers.

Have you noticed that Satan roams about "like" or "as" "a roaring lion"? Why a lion and not some other animal? Proverbs 19:12, says, "The king's wrath is like

⁴⁹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2666/niv/mgnt/0-1/

the roaring of a lion.” The devil is an imposter imitating the King of kings, our Lord Jesus, the true lion of Judah. He aims to deceive, making it seem like our King is filled with wrath, anger, and rage against us. Satan comes at us roaring with condemnation, accusation, and shame, attempting to rob us of the truth about who God is and His disposition toward us.

Satan wants you to believe you’ve failed God, that He is not just disappointed but furious with you. If you accept this lie, you won’t seek refuge under the shelter of His wings. You’ll relinquish your authority, power, and strength. Believers under condemnation feel unworthy of God’s promises, expecting punishment instead of blessings. This is exactly where the devil wants you – running away from God, falling into his snare. You forfeit your authority when you abandon intimacy with God.

Instead of running from God, know that God is not angry with you. In Christ, you can have the confident assurance that you are forgiven, loved, and righteous (Ephesians 1:7, Romans 8:37, 2 Corinthians 5:21). See your heavenly Father with open arms ready to lavish His love and His grace upon you. Resist the imposter by submitting to God and the Bible assures that he will flee from you (James 4:7).

Our spiritual journeys are similar to Daniel’s in that we too face adversity for our faith. Embracing the light of Christ in our lives will attract persecution, yet we are urged not to lose heart—God, in His wisdom and providential plan, is causing us to prosper in Christ. The shift from predicament to prosperity occurs through faith, echoing the lessons found in Daniel 6.

Jesus came to give you abundant life, not abundant lack in life. John 10:10 says: “The thief’s purpose is to

steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.”

Jesus died to give us a rich prosperous life.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

When the verse says “though He was rich” that particular Greek word is plousios which means: wealthy, abounding in material resources.⁵⁰

The second reference to “rich” in 2 Corinthians 8:9 says: “that you through His poverty might be rich.” This second Greek word plouteō means: to be rich, to have abundance; of outward possessions; to be richly supplied; is affluent in resources so that He can give blessings of salvation to all.⁵¹

Daniel’s narrative resonated with me as I, too, experienced the abrupt immersion into a den that could cause despair. While Daniel’s circumstances were more severe than mine, there were days when I wished to exchange positions with him. Anyone enduring prolonged suffering simply yearns for the pain to end. Daniel would have his answer come quickly, whereas, mine would take years.

Daniel’s narrative didn’t conclude in the den, and similarly, my story wasn’t defined by my illness. The One who sealed the lions’ mouths was with me, guiding me to rest in green pastures through the prayers of others, well-timed words of encouragement, and the infusion of faith from hearing

⁵⁰www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4145/kjv/tr/0-1/

⁵¹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4147/kjv/tr/0-1/

the Word of God. Jesus lifted me out of the den of disease.

God has richly blessed us and caused us to prosper in Christ so that we might use those blessings for God's glory and the salvation of mankind just as Daniel did. God prospered Daniel so a nation might know who God is and worship the God of Daniel.

It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel (Daniel 6:1-2).

Daniel has a high position of leadership over a powerful Persian empire. "Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom" (Daniel 6:3).

What is important to point out is man's plan was to appoint Daniel over the whole kingdom, yet God's plan is better still. God's plan was one of salvation for many and God's plan will work even through the evil actions of others.

"At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, 'We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the Law of his God'" (Daniel 6:4-5).

Have you ever wondered what empowers an individual to rise as a champion, enduring challenges similar to Daniel's journey? The Book of Daniel imparts the

wisdom of how Daniel endured such persecution, “The people who know their God shall be strong and carry out great exploits” (Daniel 11:32). Apply this directly to your life by inserting your name into Daniel 11:32.

I (insert your name), know my heavenly Father and am strong in Christ, so I will carry out great exploits in life in Jesus’ name.

If you desire to walk in strength, wisdom, and favor today that is undeniable and irresistible then I encourage you to keep hearing and growing in your knowledge of God’s grace and mercy toward you (Daniel 10:11). In Daniel’s story, the Lord, through an angel, addressed him as a “man greatly beloved” (Daniel 10:11). The more you hear about and are confident in God’s love for you, the more you will live life with boldness that sets you apart from others and testifies of His power in your life.

The plan unfolds to try and destroy Daniel but the very trial brought before him by the enemy will be the testimony of the deliverance and the victory of the Lord (Daniel 6:6-9).

“So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: “May King Darius live forever! The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers, and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” So King Darius put the decree in writing” (Daniel 6:6-9).

What was Daniel's response to the decree?

"Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before" (Daniel 6:10).

Daniel openly prayed and in the next verse these men "found Daniel praying and asking God for help." The enemy aims to hinder you from seeking God's assistance. Daniel, with his wisdom, chose to pray and seek God's help. Daniel was forbidden from praying, yet he chose to pray specifically about the very act for which he was being persecuted. The lesson here for us is to pray about the persecution and believe in God's prosperity out of it (Daniel 6:11).

These evil men go back to the king with the evidence they need to throw Daniel into a lion's den. Their plan has worked, not even the king can change a decree he has made (Daniel 6:15).

This horrible situation provides the opportunity for God to do work in this king's heart. We discover from verse fourteen, "When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him" (Daniel 6:14).

The king didn't make the decree to trap Daniel, he was outsmarted and used as a pawn to destroy Daniel. But even when the king can't save you, the King of kings (1 Timothy 6:15) has made a way for your salvation.

“So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you” (Daniel 6:16)!

Do you see the hand of God at work in this terrifying situation? If God rescues Daniel then you have a king who would believe, a nation that would know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is in the den where our trust in God’s deliverance will provide the opportunity for the salvation of others. What you are going through and the victory you will experience will provide the opportunity to minister unto others and for them to receive the salvation of the Lord.

Why am I suffering for doing what is good? “So that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7).

Into the Lion’s Den

“A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed” (Daniel 6:17).

The den was sealed with a stone and it reminds me of a time when a tomb was sealed with a stone and posted with Roman guards. Did you know that an impossible situation to change by man is a God-given opportunity for Him to reveal who He is (Daniel 6:17)? What I found in my failing health is that what doctors could not do for me, the Great Physician Jesus Christ can and has.

“At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?” Daniel answered, “May the king live forever! My God sent His angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty” (Daniel 6:20-22).

Do you know who God sent to be with Daniel in the lions’ den? He sent Jesus. “My God sent His angel” (mal’ak). It is the same Aramaic word used only two times in the entire Bible and both times is Jesus Christ.⁵² The other time it is used is when an angel appeared in the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3:28. This is a sign that salvation is found in Christ. Daniel survived the lions because Jesus was in the den with him.

“The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. At the king’s command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions’ den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones” (Daniel 6:23-24).

This indicates that these were not well-fed lions; they were hungry and immediately devoured those who were thrown into the den without even reaching the ground. It wasn’t that the lions did not want to

⁵²www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h4398/kjv/wlc/0-1/

consume Daniel but that Jesus shut the lions' mouths. Remember the One who has all power and all authority over your situation is with you.

Jesus said, "All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Me" (Matthew 28:18).

Psalm 91:13: "You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent."

Whatever challenges or circumstances we may encounter, we can take solace in knowing that our God reigns supreme. Trusting in God's sovereignty, we find strength and hope, knowing that He is in control, and His power is greater than any obstacle we may face. Jesus, the Word of God, will shut the mouth of the roaring lion and the lies he tries to get us to believe (John 8:44).

God's plan was revealed from the mouth of a pagan king in Daniel 6:25-27: "Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the Earth: 'Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for He is the living God, enduring forever; His kingdom shall never be destroyed, and His dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; He works signs and wonders in Heaven and on Earth, He who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.'"

King Darius recognizes God's sovereignty. The God of Daniel is the living and eternal God whose Kingdom will never be destroyed. We are encouraged in Scripture to recognize God's ultimate authority and sovereignty over all things (Colossians 1:16-17, Revelation 4:11).

Proclamation of God's power. Darius declares the miraculous deliverance of Daniel from the lions' den, highlighting the power and deliverance of the God of Israel. New Testament believers can proclaim the power of God through their testimonies of God's faithfulness, grace, and deliverance in their lives (1 Peter 2:9, Revelation 12:11).

Call to worship God. Darius issues a decree for all people to reverence the God of Daniel. Similarly, New Testament believers are called to worship God, recognizing Him as the one deserving of reverence and awe (Matthew 10:28, Hebrews 12:28-29).

Confession of God's deliverance. The decree acknowledges God as the one who delivers and rescues. New Testament believers can also confess and testify to God's deliverance and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10, 1 Corinthians 15:57).

Lessons from Daniel

Have faith in God in adversity. Despite all that Daniel went through he continued to trust in God.

Daniel's refusal to compromise on his dietary choices in adherence to his religious beliefs (Daniel 1:8) highlights the significance of standing firm in God's Word even in the face of cultural pressures.

Attributing success to God. Daniel consistently gave God the glory for his ability to interpret dreams and achieve success. Acknowledging God's role in our accomplishments fosters both humility and gratitude.

Prosperity in God's terms. True prosperity, as seen in Daniel's life, doesn't mean an absence of challenges. Instead, God's prosperity manifests in trials,

positioning individuals for blessings. Prosperity in God's terms involves trusting Him through difficulties believing He is going to work all things for my good.

The story of Daniel emphasizes that the genuineness of our faith is tested in the crucible of challenges. This testing, like gold refined by fire, results in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:7).

Live a rich prosperous life of rejoicing in Jesus, casting our cares on Him, and knowing that as you receive the gift of no condemnation in Jesus you become undevourable by the enemy.

Chapter 6: Daniel: A Roaring Victory Sheltered in Protection Small Group Questions

How does Daniel's experience in the lions' den challenge your understanding of prosperity during adversity?

Have you ever faced a situation where, despite your trust in God, things seemed to get worse? How did you prosper out of the situation?

How do you view challenges and adversities in your spiritual journey?

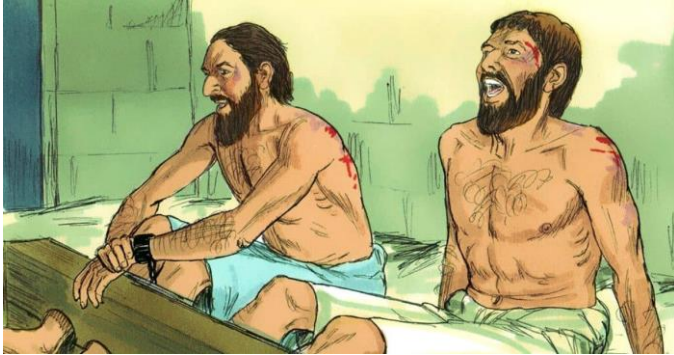
Can you recall a time when a seemingly impossible situation turned into an opportunity for God to demonstrate His power in your life?

What did Daniel do immediately after the king's decree came? What lesson do we learn from Daniel's action when we face persecution for our faith?

What significance do you see in the fact that Jesus, was with Daniel in the lions' den? How did Jesus emerge from the Tomb and how did the lion's den foreshadow the Resurrection? How might impossible situations become opportunities for God to reveal Himself?

What impact does King Darius' proclamation in Daniel 6:25-27 have on your perception of God's sovereignty and the ultimate purpose of trials?

Chapter 7: Paul and Silas: Cultivating Joy in Captivity



53

The Apostle Paul, in his missionary journeys and efforts to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, faced numerous challenges, including beatings and imprisonments. One such incident occurred in Philippi.

Acts 16:23-34: "After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks."

The Greek city of Philippi was conquered by the Romans in 86 B.C. and by 42 B.C. it could be described as a "small settlement".⁵⁴ The use of flogging as a punishment was common among both the Romans and Greeks, so the form of punishment administered to Paul and Silas was anticipated given the historical practices of that time.

The process of flogging in 1st-century Rome typically involved the use of a whip or scourge. The scourge was a multi-tailed whip, often made of leather strips embedded with pieces of bone or metal (usually zinc and iron) to quickly remove flesh from the body of a victim.⁵⁵ The person being flogged would be bound or tied to a post or frame, and the Roman lictors (officials) would administer the punishment. The person administering the flogging would strike the victim repeatedly on the back, shoulders, and sometimes other parts of the body. The purpose was not only to inflict physical pain but also to serve as a deterrent and a form of public humiliation.

⁵⁴Philip J. Long. How Roman was first century Philippi? October 21, 2017. www.readingacts.com/2017/10/21/how-roman-was-first-century-philippi/

⁵⁵Bible History: Maps, Archaeology. The Roman Scourge. www.bible-history.com/past/flagrum

Flogging often involves the removal of clothing to expose the back and make the flogging more effective in causing pain and injury. Stripping the clothes off would add an extra level of shame and vulnerability to the punishment.

The “inner prison” Paul and Silas were placed in referred to a more secure and harsher section of the jail. Ancient prisons didn’t have the same level of amenities or human rights considerations we have today, and conditions could be quite challenging.

What would it have been like being in the inner cell placed in stocks? The inner cell was a more confined and less comfortable space within the prison. It was a smaller, windowless room, most likely underground, making it dark, damp, and lacking proper ventilation. “Paul may have spent as much as 25 percent of his time as a missionary in prison. Most cells were dark, especially the inner cells of a prison like the one Paul and Silas inhabited in Philippi. Unbearable cold, lack of water, cramped quarters, and sickening stench from few toilets made sleeping difficult and waking hours miserable. Male and female prisoners were sometimes incarcerated together, which led to sexual immorality and abuse. Prison food, when available, was poor. Most prisoners had to provide their own food from outside sources. When Paul was in prison in Caesarea, Felix, the procurator, gave orders to the centurion that “none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.” Because of the miserable conditions, many prisoners begged for a speedy death. Others simply committed suicide.”⁵⁶

⁵⁶John Mcray. Christianity Today. Stench, Pain, and Misery: Life in a Roman Prison. www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-47/stench-pain-and-misery.html

The stocks were a form of restraining device used to confine a person's feet. They consisted of two wooden boards with holes for the ankles, and when closed and locked, they held the prisoner's legs in a fixed position. This not only restricted movement but also caused discomfort, pain, and cramping.

Combining the inner cell with the use of stocks would have made their prison experience miserable. Paul and Silas, in this situation, not only endured physical discomfort but also faced the psychological and emotional strain of being confined in a harsh environment with no end in sight. Despite these difficult circumstances, as the narrative goes on, we see Paul and Silas praying and singing hymns to God, demonstrating their faith and resilience even amid adversity.

"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25).

We don't know exactly why Paul and Silas were still awake at midnight but it probably had something to do with the uncomfortable conditions they found themselves in and also the pain caused by the severe flogging they had just received. Paul and Silas ignored their physical conditions as they prayed and sang hymns to God. In times of adversity, when everything appears to be going awry, your song of praise amid persecution captures the attention of those who also are in a state of confinement. Demonstrating joy in the face of suffering and sorrow invariably draws the notice of those nearby (Acts 16:25). That prison had borne witness to curses, groans, cries, pleas, and desperation, but never before had it experienced the uplifting melody of songs of praise.

Let's look at what brought Paul and Silas to Macedonia in the first place. "When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the Gospel to them" (Acts 16:7,9-10).

At first, their trip had great success, they met Lydia, and she and members of her household were baptized. They would set a demon-possessed girl free but this is what caused them to be beaten and imprisoned. Following God's leading does not mean that we will not go through dark valleys. Sometimes, our life's journey may take us through rough terrain, but God promises that these paths ultimately lead to a place of beauty, abundance, and fulfillment in His perfect plan. So, as we face life's challenges, let us hold fast to the assurance that God is directing our steps toward a glorious destination beyond our imagination (Ephesians 3:20). Find joy in Jesus while in the circumstances that would seem to confine us; and break free from the chains of bondage through the uplifting melody of praise.

During the peak of my challenging health condition, the simple act of driving my daughter to school every morning felt like an insurmountable task. In the harsh winters of Michigan, where the cold can be unforgiving, venturing outdoors entailed the challenges of snow removal and scraping icy windows. The journey to school frequently involved tense, white-knuckled moments of navigating slippery country backroads. Before setting out, there was a

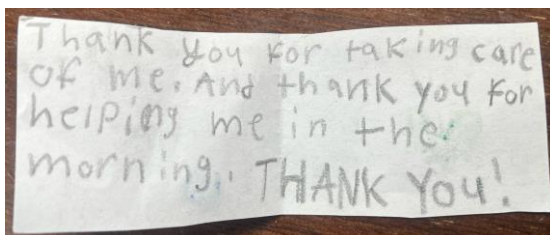
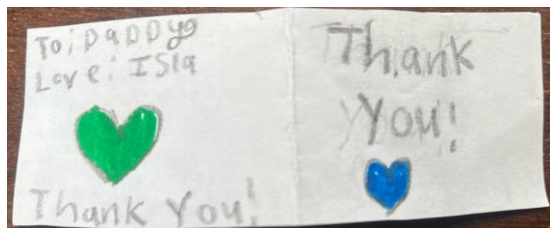
routine of making breakfast, preparing lunches and snacks, checking homework, and occasionally managing last-minute laundry, among other tasks. Many mornings, I faced the uncertainty of whether I could physically manage all that was required of me to get her to school. Even though the Lord provided me with the strength to accomplish this daily responsibility, I couldn't shake the sense of failure. My attention was fixated on the things I couldn't achieve and the opportunities I had missed, rather than recognizing the simple yet profound reality of being able to spend each morning with my daughter.

The Lord revealed the impact my efforts made through a note from my daughter. As she entered my bedroom and handed me a heartfelt note, I understood that rising several hours early to prepare my body for the day had not gone unnoticed by her.

To: Daddy Love: Isla

Thank You! Thank You!

Thank you for taking care of me. And thank you for helping me in the morning. Thank you!



The story of Paul and Silas rejoicing in prison led me to start singing God's praises during my morning routine when I was often in great physical pain. Despite the dire circumstances, Paul and Silas exemplified courage and hope, transforming a prison cell into a place of worship. My kitchen which once felt like a prison started to feel more like a beautiful cathedral drawing me in to sing God's praises and filling my heart with gratitude to spend the morning with my youngest daughter. Fresh blueberry pancakes became our new tradition, what a delight! "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4).

As I reflect on my past struggles, I am reminded of the mindset shift I underwent. Rather than dwelling on perceived failures and limitations, I began to appreciate the profound value of my daily experience that God abundantly blesses me and that every provision I need, including strength, He provides me in Christ. In the face of adversity, Paul and Silas turned their focus from their immediate predicament to praising God.

"Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose" (Acts 16:26).

When we choose to walk by faith and not by sight, embracing a spiritual journey guided by the Holy Spirit, we discover the power to sing even in the confines of life's challenges. As we navigate this spiritual path, remarkable transformations unfold, including deliverance from our physical constraints. The liberation we experience in our physical state originates in the spiritual realm, emphasizing the

precedence of faith over mere sight. By singing about our spiritual freedom, we pave the way for its tangible manifestation in our physical conditions.

“The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here” (Acts 16:27-28)!

An individual with a criminal record tends to flee when an opportunity arises, driven by the lack of true freedom. However, a transformed life, one where the Son has already granted freedom (John 8:36), leads to a different response. In such a liberated existence, there’s no compulsion to run, as true freedom eliminates the need for escape, as illustrated in Acts 16:28.

“The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” Then they spoke the Word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household” (Acts 16:29-34).

The inception of the first church in Philippi is a testament to God’s transformative work among a diverse group of individuals. It began with Lydia a businesswoman and her household and possibly included a former slave girl, as well as the Philippian jailer and his household, and likely others freed from

prison who joined. This unique assembly is truly inspiring because it was orchestrated by God, showcasing the diversity of those brought together by God's grace. Luke records how the Lord opened Lydia's heart (Acts 16:14), the name of Jesus freed a demon-possessed slave girl (Acts 16:18), and the Lord shook the jail with an earthquake. The same divine power that founded the Philippian church resonates today through the enduring power of God's Word and the indwelling Holy Spirit in your life.

Lessons from Paul and Silas

Paul and Silas demonstrated remarkable resilience and faith in the face of adversity. Despite being beaten and thrown into prison, they chose to pray and sing hymns to God. The act of singing hymns and worshiping in the prison signifies the power of worship as a source of strength and hope. It emphasizes that, even in challenging situations, believers can find comfort and courage through praise and connection to God in prayer.

Paul and Silas' response exemplifies the ability to find hope and joy amid difficult circumstances, serving as a model for us when we face severe trials.

The subsequent earthquake that opened the prison doors and the conversion of the jailer highlight the theme of divine intervention and miracles. The conversion of the jailer and his household is an unexpected and powerful outcome of Paul and Silas' imprisonment. This event demonstrates that God can bring about positive and transformative changes in the lives of those who seem far from faith. It encourages believers to maintain hope even when circumstances appear bleak. This reinforces the belief that God is

actively involved in the lives of believers, capable of turning dire situations into opportunities for redemption and transformation.

The theme of spiritual freedom is evident in Acts 16. The earthquake not only physically liberated the prisoners but also symbolized the spiritual freedom that comes through faith in Christ. This assures New Testament believers that, regardless of external circumstances, they can experience profound freedom in Christ.

Despite facing imprisonment, Paul continued to boldly proclaim the Gospel. His commitment to sharing the message of Christ, even in challenging situations, inspires believers to have the courage to share their faith in all circumstances.

The power of worship. The act of singing hymns and worshiping in prison highlights the power of worship as a source of strength and hope. In the harsh conditions of the inner cell and the discomfort caused by the stocks, Paul and Silas chose not to succumb to despair but instead turned to worship. The Scriptures remind believers that "the joy of the Lord is our strength" (Nehemiah 8:10), emphasizing that true and enduring strength comes from finding joy in God's presence, irrespective of external circumstances.

Expect divine intervention. Believers can draw hope from the understanding that God is actively involved in their lives.

Chapter 7:

Paul and Silas: Cultivating Joy in Captivity Small Group Questions

The Bible mentions that “the joy of the Lord is our strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). How do Paul and Silas model this for us in prison? How might you be brought joy in the face of severe circumstances?

The story in Acts 16 emphasizes divine intervention, from the earthquake to the conversion of the jailer. In what ways have you experienced or witnessed divine intervention in your life or the lives of others?

How does faith in Christ bring a sense of spiritual freedom in your own life, especially in challenging moments?

Paul and Silas faced imprisonment as a result of following God's leading. How do you interpret the idea that following God doesn't exempt us from dark valleys but still will ultimately lead us to a place of beauty, abundance, and fulfillment in His perfect plan?

The jailer's conversion and the formation of the first church in Philippi were outcomes of Paul and Silas' persecution. Share a time when you witnessed a positive outcome arise from a challenging situation, not just for yourself but also for those around you.

In what ways does spiritual liberation pave the way for transformation in our physical conditions?

Chapter 8:

Hannah: Bountiful Grace through Barren Seasons



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“Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb” (1 Samuel 1:4-5).

There are some amazing truths found in these two verses about Hannah’s life that were an immense blessing for me to discover during the period of my life when I awaited God’s healing. In Hannah’s barrenness, there was a double portion of blessing to be found.

The name “Elkanah” means “God has created”⁵⁸. In her barrenness, God has created or given a double portion of blessings into her life. This is a great lesson for us while we are waiting and believing God for our miracle. Think about how God has blessed you and sustained you in your period of distress. Which spiritual blessings have you already inherited by faith during your time of need? What other spiritual blessings do you need to receive by faith? Once again I highly recommend reading the book, *Overflowing Grace: 100 Blessings to Unleash Your Divine Inheritance and Unveil the New You*⁵⁹ to understand all that is yours in Christ.

Psalm 55:22: “Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous be shaken.”

“Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in

⁵⁸www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h511/niv/wlc/0-1/

⁵⁹Dr. Matthew Webster. *Overflowing Grace: 100 Blessings to Unleash Your Divine Inheritance and Unveil the New You*. Kindle Direct Publishing. 2023.

your inheritance. And so you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours” (Isaiah 61:7). The Old Testament prophecy of receiving our inheritance is fulfilled in Jesus. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy, He has given us new birth into a living hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is kept in Heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4).

The idea of receiving a double portion of a certain blessing in the Old Testament is increased in the New Covenant in Christ as every spiritual blessing is ours and is given in greater measure (Ephesians 1:3).

“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for My sake will receive a hundred times as much (underlined emphasis is mine) and will inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29).

The concept of rejoicing in inheritance and experiencing everlasting joy can be seen in the hope and salvation provided through Jesus.

Hannah’s barrenness and Elkanah’s response of giving her a double portion carry a significant lesson. In the cultural context of that time, having children was often seen as a sign of blessing and favor from God. Barrenness, on the other hand, could be stigmatized and bring shame. Peninnah, Elkanah’s other wife who had children, taunted Hannah, further exacerbating her distress.

Elkanah's response, giving Hannah a double portion of the sacrifice because he loved her, reflects a deep compassion for her pain. Although Elkanah loved her deeply, a chasm separated him from the depth of her pain. He couldn't fully empathize with the anguish she carried. The reason was evident in the fact he had his own children with Peninnah. When he questioned her sorrow in 1 Samuel 1:8 asking, "Why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Am I not worth ten sons to you?"—it was clear that Elkanah could not relate to Hannah's pain of remaining childless.

In the cultural and historical context of ancient Israel, it would have been unusual for Elkanah to favor Hannah, his barren wife, because societal norms often placed a high value on fertility.

In a polygamous setting like Elkanah's, where he had both Hannah and Peninnah as wives, Peninnah's ability to bear children would likely have been viewed as a positive and desirable quality. In contrast, Hannah's barrenness might have been seen as a source of shame or disappointment, especially considering the cultural emphasis on lineage, inheritance, and the continuation of family lines.

Elkanah's unusual favoritism towards Hannah, despite her inability to conceive, illustrates God's grace toward us. Elkanah's favor toward Hannah, despite her barrenness, can be seen as a reflection of God's grace in several ways.

God's grace is often described as unmerited favor or kindness that is not earned or deserved. Similarly, Elkanah's favor toward Hannah goes beyond societal

expectations or norms related to fertility. It is an undeserved act of kindness and love.

Love despite imperfection. In the same way that God loves us despite our imperfections and shortcomings, Elkanah loves Hannah as she is, giving her a double portion regardless of her inability to conceive. This love mirrors God's unconditional love for us, loving us while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

Love beyond circumstances. God's grace is not contingent on our circumstances or achievements. Elkanah's love for Hannah extends beyond her ability to bear children, emphasizing the value of the person rather than external markers of success. Similarly, God's grace is constant and does not waver based on our circumstances. Our healing/miracle does not come to us because we deserve it, our healing is a gift of God's grace that we receive by faith.

One of the primary reasons why people fail to receive healing is because there is condemnation and guilt within them that makes them feel like they are not worthy or holy enough to receive healing. Jesus did not heal people on Earth because they were holy and deserved it, instead, Jesus healed those who reached out to Him or responded to Him (Mark 6:56).

Hannah's double portion that she received was because of grace alone, she was unable to bear any children with Elkanah like Peninnah did.

"Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:
Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases" (Psalm 103:2-3).

Comfort in affliction. Hannah faced distress and taunting due to her barrenness, but Elkanah's favor provided her with comfort. God's grace unto us will comfort us in times of affliction and provide solace amid life's challenges.

A picture of redemption. Elkanah's favor toward Hannah, leading to the eventual birth of Samuel, echoes the redemptive nature of God's grace. Even in seemingly hopeless situations, God's grace can bring forth blessings and fulfill His purposes. Barrenness is broken in God's favor. Through God's intervention or favor, what was once unproductive or lacking is transformed into a state of blessing, fruitfulness, or abundance. The double portion provided good health unto Hannah sustaining her in her barrenness so she would remain strong and receive the blessing of the baby to come.

Elkanah's favor toward Hannah demonstrates love that transcends societal expectations, love despite imperfections, and comfort in times of distress.

"He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none" (1 Samuel 1:2).

Elkanah was a devout man with two wives. While polygamy is tolerated in the Old Testament, it is consistently portrayed with the accompanying heartaches it entails. From the outset, God's design was one man and one woman, and I believe this passage aligns with that foundational principle.

Elkanah "God has created"⁶⁰ has two wives:

Peninnah meaning "jewel"⁶¹ bears children.

Hannah meaning "grace"⁶² has no children.

The significance of the meanings of the wives' names in 1 Samuel chapter one adds depth to the narrative and provides insights into their respective situations.

Peninnah meaning "jewel" or "coral", carries connotations of value, beauty, and preciousness. In the context of the story, Peninnah is described as having children, and her name symbolizes the societal value placed on fertility and bearing children during that time. The juxtaposition of her name with her ability to bear children might emphasize the cultural perception that her role as a mother adds to her worth.

Hannah meaning "grace" or "favor", contrasts with her barrenness. Despite her name suggesting the favor "grace" that she has from Elkanah she faces the hardship of infertility. This incongruity highlights the theme of grace, as Hannah's eventual conception of Samuel is presented as an act of divine favor or grace rather than a result of her own efforts or circumstances. Her story underscores that God's favor operates beyond human expectations and conventions.

The significance of the names lies in the contrast between the meanings of their names and their life situations. Peninnah, the "jewel" with children,

⁶⁰www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h511/niv/wlc/0-1/

⁶¹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h6444/niv/wlc/0-1/

⁶²www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2584/niv/wlc/0-1/

represents the cultural ideal of a woman's worth tied to fertility. On the other hand, Hannah, whose name signifies "grace" or "favor," experiences the transformative power of God's grace despite her barrenness. This points us to the unconditional love of God who simply loves us. We all require God's grace for Him to work in areas where the outcomes fall short of our earnest desires.

Why did God close Hannah's womb (1 Samuel 1:5)? We might ask, "Why am I not receiving an answer to my prayer?" Why has God allowed me to be brought to a place of barrenness? Being in a place of need and dependence on God allows us to be receptive to receive the grace God desires to give us. What might we do as long as we can handle something? We handle it and we never experience God's miracle-working power.⁶³ God is glorified through our triumphs in Christ.

"But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

What various factors caused Hannah to be so distraught that she would not eat?

"Because the LORD had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat" (1 Samuel 1:6-7).

⁶³Lesson 2: Hannah. Women of the Bible Series Bible.org.
www.bible.org/seriespage/lesson-2-hannah.

Peninnah continued to cause Hannah pain year after year and we have no mention of Hannah retaliating against her, instead, Hannah is brought to tears and she takes her pain to God instead of fixating on comparing herself to Penninah. Teddy Roosevelt said, "Comparison is the thief of joy".⁶⁴ While I acknowledge that making comparisons can hinder us from recognizing the blessings actively bestowed upon us by God, we can find encouragement in celebrating the blessings received by others (Romans 12:15). This practice instills in us a confident expectation of the goodness that God will bring into our lives.

Hannah in deep pain prays. "In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, "LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head." As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine." "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief." Eli answered, "Go in peace, and

⁶⁴Robert Puff Ph.D. We Do Better When We're Not Comparing Ourselves to Others. www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/meditation-modern-life/202104/we-do-better-when-we-re-not-comparing-ourselves-others

may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him" (1 Samuel 1:10-17).

"This response from Eli came after Hannah explained to the High Priest his mistake, and we view this sentence from the lips of Eli as a prayer to God, and not merely as a wish that God would answer Hannah's prayer. The proof of this is seen in the fact that Hannah is no longer sad (1 Samuel 1:18). The soon-to-be answered prayer of the great High Priest and judge of Israel himself played a factor in the dramatic change in Hannah's attitude."⁶⁵

She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast" (1 Samuel 1:18).

Amid Hannah's profound anguish and distress, she turned to God in prayer. This encourages us to bring our troubles to the One who deeply cares for us whenever our circumstances bring pain and distress.

"Casting all your care upon Him; for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). The significance of your prayers lies not in their length or volume, but in who you pray to that matters. As you engage in prayer today, recognize that you are in communion with your heavenly Father, who deeply loves you and attentively listens because of your righteousness in Christ. We pray in Jesus' name, and Jesus as our High Priest, purifies our prayers before God (Hebrews 4:14).

Did Hannah receive what she wanted from the Lord because she made a plea deal with Him? No! Remember Hannah's name means grace and it is

⁶⁵Coffman's Commentaries on the Bible. www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/bcc/1-samuel-1.html

through grace received that she can bear a son, not because of her ability to broker a deal with God. God's plan would be for Samuel to be a prophet to the nation of Israel. I believe Hannah's desire to dedicate Samuel unto the Lord is born out of a response of gratitude for God's grace in her life prompted by the Holy Spirit who was upon her.

"As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk" (1 Samuel 1:12-13).

It is interesting to note that when people were filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2 people thought they were drunk too.

"Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine" (Acts 2:13).

What was the priest's response to Hannah's explanation of her situation and prayer?

Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him" (1 Samuel 1:17).

Upon hearing the words of the priest, and after praying to God, how does Hannah react? She responds with belief. We can discern Hannah's faith in her conviction that God will overcome her barrenness and grant her the blessing of a son because of how her demeanor changed.

"She went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast" (1 Samuel 1:18b). Her appetite returned and the look on her face changed. Her inward faith led to an outward change in her

appearance before anything had changed in her life. Our body language can communicate to us that we need to spend some time casting our cares to our heavenly Father.

Early the next day Hannah wakes up and worships God. She worships God while she is still barren. The result is that "Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him" (1 Samuel 1:19b-20).

What did Hannah learn from the Lord and her period of barrenness?

"My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in Your deliverance. "There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides You; there is no Rock like our God." "It is not by strength that one prevails" (1 Samuel 2:1-2,9b).

God's grace continued to flow in Hannah's life. "Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, 'May the LORD give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the LORD.' Then they would go home" (1 Samuel 2:20).

Hannah went on to have a total of six children. After the birth of Samuel, 1 Samuel 2:21 states, "The Lord was gracious to Hannah; she gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord."

In 1 Samuel 2:5 Hannah's prayer states: "Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry are hungry no more. She who was

barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away.”

The mention of “she who was barren has borne seven children” is a poetic expression with seven representing completeness and perfection⁶⁶ and not a literal count of Hannah’s children. Hannah had a total of six children, as mentioned earlier— Samuel and five additional children. Five is the number of grace and Hannah whose name means grace received grace (Samuel) and she received grace upon grace (five more children).

What need do you currently have? Bring your need to your heavenly Father in Jesus and receive grace upon grace. Receive His grace in abundance. “For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (John 1:16).

Lessons from Hannah

- Don’t retaliate against those who cause you harm, take your pain to God in prayer (1 Samuel 1:10, Romans 12:17, 1 Peter 3:9-10).
- Allow others to pray for you (1 Samuel 1:17, Ephesians 6:18-19).
- Believe God is answering your prayer before you see any external change (1 Samuel 1:18, Hebrews 11:1).

⁶⁶Meaning of Numbers in the Bible The Number 7.
www.biblestudy.org/bibleref/meaning-of-numbers-in-bible/7.html

- Be actively involved with co-laboring with God in the plans He has for you (1 Samuel 1:19, 1 Corinthians 3:9).
- Remember that every good gift comes from God (1 Samuel 1:20, James 1:17).
- Remember the Lord hears and answers our prayers because we are in Christ. Pray in the power and authority of Jesus' name (1 Samuel 1:27, 1 John 5:14-15).
- Your success is not a result of your strength (1 Samuel 2:9b, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10).
- You have been given grace upon grace in Jesus (1 Samuel 2:21, John 1:16).

Chapter 8: Hannah: Bountiful Grace through Barren Seasons Small Group Questions

In a culture where bearing children was highly valued, Elkanah's favoritism towards Hannah, who was barren, is unconventional. The meanings of Biblical names often carry symbolic weight. How do the meanings of Peninnah's name "jewel" and Hannah's name "grace" reflect their roles in the narrative? How might the cultural expectations of the time be reflected in these names?

Elkanah's favor toward Hannah is seen as an expression of grace. How does Elkanah's favor mirror the unmerited favor or grace that God extends to us?

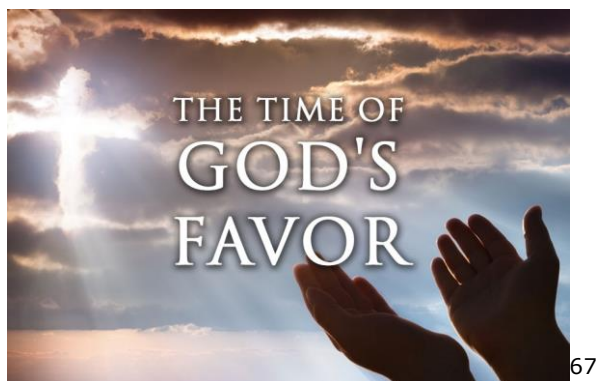
Barrenness was a source of distress for Hannah, yet it became a pivotal point for God's redemptive plan. In what ways have you experienced God's redemptive power in challenging situations that seemed hopeless?

Peninnah's taunting caused Hannah deep pain, yet Hannah chose not to retaliate. How can we navigate situations of distress and pain without succumbing to bitterness or revenge? What can we learn from Hannah's response?

Hannah's belief in God's response was evident in her changed demeanor. How might the promises found in God's Word lead to a change in our outward demeanor too?

Hannah worshiped God even before her situation changed. How can we cultivate a worshipful attitude in the midst of waiting for answers to our prayers during challenging times?

Section III: Flourishing in God's Favor



“For He says, ‘In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

⁶⁷www.newhopechristiancenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Gods-Favor-THUMB.jpg

Chapter 9:
Gideon: Freedom Found in Your New Identity



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As we dig into the narrative of Gideon, we'll discover the transformative work that God has already accomplished in the life of a believer. "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). The truth is that Jesus has liberated every believer. We are no longer bound as slaves to sin and its effects. Faith in Jesus leads to authentic freedom. Live in the reality of this truth.

In the story of Gideon a pivotal question emerges, do you see yourself as God sees you? Do you see yourself as the bold, courageous champion you are in Christ? Do you see yourself liberated from that which would bind you? "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). Only when you are free from the yoke of the Law (Acts 15:10) can you follow the Spirit and walk in holiness (Galatians 5:18).

"The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years He gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves, and strongholds. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys" (Judges 6:1-4).

Within this narrative, the challenge facing the people is the formidable and overpowering nature of the enemy. Yet, the issue addressed in verse one is not the sheer might of the adversary.

The underlying problem lies in a sin issue; the Israelites, having done evil in the eyes of the Lord, were robbed of the abundant harvest that rightfully should have been theirs (Judges 6:1).

We too had a sin problem that had separated us from the abundant blessings of God but Jesus came and defeated our sin problem. In the New Covenant, through faith in Jesus, believers are made complete in Him. They are no longer under the burden of the Law but are reconciled to God through Christ's sacrifice. The blessings promised in Deuteronomy 28 are now given to those who believe in the finished work of Christ. In Deuteronomy 28:15-68, known as the blessings and curses chapter, God outlines the consequences of disobedience to His Law. The passage describes a series of curses that would come upon the Israelites if they turned away from God and His commandments. This included various forms of suffering, including sickness, poverty, and the loss of blessings. Take a few minutes to look at the curses found within Deuteronomy 28 that came with disobedience to the Law. Gratitude comes as we recognize that through Christ, we have been redeemed from the consequences that come with the inability to perfectly uphold the Law. When you read the qualifications for the blessings (Deuteronomy 28:1-2) and you look to your Law keeping ability to receive them, you will realize you are unqualified (in and of yourself) for them. None of us have kept all of God's commandments perfectly. None of us diligently have hearkened to His voice at all times. If we fail to keep just one commandment, we fail to keep them all (James 2:10).

But here's the good news: Jesus is our qualification for God's blessings. He came to fulfill the Law, not to abolish it (Matthew 5:17). Through Jesus, we can

claim all the blessings that were promised if the Law was perfectly obeyed because Jesus has already fulfilled all of God's commandments on our behalf.

Galatians 3:13 explains that through Jesus Christ, believers are redeemed from the curse of the Law. The verse states that Christ became a curse for us, taking upon Himself the punishment we deserved. His sacrificial death on the cross provides redemption and delivers believers from the consequences of the curse of sin. Therefore, all the blessings listed in Deuteronomy 28 are now ours in Jesus. God loves to bless us, and in Christ, His blessings will abundantly fill our lives. It is not about deserving the blessings but it is about receiving them by faith and believing in God's grace to us in Jesus.

"Today, it's not about how well we have kept God's commandments, but about how much we can believe God for His blessings. All the promises of God in Christ are "Yes," and because we are in Christ, we can say "Amen!" to His blessings (2 Corinthians 1:20). Being in Christ is a fixed position that doesn't depend on our ability to keep the Law. Therefore, we are qualified for blessings because of our union life with Jesus."⁶⁹

Because of Jesus' victory over our sin problem, we are to see ourselves as the mighty warrior in Gideon's story. Identify the oppressive forces in our lives, whether it's fear, doubt, past mistakes, an overwhelming situation, health problems, or anything else, and understand these "Midianites" have already been defeated in Jesus. This truth will give us hope that we will experience the victory of the Lord. "But

⁶⁹Dr. Matthew Webster. *Overflowing Grace: 100 Blessings to Unleash Your Divine Inheritance and Unveil the New You*. Kindle Direct Publishing, 2023.

thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Victory is not achieved through our self-effort but is a gift from God through Jesus Christ causing us to rejoice in the knowledge that victory belongs to the Lord.

"Midian so impoverished the Israelites" (Judges 6:6a). The Hebrew word for impoverished means to be brought low.⁷⁰ They were brought so low to the point they cried out to God. What a remarkable blessing it is to encounter a force greater than ourselves that prompts us to earnestly call upon God for help.

"The Angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the Angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, He said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior" (Judges 6:11-12).

Anytime you see the title "The Angel of the Lord" this refers to Jesus. This understanding is based on several key characteristics and incidents associated with the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Angel of the Lord is often described as speaking with the authority of God and making statements that imply divinity.

In certain passages, the Angel of the Lord accepts worship (Joshua 5:13-15), which is reserved for God alone. In Judaism, worship of anyone other than God is strictly prohibited, so this acceptance of worship suggests a divine identity.

⁷⁰www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h1809/kjv/wlc/0-1/

The Angel of the Lord is sometimes identified with the presence of God or referred to interchangeably with God.

The Angel of the Lord frequently plays a significant role in key moments of salvation history, such as appearing to Hagar, Abraham, Moses, and others, often delivering important messages or guidance.

This is important for us to see “The Angel of the Lord” as Jesus because Christ gives us a new identity in Him just as He did for Gideon. Jesus calls Gideon as He will make Him to be not as He was at this point in his life. Gideon is not acting mighty when the Lord comes to him. We find Gideon threshing wheat in a winepress so his food would not be taken from him. Jesus speaks to Gideon and He calls him a mighty warrior!

“Pardon me, my Lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us (Judges 6:13)? Isn’t this the same question we all ask when bad things happen to us? God if you love me and You are with me why did this happen to me?”

Gideon doesn’t stop there he continues, “Where are all His wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian” (Judges 6:14).

“Where are the wonders our ancestors spoke of?” When you’ve heard stories of others experiencing God’s miraculous healing, and yet you remain unhealed, it’s natural to echo Gideon’s question. The temptation arises to think that God may have forsaken you or overlooked your prayers. However, just as Jesus appeared to Gideon with a powerful word, today, the assurance of His Word in Scripture,

unveiled by the Holy Spirit, confirms that He is with you too. Whatever has oppressed your life, you will conquer, for you are more than a conqueror through Him who loves you (Romans 8:37).

Gideon is confused as to why God would deliver the Israelites from the Egyptians only to later be oppressed by the Midianites. If we were once set free, why are we now enslaved again? The reason is God is love (1 John 4:18) and so He gives us all free will. The Israelites chose to live in the bondage of sin which brought about the consequences of breaking their Covenant with God. God would remain faithful to His people, and deliver them from oppression just as He did when they were in Egypt, but they first needed to acknowledge their need for Him. God doesn't cause bad things to happen to us, but He is ready to deliver us from evil as we call upon His name (Joel 2:32, Acts 2:21, Romans 10:13).

Jesus in His response to Gideon doesn't focus on the past but gives the promise of victory moving forward. "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you" (Judges 6:14)?

Jesus' command is problematic for Gideon because he doesn't see the strength that he has to defeat a much stronger enemy than him. "Pardon me, my Lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family" (Judges 6:15)?

The point is that what God is about to do for you, you can't do yourself. I will bring glory to Myself by using the weakest in strength to defeat the Midianites. Whatever attack that has come against you from the enemy, remember "Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 also says: "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him."

The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive" (Judges 6:16). Jesus has promised to never leave us (Matthew 28:20) and so you will see the enemies that have come against you be defeated because of who is with you. God will give you victory over your enemies despite what little strength you might have. Our part is to be strong in the Lord by trusting and resting in our victorious position in Christ.

"He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of Yahweh, "He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust" (Psalm 91:1-2).

The word "dwells" comes from the Hebrew word "yeshab" which means to sit.⁷¹ You cannot be separated from the secret place of the Most High, as it is found in being united with Christ. You are seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6).

Gideon was perfectly positioned to be used by God because Christ was with Him and this is what ensured the victory for him.

Overcome self-doubt as you see yourself as God sees you. In Christ you are a mighty warrior. 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new

⁷¹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3427/kjv/wlc/0-1/

creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" Recognize that in Christ, you are a new you. Your identity is no longer defined by past mistakes or worldly standards but by your position in Christ. Understand that in Christ, you are fully accepted and deeply loved by God (Ephesians 1:6). Your worth is not based on performance but on God's grace and love. Realize that in Christ, you are complete. Your life finds its purpose and fulfillment in Him, and you lack nothing for your spiritual journey (Colossians 2:10). Recognize that in Christ, you are empowered by the Holy Spirit. You have the strength and guidance needed to live a life that honors God and fulfills His purpose (Acts 1:8). See yourself as you are, seated with Christ in heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6).

"Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in Your eyes, give me a sign that it is really You talking to me. Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before You" (Judges 6:17-18).

This is an understandable request by Gideon. If a person who lived in the Old Testament sinned the favor of the Lord would not be upon them and they would be on their own. This is not a good place to be when the enemy outnumbers you. The wonderful truth about living in the New Covenant is that we don't have to put out a fleece before God to find out if we have God's favor. "It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30). The blessing of being placed in Christ means that wherever we go we always have the favor of God. If we have the favor of God then we must also have the victory of the Lord. "If God is for us, who can be against us" (Romans 8:31b)?

In Chapter 7, Gideon goes with the strength he has and gathers an army. God reveals that Gideon's army, initially numbering 32,000, was too large, and He intentionally reduced it to a mere 300 men (Judges 7:7). The number 300 in Hebrew numerology represents victory. This was also seen in Noah's story and the dimension of the ark. "In the Bible, the number 300 is used approximately thirty times. In Hebrew, the letter T represents the number 300, which is a similar shape to the cross on which Jesus was crucified."⁷² The cross is a sign of our victory.

The Midianite army, as mentioned in Judges 8:10, numbered at least 135,000, placing Gideon's initial force of 32,000 at a significant numerical disadvantage—outnumbered more than 4 to 1. Astonishingly, their army was eventually reduced to around 0.2% of the enemy's forces, emphasizing the profound odds against them. This was to make clear the truth that the victory belonged to the Lord.

In history, outnumbered armies have achieved victory through strategic brilliance and tactical advantage. The Boudican Revolt, reaching its pinnacle in the Battle of Watling Street in AD 61, witnessed Roman forces facing even greater odds than Gideon's army before its reduction. Roman Governor Gaius Suetonius Paulinus adeptly positioned his troops in a bottlenecked valley, exploiting the Celts' lack of coordination. Boudica's formidable army, estimated at 230,000 Celtic tribesmen, confronted a disciplined Roman legion comprising approximately 10,000 soldiers.

⁷²Gants Hill URC. 300 and 390: The Importance of Numbers in the Bible. www.gantshillurc.co.uk/ministers-blog/300-and-390-the-importance-of-numbers-in-the-bible

Despite being vastly outnumbered, the Romans displayed superior tactics and discipline in the tight confines of the valley, neutralizing the numerical advantage of the Celtic forces. The Roman victory was resolute, leading to harsh reprisals against the rebellion's leaders, including Boudica. Her fate, either death by suicide or in battle, marked the collapse of the revolt.

Gideon's obedience to reduce his forces to a mere 300 men made it evident that God was with them, emerging as their ultimate victor. If they had fought with 32,000 men they still would have won because God had promised to be with them but the result would have been detrimental to Israel. "I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against Me, 'My own strength has saved me'" (Judges 7:2b).

During the initial two years of grappling with various health challenges, I couldn't comprehend why my healing seemed elusive. Witnessing the healing of many fellow Christians through prayer was a blessing, but I was puzzled as to why I continued to struggle with my recovery. Though I made some progress through determination, exercise, and dietary changes, setbacks persisted. In hindsight, I recognize the blessing in the timing of God's healing. Delayed healing prevented me from attributing it solely to my efforts. Like Israel in Judges 7:2b, I might have mistakenly believed I was solely responsible. This journey solidified my understanding that victory over my illness came through God's miraculous healing and answered prayer. When facing an insurmountable force, Jesus remains the source of healing and wholeness.

As a believer in the New Testament, clothed with every spiritual blessing in Christ and enjoying God's favor, victory is already secured in Jesus' name. Embrace your victory by faith, stepping forward as the mighty warrior you are. Your triumph will serve as a testimony drawing others to the incredible grace of God found in Jesus who is our ultimate Victor.

Lessons from Gideon

Redemption through Christ. Understand that Jesus has defeated our greatest enemies of sin and death. Through faith in Christ, believers are redeemed from the curses of the Law. Embrace the blessings promised in God's Word, not based on your merit, but through faith in Christ's finished work.

New Identity in Christ. Embrace your identity in Christ. Just as Jesus called Gideon a mighty warrior, recognize that in Christ, you are a new creation and more than a conqueror. The spoils of war (Jesus' victory on the cross) go to you. You have a grand spiritual inheritance (Ephesians 1:3) that you possess by faith. Your worth is not determined by past mistakes or worldly standards but by your position in Christ.

Despite Gideon's initial doubts about his strength and ability, God assured him of victory because He was with him. In Christ, you have the promise of victory too because Christ is with you always.

Victory through faith. Understand that victory is a gift from God through Jesus Christ. Just as Gideon's small army achieved victory against overwhelming odds, believers who have been given every spiritual blessing

in Christ can triumph over challenges. Step forward in faith, knowing that your ultimate victory is already secured in Jesus.

God's timing is perfect. Gideon initially doubted God's plan and questioned why the Israelites faced hardship. However, God's timing was perfect, and He chose the right moment to reveal Himself to Gideon when God's people were brought to the place of crying out to God for help. Understand that God's timing in your life is impeccable. Patience and trust in His plan are crucial. What may seem like delays or challenges are opportunities for God to work and display His faithfulness. Wait on Him with confidence and always cast your cares on Him for He cares greatly for you.

Chapter 9: Gideon: Freedom Found in Your New Identity Small Group Questions

Jesus is our qualification for God's blessings. How does understanding this truth free believers from the burden of trying to qualify themselves through their actions? How does the truth that we are qualified for blessings through Jesus Christ challenge our feelings of unworthiness?

Reflect on the shift from living under the burden of the Law to living in God's grace through faith in Jesus. How does this shift impact your daily life and your relationship with God?

Consider Gideon's transformation from a fearful man to a mighty warrior. How does Jesus give us a new identity, calling us to the life that is His?

Gideon is confused by God's actions of freeing His people from Egyptian slavery only to be impoverished later by the Midianites. What is the truth Gideon will discover about how we are victorious over our enemies?

Consider the command for Gideon to go in the strength he has. How can believers today rest in the strength of Christ in the face of challenges and opposition?

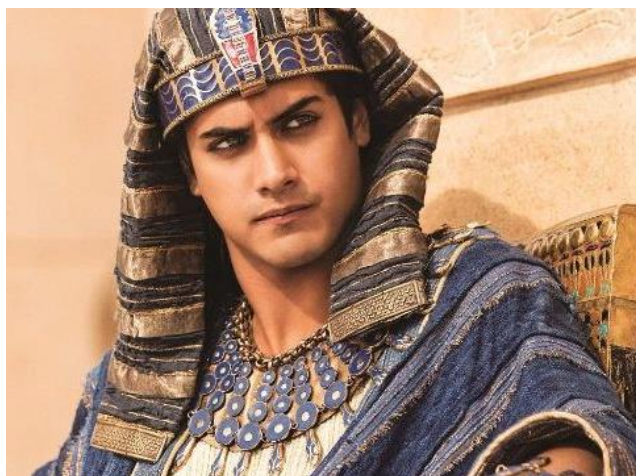
Reflect on the understanding of God's favor, as seen in Gideon's request for a sign. How does 1 Corinthians 1:30 assure believers of God's favor, and how can this impact your confidence in approaching God?

How can acknowledging our weaknesses and relying on God's strength lead to greater manifestations of His glory in our lives? Think about how God whittled down Gideon's army to 300.

Consider the triumph already secured in Jesus' name. How does embracing this victory by faith impact your approach to challenges and uncertainties?

Your triumph in Christ can draw others to the incredible grace of God. Share instances where someone's faith affected your life.

Chapter 10: Joseph: Resilient Rise led in God's favor



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Joseph's early challenges set the stage for his God-led prosperity in saving many lives, his family included. The very hardships you are going through can be used by God in extraordinary ways.

Joseph's story features family dysfunction including favoritism, jealousy, and hatred. Jacob/Israel's favoritism towards Joseph is seen in the gift of the ornate robe.

"Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him" (Genesis 37:3-4).

The reason for Jacob's favoritism of Joseph who was not the oldest of his brothers is that Joseph was the firstborn son of Jacob's favorite wife Rachel (Genesis 29:30-31).

Joseph's coat of many colors was a symbol of favor. A robe adorned with beautifully intricate details, long sleeves, and reaching down to his ankles. This gift held significant symbolism, delivering a clear message as it departed from the ordinary attire. Charles Swindoll writes in his book, *Joseph: A Man of Integrity and Forgiveness*, "By giving Joseph this elaborate full-length coat, which was also a sign of nobility in that day, his father was boldly implying, 'You can wear this beautiful garment because you don't have to work like those brothers of yours. Success for you will come because you are my son.'"⁷⁴

⁷⁴Charles Swindoll. *Joseph: A Man of Integrity and Forgiveness*. Thomas Nelson Publishing. 2008.

Success for Joseph would not come because he was favored by his earthly father. Success would come because of the favor of God in his life. God's plan for your success is not dependent upon your upbringing either. Success for us is because Christ lives in us (Colossians 1:27).

The gifting God placed inside Joseph blossomed. We see Joseph's gifts of administration and oversight flourish as "Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned" (Genesis 39:6). We continue to see Joseph's giftings develop as he was put in charge of the prison he was in and eventually over all of Egypt! The hardships Joseph faced refined the giftedness that would be used for God's glory (Genesis 39:6). Peter says the same thing is true for believers in Jesus. "These have come (trials) so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:7).

Dreams and sibling rivalry. Joseph has dreams of prominence and authority (Genesis 37:5-11). His siblings were jealous and would resent him for his dreams and their father's favor towards him.

Joseph received a robe that wouldn't last. He hardly even broke it in before his brothers stripped Joseph of his robe (Genesis 37:23). We received robes too but much better ones that will never fade, never perish, and no one can strip us of them. Isaiah wrote, "All who see them will recognize them because they are the offspring whom the LORD has blessed. I will

rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns" (Isaiah 61:9-10).

The apparel of our lives is the righteous robe of Jesus Christ. "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

Joseph was betrayed by his brothers. Joseph's brothers' plan to get rid of him unfolds in Genesis 37:18-24 where they throw him into a pit and sell him into slavery to Midianite traders. Despite slavery, Joseph rises to a position of trust in Potiphar's house. God's favor is evident in Joseph's success (Genesis 39:2-6). Joseph is then falsely accused by Potiphar's wife of sexual misconduct and he is thrown into prison (Genesis 39:6-20). While in prison Joseph interprets dreams for fellow prisoners (Genesis 40:5-23). However, the freed prisoner who has his job restored forgets about Joseph (Genesis 40:23) until two full years have passed and Pharaoh has a dream (Genesis 41:1). Despite imprisonment, God's gift of dream interpretation is showcased and when the time came for Joseph to interpret Pharaoh's dream he did (Genesis 41:1-32).

Pharaoh had two troubling dreams that none of his wise men could interpret. In the first dream, seven healthy cows emerged from the Nile and grazed, but then seven thin, sickly cows appeared and devoured the healthy ones. In the second dream, seven plump and good ears of grain grew on a single stalk, only to be consumed by seven thin and blighted ears.

Unable to find an interpretation among his advisors, Pharaoh's cupbearer remembered Joseph and his ability to interpret dreams. Joseph was quickly brought from prison to Pharaoh. Joseph acknowledged that he had no power to interpret dreams on his own but that God would provide the answer. The dreams were interpreted as follows:

The dreams were one and the same, indicating God's certainty in carrying out the events. Egypt would experience seven years of abundant harvests, symbolized by the healthy cows and good ears of grain. This period of prosperity would be followed by seven years of severe famine, represented by the sickly cows and blighted ears.

Joseph advised Pharaoh to appoint a wise and discerning man to oversee the collection and storage of excess grain during the years of plenty to prepare for the years of famine. Pharaoh was impressed by Joseph's wisdom and discernment, recognizing that the Spirit of God was with him (Genesis 41:38). He appointed Joseph as the second-in-command over all of Egypt, giving him authority to implement the plan to save the country from the impending famine.

Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams not only saved Egypt from famine but also elevated Joseph from a prisoner to the second most powerful man in the land. This turn of events played a crucial role in the fulfillment of God's larger plan to preserve the descendants of Abraham and fulfill the Covenant made with Him. This rise in power also would lead to the fulfillment of the dreams Joseph had in his youth.

When the severe famine struck Canaan, it forced Joseph's brothers to travel to Egypt in search of food. When Joseph's brothers arrived in Egypt, they bowed before him, not realizing that the powerful Egyptian official they were dealing with was their long-lost brother.

Joseph subjected his brothers to a series of tests (Genesis chapters 42-45). He accused them of being spies and insisted that they bring their youngest brother, Benjamin, to prove their honesty. Simeon was detained in Egypt until they returned with Benjamin. Jacob reluctantly allowed Benjamin to accompany his brothers to Egypt. Joseph arranged a feast for them but concealed his identity.

After Judah pleaded on behalf of Benjamin, recounting the anguish it would cause their father, Joseph could no longer contain his emotions. He dismissed the Egyptian attendants, and in private, he revealed his identity to his astonished brothers.

Instead of seeking revenge, Joseph reassured his brothers and emphasized that their actions, though harmful, were part of God's plan to preserve life during the famine, recognizing God's greater plan (Genesis 50:19-21).

Joseph urged his brothers to bring their father Jacob and the entire family to Egypt, assuring them that they would be cared for during the remaining years of the famine.

When the news reached Jacob that Joseph was alive, he initially could not believe it. However, after seeing the evidence and hearing Joseph's words, Jacob's spirit was revived. The entire family, consisting of Jacob, his sons, and their households, moved to Egypt under Joseph's care. In Egypt, the family was settled in the land of Goshen, and God continued to bless them and multiply their numbers. The place God led Joseph's family to settle in "Goshen" means to draw near⁷⁵ (Genesis 47:27). As Israel and his sons settled in Goshen, as they drew near God, they found protection and abundant provision in a time of famine. Because of Jesus, we can draw near to God with full assurance that faith brings (Hebrews 10:22).

While the global economy may be facing challenges, our financial stability can remain unshaken, even thriving. Despite the world grappling with terrorism, our safety is assured (Psalm 91:7). Widespread outbreaks of deadly diseases may be a concern, but we can sustain strong and vibrant health (Psalm 91:6). We need not succumb to the hardships experienced by the world because we are under the protective care of Almighty God (Psalm 91:9-10). Amidst the turmoil in the world, I opt to reside in the land of Goshen, finding total peace, security, and rest in the shadow of the Almighty (Psalm 91:1).

In each of these challenges, Joseph faced adversity, but God's hand was consistently at work, turning Joseph's trials into opportunities for growth and prosperity.

⁷⁵www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h1657/kjv/wlc/0-1/

Success in our lives is because we are in Christ and He abundantly blesses us through good times and bad times so that others too might find everlasting and abundant life in Christ (Genesis 50:20).

Lessons from Joseph

Challenging times don't prevent God-led prosperity in our lives. Joseph's early hardships set the stage for his remarkable rise to power in Egypt, showcasing that God can turn adversity into prosperity. Trust in God during difficult times, knowing that He can use challenges for a greater purpose.

True success comes from God's favor. Joseph's success wasn't due to earthly favor with his father but stemmed from God's plan and purposes being fulfilled in his life. Success came because God was with him and prospered him. We prosper in Christ through adversity just like Joseph was.

The symbolism of robes. Joseph's ornate robe symbolized favor, but it was stripped away by his brothers. He still went through life in God's favor. In Christ, believers receive an everlasting robe of righteousness from God. Find security and peace in the eternal garments of salvation provided by God, which no one can take away. The salvation of the Lord also includes protection, preservation, and deliverance.

Interpreting dreams and divine timing. Joseph's gift of dream interpretation played a crucial role in God's plan coming to fruition at the right time. Develop your spiritual gifts by putting them to use and trusting God's timing. Understand that your unique abilities have a specific purpose God will reveal in the future.

God's plan of salvation is in Joseph's story. Joseph's journey, from betrayal to redemption, foreshadows God's grand plan of salvation for humanity through Jesus Christ. Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers mirrors God's offer of forgiveness to humanity through Jesus. Despite our sin and rebellion, God, in His mercy, extends forgiveness and redemption found in Christ. Through Joseph's trials, God saved many lives. Similarly, through Jesus' suffering, God offers salvation and eternal life to all who believe. Just as Joseph's suffering had a purpose for the preservation of his family, Jesus' sacrificial death had the purpose of the salvation of souls.

Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers symbolizes God's desire to reconcile humanity to Himself. Through Jesus, God provides a way for us to be reconciled and restored to a relationship with Him. Joseph's story becomes a powerful narrative within the broader Biblical context, pointing toward God's ultimate plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. It encourages believers to recognize God's redemptive work in their own lives and to share the message of salvation with others.

Chapter 10: Joseph: Resilient Rise led in God's favor

Small Group Questions

How do Joseph's early challenges illustrate the concept that hardships can be used by God for a greater purpose in our lives?

Discuss the symbolic significance of Joseph's ornate robe and its contrast with the eternal robes mentioned in Isaiah 61:9-10. How does this symbolism apply to our identity in Christ?

How does God's redemptive plan play out in the midst of Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers? What past hardships have led to future successes in your life?

How can recognizing God's favor in adversity impact our perspective during difficult times? Reflect on the time when Joseph was in jail for an additional two years after interpreting the two prisoners' dreams.

Reflect on the significance of Joseph's gift of dream interpretation and how it played a role in God's timing for both Joseph and the nation of Egypt. For what reason might God place us in challenging situations, armed with the unique gifts He has bestowed upon us?

Explore Joseph's response to his brothers when he reveals his identity. How does Joseph's forgiveness align with God's plan for reconciliation? How can we apply this principle in our relationships?

Reflect on the concluding statement about success in Genesis 50:20. How does being in Christ bring blessings even in challenging times, and how can our lives be a testimony for others seeking everlasting life?

Chapter 11: Job: Restorative Grace that Supplies Abundance



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What will God do for me when I have already suffered a loss? Allow me to present to you the story of Job a man who lost it all. One of the things I love about Job's story is that no matter how bad I think I might have it Job's situation was much worse. However, if the sole lesson from Job's narrative were that things could always be worse, we wouldn't find any comfort in our troubles from that. My experience was that things did get worse before they got better and that is a distinct possibility for you too. However, the good news is that in Job's story we will discover that what God did for Job through profound loss, pain, and hardship, God can and will do for us too. Restorative grace always supplies us abundantly.

What did Job experience?

- Loss of wealth and possessions (Job 1:13-17).

"One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, 'The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'

While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, 'The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'

While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, 'The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with

them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

- Loss of children (Job 1:18-19).

“While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, ‘Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!’”

How do you process such bad news in such a short period? “While they were still speaking” one bad report came after another after another after another. At this point, it would be easy to assume that you must be cursed. What are the odds that something like that could all happen at the same time? God must be bringing judgment on me for all that has transpired. This is what Job believes.

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised” (Job 1:21).

Matt Redman created the song “Blessed Be Your Name” sung in churches today with the lyrics, “You give and take away”.⁷⁷ Unfortunately, many believe that God will take things from them to teach them a lesson. Is this the case in Job’s story that God took Job’s family and possessions from him and that God caused painful sores to cover his body? Absolutely not! If you read the entire story of Job, you find that

⁷⁷Matt Redman. Where Angels Fear to Tread. “Blessed Be Your Name” 2002.

Job was wrong in believing that the bad things that happened in his life came from God.

Job also believes that God was trying to kill him. "You turn on me ruthlessly; with the might of Your hand You attack me... I know You will bring me down to death" (Job 30:21,23). In Job's understanding the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune come from the Lord's bow. "Why do You shoot Your arrows at me (Job 7:20)? The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison (Job 6:4). Towards the conclusion of the book, a young man named Elihu confronts Job. Serving as the voice of wisdom and reason, Elihu emphasizes: "It is far from God to do evil, from the Almighty to commit wrongdoing" (Job 34:10).⁷⁸

If you believe that God is responsible for the bad things you have experienced in your life, shift your attention from Job's perspective to Elihu's insight. According to Elihu, God doesn't cause harm such as taking the lives of your children, robbing you of your wealth, or inflicting illness upon you. Instead, God bestows good gifts without retracting them. He doesn't use sickness as a tool for character development, nor does He snatch away the joys we experience. The pain and suffering of Job are revealed to come from Satan (Job 1:6-12).⁷⁹

The only thing that has not negatively impacted Job's life in chapter one is his health. This is about to change too.

⁷⁸Paul Ellis. The Gospel of Elihu. www.escapetoreality.org/2015/10/30/gospel-of-elihu/. October 30, 2015.

⁷⁹Ibid.

- Job is afflicted with painful sores (Job 2:7).

“So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head.”

We discover who is responsible for all of Job’s sufferings, it was the devil. We already discovered the early losses were a result of the devil’s work too (Job 1:6-12). Observe that illness for Job extends from the feet to the head (Job 2:7). Sickness originates from below while healing descends from above. God is actively engaged in the work of restoration and healing in our lives.

The advice of Job’s wife and friends:

Job’s wife advises him to curse God and die (Job 2:9), and his three friends give him bad counsel too. Upon the introduction of Job’s friends, he is already afflicted with painful sores and all his possessions and children have been lost. In this dire situation, his three friends arrive to offer comfort. What you will notice as you read the book of Job is that when the three friends arrive Satan is no longer mentioned because he is no longer needed as Job will receive destructive counsel from the three. “Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm” (Proverbs 13:20).

What turned it around for Job was what Elihu had to say to him.

“His flesh wastes away from sight,
And his bones stick out which once were not seen.
Yes, his soul draws near the Pit, and his life to the executioners. If there is a messenger for him, a mediator, one among a thousand, To show man His

uprightness, then He is gracious to him, and says, 'Deliver him from going down to the Pit; I have found a ransom'; His flesh shall be young like a child's, he shall return to the days of his youth" (Job 33:21-25).

"To show man His uprightness", Elihu emphasizes that delivering a person from suffering and sickness involves revealing God's righteousness to him. When consoling someone facing challenges, refrain from discussing their actions that led to their suffering—instead, focus on highlighting the righteousness of Jesus. Through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we are fully qualified to receive His healing and triumph over sin and all forms of bondage that deprive us of health and abundant life.

"Then He is gracious to him", once the messenger of grace effectively communicates the Gospel of Grace, they witness God's graciousness extended to the one experiencing suffering. It is God's will to bring wholeness and healing into our lives. He gave His son as a ransom so we might have redemption and liberation from sin and its consequences.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

"I have found a ransom", the Hebrew root word "kôpher," meaning "to make an atonement"⁸⁰ is speaking of Jesus atoning for our sin and the effects of sin which includes sickness, disease, and anything negative that robs us.

⁸⁰www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3724/kjv/wlc/0-1/

Living under the grace of God unleashes His power, which brings salvation, healing for your body, soundness for your mind, and peace in your relationships. Salvation starts from the inside out. It starts from your spirit (when you receive eternal life), then it translates to your soul (your thoughts and emotional well-being), then it translates to bodily health.

Job expressed a desire for a mediator in his lament: "If only there were a mediator between us, someone who could bring us together" (Job 9:33).

Consider the impactful words spoken by Elihu in Job 33:23–24, describing this mediator: "If there is a messenger for him, a mediator, one among a thousand, to show man His uprightness, then He is gracious to him, and says, 'Deliver him from going down to the Pit; I have found a ransom.'"

Elihu's depiction of a mediator foreshadows what 1 Timothy 2:5–6 conveys: "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." Job underwent suffering without a mediator. However, today, you and I have one—in the person of our Lord Jesus, who sacrificed Himself on the cross to atone for our sins and declare us righteous before God.

What is a mediator? A mediator (*mesítēs*): is one who intervenes between two to make peace and ratify a Covenant.⁸¹

⁸¹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3316/niv/mgnt/0-1/

Jesus as our mediator gives us peace with God (Romans 5:1) and because He ratified the New Covenant He has given us the forgiveness of sins, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of eternal life. Jesus our ransom that was paid for our redemption, gives to those who believe, His divine life.

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:3-4).

When do things turn for Job? The Lord restores Job’s losses when he prays for his friends. This serves as a valuable lesson, teaching us not to delay our prayers for others until after we’ve received our miracles. Take a moment to intercede for the healing of someone else. “Pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16b). Seeing those you pray for experience the Lord’s salvation will encourage you to receive yours.

“And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (1 Peter 5:10).

All love and grace have their origins with God. Grace is what the unconditional love of God looks like from our side. Grace is love come down, the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. Peter prayed

that His grace would be yours to the “fullest measure” or in increasing abundance (1 Peter 1:2).⁸²

“After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before” (Job 42:10).

God’s Word holds a promise of restoration for your life, akin to the remarkable transformation experienced by Job. What’s truly astounding is that God’s method of restoration surpasses the mere return of what was lost. In the Old Testament, the law of restitution dictated a return of 120% of the losses based on the principle of restitution in the law of the trespass offering found in Leviticus 6:4–5:

“When they sin in any of these ways and realize their guilt, they must return what they have stolen or taken by extortion, or what was entrusted to them, or the lost property they found, or whatever it was they swore falsely about. They must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the owner on the day they present their guilt offering” (Leviticus 6:4-5).

“In Leviticus, it says that the person brings his restitution on the day of his trespass offering. The trespass offering is a picture of what Jesus did for us at the cross. He became our substitute and was judged in our place for every trespass we committed so that we can freely receive every blessing of God, including the blessing of His much more restoration.

⁸²Paul Ellis. Who are the Hypergrace Preachers? Septemeber 22, 2016. www.escapetoreality.org/2016/09/22/who-are-the-hypergrace-preachers/comment-page-2/

If you have received Christ as your trespass offering, then much more restoration is coming your way. If the enemy has stolen from you or defrauded you of the best years of your life, then in that very area where you have suffered loss, God is going to restore to you more than you had before.

The restoration to the abundant life that you seek is found in Jesus. The word restoration begins with rest. As you rest in Jesus' grace and finished work, you will see your restoration, we find this truth in (Matthew 11:28-30)."⁸³

Let's look at some other verses to bring this out:

- I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten... (Joel 2:25).
- For I will restore health to you... (Jeremiah 30:17).
- Then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes... (Deuteronomy 30:3).
- You will restore me to even greater honor... (Psalm 71:21).

Our Lord Jesus has purchased every blessing, including restoration, for you at the cross. No matter what you have lost, according to His Word, you can believe God to redeem all that has been stolen from you.

What this means is that we don't have to accept defeat or live in despair. We don't have to be fearful of

⁸³Joseph Prince. God's Much-More Restoration. February 26, 2023.
www.allpastors.com/joseph-prince-daily-devotionals-february-26-2023/

the future. Instead, you can say, "Lord, restore to me!", knowing that His sacrifice at the cross has qualified you to receive and enjoy His incomparable restoration.

The truth of God's restoration fills me with such hope because, like many, the enemy has stolen from my life. The enemy's aim isn't just theft; he seeks to destroy us. Yet, Jesus came to grant us abundant life (John 10:10). While we will face losses in this earthly life, the beauty of restoration lies in always emerging ahead. All aspects—losses, pain, suffering, momentary setbacks—converge for our good. Your loss becomes an opportunity to witness the splendor of God's restoration.

The adversary desires to keep you in a state of disbelief and defeat, but our God doesn't intend for us to reside in the valley. Instead, He leads us from one lush pasture to the next. Our role, fueled by faith, is to place our trust in Him, find repose in Jesus' accomplished work, and have faith in the promise of restoration—where all things work together for our good. Goodness and mercy accompany us every day of our lives. What's even more remarkable is that we are destined to dwell in the Lord's house eternally and we are citizens of the Kingdom today (Philippians 3:20).

"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm—My great army that I sent among you. You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will My people be shamed" (Joel 2:25-26).

At first glance, it's easy to overlook the relevance of verses like these in our lives. How many of us fret about locusts affecting our day-to-day existence? How often in the past year have we been concerned about losing our jobs and facing a scarcity of food due to locust attacks on our crops? Likely, none of us. However, for those who received Joel's prophecy, it brought immense relief. Locusts were formidable foes for farmers, especially in an agricultural society to which this was addressed. Throughout history, locusts have instilled both fear and awe. Their swarms wreak havoc on crops, causing significant agricultural damage that can lead to famine and starvation.

"A desert locust swarm can be 460 square miles in size and pack between 40 and 80 million locusts into less than half a square mile. Each locust can eat its weight in plants each day, so a swarm of such size would eat 423 million pounds of plants every day."⁸⁴ This is a total devastation of your livelihood and sustenance.

Envision an adversary so potent that it can obliterate all your hard work in a single day, leaving you with nothing and no sustenance. The locust serves as a metaphor for this formidable foe. Take note that God's message to His people through the prophet Joel isn't a pledge to prevent the locust-like trials from occurring in their lives. In contemporary terms, these "locusts" could manifest as economic downturns, with your retirement savings plummeting to less than half as you approach retirement. Perhaps your health undergoes a challenging phase, and you've been

⁸⁴National Geographic. Locusts, Facts and Photos.
www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/invertebrates/facts/locusts

grappling with an ailment for several years. Any assault on your life, any attempt by the enemy to plunder from you, echoes the imagery of a swarm of locusts descending upon your existence, seemingly leaving you with nothing in that area. Yet, here lies the promise of God's Word:

"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten— the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm."

The Hebrew word for repay "shâlam" is to cause to be at peace.⁸⁵ The restoration from God goes beyond merely compensating for our losses; it leads us to a state of receiving God's peace in abundance.

Because the prophecy doesn't stop with just Joel 2:25 the next verse and the promise found within it brings us to a place of peace.

"You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you" (Joel 2:26a).

When the Lord restores, what He gives is always greater in quantity or quality than what was lost. "In Romans 5, the phrase "much more" is mentioned five times, telling us that the work of Jesus (grace) in redemption is "much more" than the sin of Adam/mankind, in every way. Jesus has given us access to His abundant life through His finished work on the cross. We can expect the much more restoration that has been promised to us is coming."⁸⁶

⁸⁵www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h7999/kjv/wlc/0-1/

⁸⁶Joseph Prince. Much More Restoration is Coming! February 19, 2023. www.josephprince.com/sermon-notes/much-more-restoration-is-coming

What did the locusts snatch away from the hardworking farmers? Their food, their crops, right? What did God assure those who suffered significant losses would be given? "Plenty to eat", abundant provision to satisfy their needs. Do you grasp the mechanism of God's restoration? Whatever great loss you've endured, God pledges to multiply it back to you in the area where you suffered the loss. This holds true even in the face of death. The assurance of Resurrection is ours, a life where there is no more sadness, sickness, and suffering.

May our spiritual eyes be opened to perceive the redemptive work unfolding in that area of our loss right now. God has guaranteed a life in Christ that's abundantly rich, even when we've been plundered for years by the enemy, the locust. He is the God of restoration, providing bountifully until we are satisfied. In Christ, I am whole and I lack nothing, so I will exalt the name of Jesus, acknowledging that in Him, my God is continuing to work wonders in my life.

1 Peter 5:10b: "Will Himself perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you."

The word "perfect" is the verb (katartízō) which means to repair, adjust, equip, and thoroughly complete.⁸⁷ Dead religion says you have to fix yourself, but the Gospel of Grace says you can trust the Lord to complete the good work He has begun in you (Philippians 1:6).

The word "establish" is the verb (stērizō) which means to fix or set firmly in place.⁸⁸ It is usually translated as

⁸⁷www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2675/kjv/tr/0-1/

⁸⁸www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4741/kjv/tr/0-1/

establish and strengthen, so Peter is repeating himself to emphasize what God will do in your life.

Grace builds us up (Acts 20:32), empowers us to do good works (Galatians 2:9), makes us fruitful (Colossians 1:6), and prospers us (2 Corinthians 8:9, 9:8). Grace gives us hope (2 Thessalonians 2:6) and enables us to reign in life (Romans 5:21). Grace is not merely for “sinners” and those outside the Kingdom, grace is for all of us, every day. We are saved and kept by grace. God’s grace is sufficient for the trials you face today. And in the end, He will restore unto you more than whatever the enemy has taken from you.

As we reflect on the beauty of restoration, let us be filled with hope and assurance. Our God is the God of restoration, and His promises are sure. He is the one who repays us for the years the enemy has stolen from us. Just as He restored Job’s fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before, He will restore us and make us strong, firm, and steadfast. We may face losses, sufferings, and setbacks in this life, but God is faithful to work all things together for our good. He multiplies what we have lost, bringing us to a place of abundance and peace. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, who is the source of our restoration, and trust in His finished work. May we find comfort in knowing that the locusts of life have no power over us, for our God is greater than any enemy we face.

May you walk in the confidence of God’s grace, allowing Him to perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. May the beauty of God’s restoration be evident in every area of your life, and may you praise the name of the Lord, who works wonders in your life.

Lessons from Job

Perspective in loss. Job experienced a devastating loss of wealth, possessions, and children in a short amount of time. In Job 34:10, Elihu says, “So listen to me, you men of understanding. Far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong.”

Elihu’s words suggest that when facing trials and hardships, acknowledging God’s sovereignty involves trusting in His goodness. Also, believe in God’s plan and promise of restoration unto you, paying back more than what the enemy has taken from you.

Recognizing the source of affliction. Job’s afflictions came from Satan, not from God. Understanding that God doesn’t cause us harm, and instead bestows good gifts (James 1:17) without retracting them, challenging the misconception that suffering is a divine punishment (Job 2:7; Job 34:10).

Discernment in counsel. Job’s wife and friends offered destructive counsel. Job’s wife advised him to curse God and die, while his friends provided misguided counsel. The turning point for Job came when Elihu spoke, emphasizing God’s righteousness and the need for a mediator (Job 33:23–24). Listen to godly counsel and mediate on God’s Word.

Elihu’s depiction of a mediator foreshadows what 1 Timothy 2:5–6 conveys: “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” Job underwent suffering without a mediator. However, today, you and I have one—in the person of our Lord Jesus, who sacrificed Himself

on the cross to atone for our sins and declare us righteous before God. Jesus became our ransom.

The mediator we need is Jesus Christ. His sacrifice at the cross is the ultimate act of mediation, reconciling us to God and securing our righteousness. When we face challenges, let us focus on Jesus, our mediator, who intercedes on our behalf and has given us God's righteousness. The beauty of restoration is fully realized through the redemptive work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Praying for others in times of need. Job's restoration began when he prayed for his friends. This teaches the importance of interceding for others even during personal challenges. The act of praying for others can precede and even accelerate personal restoration (Job 42:10; 1 Peter 5:10).

God's restoration exceeds loss. The promise of restoration in Joel 2:25-26 reveals God's commitment not only to repay losses with even more but to bring abundant peace.

Chapter 11: Job: Restorative Grace that Supplies Abundance Small Group Questions

How might you have reacted if you received multiple pieces of devastating news in quick succession, as Job did? Who might you seek counsel/ministering from?

Why do you think many people's first inclination is to believe like Job that God was responsible for taking from them? What was Elihu's response to Job's incorrect theology (Job 34:10)?

How might our perception of God's character and His promises of restoration to us influence our response to adversity?

Why do you think Job expressed a desire for a mediator (Job 9:33)? How does this relate to our need for Jesus as a mediator in our lives?

In what ways can we serve as messengers of grace to those facing challenges?

What does Job's story teach us about the timing of restoration? Why is it significant that his fortunes were restored after he prayed for his friends?

Reflect on the idea of much more restoration. How does this concept align with God's nature as revealed in the Bible? Can you think of any others in the Bible who experienced the Lord's restoration?

In what ways have you experienced the devastating effects of locusts attacking your life? In what specific areas of your life do you currently need to trust in God's restoration, and how can the group pray for and encourage you like Elihu did for Job?

Chapter 12: Barnabas: Nurturing Growth through Encouragement in Christ



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The first mention in the Bible of Barnabas is found in Acts 4:36-37:

“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas which means “son of encouragement”, sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”

Earlier in Acts chapter four, we were told the early church was selling their possessions and bringing the money to lay at the apostle’s feet (Acts 4:34-35), but here Barnabas is called out by name as one who had done this. Perhaps he was the first to do so, with others following his example. Encouragers provide support both verbally and through their actions.

Acts 4:33 states, “With great power the apostles continued to testify to the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all.”

The translation from Greek into English omitted a crucial word. Instead of saying “and God’s grace,” the Greek text reads “megas”⁹⁰ grace, signifying abundant grace. “God’s abundant grace was so powerfully at work in them all.”

Barnabas realized how abundantly supplied he was in Christ and used the grace he received to encourage others. Because of this revelation in his life, Barnabas witnessed a life of God’s grace powerfully working through him.

⁹⁰www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3173/kjv/tr/0-1/

Acts 4:37 and the picture of believers giving what they had to support the building of God's Kingdom is remarkable when viewed in the context of the prevailing circumstances, including Roman oppression and the persecution faced by early Christians.

Considering the socio-political climate of that time, the act of selling one's property and giving away the proceeds was no small gesture. Roman oppression was marked by heavy taxation, and the early Christians were often marginalized and faced social and economic challenges. In this environment, Barnabas' willingness to part with his property and donate the funds to the community reflects an understanding of where his blessings are from and the belief that God's grace would continue to flow, and powerfully be at work in his life, supplying him the grace he needed. Faith in God's ongoing provision is a marker of one who will thrive in turbulent times.

In the face of potential persecution and economic hardships, Barnabas' generosity becomes a powerful testament to the transformative impact of the Gospel and the strength of fellowship among the early Christians.

One of the most powerful ways that we can experience a breakthrough in our lives is when we help support others. Engaging in acts of kindness and support for others can shift one's focus off of their problems. God's generous provisions sometimes flow through people meeting other's needs.

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will

be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:38).

Consider it a joy to share the Gospel with others and witness God's powerful grace in action

Imagine one place in the world that you would love to visit. Have you picked your destination? It is hard to pick one place with all the wonderful choices that exist. What if I told you that I have covered all the expenses for you to enjoy an all-inclusive trip to this place, what are the odds you might share this good news with others? Would you tell of how the vacation became possible for you? What if I also told you that whoever you told about this vacation could come with you too? Wouldn't it be wonderful to experience this place with someone you love?

The most significant event in your life happened when you received the salvation of the Lord- all expenses paid for you to spend eternity in Heaven. Alongside this, you've inherited a royal position as part of God's family, you can experience "megas" grace from now until your arrival. Why wouldn't we want to share this incredible news with others who could join us for all eternity in Heaven? Wouldn't we want everyone to experience God's abundant grace in their lives today as sons and daughters of God Most High?

Barnabas looked for opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ and encourage brothers and sisters in their faith. Although his actual name was Joseph, the apostles bestowed upon him the nickname Barnabas. Among all the individuals the apostles encountered, Barnabas stands out as the one to receive a nickname.

Why does the text give us the additional information that when they called Joses/Joseph "Barnabas" they were referring to him as "the son of encouragement"? They make this distinction because Barnabas means "son of rest" not "son of encouragement".⁹¹ His birth name "Joses" means "exalted" which is also different from "encouragement".⁹²

Barnabas was the first Christian in Jerusalem to recognize the hand of God upon Saul's life. Joseph/Barnabas was a Levite from Cyprus (Acts 4:36). He became one of Saul's closest friends and most important ministry partners.

The Bible doesn't explain why Barnabas alone received Saul. It's possible that Barnabas and Saul already knew each other. Barnabas was from Cyprus (Acts 4:36) while Paul was from Tarsus across the water. Barnabas was of the priestly Levite tribe, while Saul was a Pharisee. They were both devout Jews who had moved to Jerusalem. Perhaps they met at the Temple and became friends. Then Barnabas became a Christian and the friendship was strained. But after Saul met the Lord, the friendship was restored and Barnabas introduced Saul to the apostles. This is all speculation, but what we cannot dispute is that the "son of encouragement" was quick to believe the best in Saul and we should all be glad he did."⁹³

"But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him,

⁹¹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g921/kjv/tr/0-1/

⁹²www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2500/kjv/tr/0-1/

⁹³Paul Ellis. The Grace Commentary. www.thegracecommentary.com/acts-9/#acts9v27

and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:27).

A kind and uplifting word can make a substantial difference in someone’s life, particularly during challenging times. Barnabas played a significant role in taking a chance on Paul (formerly known as Saul), and this decision had profound implications for Paul’s future ministry.

Here’s why it’s significant:

Before his conversion, Saul was known for persecuting Christians. Many were understandably skeptical and fearful of him. Ananias who was sent by God to open Saul’s eyes was hesitant at first to go to see him.

Acts 9:13-14: “But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to Your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name.’”

Barnabas, however, looked beyond Saul’s past and saw the transformative work of God in his life. This was evident in the fact that in Damascus he had preached fearlessly (Acts 9:27). Barnabas vouched for Saul to the apostles and the early Christian community in Jerusalem. His testimony and trust in Saul’s conversion helped others overcome their doubts and fears about accepting Saul as a fellow believer.

Barnabas played a crucial role in bringing Saul into the Christian community. He introduced Saul to the apostles, facilitating his acceptance and integration into the fellowship of believers. In times of despair, emulating the spirit of Barnabas by offering

encouragement and bringing individuals into fellowship with other believers is a powerful way to uplift their spirits, allowing them to hear the Word of God, believe in its transformative power, and receive the miracles they need.

Barnabas the “son of encouragement” provided emotional and spiritual support to Saul during a critical period when others were hesitant to associate with him.

The Power of Partnership in Ministry

Ecclesiastes 4:12: “Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Barnabas partnered with Paul in ministry, and later, they embarked on missionary journeys together. This collaboration allowed Saul to learn, grow, and gain practical experience in spreading the Gospel.

“Calling the Twelve to Him, He began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits” (Mark 6:7).

“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of Him to every town and place where He was about to go” (Luke 10:1).

“As disciples of Jesus, we are called to share the Gospel with people everywhere and it is a lot easier to share it when we do it together” (Mark 16:20).⁹⁴

⁹⁴Dr. Matthew Webster. Making Disciples Through Sharing the Good News. Kindle Direct Publishing. 2021.

In the cultural context of the time, the testimony of two or more witnesses held greater credibility. Sending disciples in pairs allowed for the verification of their accounts, reinforcing the validity of their message.

From the very beginning, God knew the importance of having others in our lives. In Genesis 2:18: it is stated, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" This verse highlights God's recognition of the fundamental need for companionship and community in human existence.

From the very outset of creation, God, in His infinite wisdom, acknowledged that human beings thrive in relationships and community.

This foundational understanding reverberates throughout the entirety of the Bible, emphasizing the significance of relationships, community, and mutual support. The concept of "it is not good to be alone" extends beyond the context of marriage; it encompasses the broader idea that humans are inherently social beings designed to thrive through connection and communal bonds.

Genesis 2:18, "It is not good for the man to be alone," also finds resonance within the broader Biblical concept of the Body of Christ. Throughout the New Testament, the metaphor of the Body of Christ is employed to illustrate the interconnectedness and interdependence of believers.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27: the Apostle Paul emphasizes that, just as the human body is composed

of many parts, each with a unique function, so too is the Church. No part can function in isolation; every member is essential for the well-being of the whole. This metaphor beautifully aligns with the Genesis narrative, emphasizing the innate human need for connection and community.

Therefore, when we reflect on the significance of having others in our lives, we not only recognize the importance of individual relationships but also appreciate our role within the broader community of believers—the Body of Christ. In the unity of the Body, we find strength, support, and shared purpose, echoing God’s original design for companionship and mutual care.

As members of the Body of Christ, we are called to walk alongside one another, bearing each other’s burdens, celebrating each other’s joys, and collectively fulfilling the divine purpose for which we were created. Barnabas played a crucial role in doing just this. He opened doors for Paul’s future ministry, especially to the Gentiles. Their joint mission trips, documented in the Book of Acts, were instrumental in spreading Christianity beyond Jewish communities.

Our greatest strengths have the potential to also be our greatest weaknesses. Barnabas’ encouragement of others led to a heated argument with the very one he had encouraged and helped establish within the Christian community.

“Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the Word of the Lord and see how they are doing.’ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called

Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work" (Acts 15:37-38).

Understanding the dynamics between Barnabas and John Mark requires a deeper study. Firstly, Barnabas, aptly named the "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36), possesses the spiritual gift of an encourager (Romans 12:8). Having fulfilled this role for Paul, Barnabas is inclined to continue nurturing John Mark in the faith, despite John Mark's previous shortcomings. Secondly, Colossians 4:10 reveals that Mark and Barnabas are cousins, presenting an opportunity for Barnabas to extend his encouraging nature to his own family. Thus, Barnabas' strong advocacy for bringing John Mark along stems from both his inherent disposition as an encourager and the familial bond they share.

However, in Paul's mind, it's not right to depart from the mission field, leaving your companions behind. Such a move is perilous, diminishing the mission's effectiveness and straining its resources. It's dangerous to travel in limited numbers. John Mark's departure may have been prompted by homesickness, a reason that, in Paul's view, lacked validity. If John Mark had a valid reason for deserting them, Barnabas likely would have cited it in his argument for bringing Mark back. The absence of any mention of a medical issue suggests that wasn't the cause, especially given Paul's openness about his own afflictions and Timothy's health challenges. Speculatively, Mark's swift return to Jerusalem may hint at a personal issue there, though homesickness remains a plausible explanation.

“They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord.

He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches” (Acts 15:39-41).

Their disagreement reached a level of intense fervor, described by the term “paroxysmos,” signifying a dispute marked by anger, passion, and violent emotions.⁹⁵ This was an unmistakably heated argument. It’s crucial to recognize that, given the language used “dispute in anger”, this passionate clash was not aligned with God’s desired approach to conflict resolution. The argument was so demonstrative that a resolution became unattainable, ultimately leading to the decision to part ways, as the text conveys.

Despite the wounded friendship, God still works a miracle through Barnabas and Mark and Paul and Silas (Acts 15:40). Sometimes relationships, even ones between close Christian friends can get severed. As far as the Biblical record is concerned these two remarkable men never saw one another again. However, Paul does forgive and speaks highly about Barnabas and his apostleship in 1 Corinthians 9:6.

⁹⁵www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3948/kjv/tr/0-1/

Consider an alternative perspective on this matter: Maybe both Paul and Barnabas were right in their reasoning, but they just handled it wrong. Perhaps it was God's intentional plan for Barnabas and John Mark to embark on one path while Paul and Silas took another.

How much better would it have been to encourage one another to take separate paths rejoicing in the fact that God would work greatly through them in their separate adventures?

It's plausible that both directions these men took were God-ordained. If you're fervent about John Mark joining you on the mission field and mentoring him, proceed without waiting for Paul's endorsement. Similarly, if you firmly believe you're not meant to accompany John Mark, maybe God is signaling a different journey for you.

Years later, Paul finds the formerly useless Mark "useful," as revealed in the apostle's concluding epistle. "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministering" (2 Timothy 4:11). And in Colossians 4:10, the once-rejected young worker was commended, and the Colossian saints were asked to be receptive to him. Peter will take him under his wing and call him "my son" (1 Peter 5:13).

I don't believe John Mark would have become useful in ministry if not for Barnabas' tutelage. John Mark needed an encourager, someone to take a chance on him (like Saul did) and so I am thankful for Barnabas not giving up on him.

Lessons from Barnabas

Generosity and encouragement go hand in hand (Acts 4:36-37). When we embody generosity, freely giving of our resources, time, and support, we create an environment where encouragement naturally flourishes. Generosity sets the stage for encouragement by demonstrating a selfless willingness to contribute to the well-being of others.

Seeing yourself abundantly supplied by grace leads to experiencing God's grace powerfully working in your life (Acts 4:33).

Breakthroughs happen as we help others. Luke 6:38's teaching on giving emphasizes the reciprocal nature of generosity—giving leads to receiving. Barnabas' life demonstrates that experiencing breakthroughs often begins with helping others. When we extend a helping hand, we open ourselves up to the abundant blessings that come with helping others.

See the potential in others and the power of restoration. Acts 15:37-38 reveals Barnabas' willingness to give John Mark a second chance, recognizing the importance of restoration and mentoring. This teaches us the value of looking beyond past mistakes and seeing the potential for growth in others.

Handling disagreements with grace. The disagreement between Barnabas and Paul in Acts 15:39-41 underscores the reality that even strong Christian relationships can face challenges. However, despite the heated argument and parting ways, God continued to work miracles through both Barnabas and Paul, demonstrating that even in conflicts, God's plans can still unfold. This teaches us the importance of handling disagreements with grace and acknowledging that God can still work through divergent paths.

Conclusion

For those who profess faith in Jesus Christ, I aim to conclude this book by being a source of encouragement, akin to being a Barnabas unto you. If you do not yet believe in Jesus Christ and the sacrifice He made, giving His life for the opportunity to receive His salvation, I earnestly pray that the Holy Spirit will illuminate your spiritual understanding, leading you to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Son of God. He sacrificed Himself on the cross for your sins, triumphed over sin and death by rising on the third day, ascended to Heaven, and now extends to you His abundant and eternal life. The promise of God's Word is this:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

I do not know the battle that you are in but I do know who goes with you in your battles (Matthew 28:20). The victory you seek belongs to the Lord (Proverbs 21:31) and He delights to lead you to the place where He prepares a victory feast for you in the presence of your enemies (Psalm 23:5). You will overcome (even though you might not feel like you will) because greater is He that is in you than He that is in the world (1 John 4:4). As a believer in Jesus Christ you have been given the Spirit of an overcomer (2 Corinthians 3:4). No weapon formed against you shall prosper (Isaiah 54:17). Jesus conquered sin and its effects, and by His wounds, you are healed (1 Peter 2:24).

Whatever the enemy has taken from you the Lord will repay unto you more than what you lost (Joel 2:25-26). You will come out of this ahead and your testimony of the Lord's triumph out of the trials you

faced will be used for God's glory as others receive the salvation of the Lord.

Share your Victory Story

When you receive the salvation of the Lord (healing, preservation, protection, deliverance, everlasting life) would you share your victory story with us @ acts433church@gmail.com. Let's encourage others.

Chapter 12:

Barnabas: Nurturing Growth through Encouragement in Christ Small group questions

What does it mean to recognize and embrace the abundance of God's grace in our lives? How might this recognition lead us to be a Barnabas (encourager) to someone else?

Reflect on a time when someone believed in your potential and offered you a second chance. How did this impact your life?

Have you ever encountered a disagreement similar to the one Paul and Barnabas had? Did your situation turn out differently? What lessons have you learned as a result? Do you think Paul and Barnabas would have changed anything about the way they handled the disagreement that they had about John Mark?

Paul and Barnabas went their separate ways but both were used by God. How might this influence future disagreements we might have with others to know that God might be leading us down different paths in our lives?

Galatians 6:2 encourages us to "carry each other's burdens." How can we create an environment where individuals feel safe sharing their burdens?

Why might encouragement be exactly what we need to step forward by faith into the things God is calling us to do? Look for someone to encourage this week. Share a time when either you encouraged someone else or were encouraged by another.