

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

MIKE EVANS

UNLEASHING

GOD'S
FAVOR

30
DAYS

TO ACTIVATING GOD'S BLESSINGS
IN EVERY AREA of YOUR LIFE

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TO ACTIVATING GOD'S BLESSINGS
IN EVERY AREA *of* YOUR LIFE

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GOD'S
FAVOR



P.O. BOX 30000, PHOENIX, AZ 85046

***Unleashing God's Favor: 30 Days to Activating God's Blessings
in Every Area of Your Life***

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*“Let the favor of the Lord our God
be upon us, and establish the work of our hands
upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!”*

– Psalm 90:17 ESV

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P R E F A C E

GET READY FOR YOUR BREAKTHROUGH!

For many decades now, I've travelled the world as an ambassador for Christ and a herald of His life-changing favor. In every continent and nation, I've met people in search of new beginnings, and they yearn to live in the Favor of God (F.O.G.). They see the marvelous promises the Lord has given them in the Scriptures, but often they're frustrated because they don't know how to *activate* those promises.

When I talk with people in my travels, they tell me of their desire for breakthroughs in their life. Some need God's healing touch in their body or their emotions. Others are desperate for a financial turnaround. Many are seeking a breakthrough in their marriage or their children.

It grieves my heart that many of these precious people can quote Bible verses about the promises of God; yet, they often are missing some crucial ingredient of implementation and activation. They lack

the necessary tools to bridge the gap between the *doctrine* of God's favor and the actual *experience* of that favor.

I've written this book to help YOU experience more of God's favor so you can receive the breakthroughs you need. As you join me on this exciting 30-day journey, you will be blessed, encouraged, and challenged to go deeper into the amazing Favor of God (F.O.G.)—where miracles happen and blessings are released.

As you learn how to implement these truths day by day...

Your life will never be the same!

—Mike Evans



ACTIVATING GOD'S BLESSINGS

If you've spent any time reading God's Word, you've surely seen that your Heavenly Father *loves you* and wants to *bless you* with the good things of life. Jesus makes this absolutely clear in Matthew 7:11: *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"*(NASB).

As much as your earthly father may love you, your Heavenly Father loves you more...so much more. Your Father in heaven longs to show you His kindness, approval, and favor.

However, it breaks God's heart—and breaks my heart as well—to see so many of His children missing out on the abundant life He wants them to have (John 10:10). Often they are trying hard to do the right things, but something is missing.

My friend, if you are frustrated today in some area of your life—such as your finances, your relationships, your emotions, or your health—I have good news for you:

**The Favor of God (F.O.G.) can reverse your
losses and turn things around for you!**

Living in the F.O.G. will help you turn the head of God, touch the heart of God, and move the hand of God. It's a place where you can gain affirmation from the Father and His Word rather than from those around you—at home, at work, or wherever else you may be. As God's favor releases emotional, physical, spiritual, and financial success into your life, you will no longer have to allow people or problems to define you.

When you're living in God's favor, you will attract His blessings like a magnet. He will also activate the gifts and tools you need to BE a blessing to others, and you'll be equipped to fulfill your calling and perform His work on earth.

However, I've discovered that while many people have *heard about* God's favor, they still don't understand how to *activate* His favor in the practical areas of their life. That's why I've prepared ***Unleashing God's Favor***—to give you the tools you need to release more of the Lord's favor than you've ever experienced before!

The Favor of God (F.O.G.) is released in your life when you learn how to activate the promises in His Word. Peter writes that you've been given “*exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4). This means you must study the promises of His Word and wait for Him to speak to you by His Spirit. And when God has promised you something, you can't let *anyone* talk you out of receiving it!

The Bible describes specific attitudes and actions that touch God's heart and release His favor. In order to unlock the amazing treasures He has given you in Christ, you must learn to practice

Radical Obedience, Forgiveness, Humility, and Generosity. As you will see in the pages of this book...

**The Bible is filled with stories of people
who changed their entire destiny
through one step of faith, obedience,
forgiveness, humility, or generosity.**

If you're only interested in more theories or head knowledge about God's favor, this is not the book for you. It's all about receiving the breakthroughs you've been praying for—releasing and activating the F.O.G. in every area of your life.

Before we get started, take a moment and thank your Heavenly Father that His favor is about to be activated in a powerful new way. Then get ready to unleash God's favor!

—Mike Evans

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Take a moment to write down your present thoughts about how God's favor can be activated and released more fully in your life.

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- ✧ On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the fullness of God's favor), to what degree do you feel you are currently walking in the Favor of God (F.O.G.)?

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- ✧ Take a few minutes to list specific breakthroughs you are seeking from God as more of His favor is released in your life.

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LESSONS FROM A BLIND BEGGAR

The story of a blind man named Bartimaeus is a beautiful illustration of how to unleash more of God's favor in your life—even when your situation appears hopeless. One minute this man was begging along the roadside, just as he had done for much of his life. But in a moment's time, *everything* changed for him. Suddenly he could see! He had received a new beginning beyond his wildest dreams.

Bartimaeus had stumbled upon the secret to unleashing God's miracle-working power, and his life would never be the same. When he went to sleep that night, his life was completely different than it was when he had awakened that morning.

So, what can we learn from this amazing story, told in Mark 10:46-52? Let's take a look...

When Bartimaeus encountered Jesus, he “*sat by the road begging*” (v. 46). This man had learned to depend on the favor of

PEOPLE to give him his daily sustenance. However, even though God wants to give you favor with other people (Luke 2:52), you must look to HIM as the main source of your favor and provision. That's why King David wrote, *"those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing"* (Psalm 34:10).

You see, the Favor of God (F.O.G.) is all you really need. Everything else will follow when you seek Him and His kingdom (Matthew 6:33).

Bartimaeus started his day seeking favor from anyone passing by on the road, but then he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was coming by. Faith began to rise in the heart of this blind man, for he knew that Jesus was no ordinary man.

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (v. 47) Bartimaeus cried out. At that point, people in the crowd told him to be quiet, but he *"cried out all the more"* (vs. 48).

If you need some kind of breakthrough in your life today, it begins when you recognize that Jesus is nearby and you begin to call out to Him by faith. And a crucial principle here is to not let *anyone* talk you out of your plea to the Savior! There will always be naysayers, trying to discourage you and undermine your faith, but you need to keep crying out to Jesus for your miracle.

Something stunning happens at this point in the story: *"So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called"* (v. 49). If not for the impassioned cries of Bartimaeus, Jesus would have passed right on by. But sensing faith in the voice of this blind beggar, Jesus *"stood still."*

If you've been crying out to Jesus for some kind of turnaround in your life, I encourage you to take a moment to picture Him stopping...pausing...standing right in front of you. Yes, the Lord of all

creation is taking time to stop and hear your petition, ready to meet your need!

Those near Jesus told Bartimaeus, *“Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you”* (v. 49). Some other translations say, *“Cheer up!”* In other words, your negative words or attitude can block God’s favor. Bartimaeus had an *attitude of expectancy*, and that was a vital factor in the miracle he would soon receive.

He was also told to *“rise”* and hear Jesus’ voice. Without a hint of procrastination, this desperate man sprang into action: *“Throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus”* (v. 50).

Notice that if you want to *activate* the Favor of God (F.O.G.) in your life, you often must take *action* of some kind. It’s likely that Bartimaeus never would have received his healing if he had remained seated on the side of the road. **OBEDIENCE** is one of the most important ways to unleash God’s favor, and we see that principle here in the story of the beggar who needed a breakthrough.

Another thing Bartimaeus did was throw aside his old garment. If you are going to start a new life, you need a fresh set of clothes! We see this in passages such as Isaiah 61:3, where God promises to give us *“the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”* In order to enter into a new dimension of God’s favor, you will need to cast off any old garments of fear, depression, unbelief, or unforgiveness. It’s a new day!

Jesus next asks Bartimaeus one of the most important questions in the entire Bible—and it’s the same question He is asking YOU today: *“What do you want Me to do for you?”* (v. 51).

Let that sink in for a moment. Jesus is right there with you, and He wants you to tell Him what your greatest need is. What, exactly, do you want Him to do for you? This is a critical component of what

it takes to unleash the F.O.G. in your life: *You must be able to define the miracle you are seeking from God.*

To no one's surprise, Bartimaeus told Jesus that he wanted to receive his sight. I'm sure Jesus already knew this, just as He already knows the desire of *your* heart today. However, He wants you to *pray it* and *say it*, letting your specific request be known before His throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16, Philippians 4:6).

When Bartimaeus' breakthrough came, it was sudden and amazing: *"immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road"* (v. 52). Of course, Jesus could have told the blind man that his healing would come gradually, over a long period of time, but that was not the case with Bartimaeus. Jesus had unleashed the miraculous, and the results were instantaneous.

How did this happen? What secret had the blind beggar discovered? Jesus told him plainly: *"your faith has made you well"* (v. 52). Through faith and obedience, Bartimaeus had activated God's supernatural favor and healing power.

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Take a moment to assess whether you've had times in the past when you've looked to *people* for favor or provision—whether to your boss, your spouse, your parents, or the government—rather than to the Lord. If so, renew your commitment today to make God your source!
- ✧ As you are looking to God for a breakthrough, do you have some kinds of “old garments” that you need to discard, such as discouragement, bad attitudes, or unscriptural beliefs?
- ✧ When Bartimaeus knew Jesus was at hand, he immediately sprang into action and promptly obeyed. Is there some word of instruction the Lord is calling *you* to obey today in preparation for your turnaround?
- ✧ Jesus said Bartimaeus had received his healing because of his faith and expectancy. Take a moment to examine your heart before the Lord, asking Him to raise your expectancy level.
- ✧ Now your heart has been prepared, and it's time to do as Bartimaeus did, crying out to Jesus for your breakthrough! Make sure you are *specific* in asking Him for what you need.



THE LEGACY OF ADAM AND HIS DESCENDANTS

All of us are descendants of Adam and Eve. Is that good news or bad news? Well, it's both.

The good news is that God created us in His image and likeness, commissioning us to rule over everything He has made:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the

air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”
(Genesis 1:26-28)

The first man and woman, Adam and Eve, were lovingly placed in a beautiful garden, where there was no sin, sickness, poverty, relationship strife, or death. These first two members of the human race could walk in daily, unbroken fellowship with their wonderful Creator. What an incredible picture of living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.)!

But the bad news is that Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, and this inevitably caused dire consequences. God still loved them, but His favor was blocked by their sin and disobedience.

When sin entered the world, so did poverty and strife, sickness and death. The Garden of Eden had been the perfect display of how it looks to experience God's favor, but when they sinned, they were kicked out of that realm of unimaginable blessings (Genesis 3:23-24).

Everything changed for humankind after that. Instead of God's original intention that we would automatically be born into a place of blessing, abundance, and favor, the descendants of Adam and Eve were born *outside* the Garden of Eden. The Lord still wanted His children to experience His love and favor, but it was no longer automatic. Now He provided special keys that must be utilized in order to gain access to His favor.

The first powerful key is **RADICAL FORGIVENESS**, demonstrated by God's gracious act of preparing Adam and Eve garments made of animal skins to cover their sin and shame (Genesis 3:21). Why is this significant? Because animal skins were obtained through the *shedding of blood*, a foreshadowing of Christ later coming as the Lamb of God to shed His blood for the sins of the world (John 1:29).

After their disobedience to God, Adam and Eve had tried to cover their nakedness by sewing fig leaves together (Genesis 3:7), a picture of our efforts to cover up our sins through our own works and good deeds. You'll never gain God's favor through religious cover-ups, my friend! You must receive His forgiveness and cleansing through the blood of Jesus.

Notice that this forgiveness from God was not a long, drawn-out process. It came in a moment's time, like turning on a light switch from darkness to light. One minute they were cowering from God and trying to hide their sinfulness through garments made of fig leaves, and the next minute, they were covered by a *new* garment, made by God and formed through an animal's shed blood.

In the same way, you can receive God's grace and forgiveness today, not on the basis of your own merit or good works, but because of the blood Jesus shed for you on the cross. You can experience God's amazing favor NOW, with no more condemnation or shame (Romans 8:1).

The second powerful key to God's favor is **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, illustrated in the story of Adam and Eve's first two sons, Cain and Abel. Obedience can be defined as "the act or practice of obeying; dutiful or submissive compliance." Throughout the Scriptures, we see stories where a person's act of obedience to God resulted in a dramatic release of His favor and blessings.

Both Cain and Abel brought offerings to the Lord, but only one of these acts was pleasing to Him. Why? Because God consistently says that He values *obedience* over *sacrifice* (1 Samuel 15:22, Psalm 40:6-8). Without *obedience* born out of an actual *relationship* with the Lord, sacrifice by itself is just a dead religious activity, with no power at all to open the floodgates of God's favor.

We read that while Cain “*brought the fruit of the ground*” as an offering to the Lord (Genesis 4:3 KJV), his brother Abel wisely brought an animal sacrifice instead, a firstborn from his flock. Rather than offer God crops from the ground or some skinny, lame, imperfect sheep, Abel gave the best he had to offer. He approached the altar humbly and penitently, bowing low in the presence of Almighty God. He presented his gift in faith, trusting that God would accept his sacrifice.

In Hebrew, the name Abel means “breath” or “vapor,” perhaps an indication of the shortness of his life. But Hebrews 11:4 makes this beautiful statement about his lasting legacy: “*By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.*”

This verse provides important keys on how Abel obtained God’s favor. He lived “*by faith*” gave “*a more excellent sacrifice*” was “*righteous*” and gave generous, sacrificial “*gifts*” to the Lord. Although Abel’s life on earth was short, we’re told that he “*still speaks*” through his powerful example.

Abel’s legacy teaches us about God’s prescribed path of righteousness. Although we are told relatively little about Abel’s life in Genesis 4, Jesus referred to him as “*righteous Abel*” (Matthew 23:35). What did he *do* to qualify as being “*righteous*”?

Abel’s offering of a sheep was his way of acknowledging what God had done in the Garden of Eden when He wrapped Abel’s parents, Adam and Eve, in animal skins (Genesis 3:21). In essence, Abel was saying, “I want to be obedient in coming to You on the basis of shed blood, as you showed my parents. As You showed grace to them, I am asking You to show the same grace and forgiveness to me.”

RADICAL OBEDIENCE cost Abel his life, but won him a place in the Bible's Hall of Heroes (Hebrews 11:4). The sacrifice from his flock foreshadowed the salvation Jesus won for us on the cross. Abel's sacrifice was one lamb for one person. Later, the Feast of Passover introduced the concept of one lamb for one family. Then on the Day of Atonement, one lamb was offered for the nation. And the final sacrifice came on the cross of Calvary, where one Lamb was slain for the whole world (John 1:29).

Because of his obedience in bringing a sacrificial lamb to God, *Abel* was saved. But because of *Jesus'* sacrifice on the cross, *you and I* have full access to God's forgiveness and salvation. Nothing is standing in your way to switch on the light of God's amazing favor in your life!

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Before Adam and Eve could release God's favor in their lives once again, they had to receive His **FORGIVENESS**, as He clothed them in garments of righteousness instead of condemnation and shame. Take a few moments to reflect on your present relationship with the Lord. Do you know, deep in your heart, that your sins have been totally forgiven and cleansed? If so, give God praise for His amazing grace and favor. If not, ask Him to give you this deep assurance right now.
- ✧ If you find yourself still struggling to feel "worthy" of God's favor, you need to make sure you're coming to God on the basis of His grace rather than on the basis of your own merit or good works. Take time to meditate on verses like these:

*"Not by works of righteousness
which we have done, but according to
His mercy He saved us"
(Titus 3:5).*

*"We have been made right
in God's sight by the blood of Christ"
(Romans 5:9 NLT).*

*"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that
we might become the righteousness of God in Him"
(2 Corinthians 5:21).*

- ✧ Write down anything that particularly stands out to you about these verses.

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- ✧ Abel believed God, and he released God's favor in his life through his **OBEDIENCE**. Take a moment to stop and pray for God to search your heart, asking Him to reveal any area of your life in which you haven't done as He has instructed.
- ✧ Through his faith and obedience, Abel left a powerful legacy that has continued down through the centuries. Take a few minutes to reflect on the kind of legacy *you* are leaving—to the people around you today and those in the generations to come (Psalm 145:4).



HOW NOAH FOUND GOD'S FAVOR

It's hard for us to even imagine a sinless world without sickness, poverty, emotional distress, or death. But that's the kind of world Adam and Eve were born into: *"Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good"* (Genesis 1:31).

When sin entered the world through human disobedience, God's favor was lost, and the results were catastrophic. Instead of walking in intimacy with the Lord, Adam and Eve hid from Him (Genesis 3:8). Soon there was friction between Adam and Eve as they pointed the finger of blame for their disobedience (Genesis 3:12). And then God pronounced a curse upon the ground itself—the ground that once had brought them such abundant provision:

*Cursed is the ground for your sake;
In toil you shall eat of it
All the days of your life.*

*Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,
And you shall eat the herb of the field.
In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread
Till you return to the ground,
For out of it you were taken;
For dust you are,
And to dust you shall return.
(Genesis 3:17-19)*

Things continued to go downhill, for their eldest son, Cain, killed his brother Abel out of jealousy and anger (Genesis 4:8). Wickedness and violence increasingly filled the earth, until in Noah's time, God "*was grieved in His heart*" (Genesis 6:6).

During this time of lawlessness and corruption, the Lord decided to destroy most inhabitants of the earth and start over with a clean slate. But first He searched for someone to whom He could show His favor. His plan has *always* been to bless and multiply those who reflect His image and likeness, and this was again His strategy in Genesis 6.

We read that "*Noah found **grace** in the eyes of the Lord*" (v. 8). Other translations say, "*Noah found **favor** in the eyes of the Lord.*" And *The Message* renders this, "*But Noah was different. God liked what he saw in Noah.*"

What made Noah stand out? How did he find the Lord's grace and favor when most of humankind was marked for judgment and destruction? Noah was a righteous man among the unrighteous, and through his **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, he had released God's favor.

Noah wasn't just trying to "fit in" with the people around him. He didn't adopt the common philosophy today of "going along to get along." Instead, he was willing to take a stand and do what was pleasing to the Lord.

The apostle Paul later gave a challenge to the Romans that would also describe the kind of life-changing commitment Noah had made:

I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2 NLT)

How did Noah know God's will for his life? It started with his decision to put his life as a sacrifice on God's altar, refraining from copying *"the behavior and customs of this world."*

God had a plan, both for Noah's family and for the world. But this plan would not be fulfilled without **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**—obedience only possible for those who have made a wholehearted commitment to do the Lord's will, no matter the cost.

God began to share with Noah a special assignment, and it was a BIG one: to build an ark for the deliverance and salvation of his family. Although Noah probably had no idea what an "ark" was, he was willing to follow God's instructions. The Master Architect gave Noah, His willing builder, a detailed blueprint for an extremely difficult project that wouldn't be completed for more than 100 years. Yet Noah obeyed.

Many people claim to be living in obedience to God, but it is only partial, half-hearted obedience. In contrast, we read of Noah that he *"did EVERYTHING exactly as God had commanded him"* (Genesis 6:22

NIV). Is it any wonder that God noticed this man and chose to give him special grace and favor?

Noah's obedience ensured a place of safety not only for him, but also for his wife and their three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. By heeding the voice of God, they were spared the destruction that was about to rain down—literally—upon the earth. As he worked on the massive vessel, Noah preached righteousness to anyone who would listen, but the response was mockery and scorn.

Bible scholars tell us that before the time of Noah, it had never rained on the earth. The faithless were unable to accept God's warning through Noah. They had a choice to believe or reject Noah's warning—and the overwhelming majority chose unbelief and rejection instead of obedience.

However, Noah and his family displayed **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, and this was crucial for their very survival. Heeding the voice of God, they built the ark, entered it, and were saved.

Obedience to God is seldom easy. But what is the alternative? If not for the successful completion of the ark, Noah and his family would have perished in the flood.

Despite harassment and ridicule, Noah obeyed the Lord. He gathered pairs of animals as instructed and brought them safely inside the ark. He gathered food for the preservation of his family and the animals, all the while warning people of the impending disaster. He was an obedient servant of the Lord, even though it must have been very difficult at times.

How was this **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** possible? Simply stated: Noah believed God. And like Abraham after him, God “*counted it to him as righteousness*” (Genesis 15:6 esv). Because of his faith and obedience, Noah enjoyed intimacy with Jehovah. They walked and

talked together. God laid out the plan, and Noah followed it to the letter.

Faith coupled with obedience creates an unstoppable force. When these qualities infuse your spiritual life, you will live a life of victory, enjoying the Favor of God (F.O.G.) in everything you do.

Think about Noah's amazing example: He labored over 100 years on the ark, obeying God's warnings even of things he had *never experienced* before. The Lord hadn't given Noah a preview of what "rain" was, nor had Noah seen anything that remotely resembled a flood. Yet we read: "*By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household*" (Hebrews 11:7).

When the Bible says Noah was "*moved with godly fear*," you might get the wrong impression. "Aha! That's why he did it," you might say. "God held a big stick over him and said, 'You'd better do this, or I'll let you have it!'" But that wasn't it at all. Noah simply revered God enough to obey His instructions.

In today's humanistic, relativistic culture, people often mistakenly think "all roads lead to God" or that we can receive divine favor no matter what we believe or what we do. However, notice that when God gave Noah the blueprint for the ark, it contained only ***one door*** set in the side of the structure. This door initially hung open, ready and waiting to receive any who desired to enter in and be saved from God's judgment.

God left the door to the ark open until the last possible moment. Yet after 120 years of hearing Noah preach about the impending judgment of God upon all the earth, not one person outside of his family chose to board the ark! Then Noah and his seven family members entered in, and "*the Lord closed the door behind them*" (Genesis 7:16 NLT).

As the sound of the door being slammed shut echoed throughout the surrounding area, the first drops of rain began to fall. Now it was too late—no one else was allowed to enter the ark. Lightning flashed and thunder rattled as judgment fell from the cloud-laden sky and underground waters erupted from beneath the earth.

But through their obedience, Noah and his family had faithfully executed God's command to construct and enter the ark, and thus they were spared. What a beautiful picture of how obedience can bring safety and blessing for us today as well.

The ark was a beautiful foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, who said: *"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture"* (John 10:9). Just as there was only one door into the ark, so there is just one Door into the presence of God and a life of His favor. Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life,"* and *"no one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:6).

So if you want to activate God's favor in your life, remember this: There is no other way but Jesus, *"nor is there salvation in any other"* (Acts 4:12). Nothing else will satisfy the longing of your heart. You need to give your life fully to Jesus and enter into God's favor through Him alone.

Notice that life wasn't always easy for Noah just because he was living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.). After years of suffering ridicule and rejection while building the ark, he and his family then had to go through rough waters for many months.

However, at the end of Noah's stormy waters, God had prepared a rainbow as a sign of His covenant promises: *"I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth"* (Genesis 9:13).

The message for us is clear: Even if you're still going through difficult storms in your life, don't despair. God loves you. If you trust the Lord and practice **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, you can be sure that a rainbow of His favor is straight ahead!

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Before going any further in this study, take time to pray and make absolutely sure you have entered into the ark of God's favor through Jesus Christ—your only Door to abundant and eternal life. (First John 5:12-13 says you can KNOW that you have eternal life!)
- ✧ An important principle from the life of Noah is this: *Your **future favor** depends on your **obedience today***. It wasn't even raining when God first gave Noah instructions to build the ark, but it was time for the construction to begin! Take a moment to consider whether there are any long-term goals that God is calling you to get started on right away.
- ✧ Sometimes people have the misconception that God's favor will keep them from ever having to work hard or plan ahead. Noah's story clearly shows otherwise, as do other Scripture passages like these:

*“Take a lesson from the ants, you lazybones.
Learn from their ways and become wise! Though
they have no prince or governor or ruler to make
them work, they labor hard all summer, gathering
food for the winter” (Proverbs 6:6-8 NLT).*

*“Good planning and hard work lead to
prosperity” (Proverbs 21:5 NLT).*

- ✧ Ask God to search your heart and show you any areas of laziness, procrastination, or resistance to hard work.

✧ In order to succeed in his mission, Noah had to ignore the scorn of his critics and naysayers. Have you allowed people like that to discourage you and hold you back from fulfilling God's purposes for your life? If so, meditate on these verses, and ask the Lord to give you new boldness:

"The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe" (Proverbs 29:25).

"don't worry too much about what the critics will say" (1 Timothy 5:21-23 MSG).

"Deflect the harsh words of my critics—but what you say is always so good. See how hungry I am for your counsel" (Psalm 119:39-40 MSG).

✧ What is God saying to you right now about being bold and not allowing people to discourage you or squeeze you into their mold?

✧ The Bible gives us many wonderful promises like this about the Lord's ability to bring us safely through the stormy waters of life: *"There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while"* (1 Peter 1:6 NLT). Write down a description of any stormy waters in your life right now, and then take a moment to thank God for the rainbow He's preparing for you to experience in the coming days.

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ABRAHAM'S WALK OF FAITH

In order to walk in the Favor of God (F.O.G.), you must learn to walk by faith rather than feelings. As famed evangelist D.L. Moody once said, “Obedience means marching right on whether we feel like it or not. Many times we go against our feelings. Faith is one thing, feeling is another.” The apostle Paul affirmed this when he wrote, *“For we walk by faith, not by sight”* (2 Corinthians 5:7).

When you have **RADICAL FAITH** and have committed your life to **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, you move when God says “Go” and stop when He says “Stop.” Abraham exemplified this beautifully when he obeyed God’s instruction to leave his homeland and set out for an unknown destination. God’s call seems to have come when Abraham was going about his usual activities, and the Lord said: *“Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you”* (Genesis 12:1 NLT).

By believing God and faithfully obeying His call, Abraham became the father of the chosen people. He not only obeyed God's instruction to leave his homeland (Genesis 12), but he even was willing to offer his son Isaac to God on an altar of sacrifice (Genesis 22). Could *you* have displayed that kind of unconditional faith and obedience?

When we first read of Abraham in Genesis 11, his name is "Abram." According to tradition, his father, Terah, was a seller of idols, and Abraham originally worked for his idol-worshipping father. But as a young man, he began to doubt the value of worshiping gods made of metal, wood, or stone, and he came to believe that the world had been made by one Creator. When he tried to share his beliefs with his father, however, it was to no avail.

Abraham was one of many Biblical heroes surrounded by cultures where idolatry was rampant. Ironically, those who worship pagan gods are seeking *favor*—prosperity and protection—through their misguided, superstitious practices. Yet by failing to have a relationship with the true and living God, pagan idolaters end up in bondage to fear-based religion, worshiping the creation of their own hands.

Even those who know the God of the Bible can sometimes allow subtle idols to enter our lives. Writing to believers, the apostle John warned, "*Little children, keep yourselves from idols*" (1 John 5:21). He probably wasn't referring just to bowing down to statues; for idols can be *anything* we set our hopes and affection on, rather than on the Lord.

Make no mistake about it: If you allow idols in your life, they will inevitably sap your spiritual vitality and undermine God's favor. When Moses delivered the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel, the second one dealt with this issue directly:

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:4-5).

When the Lord says He’s “a jealous God,” it means He wants us for Himself—wholeheartedly devoted to Him alone.

But do you see how difficult it might have been for Abraham to break loose from his family ties and his association with idol worship? His decision to obey God’s leading is an illustration of Paul’s words in Philippians 3:13: *“forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.”*

Abraham’s story also illustrates how the Lord’s favor is unleashed when we take steps of faith and obedience. When God told Abraham to leave his homeland, his relatives, and the idolatrous culture behind, He also gave him wonderful “*I will*” promises of how Abraham would be rewarded for obeying:

***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 NIV).*

Notice how powerful this principle is. When God gives you *instructions*, He often gives you *promises* as well. When you trust Him to bring more of His favor into your life, He gladly says, “*I will!*”

Time and time again, the Lord tested Abraham's faith and obedience—and He will test *yours* as well. One of the most pivotal verses in the Bible is Genesis 15:6 (NIV): "*Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness.*"

Sometimes it was very difficult for Abraham to trust the Lord, yet the Scriptures repeatedly commend him for not losing heart when things looked bleak:

When everything was hopeless, Abraham believed anyway, deciding to live not on the basis of what he saw he couldn't do but on what God said he would do
(Romans 4:18 MSG).

This doesn't mean Abraham's faith and obedience were perfect. As we will see in tomorrow's lesson, sometimes he made major blunders. However, God saw that Abraham's heart was to "trust and obey," as John H. Sammis would describe in his famous nineteenth-century hymn:

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

Refrain:

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

*Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh or a tear,
Can abide while we trust and obey.*

*Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,
But our toil He doth richly repay;
Not a grief or a loss, not a frown or a cross,
But is blessed if we trust and obey.*

*But we never can prove the delights of His love
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favor He shows, for the joy He bestows,
Are for them who will trust and obey.*

*Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at His feet,
Or we'll walk by His side in the way;
What He says we will do, where He sends we will go;
Never fear, only trust and obey.*

What a beautiful hymn. And don't miss the lines that say, "For the favor He shows, for the joy He bestows, are for them who will trust and obey." Just as Abraham discovered, the Favor of God (F.O.G.) is unleashed in amazing ways when you believe God and obey His instructions.

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ACTIVATION STEPS
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- ✧ It must have been difficult for Abraham to break loose from his family ties and the idol worship associated with his upbringing in Ur of the Chaldeans. Reflect back on times in your life when you had to make a difficult choice in whether you would trust and obey the Lord. How well do you think you passed the test?
- ✧ Meditate on the words of the psalmist, *“Today, if you will hear His voice: Do not harden your hearts”* (Psalm 95:7-8), and of Jesus, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me”* (John 10:27). Give thanks to the Lord that He wants to speak to you and show you His will. Ask Him to reveal any areas of your heart that have been hardened by fear and unbelief.
- ✧ Take a few minutes to quiet your heart before the Lord, and ask Him to show you His next steps for your life. What is He calling you to do? Has He given you any specific promises for the outcome if you trust Him and are obedient?
- ✧ Paul wrote in Philippians 3:12-14 that in order to press forward to God’s best for his life, he had to first “forget” or let go of the things that were in his past. Ask God to search your heart and reveal whether anything from your past is holding you back from fulfilling His highest purpose for your life.



RECOVERING FROM IMPER- FECT OBEDIENCE

Although Abraham was a man of **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, that doesn't mean his obedience was always *perfect*. Sometimes there were horrible lapses in the faith of Abraham and his wife Sarah, with devastating results.

Perhaps it's surprising that the Bible is so painfully honest about the failures of heroes of the faith like Abraham and Sarah. But isn't it refreshing to know that even those who are held up as Biblical role models often *struggled* to trust and obey?

Abraham and his wife were living in Ur of the Chaldeans when God first called them. And although the family started out for Canaan, they ended up settling in *Haran* until Abraham's father died (Genesis 11:31-32). Perhaps this was an indication of some hesitancy or reluctance in following God's call. Can you relate?

Eventually Abraham and Sarah resumed their journey toward Canaan. Again, this may be an important message for *you* today. Even if you've been delayed in fulfilling your God-given purpose, this can be the day you resume your journey!

From cover to cover, the Bible is clear that its heroes were as human and fallible as you and me. Yet, although they had "*a nature like ours*" (James 5:17), they succeeded in unleashing extraordinary breakthroughs of God's favor through their Radical Obedience, Forgiveness, Humility, and Generosity.

Abraham and Sarah had been unable to have children for many years and were faced with a difficult test. God had told them they would be blessed with a child through Sarah, but they got tired of waiting. Again, this is the type of experience to which we all can relate; waiting for God to fulfill His promises is a hard test indeed.

At his wife's insistence, Abraham made the terrible mistake of having a child through Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian handmaiden. The result was Ishmael—a child whose birth ultimately led to today's ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Paul writes in Galatians 4:25, "*Now Hagar...is in slavery with her children*" (NIV).

God had a much better plan, of course. He already had promised Abraham a son through Sarah, resulting in descendants as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:5). The Lord wanted to bless this couple with an "Isaac," a sign of His supernatural favor.

However, instead of trusting in the Lord, they took matters in their own hands. In Sarah's misery over not having children, they turned from faith in God's promises to dependence on self. Hagar represents human works—trying to make things happen apart from God's supernatural grace and favor.

Of course, Abraham could have said no to his wife's suggestion and continued to hold on to the promises of God. But instead, he went along with Sarah's ill-advised plan.

By the time Hagar was heavy with child, Sarah was consumed with jealousy, and Abraham was forced to endure the contentious atmosphere he had helped create. Not a happy situation!

When Sarah saw Hagar pregnant with Ishmael, she began to have second thoughts about the foolhardy plan she had concocted. Fortunately, God is a merciful God, and when we humble ourselves, He can turn our *second thoughts* into *second chances*. He can display His favor in our lives, even when we least deserve it.

The Lord still had a plan for Sarah and Abraham. Instead of scolding them for their foolish actions, God reaffirmed His love for them and His plan for their lives. In order to show the couple He was giving them a new beginning, God changed Abram's name to *Abraham* (father of a multitude) and Sarai's name to *Sarah* (noblewoman). And He reminded them of His promise, which had never changed: "*I will bless [Sarah] and also give you a son by her...*" (Genesis 17:16).

No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham [father of a multitude]; for I have made you a father of many nations....As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah [noblewoman] shall be her name (Genesis 17:5, 17:15).

Friend, you don't have to be perfect to live in the Favor of God (F.O.G.). If you've made mistakes, you can humble yourself before the Lord, receive His forgiveness, and let Him reaffirm His promises and

His plan for your life. As Paul writes, “*for God’s gifts and His call are irrevocable*” (Romans 11:29 NIV).

Yet despite God’s promise to give them a son, Abraham reached the age of 99 and Sarah 89, both well past normal childbearing age. Yet, we’re told that Abraham continued to believe God, and this was the key to his breakthrough:

...When everything was hopeless, Abraham believed anyway, deciding to live not on the basis of what he saw he couldn’t do but on what God said he would do...
(Romans 4:18 MSG).

Then came the day when Sarah awoke to find that she was pregnant in her old age. She who had laughed at the pronouncement that she would bear a child, who had intervened and proposed her own plan for an heir, Sarah was now carrying Isaac, the son of promise. God had taken away her barrenness and provided the strength to carry the child to term—just as He had promised.

What a great lesson: No matter what our circumstances may be, we must continue to believe God for a demonstration of His favor in our life. Even though the “evidence” of God’s faithfulness was scant at the time, “*Abraham believed God*” (James 2:23).

The story of Abraham and Sarah’s detour with Hagar also teaches us that, in contrast to the unwise human plans we may be tempted to follow, we must trust in the Lord and follow HIS plan for our life (Proverbs 3:5-7). His plan is always the BEST plan (Jeremiah 29:11).

The Bible also promises that we will be *blessed* when we trust and obey God's plans: "*Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord*" (Jeremiah 17:7).

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Despite their overall track record of trusting God and displaying **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, Abraham and Sarah made some mistakes along the way. Take a few minutes and allow the Lord to assess your life and show you any ways that you've been diverted from His plans for your life. Write these down, and then receive His grace and **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** through Jesus' death for you on the cross.

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- ✧ We've all had times when we followed the wrong advice. For example, terrible consequences resulted when Abraham agreed to follow Sarah's plan. And the entire human race has paid a horrible price for Adam's foolish willingness to follow Eve in eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6). Sometimes this kind of error stems from having a greater desire to please *people* than to please *God* (Galatians 1:10). At other times, we simply fail to check with God before we say "yes" to someone's proposal (Joshua 9:1-27). Reflect on how these principles apply to your own life, whether in the past or with decisions you are facing at the present time.

- ✧ Write down any difficult circumstances you are facing when it comes to trusting and obeying God. Especially note any promises the Lord has given you, but that you're waiting *upon* to be fulfilled.

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- ✧ Seeing the faith and obedience of Abram and Sarai, God gave them a *new identity* and *new names*, Abraham and Sarah. Then, at long last, Isaac was born to them, signaling a *new beginning* in their lives after years of waiting and frustration. Take a few minutes to write down any areas of your life where you need God to intervene and give *you* a new identity, fresh start, or new beginning.

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- ✧ In Revelation 21:5, Jesus declares, "*Behold, I make all things new*" Commit this amazing promise to memory, and regularly claim it over the areas of your life where you need a breakthrough.



BLESSINGS FROM PASS- ING A DIFFICULT TEST

Finally, Abraham and Sarah's long-awaited child of promise arrived. Abraham set about to teach Isaac God's covenant promises, just as the Lord knew he would: *"For I have chosen [Abraham], so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord...so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him"* (Genesis 18:19 NIV).

Then horror came, as God told him, *"Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you"* (Genesis 22:2).

This was the ultimate test, for Abraham loved Isaac more than life itself. Yet he was committed to **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**—and he trusted God to *bless* that obedience. Hebrews 11:17 summarizes

the story like this: “**By faith** Abraham, when he was **tested**, offered up Isaac, and he who had **received the promises** offered up his only begotten son...”

What a test this surely was! Yet “*by faith*” Abraham passed the test and unleashed a whole new level of the blessings of God.

As we look at this remarkable story in the life of Abraham, it’s a good opportunity to consider what the Lord might be requiring from *us* today. Will we put it on the altar and allow God to show Himself as *Jehovah Jireh*, our faithful Provider?

Although we can read the entire story of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac and see that it had a happy ending, Abraham didn’t have that benefit. He just knew what God was asking him to do—and he obeyed without question or protest. He could have argued... hesitated...or tried to bargain with God. But he didn’t.

Yet, puzzled about God’s plan, his heart must have been heavy as he set out on the three-day journey to Mount Moriah. He was not some Superman—a spiritual hero with mystical powers. He was simply an “everyman” who had waited many years for the miraculous child he was now about to offer on the altar.

There are signs that God had convinced Abraham that his son would either be spared or raised from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). When asked about the sacrifice, Abraham assured Isaac, “*God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering...*” (Genesis 22:8 NIV).

When God instructed him to put his beloved son on the altar, there’s no evidence that Abraham demanded an *explanation* or tried to get the Lord to promise him some kind of *reward* for his obedience. Nevertheless, God *always* rewards obedience with His favor—and Abraham’s case was no exception. After Abraham showed his willingness to put Isaac on the altar, God told him:

Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely **bless you** and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, **because you have obeyed me** (Genesis 22:16-18 NIV).

Although God doesn't always let us know ahead of time **HOW** He will bless our obedience, we can be confident that He **WILL** bless us with His supernatural favor in some way.

Thankfully, we don't have to "figure God out" in order to live in His favor. We just need to obey what He tells us to do—without always understanding *why* He's giving us those instructions or *how* He's planning to bless us in return.

Notice that when Abraham obeyed God by putting Isaac on the altar, he probably had no clue about *how* God would provide. Would the Lord grant a last-minute stay of execution? Would He raise Isaac from the dead? Abraham only knew he could trust the Lord to provide in His own way.

And just as his father displayed **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** that day, so did Isaac. Although he was old enough to run for his life, he trusted his father enough to humbly submit to his will. What a beautiful picture of Jesus, God's dear Son, who *"...humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death..."* (Philippians 2:8).

Isaac, the son of sacrifice, foreshadowed the One who also bore the wood upon His back—His own cross. Christ became the sacrifice who shed His blood for the salvation of humankind—obeying His Heavenly Father without question.

The Bible never says obedience to God will be easy or convenient. Jesus was in great agony as He wrestled with the His Father's will in the Garden of Gethsemane. But in the end He said, "*not My will, but Yours, be done*" (Luke 22:42).

What was the result of Jesus' obedience and humility? Great favor and blessing! "***THEREFORE*** *God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Philippians 2:9-11).

In the same way, God's favor and authority will be released in *your* life as you trust Him and do His will. And although your Heavenly Father wants you to walk in His favor *all the time*, moment by moment, often He will instruct you to take specific steps of faith to *trigger* or *unleash* that favor. And don't be surprised if you experience the breakthrough of His favor at the very last minute—right when you need it the most.

Abraham's breakthrough of favor came just as he raised his knife to plunge it into Isaac's heart. The angel of the Lord stopped him at the very last moment and said, "*Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me*" (Genesis 22:12).

As his knife was raised to sacrifice his son, Abraham heard something rustling in a bush near the altar. He looked around and there, held fast, was a ram caught by its horns. With unparalleled gratitude, Abraham untied his son, bound the ram, and laid it on the altar as a sacrifice to his faithful *Jehovah Jireh*, the Lord his Provider.

This is the first time in the Scriptures that God revealed Himself as *Jehovah Jireh*. Of course, He had *always* been a faithful Provider,

but Abraham didn't *recognize* this about the Lord until that critical moment on Mount Moriah.

Not only had Abraham displayed **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, but his willingness to sacrifice his dear son was also a display of **RADICAL GENEROSITY**. He hadn't held anything back but was willing to give his very BEST to the Lord.

Do you see why this is significant? As Abraham displayed his willingness to give God *his* best, God revealed Himself as the covenant partner who would provide *HIS* best for Abraham. This kind of **RADICAL GENEROSITY** is vital to "the great exchange" and to living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.). As we are generous with God, He is even *more* generous with us!

May we follow this amazing example—unleashing God's favor by surrendering what we cherish most. This principle is found throughout the pages of Scripture, verses such as Numbers 18:29 (MSG): "*Make sure that God's portion is the best and holiest of everything you get.*"

Mount Moriah was a place of faith and obedience for Abraham, and he called it "*The-Lord-Will-Provide*" after this experience (Genesis 22:14). This story is a great example of how faith and obedience go hand in hand. One cannot exist without the other. Strong faith produces **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, which touches the heart of God, moves the hand of God, and releases the blessings of God.

Just as God was faithful to Abraham as *Jehovah Jireh*, so He is committed to us as His children today. He lovingly gives us what we need—though not always what we want.

Because of Abraham's **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** and **RADICAL GENEROSITY**, he discovered how to live in the Favor of God (F.O.G.). Not only was his faith "*accounted to him for righteousness,*"

but he also received the ultimate honor: “*he was called the friend of God*” (James 2:23).

Today we can follow in the footsteps of Abraham, the father of faith. God gives us this amazing promise: “*all who put their faith in Christ share the **same blessing** Abraham received*” (Galatians 3:9 NLT). So let’s believe His promises and enjoy His blessings!

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ACTIVATION STEPS
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- ✧ Take a few moments to look back over your life, noting any difficult tests you've faced and any blessings unleashed when you passed the tests by trusting and obeying God.
- ✧ Are you struggling with some question of God's will today? Or has God already made His will known to you on a certain issue, but you are struggling to trust and obey Him?
- ✧ Hebrews 12:2 says we should keep our eyes on Jesus, "*who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.*" Take some time to give thanks to the Lord for the joy and blessings He will unleash in your life when you choose to trust and obey Him.
- ✧ By his willingness to place his son Isaac on the altar, Abraham demonstrated the principle of giving God our BEST. Allow the Holy Spirit to search your heart today, revealing any areas in which you've given Him less than your best.



OVERCOMING FAM- INE WITH FAVOR

If you are facing a difficult test of your faith today, here's good news: God's favor can give you peace and victory even when times are tough.

It's one thing to say you're trusting God when you are on the mountaintop and everything seems to be going your way. But what happens when you're stuck in the valley and God's blessings seem hard to find? Will you trust Him *then*?

The Bible contains numerous stories of men and women of God who had their faith tested. They had to make a decision to trust and obey the Lord, even though their breakthrough was sometimes delayed.

Genesis 26:1-14 contains important lessons for us about how Isaac sowed seeds in a time of drought and famine:

Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And the Lord blessed him, and the

man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy; for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him (v.12-14 NASB).

If you're like most people, you may be tempted to *hoard* your seeds during times of insecurity and lack. But not Isaac! He chose to trust God and sow seeds in the Promised Land even amid a terrible drought all around him.

Notice the result of Isaac's bold step of faith and obedience: The Lord rewarded him with a gigantic harvest that was the envy of everyone around. While this outcome during a time of famine was already astounding, the story doesn't end there. We read that Isaac "***continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy.***" What an amazing turnaround this was! God's blessings were exponentially unleashed in his life as he faithfully practiced the law of seedtime and harvest.

Friend, instead of focusing on the famine around you, remember this: You are a walking warehouse of seeds. Instead of cowering in fear and hoarding those seeds, you can release God's favor by following Isaac's example and sowing seeds during your difficult seasons of life.

As hard as it may be to trust God and sow seeds in a time of famine, this is one of the surest ways to trigger your breakthrough. By taking steps of faith to sow generous, sacrificial seeds into God's kingdom, you are displaying **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** and **RADICAL GENEROSITY**—a powerful combination of ingredients to unleash more favor in your life.

Do you have a big need right now? Then I encourage you to sow

a big SEED! Do this in great expectancy that God will do amazing things in response to your simple acts of faith and obedience.

No matter how dry and barren the fields may look around you, God will honor your faith...your obedience...and your expectancy. He encourages you to put His promises to the test and trust Him. Trust Him to give you a bountiful harvest from the seeds you sow into His kingdom.

When God blessed Isaac, the abundance was so fantastic that *“the Philistines envied him”* (Genesis 26:14). Paul cites the same principle in Romans 11:11, where he says God was blessing the Gentiles through the Gospel in order to make the Jews jealous enough to accept Jesus as their Messiah.

Just as we must open our hands to the Lord, releasing our lives and possessions into His care, the Bible also instructs us to open our hands to bless others. Instead of being miserly and trying to hang on to what we have, we're told to be generous, especially to the poor: *“He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward him for what he has done* (Proverbs 19:17 NIV).

*If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs...You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because **for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand*** (Deuteronomy 15:7-8, 15:10).

Aren't these wonderful promises? If we are attentive to the needs of the poor, God says He will bless us in all our works and in everything we put our hands to do.

Remember: God blesses us so we can be a blessing to others (Genesis 12:2). And the more we set our hearts to bless God's kingdom and people in need, the more He will bless us in return.

Some Christians, displaying either ignorance or false humility, like to say, "Oh, I never ask God to bless me. That would be selfish." Yet it's even MORE selfish for God's people to remain in poverty and financial lack, because then we'll have nothing to give to others.

In contrast to the poverty mentality some people have adopted, the psalmist boldly declares his need for God's blessing—not just for his own sake but so that the world may be blessed through his life: *"God be merciful to us and **bless us**, And cause His face to shine upon us, Selah **That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations...God shall bless us, And all the ends of the earth shall fear Him** (Psalm 67:1-2, 67:7)."*

The psalmist knew that salvation could only go out to the ends of the earth if God *first* blessed His people. So don't be afraid to ASK God to bless you! He wants to bless you so abundantly that people all over the world are touched by your example and generosity.

It's not necessary to twist God's arm to receive His blessings. He's *eager* to bless you—not just financially, but also in your health, relationships, and peace of mind. He knows that the more you prosper, the more people will observe His blessings and recognize what a great Heavenly Father He is.

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ACTIVATION STEPS
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- ✧ Take a few moments to assess your life right now. Are you presently living in the abundance and favor of God, or do you find yourself in a time of famine?
- ✧ Write down the specific areas of your life where you need a turnaround. For example, do you need a breakthrough in your health, finances, emotions, family, or career? Be clear on what you need God to do for you.

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- ✧ Reflect on how the story of Isaac in Genesis 26 applies to your life. Have you been faithful in sowing seeds into God's kingdom and the lives of others? Is there some step of faith and obedience that He is calling you to take?
- ✧ Isaac was not just blessed with enough to meet his own needs, but he was blessed with overflowing abundance—MORE than enough. Even the Philistines were impacted by the amazing favor Isaac was shown. Take a few minutes to pray and ask God to give you a greater vision for this kind of abundant, impactful life.



UNLEASHING FAVOR THROUGH FORGIVENESS

Another powerful key to releasing more of God's favor is **RADICAL FORGIVENESS**. Often this is a very difficult step, for all of us have been wronged or mistreated at times.

One of the Bible's accounts of forgiveness is the story of Jacob and Esau, the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Born fighting, these boys struggled even in their mother's womb. During their birth, Jacob's hand grasped Esau's heel, prompting his parents to name him *Jacob*: "he who supplants or usurps another's place."

We've *all* faced this kind of situation to one degree or another. Perhaps it's a relatively minor incident, as when someone cuts in front of us on the freeway or in the grocery checkout line. Or maybe someone usurped the promotion we hoped to get at work. Or perhaps we felt slighted on the worship team or preaching rotation at church.

Regardless of how someone may have “supplanted” the role you think you were entitled to, you must let go of the offense and choose to forgive. That’s the pathway to more of the Favor of God (F.O.G.): Forgive freely, just as you’ve been forgiven by the Lord!

We know little of the childhood of Esau and Jacob, except “*Esau became a skillful hunter...while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents*” (Genesis 25:27 NIV). Their temperaments and interests were opposite from each other, adding to their friction.

Another factor was this: “*Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed eating the wild game Esau brought home, but Rebekah loved Jacob*” (Genesis 25:28 NLT). Isaac and Rebekah’s partiality—each favoring one son over the other—tended to foster a spirit of rivalry and contention. Like the discord between Isaac and Ishmael, it created a feud that has lasted thousands of years.

If you are experiencing relationship conflicts of some kind, ask yourself two questions: Is the problem, like Esau and Jacob experienced, partly based on different personalities and interests? Is your present conflict rooted in some issue of your upbringing and childhood? Whatever factors may have brought you to a relationship conflict, the Bible warns you not to allow your life to be poisoned by unforgiveness: “*Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many*” (Hebrews 12:15 NLT).

As the oldest son, Esau was expected to carry on the family business, but he had other plans. He was *ish-sadeh*, which is translated “a man of the open fields.” He shirked his family responsibilities for the thrill of hunting. Impulsive, headstrong, and hedonistic, Esau thought of fulfilling his own desires instead of caring for the needs of the family. Jacob, though often wily and deceptive, was *ish-tam*, which means “a man who ultimately went wholeheartedly after God.”

After hunting all day, Esau arrived home to the smell of Jacob's lentil stew. Focused on his own cravings, he cried out, *"I'm starved!"* Seeing an opportunity, Jacob shrewdly proposed a bargain: *"Make me a trade: my stew for your rights as the firstborn"* (Genesis 25:31 MSG).

Esau foolishly shrugged off his rights as the firstborn son, trading the Favor of God (F.O.G.) for a bowl of stew. Again we are warned in Scripture not to follow this misguided example: *"Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau, who traded his birthright as the firstborn son for a single meal"* (Hebrews 12:16 NLT). We must make sure NOTHING is more important to us than God's favor!

When Rebekah overheard Isaac's plan to bless Esau as his firstborn, she began to plot how she could advance God's promised plan—spoken to her before the twins were born: *"Two nations are in your womb...and the older [Esau] will serve the younger [Jacob]"* (Genesis 25:23 NIV).

Nearing death, Isaac called Esau to his tent and asked him to kill a deer and make him some savory stew. Isaac promised that he would bestow a blessing upon Esau after he ate. But Rebekah quickly hatched a scheme, dressing Jacob in his brother's smelly clothes to fool his nearly blind father into believing he was Esau. And sure enough, when the big moment came, Isaac gave the double portion blessing to Jacob rather than his firstborn son Esau (Genesis 27:29).

When Esau found out what had happened, he was livid, and he planned to kill his brother. God's prophetic word to Rebekah had been fulfilled, but of course this didn't sit well with Esau. Because he lacked both **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** and **RADICAL HUMILITY** at this point in his life, Esau was unable to accept God's choice and was unwilling to immediately forgive his brother.

Perhaps you are facing some situation today where you feel the outcome has been unfair. It could be disappointment over not receiving a promotion at work. Or an inequitable distribution of your parents' estate. Or a lack of ministry opportunities in your church.

Whatever the situation may be, remember your need for humility, the indispensable character quality that must precede honor: "*humility comes before honor*" (Proverbs 15:33 NIV). The Lord will hear "*the desire of the humble*" (Psalm 10:17), so this is a key to having your prayers answered.

This is good news if you feel buried under the cares of life today or wounded by past failures or people's unkind words. Through **RADICAL HUMILITY**, God can lift you up and help you overcome whatever difficult circumstances you may be going through: "*Be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble'*" (1 Peter 5:5-7).

Notice the vivid contrast: God *resists*—fights, confronts, and disregards—those who are proud and have an exaggerated view of their own importance. But He grants His grace and supernatural favor to those who humbly acknowledge their dependence on Him.

Humility means recognizing that He's GOD and you're NOT! And you're promised that when you humble yourself under God's mighty hand, He will "*exalt you in due time*" (1 Peter 5:6-7).

Esau struggled to learn these vital lessons for unleashing the Lord's favor. Unable to accept the calamity of forfeiting his father's blessing, he still hoped he could change the outcome. He bowed before Isaac and tearfully pleaded for a blessing: "*Bless me too, my father!*" (Genesis 27:38 NIV), but with a heavy heart, his father responded: "*Your dwelling will be away from the earth's richness,*

away from the dew of heaven above. You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother” (Genesis 27:39-40 NIV).

Despite his foolish choice to trade his birthright for a bowl of stew, Esau had thought he could get his father’s blessing anyway. But instead of a blessing, Isaac’s words turned out to be more like a curse. While Jacob would enjoy God’s covenant blessings, Esau and his descendants would make their home in a dry, arid land, living under the threat of constant battles and acting as servants to Jacob’s descendants.

This story illustrates that while God is a forgiving God, our choices have consequences. The Bible describes Esau’s tragic error: *“Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done” (Hebrews 12:17 NIV).*

This is an important lesson for us today. In contrast to how Esau chose to indulge his own fleshly needs rather than value the blessings of God, we must choose God’s will and His favor above all else.

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Spend some time in God's presence and ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart for any areas of unforgiveness. Make a decision to forgive anyone who has wronged or offended you. Ask the Spirit to bring peace to your heart, confirming that true forgiveness has occurred.
- ✧ Esau didn't fully value his "birthright," which represented the blessings and favor of God. As a result, he made a foolish trade in order to gratify his momentary desires. Review your own decisions throughout life to see whether you've made similar mistakes in the past, exchanging long-term blessings for momentary pleasures.
- ✧ The Scriptures teach that God unleashes more of His honor and favor on those who have humbled themselves before Him. Ask God to search your heart for any areas of pride, where you have relied on your own ingenuity instead of seeking His wisdom and instructions.
- ✧ If you've been awaiting some kind of breakthrough in answer to prayer, remember that God promises to exalt you "*in due time.*" Take a moment to give Him thanks and praise that your turnaround is on the way!



FROM FAVOR TO FRUITFULNESS

When you're living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.), you will receive His *blessings*—but that's not all. Genesis 1:28 says your calling is also to “*be fruitful and multiply.*”

What does it mean to experience fruitfulness and multiplication? Simply this: As you walk in His favor, God wants to give you *impact* and *increase*.

We see this in the life of Jacob. His father Isaac had already given him a blessing, though Jacob was his youngest son. But Isaac wasn't finished yet.

Recognizing that Esau was incredibly angry with Jacob, their father again called for Jacob to give him yet *another* blessing. This was the covenant inheritance originally meant for Adam and Eve, and then reinstated in the life of Abraham: “*May God Almighty bless you, and make you **fruitful** and **multiply** you...and give you the*

blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you” (Genesis 28:3-4).

Just as Abraham had been promised God’s richest blessings so he could be a blessing to others (Genesis 12:2), so too, this was the inheritance received by Isaac and then passed on to Jacob. Jacob had already received a wonderful blessing from his father (Genesis 27:29), but God wanted to bless him even MORE.

What a lesson: Don’t settle for the blessings of *yesterday*, but press on to receive even MORE of God’s favor TODAY! Paul assured the Christians in Galatia that believers have full access to the blessings of Abraham: *“Abraham’s blessing is present and available for non-Jews, too. We are all able to receive God’s life...just the way Abraham received it”* (Galatians 3:14 MSG).

Sometimes we fail to appropriate all the blessings God wants us to have, however this was initially the case with Jacob. Afraid for his life, he fled Canaan and set out toward Haran, the land of his mother’s brother, Laban.

Little did Jacob know that he would have a dramatic encounter with the Lord along the way. The covenant promises spoken by his father over his life were about to become personal and real to this headstrong young man.

When the sun set, Jacob used a stone for his pillow and tried to sleep. But as he tossed and turned, he experienced a vivid dream of angels ascending and descending on a ladder reaching to heaven. God spoke to him and reaffirmed the covenant blessings promised to his grandfather Abraham and father Isaac: *“In you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed”* (Genesis 28:14).

Jacob already had received a blessing from his father, who prayed for him to walk in all the covenant blessings of Abraham. Yet

this was different. Instead of being secondhand, it was a blessing directly from God!

Among God's words of affirmation, He gave Jacob some of the most encouraging words a person could ever hear: *"Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go...I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you"* (Genesis 28:15).

Never again would Jacob have to wonder if he just had a "hand-me-down" kind of faith. The Lord cared enough about Him to personally assure Jacob of His *presence* and His *plan*.

Prior to this stunning experience while alone in the wilderness, Jacob had lots of plans of his own. But from this moment onward, he would begin to grasp the principle later expressed by King David: *"Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass"* (Psalm 37:5).

When Jacob awoke from his dream, he said in amazement, *"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it"* (Genesis 28:16). Because of His dramatic encounter with the living God, Jacob suddenly had a deep awareness of the Lord's presence with him. But he had to admit that even though God had been there all along, he *"did not know it."*

Perhaps you've had similar experiences, when you didn't initially recognize God's presence amid your difficult circumstances. You were in a hard place, and the Lord seemed nowhere to be found. However, it turned out that He was right there with you—even as He was with Jacob in the barren wilderness.

After encountering God in his life-changing dream, Jacob saw things in a whole new way. He was still in the barren wilderness, but suddenly his drab surroundings were cast in beautiful, radiant colors. *"How awesome is this place!"* he exclaimed. *"This is none*

other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!” (Genesis 28:17).

Despite his new perspective, absolutely nothing had changed in Jacob’s surroundings or his circumstances. He was still by himself...fleeing from his angry brother Esau...pursuing an uncertain future with relatives in Haran. Yet his life would never be the same. He knew that God was with him, and that realization changed *everything*.

That’s what will happen to YOUR life when you catch a glimpse of the Favor of God (F.O.G.). Your circumstances may not immediately seem to change, but suddenly there will be fresh hope...new joy...and unshakeable confidence that God is working out His purposes in your life. You’ll grasp the truth of the apostle Paul’s wonderful statement: *“Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass”* (1 Thessalonians 5:24 NASB).

Although this experience in the wilderness marked a new beginning in Jacob’s relationship with God, he still had a lot to learn about consistently walking in the Lord’s favor. God had broken through his cloud of fear and insecurity, but Jacob nevertheless wasn’t ready for *radical* and *unconditional* obedience:

*“If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, **then** the LORD shall be my God...and of all that You give me I will surely give a **tenth** to You”* (Genesis 28:20-22).

Notice that even after all God had done for him, Jacob still was putting *conditions* on his obedience. The Lord would be his God **IF**,

and only if, all of his needs were met. And he only promised to tithe IF God made things go his way.

In contrast, **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** drops all the conditions and simply says, “YES, LORD!” That’s why Paul said we should “*obey in ALL things*” (Colossians 3:22).

Jacob was a schemer who tried all sorts of tricks to gain God’s covenant blessings. But eventually he discovered that obedience was the indispensable key to unlocking God’s favor and bringing him into fruitfulness and increase.

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Prior to his dream in Genesis 28, Jacob's relationship with God seemed mostly secondhand, based on truths passed down from his father and grandfather. Pause for a moment to consider whether *your* relationship with the Lord is based on firsthand experience and a personal faith, not just ideas about God that have been passed down from others.
- ✧ Take some time to assess your life in terms of these three words seen in the story of Jacob: favor, fruitfulness, and increase. If you are pleased by what you see, give thanks to the Lord for His goodness and faithfulness. If you still feel lacking in these areas, ask Him to show you the keys you need for a turnaround.
- ✧ Genesis 28:11 says Jacob came to "*a certain place*" in the wilderness. What kind of place do you find yourself in today? Is it a place where you're experiencing God's presence and favor, or a place where He seems distant?
- ✧ Although Jacob was in a dry and barren place, he was surprised to discover that God was right there with him (Genesis 28:16). No matter whether you feel like you're in a difficult place or a blessed place today, stop and give thanks to the Lord for being with you, even if you didn't initially recognize that fact. Make a commitment to obey Him *unconditionally* in anything He asks you to do.



NEW FOCUS, NEW FAVOR

Jacob learned many additional lessons after he arrived at the home of Laban, his mother's brother. While working there, Jacob married two wives, Leah and Rachel, and sired 12 sons and one daughter. His father's prayer was fulfilled as God blessed Jacob, making him fruitful and multiplying him (Genesis 28:3-4).

Through the Favor of God (F.O.G.), Jacob became "*exceedingly prosperous*" (Genesis 30:43). Genesis 30:25-43 tells the strange story of how his sheep and goats miraculously reproduced according to what they intently gazed upon. The flocks "conceived" according to the image of the fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees Jacob set before them.

There is an extremely important principle here. Just as Jacob found with his sheep and goats, whatever our eyes are focused upon will be reproduced in our lives.

God didn't put this story in the Bible so we would know how to reproduce livestock! In fact, there is no *biological* basis for Jacob's

experiment. The only plausible explanation is that the Lord wants us to recognize the *spiritual* principle that we'll inevitably become *like* whatever we set our focus on.

The story of Jacob and his flocks illustrates the importance of putting our focus on a vision of God's favor, blessing, and prosperity rather than on fears of poverty and lack. We will attract *whatever* our thoughts are focused upon, whether positive or negative. No wonder Paul writes, "*Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise*" (Philippians 4:8 NLT).

This is how spiritual transformation occurs—by fixing our eyes on the Lord and a vision of what He wants us to become (Hebrews 12:2). When we put our attention on Jesus and fix our hope on Him, we're increasingly changed into His likeness (1 John 3:2-3). That's why Paul writes:

We all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV).

In *The Message* paraphrase, this passage says our lives are "*gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful*" as we gaze upon the Lord. What a great promise!

So pause and ask yourself: Are you focusing your attention on your problems or on the Lord and the things of His kingdom?

This was wonderfully illustrated when Peter attempted to walk on water (Matthew 14:28-32). He did just fine when his eyes remained fixed on Jesus, but he immediately started to sink when

he got distracted by the wind and waves swirling around him. In a moment's time, his faith turned to fear, and his favor turned to failure—all because of where he focused his attention!

It's vital to remember this principle if you sense that something is holding you back from living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.). If you are fighting a discouraging battle in your emotions, your physical body, your relationships, or your finances, perhaps it's because your eyes are focused in the wrong direction.

Remember, an important secret to releasing God's favor is to focus on HIS image rather than your own. When you look to the Lord and take your eyes off of your own problems and cares, you will be amazed at how quickly you begin to experience His love, joy, and peace. Today can be the day God's favor begins to reverse every negative situation in your life. As you look to Him, you will be *blessed*.

If you are looking in the wrong direction or seeing things incorrectly, every area of your life will be negatively affected, as Jesus explained:

The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness (Matthew 6:22-23).

In today's world there are so many distractions, and it can seem harder than ever to maintain your focus and clarity of vision. Yet you need to remember King Solomon's wise instruction: "*Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you*" (Proverbs 4:25 NIV). Don't allow people or circumstances to divert your attention from gazing on the Lord and His purpose for your life!

This principle of “focus” not only explains a key ingredient in unleashing God’s favor, but it also reveals why we tend to become either like our *heroes* (people we admire) or our *foes* (people we hate, fear, envy, or have failed to forgive). In either case, we’re gravitating toward wherever we’ve put our attention.

No wonder many children of abusive parents vow they’ll never become like them—yet, in some cases, their judgment against their parents draws them to reproduce the same negative qualities in their own lives. This is another reason **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** is so crucial to receiving God’s favor in our lives. Unforgiveness and bitterness will always keep us in bondage to the very people and situations that have offended us.

Instead of focusing on the negative things of life, we can follow the beautiful example described by King David: “*Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame*” (Psalm 34:5 NIV).

So if you want to radiate the joy of the Lord and get rid of any shame in your life, put your eyes on Him! What a great way to release a new level of His favor in your life.

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ACTIVATION STEPS
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- ✧ Would the people who know you best describe you as a positive or a negative person overall? What steps can you take to reverse that tendency?
- ✧ Read in 2 Chronicles 20:1-30 how King Jehoshaphat found victory in the Lord when surrounded by enemy armies: “*We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you*” (2 Chronicles 20:12 NIV). What other lessons can be learned from how victory was gained in this situation?
- ✧ Take a few minutes to put Isaiah 26:3 into practice: “*You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.*” Set your mind on Jesus...trust Him with the challenges you face...and let His peace penetrate deeply into your heart and life.
- ✧ Choose a favorite hymn or worship chorus and give praise to the Lord for His love and faithfulness. Be radiant in His presence!



WRESTLING FOR YOUR BREAKTHROUGH

Just because God has given you His favor, doesn't mean life will always be easy. Sometimes you need to fight for your Promised Land or wrestle for your breakthrough. We see this principle throughout the pages of Scripture.

God has a *purpose* in the battles and obstacles we face. In fact, He often orchestrates the events of our lives to bring us face-to-face with enemies we need to overcome. Why? Because in our hour of struggle, we learn to draw upon His supernatural strength.

Jacob eventually became so homesick he gathered his family and flocks, folded his tents, and set out for Canaan. As they neared the land, Jacob sent word to his brother Esau that he was coming home. When the messengers returned, their news was disturbing: “*We came to your brother Esau, and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him*” (Genesis 32:6-7).

As you might imagine, Jacob was terrified. He had deceived his twin out of a blessing, and the only reason Esau would bring 400

men with him was to destroy Jacob and his family. So Jacob did the only thing left to do—he fell on his face before God in prayer and supplication.

This is a vital lesson if you are facing a frightening situation today. Worrying will only make things worse. Instead, you must humble yourself before the Lord and pray for His help and intervention: *“Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns”* (Philippians 4:6 MSG).

This is exactly what Jacob did. Faced with his brother Esau’s soon arrival, he turned his worries into prayers:

“O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’ I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant...Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me...But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea’ (Genesis 32:9-12 NIV).

After many years of walking with God, Jacob eventually learned to pray powerful prayers. He focused on the covenant he and his ancestors had established, thanked the Lord for His past faithfulness, and then reminded Him of His promises.

I encourage you to take a few moments to meditate on Jacob’s prayer, thanking God and reminding Him of His promises in YOUR life. Renew your own covenant relationship with Him, remembering the words of Psalm 25:14: *“The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.”*

Even after Jacob's prayer, he was suddenly attacked as he sat alone in the camp. At first he probably thought it was Esau or one of his men who had come to kill him. All night, Jacob wrestled for his very life (Genesis 32:24-31). As the light of dawn peeked over the horizon, Jacob realized this was no ordinary foe. It was the angel of God, and ultimately *God Himself!* At the end of this wrestling match, Jacob declared, *"I saw God face-to-face and lived to tell the story!"* (v. 30 MSG)

Like Jacob, perhaps you are wrestling today with something you don't fully understand. Maybe it's a struggle with your spouse, children, boss, health, finances, or emotions. Or perhaps you are wrestling in the spiritual realm, with the devil and his evil minions (Ephesians 6:12-13).

But as Jacob discovered, the *ultimate* wrestling match is between us and GOD. Once we are fully submitted to Him, there is victory in every area of our lives. This is RADICAL OBEDIENCE in action, as Jeremiah 38:20 reminds us: *"Obey the voice of the Lord...so it shall be well with you."*

Jacob's example also demonstrates the necessity of *tenacity* in our pursuit of God's favor. In order to end the combat, his opponent dislocated Jacob's hip socket and shouted, *"Let Me go,"* but Jacob refused: *"I will not let You go unless You bless me"* (Genesis 32:26).

Do you see what a crucial principle this is for living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.)? While his brother Esau had been all too willing to let go of his birthright as the firstborn son, Jacob tenaciously pursued the blessing—even if it meant wrestling with God.

Finally, Jacob sensed that the Lord's favor was in his grasp, and he refused to let go! As *The Message* translates Matthew 10:22, *"Don't quit. Don't cave in. It is all well worth it in the end."*

Dear friend, don't be surprised if you receive a whole new identity when God gives you victory over your struggles. In the midst of Jacob's fierce wrestling match, his opponent asked him his name. When Jacob told him, he must have been surprised by the angel's answer: "*Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed*" (Genesis 32:28).

Jacob's ordeal of wrestling with God resulted in a new name, a complete change in his identity. No longer was he to be known as Jacob, the usurper and deceiver. Instead, he had become Israel—a prince with God!

In the same way, the Favor of God (F.O.G.) can transform *your* life and your circumstances today. Yes, you may have to wrestle with some things first. God may have to ensure that your human strength is depleted so He can truly reign supreme in your life. But at the end of the trial, you can find a new identity and favor you've never known before!

However, notice that although Jacob had been changed by his wrestling match with the Lord, his transformation came at a price. His hip had been dislocated, and when he walked away, "*he was limping because of his hip*" (Genesis 32:31 NIV).

This means you shouldn't despair if you find yourself "limping" in some area of your life today. God wants you to put your full weight on *Him* as your Protector and Provider. You can trust in His favor and rely upon Him as your covenant partner. Why? Because He has promised that "*those who trust in the Lord will lack no good thing*" (Psalm 34:10 NLT).

So go ahead and trust God fully with your life. Even if you are walking with a limp, His favor can bring you to victory!

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Take a moment to review some of the difficult battles you've faced in your life. What valuable lessons did you learn?
- ✧ Jacob experienced fear, anxiety, and worry when he heard his brother Esau and 400 fighting men were coming in his direction. Are you facing any situations on the horizon of *your* life right now that could cause similar fear or worry? If so, pause and turn those situations over to the Lord, asking Him for His strategies for victory.
- ✧ Jacob displayed great tenacity in pursuing God's favor, refusing to let go until he *knew* he had received the Lord's blessing. Make a fresh commitment to keep wrestling and not give up until your breakthrough has come.
- ✧ By the end of this episode in Jacob's life, he not only had received a new level of divine favor, but also a whole new identity—no longer a scoundrel and deceiver, but a prince with God. Pray and ask the Lord to show you any ways He's working to adjust your self-image and your vision of His future plans for your life.



LETTING GO OF OFFENSES

Over the horizon, Jacob saw an ominous sight: Esau's 400 men were drawing closer. What was Esau planning to do? Was this payback time for the devious way Jacob had stolen his brother's birthright and family blessings?

Suddenly, Esau broke into a run: *"Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept"* (Genesis 33:4 NIV). Esau, who originally had harbored great hatred and resentment toward his brother, had found the grace to release God's favor by showing Jacob **RADICAL FORGIVENESS**.

By its very nature, forgiveness is a radical act, not something one does easily. But those who refuse to forgive are inevitably tormented by misery and rage. Their hostility becomes a wall that blocks them from tender human relationships and even from intimacy with God. If left unaddressed, their unforgiveness will paralyze and destroy them.

When you harbor unforgiveness—against a spouse, parent, co-worker, or anyone who has wronged you—you allow that person to control your life. Despite the very real injustices you may have faced, you must follow Esau’s example and choose forgiveness instead.

Perhaps there is someone you are struggling to forgive. Maybe you even think it’s *impossible* to forgive such a person.

Remember: **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** begins with God. He is the supreme Pardoner. Yes, it may at times be impossible to forgive radically without Him working in our heart, but the Bible says, “*With God all things are possible*” (Matthew 19:26). With Jesus living in you by His Holy Spirit, you CAN forgive even the worst offender.

How often must you forgive a person who has wronged you? When Peter asked this question to Jesus, he suggested that seven times might be often enough. But Jesus replied, “*No, not seven times, but seventy times seven!*” (Matthew 18:21-22 NLT).

In other words, in order to walk in forgiveness and favor, you must quit keeping score toward those who have wronged you. This is how God has lovingly forgiven you, and He expects you to extend the same love to others: “*Love...keeps no record of being wronged*” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5 NLT).

The Message paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 says love “*doesn’t fly off the handle*” and “*doesn’t keep score of the sins of others.*” It “*trusts God always*” and “*always looks for the best.*”

Why is this issue of forgiveness so important? Because you and I live in a world that is full of offenses, as Jesus reminded us: “*Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!*” (Matthew 18:7) Rest assured, we *will* be offended from time to time, so we must learn to greet the offenses with love and forgiveness.

Relationship conflicts are an age-old problem, and the early Christians were often reminded of their need to forgive one another:

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma (Ephesians 4:31-5:2).

As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:12-14 NIV).

So if you're dealing with a forgiveness issue today, you're not alone! As long as people endeavor to have close relationships, they are bound to face the need for forgiveness from time to time.

Jesus even tied the issue of forgiving others to our ability to receive forgiveness from our Heavenly Father: "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you" (Matthew 6:14 NLT). Although God forgives you on the basis of what Jesus did for you on the cross, if you hang on to offenses toward others, you'll be blocked from *experiencing* that forgiveness.

How do you know when you've truly forgiven someone? For one thing, you quit holding pity parties and endlessly rehearsing the wrong done. In contrast, when we hold on to past hurts and offenses, it only gives more life to the past. That's why the apostle Paul wrote that he was focused on "*forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead*" (Philippians 3:13 NLT). When you truly extend **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** and pardon the other person, you're also able to *move on* toward God's great calling for your life.

But unforgiveness is like walking on a pathway with a hundred-pound weight on our back. Proverbs 27:3-4 (NLT) warns about resentment, anger, wrath, and jealousy—all of which are typically connected with a forgiveness issue: "*A stone is heavy and sand is weighty, but the resentment caused by a fool is even heavier. Anger is cruel, and wrath is like a flood, but jealousy is even more dangerous.*"

In order to fully experience the Favor of God (F.O.G.), we must "*strip off every weight that slows us down*" (Hebrews 12:1 NLT)—and that starts with forgiving anyone who has wronged us.

Friend, you must determine to avoid unforgiveness at any cost. Just as a virus strikes a computer and destroys it from within, so unforgiveness can attack the body and cause a multitude of health problems. It is believed that stress levels rise when unforgiveness is harbored in one's soul, and author Dr. Don Colbert calls it "*one of the secret causes of stress plaguing millions of people.*"

There's a very close connection between confession, forgiveness, and healing, as we're told in James 5:16 (NLT): "*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed*" (James 5:16 NLT). In contrast, someone who holds on to unforgiveness is like a person who drinks deadly poison, all the while wishing ill-will toward the offender.

Refuse to sip from that chalice of poison! Choose instead to offer **RADICAL FORGIVENESS**. It will result in unleashing a flood of God's healing power in your body, soul, and spirit.

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ACTIVATION STEPS
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- ✧ Instead of drinking from the toxic chalice of unforgiveness, God wants you to experience the refreshing healing waters that flow from His throne:

He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him (Revelation 22:1-3).

- ✧ Read this passage carefully and write down some of the contrasts between this healing stream and the toxic well of unforgiveness and bitterness.

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- ✧ Take a few minutes to ask God to search your heart about whether there's someone you still need to forgive or a situation where you've been keeping a score of offenses. Thanking Him for forgiving YOUR sins totally and completely, then ask Him to work His forgiveness in your heart toward anyone who has wronged you.
- ✧ Have you tended to be irritable or fly off the handle lately? If so, ask God to fill your heart with His Holy Spirit, manifesting love, joy, peace, and the other aspects of the fruit of the Spirit in your life (Galatians 5:22-23).
- ✧ One of the destructive effects of unforgiveness is that it is a heavy weight that anchors us to our past and hinders us from moving on toward God's great destiny for our life. In the powerful name of Jesus, make a conscious declaration that you are severing any cords of anger or unforgiveness that have been tying you to the traumas or failures of your past.



OVERCOMING THE CAN- CER OF ENVY

Ever since the days of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-12), humankind has experienced conflict because of envy. We're tempted to be jealous of someone who is wealthier or who seems to have an easier life.

But envy is *never* the pathway to more of God's favor. Instead, the Bible says we should rejoice when others are blessed.

The story of Joseph in the Old Testament is a beautiful picture of Radical Forgiveness, as Joseph forgave his brothers. But the saga of Joseph and his half-brothers opened quite differently—with jealousy, hatred, and callous plotting.

Joseph, Jacob's son by his beloved Rachel, was a young man of 17 when he unwisely flaunted his father's partiality in the faces of his older siblings. The fire of discord was especially fueled when Jacob presented Joseph with a beautiful, multicolored coat, in stark

contrast to the plain sleeveless tunics worn by his brothers. Joseph's special coat was a symbol of the father's love and favoritism, and the brothers despised Joseph for it.

In your quest for more of God's favor, beware of harboring jealousy in your heart! Solomon warned that it is "*like cancer in the bones*" (Proverbs 14:30 NLT). Just like cancer, jealousy often does much of its destructive work in secret, but then it typically boils over in anger and strife: "*Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?*" (Proverbs 27:4 NIV).

Envy and jealousy are robbing countless people of the Favor of God (F.O.G.) today. While God's favor thrives on thankfulness, an envious person feels deprived and ungrateful. This is the trap Joseph's brothers fell into, and it caused them to forfeit God's blessings.

Fueled by the devil himself, jealousy and selfish ambition bring about disorder and often violence:

Jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind
(James 3:15-16 NLT).

Like Joseph's brothers, you may feel you have a "right" to be envious and angry with someone. But remember, it is far better to allow God's favor to promote you than to attempt to promote yourself because of jealousy.

In order to get rid of envy, you must stop comparing yourself to others, as the apostle Paul warned about: "*They are only*

comparing themselves with each other...How ignorant!" (2 Corinthians 10:12 NLT). Instead of falling into the comparison trap, start giving THANKS to the Lord for all the ways He has blessed *you*.

Although Joseph had foolishly flaunted his favor before his brothers, they were foolish to harbor jealousy and hatred toward him. Joseph wasn't yet the wise elder statesman he later became. He had dreams from God, and rather than ponder them in his heart, he shamelessly shared their contents with his disgruntled brothers (Genesis 37:5-11). Two of Joseph's dreams depicted him as a ruler to whom his brothers must bow down. Really, now!

Not only were the brothers outraged by Joseph's impudence, but even his father scolded him: *"What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"* (Genesis 37:10 NIV).

If you are struggling in one of your relationships today, make sure you aren't making the same mistake that Joseph did. Beware of boasting or gloating. Try **RADICAL HUMILITY** instead, seeking always to honor others before yourself.

When Joseph's brothers finally had enough of his insolence, they connived to get rid of him. They saw their chance when their father dispatched Joseph to Shechem to inquire about the well-being of his sons who were tending the flocks. As they saw him in the distance, the first plan was simply to kill him. The brothers grabbed him, tore off his coat, and tossed him into a waterless pit.

Reuben pleaded with the others to spare his life, and Judah suggested that they sell him as a slave to a caravan of traders on its way to Egypt. The brothers agreed (Genesis 37:22-28).

Perhaps they thought Joseph would perish en route or be worked to death after he arrived—but God had other plans for that

brash young man. After all, God had given him some dreams, just as He wants to give YOU a vision for your life.

Of course, Joseph had to *wait* for his dreams to be fulfilled. Just because you have the Favor of God (F.O.G.), that doesn't mean you will have a quick or easy road to your destiny. Remember God's wise instruction: *"The vision is yet for an appointed time...Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come"* (Habakkuk 2:3).

When the caravan reached Egypt, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, one of the king's military leaders. Things seemed to be looking up for the young man—until the general's wife tried to seduce him. Although Joseph fled, she accused him of attempted rape, and he was thrown into prison.

Perhaps Joseph was beginning to wonder how his dreams would ever come to pass. Although he may have concluded that prison was his final destination, he was about to experience more of God's favor than ever before—yes, even in prison: *"The Lord was with [Joseph]; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden...The Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did"* (Genesis 39:21-23 NIV).

Perhaps you feel "imprisoned" by some difficult circumstances in your life today. If so, remember that God is with you, even there. Because of His amazing favor, He may be preparing you for greater influence than you can imagine!

When two of his prison mates—the king's baker and butler—had dreams, God enabled Joseph to accurately interpret them. After three days, the butler was restored to his position of trust, but the baker was beheaded for his perceived crime.

Then one night a few years later, Pharaoh had a disturbing dream. The butler remembered Joseph's gift for interpretation and

told the king about the young man he had met in prison. Joseph was summoned from his cell to the palace. His journey from the pit, to the prison, to the palace had been long and arduous, but Joseph was about to reap the benefits of having lived a life of integrity in Egypt (Genesis 41).

Joseph couldn't possibly have imagined how God was working behind the scenes to prepare his life for an incredible outcome—with blessings for himself, his family, and the entire nation. But eventually he would be able to look back and testify, *“God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people”* (Genesis 50:20 NLT).

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Pause to consider your own journey of faith so far. Have you experienced the pit? The prison? The palace? What lessons did you learn at the various stages of your journey?
 - ✧ As a young man, God gave Joseph a supernatural vision for his life—dreams that seemed increasingly improbable to ever come to pass. Regardless of how difficult and distressing your present circumstances may be, take a few minutes to write down any dreams God has given you for your life. Even though you may not see any way for them to be fulfilled, go ahead and thank God that He's working behind the scenes to fulfill His promises (see Jeremiah 1:12).
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- ✧ Joseph's brothers fell into the trap of envy when they compared themselves with the favor Joseph had received from their father. Ask God to search your heart and reveal any areas of jealousy that have hindered you from being grateful and from unleashing more of His favor in your own life.
- ✧ It's easy to get discouraged when you're waiting for God to fulfill His promises in your life. For example, in the face of the injustices he experienced, Joseph could have decided to turn his back on the Lord. Instead, what are some of the ways he displayed traits such as **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** and **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** on his journey to unleashing God's favor in his life?



POSITIONED FOR MAX- IMUM IMPACT

Too often, when people think of unleashing God's favor, their focus is only on how their own life will be impacted by receiving more of the Lord's blessings. However, the life of Joseph is a beautiful illustration of how the Favor of God (F.O.G.) in a person's life can cause a ripple effect that blesses countless others.

Joseph had suffered years of painful injustices, but each one of them brought him closer to the fulfillment of the Lord's ultimate purposes for his life. Each step of the way, he was being brought closer to the position he would need to occupy in order to have the greatest impact.

When Pharaoh had a disturbing dream one night, the butler remembered Joseph's gift for interpretation and told the king that perhaps the young Hebrew man could help him. Joseph was quickly summoned from his cell to the palace, perfectly positioned for the Lord's next step in his life.

God gave Joseph the interpretation of the king's dream: seven years of miraculous abundance followed by seven years of harsh austerity. So impressed was Pharaoh with Joseph that he appointed him prime minister and placed him in charge of the country's agricultural program over the following 14 years (Genesis 41).

During the prosperous years, Joseph saved much of the grain in vast storehouses across the land. When the predicted famine struck, Joseph disbursed the grain in a manner that would safeguard the lives of the Egyptians and their neighbors.

Are you waiting for God to open some kind of door for you today? Have you been praying about a new ministry...career...or relationship?

When you consider what God did in the life of Joseph—swiftly delivering him from prison and then lifting him to a role of incredible impact—remember these words of Jesus: *“See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut”* (Revelation 3:8 NIV).

No matter how long you may have been waiting for your breakthrough, God's favor can open amazing doors for you in the days ahead. You can have a testimony like the apostle Paul described: *“God had opened the door; all I had to do was walk through it”* (2 Corinthians 2:13MSG). You may have to keep asking, seeking, and knocking for a while, but the Lord WILL open the right doors for you in due season (Matthew 7:7).

Just as God had been working behind the scenes to set up the breakthroughs in Joseph's own life, He also was preparing to bless Joseph's family. As scarcity gripped the land of Canaan, Jacob was told there was plenty of grain in Egypt. God was setting the stage for one of the Bible's most poignant examples of **RADICAL FORGIVENESS**. Jacob sent his ten eldest sons to the land of Pharaoh to purchase grain:

Now Joseph was governor over the land; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the earth (Genesis 42:6).

Joseph's dream was realized—but his brothers did not even recognize him. While his father, Jacob, often resorted to trickery to fulfill God's dreams for his life, Joseph never in a million years could have orchestrated these events.

What a testimony that God truly sits on the throne of the universe, working out His sovereign purposes for those who walk in His favor! As we read in Job 12:7-12 (MSG), “*God is sovereign...he holds all things in his hand—every living soul, yes, every breathing creature.*”

At this point, Joseph began a game of cat and mouse, testing his brothers over a period of months and possibly years (Genesis 42-45). When he finally revealed his identity, the brothers were speechless, fearing for their lives (Genesis 45:1-3). But rather than speaking to them with condemnation or punishment, Joseph gave them stunningly beautiful words of **RADICAL FORGIVENESS**:

I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives...And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt (Genesis 45:4-8 NLT).

Joseph said it was GOD—not his brothers—who had sent him to Egypt! When you know you're living in God's favor, you can trust

yourself to His purposes. As Job testified, “*You [God] can do anything and everything. Nothing and no one can upset your plans*” (Job 42:2 MSG).

Have you ever wondered whether one of God’s promises is really true? For example, take a look at this one:

No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord (Isaiah 54:17).

At certain points in Joseph’s story, it certainly *looked* as if the weapons formed against him were prospering. But the story wasn’t over yet!

As his brothers stood before him, Joseph no longer could control his emotions. He had the room cleared so he could reveal his identity to his brothers and extend **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** to them in private. The brothers were terrified to discover that the brother they had so mistreated now stood before them with the power to retaliate a hundredfold (Genesis 45:1-8).

Although Joseph didn’t minimize what had been done to him, he assured his siblings that he recognized God’s purpose for the path his life had taken (Genesis 50:20). Through it all, the Lord had been in control of his darkest nights and brightest days.

Joseph’s ability to offer **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** to those who had wronged him came from seeing God’s sovereign goodness and favor upon his life. Just as he found God faithful in the pit and the prison, the Lord had not forsaken him in the palace. God’s presence, protection, and provision had been with him all along the way.

Forgiveness isn't easy. Joseph had paid a high price for his brothers' jealousy. Because of their actions, he spent years in exile from his father before God raised him up to a position in the palace. He didn't forgive because his brothers *deserved* to be forgiven; he forgave in order to be pleasing to the Lord.

If we wait until we “feel” like forgiving, forgiveness will never come. Instead, true forgiveness is a *decision* of the heart, and Joseph willingly made that choice. Because of experiencing Jehovah's grace and mercy, even when he didn't deserve it, he was able to love those who had mistreated him. And as he extended forgiveness to his brothers, Joseph unleashed the Favor of God (F.O.G.) in his life more than ever before.

Sometimes people think they're required to extend forgiveness only when the person who has wronged them apologizes and grovels. However, as you read the story of Joseph, you realize that Joseph had forgiven his brothers *proactively*—before they ever set foot inside the palace.

RADICAL FORGIVENESS takes the initiative, granting the offenders a pardon even before it is sought. By canceling their debt and extending grace, you are giving yourself a gift that money cannot buy—a release from your emotional ties to a hurtful past. In addition, your acts of love and forgiveness free God to work in the life of the person who harmed you.

Joseph not only forgave in his heart, but he also *demonstrated* the genuineness of his forgiveness through his actions, warmly embracing and weeping over each of his brothers (Genesis 45:14-15). What a great way to become more like Jesus and be transformed into the person He wants you to be!

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ If you're struggling to love or forgive someone, pause to remember where love comes from: *"Let us love one another, for love comes from God"* (1 John 4:7 NIV). Quiet your heart before the Lord, asking Him to fill you afresh with His Spirit and put His supernatural love in your heart.
- ✧ Perhaps, like Joseph, you've experienced injustice and gone through hard times. Pause and ask God to show you how He plans to use these experiences to prepare you for your destiny and give you greater impact in the lives of others. If you get stumped, take a look at 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 for clues.
- ✧ God sovereignly worked through Joseph's circumstances to prepare him for maximum impact. However, notice that Joseph was able to minister to people while in prison, not just after he arrived at the palace. Prayerfully assess the position you are now in—both geographically and in your job, ministry, or relationships. What opportunities do you presently have to share the love and power of Jesus with those around you?
- ✧ One of the lessons in Joseph's story is that God has a process of preparation and maturity for each of us before we can fulfill His ultimate plans for our life. For example, although Joseph was given a vision for his life at age 17, he clearly lacked the maturity at that point to save a nation or rescue his family. Take a few moments to assess whether there is still some maturity issues holding you back from the impact God wants you to have in the future.



TRUSTING GOD FOR YOUR BREAKTHROUGH

After Joseph's death, the Israelites were held captive in Egypt for over four hundred years. Egypt was one of the most powerful nations on earth, and the fortunes of the Israelites seemed bleak at best. But God was getting ready to do a *new thing*—just as He can do in *your* life today.

The turnaround of the Israelites started with the **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** of Moses' mother, Jochebed. For three months after his birth, she courageously hid Moses from the Egyptians (Exodus 2). Pharaoh had instructed the midwives to kill every male child as soon as he emerged from the womb. But instead, the midwives united to save as many children as possible, one of them being Moses.

When baby Moses became too old to hide, Jochebed took reeds and wove a basket to set among the bulrushes on the bank of the Nile. Moses' sister Miriam was posted at a distance to watch over the child.

Do you see how Jochebed chose to trust God's provision and care for her baby? It's human nature to try to grasp onto the things God gives us. But through **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** and **RADICAL GENEROSITY**, we entrust our possessions—and even our children—into the hands of God.

The Lord blessed her decision to trust Him with her child, and He also was honoring the prayers of His people for deliverance from captivity: *“God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant”* (Exodus 2:24).

In order to act in obedience or generosity, we often must confront and overcome our fears. God repeatedly tells us, *“Fear not, for I am with you”* (Isaiah 41:10). Why? Because fear is something we all deal with from time to time.

Moses' parents had to be willing to courageously defy Pharaoh's command in order to obey the Lord:

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents...and they were not afraid of the king's command (Hebrews 11:23).

In the same way, we're told that the midwives saved the male babies because they *“feared God”* more than they feared Pharaoh. As a result, God rewarded them with His favor: *“God dealt well with the midwives,”* and He provided for them (Exodus 1:20-21).

Don't miss the lesson here: Just as the Lord blessed Moses' parents and the midwives with His favor because of their courageous obedience, He wants to bless YOU as you confront your fears and act in faith.

Acts 7:20 makes a wonderful statement about Moses' birth:

“At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God.” This was to become a constant anthem throughout Moses’ life: He wanted to please the Lord in everything he did. Even as a newborn, the Favor of God (F.O.G.) rested upon Moses.

This same theme of pleasing God is picked up by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:9 when he says, *“We make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.”* Other translations say that it should be our “goal,” “ambition,” or “main thing” to please the Lord.

So if our aim in life is to please the Lord, what are the qualities we need in order to make that happen? The starting point in pleasing God—and in unleashing more of His favor in our lives—are the radical qualities of Obedience, Forgiveness, Humility, and Generosity. These powerful themes are woven throughout the Scriptures, displayed in the lives of Biblical heroes from Genesis to Revelation.

Another indispensable ingredient is faith: *“It’s impossible to please God apart from faith. And why? Because anyone who wants to approach God must believe both that He exists and that He cares enough to respond to those who seek Him”* (Hebrews 11:6 MSG). Put simply, it pleases the Lord when we *trust Him* and *take Him at His word*.

The Bible is full of statements about how God’s favor is unleashed when we believe His promises and put our full reliance on Him:

As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him (Psalm 18:30).

The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped (Psalm 28:7).

Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him (Psalm 32:10).

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! (Psalm 34:8)

Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and He will help you (Psalm 37:5 NLT).

Oh, the joys of those who trust the Lord, who have no confidence in the proud or in those who worship idols (Psalm 40:4 NLT).

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths (Proverbs 3:5-6).

You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You (Isaiah 26:3).

If you need a breakthrough in some area of your life today, the starting point may be a new commitment to trust God and put the situation in His hands. He wants to do a new thing in your life today!

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ACTIVATION STEPS
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- ✧ In many ways, the turnaround of the Hebrew nation began with the **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** of Moses' mother, Jochebed, when she placed her baby in a basket among the bulrushes on the bank of the Nile. Pause for a moment and ask the Lord if *you* need to trust Him in a similar way—releasing something from your hands and placing it on the altar before Him.
- ✧ One of the reasons Jochebed and the Hebrew midwives disobeyed Pharaoh's edict is because they wanted to please the Lord above all else, and they feared Him more than they feared Pharaoh. Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and reveal any ways you've fallen into the trap of being a people-pleaser at the expense of pleasing God. (Note the apostle Paul's warning about people-pleasing in Galatians 1:10.)
- ✧ Take a few moments to ask God if there's anything in your life that has been displeasing to Him. Repent of any ways your primary ambition has been something *other* than to please the Lord. Then make a fresh commitment to the qualities that unleash His favor: Obedience, Forgiveness, Humility, Generosity, and Faith.
- ✧ Exodus 2:24 says, "*God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant.*" This is very good news if YOU are "groaning" about some situation in your life today. Take time to thank the Lord that He hears your prayers, remembers His covenant promises, and is ready to intervene in your circumstances. His help is on the way!



FULFILLING GOD'S PURPOSE FOR YOUR LIFE

The life of a believer is a supernatural life...a life of miracles and breakthroughs. Yes, there may be many trials and tribulations, but we can trust our Heavenly Father to be with us and care for us all along the way, as we seek to fulfill His purposes.

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous," King David wrote. Thankfully, he added, ***"BUT the Lord delivers him out of them all"*** (Psalm 34:19). The NLT says, *"The Lord comes to the rescue each time."* So if you're going through a difficult situation today, you can trust God to come to your rescue when you cry out to Him.

Jesus described this same principle when He said, *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33). Notice that we can find peace and victory even in the *midst* of life's tribulations and storms.

Consider God's favor in the life of Moses. Right from the beginning, his life was marked by miracles. However, living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.) certainly didn't mean his life would always be easy or carefree. He faced countless difficulties, but the Lord never failed to provide for him and keep him safe.

Look at these miracles just in the early years of Moses' life...

Miracle #1 – The child was not consumed by the crocodiles that inhabited the Nile.

Miracle #2 – Pharaoh's daughter came down to the water's edge to bathe and spotted the basket with the child inside, and recognized it was a Hebrew child. Then Miriam, Moses' sister, crept from her hiding place and timidly offered the services of her mother Jochebed to care for the baby. The plan could have failed at any point, but God made sure it worked perfectly.

Miracle #3 – The Lord not only worked it out for Moses' own mother to care for him, but his upbringing came at Pharaoh's expense!

Miracle #4 – God orchestrated Moses' life so that he was educated both by his parents—in the ways of the God of Israel—and by the Egyptians. Both kinds of training were vital in laying a foundation for God's destiny for his life. After Moses' mother raised him for a while,

we're told that *"Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds"* (Acts 7:21-22). At the time all this was happening, Moses certainly had no idea he would need *both* a worldview focused on the God of Israel and *also* an awareness of the Egyptian culture. Yet the Lord was preparing him—just as He desires to prepare YOU for what lies ahead in your life.

Pause for a moment to consider the remarkable care and sovereignty of God in Moses' life. Even when he was an infant, the Lord was working behind the scenes to fulfill a fantastic purpose that would not only impact Moses himself, but an entire nation.

Many promises in God's Word testify of the great plans He has for you—and also of His ability to *fulfill* those plans:

I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for. When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen. When you come looking for me, you'll find me. Yes, when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I'll make sure you won't be disappointed...I'll turn things around for you. I'll bring you back... (Jeremiah 29:11-14 MSG).

Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails (Proverbs 19:21 NIV).

God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28 NLT).

I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns (Philippians 1:6 NLT).

Taken together, these verses send a powerful message: God has a wonderful plan for YOU! Not only that, but He's also putting powerful resources to work in *fulfilling* that plan. As you take steps of faith and obedience TODAY, God will use each step as part of His great plan for your FUTURE.

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ACTIVATION STEPS
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- ✧ When you consider how God sovereignly orchestrated the events in Moses' early life, do you see any parallels to how He's used events and relationships in YOUR life to fulfill His plans?
- ✧ Read Jeremiah 29:11-14 (MSG) again, reflecting on any ways the passage applies to your life today. For example, do you ever struggle to really believe God knows what He's doing and has plan to take care of you, rather than abandon you? What does it mean that He promises to turn things around for you when you want His will "*more than anything else*"?
- ✧ Proverbs 19:21 and Romans 8:28 refer to God's "purpose" in our lives. Take time to write down some of the things you KNOW about His purpose for your life. You can start with His purpose for *every* believer, for example that we would be increasingly conformed to the image of His Son Jesus (Romans 8:29). But what has He also shown you about His *unique* gifts and calling for your life?

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- ✧ Philippians 1:6 mentions that there was a starting point when you were saved and God *began* a "*good work*" in you. However, it also says He's not *finished* with you yet! Write

down a description of two things based on this verse: (1) What changes did God bring about in your life when you first received Christ as your Lord and Savior? (2) What are some of the ongoing areas of your life He is still working on?



GOD'S PREPARATION FOR GREATER BLESSINGS

Moses was reared in luxury in the household of Pharaoh, but nothing else is recorded of his life until he was a young man. He was out walking one day when he saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Jewish slave. So incensed was Moses that he killed the Egyptian.

After hearing that Pharaoh had placed a price on his head because of this deed, Moses packed his knapsack and headed for the backside of the desert, where he found himself taking care of sheep for a living.

Even though this seemed like a major detour in Moses' life at the time, it turned out to be an additional part of God's training and preparation. Forty years later, he would be in the wilderness caring for "sheep" of another kind—the people of God. What a reminder

that we must be alert to how God is preparing us today for our assignment tomorrow.

Moses may have wondered if anything good could come from being exiled from his homeland and having to flee to a remote part of the desert. However, as we've already seen in other aspects of Moses' life, this turn of events was all part of God's sovereign plan. The Lord was truly causing "*everything to work together for the good*" of Moses (Romans 8:28 NLT)—even though it surely didn't look that way at the time.

Moses had no idea he would one day meet his future wife, Zipporah, at the watering trough. He seems to have won her heart when he displayed **RADICAL HUMILITY** and **RADICAL GENEROSITY**. First, he stood up to the shepherds who tried to take the water drawn by Zipporah and her sisters to tend to their father's sheep. Then he helped do the watering, which saved them a lot of time.

The girls and their father, Reuel, were impressed, and Reuel offered Moses the hand of Zipporah in marriage.

Notice that traits like humility and generosity typically aren't displayed in grandiose acts of sacrifice. More often, they are shown in small acts of kindness and service behind the scenes. As Jesus pointed out, "*If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones*" (Luke 16:10 NLT).

Moses finally seemed content with his new life. He had a wife, a job, and then a son, Gershom. Yet all of this was just more preparation for God's greater purposes ahead. After 40 years in the desert of Midian, he was about to face the challenge of a lifetime—far greater than leaving his homeland and family, or the daily grind of caring for the sheep.

One day as he led the sheep to the far reaches of Mount Horeb, he noticed a bush that burned brightly but was not consumed. Knowing that this was totally against the laws of nature, Moses turned aside to see this phenomenon.

He must have been stunned when the Lord spoke to him from the midst of the bush. *"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt..."* God said. *"So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt"* (Exodus 3:7-10 NIV). In mere moments, Moses had received a new commission from the Lord that would profoundly impact the remainder of his life.

While giving him this radical new commission, the Lord sought to assure Moses of His benevolent purpose. Speaking from the burning bush, He described His great compassion for His people and His desire to bring them into a wonderful new land:

I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 3:7-8 NIV).

Pause to consider how this beautiful passage might apply to *your* life today. No matter what you may be going through, God wants you to know that He has heard your cry...He is concerned about your suffering...and He has a plan to rescue you. He wants to lead you out of your dark circumstances and bring you into a land of blessings and abundance.

However, Moses was undoubtedly shocked by what God was telling him to do. He had killed a man in Egypt, so it must have

seemed unthinkable to be sent back to the scene of the crime with instructions to confront Pharaoh.

Moses initially protested to God, “*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?*” (Exodus 3:11 NIV). But the Lord gave him a beautiful message of comfort—the same message He gives us when we’re tempted to be fearful: “*I will be with you*” (v. 12).

If Moses was sent in his own strength to confront Pharaoh and set the Israelites free, he would have had every right to be fearful. Yet with Jehovah, his mighty covenant Partner, by his side, victory was assured.

Despite his misgivings, Moses trusted the Lord enough to exemplify **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** in his new assignment. Yet he also was honest with God about the questions he had about this daunting, seemingly impossible mission to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. For example, he asked what he should say if the Israelites asked the *name* of the God who had sent him.

The Lord replied, “*I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you’*” (Exodus 3:14-14). This is a powerful statement, my friend. Your Heavenly Father is *still* the great “*I AM*” today. He is a present-tense God...a God who is faithful...a God who is with you NOW and FOREVER!

The Lord went on to say that He was the same God who had appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As He had been faithful to their fathers, He would be faithful to Moses and the current generation of Israelites.

In other words, the God of the Bible has a *track record* of faithfulness to His people down through the millennia. Not only that, but He *also* has a record of faithfulness in your life and mine.

The prophet Jeremiah said it this way, *“The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning* (Lamentations 3:22-23 NLT).

Remember: Whatever you may be going through today, God is at work to prepare you for your next assignment. As the apostle Paul wrote, *“Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass”* (1 Thessalonians 5:24 NASB).

So, have you been faithful to fulfill the tasks you’ve already been given—now ready for God to give you a new assignment today? Make sure you’re regularly spending time in His presence, listening for the new things He has in store for you: *“I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown to you”* (Isaiah 48:6 NIV).

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Take some time to review God's faithfulness to you, especially noting the times when you didn't understand what He was up to until later. Are there still some events in your past that seem bewildering at the moment? If so, pause to pray and commit these things to the Lord.
- ✧ Reflect on Jesus' statement in Luke 16:10: *"If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones."* Do you feel you've been faithful to carry out the "little" assignments God has given you? How do you see your current readiness for a more difficult assignment in the days ahead?
- ✧ Moses initially protested to God that he was inadequate for his assigned mission: *"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"* (Exodus 3:11 NIV). The Lord responded simply, *"I will be with you"* (v. 12). Do you feel inadequate for what God has called you to do? If so, pause to thank Him for His presence and power in you, enabling you to fulfill your mission. Memorize Paul's words in Philippians 4:13 and make them your own: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*
- ✧ Rather than focusing on your past traumas or failures, or on the difficult circumstances you may presently be facing, meditate on God's statement in Exodus 3:8 about the *"good and spacious land"* (NIV) that He was going to bring the Israelites into. Ask the Lord to give you a vision of the great future He has planned for you when you trust and obey Him.



READY TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE

One of the challenges of living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.) is that you're sometimes given difficult assignments to handle. Too often, people interpret the hard circumstances of life as a sign of God's *disfavor*, when it may mean just the opposite; the Lord knows that, because of His supernatural favor, you can be an overcomer in every situation.

When you're living in His favor, God will often give you assignments that seem much too big for you. Yet, because of His favor and faithfulness, your obedience can lead to *miraculous* outcomes.

Pause for a moment to consider your life today. Is God directing you to do something that seems difficult or even impossible? Do you find fear welling up in your heart when you consider the weight of the assignment He has given you? Then put your eyes on the Lord, and thank Him that He will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5).

Even if you face daunting enemies that seem to be blocking your path, remember Paul's words in Romans 8:31: "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" If you are on the Lord's side, He is on your side as well, as the apostle John reminds us: "*You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*" (1 John 4:4).

At the burning bush, God told Moses that his obedience would deliver the entire Hebrew nation from their bondage in Egypt. No assignment could have appeared more improbable than that. Think of how ludicrous this mission would have seemed—over a million slaves suddenly being set free from the captivity of one of the strongest nations on earth. Unlikely indeed!

Despite God's assurances, Moses still was apprehensive about his assignment to set the Israelites free. "*Suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice?*" he asked the Lord (Exodus 4:1). But if God has given YOU some assignment that seems much too big, you need to see what happens next...

"*What is that in your hand?*" God asked him (v. 2). Moses replied that it was just his shepherd's rod. The Lord told him to throw it on the ground, and when he did it became a snake. God instructed him to pick it up, and it became a rod again.

Yet after Moses gave God his shepherd's rod, it was never the same. This "ordinary" rod became *extraordinary*—used to part the Red Sea, bring water out of a rock, and win battles against enemy armies. Today God is asking you to give Him whatever is in your hand. When you do, get ready for *miracles*!

However, like Moses, perhaps you've been making up excuses to keep from obeying what God is calling you to do. Take a look at how that worked for Moses...

“Lord, I’m not very good with words,” he pleaded. “I never have been, and I’m not now, even though you have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled” (Exodus 4:10 NLT).

But God rejected all of Moses’ excuses, just as He will reject yours and mine. *“Who makes a person’s mouth?”* He replied to Moses. *“Is it not I, the Lord? Now go! I will be with you as you speak, and I will instruct you in what to say”* (vs. 11-12).

The Lord’s answer to Moses’ feelings of inadequacy was the same as He often must say to us when we try to make excuses: *“I will be with you!”*

If God has revealed His plan to you, don’t expect Him to change it because of your complaints or excuses. Nor will He put up with procrastination or delays, as Jesus warned us: *“No procrastination. No backward looks. You can’t put God’s kingdom off till tomorrow. Seize the day”* (Luke 9:62 MSG).

Despite his trepidation and his attempts to avoid His assignment, Moses eventually obeyed. He and Aaron went before Pharaoh and demanded the release of the children of Israel to go into the desert and worship Jehovah God. What an audacious step of faith!

However, notice that God always rewards those who trust Him enough to display **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**. Confronting Pharaoh with such demands seemed both nonsensical and dangerous, but Moses’ obedience won him a place in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11:23-28. In addition, he was showered with the miraculous Favor of God (F.O.G.) throughout his life.

One of the secrets for doing the IMPOSSIBLE is seeing the INVISIBLE. This was a key in the life of Moses: *“By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible”* (Hebrews 11:27 NIV).

What a powerful lesson this is. If you only see your circumstances with your natural eyes, your life will be a rollercoaster, and you will frequently be discouraged. Instead, you must see past the dark clouds of life to the fact that your God is still sitting on the throne of the universe, ready to come to your aid (Revelation 4:1-2).

Do you see “giants” standing in the way of the entrance to your Promised Land? Then remember Caleb and Joshua’s example, as they saw the bigness of the *Lord* instead of the bigness of their *problems* (Numbers 13:26-33).

When Joshua again stood on the brink of the Promised Land 40 years later, God gave him powerful words of encouragement, very appropriate for us as well:

Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses...No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you...

Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and

then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:3-9).

Perhaps, like Joshua, you are standing within sight of your Promised Land today. Don't cower in fear. Don't procrastinate or turn back. Make a commitment that you will trust and obey the Lord, and you will see miraculous outcomes you never dreamed were possible.

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ACTIVATION STEPS
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- ✧ Pause to take inventory of the assignments God has presently given you, noting what He has told you to do, whether you've been obedient so far, and any feelings that your assigned missions are simply "too big" for you. If you've been procrastinating or making excuses, confess that to God and ask Him to change your heart.
- ✧ A pivotal moment in Moses' life came when God asked him, "*What is that in your hand?*" (Exodus 4:2) Take a moment to assess the resources (such as time, talent, and treasure) He has already placed in your hands. Even though your resources may seem completely inadequate to meet the needs you face, make sure you have given them to the Lord. For reference, see the story of Jesus multiplying the loaves and fish in Matthew 14:14-21.
- ✧ Both Moses and Joshua found success when they looked to the invisible God instead of their visible circumstances. Have YOU been doing that—fixing your eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2)—or are your eyes still fixed on your circumstances? For reference, look at the story of Peter walking on water to approach Jesus (Matthew 14:25-33).
- ✧ Take a few minutes to review Joshua 1:3-9 again, applying God's promises and instructions for Joshua to your own life today. What did the Lord promise Joshua? What did He tell him to DO? How does this apply to the things you are going through today?



GAINING VICTORY OVER THE ENEMY

When you think of the word “victory,” what comes to mind? Defeating a rival team in a sporting event? Overcoming some addiction or sin in your life? Getting unstuck from some troubling situation in your health, finances, or relationships?

While you may need God to give you victory in a number of different areas of your life, certain basic principles are important to remember. First, the Bible declares that you can have victory in every situation, as Paul pointed out: “*Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ*” (2 Corinthians 2:14). Isn’t that awesome? He doesn’t just want you to triumph *occasionally*, but rather “*always*.”

Notice that a key ingredient in this victory plan is God’s desire to *lead you*. In other words, if you expect to experience His favor and walk consistently in His victory, you must *follow His instructions*.

That's why **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** is so crucial to living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.).

However, even when the Lord has given you His favor, you shouldn't be surprised if you must *battle* for your victory at times. When God told the Israelites He was giving them the Promised Land, it would have been erroneous to assume they could simply walk in and live there. No, they had to battle for their breakthrough—and it's likely that you will, too.

Forty years earlier, the Israelites had experienced another amazing aspect of what it means to walk in victory. After more than 400 years of bondage, it must have been hard to imagine walking out of Egypt as free men and woman. That alone would have been a tremendous victory and sign of God's favor, but God wanted to do much MORE for them than merely get them out of slavery.

Solomon writes in Proverbs 16:7 that *"when a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."* Illustrating this fantastic principle, the story of Moses and the Israelites shows that when we please God, we can receive *favor* and *blessings* even from our enemies!

God promises Moses, *"I will give this people **favor** in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed"* (Exodus 3:21). Think of it: Not only would the Israelites be delivered from the Egyptians, but they *also* would be given silver, gold, and clothing as they were leaving: *"So you shall plunder the Egyptians"* (v. 22).

What a great example of the truth of Proverbs 13:22 (NIV): *"A sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous."* After living as paupers for so many years, it's likely the Israelites didn't really expect much from life or from God. Perhaps you've struggled like this as well, not

daring to pray BIG prayers or expecting BIG breakthroughs from the Lord.

What breakthrough do you need from God today? It's time to stop limiting the size of the blessings you're expecting when you unleash His favor in your life: *"God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams!"* (Ephesians 3:20 MSG) He wants to bless you in unimaginable ways—so you don't leave your captivity empty-handed!

If you are still in the midst of a difficult battle today, you may be tempted to doubt that victory is on the horizon. Although Moses was committed to trusting the Lord and walking in **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, things seemed to go horribly wrong when he first confronted Pharaoh with the Lord's demand: *"Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness"* (Exodus 5:1). Pharaoh scoffed at the request and commanded his taskmasters to make the Israelites' workload much harder. And who did the Israelites blame? Not Pharaoh, but Moses.

What an important lesson. When you set out on an assignment from God and it doesn't go well at first, don't despair. Be patient. Be persistent. And most importantly, seek the Lord for more instructions.

Moses wisely *"returned to the Lord"* for further direction (v. 22). Notice how he displayed two vital principles about living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.): He *persisted* when he ran into obstacles, and he was faithful to keep checking with the Lord to see if He had *additional instructions*.

Notice that God often does His greatest miracles during our times of greatest testing. He wasn't surprised or caught off-guard by Pharaoh's response to Moses' demands. All along, He had a plan

for the situation, just as He has for the difficult situations in your life today.

Even as Pharaoh's heart was hardening against the Israelites, the Lord told them, "*I will...multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt*" (Exodus 7:3). In the face of a stubborn, powerful enemy, the Lord was about to send His miracles as a sign of His love and favor for His people. It is a tremendous reminder that He's a powerful, supernatural God, not limited by human strength and ingenuity.

But the Lord also does signs and wonders to get the attention of the unbelieving world: "*The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them*" (Exodus 7:5). As non-believers look at your life—both the battles and the breakthroughs—they should see evidence of the faithfulness of God.

You see, God isn't giving you victory for your sake alone. He is working to reveal His love and power to a lost and needy world, as Psalm 106:8 describes: "*He saved them for His name's sake, that He might make His mighty power known.*"

We earlier saw Paul's declaration in 2 Corinthians 2:14 that we can experience victory in every situation, but the verse continues with a description of how this is meant to impact others. As "*captives in Christ's triumphal procession,*" God "*uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of Him everywhere*" (NIV).

What a beautiful picture this is of the *ripple effect* of blessings that will touch the lives of others when God unleashes more of His favor in your life. God will be glorified, and people around you will be impacted, as He gives you supernatural breakthroughs in your family, finances, health, and peace of mind!

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Proverbs 28:20 (MSG) says, “*Committed and persistent work pays off,*” and persistence was clearly one of the keys to Moses’ eventual success. Take a few moments to assess whether *you* have been persistent in following God’s assignments, or whether you’ve sometimes quit much too early.
- ✧ **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** is crucial to unleashing God’s favor, and we see in the life of Moses that he regularly asked for God’s ongoing instructions. Make a new commitment to meet with the Lord each day, enjoying His presence and listening to His voice.
- ✧ Pause and thank the Lord that He has a plan to give you victory in every situation. What specific situations in your life need a supernatural breakthrough today? How would a breakthrough in your life be likely to impact other people around you?
- ✧ Reflect on God’s ability to do unimaginable things in your life: “*God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams!*” (Ephesians 3:20 MSG) Have you prayed only “small” prayers, limiting the kinds of blessings that could be unleashed through His favor? If so, ask the Lord to give you a new vision for BIG breakthroughs and victories.



GOING OUT, ENTERING IN

Many people have made it a habit to worry about conditions in the world or fluctuations in their nation's economy. Every news report seems to fuel their fears and diminish their faith.

However, when you are living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.), you're part of a new kingdom, with an entirely different economy. No matter what the conditions may be around you, you can rest secure in the Lord's protection and provision.

When Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt, God sent terrible judgments upon the nation. But the Lord said He would "*set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell*" (Exodus 8:22). When the rest of Egypt was afflicted with swarms of flies and hailstorms, God's people were safe.

Psalms 91 promises that you can find protection "*in the secret place of the Most High*" and "*under the shadow of the Almighty*" (v. 1). Even though "*a thousand may fall at your side...it [destruction] shall not come*

near you" (v. 7). So go ahead and breathe a sigh of relief—God's favor can keep you safe and sound, as the psalmist discovered: "*With favor You will surround him as with a shield*" (Psalm 5:12).

However, notice that the "*secret place*" of God's favor is not somewhere we're likely to find automatically or by accident. We need to make an active commitment to *enter into* this amazing place of blessing in the presence of the Lord: "*Let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God...and we will find grace to help us when we need it most*" (Hebrews 4:16 NLT).

But before we can fully *enter into* a place of favor with God, there will be some things we'll have to *leave behind*. You see, there are two sides to unleashing the Favor of God (F.O.G.) and a life of abundance. First, we must let go of the past and anything that is holding us back. Next, we must take active steps to enter into God's best for our life.

We see this pattern with the Israelites. God spoke to them about both sides of this process:

*"I am the Lord your God who **brings you OUT** from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will **bring you INTO** the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage"* (Exodus 6:7-8).

Exodus 12 describes God's instructions for the first Feast of Pass-over, which is a powerful demonstration of the OUT and IN principle we need to grasp in order to unleash more of God's favor. During Pass-over, each family was to kill an unblemished lamb and "*they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat*" (v. 7).

Rather than being just an empty religious ceremony, Passover was God's means of protection: *"I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt...And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you"* (vs. 12-13).

The Passover lamb symbolized the blood later shed by Jesus—*"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29). Through His blood, we are forgiven, protected, and given a covenant relationship with God. We become overcomers, as Revelation 12:11 describes: *"They overcame [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb."*

The Israelites were given some intriguing instructions about how to prepare and eat the Passover lamb: *"Make sure it's roasted—the whole animal, head, legs, and innards. Don't leave any of it until morning; if there are leftovers, burn them in the fire"* (Exodus 12:9-10 MSG).

It's significant that God's people were told to consume *"the whole animal"* and make sure no *"leftovers"* remained until morning. The Christian life is not meant to be a cafeteria, where we can choose the parts we like and those we don't. If we expect to live in the Favor of God (F.O.G.), we must consume the *"the whole animal"*—willingly partaking of *everything* Jesus did for us through the blood He shed on the cross.

When Jesus is truly our Lord, you can no longer pick and choose which parts of His will to obey. He must be Lord of ALL! As Paul wrote, *"do you not know...that you are not your own? For you were bought at a price"* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

The Feast of Passover is a beautiful picture of living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.). But that's not all. In addition to unleashing God's favor, the Biblical account *also* says the Israelites received *"favor in the sight of the Egyptians"* that day (Exodus 12:36).

It took **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** for the Israelites to obey the Lord's instructions. But through the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts, they were spared God's judgment and received **RADICAL FORGIVENESS**—not on the basis of their own merit, but because of the blood that was shed on their behalf.

The Israelites received these blessings as they obeyed God's instructions for Passover: *"Thus all the children of Israel **did**; as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron, so they **did**. And it came to pass, on **that very same day**, that the Lord brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt"* (vs. 50-51). After hundreds of years of slavery in Egypt, the **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** of the Israelites in celebrating Passover resulted in their deliverance *"that very same day."* What an incredibly quick turnaround!

Fortunately, we don't have to go back to the days of Moses and the Egyptians to experience the blessings of Passover. As Paul reminds us, *"Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed"* (1 Corinthians 5:7 NIV). Just as the Israelites had to be set free from captivity in Egypt in order to begin their journey to the land of God's favor, so must we apply the blood of the Lamb to our hearts in order to walk in His blessings today.

Do you remember the day you first received Jesus the Messiah as your Lord and Savior? Moses told the people to be sure to *commemorate* the day God had set them free from bondage in Egypt: *"This is a day to remember forever—the day you left Egypt, the place of your slavery"* (Exodus 13:3 NLT).

Moses also wanted the Israelites to remember that this deliverance was the *work of God*, not the result of their own strength or wisdom: *"Today the Lord has brought you out by the power of his mighty hand"* (v.3). Thank God, His hand is still mighty to save us, deliver us, and bless our lives with favor.

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Reflect on your own testimony about God's redemptive power in your life. Do YOU have "*a day to remember*," when you invited Jesus to be your Lord and Savior? Do you realize that it was only through His mercy and His "*mighty hand*" that you were saved from the hand of the Enemy? What are some of the changes He has made in your life since your turnaround began?
- ✧ Take some time to assess where you are on the journey to God's favor. Have you left behind the toxic situations that were keeping you from enjoying God's blessings? Have you taken the needed steps of obedience to press into His will for your life?
- ✧ Paul tells the believers in Ephesus to "*put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness*" (Ephesians 4:22-24). What are some negative traits you still need to "*put off*," and what are some godly qualities the Lord is calling you to "*put on*"?
- ✧ Take a few minutes to pause and thank Christ Jesus for His shed blood and all that He has done in your life. Picture His blood being applied to the doorposts of your heart and life, protecting you from any attacks by the enemy.



A NEW LEVEL OF COMMITMENT

During the first Passover, God spared the firstborn sons of the Israelites. However, now the Lord was asking His people for a new level of commitment: *“Dedicate to me every first-born among the Israelites. The **first** offspring to be born, of both humans and animals, **belongs to me**”* (Exodus 13:2 NLT).

This principle of giving God the firstborn and the “*firstfruits*” is found throughout Scripture, and it’s one of the most important keys to walking in the Favor of God (F.O.G.). Solomon, the wealthiest man who has ever lived, gives us this advice: *“Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine”* (Proverbs 3:9-10 NIV).

Honoring the Lord with our “*firstfruits*” is the initial step toward faithful stewardship and a life of **RADICAL GENEROSITY**.

When we act upon this principle, God has promised that our lives will be “*filled to overflowing.*”

You see, our Heavenly Father never intended for His children to remain in the Land of Not Enough or the Land of Barely Enough. His intention, all along, has been to bring you and me into the Land of MORE Than Enough, where “*you will drink deeply and delight in...overflowing abundance*” (Isaiah 66:11 NIV).

Yet, for us to experience God’s best, we must submit to His precepts and allow Him to put our lives in order. Consider this: More than a million Israelites left Egypt—all on the same day. Unless there was some kind of order to their exodus, it would have been a chaotic mess. However, we read that “*the children of Israel went up in **orderly ranks** out of the land of Egypt*” (Exodus 13:18).

This example illustrates an important principle: For God to fully bless you with His favor and abundance, He often must help you put your life *in order* first. We see this in the way Jesus first made sure the multitudes were sitting in orderly groups of 50 before He miraculously fed them (Luke 9:14).

Job 25:2 (NIV) says, “*Dominion and awe belong to God; He establishes order in the heights of heaven.*” But what if your life is chaotic and disorderly today? Is it still possible to receive the Favor of God (F.O.G.)? Thankfully, God has a plan—the same plan He had when the earth was “*without form, and void*” shortly after creation. The Spirit of God will hover over your life to bring order and peace (Genesis 1:2).

Just as He sent His Spirit to bring order to the original creation, God provided a supernatural guidance system to lead the Israelites: “*The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day*

and night” (Exodus 13:21). Long before the day of GPS technology or Google Maps, the Lord directed the path of His people on their journey to the Promised Land.

When we embrace **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** and allow God to orchestrate our life, He assures us of “*a future and a hope*” (Jeremiah 29:11). Ephesians 2:10 teaches that we are His *workmanship* (NKJV), *masterpiece* (NLT), and *handiwork* (NIV). If that weren’t enough, it says He has *gone before us* to prepare a path of incredible favor and blessings for us to walk in. At every crossroads of life, He offers to guide us: “*Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls*” (Jeremiah 6:16 NIV).

Fortunately we’re not left alone when we stand at a crossroads and must make an important decision. Proverbs 8:1-2 (NLT) says God’s wisdom calls out to us and “*takes her stand at the crossroads.*” Instead of relying on our own understanding, we can listen for God’s direction as He tells us, “*This is the way, walk in it*” (Isaiah 30:21).

Even when the Israelites were walking in **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, they didn’t always have an easy time. After they obeyed God’s instructions and miraculously escaped from Egypt, they were chased by Pharaoh and his army. At this point, they second-guessed their decision to leave Egypt, as they so often did in the years that followed. And they complained to God and to Moses for bringing them on such a perilous journey.

As they stood between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea, Moses told the Israelites to remain calm, for “*the Lord himself will fight for you*” (Exodus 14:14 NLT). Moses raised his shepherd’s rod over the sea, and the waters parted: “*The Lord opened up a path*

through the water” (v. 21). As a result, *“the people of Israel walked through the middle of the sea on dry ground”* (v. 22).

God truly made a way, where there seemed to be no way. He opened a pathway of escape for the Israelites, even making sure the ground was *dry* for them!

One of the covenant blessings of living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.) is that He promises to be *“an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries”* (Exodus 23:22). We aren’t left alone to fight our battles, for God Almighty offers to fight on our behalf.

When God parted the Red Sea, the Israelites walked across safely on dry land. But when Moses stretched out his hand over the water again, it returned to its original depth, drowning the Egyptian army: *“So the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea”* (Exodus 14:27). Although the Israelites had to trust the Lord and display **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, they didn’t have to lift a finger to fight against Pharaoh’s army.

As you can imagine, this was quite a faith-building display of God’s faithfulness: *“Israel SAW the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt...and believed the Lord and His servant Moses”* (v. 31). The Israelites had been tested greatly, but the result was a great testimony of God’s amazing favor. As the psalmist would write many years later, *“He saved them...and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy”* (Psalm 106:10).

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Are you facing some kind of crossroads or “Red Sea” experience in your life today? If so, pause to ask the Lord to give you His wisdom and direct your steps. Close your eyes and picture the Lord going before you to clear a path of blessing and abundance for you to walk in.
- ✧ When God gave them victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea, the Israelites sang His praises, “*I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; He has hurled both horse and rider into the sea*” (Exodus 15:1 NLT). Take time to review some of the pivotal times in your life when you saw God’s faithfulness and He made a way for you where there seemed to be no way. You might even want to write a song to give Him praise!
- ✧ Exodus 13:18 says the children of Israel left Egypt in “*orderly ranks*.” Pause to reflect on how this might apply to your life today. Are there still some areas of your life where God wants to bring His order?
- ✧ The Israelites were given a vital secret for unleashing more of God’s favor: Giving Him their firstfruits, then going on to live lives of **RADICAL GENEROSITY**. Have you put this principle to work in *your* life up to this point? If not, take a moment to make a new commitment to honor the Lord with the firstfruits of the financial blessings He gives you.



OVERTAKEN BY BLESS- ING AND REFRESHING

God had been faithful to save the children of Israel from Pharaoh's army, but it was a terrifying experience. Imagine being pursued by an enemy much stronger than you...or even *surrounded* by enemies, as King David wrote about (Psalm 3:1-3).

Although we all face attacks from the Enemy from time to time, God makes an amazing promise to those who are living in His favor: Rather than constantly being pursued by difficulties, we can expect to attract and be overtaken by God's blessings.

Deuteronomy 28:1-14 provides a list of wonderful benefits derived from Radical Obedience: *"...because you obey the voice of the Lord your God."* And verse 2 promises: *"All these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you!"*

This is great news if you are facing difficult times today. Just as the Israelites were miraculously delivered from captivity during the

Feast of Passover, your turnaround can come faster than you can possibly imagine. Instead of being hounded by enemy armies, you can be chased by the blessings of God!

In contrast, many people have believed Satan's lie that their life is destined to be just one struggle and defeat after another. Rather than living in expectancy of God's faithfulness and favor, they anticipate a future filled with hardships—things like sickness, poverty, strife, and depression.

Faith and expectancy go hand in hand, and they are a powerful force in our lives. We tend to attract *whatever* we expect, as Jesus said, "*According to your faith let it be to you*" (Matthew 9:29).

King David had experienced God's love and faithfulness as his Good Shepherd (Psalm 23:1). As a result, he expected a future full of blessings: "*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever*" (v. 6).

Look at the remarkable scope of David's confidence. He would continually walk in the Favor of God (F.O.G.). Rather than having any doubt, he said this would happen "*surely.*" And instead of only receiving a *temporary* burst of blessings, he expected the Lord's goodness and mercy to follow him "*ALL the days of my life.*"

And that's not all. David had a revelation that God's favor would even follow him beyond this present life and into eternity: "*forever.*"

However, sometimes the circumstances of life are difficult. We can be tempted to give in to negativity and complaining, even though we've seen God's faithfulness to us in the past.

For example, the Israelites had seen the Lord do miraculous things on their behalf. No longer were they slaves in Egypt. No longer were they in danger from Pharaoh's horsemen and chariots. A great new life was ahead for them if they would obey the Lord.

Yet the children of Israel still had a lot to learn about trusting God, instead of complaining when times were tough. Three days after their victory at the Red Sea they came to Marah, where they expected to find clean water to drink (Exodus 15:22-27). However, the water there was bitter—undrinkable. What could they do?

God showed Moses a tree to throw into the bitter waters, and they instantly became sweet! The “tree” is a picture of the cross of Christ and **RADICAL FORGIVENESS**. If you are facing a bitter situation in a relationship, in your finances, or in your health, you need to apply the cross and **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** to your situation. In a remarkably short period of time, God can turn your bitter waters sweet!

It's also significant that shortly after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and discovered how to turn the bitter waters of Marah sweet, God gave them a powerful promise about His desire for them to walk in good health:

If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you (Exodus 15:26).

Don't miss this: In addition to being your Savior from sin, God wants to be your Doctor! But He makes it clear that there are *conditions* placed on this promise. In order for Him to be your Healer, you have to take His prescriptions and follow His instructions: “Give attention to My words...for they are life to those who find them and health to all their body” (Proverbs 4:20-22 NASB).

And not only does the Lord offer us salvation from sin and healing from sickness, He also provides us with needed rest and refreshing. After the Israelites left Marah, they came to “*the oasis of Elim, where they found twelve springs and seventy palm trees*” (Exodus 15:27 NLT).

What a joy to discover an oasis after we’ve faced times of trial and stress! Imagine...finding an oasis of refreshing in the middle of the wilderness! Even when everything around you is dry and barren, God can provide you with a place of beautiful vegetation and shade.

But Psalm 84:6 (NLT) says our times of refreshing don’t always happen right away. Sometimes we must pass “*through the Valley of Weeping*” first, in order to make it “*become a place of refreshing springs.*”

The good news is this: When you are walking in the Favor of God (F.O.G.), you can be confident He will take care of you all along the way. In every situation, you can count on Him to make the bitter waters sweet, giving you His blessings, His healing touch, and His oasis of restoration and refreshing.

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Take a moment to assess: Where are you in *your* pilgrimage today? A barren wilderness? A Valley of Weeping? Or places of refreshing springs like Elim? Be as detailed as possible as you honestly describe your present condition and position.
- ✧ Do you presently face “*bitter waters*” in some situation in your life? If so, make a decision right now to apply **RADICAL FORGIVENESS**. This will make the bitter waters sweeter.
- ✧ Ask God to search your heart and show you your expectations about the future. Are you like King David, expecting God’s blessings to follow you, or have you believed the devil’s lies that you’ll have a life of misery and deprivation in the days ahead?
- ✧ Acts 3:19 says “*times of refreshing*” come from the presence of the Lord, and Exodus 15:26 promises that God will be our Healer if we heed His voice. Take time today to draw near to the Lord to enjoy His refreshing presence and to listen to His prescription for your healing. Thank Him for giving you an oasis of refreshing and a healing touch for your body, mind, and emotions.



NOURISHED BY YOUR DAILY BREAD

When Jesus told us to pray for our Heavenly Father to give us “*our daily bread*” (Matthew 6:11), He may have been referring to the account in Exodus 16 where God gave the Israelites “*manna*.” This “bread from heaven” came promptly in the early morning, six days a week. On the sixth day, they received a double portion, since the following day was the Sabbath.

The Israelites received this Manna from the Lord during their entire 40-year trek through the wilderness: “*They gathered it every morning, every man according to his need. And when the sun became hot, it melted*” (v. 21).

This is still a great pattern for us today. Just as the Israelites received a daily dose of manna, we don’t need to wait for days or months to receive the Favor of God (F.O.G.). Because of His great

love for us, He is sending this our way every morning, and it is meant to satisfy our hunger: “*He satisfied their hunger with manna—bread from heaven*” (Psalm 105:40 NLT).

However, we need to be sure we don’t miss out on our daily bread. If the Israelites failed to gather the manna in the morning, it would *melt* when the sun became hot. This example has a number of possible applications for our devotional life with the Lord today:

- ✧ There’s a great benefit in *starting the day* with time in God’s presence and in His Word.
- ✧ Instead of being haphazard about our devotional life, it’s wise to establish a consistent rhythm of receiving our manna from heaven *every day*.
- ✧ Just as the Israelites had to scoop up the manna before it melted, there should be an *urgency* and *passion* in our hearts to receive our spiritual sustenance from God. Just as we need physical food to nourish our body, we must have spiritual manna to feed our soul: “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4).

One of the reasons it’s so crucial to spend time in daily prayer and Bible reading is that we need to have our mind renewed to see ourselves as God sees us (Romans 12:2). For example, many people desire to live in the Favor of God (F.O.G.), yet they feel unworthy. God’s blessings in their life are short-circuited by low self-esteem—by not seeing themselves as their Heavenly Father sees them.

As the Israelites camped at the base of Mount Sinai, God began to outline the special relationship He had called them to have with Him. He reminded them of how He had miraculously delivered them from the Egyptians and carried them on “*eagles’ wings*” to Himself (Exodus 19:4). By obeying His voice and keeping His covenant, He said, “*You shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine*” (v. 5).

Think of how amazing this statement was. For hundreds of years, the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt. It must have been difficult to grasp that God was giving them a whole new identity and purpose. Yet God declared, “*You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*” (Exodus 19:6). Instead of being slaves, they now were to be *kings and priests*—just as WE are meant to be today (Revelation 1:6).

Referring back to this scene at Mount Sinai, Peter says believers are “*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (1 Peter 2:9). Just like the Israelites, God has given us a new identity—no longer His enemies (Romans 5:10), but His beloved children (1 John 3:1-3).

When we were born again by God’s Spirit, we received His spiritual DNA. John 1:12-13 explains: “*As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*”

While physical DNA stands for deoxyribonucleic acid, God’s supernatural DNA can be defined as “**Divine Nature Acquired.**” By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are God’s spiritual offspring, called to reflect His nature (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Jesus perfectly modeled what the Father's DNA is like. In addition to radically forgiving us, He was radically obedient, humble, and generous. When we follow in His footsteps and exhibit these four traits, we express His DNA and manifest His image. Then, and only then, can we live in God's favor and activate the promises of His Word.

But in order to grow increasingly into the image of Christ, it's crucial that we nourish our spiritual life: *"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good"* (1 Peter 2:2-3 NIV). And as believers, we have the incredible privilege of being *"partakers of the divine nature"* (2 Peter 1:4). And when we partake, our lives are transformed!

Friend, be clear on this: God's plan is not *just* to make your life better—He wants to give you a whole new beginning...a whole new life. The apostle Paul writes, *"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"* (2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT)

Do you see the difference God's favor can make in your life? You're no longer a slave...a victim...or an outcast. The Lord has set you FREE and called you to be part of His *"holy nation,"* giving you a new life as part of His new creation.

When you look at your life today, make sure you're seeing yourself through God's eyes of love. As you commit yourself to a life of obedience, forgiveness, generosity, and humility, He sets you apart as His *"special treasure"*—ready to walk in His blessings and favor.

But in order to walk in the fullness of our new life, we must leave our *old* life behind. Paul describes the radical ramifications of how this approach had impacted him:

I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 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 (Philippians 3:8-14 NIV).

Not only had Paul left some things behind in order to wholeheartedly follow Christ, he considered every other quest “garbage” in comparison. In addition to experiencing a life-changing relationship with Christ through “the power of his resurrection,” Paul also had encountered **RADICAL FORGIVENESS**—“righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”

What a great salvation!

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ACTIVATION STEPS
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- ✧ Paul was pressing forward toward a priceless prize—“*the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*” Take a moment to allow God to search your heart. Is this quest for intimacy with Christ a passion of *your* life, or is it merely a hobby or afterthought?
- ✧ Reflect on the example of the Israelites in gathering manna each morning for their nourishment. To what degree does your devotional life (prayer, worship, and Bible study) follow this pattern? In what ways would you like to establish new routines to grow deeper in your relationship with the Lord?
- ✧ In 2 Corinthians 5:17 (MSG), Paul contrasts our “*old life*” and our “*new life.*” Pause to write down some characteristics of your old life in contrast to the new life you now have in Christ.

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- ✧ After centuries of living as slaves in Egypt, it must have been extremely difficult for the Israelites to see themselves as God’s “*special treasure.*” What are some ways *your* self-image needs to be adjusted as your mind is renewed by what the Lord says about you in His Word?



FATEFUL DECISIONS

Each of our decisions has a consequence, either positive or negative. Hebrews 11: 24-26 (NIV) describes Moses' pivotal decision to identify with the oppressed people of God rather than the royal family of Egypt:

*By faith Moses...**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.*

Moses didn't make the *easy* choice—but it was the BEST choice. He chose a life of faith and **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, because he knew the reward of God's favor would be better than "*the fleeting pleasures of sin*" and "*of greater value than the treasures of Egypt.*"

Notice the phrase “*greater value*.” All of us have things we value and things we don’t. In many ways, our decisions are simply a reflection of what we truly value. We will spend our time, talent, and treasure on things that really *matter* to us.

When we choose God’s best, He always rewards us with HIS best! Like Paul’s example in Philippians 3:8-14, Moses determined in his heart that he would value intimacy with God over the pleasures of worldliness.

Moses knew his obedience to the Creator could not end with the crossing of the Red Sea and the defeat of Pharaoh’s army. He had been assigned the responsibility of leading the Israelites to the Promised Land, and God had equipped him well for the task.

In Exodus chapters 19 and 20, Moses was called by God to the heights of Mount Sinai to personally receive the Ten Commandments—the only man to have seen God’s glory and lived. Although the Lord was inviting *all* of the Israelites to be “*priests*” able to come into His presence (19:6), the people “*trembled and stood afar off*” (Exodus 20:18) when they witnessed the thundering, lightning flashes, and smoke surrounding the mountain. Only Moses went up the mountain and drew near to God.

Again, people faced a decision on whether they would pursue intimacy with the Lord or merely stand “*afar off*.” Only Moses accepted God’s invitation to draw near to Him. He recognized that the Favor of God (F.O.G.) is only found in His presence.

Still today, God is beckoning us to *come near* to Him: “*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you*” (James 4:8). His throne of grace remains open to everyone who desires to “*obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hebrews 4:16).

In many ways, *idolatry* is the very opposite of *intimacy*. After

Moses received the Ten Commandments written on stone tablets by the very finger of God, he returned to the camp to deliver them to the people. But what did he find? The people had turned to idolatry, reveling in rebellion and disobedience (Exodus 32).

Having grown weary of Moses' absence, the Israelites had prevailed upon Aaron to make them a god of gold—a calf. *“Come on,”* they said, *“we don’t know what has happened to Moses. We need a god that will lead us out of the wilderness”* (Exodus 21:1).

As the people danced before the golden calf, God had told Moses of trouble in the camp, threatening to destroy the people for their foolish behavior. But when Moses interceded for the rebellious Israelites, God heeded His plea to spare them.

Nevertheless, as Moses reached the bottom of the mountain, he was stunned by the pagan revelry he saw: *“His anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain”* (Exodus 32:19-20 NIV).

He was particularly livid at his brother, Aaron, who was in charge when all of this was going on. Instead of bowing in contrition and accepting responsibility when confronted by his brother, Aaron just made lame excuses.

Rather than take a stand and exemplify **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** and **RADICAL HUMILITY**, Aaron tried to justify going along with the crowd. This is one of many illustrations in Scripture of how people-pleasing leads to disobedience toward God. As the apostle Paul wrote, *“If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ”* (Galatians 1:10 NIV).

Moses' reaction to the situation was completely different than Aaron's. He was so distraught by the Israelites' sinful behavior that he literally drew a line in the sand, shouting to the people: *“All of*

you who are on the Lord's side, come here and join me" (Exodus 32:26 NLT). He then told the Levites to kill everyone who refused to follow the Lord. As a result of this boldness and **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, about 3,000 people died that day.

From the time of Adam and Eve's sin in the garden to Christ's death on the cross, the wages of sin have always been the same: death (Romans 6:23). Although it must have grieved Moses to issue God's decree, he was obedient and faithful.

RADICAL OBEDIENCE is seldom easy but always necessary. It requires laying aside Self and clinging to God's precepts, even in taking action that is unpopular or controversial. And it recognizes that if we want to unleash the Favor of God (F.O.G.) instead of His judgment, we must be *doers* of the Word and not just hearers (James 1:22-25).

This episode in the history of Israel presents a stunning example of the power of our decisions: *"Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses...Oh, that you would choose life!"* (Deuteronomy 30:19 NLT)

While Moses chose *intimacy* with the Lord, the people chose *idolatry* with false gods. Idolatry comes in a variety of forms, and often it can affect us in subtle ways of which we're not even aware.

Many people today—even some Christians—have been influenced by the popular culture that says there's really little difference between various faiths and philosophies. Relativism is rampant, and the prevailing mindset in many instances is tolerance, coexistence, and "different strokes for different folks."

People have been brainwashed to think "all roads lead to God," and that we shouldn't judge anyone else's viewpoint on the subject.

However, this isn't what the Bible teaches. Jesus told His disciples, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:6). This exclusivity of Christ and the Gospel message was reaffirmed by the apostles when they said, *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

While many people today assume *everyone* will enjoy eternal life in heaven, Jesus made it clear that people's eternal destiny was dependent on having a *personal relationship* with Him: *"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent"* (John 17:3). Yes, there are other "gods"—idols devised by humans—but only ONE *"true God."*

When Moses delivered the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel, the first two were very explicit: *"You shall have no other gods before Me"* and *"You shall not make for yourself a carved image"* (Exodus 20:3-4).

The psalmist David echoed this theme throughout the Bible: Worshipping other gods is not only foolish, but also offensive to the Lord:

*Their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands.
They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see.
They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell.
They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk,
nor can they utter a sound with their throats*
(Psalm 115:4-7 NIV).

Put succinctly, the false gods are DEAD, while our God is *"the living and true God"* (1 Thessalonians 1:9 NIV). He's REAL, and He's ALIVE!

However, each person on earth must make a decision on *who* or *what* they will worship. While some people claim to be atheists, not believing in any god at all, the reality is this: *Everyone* worships something—even if they are just worshiping *themselves*.

Even as believers, we face crucial decisions about our relationship with the Lord. Will we draw near to Him and experience His favor? Or will we ignore His invitation to intimacy and fall into some kind of idolatry instead?

If we want to live in the Favor of God (F.O.G.), we sometimes must take a stand against popular opinion and political correctness. As the apostles declared, “*We must obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29 NASB).

No matter what opposition or conflict you face, cast off idolatry. Choose intimacy and draw near to Him!

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ If you aren't actively pursuing a life of intimacy with the Lord, it's likely that you've been distracted by lesser pursuits or even idols. Take some time to allow the Holy Spirit to search your heart to reveal any ways in which you've been diverted from the wholehearted pursuit of God.
- ✧ Picture yourself transported in time to the scene described in Exodus 19 and 20: The Israelites are gathered at the base of Mount Sinai. While Moses draws near into the presence of God, the rest of the Israelites "*trembled and stood afar off*," telling Moses that they didn't want God to speak directly to them (20:18). Later, these same people who refused to pursue intimacy with God were swept up in pagan idolatry (Exodus 32). If *you* were in this scene, would you be with Moses, pursuing more of God; standing at a distance and just watching the lightning flashes and smoke; or joining the crowd that engaged in a party full of pagan revelry?
- ✧ Take a moment to assess whether you're truly convinced, in your heart of hearts, that Jesus not only is *your* Savior, but also is the only way to eternal life, distinct from all other world religions and philosophies. If this has been a struggle for you, pray and ask God to give you a clear revelation of this in your heart.
- ✧ In Acts 5:29, the apostles declared that we must obey God rather than man. To what degree are **YOU** committed to **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, trusting and obeying the Lord even when your friends and the surrounding culture disapprove?



PRIORITIZING GOD'S PRESENCE

As we've seen, Moses wasn't always popular with people. But He had set his heart on **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** and **RADICAL HUMILITY**, a life pleasing to the Lord. As a result, God told him, "*you have found favor in My sight*" (Exodus 33:12 NASB).

Yet Moses understood that the true *evidence* of the Favor of God (F.O.G.) is having His presence manifested in our lives:

"For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight...Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?" (v. 16 NASB)

Read these words one more time and let them sink in. There are so many different ways people may attempt to "distinguish

themselves” today. Some try to be distinguished by their massive wealth. Others try to gain recognition through their successful accomplishments. Still others focus on beauty, fame, or popularity.

What a contrast such things are to what Moses says here! The Israelites could have tried to “brand themselves” and create a persona based on any number of given things. However, Moses realized that only one thing really matter in the end. He wanted the Israelites to be distinguished by *God’s presence* among them, and he knew that if they walked in God’s presence, they would also have *God’s provision* and favor.

When he was on the mountaintop, Moses was told by the Lord:

There is a place near Me where you may stand on a rock. When My glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove My hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen (Exodus 33:21-23 NIV).

Every phrase in this passage has a profound application for living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.). “*There is a place...*”—a place of God’s favor, where He reveals His glory. God says it’s a place “*near Me*”—a place of *intimacy*. It’s also a *solid* place, where you can “*stand on a rock*.” And notice that this wonderful place is absolutely *secure*. You are hidden away “*in a cleft in the rock*,” and the Lord covers you with His hand.

If you are facing serious problems in your life, there’s no better place to go than into the presence of the Lord. That’s where you can find new joy and a greater measure of God’s favor and provision, as

King David discovered: *“In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore”* (Psalm 16:11).

Jesus said the problems in our lives are like “mountains” that we can speak to in faith and move out of our way (Matthew 17:20). However, while it’s awesome that we’ve been given that kind of power and authority in the name of Jesus, Psalm 97:5 describes another vital key to an overcoming life: *“The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord!”* (Psalm 97:5)

Consider how revolutionary this is: When your “mountain” refuses to move right away, you can use a different tactic—melting away your troubles by entering into the presence of the Lord. In God’s majestic presence, sickness is healed...depression is lifted...addictions are overcome...poverty is defeated...and broken relationships are restored. With one touch from Him, your troubles can melt away like candle wax!

Whether we realize it or not, every one of us is crying out for more of God’s presence. Something inside us yearns to know Him, to experience intimacy with Him, and to offer the only thing we truly have to give Him...our worship.

A genuine encounter with the presence of God brings inevitable change. Either our commitment to Him grows deeper and we become more like our Heavenly Father, or we harden our heart and die spiritually. The Bible is filled with stories of people who met God and went away with a new identity and new mission—but *no one* went away unchanged.

One day the prophet Isaiah found himself surrounded by God’s smoke-filled glory (Isaiah 6:1-10). He heard the majestic worship of seraphim or “burning ones.” So thunderous was their worship that the very foundations of the Temple shook. Although these were

esteemed angelic beings, they humbly covered themselves in the presence of Almighty God (v. 2).

It's no wonder that one of Isaiah's favorite titles for Jehovah was "the Holy One of Israel." He had entered into the presence of God and come away with a renewed conviction of the Lord's awesome splendor and holiness.

But there's a price to pay when we see God in His holiness. That kind of experience causes us to turn from any wicked ways so we can be transformed into His likeness. We yearn to join the heavenly choir in their joyous song of "*Holy, holy, holy.*"

While some people only want to experience the joy or goose bumps found in the Lord's presence, we're told that His glory is "*a consuming fire*"—burning up anything in our lives that displeases Him or hinders His favor. It's a fire that purifies, cleanses, and liberates us from all bondage.

The Israelites were told, "*The Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God*" (Deuteronomy 4:24), and this same truth is found in the New Testament as well (Hebrews 12:29).

In addition to melting away our problems and bringing about greater purity in our lives, the presence of God will also result in **RADICAL HUMILITY**—one of the prerequisites for living in His favor. Prior to his dramatic encounter with the Holy One, Isaiah probably thought he was a fairly righteous person—certainly better than most of his peers. But when he encountered the Lord's glorious presence, the prophet saw he must deal with his *own* sin first. In the bright searchlight of God's holiness, Isaiah saw himself much differently:

Woe to me...I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty (Isaiah 6:5 NIV).

What a powerful example of **RADICAL HUMILITY**, prompted by the stark contrast Isaiah saw between God's absolute holiness and his own imperfect character. This principle is echoed in the words of the psalmist: "*You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence*" (Psalm 90:8 NIV).

Since God's power is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9), He always calls the humble to fulfill His mission. Only when we realize we can do *nothing* without Jehovah are we ready to be used by Him (John 15:1-5). Only at that point of surrender and **RADICAL HUMILITY** are we showered with a full measure of the Favor of God (F.O.G.). More favor is *always* unleashed when we enter into the presence of God, behold the holiness of God, and are transformed into the image of God.

Never forget: If you want to find more of the Favor of God (F.O.G.), the best place to look is in the *presence* of God!

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ACTIVATION STEPS
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- ✧ Reflect on the following statement: Comparing yourself with others will always lead to either pride or envy, but seeing yourself in light of God's holiness always leads to greater humility and favor. Have you found this to be true in your own life?
- ✧ What kind of priority have you made it to spend time alone with God each day? Were there specific obstacles that have hindered you from doing this in the past?
- ✧ Reflect on these words of King David: "*I love your sanctuary, Lord, the place where your glorious presence dwells*" (Psalm 26:8 NLT). Is this kind of passion for God's presence a reality in *your* life? If not, take a few moments to pray and ask the Lord to give you a greater passion for intimacy with Him.
- ✧ The Bible describes a variety of benefits of coming into the presence of the Lord, including joy, peace, problems melted away, transformation, holiness, and humility. As you enter deeper into God's presence, ask the Holy Spirit to show you what your greatest needs are, and ask Him to address them.



A PERSON AFTER GOD'S HEART

The Bible is full of stories of how God's people faced criticism when they sought God's favor through a life of faith and obedience. King David prayed, "*Deflect the harsh words of my critics—but what you say is always so good. See how hungry I am for your counsel*" (Psalm 119:39-40 MSG). Instead of paying attention to critics and naysayers, David knew he needed to hear the counsel of the Lord.

In order to experience the Favor of God (F.O.G.), *you* need to hear the Lord's voice as well—the same message Jesus heard at His baptism: "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" (Matthew 3:17). If your Heavenly Father is pleased with you, everything else will ultimately be okay.

David is a perfect example of the four key components of activating God's Word in our lives and living in His favor. Even as a

young man, he displayed **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, **RADICAL FORGIVENESS**, **RADICAL HUMILITY**, and **RADICAL GENEROSITY**.

God's favor particularly came into view in David's life in 1 Samuel 16, when the prophet Samuel was sent to find Israel's next king among the sons of David's father, Jesse. David was Jesse's youngest son, the runt of the litter, the shepherd who often was separated from the rest of the family. Although David seemed an unlikely candidate to be the next king, he was living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.).

Everyone, including David, must have been stunned when Samuel said that David was God's choice. When Samuel anointed this future king with oil, *"the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward"* (1 Samuel 16:13).

Although none of young David's parents or siblings seemed to think of him as a prospect to be the next king, he had been faithful to the Lord, ready for a promotion. It took many years, but David finally was given a kingly crown—just as YOU can look forward to a crown as God rewards *your* faithfulness one day: *"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life"* (Revelation 2:10).

When David was called home from his duties as a shepherd, he could have hesitated. Yet he displayed **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**—to his father, to his king, and most importantly, to his God. His faithfulness and obedience placed him in the forefront of Jewish history and on the throne that would one day be occupied by Jesus, the Messiah.

Receiving great favor from the Lord, David was given this unparalleled testimony: *"I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will"* (Acts 13:22). Notice that God said David was a man who would do ALL of His will.

What a beautiful statement of David's commitment to **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**! Many people take a "cafeteria" approach to doing God's will, trying to pick and choose the things they want to obey. But David knew that incomplete obedience is really *disobedience*. Instead, he followed the maxim found throughout the Scriptures: "*Walk in obedience to ALL that the Lord your God has commanded you*" (Deuteronomy 5:33 NIV).

And in addition to practicing **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**, David was a perfect example of **RADICAL HUMILITY**. This indispensable trait for unleashing God's favor helped to make him a wise, godly leader rather an egotistical power monger.

David willingly served his father as a shepherd—a job some people might have found demeaning. Although he was greatly favored by God, he had not been privileged to be the oldest son, with the largest inheritance, or one of the sons who served in King Saul's army.

No, it was David's job to rise early in the morning to tend the sheep...and to spend lonely days and nights finding food and water for their care. He was responsible for protecting them from marauders, lions, and bears. But as David gladly submitted to the will of his father, Jesse, God prepared him for a life of amazing favor and blessing.

What a lesson for us today. Today God may be teaching us humility while we're caring for a bunch of smelly sheep, but tomorrow He can make us a king! As James would later write, "*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up*" (James 4:10).

Another sign of David's **RADICAL HUMILITY** was his recognition that he was unable to do anything except through the power

of God. Rather than accept any commendation for his heroic feats, he gratefully credited the Lord for his victories: *“Blessed be the Lord my Rock, Who trains my hands for war, And my fingers for battle”* (Psalm 144:1).

When he defeated Goliath, David recognized that his victory came because he was living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.). Instead of becoming conceited as if he was entitled to the credit, he modeled the principle later written in Zechariah 4:6: *“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord of hosts.*”

David sang about this in Psalm 124:1, saying he surely would have been defeated *“if it had not been the Lord who was on our side.”* Because of God’s favor, there was victory rather than defeat: *“Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth”* (v. 8).

This realization gave David great boldness. He assured King Saul that the Lord would stand with the person who dared to challenge Goliath in His name. Trusting God for victory, he humbly offered himself to be a divine instrument to defeat the Philistines.

Another characteristic of **RADICAL HUMILITY** is that it recognizes God as the Source of every good thing—life, health, opportunity, talent, and blessing. David wrote about this in Psalm 23:1, one of the most powerful statements in the entire Bible: *“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”*

Sheep are dependent on the shepherd for *everything*, and David was confident in God’s faithfulness to meet all of his needs. As a shepherd himself, David had seen God’s miraculous provision and protection for him and his flock. He knew that when he humbly submitted to the Lord’s will as his Shepherd, his life would be full of favor. *“My cup overflows”* (Psalm 23:5 NIV), or as *The Message* paraphrases this: *“You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing.”*

While our modern-day “me first” society acts like we can take care of ourselves without God’s help, the Bible says clearly, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning”* (James 1:17).

Do you want to unleash more of God’s favor? Then follow David’s example. Make sure you’ve humbled yourself to follow the Lord as your Good Shepherd.

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ACTIVATION STEPS
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- ✧ Pause for a few minutes to list some examples of God's faithful provision in your life. Give Him praise for His promise to meet your every need.
- ✧ God testified that David was a person who would do ALL of His will (Acts 13:22). Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to show you any areas of your life where you've *not* been faithful to obey the Lord's will. Repent, request His forgiveness, and ask Him to change your heart so you will fully obey Him.
- ✧ As part of his commitment to **RADICAL HUMILITY**, David was willing to do menial jobs as God prepared him for future promotion. Take a moment to assess whether you have that kind of willingness to humble yourself and be a servant to the Lord and others.
- ✧ One important aspect of **RADICAL HUMILITY** is to realize that everything we have is a gift from God, not just the result of our own efforts, ingenuity, or skill. Prayerfully take an honest look at your heart, asking God to show you whether you have truly been looking to Him as your Good Shepherd and Provider.



KEYS TO DAVID'S SUCCESS

King David exemplified ALL of the major keys to unleashing God's favor: Obedience, Forgiveness, Humility, and Generosity. No wonder the Lord described him in such endearing terms: "*a man after My own heart, who will do all My will*" (Acts 13:22).

However, in contrast to the example of David and other Biblical heroes, lots of things are written today on how to make more money or be more successful through "self-help." These books, magazines, and blogs encourage people to rely on their human ability rather than on the Favor of God (F.O.G.). If someone gains wealth or fame through this approach, we typically call them a "self-made" man or woman.

The heroes in the Bible all realized they couldn't boast of their accomplishments. As the psalmist pointed out, they weren't "self-made," after all: "*Know that the Lord, He is God; it is **He** who has made us, and not we ourselves*" (Psalm 100:3).

RADICAL HUMILITY understands that we can't take credit for the blessings in our lives. Everything we have and everything we are is a product of God's grace instead of our own merit or good works.

This means you can't consider yourself superior to others in your gifts, appearance, achievements, intelligence, or fortune. Humility and favor fly out the window when you think you're better than others and treat them as undeserving of your courtesy and respect.

You exhibit humility when you rejoice in the successes of others, not pouting when someone else is exalted and you are not. And true humility is demonstrated when you're content to labor for Christ in the background, without accolades or appreciation.

God tells us not to boast of our own wisdom, power, or riches, but only in this: *"that they truly know Me and understand that I am the Lord"* (Jeremiah 9:24 NLT). It's all about HIM, not about us, as the apostle Paul recognized: *"Whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out His special favor on me"* (1 Corinthians 15:10 NLT).

King David was a great model of **RADICAL HUMILITY**. Although he displayed great boldness against his enemies, he consistently gave God all of the credit for his blessings and victories. Praising God's amazing favor, he sang, *"Through **God** we will do valiantly, for it is He who shall tread down our enemies"* (Psalm 60:12).

This is important to take note of whether "enemies" are taunting you today. You may not be facing a giant like Goliath, but perhaps you're being attacked in your health, finances, family, or peace of mind. If so, remember what David discovered: Through God, you

can do valiantly. You can tread down your enemies and find overwhelming victory through the Favor of God (F.O.G.).

Humility is often misunderstood, as if we must be a doormat or renounce our self-esteem. But David's example illustrates exactly the opposite: Instead of living a life of failure and victimhood, we can be VICTORS through the mighty name of Jesus!

The Lord proved Himself faithful to David again and again. He was *Jehovah Nissi*, which means "the Lord our banner." He was strong in battle, ever-present during trials, and a light in the darkness. As David's Good Shepherd, He was *Jehovah Jireh*, a constant Provider.

RADICAL FORGIVENESS was another vital key to David's success. The shepherd boy who became king had to practice forgiveness when his father didn't think him worthy to be introduced to Samuel (1 Samuel 16:1-13). Again, he needed to exercise forgiveness when his brothers belittled him in front of the entire army of Israel (1 Samuel 17:28).

Then King Saul became insanely jealous, and David spent years running and avoiding the deranged king. David hid in caves, took refuge in enemy territory, and passed up opportunities to kill his adversary. He radically forgave this man who had caused him so much distress.

Even after all these episodes, David still wasn't finished learning the importance of **RADICAL FORGIVENESS**. He had to forgive his son Absalom, who tried to snatch the kingdom of Judah from him. Even amid Absalom's rebellion and attempted coup, David prayed for his safety and was heartbroken when he received news of his son's death: "*My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you*" (2 Samuel 18:33 NIV).

King David's example of Radical Forgiveness is amazing, as he forgave his father, his brothers, King Saul, his son Absalom, and others who had wronged him. However, this was just a foreshadowing of an even *greater* king who would one day come on the scene: King Jesus! As Jesus hung dying on the cross, He cried out on behalf of those who crucified Him, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do*" (Luke 23:34).

Those powerful words of forgiveness and reconciliation weren't intended only to cover the Romans or the Jewish leaders involved in His crucifixion. Nor even just to extend to the people alive during Jesus' death and resurrection. Instead, Jesus was asking the Father to forgive *each one of us* who comes to Him in faith. Because of His amazing grace and forgiveness, we've been invited as His blood-bought children to come to His banqueting table and enjoy His life-changing favor.

RADICAL FORGIVENESS is an astounding magnet for the Favor of God (F.O.G.). When you live a life of forgiveness, you relinquish the right to retaliate. However, this doesn't lessen the price the one who has harmed you must pay. There are consequences to the choices people make, and your forgiveness doesn't shield the offender from those consequences.

But as you set the offender free, **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** sets *you* free. It enables you to move forward, living your life in God's grace and peace instead of bitterness and resentment.

And remember: Jesus is extending his forgiveness to **YOU** today. Don't let *anything* hold you back from coming boldly into His presence and receiving His favor!

Near the end of his life, David also displayed the power of **RADICAL GENEROSITY**. It was his desire to build a permanent

house for God in Jerusalem—a lavish Temple worthy of the King of the Universe. But God spoke to the prophet Nathan that Solomon, David's son and successor, should be the one to build the Temple.

Instead of being upset by this, David amassed a large quantity of costly materials—gold, silver, and precious stones—to build and adorn the Temple. This amounted to three thousand tons of gold and 30 thousand tons of silver. The Temple in Jerusalem was built and extravagantly furnished because of David's generous, sacrificial offering.

It's stunning that David would give so radically to this project, knowing he would never see the fruits of his labor. No wonder God loved him and showed him such incredible favor. He was a “*cheerful giver*,” after all, as Paul would later describe: “*Let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver*” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

And no wonder David reaped such a harvest of blessings from the Lord. Through **RADICAL GENEROSITY**, he had sown bountifully into God's kingdom and the lives of others (2 Corinthians 9:6). He was a GIVER, and he unleashed the benefits of that generosity: “*Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom*” (Luke 6:38).

While it's wonderful to practice generosity toward your friends and relatives, it's much *more* radical to extend God's love, forgiveness, and favor to those who have mistreated you. David's son Solomon describes this well: “*If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; For so you will heap coals of fire on his head, And the Lord will reward you*” (Proverbs 25:21-22).

Don't miss the wonderful conclusion of this verse. When you practice **RADICAL GENEROSITY**—toward your enemies, in addition to your friends and family—“*The Lord will reward you.*”

Solomon also writes, “*He who has a generous eye will be blessed, For he gives of his bread to the poor*” (Proverbs 22:9). You see, God rewards generosity. It’s a powerful way to set in motion a new level of favor in your life.

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Pause to consider whether you've fallen into the seductive philosophy of the world that you can be a "self-made" person, achieving success on your own terms without recognizing your need for God's direction and favor.
- ✧ Take a few minutes to list the things you've accomplished in your life. Now do as King David did, acknowledging God's role in blessing you and giving you success.
- ✧ David didn't have to extend **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** just once or twice, but multiple times during his lifetime. When you look back on your own life, list the people you've already forgiven—and any you still need to forgive. Do your best to "clean the slate" of offenses before you go to bed tonight.
- ✧ Pause for a few minutes to pray and ask God to show you ways you can be more generous—even toward those who have wronged you. Is there some act of **RADICAL GENEROSITY** He is leading you to do, even before the week is over?



FAVOR LOST AND REGAINED

Jesus' Parable of the Prodigal Son is a powerful illustration of how the Favor of God (F.O.G.) can be lost, and how it can be regained. We're told little about the wayward son, but much can be surmised from the experiences of others who've walked away from God and chosen a life of debauchery.

This story beautifully depicts a father's love and **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** for a lost child, and it's a picture of our Heavenly Father's willingness to graciously shower us with blessings when we return home to Him.

You probably know the story well. A loving father had two sons. The younger was a playboy—seeking pleasure, partying, and catering to his friends. He shirked his responsibilities for a life of self-indulgence. This son thought he had it made when his father agreed to give him his inheritance early, enabling him to move to a faraway land where he would answer to no one.

This adventurous and foolhardy young man had great expectations but ended up LOST, just like the lost sheep and lost coin described by Jesus earlier in Luke 15. Soon after receiving one-third of the estate from his anguished father, this son set off for a distant country and “*squandered his wealth in wild living*” (v. 13 NIV).

He had dreamed of a life without inhibitions, and initially all had seemed to go well. Replete with treasure, he wine and dined his friends, indulged in drunken revelry, and engaged in unrestrained lusts. However, when his money ran out, the prodigal found himself without a friend in the world.

What a warning this story sounds to anyone who thinks they can experience an “abundant life” outside of God’s will. Even a large stash of money won’t bring happiness unless you have a loving personal relationship with God and are pursuing His favor through **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** instead of arrogantly seeking your own way.

Bowed and broken, the prodigal finally went to the local pig merchant and pled for any menial task available. Soon he was doing the most demeaning task any Jew could have been given—working in a pigsty. He was so hungry that even the husks he fed the swine looked like a feast.

Meanwhile, the distraught father watched and prayed for his wayward son to return. He paced the rooftop each evening, gazing down the road in hopes of catching a glimpse of his beloved younger son. The father had long ago extended **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** to his child, and he yearned to see his son again and have him home, safe and sound.

One day, the father’s prayers were answered. The prodigal “*came to his senses*” and decided to humble himself and return to his father (Luke 15:17-19 NIV). A full turnaround was coming, but first there had

to be a pivot toward a new direction—back toward the Favor of God (F.O.G.).

The prodigal's turnaround began when he embraced **RADICAL HUMILITY** and faced the reality of his sins: "*Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you*" (Luke 15:18). When the light of conviction and hope finally penetrated his mind, the wayward young man concluded that although he was unworthy to be considered a son again, perhaps his father would allow him to work as a laborer in the family business. But the father had other plans for his son.

Just like our Heavenly Father, this man constantly watched for his son's return. Spotting someone in the distance, he dropped everything, tucked in his robe, and sped toward the approaching traveler. Notice that after the rebellious son took his first steps toward home, his father enthusiastically ran to greet him.

Jesus' story presented a scenario quite contrary to the customs of that day. If a son wasted his birthright, it was Jewish custom that he would undergo *kezazah*—a cutting-off ceremony. In a display of total rejection, a large pot would be smashed before the prodigal while people shouted, "You are now cut off from your people!"

However, to spare his son this shame, the father in Jesus' parable wanted to reach the young man before he entered the village. As he ran down the road, he would have amassed a throng of curious followers who saw his unusual actions. And by lovingly embracing his son before the entire town, the father prevented any attempt to bring scorn or rejection on the repentant prodigal.

The returning son barely stammered out his apology, when his overjoyed father grabbed him and embraced him tightly. He yelled for the servants to bring the best robe—likely one of the father's own. It was a sign of worth and of devotion, showing that the son was loved

and accepted by his father. The servants were told to bring a ring for the long-lost child's hand—a sign of influence and relationship. And sandals were placed on his feet—indicating that he was not to be a servant, but a son!

Then the father shocked everyone by calling for the fattened calf to be killed—something ordinarily reserved for special occasions like the Day of Atonement. “*Let’s have a feast and celebrate,*” he said, “*For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found*” (Luke 15:23-24).

This was no ordinary celebration. The son deemed lost had returned, and it was time to rejoice in the goodness of God. The father’s **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** and **RADICAL GENEROSITY** paved the way, turning what would have been a funeral under the law, into a celebration of restoration and new life.

Perhaps the father recalled the words of King David, who experienced God’s forgiveness and restoration in his own life:

[The Lord] does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him (Psalm 103:10-13 NIV).

The Favor of God (F.O.G.) is cause for a celebration, don’t you think? When we return to the Lord and receive His loving embrace, great rejoicing can begin. Even though our journey home will require **RADICAL HUMILITY**, we can be confident that our Heavenly

Father will *run* to greet us when we take steps in His direction. As the apostle John pointed out so beautifully, *“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”* (1 John 3:1 NIV).

So remember: When you return home to the Father’s house, you’ll never have to worry about rejection: *“Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us—who was raised to life for us!—is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us”* (Romans 8:33 MSG).

Instead of merely putting you on “probation” when you return, *“you get a fresh start, your slate is wiped clean”* (Psalm 32:1 MSG). In addition, the Lord will unleash an incredible flood of supernatural love and favor, even singing love songs to you: *“Your God is present among you...Happy to have you back, He’ll calm you with His love and delight you with His songs”* (Zephaniah 3:17 MSG).

Don’t procrastinate a moment longer. The Father is waiting! *“Come, let us return to the Lord”* (Hosea 6:1 NIV).

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ When we humble ourselves, acknowledge our sins, and come before the Lord, He is faithful to forgive us and cleanse us. Isaiah 1:18 says, *“Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.”* If you’ve asked God for forgiveness, make sure you’re not continuing to wallow in defeat or condemnation. Take a moment to give thanks to the Lord that *“He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

- ✧ One of the biggest lies of the devil is to tell us we’ve done something so bad that God will not forgive us. Have you ever struggled with such thoughts? If so, review Paul’s words in Romans 8:1: *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”* Take a moment to thank God for His grace and mercy in forgiving you, not based on your merit but because of Christ’s death for you on the cross. Rejoice that there’s NOTHING you can ever do to separate you from the love of God (Romans 8:35-39).

- ✧ In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the father forgave his son and wiped the slate clean of all his misdeeds. But he also did much *more* than that, showering him with great affection and favor. Do you have this kind of affectionate, intimate, favor-filled relationship with your Heavenly Father? If not, pause and ask Him to draw near to you, remembering the words of *“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you”* (James 4:8).

- ✧ The older brother was close to the father in geographical terms, but his *heart* was distant—perhaps even more so than the prodigal. He was unable to extend **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** to his brother or join the celebration when he returned. What are some of the factors that caused him to miss out on experiencing the Favor of God (F.O.G.) in his life?



THE PERFECT PAT- TERN AND PROVISION

Although the Bible is filled with stories of men and women who unleashed the Favor of God (F.O.G.) through Obedience, Forgiveness, Humility, and Generosity, there is One example far greater than all. In fact, He's the *perfect* pattern—our Lord Jesus Christ.

No one could ever match His obedience to the Father in offering His life; His humility in coming to earth as a man and a servant of humanity, even washing His disciples' feet; His forgiveness to those who crucified Him; and the most generous act in all of history—His selfless sacrifice that now provides us with the gift of salvation.

Pause for a moment to give thanks to the Lord Jesus for being our perfect model. Hebrews 2:10 (NIV) says, *"In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God...should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what He suffered."*

Scripture makes the remarkable statement that “*Jesus is not ashamed to call [us] brothers and sisters*” (Hebrews 2:11 NIV). And we are called, as God’s beloved sons and daughters, to follow in the footsteps of our wonderful Savior.

Consider the **RADICAL HUMILITY** of our Lord; He gave up the grandeur of heaven to become a man! The King of Kings laid aside His glory, His robes, and His scepter. Clothing Himself in flesh, He took on the frailties of humanity and became the sacrifice for sin. He temporarily left heaven behind in order to rescue us and bring us with Him to heaven.

Christ humbly relinquished His rights. He surrendered His omniscience, His omnipotence, and His omnipresence. He became dependent on His mother for food and clothing. He took on scorn, rebuke, unbelief, anger, and hatred. He was arrayed not in splendor, but in homespun cloth. His feet walked not on streets of gold, but on the dusty roads of Palestine. He was subject to the authority of His parents, even as He perfectly submitted to His Heavenly Father.

The Savior left heaven to become the Son of Man that we might become sons and daughters of God and ultimately have a home in heaven. As Paul writes, “*You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that by His poverty He could make you rich*” (2 Corinthians 8:9 NLT)

Our Lord Jesus was also the epitome of **RADICAL GENEROSITY**. No one will ever exceed His example of radical giving. He gave up the perks of heaven. He gave people new health, new hope, and new beginnings. And then He gave His life for all—even those who hated Him and who caused His death:

when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6-8 NIV).

This is very important to understand. Although someone might be willing to be generous, or even die for a loved one, hardly anyone would give their life for an enemy. Yet this is exactly what Jesus did for us. He loved us *“when we were at our worst”* (Romans 5:10 MSG), and He *“has made us friends of God”* (Romans 5:11 NLT).

You’ve probably heard stories of people who crave access to political leaders, such as presidents, prime ministers, and other powerful dignitaries. But Jesus Christ gave us something far greater than that: access to God the Father, ruler of the universe!

When Jesus uttered the words, *“It is finished!”* (John 19:30) and breathed His last breath on the cross, the veil in the Temple was torn from the top to the bottom (Mark 15:38). Through the blood of Christ, it became possible to enter into the Holy of Holies—the very presence of God—and offer prayers and petitions directly to Him.

What a magnificent gift! No longer was it necessary to be a high priest and then wait for a specific day or festival to enter God’s presence. Because of Jesus, every believer has been given the gift of unlimited access to the throne room of Almighty God! Jesus’ promise to His disciples is still true for us today: *“You will have complete and free access to God’s kingdom, keys to open any and every door: no more barriers between heaven and earth”* (Matthew 16:19 MSG).

It's because of Christ's **RADICAL FORGIVENESS** and **RADICAL GENEROSITY** that we all have an opportunity to experience the Favor of God (F.O.G.) during our sojourn on earth. But His amazing favor goes far beyond this lifetime. As David observed, our earthly life is just a drop in the bucket compared to eternity: *"My entire lifetime is just a moment to you; at best, each of us is but a breath"* (Psalm 39:5 NLT).

Jesus described the eternal home He was going to prepare for us: *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also"* (John 14:1-3).

Isn't that exciting? As His followers, Jesus not only promised us His favor on earth, but better yet, He's preparing a place of *eternal* favor for us in heaven as well. As Paul writes, *"There's more life to come—an eternity of life! You can count on this"* (Titus 3:7 MSG).

So what does our heavenly home look like? Paul the apostle quotes Isaiah the prophet on this: *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him"* (1 Corinthians 2:9, Isaiah 64:4).

Artists who try to paint the splendor of heaven always come up short, simply because it's impossible for the human mind to conceive the grandeur of God's house. And one reason it's impossible to do justice to the majesty of heaven is that its beauty is totally overshadowed by the presence of God Almighty.

John saw amazing visions of eternity: a new heaven, new earth, new Jerusalem, new river of life, and new tree of life (Revelation 21 and 22). He saw a day when the curse of pain and death would be

gone, tears would be wiped away, and the leaves of the tree of life would bring healing to the nations. Best of all, we will see the Lord face-to-face.

You see, the *best* of God's favor is yet to come, and how you live your life here on earth will have a direct relationship to what you'll find awaiting you in heaven. Fantastic favor, grace, and glory await you when you've lived a life of Obedience, Forgiveness, Humility, and Generosity. You will be greeted with these wonderful words of favor: *"Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord"* (Matthew 25:21).

What an incredible finale to a life lived in the Favor of God (F.O.G.)! We have great hope, not just for this present life, but also for the life to come!

ACTIVATION STEPS

- ✧ Review the life of Jesus, meditating on how He perfectly modeled each of the four traits that unleash God's favor: Obedience, Forgiveness, Humility, and Generosity.
- ✧ Pause for a moment to reread the heavenly greeting Jesus described: "*Well done, good and faithful servant,*" reflecting on how they apply to your life today. Are YOU a "*faithful servant,*" humbly obeying your Master? Have you been a good steward of the "*few things*" He has given you, ready to be made the "*ruler over many things*" in eternity?
- ✧ One of the most life-changing revelations you can ever have is to recognize that this world is not your ultimate home, because "*We're citizens of high heaven!*" (Philippians 3:20-21 MSG). In your own words, describe some of the ramifications of being a citizen of heaven. How would your life be changed today by focusing on "*things above*" rather than on "*earthly things*"? (Colossians 3:1-4 NIV)
- ✧ Reflect on one of the themes of John's heavenly vision, found in Revelation 21:5: "*Behold, I make all things new.*" Notice that He doesn't promise to make just *some* things new—He says "*ALL things!*" As you consider your life today, what are some of the things you want God to "make new"? Your health? Your finances? Your marriage? Your children? Your emotions? Although John's vision focuses on a future day, the renewal process can start TODAY as the Lord releases more of His favor in your life!

A FINAL WORD

ONE MORE THING

Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus had a final meal with His disciples. For three years, He had lived with them...taught them...and poured His life into them. But now it was time for some final words of encouragement and instruction.

Among the reminders Jesus gave His disciples that night, He said, “If you *know* these things, *blessed* are you if you *do* them” (John 13:17).

What a powerful statement this is! It wasn’t enough for Jesus’ disciples to KNOW the things He had told them. In order for His blessings and favor to be unleashed in their lives, they also had to DO the things He had told them to do. They had to become *doers* of the Word, not merely hearers (James 1:22-25)

My friend, this is my final challenge to *you* as well. For 30 days, we’ve examined and applied some life-changing truths

about living in the Favor of God (F.O.G.). However, the truths will only be life-changing to the extent that you practice **RADICAL OBEDIENCE** and put them into practice. This obedience—along with Forgiveness, Humility, and Generosity—will transform every area of your life, enabling you to withstand every storm and trial that comes your way (Matthew 7:24-27).

My prayers are with you, and I'm confident the *rest* of your life can be the *best* of your life!

—Mike Evans



MICHAEL DAVID EVANS, the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author, is an award-winning journalist/Middle East analyst. Dr. Evans has appeared on hundreds of network television and radio shows including *Good Morning America*, *Crossfire* and *Nightline*, and *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, and on Fox Network, *CNN World News*, NBC, ABC, and CBS. His articles have been published in the *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *Washington Times*, *Jerusalem Post* and newspapers worldwide. More than twenty-five million copies of his books are in print, and he is the award-winning producer of nine documentaries based on his books.

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