



ABIDING IN GOD'S FAVOR

THE PURSUIT OF WHAT PLEASES GOD

STUDY BY RICHARD ELWELL

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A decorative graphic consisting of four horizontal stripes of equal width, stacked vertically. From top to bottom, the colors are red, blue, orange, and red.

RICHARD ELWELL



WHY IDEAS MATTER.

Ultimate Outcomes is a non-profit organization founded on the fruit of the 30 plus years Pastor Richard Elwell and his wife Marty spent in church ministry, developing studies that would help their congregants discern and apply God's truth. Richard was a firm believer that the outcomes in our lives are a result of what ideas we choose to believe and follow.

After Richard died of a rare liver disease in 2018, Ultimate Outcomes has taken on the mission of sharing the Elwell's insights with all people who desire to live a better life and are willing to look to God for understanding of the way they are to go. To that end it makes available for free download on its website: Bible studies, Sunday school curriculum, and sermon podcasts.

Richard earned a Master of Divinity degree from the International School of Theology and was the founding and senior pastor at University Park Church, San Bernardino, CA for over 30 years. His passion was always to make God's truth understandable and applicable to all who hunger for it. Marty holds a Master's Degree in Teaching Processes from Claremont Graduate University. Her passion has been to train women and provide curriculum for parents who want to raise up their children up in the ways of the Lord.

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STUDY PURPOSE

When we enter into a relationship with God through Christ, we want him to look on us with favor. If God looks on us with favor that means we are doing what pleases him. This study will examine what pleases God and gains his favor and what having his favor means for us.

1

SEEKING GOD'S FACE

INTRODUCTION

1. What does it mean to have someone's favor?
2. What are things we do to gain the favor of another person?
3. Why is gaining another person's favor important to us?
4. What would cause us to be reluctant to seek the favor of another?
5. Why would having the favor of one person be more important to us than that of another person?
6. What are the pros and cons of seeking God's favor?

KEY VERSE

PSALM 105:4

Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.

What does it mean to look to the Lord's strength and seek God's face always?

LESSON FOCUS

The focus of this lesson is to introduce the idea of seeking God's favor by looking at the often-used Old Testament analogy of seeking God's face.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

THE BLESSING OF GOD'S FACE

Numbers 6:22-26

²² The LORD said to Moses, ²³ "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: ²⁴ ""The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.'"

What does it mean to have God's face shine upon us?

Psalm 13:1-6

¹ How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?
² How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?
³ Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;
⁴ my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall. ⁵ But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. ⁶ I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.

1. What happens when God hides his face from us?
2. What is at stake in gaining God's acceptance and favor?

Ezra 9:5-15

This is the prayer of Ezra when he went back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple after the Jews had been in exile in Bablyon.

⁵ Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God ⁶ and prayed:

“O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. ⁷ From the days of our forefathers until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today.

⁸ “But now, for a brief moment, the LORD our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary, and so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage. ⁹ Though we are slaves, our God has not deserted us in our bondage. He has shown us kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia: He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem.

¹⁰ “But now, O our God, what can we say after this? For we have disregarded the commands ¹¹ you gave through your servants the prophets when you said: ‘The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other. ¹² Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them at any time, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it to your children as an everlasting inheritance.’

¹³ “What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, you have punished us less than our sins have deserved and have given us a remnant like this. ¹⁴ Shall we again break your commands and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor? ¹⁵ O LORD, God of Israel, you are righteous! We are left this day as a remnant. Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence.”

1. What caused Ezra to be reluctant to show his face to God?
2. What keeps us out of God's presence?
3. Why is the cross of Christ necessary to enable us to come into God's presence and seek his face?

Hebrews 10:16-22

¹⁶ *“This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”*

¹⁷ *Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”*

¹⁸ *And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.*

¹⁹ *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,* ²⁰ *by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,* ²¹ *and since we have a great priest over the house of God,* ²² *let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

What gives us confidence to seek God’s face?

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. What causes people to pursue or seek after something?
2. In pursuing one thing, what happens to other things?
3. What does the pursuit of God’s favor entail?
4. To pursue God’s favor what do we have to leave behind?
5. What would cause a person be favored by one person at the same time being disfavored by another?
6. Who will disfavor us if we seek after God’s favor?
7. Why is it foolish not to desire and seek after God’s favor?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

THE VALUE OF GOD'S FAVOR OVER MAN'S FAVOR

Psalm 108:11-12

¹¹ Is it not you, O God, you who have rejected us and no longer go out with our armies? ¹² Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless.

1. Why does the Psalmist say that the help of man is worthless compared to that of God?
2. Why is it foolish to seek the favor of people over God's favor?



Remember: It's impossible to have both the favor of man and God simultaneously. If you prioritize seeking the favor of others, you may end up forfeiting the favor of God.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. What kinds of actions/attitudes would show that a person is truly pursuing God and his favor?
2. Are those kinds of actions/attitudes apparent in your pursuit of God?

PRAYER

Thank God that he is God and the source of all that is good and beneficial. Pray that seeking his favor would be your focus and that you would be aware of anything you are seeking more than him.

2

The Relationship of Humility and Arrogance to God's Favor

INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. What does the command in Psalm 105:4 "to seek God's face always" mean?
2. In what ways does God's face show either his favor or disfavor?
3. What is at stake in gaining or failing to gain God's favor?

LESSON FOCUS

There are characteristics God favors and ones he disfavors. The focus of this lesson is to examine the characteristics of humility and arrogance and how they relate to God's favor.

Psalm 131:1-2

¹ My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. ² But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

What does it mean to be humble?

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

GOD FAVORS THE HUMBLE

Psalm 138:6

⁶ Though the LORD is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar.

1. What does the phrase “God looks upon the lowly” mean?
2. Why does God in his exalted position favor the humble?
3. What is difference between the response of God and people of high position to the humble?

1 Peter 5:5-11

⁵ *Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

⁶ *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*

⁷ *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

⁸ *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.* ⁹ *Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*

¹⁰ *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.* ¹¹ *To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

1. What does God promise the humble?
2. What is the connection between suffering and humility?
3. Why is perseverance an important companion to humility?

Luke 14:7-11

⁷ *When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable:* ⁸ *“When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited.* ⁹ *If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.* ¹⁰ *But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests.* ¹¹ *For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

What is the paradox of humility?

Matthew 18:1-4

¹ At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

² He called a little child and had him stand among them. ³ And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Why is humility a prerequisite to entering into God’s kingdom?

Proverbs 16:4-5

⁴ The LORD works out everything for his own ends—even the wicked for a day of disaster.

⁵ The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.

Psalms 31:23

Love the LORD, all his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full.

Why does arrogance disqualify us from receiving God’s grace?

THINKING IT THROUGH

CHRIST IS OUR EXAMPLE

Matthew 11:28-29

²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

John 13:12-17

¹² When [Jesus] had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. ¹³ “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

How does Christ’s humility increase his greatness?



Example: George Washington is an example of a great leader who was humble. At Valley Forge, he endured alongside his men who were suffering due to a lack of provision. He cared deeply about the men who were under his command. They knew that and loved him in return.

Matthew 20:25-28

²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

1. Who did Jesus say would be great?
2. How does being a humble servant bring honor?
3. Why can't we be humble toward God without at the same time being humble toward each other?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

CHRIST'S HUMILITY

Philippians 2:1-9

¹ If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

Why would Paul's joy be made complete when we are humble toward each other the way Christ was humble toward us?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. What are some ways you can express your humility toward God?
2. What are some ways you can express your humility toward others?
3. Is God calling you to wash the feet of someone in particular?

PRAYER

Thank Christ for his love and care for you, that he gave up his high position to rescue you. Pray that you would have a right view of yourself in relation to him and truly walk in humility in the way you relate to him and others.

3

The Relationship Between Gratitude and Ingratitude to God's Favor

INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. Why is God's approval important to us?
2. Why does God favor the humble over the arrogant?



Note: Humility corresponds to God's own nature. It is interesting to note that the capricious, evil, arrogant gods of myths and false religions favor arrogant, crafty, cunning, self-righteous people.

LESSON FOCUS

This lesson will look at God's response to both gratitude and ingratitude.

1. What causes people to be grateful?
2. What is the relationship between gratitude and humility?

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

GOD FAVORS THE GRATEFUL

Psalm 100:1-5

¹ Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. ² Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. ³ Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. ⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. ⁵ For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

1. What do grateful people know about their relationship with God? (vs. 3)
2. What does gratitude toward God give us access to? (vs. 4)
3. What is it about God that we should be grateful for? (vs. 5)

Psalm 69:30-31

³⁰ I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. ³¹ This will please the LORD more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hoofs.

1. What is the relationship between glorifying God and being grateful to God?
2. Why is our gratitude to God more pleasing to him than our giving gifts to him?

Psalm 50:9-14

⁹ I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, ¹⁰ for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹ I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. ¹² If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. ¹³ Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? ¹⁴ Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High,

Why is the giving of our gratitude to God different from any other sacrifice?

Psalm 149:2-5

² Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. ³ Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp. ⁴ For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation. ⁵ Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds.

1. What is the relationship between our gratitude and God's favor?
2. Why is it an honor for us to be grateful to God?

THINKING IT THROUGH

THE OUTCOME OF INGRATITUDE

Deuteronomy 8:10-17

¹⁰ When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹ Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹² Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹⁵ He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. ¹⁶ He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. ¹⁷ You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.”

What is the relationship between ingratitude and arrogance?

Luke 17:11-19

¹¹ Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷ Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

Why does God look with disfavor on ingratitude?

Romans 1:21

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

How does ingratitude affect our thinking?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

GRATITUDE AND THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Isaiah 43:20-21

The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen,²¹ the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.

To what purpose has God called his people?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. How can you nurture a grateful attitude? (Think about Philippians 4:8 & 2 Corinthians 10:5.)
2. How does our individual attitude of gratitude or ingratitude affect our corporate praise in church on Sundays?

PRAYER

Thank God that he is loving, faithful, and good. Thank him for his blessings and the life he has given you. Pray that you would honor him with your attitude and the way you live your life.

4

The Relationship of Obedience and Disobedience to God's Favor

INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. Why is it an illusion to think we can live well outside of God's favor?
2. Why is humility the consequence of seeing ourselves clearly in comparison to God?
3. Why is gratitude the consequence of seeing God clearly?

LESSON FOCUS

This lesson will examine the relationship of obedience and disobedience to God's favor.

1. Why do we do the things we choose to do?
2. What causes us to want to obey God and follow his ways?
3. Why does God disapprove of our disobedience?

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

LIVING TO PLEASE GOD

1 Thessalonians 4:1-11

¹ Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

³ It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵ not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; ⁶ and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. ⁷ For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. ⁸ Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

⁹ Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰ And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

¹¹ Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, ¹² so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

1. What is God's will for us?
2. What does it mean to be sanctified?
3. Why does our being sanctified please God?

1 Peter 3:1-4

¹ Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³ Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. ⁴ Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

1. Why is a godly woman of great worth to God?
2. Why does our acting right please God more than our telling other people to act right?

Romans 8:5-8

⁵ Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

1. What keeps us from pleasing God?
2. Is everyone's struggle against their sinful nature the same? Why not?

THINKING IT THROUGH

THE ISRAELITES' CHOICE

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

¹⁵ See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶ For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, ¹⁸ I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

¹⁹ This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ²⁰ and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

1. Why does God make obedience a matter of choice?
2. What is the relationship between obedience and love?
3. What is the relationship between obedience and listening to God?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

FAITH AND ACTION

Hebrews 11:6-7

⁶ *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

⁷ *By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*

1. Why are we unable to please God without faith?
2. What is the relationship between faith and behavior?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. How has your life been a demonstration of your faith?
2. What are you trusting in when you disobey what is right?

PRAYER

Thank God that you are able to freely choose to love and obey him. Pray that you would set your heart on him, fully recognize his goodness, and want to do what pleases him.

5

God's Favor: Meeting Our Need for Strength and Security

INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. What are the three characteristics we have studied that God favors?
2. How are these three characteristics interrelated?
3. Why isn't it possible to have two of these characteristics and not have the third?

LESSON FOCUS

With this lesson we will begin focusing on the benefits of being in God's favor by looking at our need for strength and security.

How does our need for strength and our need for security relate to one another?

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

OUR INFINITE SOURCE OF STRENGTH

Isaiah 40:28-31

²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. ²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. ³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

1. How does the strength of God differ from the strength of man?

2. How does our hope relate to our strength?

3. How strong is the strength of our adversary Satan?

Psalm 46:1-3

¹ God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, ³ though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

1. Who can say God is our refuge and strength?

2. When is God's help available?

3. How does our assurance of God's help affect us?

Psalm 91:1-12

¹ He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. ² I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." ³ Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. ⁴ He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. ⁵ You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, ⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. ⁸ You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. ⁹ If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the LORD, who is my refuge—¹⁰ then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; ¹² they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.



Note: A fowler is a person who hunts wild fowl. A rampart is a protective barrier or bulwark.

1. What does it mean to dwell in the shelter of the most high? (vs. 1)

How do we do that?

2. How comprehensive is God's protection?

vs. 3

vs. 5

vs. 10

3. What is the fowler's snare in our life?

4. What would some of those traps be?

THINKING IT THROUGH

THE IRONY OF STRENGTH AND SECURITY

2 Corinthians 12:7-10



Note: The Apostle Paul, who persecuted Christians and then came to know Christ on the road to Damascus, received powerful revelations from God.

⁷ To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.



Note: Relief can come in two ways: removing the burden or strengthening the person.

1. Why is it through our weakness that Christ's power is made perfect?

2. What does Paul mean when he says, "When I am weak then I am strong"? (vs. 10)



Remember: Our strength will fail if we trust in ourselves. We are able to overcome when our faith is completely in Christ.

Luke 22:31-32

³¹ “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”



Note: Just before he was arrested Jesus spoke those words to warn Simon Peter. At the time, Peter said he would be with Jesus to prison and death, but instead, when he was confronted, Peter denied he knew Jesus three times.

1. What made Simon Peter a target of the enemy?
2. What did Peter have to learn about himself?
3. How can we remain safe when Satan tests us?



Remember: The closer we are to Jesus the more Satan wants to destroy us, but the safer we are from his destructive power. God intends to bring us to perfection through affliction.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S POWER

Ephesians 1:15-23

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

1. What is the power of God working in us likened to? (vs. 19-20)
2. What does that mean for our future prospects?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

PERSONAL EVALUATION

Where are you going for strength and safety? How do you know?

Jeremiah 16:19

O LORD, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in time of distress, to you the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say, "Our fathers possessed nothing but false gods, worthless idols that did them no good."

How does Jeremiah's confession relate to the ultimate confession of the nations?

What are worthless idols we often trust in?

Is your confession in the Lord Almighty or in worthless idols? How do you know?

PRAYER

Thank God that he wants to be your dwelling place, your source of security and protection. Pray that you would more fully place your trust in him, his goodness, and his infinite power.

6

God's Favor: Meeting Our Need for Peace and Prosperity

INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. What are the three human characteristics that God favors?
2. What is the relationship between God's favor and God's blessing?
3. How is the withholding of his blessing consistent with God's love?

LESSON FOCUS

This lesson will focus on the benefits of God's favor by looking at the blessings of peace and prosperity.

What is the difference between peace and prosperity?

Proverbs 14:30

A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.

What is the difference between what peace and prosperity bring?

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

GOD'S PROMISE OF PEACE

Isaiah 32:17

The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.

Philippians 4:4-7

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

1. According to the verse from Isaiah, what are the conditions for receiving the blessing of peace?
2. According to the passage from Philippians, what are the conditions for receiving the blessing of peace?

GOD'S PROMISE OF PROSPERITY

Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 8-12

¹ If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. ² All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God:

⁸ The LORD will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The LORD your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.

⁹ The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. ¹⁰ Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will fear you. ¹¹ The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground—in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you.

¹² The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none.

1. What is the condition for receiving the blessing of prosperity?
2. What does the work of our hands have to do with being prosperous?
3. What is a common misconception about God's blessing of prosperity?

Proverbs 17:1

Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife.

1. Which is more valuable: the blessing of peace or the blessing of prosperity?

Why?

2. Which blessing do most people desire more, peace or prosperity?

Why?

Deuteronomy 8:6-19

⁶ Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and revering him. ⁷ For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; ⁸ a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; ⁹ a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

¹⁰ When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹ Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹² Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹⁵ He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. ¹⁶ He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. ¹⁷ You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” ¹⁸ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.

¹⁹ If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed.

1. What can prosperity cause us to become?

2. How does arrogance threaten our prosperity?

THINKING IT THROUGH

RESTORED PROSPERITY

Deuteronomy 30:1-10

¹ When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, ² and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, ³ then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.

⁴ Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back. ⁵ He will bring you to the land that belonged to

to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. ⁶ The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live. ⁷ The LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies who hate and persecute you. ⁸ You will again obey the LORD and follow all his commands I am giving you today. ⁹ Then the LORD your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The LORD will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your fathers, ¹⁰ if you obey the LORD your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.



Note: God instituted the covenant of circumcision to set the Jews apart as his people.

1. What does it mean to have a circumcised heart? (vs. 6)
2. How does God's favor relate to a restoration of prosperity?

Proverbs 22:4

Humility and the fear of the LORD bring wealth and honor and life.

How are humility and the fear of the Lord a key to our physical and spiritual well-being?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED

Psalm 73:1-17

¹ Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. ² But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. ³ For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵ They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. ⁷ From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. ⁸ They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression.

⁹ Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. ¹⁰ Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. ¹¹ They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" ¹² This is what the wicked are like— always carefree, they increase in wealth. ¹³ Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.

¹⁴ All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning. ¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed your children. ¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me ¹⁷ till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.

1. Why is the apparent prosperity of the wicked confusing?
2. What perspective clears up that confusion?
3. Why would it be better for the wicked if they didn't prosper?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. Which do you value most, peace or prosperity? What shows that in your life?
2. What can you do to nurture a humble, God-fearing attitude?

PRAYER

Thank God that he is the source of peace and contentment. Pray that you would see him for who he is and be humble, grateful, and obedient.

7

God's Favor: Meeting Our Need for Meaning and Purpose

INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. Why is there no greater gain than the gaining of God's favor?
2. What does God's favor have to do with our safety and security?
3. What does God's favor have to do with our peace and prosperity?

LESSON FOCUS

This lesson will focus on God's favor and our need for meaning and purpose in life.

1. How does it affect us if we are unable to answer the question: Why am I here?
2. What is the ultimate purpose of the goals we set?

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

SALVATION: GOD'S ULTIMATE FAVOR

Romans 5:1-11

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and

character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

1. In verse 8, how is God's ultimate favor demonstrated?
2. Why did God save us from his wrath? (vs. 2)
3. What is the hope of the glory of God and how does that relate to our purpose in life?

Genesis 1:26

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

What was man's original purpose?

Romans 3:23

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Why is it impossible to fulfill our purpose without salvation?

Romans 8:28-33

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

1. What needs to occur for us to ultimately fulfill our purpose? (vs. 29)
2. How does God's favor insure that our purpose is realized?

Revelation 20:6

⁶ Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

How does this verse relate to God's favor restoring our original purpose seen in Genesis 1:26?

THINKING IT THROUGH

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

Isaiah 64:8

⁸ Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

1. If we are the clay in the Potter's hands, who determines the purpose for our lives?



Note: Clay cannot be anything useful without the work of the potter. Pressure has to be applied to form the pot. Once the pot is formed and fired in a kiln, it can fulfill its purpose.

2. When we view ourselves as clay in the Potter's hands, what character qualities does that attitude produce in us?
3. How do those qualities relate to God's favor?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

CHRIST IN US

Colossians 1:25-27

²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

1. What is the mystery that God revealed through the gospel message? (vs. 27)
2. How does that mystery relate to our purpose?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. How does your purpose for your life match with God's purpose for it?
2. How can you adjust your vision so that your ultimate goal for life is the purpose God has for you?

PRAYER

Thank God that his ultimate purpose for you is to reflect him in your life. Thank Jesus that through his death and resurrection he has made that possible. Pray that you would humbly submit to him so that his purpose for you would be fulfilled.

8

God's Favor: Meeting Our Need for Justice and Mercy

INTRODUCTION

REVIEW

1. What are the three human characteristics that God favors?
2. What is our ultimate purpose in life?
3. Why is fulfilling our ultimate purpose in life dependent upon God's favor?
4. How is our peace and prosperity dependent on God's favor?
5. Why do we need God for strength and security?

LESSON FOCUS

This lesson will look at God's favor in relation to our need for justice and mercy.

1. What is the difference between justice and mercy that makes them seem incompatible?
2. When do we most often feel a personal need for justice?
3. When do we usually feel a personal need for mercy?

4. In terms of other people, which do we usually feel a greater need for? Why?

5. How can God be a God of justice and at the same time a God of mercy?

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

GOD'S FAVOR BRINGS BOTH JUSTICE AND MERCY

Zechariah 1:1-6

¹ In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo:

² "The LORD was very angry with your forefathers. ³ Therefore tell the people: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Return to me,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the LORD Almighty. ⁴ Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices.' But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the LORD. ⁵ Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever? ⁶ But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers?"

"Then they repented and said, 'The LORD Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do.'"

1. What is God's purpose for justice?

2. What is God's purpose for mercy?

3. How are justice and mercy both an expression of God's favor?

Isaiah 30:15-20

¹⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it. ¹⁶ You said, 'No, we will flee on horses.' Therefore you will flee! You said, 'We will ride off on swift horses.' Therefore your pursuers will be swift! ¹⁷ A thousand will flee at the threat of one; at the threat of five you will all flee away, till you are left like a flagstaff on a mountaintop, like a banner on a hill."

¹⁸ Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! ¹⁹ O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. ²⁰ Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them.

1. Why does God long to be gracious?
2. Why is God's justice the precursor to his mercy?

Romans 3:21-26

²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

1. When would God extending His mercy be just and when would it be unjust?
2. Why was it just for God to leave sins unpunished beforehand (before Christ)?
3. Why must God be both just and merciful?

THINKING IT THROUGH

OUR NEED TO BE MERCIFUL

Matthew 18:21-35

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

²³ "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

²⁶ “The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’²⁷ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

²⁸ “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

²⁹ “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’

³⁰ “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³² “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.’³³ Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’³⁴ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵ “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

Why is it unjust to refuse to be merciful?

Matthew 6:12-14

¹² Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.¹⁴ For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

1. In terms of his justice, why will God withhold his mercy to the merciless?
2. How do the three characteristics that God favors, humility, gratitude and obedience, relate to mercy?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

BEING JUST AND MERCIFUL

Micah 6:8

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

1. How are we to combine being just and merciful?

2. When are we to be merciful?

Romans 12:16-21

¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

1. What should be our response to God's mercy?

2. What is our relationship to justice?

3. How does leaving justice to God protect us?

4. How are we to overcome evil?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

PERSONAL EVALUATION

1. How can you increase your willingness to be merciful?

2. When do you cause harm by trying to get justice?

3. When can you cause harm by being merciful?

PRAYER

Thank God that though you deserve punishment for your sin he has shown you mercy. Pray that you would act justly towards others and extend them mercy.

