

The Apostle Paul's Advice for Thriving at Your Job

My conclusion at the end of spring break: I am ... different.

Partly I know this because of the look on my brother's face when he found out I was listening to *Grit: The Power of Passion And Perseverance*, by Angela Duckworth on my 12-hour drive to our mom's house.

"No," he said. "You should be listening to something fun. You're on vacation."

"This is fun," I said. "I like to learn and think and be challenged."

Eye roll.

Then there was my niece, who needed to practice her speech on a live audience. So I listened, and I gave feedback. While I was talking to her, my heart picked up speed, and I sat forward in my chair.

"This is so fun," I thought. "Now this is vacation."

And also, I know I am different because I have Spanish flashcards by the toothpaste in the bathroom.

This is me, and I rarely do well at pretending I'm like all you normal folks, because of course I think the rest of you must be normal and I am the odd duck.

Teaching is the thing for me. Teaching in front of a class. Teaching one-on-one. Teaching with words on paper. Learning for myself so that I'm equipped to teach others. Thinking about lesson plans at 3:00 a.m. Practicing Spanish explanations in the car on my way to work. Scratching Bible study ideas on the nearest notebook. Throwing pens away

because I keep running them out of ink.

So I want to hug Paul when I hear him say, “Whatever you do ...”

Whatever.

Whatever is your thing. Whatever your task.

Whatever you do as a servant.

“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as for the Lord and not for men” (Col. 3:23).

I know Paul is talking to slaves about having an excellent work ethic, whether they’re being watched or not being watched, and I just love that he doesn’t know exactly what they’ll be doing. One servant’s job will be different than another’s job.

“Whatever it is for you –do it with everything you’ve got,” he tells them.

Sit up. Open your eyes wide. Exert full energy. Push for excellence. Refuse to give up even when it’s hard. Put in overtime. Find ways to improve.

Grit, just like Angela talks about on my nerdy audiobook.

Do whatever work God has put in front of you (probably different work than what he has me doing) with grit, as though you’re doing it for the Lord and not for anyone else. {eo}

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What You Should Know About Satan's Power in This Age—and His Final Destination

I receive so many prayer requests about people suffering from demon oppression and possession, so we are going to study and find out what the Bible has to say about Satan and his demons. Who are they? Where did they come from? And more importantly, where is their final destination?

Scripture talks about the fall of Lucifer. He was a beautiful angel whom God created. But he deceived himself and became full of pride because of his beauty, and he thought he was greater than God, his creator. He even deceived a third of the angels to believe his deceitful lie and convinced them to rebel against God with him. Scripture says he fell from Heaven, "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weaken the nations!" (Is. 14:12).

But before he fell, it says that he was the anointed cherub who covered and that he was in Eden, the Garden of God, as well as on God's holy mountain. "

Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, Thus says the Lord God: "You had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold. The workmanship of your settings and sockets was in you; on the day that you were created, they

were prepared. You were the anointed cherub that covers, and I set you there; you were upon the holy mountain of God; you walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, until iniquity was found in you (Ezek. 28:12-15).

But Lucifer was evicted from these places and more importantly, from God's presence, and his name was changed to Satan (the devil). The angels who fell with him are now called demonic spirits, or demons. And God has a place prepared for them called hell. The worst part of this eviction process is the separation from God, Himself. Lucifer's foolish pride cost him everything; he lost it all.

How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weaken the nations! For you have said in your heart, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit also on the mount of the congregation, in the recesses of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High." Yet you shall be brought down to Hell, to the sides of the pit. Those who see you shall stare at you and ponder over you: "Is this the man who made the earth to tremble and shook kingdoms, who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities, who did not open the house of his prisoners? "All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, each one in his own tomb; but you are cast out of your grave like an abominable branch and clothed with those who are slain, thrust through with a sword, who go down to the stones of the pit as a corpse trodden underfoot. You shall not be joined with them in burial because you have destroyed your land and slain your people. The seed of evildoers shall never be renowned. Prepare a place of slaughter for his children for the iniquity of their fathers; they must not rise nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities.

Why was he cast out?

“By the multitude of your merchandise, you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; therefore I have cast you as profane out of the mountain of God; and I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness; I cast you to the ground, I lay you before kings, that they may see you. You have defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your trade; therefore I have brought fire out from your midst; it has devoured you, and I have turned you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all those who see you. All those who know you among the people are astonished at you; you are a terror, and you shall cease to be forever (Ezek. 28:16-19).

“The great dragon was cast out, that ancient serpent called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world. He was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him” (Rev. 12:9).

And this is his final destination found in Revelation 20:10: “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and false prophet were. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” This is a good Scripture to use when he tries to torment you. He fears his destination and does not like to be reminded of it.

Tomorrow, we will discuss why Satan went after Adam and Eve and why he goes after us today.

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Inner Death and Resurrection

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is also a metaphor of what is supposed to happen within us. A resurrection implies that there is a prior death. What does this death and resurrection look like for us?

Paul, in Romans 6:3, explains: *“Do you not know that we who were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?”* Baptism is the ceremony or sacrament that signifies our death to the law of sin that Paul describes in Romans 7:14-8:2. This law is the human weakness that we all share, and not just a theological concept. It is there whether you believe in it or not.

“Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). This newness of life is our resurrection in this life that we can walk in.

“For if we have been united with Him in the likeness of His death, so shall we also be united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him, so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we should no longer be slaves to sin. For the one who has died is freed from sin” (Rom. 6:5-7). We are dead to the hold that the law of sin has on us, which is the human weakness that we all struggle with. “Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away. Look, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). What does this new creature look like?

“Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also

live with Him, knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death has no further dominion over Him. For the death He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life He lives, He lives to God. Likewise, you also consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but yield yourselves to God, as those who are alive from the dead, and your bodies to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:8-14).

The last part of this passage speaks of our resurrection in this present life. It is our victory over the law of sin. The Mosaic Law was not able to produce this.

The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 is what this victory looks like. Those that were under the Mosaic Law did not have the grace to overcome the law of sin. This grace became available with Christ. This why Paul says in Galatians 5:4: "ou have been cut off from Christ, whoever of you are justified by law; you have fallen from grace." Paul says that the Law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. Only Christ was able to fulfill the Law because it needed to be done perfectly in order to have its righteousness. This is why all that were under the Law were cursed; except for Christ, who was the only one who could actually fulfill its requirements.

Our victory over the law of sin is not possible without the Spirit of Christ within us. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). How do we put on Christ in order for this death to life transition to occur? The answer is in the type faith that we apply to Christ. Humility toward Christ is required for receiving from the Godhead. First Peter 5:5-7 describes this humility: "Yes, all of you be submissive one to another and clothe yourselves with humility, because 'God resists the proud, but gives grace

to the humble.' Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time. Cast all your care upon Him, because He cares for you." We unconditionally trust in God and rest our minds on Him from our lust and anxiety—from all of our own understanding. God draws near to us when we draw near to Him (see James 4:8). "And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. While we were yet weak, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:5-6). Christ makes all of this possible.

2 Peter 1:4 says: "By which He has given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, so that through these things you might become partakers of the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust." This is our experience of death to self; and our resurrection in this life. "If you then were raised with Christ, desire those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on earth. For you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1-3). Lust is the thing that keeps us attached to the things of the world. Merely changing our location does not change our attachments because we carry our lust with us wherever we go.

When we have Christ's Spirit within us, we also have the mind of Christ. He not only shares with us the victory over sin that He had on earth; but He also gives us a discernment that is not otherwise available, "For what man knows the things of a man, except the spirit of man which is in him? Likewise, no one knows the things of God, except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, so that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God. These things also we proclaim, not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of

God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things. Yet he himself is not judged by anyone. For 'who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:11-16).

A person without the Spirit can never fully understand the Spirit-filled person; but the Spirit-filled person has the capacity to understand both the natural person and the spiritual.

"Therefore He says: 'Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light'" (Eph. 5:14). Christ shares with us the peace and strength that He has from His faith in the Father. This can only happen when we have Christ in us by our faith in Him. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). This is the true enlightenment that no other spiritual practice can ever produce.

We are to be dead to sin (see 1 Pet. 2:24). "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the age of this world and according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among them we all also once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and we were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and He raised us up and seated us together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:1-6).

Christ fulfilled the Mosaic Law and then nailed it to His cross. His Spirit now contains the righteousness of the Law

because He alone was able to fulfill it. We have the righteousness of the law within us when we have Christ's presence because "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and concerning sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3-4). We have the righteousness of the Law through Christ, without having to perform it ourselves.

"So, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may be married to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead, so that we may bear fruit for God" (Rom. 7:4). This illustrates the transition from the Mosaic Law to Christ for justification or righteousness. Paul compares this to a woman who is obligated in marriage as long as her husband is alive; but when he dies, she is released from the law that binds her to her husband and is free to marry someone else. Because our Husband, Christ, who was under the Law, died, we are now free to marry the resurrected Christ. The Law itself remains but we are not legally obligated by it because of the death and resurrection of Christ. The legal sin for breaking it does not apply to us.

We are spiritually resurrected in our present life, and bodily resurrected into our next life. "So it is written, 'The first man Adam was made a living soul.' The last Adam was made a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45).

"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit that lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if through the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God" (Rom.

8:11-14).

You can download Peter Aiello's book, Hidden Treasure by visiting his web site: .

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Watch Out for This Oft-Ignored Signal of a Fizzling Marriage

Forty years seems like a long time, but it goes by in a flash. Today, my husband and I have been married for that long. I remember when we first got married. It was almost impossible to think of being married that hope that was there became wishful thinking only a few years into marriage.

Mess

This happens to many people, and unfortunately, marriages are abandoned because our mate was not the perfect person we thought he or she was. As a matter of fact, after about five or six years, we begin to think maybe God made a mistake when He put us together. Or we may think, *Did God really put us together in the first place?* Or the most dangerous of all, we think, *I just made a huge mess out of my life by committing to marriage.*

The biggest issue in failed marriages as I see it is one of the two persons has simply given up wanting to connect with the other. Small issues like dirty, smelly socks not being picked up and put in the hamper or the garbage not being taken out become huge issues that shove any caring, concern or love

out of the way. It becomes more about the mess that we are rather than the promise we are becoming.

Dance

Marriage is an interesting dance between two people who are about as opposite as they can be. So we can either learn from each other and become helpmates, a mirror to reflect back to them, or we can become a sledgehammer to smash them to pieces in order to make them like us.

You would not want to marry yourself. You married that man or woman because you were incomplete. Having another person just like you would only make you even more incomplete.

Seeing your mate as God's gift to you to help you learn better how to walk through this life is the first step to lifelong love. Then, each day becomes a beautiful journey of learning and loving.

Communion

After 40 years, I finally love my husband for who he is, not for who I have made him to be. Discovering who he is has become a lifelong adventure, like a gift I unwrap each day and embrace each night.

Scripture says two become one flesh, which is indicated in Genesis 2:24 and reiterated again in Mark 10:8 when Jesus answered a question about divorce. Through these Scriptures, God is indicating one reason for marriage. Yes, He's talking about sex and procreation, but He's also talking about a beautiful communion of two people, which is culminated in one of life's greatest pleasures

Humans, though, have a tendency to pervert any gift God gives us. We do that by wanting more of the delights God has provided for us. So some seek those delights without marriage or outside of marriage.

The bigger issue is, though, we have not really understood what marriage is all about. It's about becoming more than one. It's about allowing God to work in the midst of our marriage to create a strong, deep union that will see us through whatever life throws our way. With Him we form a three-strand cord (Eccl. 4:12), which is not easily broken.

Through Thick and Thin

I've said many times that my husband has loved me through thick and thin, more of the former than the latter. If it had only been about sex there would have been many years he would have left. The fact he stayed and walked with me through all my issues only makes me love him more.

He has not just been my mate, he has been my anchor, my teacher and my lover. However, there was a time that I loved sugary treats more than anything, even more than him. I didn't cognitively realize it at the time, but my behavior revealed the truth.

Gift

God transformed me, restored me and anointed me to share my message with others. I couldn't have done it without the gift he gave me more than 40 years ago when I met a tall, blonde-haired, blue-eyed man of peace who would become my husband for life.

God knew what and who I needed to steady me, calm me, love me and put up with me. He used Roy Irving Parker to train me to be who I am today. Though I didn't always assimilate all the lessons quickly, I finally learned the ones that matter the most.

My husband is created by God to be who he is. I am created by God to be who I am and together with God we are way more than one.

More than One

I am noise.

You are silence.

I am an abundance of words.

You are well-chosen, words.

I am talk.

You are thought.

I am quick reaction.

You are measured response.

I am weak.

You are strong.

I am faltering steps.

You are dancing on the wind.

I am the receiver.

You are the giver.

You pour your love into and over me

And I gladly receive your gift.

Eye-to-eye,

Skin-on-skin,

We wrestle in our exultations

Of one another's differences.

I am center stage.

You are behind-the-scenes.

I am options and research.

You are get-in-the-car-and-go.

I am work and then work some more.

You are work, play, rest.

Your rhythms are set,

Mine bounce with the day.

All through the night, I feel your heart beat

And I am deeply satisfied

To be the one you have been beside

For 40 years and beyond.

It is said there won't be marriage in heaven,

But something even more glorious.

All of life is but a dress rehearsal

For the day we both will be forever with the Creator.

It's beyond our experiences,

Past the brink of this reality,

Still I have known as much on heaven on earth

As one human being can have and still live in the super-abundance of it all.

I am turmoil.

You are calm assurance.

I am shouts of joy.

You are quiet whispers of love.

I am eyes that see.

You are hands that touch.

Me-You-God, and God is the One who knows

This three-strand cord binds us together as more than one.
{eoa}

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What Jesus Would Do to Rescue His Bride? He Will Tell Her The Truth.

"I see you. I called you. I know you. You have been in a holy chamber being fashioned and formed. This conversion from the old into the new sometimes seems hard, and sometimes it is hard to breathe. Glimpses of glory! Keep feasting on Me. It seems lonely at times, but I'm all around. In this season, do not forsake assembling together, not under denomination disasters, but in Me. Family of God, you know Me by the

Spirit. Cling to one another.

THE TRUTH ABOUT HER ENEMIES

“My character is being imparted to you! You are standing—believing the words I have spoken over you. I am doing a great separation, leading my sheep away from all the wolves. Oh, you know them. They have been making merchandise of you. I am removing you away from the false prophets who speak lies over you. My power is above every power. Stand bold. Stand strong. Fight the good fight of faith. I’m with you. Pray without ceasing. This is the time that all the prophets of old long to be a part of—this generation—but I have chosen you.”

THE TRUTH ABOUT HERSELF

“Beloved with dove’s eyes, don’t let those that have been taken captive by the lust of the flesh, pride of life, and filthy lucre deter you from Me. They will lose it all and gain Me back. But you who have been found faithful, not found perfect, but faithful, will inherit the earth. There is a transition coming. You who have come out of the world, you who hate the world and its systems and its ways, you are called blessed.”

Extracted from Smashing Deception in The House of God, by Shane W Roessiger.

In righteousness and justice, in truth and mercy, Jesus, the bridegroom King, is alluring His beautiful bride back. Her freedom is at one click away! Get your free E-book copy now in English, Spanish or Portuguese version.

For more Truth:

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Reignite the Love in Your Marriage With These 5 Healing Tips

Spring has sprung, and although cleaning the house is the normal protocol of the season, why not also take some inventory of your relationship with the one you love? If you feel your relationship has become stale or you've been too busy to give it the time it deserves, try these five tips, and watch your relationship bloom.

1. Prune Away the Assumptions

Before a garden can bloom, one must prepare the soil and make sure there is nothing that will choke the blossoms to come. According to Nathan Feiles, LCSW, couples often struggle with having false assumptions about the other person. Feiles tells us assumptions are toxic to a relationship, and they can "cascade into a snowball of unrealities." Now is the time to clear the air and remove the assumptions that are keeping you and your partner from truly understanding one another.

2. Plant Some Seeds of Bonding

If you want to see flowers, you have to plant the seeds. Intentionally plan to spend more time with the one you love with a standing weekly date that you never miss. Also, start praying together, even if it's just a short prayer in the morning or evening. These moments of friendship and prayer are the most important part of tending your garden.

3. Get Out and Get Sun

Further cultivate your relationship by being active together. A great way to spend time together is during exercise. According to Theresa DiDonato, Ph.D., “a growing body of evidence suggests that couples who sweat together really do stay together.” Start running together, join a class at your gym, or find a dance class nearby.

4. Water the Garden With Fellowship

Shared social identity is integral to a relationship, so let your relationship bask in the company of a community. Make strides towards making friends with other couples, or if you live in an area that lacks community, one study suggests that watching movies together can actually help you create a shared social identity. At there is always something good to watch. Get involved in a series such as *The Encounter* or *Ties that Bind*.

5. Have Patience

Flowers don't bloom overnight. Have patience with your relationship and treasure the moments you spend with the one you love. Continue to listen and share. When you lose hope, let the words of Paul be your guide: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with gratitude, make your requests known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will protect your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6-7).

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Why You Can Have Unceasing Joy No Matter the Heartache

“God gave us free will to choose mind over matter or let the matters of life control our minds. The choice is ours, and that important choice will determine the direction of our faith and our ability to enjoy God’s joy and peace, even when our hearts are heavy. Unsinkable optimism, hope and faith hinge on where we choose to focus our thoughts, not on life’s circumstances.” –Proverbs 31 Encouragement for Today Devotion, “The Year I Didn’t Want to Buy an Easter Dress,” Tracie Miles

I’m not going to lie, today’s P31 devotion was hard to write. I remember the day I described in the devotion so vividly. It still tugs at my heart, remembering the tears trickling down my face while driving home from shopping with my Kaitlyn, after saying those hasty words about not being excited for Easter last year due to the breakup of my marriage and the heaviness of my heart.

I had been leaning so much on my faith and spending time with God every day, even on those days when that was about all I had the strength to do. But yet, my thoughts were still sinking my attitude and my outlook, and as a result, I found myself on the shore of a pessimistic, negative mind.

And I knew that wasn’t where I wanted to land. Much less live. And serious change was needed. Can you relate?

I certainly still have days when I feel sad or angry or frustrated. Days when I wish I had a magic wand to fix all the problems in my life, take away all the fears, and make all my dreams come true. But life is never going to be perfectly positive—so our only choice is to focus on our perfectly positive God and ask Him to transform our minds and the way we think, even when our circumstances remain the same. Our joy

and peace hang in the balance of that decision.

I've learned that I can be happy no matter what is going on in my life—as long I keep implementing the three strategies I talk about in *Unsinkable Faith* and continually practice the reshaping of my thoughts through the power of Christ.

Friend, if I can do it, so can you, regardless of what you're facing today. How am I so sure of that? Because this is the truth Paul shared in the Bible in Romans 12:2a (NLT): "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." These are instructions that promise we can have victory over our thoughts. Isn't that exciting? None of us is too far gone to be changed, and it's never too late to make the intentional choice to think positive!

I promise you this, my friend, you can bet your bottom dollar I'm buying a new Easter dress this year. In fact, you should subscribe to my blog if we're not already connected, because I plan on posting an Easter photo of my three amazing kids and me just to prove it, even if I'm having a really bad hair day. Smiles.

Trust me, I still have some heavy burdens to carry and wounds still trying to heal. There are still problems to sift through, more unknowns to face and more changes to come. But the one thing that will never change is the love and saving grace of Jesus Christ. It is because of Him I can be positive, and it is Him I can be grateful to for helping me learn the value of controlling my thoughts so they stop controlling my life. Not only at Easter, but every day of the year.

My prayer is that you will allow Him to do the same for you. Beginning today. {eo}

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Christ She is the author of two best-selling books, Your Life Still Counts: How God Uses Your Past To Create A Beautiful Future and Stressed Less Living: Finding God's Peace In Your Chaotic World. Her newest book is Unsinkable Faith: God-Filled Strategies for Transforming the Way You Think, Feel and Live (April 2017). She is a contributing author to the popular Zondervan NIV Women's Devotional Bible, and the Proverbs 31 Encouragement for Today Daily Devotional Book, in addition to being a monthly contributing writer for the Proverbs 31 Ministries Encouragement for Today daily devotions, which reach nearly one million people per day around the world with encouragement from God's Word. Tracie also holds the role as COMPEL Manager at Proverbs 31, has 3 children and lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. You can connect with Tracie on her blog at and all social media outlets.

Creating an Atmosphere to Activate Heavenly Help

What is the favor of God, and how do we obtain it? I went to a conference recently called Finding Favor. Some great thoughts were presented, but God had already been talking to me about this concept of favor.

Wisdom

At the beginning of each year I ask God for a word for the year. My word last year was wisdom. Throughout that year, I heard God whisper to me, "Favor follows wisdom."

I kept asking, "What does that mean?" The answer was simply the same. "Favor follows wisdom." And my response was "Huh?"

How?"

I did understand that in every decision of my life I need to ask God for wisdom and as Scripture promises if I ask I will get wisdom to go forward. That means I need to take action and take action I have to have faith, which just happens to be my word for 2017.

We read in James we are to ask for wisdom "in faith, without wavering. For he who wavers is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed with the wind. Let not that man think that he will receive anything from the Lord" (James 1:6-7).

In the Bible, God asked many people to have faith for what they couldn't see with their natural eyes. If you read Hebrews 11 you can find all of the people God singled out as examples of great faith.

Although it would be awesome to be highlighted by God, to be known a woman of great faith means I need to also be a woman who is willing to take great risks.

Though I don't see myself in that light, I know it did feel like a risky step of faith to give up sugar when I began my weight loss journey in earnest. At each juncture, I felt I was taking a giant leap of faith trusting I would fall right into the arms of grace. And every time grace was there waiting for me. Grace didn't have to catch me. On the contrary, it gave me wings to fly over the obstacles and lose over 250 pounds.

What I've been understanding lately is what role faith and wisdom have in the progression towards favor. This is not a formula for favor. We are all God's favorites, but there are definitely some things that we learn as we walk our journeys.

Love

Everything begins and ends in love. God's love is the catalyst. "For God so greatly loved *and* dearly prized the

world, that He even gave His One and only begotten Son, so that whoever believes *and* trusts in Him as Savior shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16, AMP).

That God loves us is a sure fact, but do we love Him? And if we do how do we show it? Do we just say so? Do we walk an aisle and shake a pastor’s hand? Is that all there is to it?

We all know the confession or initial meeting with Him is just the starting point. To walk with Him in love is a lifelong journey of obedience.

Obedience

For me obedience was the next step and it had to come by listening to His voice and following Him. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27, MEV).

Jesus replied, “All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them” (John 14:23, NLT).

This is not a legalistic following or judgmental adherence to laws and rules. It is wanting to follow Him out of love. It’s the same thing we wish for our children that they will want to obey us out of love because we love them and want the best for them, not because we’re bigger, louder and hold their allowances at bay.

So first we love God, then we obey God. But many times, we have problems obeying not for lack of love, but for lack of faith. This is where my word faith comes in.

Faith

Some Scriptures make me feel as if I have no faith at all. Take for instance the verse in Matthew about moving a mountain with a tiny bit of faith. I mean, do I really believe that?

“For truly I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of

mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. And nothing will be impossible for you" (Matt. 17:20).

Faith is an action verb or at least it denotes action. If we don't move forward we don't have faith. It's just wishful thinking. If faith is the substance of things hoped for, then hope is a not wishful thinking. It is a firm belief that what we have faith for will come to pass. If we have that solid, unshakable hope we will step out in faith both on what He asks us to do and what He has promised us will happen.

When we begin to step out on faith, we begin to gain a greater vision for who God is and what He wants for our lives.

More Wisdom

Faith creates wisdom. We can step out and move in circumstances because we have gained experience. We've done that before. It has increased our wisdom and knowledge of what God can and will do in our lives.

We begin to see with the mind of Christ, interpreting things through our supernaturally-inspired eyes. "But as it is written, 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us by His spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:9-10, MEV).

People may call us foolish for doing certain things that we feel God is showing us to do. If they don't know God they cannot understand them because they only see things in a human, limited way. As we begin to have faith and walk in faith, we begin to step into the realm of seeing His will be done on earth as it is in heaven (see Matt. 6:10).

Because we love Him, we will naturally want to obey Him, which will inevitably lead us to step out in faith when He shows us

what to do. This will result in greater wisdom which eventually leads us to favor. How? I'm glad you asked.

Favor

The Bible dictionary tell us that to find favor means "gaining approval, acceptance, or special benefits or blessings from God. ... The favor that human beings receive from God depends on his good pleasure and is often extended in response to prayer or righteous living."

Scripture tells us, "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give favor and glory, for no good thing will he withhold from the one who walks uprightly" (Ps. 84:11).

Some of those who were said to have favor are Jesus, of course, but also Noah, Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Ruth, Hannah, Mary, Samuel and others.

Everywhere you see blessed in the Bible it means spiritually aware, joyful and favored of God, according to the Amplified version. The biblical definition of "blessed" has a lot to do with understanding what favor is. To have favor means being spiritually aware of how God is at work in us.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God's people went to Him and asked Him for favor. They were spiritually aware that they were His children and could ask. They knew their places because they loved Him, obeyed Him, followed Him by faith, and had begun to have the wisdom to see what He was doing.

Perfection and Favor

This is the place God longs for all of us to be. All the people God calls favored were not perfect. We do not have to be perfect to be favored by God. We just have to be willing to follow Him in faith no matter how imperfectly we do it.

We can ask for favor, or God can just decide to bestow favor, especially when giving us favor or promotion will benefit His

cause and the assignment He has placed on our lives.

If we are flagrantly walking in sin, then we are certainly not blameless, and asking for favor might just mean God will show us something we need to rectify first. Favor, though, flows from God all day long in ways we are not even mindful of.

The bottom line is this: Do all that God has shown you to do in obedience. Step out in faith to do things He has shown you even though it seems scary. Ask for wisdom to understand the spiritual lessons you have learned, and then ask for and accept the favor He showers on you.

What do you need God's favor for today? {eoa}

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Protecting Your Child From Cultivating a Lifestyle of Damaging Deceit

Become a lie detector. Don't do it so you can punish liars. Do it so you can speak truth and impart knowledge. The quality of their lives may depend on it.

This is important for confusion and inaccuracies like $2+2 = 5$. But there are more important reasons to be a lie detector.

This is important for lies you hear children tell about others. Maybe they think someone is “always mean” after one negative encounter. Maybe they think a teacher is “unfair” when the grade they received they actually did earn, and the teacher was being fair.

Can you think of recent examples of lies like these that are relevant to your children? Correcting their thinking matters because their beliefs about people influence how they relate to the people.

Especially be a lie detector for lies children tell about themselves. Because identity controls behavior, they can't afford not to be honest with themselves.

- Children who think they're shy when they're really not may avoid all group activities. Maybe they just had one or a few negative experiences with people.
- Children who think they're not creative because of one comment from one teacher or peer may stop believing in their ability.
- Children who decide they're clumsy because they trip once may trip again because identity controls behavior. Maybe they were just in a hurry that time.

Think about your children and lies they may believe. Some may be much more serious than my above examples. Here's what I especially want you to understand:

If you hear your children lie to themselves about themselves and you don't correct them, and they know you heard them, they'll think you agree. That can cement the lie.

- If you hear your son say, “I'm so stupid!” you might respond, “What? I disagree. What makes you think so?” Listen to see if he was careless, didn't study, didn't

do well on something quite challenging and the like. Reframe his understanding: "You're not stupid. You got a few answers wrong on a very challenging test. Don't lie to yourself."

- If you hear your daughter say, "I can't make friends" you might respond, "I'm sad for you because that's probably scary. Is it really true that you can't make friends? Tell me what's going on." You might discover one or two girls she thinks of as friends ignored her, and she thinks it's her fault. Or maybe she talked to someone new who didn't immediately appear friendly. Talk her through this so she realizes she can make friends, but there aren't guarantees.
- If you hear your son say, "I can't play sports" or something along those lines, and you know it's based on one experience, talk up. "Wait, I don't think that's true at all. Let's name sports you do play. And, just because today you didn't play all that well doesn't mean you can't play better. Would you like to practice?"

Again, be a lie detector. Speak truth. Impart knowledge. Increase your child's quality of life. {eo}

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A Simple 3-Point Prayer Strategy to Deepen Your Intimacy With Holy Spirit

The Lord is working powerfully all across the nation to transform the way people pray, moving them from a rather

mundane approach of simply seeking God's hand through a primary focus on requests to a life-changing experience of seeking His face through a worship-based experience. This delights the heart of Christ, since He was very clear in telling His disciples how they should pray. We see this both in Matthew 6:9 and Luke 11:2. He was not just giving them a soft suggestion but a very clear instruction about the nature of biblical prayer. The words of the two passages are not exactly the same but the pattern is crystal clear in both texts. We know it as "The Lord's Prayer."

He is Worthy! We are Needy!

The most fundamental breakdown of these two instances of Christ's model for our prayers is twofold. The first half of the model prayer is "Godward". It is all oriented around God: His fatherhood, His glory, His name, His kingdom and His will. The second half of the prayer is "manward." It is all about our human need for daily provision, authentic relationships and spiritual victory in the midst of a fallen and hostile world.

I like to describe this basic division in this way: "He is worthy! We are needy!" This is the simplest rhythm of New Testament prayer. We seek His face in worship, focused on His worthiness. Second, we trust Him for the pressing needs of our lives.

But, Those Forms!

This pattern is changing the way people pray. Pastors are seeking to embrace, model and teach this to their congregations. It is wonderful to see. But—there is a mechanism that is used in virtually every church, whether on the website or in the bulletin, that still teaches people that prayer is primarily (perhaps exclusively) request-based. This mechanism is the "prayer request form."

By only asking for prayer requests via these intake forms,

even pastors who embrace the New Testament pattern of worship-based prayer are subtly undermining their own efforts. The message these forms sends is clear: Prayer is primarily about man-centered prayer requests.

Praise, Prayer Requests and Purpose

So, what if churches reworked this form to actually represent the pattern and purposes Jesus desires for our prayers? This alignment could be a consistent teaching tool and mechanism to bring a better biblical balance in how the person in the pew embraces prayer. It might even be helpful to remind people of the definition of prayer each week to help shape their understanding. Here is a helpful adjustment:

Prayer Form

“Prayer is intimacy with God that leads to the fulfillment of His purposes.”

- I praise God because He ...
- In response to God’s character, I request prayer for ...
- I’m praying about this so that ...

Why the Change?

This approach communicates that prayer is, first of all, worship and praise. By guiding our people to first “seek His face” –even in submitting a prayer request—we begin to orient them toward the pattern Jesus required. This is an important responsibility for a spiritual leader, even in the use of something so simple as a prayer form.

Of course, we then encourage them to express their need or the need of the person or situation for which they are praying. This is a vital part of prayer and best understood as a response to God’s character. We always want to care for and honor these needs, which the form can facilitate. But this is the second part of biblical praying, not the only part. When

the submitting of prayer requests is sandwiched between worship and the next prompter, it becomes much more meaningful.

Notice the “so that” portion of the intake form. This will take some teaching but will prove to be one of the most powerful tools to spiritually reorient the prayers of the people in your church.

So That!

A few years ago, my friend Dennis Fuqua provided a powerful insight to this point. He suggested that with every prayer request we should add a “so that.” In other words, we should consider and express a God-glorifying, gospel-advancing, Scripture-honoring goal of the prayer request. Walt Henrichsen has noted, “God did not create you so that He can help you obtain what you want. He created you so that you can do what He wants.” Our prayers are not about us explaining to God what we think He needs to do in order to structure the universe according to our specifications for a happy and comfortable life. Our prayers are the means of joining Him, through humble dependence, so that by His power we can fulfill His pleasure and purposes on this earth—in our walk with Him, our relationships, our work and our bodies. That, by the way, is the only reason He left us here after saving us.

Consider also the exclamation point given in Matthew 6:13: “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” This is the goal of all our prayers: the advancement of His kingdom, the display of His power and the glory of His name. This represents the “so that” of every prayer. A new “intake form” could be a practical, clear, and consistent tool to help congregations pray with a powerful “so that” in their lives, week by week. (To see a short interview where Dennis Fuqua explains this, [**click here.**](#))

Words Matter! Forms Matter!

Imagine what might happen if an entire church began to pray this way, even as it is encouraged by a prayer intake form. What would happen if we all learned to first seek His face, then trust Him with our needs, so that His purposes will be fulfilled in our lives? Words matter in even small things like a prayer form. Perhaps this could be the next step for a pastor, a church, a family, a small group, a Sunday School class or even a ministry team to change our praying to align with the clear command of Jesus. Perhaps something as simple as changing the way we pray by reworking a form could reorient a church in becoming a more authentic and gospel-advancing house of prayer. May it be! {eoa}

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