Discerning Truth and Error About God’s Grace (Part 5)

LEARNING ABOUT GRACE AND GOD’S EMOTIONS
I’m going to continue on the subject of the grace of God, and I want to focus tonight on how God feels about us at different levels, different stages, of our maturity and different responses from our heart to Him. God has different emotions related to our responses, and He has very clear emotions in the Bible that describe how He feels towards us at various levels of our maturity, and understanding this is critical—because I find that it is easy to get confused about this.

Some people think God is mad, when actually, He is glad. That’s very common. And other times, people think God is glad, and He’s not so glad, and that is called presumption. We want to understand where it is. Most people err—the Lord is far more in a posture of delighting and rejoicing in His people, but they feel like God is angry with them. That is clearly the most common error, but the other one does exist as well. And we’ve been talking about that—the presumptuous understanding of grace where grace is presented as that which makes us comfortable with God while we are sinning. That is not what grace is about either.

REVIEW: DISCIPLINES DO NOT EARN GOD’S FAVOR
Roman numeral I. Review of some of the foundational truths that we have looked at the last couple weeks. You just can’t say this too many times, though everybody knows it. We receive God’s grace, and we are justified, because of what Jesus did on the cross, not because of our spiritual disciplines.

You need to say that every time, because then we need to say that our spiritual disciplines are an essential part of growing in the grace of God. Spiritual disciplines do not earn us the grace of God. The grace of God doesn’t override them to where it nullifies their importance. Spiritual disciplines are essential in order to grow in the grace of God, and in no way are we earning grace, because we posture ourselves before the Lord with spiritual discipline.

The point I’ve been making the last several weeks that most of you are really clear on, but for those who are visiting, I just want to say it again. There is nothing in the Bible that gives anybody the assurance that God will give them grace if they don’t repent. The receiving of grace, the free grace of God, is dependent upon the human response of repenting, of changing the attitude.

People get confused about grace where they see grace as nullifying the need for human responsiveness. God does not nullify the need for our responsiveness, our repentance, which means to agree with God. In one sentence, repentance is breaking our agreement with darkness and with the devil, and coming into agreement with God. That’s what repentance really is.

The Lord requires and insists upon repentance, because repentance, the voluntary agreement of our heart with God, is the very essence of intimate relationship. God doesn’t want robots. He doesn’t want automated servants. He wants love relationships. He wants responsiveness that’s voluntary. The key word in that responsiveness is faith or repentance, which are really two sides of the same coin.

REPENTING ACCORDING TO THE LIGHT GOD GIVES
Paragraph B. Repentance is a change of attitude. It’s a change of the attitude of the heart. The attitude of the heart must change for repentance to be genuine. We’re turning from something negative, sin, and we are turning to something positive. We are turning to God. So there is a double
dimension of repentance.

Now, we only repent according to the light God gives us. Meaning, in our first encounters with the Lord, we only have a little bit of understanding of where we’re wrong, of where our attitudes are wrong. The Lord is pleased if we agree with Him to the degree that He gives us light, to the degree He gives us information.

So the Lord is as pleased with a one-day-old believer and a one-year-old believer as He is a very mature saint who is deep in holiness, because the new believer who is walking in sincere repentance is walking in all of their light. That’s the issue: that they’re walking in their light. The Lord rejoices in that, and He sees this as the person, the believer, valuing the relationship with Him, and that’s the critical issue.

It’s not that He holds back and says, “You know what? You’re just a young believer. I’m just going to wait and see how things turn out.” When we respond to the Lord to the fullness of our light—meaning, when the Lord shows us it’s wrong, we declare war on it. When the Lord shows us that something is right, we go after it. We may not attain it, but we go after it.

There is a big difference between going after it, seeking it, and attaining it. And the Lord values the seeking of it. It is the seeking to attain the right things and the seeking of abstaining from the wrong things. It’s the seeking that makes a statement from our heart to God that we value the relationship. What happens sometimes is that we put all of our energy and our attention on how much we attain. I believe that it’s more accurate of a statement of where our heart is if we would focus our attention on seeking to enter into the things God tells us to do—the disciplines, as well as the works of service and the acts of kindness, as well as putting our attention on seeking to abstain from the negative.

The seeking happens many times for a long season before we have any substantial attainment. We can seek an area of obedience and not attain to obedience in a substantial way for months, or even years in that area, according to the light the Lord gives us. The Lord will help us attain in due time if we will seek Him earnestly according to the light that He gives us.

In Psalm 36:9, King David says, “In Your light we see light.” What King David meant by that is that when we receive the light of God and we honor it and we obey it and we walk in it, then we get more light. If we walk in the light that God gives us, we see more light. If we value the areas that He tells us to seek to walk in, even though we don’t attain, but we value it, we get more insight. We get more understanding.

**WALKING IN THE LIGHT AS HE IS IN THE LIGHT**

Paragraph C. This is what it means in 1 John 1:7 when it says (paraphrased), “We walk in the light as He is in the light.”

We might think, “Wait, how can we walk in the light in the same degree that God walks in the light? I mean, God walks in the light perfectly.”

What John is talking about is, walk in the light that you have, in the way that God dwells in the light that He has. God dwells in the light that He has with all of His heart, and though we have only a little bit of light and God has all light, the idea is: inasmuch as we know the light, walk in it. That is what God does. That’s an understatement. God, of course, dwells in the light that He has, but that’s what John is telling the saints to do. Whatever the measure is you have, go with all of your heart, and then you’re living with the light in the way that God lives in the light, because God goes with all
of His heart. He dwells in the light that He possesses. Of course that’s a given, but that’s what John is telling us to do.

**REPENTANCE IS A PROCESS**

Paragraph D. Repentance is a process, meaning, we make the decision in a deeper way as we grow. Our repentance is valid even when our repentance is immature. It is still valid in the Lord’s sight. Our repentance matures. Our repentance broadens as the light increases. We have a greater sphere of understanding of what it is that we are to walk in and abstain from, but there is a process that, in every level of maturing and our repentance, this same process is happening. There are three steps that are taking place.

Number one: God is the One who gives us the light. He is the One who convicts us. He is the One who woos us and draws us. The reason I point this out is because God receives the glory for our transformation and our change, because He is the One who gave us the light. He is the One who stirred us up. He is the One who talked us into it. That’s called conviction. He talks us into it. He convinces us.

So we don’t look at repentance as a form of earning anything, because God understands that He’s the One who stirred you to repent. He doesn’t think of it as you earning anything. There are some camps in the Body of Christ where, with anything like repentance or discipline, they automatically minimize it under the wrong idea that it is a form of earning grace.

The Lord could answer and say, “No, you’re not earning it. I’m the One who convicted you. I’m the One who gave you the idea to repent, and I moved on your heart and I wooed you and I wowed you with who I am, and I convinced you to do it.” That’s step one.

Again, these three steps take place at every level of maturity. They’re the same three steps. Then the second thing that happens—step two—we respond to these divine ideas touching our heart, called conviction. We respond by making a resolve to obey those ideas. Again, we only see those ideas—we only have a little bit of insight, we only get a little bit of light when God convicts us, but we resolve to the level that we have light. And it’s critical that we do resolve to obey that light.

Then, step three: God releases more blessing. He released power. He responds to our response. So step one: God initiates. God is the One who gets our attention, and God is the One who convinces us. Step two: we respond to God’s initiation. Then step three: God responds to our response, and He gives us, He releases the blessing. So He is on the front and the back end of the whole process, and He is glorified in it. He knows that it was His power that was the major—it was the deciding factor, so to speak, in the equation because He gave us power and convinced us and gave us understanding and helped us all along the way in a supernatural way.

**REPENTANCE MUST RESULT IN CHANGE**

Paragraph E. Repentance always must result in change, always, if it’s true. True repentance—maybe I’ll just add the word “true” there. True repentance—because I don’t know what false repentance is. That’s kind of an oxymoron: “false repentance.” But true repentance always eventually, eventually results in change. It may take some years before the change is substantial, but it always brings us, eventually, into the area of light that God gave us.

Maybe on an area of our speech, which is the most difficult area in everyone’s life is their speech and their thought life. The Lord gives us, on a scale of one to ten, a level two of light about our speech, and boy it really challenges us. It may be a few years before we actually walk in that. We think, “Finally, we’ve got that down,” and then the Lord turns up the power on the microscope.
And now He gives us level three, and we say, “Oh my goodness, my speech is totally out of order.” It may take a few years to really walk in that level. Then we get there and He turns up the power on the microscope again. It goes to level four.

So the Lord is never holding us accountable to live at level eight of an area of purity, but only to live within the measure of that which He speaks to us, and He gets the glory for it, because He is the One who enabled us to see it.

But it always does result in change within the sphere of the light that He gives us, if the repentance is genuine. If years have gone by and you haven’t made any change in that area, you need to talk to the Lord about whether your repentance is genuine in that area. It doesn’t mean that you have perfectly matured. That’s not what I am saying. But there needs to be some growth—our character needs to be increasing to some degree as the light is increasing.

When the Lord, in the area of our speech, talks to us on a scale of one to ten, a two, I tell you, you will be one of the most saintly people in town. If you get actually a two, which is really low, you will be noteworthy amongst the Church because of your godly speech. I would say that most believers live far below level two in the area of truly sanctified speech. That’s the giant area in everyone’s life. And of course, then, their thought life because our speech and our thought life certainly go hand in hand.

**KNOWING WE KNOW HIM: KEEPING HIS COMMANDMENTS**

In 1 John 2:3-4 (paraphrased), John says this: “By this we know that we know Him, by this we know we’re saved” — this is a pretty important, pretty big statement here — “by this we know Him: if we keep His commandments.”

Again, the unspoken principle is that we keep the commandments according to the measure of the light that we have. Because in the commands of God, there’s an absolute standard and there’s a relative standard. In the absolute sense we do not ever enter into full obedience in this age to where we obey to the absolute highest end of purity and holiness that equals God’s. Our obedience is relative according to the light. It’s not in the absolute sense.

So he’s talking about, in the relative sense here, that we know that we know Him because in the areas in which He has given us light in our heart, we’re going after it. And over the years, our obedience becomes more substantial. It never becomes perfect, but it becomes more substantial. It grows and it broadens to reach other areas of our inner life.

Verse 4, “The person who says, ‘I know Jesus,’ but the person does not keep His commandments in the relative sense, this man is a liar. The truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4, paraphrased). Of course, the thing that’s been stirring me up the last few weeks is just the subject of so much of the false grace message that is being offered. Grace is being offered without repentance, and there is no such thing as the grace of God being offered, from a Biblical point of view, to whosoever unless they repent. There has to be a change of attitude, because God is jealous for the relationship. The repentance is because God wants relationship. He wants us to say “yes” in a meaningful way. And that “yes” does not earn us God’s favor. That “yes” is our response in the relationship. Because it’s a relational dynamic that God is after.

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES POSITION OUR HEART TO RECEIVE FROM GOD**

Paragraph F. Again, I’ve said this every week, but I just love saying it, so I’m going to say it again. Paragraph F. Spiritual disciplines are ordained by God as a necessary way to posture our hearts to receive freely. Spiritual disciplines do not earn us God’s power or God’s favor. Spiritual
disciplines merely position our heart in front of the bonfire of God.

In the analogy I have used for years is—you think of a five-pound block of frozen hamburger. You put that frozen hamburger in front of the bonfire, and in time, it is going to be tenderized. And it’s not the power of the hamburger that’s doing it; it’s the power of the fire. We put ourselves in God’s presence by reading the Word, committing to obey, fasting, and prayer. We are not earning anything. We’re putting our frozen heart in front of His fire, and the power is in the fire, not in the sitting in front of it. There is no power or virtue in the hamburger. The power and the virtue are in the fire. That’s where the energy is. And the Lord will—if we posture ourselves in front of Him, we receive from Him more. The scripture is clear that if you want to receive more, posture yourself more in His presence. You don’t earn it; you put yourself in the place to receive it freely.

GOD GIVES US MORE, BUT HIS LOVE DOES NOT CHANGE
Paragraph G. God gives more to our heart—but this is critical—He doesn’t love us more because He gives us more. Because, sometimes, we confuse this. We think that if we posture ourselves more in His presence, then He loves us more. No, He doesn’t love us more. He doesn’t like you more if you posture yourself in His presence. That’s called discipline. He doesn’t love you more if you do that. He gives you more, particularly on the inside. And He allows us to determine, in a significant way, how far and how fast we go.

Now, of course, we want to go to the fullest degree at the full speed—and I don’t mean that—but according to how God runs His kingdom, we can speed up the process by responding more aggressively to Him. We can get more, and we can get it faster. And the law of the kingdom is Matthew 5:6 (paraphrased): “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst. They will receive more”—it’s the essence of that. Hunger and thirst for God and for righteousness is a relational dynamic.

God says, “I will give you according to hunger. I’m not going to give you more because I like you more. I like you anyway. I liked you before you even said yes to Me. I liked you when you were at the total beginning of your maturity process. I don’t like you more and therefore give you more. What I do is I honor the relationship by giving you according to your hunger for the relationship.”

So really, the Lord is dignifying the relationship. He’s not stating that we deserve it, nor is He stating that He likes us more. He’s saying, “I am valuing, in your heart, the fact that you value relationship with Me.” The law of the kingdom is that God gives more to the hungry, not more to those who those who deserve it, but more to the hungry.

SOWING TO THE FLESH VS. SOWING TO THE SPIRIT
Galatians chapter 6—I will give the negative first. The principle works in the negative and the positive. If you sow to the flesh (v. 8)—you sow to the flesh in terms of immorality, in terms of different abuses and alcohol and drugs and immorality or anger or strife or covetousness, if you sow to the flesh, you will reap the habits that will create bondages that, some of them will become demonic bondages. That is called corruption. The Lord allows us to determine what seed we sow in our hearts. If we want to sow to the flesh, the Lord says, “I still love you, but there is a principle of My kingdom. It’s not the fact that I do not love you.”

If you sow immorality into your heart, if that is what you sow, you will have corruption in your emotional patterns and in your physical patterns. There will be defilement and there will be evil desires that are far more difficult to manage. It’s called corruption. Instead of the word “corruption,” you could put “bondages and habits that accelerate and increase.”

The bad habits will increase and accelerate, but it goes the other way too. If you sow to the Spirit—
and that’s by Sermon on the Mount living. Every time we fast and pray, every time we obey and humble ourselves, every time we act in kindness and servanthood, it’s a very small, incremental sowing to the Spirit. It’s a very small sowing, but it is a sowing that is substantial. It’s an important one, and what we reap is life. Now we can get tripped up by this verse, because it says that we reap eternal life, and what people sometimes think is, “It means we’ll go to Heaven when we die.”

Certainly it means that we will be in Heaven when we die, but we get life now if we sow in the Spirit. Instead of the word “life,” put the word “the anointing,” because that’s what it means—the anointing on the heart.

**SMALL, INCREMENTAL PROGRESS**

If you will sow to the Spirit in these small, incremental ways, very small—it’s like the man or woman who grows strong in righteousness and revelation; it’s like they’re doing pushups, spiritual pushups every day. If you met the world-champion pushup guy—if there is such a thing—and if you asked them, “What pushup was the one that made you the world champion?”

He would say, “Well, I do thousands of them a week. There is no one pushup that makes me strong. They all—just very small, little incremental steps, every one of them contributes to my strength.”

When we sow to the Spirit by bridling our eyes, by bridling our speech, by speaking grace instead of sarcasm or instead of bitterness, when we obey God in our finances in the kingdom—we get this emotion about our money. We get fearful, so we hold onto it, or we get other ideas and spend it in ways outside of God’s will, and even when we spend money in the will of God, that’s sowing to our spirit. The sowing to our spirit is very easy to do.

We do it thousands of times in the course of walking with the Lord for years, and every single one of them, though we can’t measure the power of one pushup in the world champion pushup guy, every single one of them is bringing more of the presence of God to our heart, though we can’t measure it in that day.

When an athlete works out or the musician practices, one hour later, out of the tens of thousands of hours of working out, that one hour, they go, “I don’t know if this was the hour. It seemed like the other hours.”

It’s the same with sowing to the Spirit. It’s every single deposit, every installment that we make—every investment that we make in Sermon on the Mount living before the Lord is a very small, incremental step forward, and it does the opposite of corruption. It makes our soul experience the presence of God. It’s a very powerful reality.

I remember talking to a guy who was addicted to pornography. He said, “Augh, this is terrible. How can I get out of it?”

I said, “It is really easy.”

He said, “It is?”

I said, “You get out of it the same way you got into it—by making ten thousand small decisions. That’s how you get out of it.” I said, “You were not addicted to it the first time. You went back, over, and over, and over, and over. You get out of it the same way. You stay away from it. You feed your spirit on the Word, over, and over, and over, and at first it will not seem to make an impact."
You get into trouble the same way you get out of trouble. It’s the same little by little, in incremental steps. You sow to your flesh; you get bad habits and addictions. You sow to your spirit; you have the anointing touching your heart over time.”

**DISCIPLINES ARE ON THE BASIS OF RELATIONSHIP**

The reason the Lord doesn’t count this as earning it is because it’s relational. He says, “No, I’m giving it to you on the basis of how much you hunger for Me, and I so value our relationship, that every movement you make toward Me in the relationship, I will honor it because I so care for the relationship.”

So when I hear people—I’ve heard it for thirty years—talk about fasting and prayer as earning, it is completely confused in their mind. They don’t have a paradigm of relationship with God when they fast and pray. They’re maybe thinking of punching in a time clock, a time card, proving to God they’re sincere, with no relational dynamic, and if they endure a boring God long enough, finally God will break down and anoint them.

It is like they’re—I have heard people talk about paying the price for prayer, and the idea is that this is a boring God, and if we really rise up and endure Him enough by reading His boring Bible and doing His boring prayer thing, finally boring God will break down and help us. That is completely the wrong paradigm for why we are praying and fasting.

We are not punching in a time card. We are giving ourselves to the relationship, and the God of relationship says, “I am going to honor the relationship. I am going to honor your part in it. I take this as love. I take this as your hunger, though there is not much you can do besides put your cold heart in front of the bonfire, but I’ll take it, because the power of My fire will then touch you.”

**SPIRITUAL IMMATURE IS NOT THE SAME AS REBELLION**

OK, let’s go to the top of page two. Spiritual immaturity—we touched this last week—is not the same thing as rebellion. We won’t go through all of the paragraphs here because we looked at this last week, but I just want to say it again for those who are visiting. It bears repeating anyway. Of course, my goal is that you would say these principles, not that you kind of grasp them and say, “I think I got that straight.” My desire is that you would say these to people in need, to people you minister to and your friends and the people that you meet over the years.

One of the greatest areas of confusion in the Body of Christ is this issue of immaturity and rebellion. Because immaturity is *sincere* toward God. It has made the choice to obey God. It hasn’t attained, it hasn’t broken through yet, there is not a breakthrough of full obedience, but it has really made the choice, and this person really wants to obey God.

But rebellion says, “No, I am not making a choice for God. I don’t want to make that choice. I have no plans to obey the Lord in this area. Don’t even bother me, Holy Spirit, with my speech. I’m going to say what I want to say, go where I go, use my money and time the way that I want to use my money and time. Leave me alone. I’ll obey in a couple other areas.”

That’s called rebellion, when the Holy Spirit is speaking in area after area and we have no regard for it. Immaturity says, “Yes, I’m totally on, Lord. Oh, no! My repentance is so weak, so fickle, so fragile, but I’m on. I am with You. I care,” and the Lord sees that as sincere, and it is real to Him, but it’s immature.

If we confuse spiritual immaturity with rebellion—and so many do it. They call the immature believer rebellious, and they injure the faith of that immature person. Or, equally bad, they call
themselves rebellious when, in fact, they are immature. That’s their problem. They are not rebellious. God is angry with the rebellious, and God actually enjoys the immature. He enjoys them while they’re growing up. You know, God doesn’t just enjoy His children once they mature. He actually enjoys them each step of the way. He doesn’t only enjoy them when they break through. He enjoys them when they resolve to be His and they make the inward decision.

When the movements of our heart line up with God and agree with Him—the movements of our heart, we call that repentance, we call that agreeing with God. We haven’t gotten the attainment yet in our character. We haven’t broken through yet at the heart level, but we have really resolved to go after this, that is precious to God. That is not rebellion. That is immaturity, and to confuse the two in your own heart is to live perpetually in condemnation.

KNOWING GOD LIKES US FREES US FROM CONDEMNATION
Now here is the bad side about condemnation—and so many believers are living in condemnation—is that they want to quit. They just think, “You know, I don’t want to keep reaching to obey God and failing so badly as a hypocrite. I can’t seek to love God and lose every time.” Sooner or later that is so painful, to reach to be a lover of God and to constantly be a hypocrite, people will end up after a few years after that, just settling down and deciding to be a second-class citizen in the kingdom of God.

They’ll say, “You know, when I was younger I had zeal for that, but it’s never going to happen. I am never going to break through,” and they resolve to live at a distance from God, and they really do love God. What really happened is that they confused their immaturity with rebellion. Somebody told them they were rebellious, they believed it, and sooner or later they said, “It hurts too much to reach to obey and fail every single day. As horrible as it is, I would rather not have that trauma of that every day in my heart day after day after day. I would rather just fall back, lower my standards, and just hope for grace when I meet the Lord on the last day.”

This can be corrected, because we tell the guy, “You’re not rebellious. Actually, the reality is that you really do care. You care intensely. That’s why you have so much pain.”

And the guy says, “Yeah”—I have gotten to do this over the years, and the guy says—“Yeah, that is right. I do care. I really do.”

I say, “I have good news for you. God is angry with the rebellious, but you’re not rebellious. God actually enjoys the process of His young ones growing.”

They say, “Yeah, but I have been young for so many years.”

I reply, “Granted, it’s twenty years later and you’re still a spiritual infant, but the principle is still true. He loves those who are seeking to obey Him.”

And when people can feel God’s smile on them while they are growing, they run to Him instead of running from Him. Then they have courage, because they go, “I haven’t attained yet to all the issues outwardly, my heart has not attained yet, but I feel His pleasure because I know that He values the resolve of my heart to go towards Him.” It makes all the difference in the world. It is huge.

STRUGGLING IN WEAKNESS IS NOT BEING HYPOCRITICAL
Paragraph D. Struggling in weakness is not the same thing as being a hopeless hypocrite. A hypocrite is somebody who is not seeking at the heart level to obey the things that they are saying.
We don’t attain all that we’re seeking, but the fact that we’re it, the fact that we’re seeking it is what causes us not to be a hypocrite. A hypocrite is not seeking it. They’re not even pretending to do it. They are telling others to do it, and in the secret place of their heart, they’re trying to fake others out. They’re not trying to obey God in thought, word, and deed and their time and their money. That’s not even on their mind. That’s what a hypocrite is.

A new believer who does not even have light in all of those areas, as long as they walk in their light, the Lord will keep increasing the light, and the Lord will bring them along in His own time.

Paragraph E. David sinned, and when David sinned, his heart was wounded. Why? Because he knew he grieved God’s heart. David didn’t repent because he got caught. David repented because he knew God’s heart was grieved. He sinned a bunch of times, but his conscience troubled him, because he cared about the relationship.

Saul—the reason, when Saul apparently repented, and God didn’t receive it, it was because Saul only repented when he got caught. He didn’t actually repent, because his heart was troubled. He repented because he got caught. He repented because there were consequences, and that repentance so often is not even genuine.

There is the guy who finally admits after he has been cornered and everybody has caught him, “OK, I did it.” Well, everybody has caught you and you can’t get out of it. “I did it. I repent,” and it might be real. Sometimes it is real even when they get caught, but often all they are doing is repenting because they have been cornered.

Because, sometimes, when people read the life of David and Saul, they say, “Man, God was nice to David, but He is mean to Saul. Saul did little things and got in big trouble. David did big things and only got in a little bit of trouble. It doesn’t seem fair.”

The truth is that David repented because he grieved God. He knew that. His conscience was troubled, and God valued that, even though David’s sins were huge. Saul didn’t care that he offended God. That didn’t trouble him. He only got troubled if, I mean, he only repented if he got caught.

**GOD’S EMOTIONS TOWARDS PEOPLE**

Roman numeral III. How God feels toward people. Paragraph A. God loves unbelievers who have no regard for Him: “For God so loved the world” (John 3:16). God loves everybody. He loves the whole world. He loves the unbelievers in the nations.

Paragraph B. God loves unbelievers, but He does not enjoy them. God does not enjoy unbelievers, but He loves them. He enjoys a believer who comes into agreement with His heart, even if the light we have, on a scale of one to ten is a one, way at the beginning, we are walking in the light that we know. Meaning, we’re seeking to obey it. We do not even fully obey the “level one light,” but we’re seeking to, and the Lord sees that and values it and esteems it as caring about the relationship.

If we only have level one of light and we don’t even obey it fully, but we seek to obey it fully. That is the key word—we’re *seeking* to. We don’t attain it for a season. The Lord says, “You value the relationship. You care about our relationship,” and the Lord’s heart is smiling over the relationship.

**HE DELIVERED ME BECAUSE HE DELIGHTS IN ME**

Now, one of the great passages in the Bible in terms of this subject is Psalm 18:19. It is so
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dynamic, because it’s the context of Psalm 18. If you read the introduction—that’s not the right word. What do you call it? You know, when you open it and it gives a little introduction there at the top. There’s an official name for it, a theological word. Anyway, when you read that little postscript, it tells you that Psalm 18 was written on the day that God delivered David from King Saul. Well, we know what day that was. It’s in 1 Samuel 30. It’s when David just left Ziklag.

I don’t want to give a big story on David right now, though it’s fun to do that. Here’s the point you need to know: David wrote, “God delivered me because He delighted in me” (Ps. 18:19), on the day he repented after sixteen months of disobedience. He has only repented one day and he gets delivered.

And then, you know, the head reported from the head magazine comes to him and says, “Why do you think”—he puts the microphone on him—“Why do you think God delivered you after 16 months?”

He had an area of compromise—I don’t want to go into that now—for sixteen months. He cried over it a whole bunch, but he didn’t actually obey. He cried a lot of tears over it. That’s clear from the Psalms.

So the reporter comes up and says, “David, why did God deliver you today?” You think—well, I don’t know. What would David say?

“Well, God likes me. He delights in me.”

The guys around David might have said, “David, that’s a little outrageous. You’ve only been fully repentant for nine hours, and you are already talking about how much God likes you.”

David said, “He liked me all the way through it. That’s why my conscience was so troubled. He delighted in me all the way. That’s why He was so severe on calling me and hemming me in”—because some negative things happened to get David’s attention because the Lord delighted in him.

This is one of the grand statements of scripture of how God feels about a guy whose repentance is only about ten to twelve hours old, his full repentance. I mean, David was crying about the fact that he was not fully—he was saying, “Oh, God, I’m not fully doing this. This isn’t good. I don’t like this.” He says in Psalm 56 that all of his tears were stored up in God’s bottle, and that was talking about that sixteen-month period in Gath, or Ziklag.

Anyway, enough on that, but I don’t want to go into the context more. The point is sixteen months of compromise—not total compromise. I mean, he was not living in brazen rebellion against God, but he has an issue or two that he is not obeying the Lord on. And he doesn’t like it. His heart’s burning within him. And the day he repents, he enters right into the revelation of God’s delight in him. Within the day, he was singing how much God liked him. He didn’t even get a chance to do his Tuesday fast day, you know, he didn’t even get through the day, and he was already singing of how much God liked him.

YOUR GENTleness HAS MADE ME GREAT
Then he went on, later on in the same Psalm, and he said, “God, it is Your gentleness toward me that makes me great” (Psalm 18:35, paraphrased).

Again, his friends might have said, “Great? You don’t look that great right now. You look like you’re a mess right now”—because he has been, again, in the wrong place for sixteen months.
“You don’t look great.”

What David was really saying was, “Because God was so gentle toward me, I will end up growing up into the fear of God in the days to come,” because on the day that David wrote it, he didn’t have that much going for him.

He had had a lot of negative things still surrounding him on that day, but he says, “Your gentleness”—what David meant was—“the fact that You treated me in gentleness, God, because, God, You know that I know that You could have wiped me out and I would have deserved it. But You forgave me, You gave me hope, and I will become a man who fears You in a mature way, and because You were gentle towards me, I will be great before You one day.”

FORGIVENESS IS WITH THE LORD

David goes on to develop that same idea in Psalm 130. This is David writing Psalm 130. He says, “If You, LORD, should mark iniquities” (v. 3)—meaning, “If you should take an account of who deserves to get in trouble”—that’s what marking iniquity is, that God carefully marks what you did in truth, not what you say you did, but what you actually did in truth at the heart level, and at the outward level, too.

If He marked it and then gave to us according to what we did, David said (Psalm 130:3, paraphrased), “If You marked the truth and then paid us according to how You marked us”—that’s an accounting term—“Oh, Lord, who could stand? I would be wiped out. You would have wiped me out way back in Ziklag.”

Look at verse 4 (paraphrased): “But with You, there is forgiveness.” Why? “Because You have forgiven me, You have given me a second chance the thousandth time.” Isn’t that great? God gives you a second chance. He is the God of the second chance. Ten thousand times He gives you a new beginning, if you want it, on that day. But we have to repent. This is not an offer that just is offered to everyone. It is people who line up with God and repent and declare at the heart level before God that they are going to obey the light that God has given them.

He says in Psalm 130:4 (paraphrased), “With You there is forgiveness”—and he could have put the word “gentleness.” It is the same idea of, “You treated me with gentleness. You could have wiped me out, God, but You were gentle with me. You gave me a new beginning again, and again, and again, and again. And now I have courage to seek You, and I will be a man filled with the fear of God before it is over. I will be great in the fear of God before this whole thing is over,” and it happened. David ended his days in the fear of God in great maturity in the Lord.

Beloved, God is looking at you right now, and He’s saying, “If I marked your iniquity, if kept careful track and then gave you what you deserve, you would never grow up to fear me.” What if God would have treated Paul the apostle, in his first days of knowing the Lord, exactly how Paul deserved it? He would have never been a mature apostle.

The Lord delights in mercy. He delights in it. It’s Micah 7:18. We say that around here all the time. Micah 7:18. He actually delights in it. He likes to give mercy. It is one of His favorite things He does. He likes to give mercy, and He likes it to connect with our spirit.

But the problem that I have seen a little bit in the seven years of IHOP–KC is that some people get into the “delight in mercy” message, and they forget a very significant part: “to the people who repent.” And it becomes—“God delights in mercy” becomes a heavenly Santa Claus just reigning in heaven to make people happy on Earth and to give them what they want.
He wants relationship with us, and the only way He can have relationship is if we repent and agree with Him at the heart level. He doesn’t delight in mercy, giving mercy to the person who won’t line up with Him. Again, we must line up. We agree to repent. We agree to pursue that area of light long before we break through and attain. We seek it long before we attain it.

**THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP**

Look at it here in Luke chapter 15. It’s the parable of the man with the hundred sheep, and one of them gets off the path. You know it. You know the story well. Verse 5 (paraphrased), “When the man found it, when the man found that lost sheep, he lays it on his shoulders”—complaining all the way about that lost sheep. No, “rejoicing.”

Did you know that, as a believer, when you get ensnared in something, and you decide that day, “Lord, I’m done with this,” and you might even stumble in it again, but you’re declaring war on it, did you know He puts you on His shoulders and rejoices? He’s not threatening you all the way back to the sheepfold, “I tell you, Bickle, you do this one more time—don’t give me that ‘I’m sorry’ deal. I’ve heard that so many times.”

He actually says, “I will carry you, and I will rejoice in the new resolve in your heart to be in the middle of My will.”

Now that lost sheep—in the human analogy, the person who returns—the day they return, their repentance is not very mature. There is a resolve, and the Lord says, “The resolve to obey Me, even before the full walking out of it, I rejoice in it. I take it personally.” The Lord takes it personally. He takes it as a love statement of our heart.

Look what He does, verse 6 (paraphrased), “The man”—now Jesus is talking about Himself. He is giving the parable, but the person He is talking about, the shepherd, is Himself. He is telling the people what His heart is like when He is redeeming people in trouble. This is not just the day someone gets saved, because it’s somebody who is in the fold, it’s somebody who is already a part of the sheepfold of God’s kingdom. This is a lost sheep, not some other animal, a goat, who gets converted into a sheep. He’s talking about within the family of God even. He’s talking about the nation of Israel who were the people in covenant relationship with God as a nation.

Look what He says in verse 6, “He calls together His friends,” and Jesus says, “When you change that attitude, I tell My friends.” He has lots of friends. Jesus is really well-liked in heaven. He gets His friends, and they rejoice over you.

You think, “Man, I’ve messed up, but you’re telling me that if I will really say yes at the heart level, that He is going to rejoice over me?”

And verse 7 (paraphrased), “I tell you there is more joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents”—and He is talking about within the sheepfold. This isn’t only something the day that somebody is born again. We have reduced this passage to only mean this is how God feels when somebody gets saved. So if somebody—if it’s three years later and they sin, all of a sudden, God’s heart is different. He can’t relate to somebody if they’ve been in the kingdom for a while. It’s only if they were deep in sin. Only for one day is He happy when they repent. No! This is what His personality is like. He calls His friends. I love this.

**GOD’S MERCY GIVES US CONFIDENCE**

Paragraph C. God’s mercy gives us confidence. Beloved, we need confidence that He enjoys us,
even in our weakness. We need confidence. We need confidence. When a person gets confident in their spirit, even in their weakness, that God enjoys them—oh my, they will run into His presence. They will run to Him, not from Him.

The great truth that the end-time prayer movement needs is that the leader of the end-time prayer movement is a Bridegroom with a passionate heart for people, who is tender toward His people. It’s not just a King who’s the head of the prayer movement. He is a King, but He is a Bridegroom. That is why it’s as a bride, as a cherished bride we cry, “Come.” It’s the relationship of His tenderness as a bride and a Bridegroom that gives us confidence to cry, “Come.” That’s why it is critical that we understand this revelation.

THREE THINGS THAT DEFINE US IN OUR WEAKNESS
Paragraph D. We are defined, there are three things that define you and define me in our weakness. Number one: the fact that God has passion for us. Number two: we receive the gift of righteousness. Number three: there is a sincere heart cry that the Holy Spirit works in us. I mean, even our own heart cry has been worked in us by the Holy Spirit. Even the Holy Spirit helps us in every step of the way to sustain that heart cry of obedience.

The reason God likes you is because of His passion. He’s a God who likes people. That’s His personality. One of the reasons He likes you is because He is a likeable Person. He likes people. That’s one of the reasons He likes you.

CONFIDENCE IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT
Then Jesus died on the cross to remove all of the legal penalty that would stand in the way between God expressing His emotion toward us. Then the Spirit works in us a response. It’s a weak response, but it is a real response. And those three things together, even in our weakness, they define us before God as lovely. They define us before God as lovely.

Paragraph E. Oh, I love this verse, this revelation of God’s kindness and His love. Look at what this says, in 1 John 4:17 (paraphrased), “Love has been perfected among us in this: we have boldness in the day of judgment.” This is just beyond exaggeration its importance. Did you know that on the day of judgment, the final judgment, a believer on the day—when the judgment of God is most severe, when the judgment of God—right now it’s being withheld. Most of God’s judgments are being restrained. Only a little bit of His judgments are being manifested in the earth, only a little bit.

On the day when His judgment is most manifest, do you know what you will have on that day as a believer? Boldness. Because you will see it like it really is. So, my logic is, as I’ve have read this over the years is, “Lord, I do not want to be bold on that day only. I want to be bold between now and then. If I’m going to be bold on the most terrible, glorious day of history when Your anger is most manifest, I will be most secure because I will see it clearest. If that’s true then, it’s true now. Hey, I’m going to get into this right now. If I’m going to have boldness on the judgment day, why shouldn’t I have boldness now because of Christ Jesus?”

You know why you have boldness on the Day of Judgment? Here it is. This is awesome. “Because as He is”—that’s Jesus before the Father—“as Jesus is before the Father, so also are we in this world” (1 John 4:17, paraphrased). In the same way that Jesus is before the Father, He looks at you, even in this world in your weakness.

Beloved, you have every reason for boldness as a sincere believer who is saying yes to the Holy Spirit. We’re not breaking through on all the areas, but we’re definitely warring in all the areas. We have every reason to be bold. “Confident” is the way you can say that.
YOU ARE FORGIVEN IMMEDIATELY UPON SINCERE REPENTANCE
Paragraph F. When we sin and we repent, beloved, if you sin at two o’clock, repent, and at 2:05 put delete—or at 2:01—push delete, and you are a first-class citizen in His kingdom. You are right there. I mean, don’t negotiate with God and put yourself in thirty days of probation, “Lord, here is what I am going to do. This was so bad what I did this time. This is the twentieth time that I have done the same thing. Here is what I’m going to do. I’m going to suffer for thirty days to kind of even the score.”

The Lord says, “That doesn’t even My score. That only injures your spirit. My score was evened when My Son took the wrath for you and when you agreed to repent by the Holy Spirit’s power in you.”

The score is even. There is no reason to be thirty days in probation. Stand there that moment and say, “I’m a first class citizen in the kingdom of God.”

They say, “Well, you’ve only been into repentance one minute.”

Well, I tell you, it’s one minute that is enough. Because the score is even because Jesus paid the penalty, and the Spirit convicted you and urged you to repent, and those are the two things that God requires for you to stand before Him in His favor. Not that you are mature, it’s that you agree in your spirit. You resolve in your spirit. We call that the “yes” in your spirit. You agree with God.

STRENGTHENED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD’S SMILE ON US
Paragraph G. We embrace the spiritual disciplines. You will pray and fast, I will just say it that way. There are lots of spiritual disciplines besides prayer and fasting. You will work through the unsettled issues of your heart, and I will work through them in my heart, far more consistently if you have confidence that God is smiling on you. Beloved, I can do a lot of discipline if I know He’s smiling on me. I can face many issues in my heart if I know He’s smiling on me.

I can bear—paragraph H—a lot of conviction of sin, if I know that the reason He is convicting me is because He likes me. If I know that, oh, I can bear a lot of conviction, because conviction isn’t rejection. The conviction of sin, if it’s coming directly by the Holy Spirit or one of His friends that you did not give permission to talk to you about it, but they talked to you about it anyway—if they are convicting you, beloved, it’s because God is jealous for you. He wants you. That’s what that’s all about.

Well, I think we are just going to end with that, because I have a couple more things. I will just bring them up next week. I’ll just kind of dovetail this into next week’s notes. Let’s stand.

I encourage you: these are simple principles, really simple principles, but you have to get them clear. You have to get them clear in your spirit. You have to be able to say them to other people. You might not say them as I say them. You might say them differently, but you have to be able to articulate these to other people to help them.

I’m going to invite anyone who would like prayer, anyone who’s saying, “I just need a fresh revelation of these things, of the grace of God. I want to know that I know that I know that I am lovely before Him. He delights in me even in my weakness. I could really run hard if I knew that I knew He was smiling at me, rather than if He had a hammer in His hand, waiting to take me out.”

Beloved, if He has a hammer in His hands, I don’t want to pray and fast; I want to hide, or at least I
want to negotiate: “OK, God, I will make a deal with You.” But if I know that He is smiling and beckoning me, boy, I am ready to repent fully.

Beloved, you can be a first-class citizen today in the kingdom no matter what you did this morning, what you did last night. You can be first-class citizens standing in full favor right now, today. This is how glorious the grace of God is. Amen. Come on up if you would like.