

## ***Freely Receiving from the Spirit: Walking Free from Legalism (Matthew 10:8)***

Turn to Matthew 10:8: “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.” Let’s pray, “Father, we thank You in the name of Jesus for the Word of God. Lord, I ask You for the spirit of wisdom and revelation, even now. Lord, I ask you that You would touch Mark Mahan and Jill Marsh, who just got married a few hours ago. I ask that You would touch them in a special way in this next week of their life. We ask for blessing. We ask for your favor, and we ask for surprises from heaven that you would speak to them in a powerful way. Speak to us even now as we hear the Word, the speaking and the hearing of your Word in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

### **FREELY RECEIVING THE ANOINTING OF THE SPIRIT**

We will start in Matthew 10:8. What I want to talk about is receiving freely from the Holy Spirit, or from God, and receiving the Holy Spirit’s ministry. Not just receiving the Holy Spirit’s ministry, somebody praying over you, but the Lord using you as well. Even when you feel badly and think you are doing badly, the Lord says, “I will still talk to you. I will still use you, even when you are struggling and stumbling.” Because we have set our hearts upon the Lord, He has made a commitment to fellowship with us and to partner with us. His commitment stays true and steady even when our follow through to our commitments are weak, wavering, and wobbly. Let’s start in Matthew 10:8.

### **OPERATE IN THE SUPERNATURAL, RECEIVE ANOINTING, AND GIVE IT AWAY**

Jesus gives His disciples three foundational truths. At this time, they were unprecedented and unusual truths. They were not common to anybody’s way of thinking. First, He calls them to supernatural ministry. He said, “Heal the sick, cleanse lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons.” He is calling the common person in the Body of Christ; I am talking about in Israel who were lovers of God. It is as if Jesus said, “You can do supernatural ministry.” This idea was new to them. The group of twelve disciples, most of them were probably in their early twenties. He calls them to supernatural ministry.

The second foundational truth Jesus gives is that they are to freely receive the anointing in order to operate in the supernatural ministry. They did not earn it; they would freely receive it.

The third foundational truth: these are pillar of truth on how the kingdom operates; they were to not make money from the anointing to heal the sick, and deliver people with the supernatural ministry. They were not to make money from it; they were to give it away freely. All three of those truths are very important in the kingdom of God. All three of those truths, they have resistance to them. The enemy has resistance to every one of those three truths; but as believers, we are contending, which means we are taking a stand for all three of them. We are not going to let any of these go. The enemy comes with unbelief, and tells us that the gifts of the Spirit are not

for today, or if they are, they are not really for you. He comes with unbelief, “They are not for today, or at least they are not for you for today.” We have to say ‘no’ to that.

The next thing: freely receive. The enemy raises up legalism to try to get us to earn the anointing. The Holy Spirit says, “No, it is given freely to every believer; it is given freely.” Whether you are in a good month or a bad month, it is given freely.

The third thing the enemy raises up is covetousness. People can operate in the anointing; they want to get rich in the anointing. The Lord says, “No, do not do that.” The enemy comes and stirs peoples’ vain imaginations with ways that they can become rich and famous from the anointing. But Jesus lays it out in this passage in a one, two, three type of format. First of all, in supernatural ministry, do not yield to unbelief. Secondly, Matthew tells us to freely receive the anointing for it, and do not yield to legalism. Thirdly, give it away freely, and do not yield to covetousness. As believers, we are contending for all three of those.

### **A SIMPLE DEFINITION OF LEGALISM**

We are going to focus in on the second one. Each one of those foundational truths deserve a lot of attention, but we are going to look at the middle one—the receive freely. The resistance to freely receive is simply lies. They are religious ideas that are lies, but they are very common religious ideas. They are ideas that are very natural to our way of thinking. Our natural mindset automatically kicks into the gear of wanting to earn God’s favor and blessing. Even though we know better, our natural mindset automatically goes there. It is not automatic to understand this. We can kind of get it conceptually, but for it to really grab our heart, the power of it has to come from revelation. It is called the revelation of grace. It is a revelation. It is not automatic. We have to cultivate it.

Our natural mindset resists it, though technically because we are believers, we should say, “Of course, it is free, and it is full of grace.” But at the emotional level, we do not really buy into it. With our mouth, we say that grace is free. However, emotionally we respond as though it is not free. One reason that it is difficult, and it is not automatic is because we do not have a natural grid for it; there is nothing on the earth to compare it with. Nothing. The verse I do not have on the notes, but I want to give it to you is a well-known verse in Isaiah 55:7-8: “Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. ‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,’” says the LORD.”

It says that God’s ways are higher than man’s ways—as high and as far as the heavens are above the earth. God’s ways are as superior and as different from man’s ways as the heavens are from the earth. In Isaiah 55:7-8, he is actually talking about his mercy and his tenderness toward our brokenness. That is the subject. Usually when people quote Isaiah 55:7-8, they say that God’s ways are higher than man’s ways. They are typically referencing that God’s ways are mysterious—His wisdom, and the way He leads us. It is actually talking about the way that God offers mercy. It is so superior to the way any human being does. The most loving father does not get close to modelling it the way that God the Father really loves us. As high as the heavens are

above the earth, so God's way of offering, giving, extending mercy, and tenderness to His people; there is nothing on the earth to compare it to. It is difficult to grasp, and it takes a revelation. It is the revelation of grace.

### **LEGALISM IS ENGAGING IN SPIRITUAL ACTIVITIES TO EARN GOD'S FAVOR**

A simple definition of legalism is to engage in spiritual activities to earn God's favor. Where you engage in spiritual activities; prayer, fasting, spiritual disciplines, giving, serving, outreach, or Bible study to earn God's love. We engage in legitimate, necessary spiritual activities, but we do it with an unspoken desire to earn God's favor. In other words, for God to pay more attention to us if we do those things, for God to like us more, or for God to be more interested in us, to earn something, or to somehow stir God up to pay more attention to us. We have this idea, naturally, all of us; it is our natural mindset, because again, God's ways are higher than our ways. We do not think about this correctly without revelation of the Holy Spirit.

God says, "No, I am committed to you. Before you were ever interested in Me, I was interested in you. I desired you when you had no desire for Me. I was committed to you when you had no commitment to Me. I was pursuing you when you were not pursuing Me at all. It starts with Me. My desire is initiated within My own heart. You do not provoke it. You did not do anything to awaken My desire."

When we really get a hold of this, it is powerful because when we understand how much God desires us and how powerful Jesus' work on the cross really was, what it really did for us, than we can rest in confidence and security. Those are the same ideas: confidence and security; use whichever word you want. We can rest confident in love and secure. Even when we have a good month or a bad month, we do not have to move in our confidence. We do not have to lose our security with God. That really changes the way that we walk with God.

The definition of legalism, again, is to engage in spiritual activities: prayer, fasting, Bible study, serving, humility, you could give a growing list to the idea of earning favor, or to motivate God to pay more attention to us. Here is the difficult part of legalism: if we are going to compare legalism and grace, the power of grace, or the negative power of legalism, many of the activities are the same. The legalistic guy will pray and fast, and the person empowered by grace will pray and fast. The legalistic guy will give his money away sacrificially to earn God's favor; but the man or woman empowered by grace will give their money away sacrificially too. The legalistic guy will have time commitments, and the person empowered by grace will keep their commitments before God. They will have their life ordered. So what is it? What is the difference? It is not the activities because many of the activities look the same. I could look at two people, and they are both doing the same thing: praying, fasting, giving, studying, etc. One of them is legalistic, and one of them is empowered by grace. It is not an issue of the activity; it is an issue of the motivation behind the activity. That is the issue. It is the motivation behind the activity.

The legalistic believer, they love Jesus. They are sweating it out trying to get God to pay attention to them. That is legalism. The grace-empowered believer, they are praying and fasting

not to try and get God to pay attention to them, but because they have a revelation that God is already paying attention to them. They want a greater capacity to experience more of God. They pray and fast not to motivate God, but they pray and fast because they know their own spiritual capacity will increase. They will be able to enjoy more of their partnership with God. Prayer and fasting does more than affect us, it moves angels and demons and shifts the spiritual atmosphere.

### **SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE DOES NOT MOTIVATE GOD TO LOVE US MORE**

It changes what angels and demons do, but praying and fasting does not motivate God to like us more. I do not study the Bible so that God will like me more. I study the Bible because He already likes me, and I want to get in on it more. I want to feel it more. I remember being with some friends some years ago—some pastor friends. We had a couple weeks in a row of conferences; ten or fifteen days with a couple conferences put together, two or three of them. I remember it was one Saturday night; it was the night off, and then Sunday was a new conference. The conference ended on Friday. We had a night off, and then Saturday. A bunch of the guys were together. I am going to be the hero of my own story here, so bear with me, but I am making a point. They said, “Hey, let’s go out together, and have a big fellowship time.”

I said, “No, I am going to stay in. I am going to spend in my hotel room, and the whole night I just want to be with the Lord.” I remember the conference speaker, a good friend of mine said, “The Lord will not mind if you go out with us. Come on, and go out with us. The Lord will not mind.” The thought of the Lord minding never occurred to me at that season of my life, though it had when I was younger. I was not doing that because I thought God would love me more. I was the one who cared. He thought I wanted to stay in so I could earn more blessing with God so the next week conference would be better.

I said, “No, no. God is easy. I am staying in for the evening. I just want to be alone. I want to spend an evening with prayer in the Word because my heart is hungry to feel more. I am not doing it to move God; I am doing it because it moves me.”

They said, “Oh. That is a different approach.”

Some people go to the prayer room and say, “Ah, my time. I have to put my time in.” We do not put time in prayer, so God will like us more—absolutely not. We put time in prayer because it moves angels and demons, changes nations, and it enlarges our capacity to experience the desire that God already has for us. It does not increase God’s desire at all. Except for by revelation, one of the automatic ways that we think, even as believers, we have more confidence in our commitment to God than we do in God’s commitment to us.

Most people would not think, if they thought for a moment, they would say, “No, that is not true.” But I think it is true at the emotional level. The emotions will tell the truth of what we really believe deep in our heart. What I mean by that is if that they have had three good months where they are keeping all their commitments to God, they feel good. They are keeping their time with the Lord, their Bible study, and they are keeping all their commitments to the Lord: their finance, their words, their fasting, the way they use their time, their speech, etc.

They are keeping all the commitments they have made to God in order to be near to God. If they have done well for three months, when they go to their prayer time, they just feel strong, good, and they are happy. They say, “Yes Lord, here I am again.”

Someone asks, “How are you doing?”

They say, “I am doing great.” It is not that their prayer time is that great, but they have an overall sense of confidence in their walk with God, and they feel good. The same guy has a bad month; he does not follow through on all of his commitments in the same way. Then you go to the very same guy who was happy the month earlier, “Hey, how are you doing?”

They do not want to pray for people because they think, “Well, God probably is not going to use me anyway if I do pray for people.” They do not want to ask for special things. They say to themselves, “You know what? I am going to get through this funk. Then I am going to ask for God to use me when I get regular and focused again.”

They wait to use the extravagant language of their heart with God. They cop out of the intimacy language of, “I love you, and You love me, and I am totally committed to you.” They say, “I do not want to use that language right now because I have done badly for a month.” They feel depressed. They feel condemned, and they put themselves a bit on spiritual probation. God does not put them on probation; they put themselves on it.

“I am not going to ask for big stuff; I am not going to really pray for people until I get through this. I am not going to express the extravagant language of devotion in my heart to God that I love Him, and He loves me. I am going to put all of that on hold until I kind of get consistent again.” That means when they do well, when they are consistent on all of their commitments, they feel confident. When they do badly, they feel ashamed, and they feel depressed. That means that they are proud when they do well, and they are depressed when they do badly because their anchor, their confidence is in their own commitment to God, not in God’s commitment to them as a primary source. They have greater confidence in their commitment to God because they are doing well. However, when it is going bad, they are depressed. They want to quit. We need to shift them off of that belief system and make God’s commitment to them bigger in their thinking than even their commitment to God.

Again, every believer would say, “Sure, I know God’s commitment to me is bigger.” However, emotionally, why are you depressed when you are doing badly then? God’s desire is still the same towards you. God still wants to use you. God will still answer your prayer. God still wants to hear the extravagant language of devotion from your heart about how committed you are in giving yourself to Him, He wants to hear that even when you are doing badly.

You think, “Ah, I do not know. I will wait, give a few three month run, and then I will go for the big stuff again.” That is the proof that we do not have a foundation in the revelation of grace. By the way, it is very, very normal for people not to have that foundation. They come into the kingdom, they are born again understanding that they are saved and forgiven as a free gift; but

after they get in, and a couple years go by, they begin to drift back into the idea that they are earning God's favor even though they know better. Emotionally, that is how they respond.

### **GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS, BLESSING, AND FAVOR ARE GIVEN FREELY**

2 Corinthians 5:17-21: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." This is one of the foundational verses for the revelation of grace. "If anyone is in Christ," so when you read that and say, "OK, that is new to me." Anyone, anywhere, for any addictions, troubles, they are, from God's point of view, a new creation. The old things have passed away. From God's point of view, He has forgiven them. He relates to us in a different way. The old things have passed. All things have become new. That is a big word, "all."

From the Lord's point of view, in terms of His relating to us, the penalty is out of the way; all the hindrances from His point of view are removed. There is no hindrance from His point of view in the relationship with us. He says, "Your sin and rebellion has been paid for. My heart is wide open. Here I am." The hindrance is now just in our minds. It is not in God's mind; it is in our minds. We have to keep renewing our mind, but God is completely clear where He stands, completely openhearted. All things are new. He is not holding our sins against us.

He is not relating to us on the basis of how consistent we are in our follow through. Yes, we have made a commitment; we want to follow Jesus, we want to love Jesus, but He is not relating to us, meaning that His heart is not more open depending on our consistency. We feel less, but that is because condemnation and shame defile our capacity; we get all discombobulated in ourselves. It is not God drawing back. It is not that His mind changed; our mind is what gets us in trouble.

Look at 1 Corinthians 5:21: "For He"—that is the Father—"made Him who knew no sin"—that is Jesus. The Father made Jesus to be sin for us. Jesus became the offering of sin. Our sin was laid on Him, and He paid the legal debt in the court of God. In God's accounting books, the debt is paid. There is no debt. None. This is an absolutely staggering statement, "That we might become the righteousness of God in Christ." We became the righteousness of God. Beloved, the righteousness of God has been given to you by the Father because of Jesus as a free gift. This is a most amazing thing. The righteousness of God has been given to you. It is not a little bit of God's righteousness; it is 100 percent of it. Do you know what? The righteousness that you received as a gift the day you were born again, whether it was a month ago, ten years ago, or fifty years ago. The day you were born again, you received a gift of righteousness on your account in heaven that can never, ever be improved upon. A million years from now, you will not have more righteousness in God's sight than the day you were born again.

It is the righteousness of Christ. It cannot be improved upon. You did not get a 10 percent instalment of it; you got the whole 100 percent in the first moment. All the hindrance from God's point of view is gone; it is out of the way. He says, "There is nothing that is stopping Me from

expressing My heart to you. The only thing that is stopping Me is your ability to receive it. It is not in My ability to give it, or My desire to give it.”

### **BECAUSE OF WHAT JESUS DID ON THE CROSS, WE WALK WITH CONFIDENCE**

Romans 8:1: “Therefore, there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” There is none to a believer. The implication is that one who has committed them to obey the Lord; their follow through is great one day and not so good the other day. The commitment is there. The follow through is sometimes good, and sometimes not so good. We call that spiritual maturity, but regardless of where that is at, we have set our heart to follow the Lord, there is no condemnation and no shame. God is not judging us. There is no shame, nor condemnation. None. We must refuse the shame when the Devil brings it to us.

When we recognize our sin, we admit it, we call it sin, we repent of it, we sign back up to war against the area we just fell in, and we push delete on the shame. There is no condemnation. When the Devil comes to you, you take Romans 8:1 and you say, “It is written, ‘There is no condemnation for me to those who are in Christ Jesus.’”

Hebrews 12:2: “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” The Scripture says that we look unto Jesus, or we fix our eyes on Jesus, one translation says. We fix our eyes. We look at Him. Why? He is the author and the finisher of our faith. This means He is the author. He initiates every good thing in us. Every fire that is in you for God, He started it. Every seed that is growing into a tree, He planted it in you. He is the author. He initiated every good thing. It was His idea, not your idea. You are not the initiator, He is. He thought of you loving God before you thought of you loving God. He is not just the initiator; He is not the one who came up with all the good ideas. We might think that we came up with the ideas. I have this idea, “I am going to be radically committed to God. I am going to be fully yours.”

The Lord says, “That was my idea. I gave you that idea. You do not have to talk Me into it. I am the One trying to talk you into it.” He is not only the initiator, the author, but He is the finisher, and He completes it. He brings it to fullness. He starts the fire, and He brings it to a bonfire. He plants the seed, and He brings it to a full tree.

He says, “I am committed to you each step of the way.” That is what the finisher is. “I will be helping you each step of the way because it was my idea, and I am overseeing the building project. I will bring your love for God to maturity.” But you have to look to Him. What I mean by look to Him, I am talking about our soul needs to be more involved in conversing with Him.

### **CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD AND NOT OURSELVES**

Now this might sound strange, but instead of conversing with ourselves, we need to talk to God. What I am saying is this: our natural mindset is to measure our spiritual maturity and growth, and then to compare it to other people, to measure, and compare. When we get into the measure and compare game, we cannot stay focused in a connection with Jesus. They are opposite focuses of the heart. They are opposite directions. The bus says, “OK, get on the bus.” One bus is going to LA, and the other bus is going to New York. They have really different destinations. You better get on the right bus. One goes really far that way, and the other goes really far the other way. We

are either going to be preoccupied in looking to Him, meaning talking to Him. I do not mean an unbroken conversation, but we are more concerned with what He is thinking. He is the author and finisher. He is the initiator. He has got the building plan, and He has got all the building skills. We need to be talking to Him about us, not talking to us about us.

### **NO MORE MEASURING, COMPARING, OR COMPETING**

The natural thing to do is to measure ourselves. Not so many people are like this, but some of them are. They get stuck into this introspection—morbid introspection. They say, “My motives may not be right. I am not sure it is right. I cannot tell what I think.” The phrase “paralysis by analysis.”

They get so into figuring out if they are right, or they are wrong. They try to figure out if it is good, if it is bad. They are frozen in an inward, self-focus upon themselves. I do not mean inward, but they are talking to the Holy Spirit who lives in their spirit. I am talking about they are in introspection in a morbid way. This is very common. “Well, I do not know if my calling is high or low. I do not know if I am dedicated. I do not know if the Holy Spirit is really touching me, touching you, or touching them. I do not know.”

The Lord says, “Here is what I want you to do. I want you to hang up the phone”

I might respond, “But Lord, my ministry is as good as theirs, or theirs is better. But mine could be worse, but I am maybe more dedicated, but he is even more dedicated. That other guy is not.”

The Lord says, “Here is what I want you to do: I want you to hang the phone up.” We are on this long phone call to ourselves. The Lord is saying, “I want you to hang the phone up because I want to talk to you.”

You say, “Lord, I love you, I love you.”

The Lord says, “OK, I want you to hang the phone up.” We are on the phone the whole time that we are trying to talk to the Lord. The Lord says, “Hang the phone up. I want to get a word in edge wise. There is so much emotional traffic inside of you, I cannot get a word in edge wise to you.”

We answer, “OK, Lord, wait a minute. I am talking to me about me. Just give me a minute, and I will be finished.” Here is the negative of that: it ends up legalism. We are trying to sort it all out. He says, “You know what? Just talk to me. I will tell you where your motives are. I will tell you why you are receiving, or not receiving. I will tell you if you are. Do not get that from everybody else. Let me talk to you.”

“I want to know why I am not receiving so much.” How do you know you are not? We measure ourselves by other people and say, “Well, by so-and-so’s definition, I am not.”

The Lord says, “Maybe I am giving you something a different way. If you will talk to Me, maybe you are receiving. You are so interested in the phone call to yourself, you will not let Me talk to you.”

We argue with the Lord, “Well, I am not getting it the way that they are getting it.”

We answer, “Ah, well, that is OK. I did not tell you I was going to relate to you the way I relate to them.” The problem is it keeps us from connecting, but if we get our eyes on Him; it means we are having a dialog. I do not mean that we are having a dialogue every minute, all day, every day, but the focus of our soul is Jesus’ Word instead of us talking to ourselves. It was some years ago, when I began to understand this. I remember some guys in the church coming in and saying, “Hey, man, how are you doing spiritually?”

I said, “What do you mean?” They gave me the five, or six areas. I said, “I do not know. I have my commitments. I am clear what they are.”

They asked, “How much do you keep them?”

I said, “The best I can. When I blow it, I repent. I push delete. I forget it.” I do not even know how much I keep them. I do not even care. When I blow it, I sign up to do it again, and I am talking to Jesus. I do not do a big “Mike Inventory” thing because it gets confusing. You get into a quagmire. You get all bogged down. I want to talk to Him. He has way more information about me than I do. His information is far more reliable. He is the author and the finisher. He initiates, and he oversees the building project.

He says, “I have way more skill than you do to build you. Talk to me. Open your Bible, make some time, turn the phone off, and talk to me for a while, and I will talk to you about you with far greater skill than you can.” We know that God releases His power by faith, but He releases His blessing by faith. He releases His ministry through us to others by faith. The word “faith” means “confident agreement.” That is what faith is; it is agreement with confidence.

God says “that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). Agree with that promise with confidence. The Devil says, “You are condemned, and you are over. You are a loser.” Do not agree with the Devil, agree with God, but agree with confidence. That is what faith is. Faith is confident agreement.

### **FAITH IS CONFIDENT AGREEMENT WITH GOD’S COMMITMENT TO US**

The idea of faith means we have confidence in God’s commitments to us. We have confidence in God’s desire for us. We have confidence in the work of the cross to move everything out of the way. We have confidence that He wants to give things to us, talk to us, and relate with us. It is confidence in God in those ways. It is not just confidence that He exists; it is confidence that His commitments are real, and His desire towards us is alive. He enjoys talking to us. He enjoys using us even in our brokenness. When we have confidence in those arenas; that is called faith. That is what faith is.

### **GOD’S DESIRE FOR US IS NOT BASED ON OUR PERFORMANCE**

Galatians 3:2-5: “This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Therefore, He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith.”

It is as if Paul said this to the Galatians, “I want to learn from you. I have a question. When you were first born again, did you receive the Holy Spirit because you earned it?” These are Paul’s converts. He said, “Did you receive it because you earned it, and then God gave you salvation, gave you the Holy Spirit, gave you a ministry, and a calling, or did you receive the Holy Spirit because you heard the message, and you had confidence that God was committed to you?”

It is as if Paul continues, “You received the Holy Spirit because you heard with faith. You heard the message, you mixed it with confidence, you believed that God’s desire for you was real, His commitments to you were real, His desire to use you was real, and you had confidence when you heard the message.” To be made perfect means to be made mature. Paul is not talking about fleshly, sinful things when he talks about the works of the flesh. What Paul means is, “You are going to do some activity to get God to pay attention to you? You do not have to do that. God is already paying attention to you. You are not going to get into the deep things of God by you stirring up God’s attention; He is already committed to you.”

We are going to pray and fast because it enlarges our capacity to receive more; it moves angels and demons. It does affect things in the Holy Spirit, but it does not move God to become more interested. He is already infinitely interested in us—eternally and infinitely. The measure of His interest cannot increase, and the duration will never end. It is infinite. His desire is infinite. It will last forever, and we can have confidence in this.

Galatians 3:5: “He who supplies the Holy Spirit to you”—that is the Father—“and works miracles among you”—here is my question: does God give you the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and does He work miracles because you earn it, or because you hear the message about His commitment, and you have confidence in the message? Of course, the answer is that they hear the message with confidence. Beloved, I do not care how bad your month has been, how bad your follow through has been, you can lay hands on people, and the Holy Spirit will still use you. My point is not, “Wow! I will just get reckless about it.” God’s loving kindness is to win us to radical obedience. Our obedience does not produce His kindness to us; the kindness is first.

### **PSALM 116: THE PSALMIST SOUGHT TO REPAY GOD FOR ALL THE BENEFITS**

Psalm 116:12-17: “What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the LORD . . . I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD.”

Now I am going to pause and give you a thirty second story. This was my favorite message; when I was nineteen years old in 1974, which was thirty-six years ago. I went to the University of Missouri. My youth pastor said, “Start a Bible study.” I was really scared. So I started a Bible study. I made a flyer, and I went out to pass it out. I invited people to a Bible study. I was a freshman on the campus. About thirty people came, some friends, but mostly strangers. I passed them out everywhere. This was my first message that I ever preached because it was my best one. Now, it was my only one, but it was still my best one. I worked all summer on this.

Psalm 116 so excited me when I was nineteen years old, and I was so nervous when thirty people showed up. It seemed like a million. I went into that room where there were thirty all packed into an apartment. I said, “Man, it is packed. It is bigger than the Billy Graham stadium!” It felt that way. I was so nervous. I went with the best message I knew, which was really the only message that I had. I think I had three; this was my best one. When I am looking at this, I have a little tenderness about preaching on Psalm 116, even mentioning it because it brings me back there.

Here it is: The psalmist says in verse 12, it is one of the greatest descriptions on how faith works in a practical way. The psalmist asks the question, “What shall I render to the Lord for all of his benefits toward me?” In other words, what should I pay back to God for giving me so many benefits? God has given you physical life, He has given you spiritual life that lasts for eternity, and He has given you grace. He has given you a calling, and He has given you many things. What should you pay God back with? That is the question.

Psalm 116:12-13: “What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD.” He says two things, “I am going to take the cup of salvation,” and, “I am going to thank Him for it.” I am going to call on Him. I am going to talk to Him. I am not going to talk to me about me; I am going to talk to Him about me. I am going to call on Him, not call on myself.

Here is what the psalmist says: if you want to pay God back, if you want to give God something that moves Him, take everything that He offers and say thank you. If you want to move God when He forgives you, if you want to move Him, then take every single offer of forgiveness. That is what moves Him. Take everything He will give you and ask for a double supply. The spirit of revelation, the spirit of grace, provision, take, and say thank you. Do not negotiate. Do not do, “Oh, shucks, I do not really deserve it. You just forgive me one more time, and I will not ever talk again about the subject. I promise this is the last time.”

He says, “Throw that language away. I do not want to hear that. What I want to hear from You is this: everything I put on my table that helps you, that blesses you, that touches you, and brings you near to Me, you take it, and say thank you because it makes your heart trust Me, love Me, and adore Me. It opens up your spirit, so I can commune with you, and have fellowship with you. It is the only way our relationship will work.” What we like to do is that we want to earn a little bit of it. The Lord says, “No. If you want to really bless Me, take everything, and say thank you.” I guess that gives you a little insight to where I was living when I was nineteen years old. I

needed that message. Do not negotiate with God. Do not put yourself on spiritual probation. I remember earlier before that, I would do something wrong and say, “God, I promise. I made vows about my commitment. I promised you how I would never stumble again in this area, ‘I will never fail again.’”

Jesus says, “I do not want you relating to me based on promises never to be weak. I want you to commit your heart to Me, promise your heart to Me, but do not promise Me you will never stumble because you will many times. I do not want you to negotiate. I do not want you to run in the back room, and sulk for a while until you even the score. I want you to take, and say thank you. Take the cup, and rejoice in it. Do not negotiate, do not have a religious reasoning, just drink it, enjoy Me, and I will enjoy you enjoying Me. I can enjoy you so well when you enjoy Me.”

### **BE AS CHILDREN: FREELY RECEIVE WITH HUMILITY**

When we enjoy God, it opens our spirit up. That is the kind of relationship God wants with us. We are enjoying God, and God is enjoying us enjoying Him, and vice versa. There is one cornerstone. He is the One who supplies it, we take it, and we just go for it. We drink deeply. We will not finish all of this, but I will just give you another verse or two.

Matthew 18:4: “Whoever humbles himself as a little child is the greatest in the kingdom.” This is an unusual statement. Whoever humbles himself as a little child, He is talking about the one who has confident boldness to take everything the parent has provided. A little three-year-old child, they do not sit at the table and say, “Hey, dad, what are the chances of you giving me some reassurance we are going to eat next week?”

“Hey, I have done a lot of work, and I think that we are about fifty-fifty right now on this meal. I have worked some, you have worked some.” A three-year-old sits at the table; they have confident boldness. They want more. They do not have this idea that Mom worked all day, and she is kind of a little stressed out at that moment. She did something kind of heroic that day to get food. They do not care. They want food, and they want it now. It does not even dawn on them. They get a little bit older, and they say, “Oh, I get it now.” They have this confident boldness, and it is interesting. If I were thinking of a child, I would think of something like, bold, confident—those are good words. I would think of how the little guy has a big appetite for everything with no awareness of what is really going on. It is interesting; Jesus uses the word “humility.”

He says, “What that child is doing is called humility from God’s point of view.”

I ask, “Humility? How does that little three-year old; how is that humility? It seems to me like he is insensitive.”

God says, “No, it is humility.” What is happening is He wants us to trust God’s heart for us more than our heart for God, and it takes humility to do that. I remember an elder in my church some years ago who did well financially. He came to me. He had a really difficult economic situation,

which was a surprise, and he was in a place where he needed other people to help him. He was always one of the big givers. He sowed into a lot of people's lives. The surprising turn of events is that he needed money, which was a new experience for him. He came to me, and he said, "This is kind of weird. I am used to giving all money and supplying. I love giving, and I love generosity. Now, I am receiving." It troubled him. It humbled him. He said, "Now, I have to stand before a friend of mine in a place of weakness and need. I am not sufficient to provide for myself, and now I need them to help me. I do not like that feeling. Then, when they do help me, I feel like I am indebted to them. They do not put the debt on me, but I feel like I am in debt. I feel like they are over me, and I am under them. I feel humbled in a lot of ways, and I do not like this feeling." When he said this to me, and I instantly thought about the Lord and I.

I responded, "That is what you are talking about, Lord." It is humility to just take, and say thank you. We would like to sit at the table with the Lord, the bargaining table, and say, "Lord, You are rich. I do not have that much, but let's at least do 90-10 percent. You do 90 percent; I do 10 percent. At least I am doing something in the relationship that sort of contributes to motivating you."

The Lord says, "No, it is 100 to zero."

"OK, how about ninety-five to five? I can motivate you a little bit."

He says, "No, you did not motivate Me at all. I was absolutely committed to you and desired you when you had no interest in Me. It is one hundred to zero. Take, and say thank you." We bargain with God thinking, "For three months, I keep all my commitments for those three months, it is not like I have moved God more. Then I have a hard time the next month, now God is depressed and disinterested. Then I keep all my commitments, and he is back interested again." God is moved by our heart to give ourselves to Him; that moves His heart, but our follow through is not what moves Him as much as the intent of our heart to give ourselves to Him. That does move Him. That is love; it moves Him. When we follow, through it actually increases our capacity, and it moves us. Our follow through helps us enjoy God, rather than helping God enjoy us. Follow through is important. When Jesus in John 13 went to Peter, He said to Peter, "I will wash your feet."

Peter said, "It is not going to happen." You know the story: It is as if Jesus said, "If I do not wash your feet, you are not in the kingdom. You end up in the lake of fire."

"OK, OK. Wash my feet. Wash all of me!"

He said, "Peter, calm down. Do it on my terms." When He first went to Peter and said, "I want to wash your feet," Peter said, "No." A lot of times God wants to use us, He is wanting to bless us and to do things through us. He desires us. He wants the extravagant language of our heart communicated, and He says, "I want to wash you."

We say, “No. No. I just feel shameful. I feel like a failure. I do not even want to talk to you right now. Just give me a month solid of doing well, and then we will talk straight again.” He says, “No, look to Me. Do not look to yourself. Take, and say thank you.”

### **THE GENTILES WERE UNGODLY AND UNDESERVING OF GOD’S BLESSING**

Romans 9:30: “Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith. But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.”

By the way, these two passages go together. There is just a chapter break between them, but Paul is giving one message. He says, “The Gentiles,” but Paul is talking to the Jewish believers here, or even unbelievers. Paul says, “The Gentiles did not pursue righteousness, but they attained to it.” This really throws the Jews off because the Jews have been pursuing righteousness for generations. Their grandfather’s grandfather, they were all pursuing righteousness. Generations, at least in theory; that was what was in their mind. Then as an individual, the guy had been pursuing righteousness for five or six decades. He is fifty, sixty, seventy years old, and He says, “I personally have been pursuing righteousness for years, and my heritage has for generations and these ungodly Gentiles,” because the Gentiles of that day, Paul led these Gentiles to the Lord. They are his own converts, they were pagan worshippers, they did not think about God, they did not care about God, and when Paul offered them salvation, they got saved instantly. These Jewish unbelievers are tripped by this.

“You are telling us that these pagan, Gentile, immoral demon worshippers heard a message, they liked it, now they are saved, and eternally in God’s family. We have had generations of people seeking righteousness, and personally decades of it in my own life. They are in the family of God, and we are not?”

Paul said, “Exactly.”

These Jewish guys said, “That cannot be true.”

Paul said, “They did not pursue righteousness, but they attained it. They received it as a gift.”

### **GOD’S LOVE WAS FREELY OFFERED TO THEM**

Romans 9:31-32: “But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at the stumbling stone.” Jesus says, “But the Jews, they have been pursuing righteousness for generations collectively and even decades individually, but they do not attain to it. They do not receive the free gift.”

Romans 9:32 basically asks, “Why?” Because the Jews did not seek it by faith, which means that they did not come to God with confidence in the message that God would give it to them freely. The Jews said, “We will pay for it with our dedication.”

God says, “It is not for sale. You cannot pay for it. If I let you in on the payment plan, then you will never be rightly related to Me. There is only one way in—the free gift plan. The payment plan does not work.”

The Jews were seeking acceptance with God. That is righteousness—acceptance with God. They were not seeking it by the gift plan, the faith, the confidence in God’s goodness, they were seeking it through the payment plan. They were seeking it by the works of the law; that is the payment plan. For they stumbled at the stumbling stone, the stumbling stone was God only offered salvation for free. That was the stumbling stone.

Again, we stumble at the same thing. We know we get into the kingdom for free, but now that we have been in the kingdom for five, ten, twenty years, then we switch over, and start relating to God with how good our follow through is. We feel confident when our follow through is good. We feel shameful and condemned when it is bad. The Lord says, “No, my heart is toward you the same either way. You can have confidence before Me in every season.”

They were talking to people who were committed to follow the Lord, but their follow through was coming up short. Sounds like us. The people in this room are sincerely committed to obey, but our follow through is not what we want it to be. The Lord says, “I can work with that. I do not lose motivation towards you. I do not lose enthusiasm toward you because your follow through is bad. I am going to show you how much I love you, and that is going to awaken a desire to follow through because you are going to want to experience more and more of my goodness in your life.”

He finishes this discussion in Romans 10:2-3: “They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.” He says, “The Jewish people have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” These guys have been seeking God for generations collectively and for decades as individuals. They are forty, fifty, sixty years old; for decades they have been seeking God. They are zealous. It is as if Paul says, “I will not argue. They are zealous. They are sincere, but they are not seeking according to biblical knowledge. They are not seeking according to the revelation of grace,” that is what knowledge is in this context.

They need to seek God on God’s terms and that means the free gift, the only way God relates is by our free gift. That is not only just the way He forgives us, it is the only way that He relates to us in our calling and our ministry; it is the free gift plan.

It is as if God says, “These Jews, they have zeal, but they do not have knowledge. They do not have the knowledge, or the revelation of grace.” Romans 10:3: “for being ignorant of how they receive God’s righteousness because they are trying the payment plan, and there is only one plan, the free gift plan.” What they are doing is trying to establish our own righteousness. They are trying to live in a way to motivate God. They are trying to provide the motivation for God to like them. Paul says here—here is the key phrase, “They have not submitted to God’s plan of giving

righteousness.” They do not submit to it. As believers, we need to submit to this, and submit to God’s plan. How does God give righteousness? It is a free gift.

We look back at the last month, and we realize that with our words, our thoughts, our time, our money, our passions, we have not followed through on our commitments. We want to keep our commitments strong, we really do. The answer is not to throw your commitments out because a true believer will always make commitments to obey the Lord. That is the evidence of a true believer; they have a commitment in their spirit to obey the Lord. They make the commitment, and though the follow through is bad, and the Lord says, “Submit to the revelation of grace. Understand that your zeal is good, but come to Me with the knowledge that I am not changing My attitude toward you because your follow through is bad this month. When your follow through is good next month, you cannot be proud. So you cannot be condemned when your follow through is bad. You are steady straight through the process. It is called confidence in love.

**MINISTRY TIME:**

Amen. Let’s stand. I want to encourage you to take some of these notes, and work on them in your own soul. There is nothing more liberating than when you are doing well not to be proud, and when you are doing badly, not to be condemned. Not to be measuring yourself, not to be comparing yourself, you are in a dialog with Jesus, and you have confidence, which is called faith that He is committed to you.