

Session 4: Getting Started

Three Ingredients to God's
Amazing Favor

1. Question - Why Would God Favor You?

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Heb 11:6 some typical answers.

a. "He'll bless me because he loves me"

Not good enough. He loves everyone, but not everyone is equally blessed. Do you really believe he doesn't love other Christians enough to bless them?

b. "He'll bless me because I have faith for it"

Nope - All the demons in Hell believe in God... and tremble (James 2:19). It takes more than faith... without works it's dead (James 2:18,20, 26) and so is your ministry.

c. "He'll bless me because I obey, serve, and I'm faithful"

Guess again. This was the hardest one for me to give up. You can go to church for a million years, never miss a devotional, and serve better than Mother Teresa... and you still won't qualify for the blessing of God.

Why does God bless some and not others?

Three reasons:

a. People that are blessed work harder

God blesses initiative. You can be as spiritual as you want to... speak in tongues, prophecy, understand mysteries and possess all knowledge. It doesn't matter. God blesses people that do things (aka work).

A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest — and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.

Prov 6:10-11 KJV, Prov 24:33-34 NIV

But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Eph 5:13-14 NIV

Three reasons: (continued)

b. People are blessed that work smarter - If you've worked hard at your job for a couple of decades and stayed ahead of the bills you can continue to work hard for a couple more decades and you may get the same results; slightly ahead of your bills. Working smarter means finding the wisdom and leading of God and making some changes. Most of us think in terms of "obedience." If I obey the Holy Spirit and follow His leading, I'll be blessed." That's the language of a servant that never inherits the Kingdom on earth. "I no longer call you servants"

It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings. Prov 25:2

c. Multiplication - Working harder and working smarter = multiplication

Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the LORD blessed him. 13 The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. 14 He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him. Gen 26:12-14 NIV

2. God Loves Initiative – It brings His Favor

God loves your initiative and willingness to co-labor with his vision so much that a few mistakes don't really bother Him. On the other hand, doing nothing does bother Him... he doesn't put his favor on passive people.

Noah - Finding God's favor is not a great mystery available only to a few. It's for you too. Noah had three ingredients that brought the favor of God (Gen 6:8-9)

1. He was righteous - right standing with God. Maybe not perfect, but forgiven
2. Blameless among the people - He was honest, likable, productive... a good citizen
3. He walked with God - not "for God"; not "followed God"; but "with God"

Jacob's Initiative - Jacob and his mother push initiative to ethical outer limits in contending for the favor of God. However, God's judgment ends up more on Esau than Jacob. Again, God loves those that cooperate with his plan even in their imperfections.

Moses - Moses takes this amazing initiative even farther. In Exodus 32-34 God is so mad at the Israelites he's ready to start over again with just Moses. However, Moses took the liberty to "seek the favor of God" and... reasoned Him out of it. That's a pretty high level of partnership in walking with God. It didn't happen once either; it happened several times. Intercession can change certain aspects of God's intent.

God Loves Initiative (continued)

Kings Walk with God - They don't subscribe to "God helps those who help themselves."
What they really believe is "God helps those that help Him build the Kingdom."

Moses' mother didn't just throw him in the river. She put him in a water-proof basket where pharaoh's wife would find him under the watchful eye of his sister... who recommend mom for wet nurse duty. High level of initiative and it worked!

Joseph didn't just wait for God's deliverance. He used every natural and spiritual gift at his disposal to work his way up to effect the plan of God. It wasn't an accident of God's providence; it was everything Joseph could do plus God's anointing.

Hezekiah became ill and Isaiah prophesied his death in no uncertain terms (thus saith the Lord). Amazingly, however, Hezekiah still appeals to God for 15 more years and before Isaiah has left the court he returns to reverse his prophecy (2Kgs 20).

David prayed that Bathsheba's child would not die because he knew there was a possibility God might extend mercy. The Lord didn't answer David's prayer but that didn't keep a man after God's own heart from asking.

Our initiative has far more influence over circumstances and God than we've realized. You already know what God is doing... building his Church, the great commission, releasing Kings, etc. The question is, "What are you doing?" and God is the one asking.

Initiative – continued (yah butts!)

What About Presumption? - The classic sermon illustration is: Abraham and Sarah don't see the promise of Abraham's offspring multiplying like the stars of heaven so Sarah volunteers Hagar and they make something happen. Now I've always heard that this was one of the onerous sins of presumption committed in scripture. But listen to what God has to say about it. Although it was God's plan to extend the covenant through Isaac, he also blesses Ishmael (the product of their initiative). I'm not saying Sarah had a great idea; I'm only suggesting that God didn't categorize it as sin. In fact, he seems to expand the tent of covenant blessing to include Ishmael.

Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." 10 The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."
Gen 16:9-10 NIV

Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. 20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and **I will make him into a great nation.** Gen 17:19-20

What About Trials, Warfare, Failure?

What about them?

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: **Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead**, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Phil 3:13-14 NIV

Give yourself permission to make a decision

- (Spiritual maturity)
- God will back you

3. The Transition – From Servant to King

Do Something for Your Own Household - Jacob worked for Laban faithfully for 14 years for Leah and Rachel, his wives. Laban understood that he had been blessed because of Jacob and offered a raise.

But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you." 28 He added, "Name your wages, and I will pay them." Gen 30:27-28

Now Jacob could have asked for a raise. Instead, he asked for a contract that gave him room to be entrepreneurial and creative. Many Christians have good jobs and get good appraisals. Employers have benefited because of them. Yet there is a divine unrest in your heart because God is asking you to step out and "do something for my own household." I have a suggestion - DO IT!

Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. 30 The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?" Gen 30:29-30

Be a Kid Again

Recover your Childhood curiosity, spontaneity, creativity, imagination, playfulness, permission to have fun.

In one series of I.Q. tests given to children ages 2 - 4 years, 95% of the children were found to be highly creative with curious, questioning minds and an ability for abstract thinking.

When the same children were tested again at age 7, only 5% still demonstrated high levels of creativity. In the ensuing years, they had learned to conform; "If you want to get along, you had better go along," is what they had discovered.

Conformity - They had learned to color between the lines, to sit in neat little rows, to do and say what the other kids did and said, and to do as they were told. Over time, they lost the wonderful fearless spontaneity of youth and learned to suppress ideas and insights that were unusual or different.