

4.12.26

Praying In Preparation for Pentecost: Forgiving and Being Forgiven; Praying and Believing; Agreeing and Authority; Receiving and the Bread of Life

First Things First

Mark 11:24-25 ESV

*“As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.” And Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, **so that** your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”*

Interesting that the connection to verse 24 of Mark chapter 11 is seldom made to verse 25, leaving the interpretation of the passage completely² untethered from its original and intended context. In fact, verse 24, without verse 25, has (sadly) been used in the faith movement to mislead thousands into unhealthy expectations and entitlements from one’s relationship with God. In fact, praying self-willed, self-purposed prayers, too often promoted by “what we want” rather than praying Christ-willed, Christ-purposed prayers, prompted by “what we need”, is why many Christians struggle to have their prayers consistently and effectively answered. Teaching the “self-willed, self-purposed” kind of prayer leads to misguided faith. Ultimately, a misguided faith is a failed faith, leaving those who believe in it with unrealistic expectations and often leading to a complete crisis of faith. Disillusioned and angry, they wrongly believed that God was to be on demand for whatever they asked and believed for, whenever they wanted it. But biblical faith is founded on the good pleasure, plans, purposes, and unmovable will of God rather than the

pleasure, plans, purposes, and ever-changing will of man. Biblical faith is founded upon love for who God is - rather than a manipulative and entitled expectation for what we may or may not want Him to do. Without forgiving one another, which is the perfect (like Christ) sacrifice, the uninformed, the deceived, or the arrogant, will continue to stand and pray prayers that HAVE NO LIFE or eternal purpose. Wrongly, we continue on...

...If I just believe more, I can ask for more!

...if I can visualize it, I can speak it into existence!

...God, You have promised in Your Word that if I believe it, I can receive it!

...Whatever I ask in Your Name, You will do it!

...I claim this under my authority as a believer!

Each of those statements carries various elements of biblical truth, and yet when abused or used outside the right and righteous context of the author's intended meaning, there is a problem for those who teach to pray and believe in that way.

As we said, this kind of unbiblical faith has too often led many Christians into a tragic crisis of faith rather than biblically disciplining them to build a stronger, more complete, or perfected faith. We must go back to the origin of this error or doctrinal falsehood.

To begin, neither you nor I (nor anyone, for that matter) can untether the two verses of Mark 11 from their shared context and coupled meaning. Jesus taught them as a seamless progression of cohesive truth. Here is how that works. First, ask yourself, *'Why would God obligate Himself to answering any and every prayer request made of Him, regardless of the intent or condition of the heart?'* If one can have faith for the right and righteous thing, then one can also have faith for the wrong and unrighteous thing. The difference or distinction between the two is as Jesus taught...

Matthew 15:18 ESV

"But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person."

The biblical premise for praying (asking), believing, and receiving in prayer is made completely possible only when preceded by praying and believing from a clean and right heart, which leads us to forgive others for their

trespasses against us so that our heavenly Father forgives us of ours. In other words, the effectiveness and success of our praying and believing are directly related to our forgiving and being forgiven from a right and righteous heart. That is precisely why Jesus said, *“and when you pray, pray this way; “forgive us of our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”* We cannot untether one from the other: our praying, believing, and receiving, from the condition, intent, and motive of our hearts. The two are uniquely connected to one another by way of preferring and surrendering to God’s will above our will for ourselves. With Yeshua, this started with an emptying of the heart of those consequential trespasses - the ones we have committed and the ones committed against us - the ones we have done, and the ones we have left undone. Here is the good news regarding our praying, our believing, and our receiving, which we must reconcile to our faith and relationship with God and with one another. Reconciliation is always possible through forgiving and being forgiven.

Go to your brother and forgive, and be forgiven; go to your sister and forgive, and be forgiven. In surrendered obedience, offer love and a full measure of grace through the means of deserved or undeserved forgiveness, which will carry with it the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. In that humbled condition, we are now aligned to pray His will for our world - this prayer is incomparably liberating. It is not only liberating to the one who is praying and believing, but it also liberates the prayer being prayed and believed for from the obvious human hindrances. Praying to God the Father, in Jesus Name, by the power of the Holy Spirit cuts away⁵ the will of our flesh to allow us to freely pray His will be done, and His Kingdom come. This all starts with forgiving and being forgiven from a place of good intent and pure motives. Amazing.

Including Mark 11, here are some further biblical examples of what our prayer, believing, and receiving should look like through the lens of Him to Whom we pray. Look closely for the connection Jesus makes to the swift forgiveness and reconciliation of an offense or trespass in relation to the offering of our prayer and worship to our Creator. Let’s open our hearts to the biblical realities of those hindrances to our prayer that we ourselves can choose to control and correct. Let’s welcome into our daily prayer the call of God to forgiveness, to righteousness, to the motive and intent of our hearts, and to living in right and righteous relationships with one another.

Matthew 5:23-24 ESV

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

James 5:16 ESV

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

1 Peter 3:7-12 ESV

“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

James 4:3-10 ESV

“You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

Preparing for Pentecost: Overcoming Hindered Prayer

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Confession, Forgiveness, and Repentance:

Regularly

confessing sins and seeking forgiveness can restore our relationship with God and clear the way for effective prayer. This is how Jesus taught us to pray.

4.26.26 *Aligning Motives and Intent:* Ensure that your requests align with God's will and purpose. Reflect on your motives and intent before bringing prayer to God.

5.3.26 *Strengthening and Increasing Faith:* Cultivate a strong faith through prayer, scripture reading, and community support to overcome doubt.

5.10.26 *Persistent and Purposed Prayer:* Continue to pray and seek God, even when answers seem delayed. Colossians 4:2 encourages us to "continue in prayer" and remain steadfast. Pray His purposes and will be done over you and in you.

5.17.26 *In One Mind and One Accord*

By courageously confronting these hindrances, we can enhance our prayer life and develop a deeper connection, consistently displaying a more purposeful and effective faith in God. Remember, effective prayer is rooted in a sincere, clean heart, fearless faith, and an unwavering commitment to living in alignment with God's Word, God's Will, and God's Ways.

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Praying In Preparation for Pentecost: Forgiving and Being Forgiven; Praying and Believing; Agreeing and Authority; Receiving and the Bread of Life

Jesus Taught Us How to Pray

Luke 11:1-4 ESV

“Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’ And he said to them, ‘When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.’”

Though we can recite the prayer from memory, there is still much for us to learn from how Jesus taught us to pray. In fact, that He taught us how to pray is most significant, and when we ourselves pray, that is what we must start with. Within the eternal template of “The Our Father,” or the biblical model of “the Lord's Prayer,” there are strong indications leading us to the ever-critical relationship between forgiveness and receiving our daily bread, which in this context means [*spiritual nourishment/sustenance*,¹⁰ *instruction, blessing, life, or daily necessities or needs*]. Or, in other words, “*the bread of life*.” Much like forgiving and being forgiven, the provisional precepts of daily bread are revealed to us in how Jesus taught us to pray. “*Give us this day our daily bread*” is a divine revelation waiting for fulfillment. And, we know that nothing we begin can be completed or fulfilled without Yeshua, or Christ the Word, being at its origin and achievement. He is both the founder and finisher of our faith.

Hebrews 12:1-2 NKJV

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Interestingly, in the spiritual context of founding and finishing, Jesus will also eventually introduce Himself as *“the bread of life.”* However, one can not overlook the significance of the connection between praying, believing, receiving, and the need and spiritual value of the perfect and complete sacrifice of Christ, the bread of life, and the forgiveness of one’s transgression.

**Jesus freely gave us the bread of life, in that He gave us Himself
- He is the bread of life.**

Listen further to the connections that Jesus Yeshua made between receiving the *bread of life* and *forgiving and being forgiven*. It is remarkable how seldom we make this connection between forgiveness and our deliverance from evil, and between the founding and the finishing or perfecting of our faith, which is Christ Jesus.

Matthew 6:11-13 ESV

“Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we also forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

What we can discover here is a biblical understanding that the forgiveness we often withhold from others not only affects the forgiveness our Heavenly Father extends to us, but also paralyzes and ultimately damages our own faith as we pray and believe for the daily petitions we consider important to ourselves and others.

Matthew 6:14-15 ESV

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

How significant are these precepts to the praying and believing follower of Jesus? Well, as we move further into John’s Gospel, we read that Jesus, in His ministry will begin to publicly instruct followers with an even deeper and all-important introduction and fulfillment. According to God’s word, will, and ways, Jesus will, in a shocking way, reveal to His followers and critics that He Himself is, in fact, *the bread of life*. **This prophetic proclamation will prove to be both a problem and a provision.** It is a problem for the Pharisees and all those whose faith is founded in the religion of men, and it is the great eternal provision for those whose faith is

fulfilled and completed in Christ Jesus. This, of course, is unheard of and considered blasphemy against the Temple and the Sanhedrin court.

John 6:32-35

“Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

*They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them, **“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”***

Why is this statement from Jesus significant? How do bread, life, and forgiveness of transgressions align to our praying, believing, and receiving? A few years back, I heard a brief teaching from a Messianic Jewish Rabbi regarding these two questions - his content and the biblical context are sound and solid, and fit here perfectly. Here is the premise and progression.

Yeshua shares the Passover Meal with His Disciples -The Last Supper (Unleavened Bread)

Matthew 26:26

“Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.”

The Bread of Life

- Yeshua as our spiritual nourishment, as the complete and perfect sacrifice for our sins and transgressions.

John 6:35

*“Jesus said to them,
“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me
shall not hunger...”*

***Interestingly, Jesus was born in Bethlehem
- Bethlehem in Hebrew [beit-lechem; means “house of bread”]***

Micah 5:2

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.”

John 7:42

“Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?”

The Hebrew Language is alpha-numeric

- All 22 letters of the Hebrew alaph-bet have a meaning that carries a numeric value or meaning. The symbolic system is widely known as “Gematria.”

[Bethlehem] in Hebrew is *Beit-le-chem*, meaning “house of bread,” and it has a numeric value of (490).

[Nativity] in Hebrew is *Mo-le-det*, meaning “land of my birth” and has a numeric value of (490).

[Perfected] in Hebrew is *Tam-mim*; meaning “complete, whole, and blameless” and has a numeric value of (490). Scripture teaches Christ the Messiah is the complete and perfect sacrifice for our sin or transgression.

In Matthew 18, Peter asks Jesus how many times one should forgive another - Jesus, seventy times seven, having a value of (490).

Matthew 18:21-22 NASB

*“Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus *said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”*

So here it is - spelled out for us in ways that cannot be denied. Christ the Word is our Bread of Life. Christ the Messiah and Redeemer is the complete and perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of all our transgressions.

The bread is life

- the life is Christ

- Christ is our sacrifice and forgiveness.

John 1:29 ESV

“The next day he (John the Baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

John 6:50-51 ESV

“This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

2 Peter 2:24 ESV

“He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.”

Christ the Messiah, our Lord and Savior, is the righteous authority and power by which we resist all evil and dispel and overcome all principalities of darkness. Outside of *Yeshua ha Mashiach*, we do not have the authority or the power, or the command and demand in prayer if we have not righteously fulfilled the will and expectations from the heart of God the Father. Forgive and be forgiven, and then receive our daily bread. And, when we have, then by all means and in righteous obedience - pray His Kingdom come, and His will be done. Pray in the name and humility of Christ Jesus. Pray in humble faith and courageous belief, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. This is a prayer that when we pray it with a pure heart, He longs to answer.

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Aligning Our Motives and Intent

2 Samuel 22:1-33 ESV

And David spoke to the LORD the words of this song on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said, "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence. I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies. "For the waves of death encompassed me, the torrents of destruction assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me. "In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I called. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry came to his ears. "Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations of the heavens trembled and quaked, because he was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals¹⁷ flamed forth from him. He bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under his feet. He rode on a cherub and flew; he was seen on the wings of the wind. He made darkness around him his canopy, thick clouds, a gathering of water. Out of the brightness before him coals of fire flamed forth. The LORD thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered his voice. And he sent out arrows and scattered them; lightning, and routed them. Then the channels of the sea were seen; the foundations of the world were laid bare, at the rebuke of the LORD, at the blast of the breath of his nostrils. "He sent from on high, he took me; he drew me out of many waters. He rescued me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the LORD was my support. He brought me out into a broad place; he rescued me, because he delighted in me.

"The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according

to the cleanness of my hands, he rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his rules were before me, and from his statutes I did not turn aside. I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from guilt. And the LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in his sight. “With the merciful you show yourself merciful; with the blameless man you show yourself blameless; with the purified you deal purely, and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous. You save a humble people, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down. For you are my lamp, O LORD, and my God lightens my darkness. For by you I can¹⁸ run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall. This God — his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him. “For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God? This God is my strong refuge and has made my way blameless.”

During our 50-day preparation for Pentecost, we align the intent and motives of our hearts and minds with the ways and will of His eternal Word. I am so excited to share with you the obvious and the glorious truth. **Every source and resource needed to accomplish what we seek in Him has been given to us and is, in fact, right before us.**

In preparing our hearts and minds for complete alignment with Him, we discover the importance and necessity of developing an ongoing pattern or a trusted template that allows us to quickly and decisively prioritize and practice His word, will, and ways above all else. In keeping with the spirit of Pentecost, we can quickly consider several instructive Biblical templates to get us there.

First. When we pray, we want to pray not just rightly but righteously.

You might ask, ‘What is the difference? The Scripture reminds us in James 5:13 (ESV), “*The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*” However, we know that the only true righteousness is found in Christ Jesus, the Messiah. So, as we taught last week, we look to Christ¹⁹ Yeshua as the founder and finisher of our faith. So we must be found and finished in Him.

Philippians 3:7-11 ESV

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

Remember, prayer is not a method or technique that just anybody can use to manipulate God into giving us what we want. Rather, the righteous prayer of faith is prayed by those who have repented of their sins, trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior, and are actively seeking to follow Him as Lord. To apply this vital lesson on prayer, we must know God as our God and obediently follow Him, walking faithfully with Him. In a loving and righteous relationship with God through Christ Jesus, we are identified and called many things. We are called His friend, His servants, His sons and daughters, His chosen, the sheep of His pasture, His redeemed, His body and bride, and even more remarkably, we are called by His name as His righteous ones.

Second. Reflect on your motives and intent before bringing prayer to God. One highly effective way to ensure that our requests align with God's will and purpose is to quickly assess and adjust the motive of our will and the intent of our heart to match that of the Heavenly Father. Jesus gave us the first model for that kind of prayer.

John 17:1-17 ESV

“When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything

that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

Yeshua made many statements and prayed many prayers that expressed the intent and motive of His heart and mission, which were to align with the Father’s heart and mission. There is no clearer example for us to follow than this. *“I am come to do the will of Him who sent me,”* and, *“when you pray, pray this way... your kingdom come, your will be done.”*

If we align with this, it will transform our prayer into the prayers of righteousness in Christ Jesus. And as on the day of Pentecost, the power of the Spirit will come.

Third. At its core, the fervent, righteous prayer is a prayer of surrender.

Orthodox teaching contends that Jesus, though fully God, had a human will that entirely surrendered to the Father’s will; never in contradiction, contention, or conflict. Unfortunately, this is not always reflected in the motive and intent of our prayers. The surrender of Jesus’ human will was both voluntary and sinless, demonstrating perfect trust in the heavenly Father. We struggle with both circumstantial and emotional trust issues that can and have adversely impacted our ability to surrender

and align to the plans and purposes of His Word, Will, and Ways. Overcoming these trust issues is critical to the effective and righteous prayer of faith. Jesus gives the prayer model for believers as the balance between seeking God's will and our own - trusting Him or trusting only in ourselves. He also gives us the model for prayer as a more righteous way to express the Father's heart for genuine love and unity. Knowing the Father's heart (who He is) is, in reality, the resolution and victory given to overcome the trust factors existing within our own motives and intent - love never fails.

John 15:7-11 ESV

"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this, my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

Finally. Here is the practical pattern and approach needed to align the motive of our minds and the intent of our hearts to the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

- Pray with certainty that the Father's will is at the center of our motive and the intent of our prayers.
- Align our desires with God's purposes, even when it is difficult and uncomfortable.
- Express the Father's heart through love, unity, and obedience.

5.3.26

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Strengthening and Increasing Faith

In preparation for Pentecost, we must have an honest conversation about strengthening and increasing our faith. Why? The Scripture teaches us that while we are here in this life in these temporal mortal bodies, we are to walk by faith.

2 Corinthians 5:6-9 ESV

“So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.”

Faith in God opens to us the understanding and confidence to accept that our time here has an expiration date or shelf life. Faith in God reveals His grace towards us and fulfills His purposes for us. It is His grace not to lament or fear the time that we do have while we are here. It is His purposes for us that give us the courage to redeem the time we have. Faith in God gives us hope and assurance that the mysteries of the unknown awaiting us will be eternally good and glorious.

So then, we can rightly conclude that fully expressing faith in the One who made us, keeps us, and has prepared for us is a very rare and remarkable thing. As a caution, let me remind us all: we are owed nothing in this life. Yet, in spite of that sobering reality, we remain forever loved by the Sovereign Creator of heaven and earth. Surely He has loved us enough to deserve our faith and trust in Him. His love was not without a cost. The measures and merits of His love have been revealed and fulfilled over and over again in the suffering, sacrifice, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus. For any one of us to right and righteously live a life pleasing to Him, or to love Him and others as He has loved us, will require faith in Him.

Here is what that looks like biblically:

One- It is impossible to please God without faith.

Hebrews 11:1-6 ESV

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now, before he was taken, he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

Two - Faith in God the Father, through Christ Jesus His Son, led by the power of the Holy Spirit, transforms life and love.

Matthew 9:27-29 ESV

“And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, “Have mercy on us, Son of David.” When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said to him, “Yes, Lord.” Then he touched their eyes, saying, “According to your faith let it be done to you.”

Three - As a disciple of the kingdom of God, one needs to understand that increased faith comes in obedience to the Word of God.

2 Peter 1:3-11 ESV

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason,

*make every effort to **supplement your faith** with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities, you will never fall. For in this way, there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

Inductive Conclusions

The instruction that the apostle is giving is interpreted in the context of original intent: **Grow in godliness, and you will grow in faith. Grow in faith, and you will grow in the favor and good pleasure of God.** Commit yourself to this simple process each day, and then pray. Now review and note the results and impact of what you have prayed and how you have prayed. Testify to God’s great faithfulness.

Consider the following scenarios:

A 20-year-old declares to his family, “I have decided to do absolutely nothing with my life.” (Mind you, no one actually writes that out as a formal plan, and yet that is precisely what nearly 30% of American 20-year-olds are doing)

A capable adult posts on social media, “I’m quitting my job so that I can spend 3.5 hours per day, 24.5 hours per week, watching Netflix or Socials.” (Again, not something people actually envision for themselves, and yet it is the actual national average for watching Social Media or cable TV.)

After three years of joblessness and living at home, a 25-year-old college graduate declares to friends, “I have \$150,000.00 of student loan debt for a worthless Bachelor of Arts degree in *Social Sensitivities*, and \$45,000.00 in credit card debt. From here on out, I plan to ignore my debt and forget about trying to make it in life. I am going to stay addicted to alcohol and drugs.” (Sounds crazy, and yet, about 55% of bachelor’s degree recipients do not directly enter their chosen

field.) Even more challenging is the emergence of AI as an entry-level replacement option for Gen-Z white-collar job opportunities. The result of the ULADS (Useless Liberal Arts Degree Syndrome) is that, according to the Strada Institute for the Future of Work and the Burning Glass Institute's Talent Disrupted report, 45% of bachelor's degree holders still do not hold a college-level job a decade after graduation.

Point. No one plans to be useless and unfruitful. No one envisages themselves the utter lack of meaning and purpose, and yet millions upon millions are just that. There is clearly a biblical path between one's faith in God, one's faithfulness to God, and the faithfulness of God's grace, favor, and good pleasure.

Proverbs 3:5-12 ESV

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine. My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

Unfortunately, within the secular American institution that is currently known as the Liberal Arts education system, there is both open disdain, disgust, and a vengeful hostility towards the Bible as a relevant and reliable source for meaningful and purposeful contribution to not only one's personal life, but also towards one's ability to thrive and accomplish in a positive and gainful way within the construct of social and civil community.

As serious disciples of Christ and as biblical worldview believers, the passages of Scripture we have considered are precisely what our approach to faith and the patterns of our faithfulness to life and love should look like. Strengthening and increasing one's faith is not a quantitative exercise in contemplation, but rather, it is a qualitative commitment to daily faithfulness to God and to one another (*quality over*

quantity). This faithful approach develops genuine patterns from which we build and better our faith and trust in God. Even a tiny faith the size of a mustard seed will have extraordinary results if it is indeed genuine. Genuine faith... Hmmm.

What makes our faith genuine?

To express genuine faith simply means being authentic, open, honest, and joyfully obedient in a relationship with God. As a caution, being genuine in this context is more than just “being real.” We all know that we are also capable of “being really or genuinely bad.” Bad doesn’t strengthen and increase genuine faith. The help that our faith is looking for here is “genuinely good.”

Quickly look back at Peter’s writing in the epistle. In verses 5-7, there are seven measures of virtue or goodness that must be continually added to our faith. Like a good recipe, here they are...

Add To Your Faith (a full measure) of:

- **virtue** (Grk; *ho’arete*)
-goodness, integrity, honor, trustworthiness)
- **knowledge** (Grk: *gnosis*)
- understanding, proficiency, competence, wisdom
- **self-control** (Grk: *enkrateia*)
-composure, moderation, restraint, discipline
- **steadfastness** (Grk: *hypomone*)
- resolute, dutiful, unwavering in the cause of goodness and godliness)
- **godliness** (Grk: *eusebeia*)
- devout, faithful, loyal in virtuous thought, thoughtfully measured words, and righteous behavior; thinking, speaking and living in alignment to the character and heart of God
- **brotherly affection** (Grk: *adelphos philos*)
- faithful or loyal union, shared covenant, devoted to; upheld, and aligned in righteous and virtuous or righteous love)
- **love** (Grk: *agapao*)

- *godly love; love that serves, shares, forgives, sacrifices, and does not give up*

A Hard Truth...

I suggest that you process this truth biblically, before either emotionally predetermining, intellectually predisposing, or circumstantially presupposing any conclusions.

A disciple, like a slave, must recognize one's proper place in relationship to the King and serve out of loyalty to the relationship and not out of expectation for the reward. **A relationship with Christ is the result of a relationship based on the grace of the Master and not on the worth of the servant.**

Conclusion

We cultivate and build strong faith through faithfulness in prayer, study of scripture, and cultivating and nurturing right and righteous relationships. From that strong foundation, we live and love each day in practice and patterns of godliness and righteousness in Christ Jesus. The result is strong and ever-increasing faith. This faith is capable and fully equipped to overcome ***doubt, fear, fault, and failure, and is especially effective in*** difficult and anxious times. Strengthen and increase your faith by growing in faithfulness.