TikTok Devotional Series Transcript:

July 2022

July 1, 2022 - I am the Bread of Life

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." (John 6:35)

What we need to see here is that the essence of faith is being satisfied with all that God is for us in Christ. Defining faith this way emphasizes two things. One is the God-centeredness of faith. It is not merely the promises of God that satisfy us. It is all that God himself is for us in Jesus. Faith embraces God in Christ as our treasure, not just God's promised gifts.

Faith banks its hope not just on the real estate of the age to come but on the fact that God will be there *(Revelation 21:3). "I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.'"*

What faith embraces most earnestly is not just the reality of sins forgiven, as precious as that is, but the presence of the living Christ in our hearts and the fullness of God himself.

The other thing emphasized in defining faith as being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus is the term "satisfaction." Faith is the quenching of the soul's thirst at the fountain of God. Here is the secret of the power of faith to break the enslaving force of sinful attractions. If the heart is satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus, the power of sin to lure us away from the wisdom of Christ is broken as we find Him the Bread of Life.

July 2, 2022 - See The Lord

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14)

There is a practical holiness without which we will not see the Lord. Many live as if this were not so. There are professing Christians who live such unholy lives that they will hear Jesus's dreadful words, *"I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness" (Matthew 7:23).* Paul says to professing believers, *"If you live according to the flesh you will die" (Romans 8:13).* Learning to fight for holiness by faith in grace is supremely important.

There is another way to pursue holiness that backfires and leads to death. Any effort to serve God that does not, in that very act, depend on him as the reward of our hearts and the power of our service, will dishonour him as a needy pagan god.

Peter describes the alternative to such self-reliant service of God, *"Whoever serves, [let him do so] as one who serves by the strength that God supplies — in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:11).* And Paul says, *"I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me" (Romans 15:18).* If we do this, we will see the Lord.

July 3, 2022 - Giving Glory to God

N*o unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith giving glory to God. (Romans 4:20)*

Oh, how I long for God to be glorified in our pursuit of holiness and love. God is not glorified unless our pursuit is empowered by faith in his promises.

The God who revealed himself most fully in Jesus Christ, who was crucified for our sins and raised for our justification (Romans 4:25), is most glorified when we embrace his promises with joyful firmness because they are bought by the blood of his Son.

God is honoured when we are humbled for our feebleness and failure and when he is trusted for grace.

Abraham grew strong in his faith, thus giving glory to God. Faith in God's promises glorifies him as supremely wise and strong and good and trustworthy. So, unless we learn how to live by faith in the promises of God's grace, we may perform remarkable religious rigors, but not for God's glory.

He is glorified when the power to be holy comes through humble faith in grace. Martin Luther said, "[Faith] honours him whom it trusts with the most reverent and highest regard, since it considers him truthful and trustworthy." The trusted Giver gets the glory.

My great desire is that we learn how to live for God's honour. Living by faith in God's grace, which, in turn, means battling unbelief and giving glory to God.

July 4, 2022 - To Be Content

I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11–13)

God's provision of day-by-day grace enabled Paul to be filled or to be hungry, to prosper or suffer, to have abundance or go wanting.

Paul's love for the Philippians flowed from his contentment in God, and his contentment flowed from his faith in the grace of God's infallible provision to be all he needed in times of plenty and want.

Covetousness is exactly the opposite of faith. It's the loss of contentment in Christ so that we start to crave other things to satisfy the longings of our hearts which only the presence of God himself can satisfy. There's no mistaking that the battle against covetousness is a battle against unbelief in God's promise to be all we need in every circumstance.

This is so clear in Hebrews 13:5. Watch how the author argues for our freedom from the love of money — freedom from covetousness — the freedom of contentment in God: *"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"* Faith in this promise — "I will never leave you" — breaks the power of all God-dishonouring desire — all covetousness.

Whenever we sense the slightest rise of covetousness in our hearts, we must turn on it and fight it with all our might using the weapons of this faith and learn to be content.

July 5, 2022 - Harmful Desires

Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. (1 Timothy 6:9)

Covetousness can destroy the soul in hell forever. The reason I am sure that this destruction is not some temporary financial fiasco, but final destruction in hell, is what Paul says three verses later in 1 Timothy 6:12. He says that covetousness is to be resisted with the fight of faith. Then he adds, *"Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession."*

So, when Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:9 that the desire to be rich plunges people into ruin, he isn't saying that greed can mess up your marriage or your business, which it certainly can. He is saying that covetousness can mess up your eternity. Or, as 1 Timothy 6:10 says at the end, "It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs".

God has gone the extra mile in the Bible to warn us mercifully that the idolatry of covetousness is a no-win situation. It's a dead-end street in the worst sense of the word. It's a trick and a deadly trap.

So, my word to you is the word of 1 Timothy 6:11: *"Flee these things."* When you see it coming, in a television ad or a Christmas catalogue or an Internet pop-up or a neighbour's purchase, run from it the way you would run from a roaring, starving lion escaped from the zoo. *"Take hold of the eternal life" a*nd avoid harmful Desires.

July 6, 2022 - God has Come to Test You

"Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin." (Exodus 20:20)

There is a fear that is slavish and drives us away from God, and there is a fear that is sweet and draws us to God. Moses warned against the one and called for the other in the very same verse, Exodus 20:20: *"Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.'"*

God means for his power and holiness to kindle fear in us, not to drive us from him, but to drive us to him. Fearing God means, first, fearing to abandon him as our great security and satisfaction.

Or another way to say it is that we should fear unbelief. Fear not trusting God's goodness. Isn't that the point of Romans 11:20? *"You stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear."* That is, what we should fear is not believing, not having faith. Fear running away from God. If we walk with him and stay close, he will be our friend and protector forever. As God tests us, let us fear him in the right way.

July 7, 2022 - How Abundant is Your Goodness

How abundant is your goodness, which you have . . . worked for those who take refuge in you. (Psalm 31:19)

The experience of grace often hangs on whether we will take refuge in God, or whether we doubt his care and run for cover to other shelters.

For those who take refuge in God, the promises of grace are many and rich.

- *None of those who take refuge in him will be condemned. (Psalm 34:22)*
- *He is a shield for all those who take refuge in him. (2 Samuel 22:31)*
- *Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psalm 2:12)*
- *The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. (Nahum 1:7)*

We do not earn or merit anything by taking refuge in God. Hiding, because we are weak and need protection, is not a work to commend our self-sufficiency. All it does is show that we regard ourselves as helpless and the hiding place as a place of rescue.

In all those promises just quoted, the condition of great blessing from God is that we take refuge in him. That condition is not a meritorious one; it is the condition of desperation and acknowledged weakness and need and trust. Desperation does not demand or deserve; it pleads for mercy and looks for grace and sees how abundant is God's goodness.

July 8, 2022 - Looking to Jesus

Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross. (Hebrews 12:2)

What faith performs is sometimes unspeakably hard. In his book Miracle on the River Kwai, Ernest Gordon tells the true story of a group of POWs working on the Burma Railway during World War II.

At the end of each day the tools were collected from the work party. On one occasion a Japanese guard shouted that a shovel was missing and demanded to know which man had taken it. He began to rant and rave, working himself up into a paranoid fury and ordered whoever was guilty to step forward. No one moved. "All die! All die!" he shrieked, cocking and aiming his rifle at the prisoners. At that moment one man stepped forward and the guard clubbed him to death with his rifle while he stood silently to attention. When they returned to the camp, the tools were counted again and no shovel was missing.

What can sustain the will to die for others, when you are innocent? Jesus was carried and sustained in his love for us by "the joy that was set before him." He looked to a glorious future blessing and joy, and that carried and sustained him in suffering.

Woe to us if we think we should or can be motivated and strengthened for radical, costly obedience by some higher motive than the joy that is set before us. We should look to Jesus and his example and the power of the Holy Spirit to empower us.

July 9, 2022 - We Love the Brothers

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. (1 John 3:14)

Love is the evidence that we are born again — that we are Christians, that we are saved.

Sometimes the Bible makes our holiness and our love for people the condition of our final salvation. In other words, if we are not holy and not loving, we will not be saved at the judgment day (e.g., Hebrews 12:14; Galatians 5:21; 1 Corinthians 6:10). This doesn't mean that acts of love are how we get right with God. No, the Bible is clear again and again as Ephesians 2:8–9 says, *"By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one may boast."* When the Bible says that we are saved by faith but that we must love people in order to finally be saved, it means that faith in God's promises must be so real that the love it produces proves the reality of the faith.

Love for others is a condition of grace in the sense that it confirms that the primary condition, faith, is genuine. We could call love for others a secondary condition, which confirms the authenticity of the primary and essential condition of faith which alone unites us to Christ, and receives his power. Let us Love the Brothers in faith.

July 10, 2022 - Obey The Gospel

God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted . . . when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (2 Thessalonians 1:6–8)

There will come a time when the patience of God is over. When God has seen his people suffer for the allotted time, and the appointed number of martyrs is complete (Revelation 6:11), then a just and holy vengeance will come from heaven.

Notice that God's vengeance on those who have afflicted his people is experienced by us as "relief." "God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted." In other words, the judgment on "those who afflict" us is a form of grace toward us.

When God's patience has run its long-suffering course, and this age is over, and judgment comes on the enemies of God's people, the saints will not disapprove of God's justice.

This means that the final destruction of the unrepentant will not be experienced as a misery for God's people, for those who do obey the gospel. God's judgment will be approved, and the saints will experience the vindication of truth as a great grace.

July 11, 2022 - Your Father's Good Pleasure

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32)

Jesus helps all who struggle to believe. His aim is to defeat the fear that God is not the kind of God who really wants to be good to us — that he is not really generous and helpful and kind and tender but is basically irked with us — ill-disposed and angry.

Sometimes, even if we believe in our heads that God is good to us, we may feel in our hearts that his goodness is somehow forced or constrained, perhaps like a judge who has been maneuverer by a clever attorney into a corner on some technicality of court proceeding, so he has to dismiss the charges against the prisoner whom he really would rather send to jail. Jesus is at pains to help us not feel that way about God.

Every little word of this stunning sentence is intended to help take away the fear that Jesus knows we struggle with; namely, that God begrudges his benefits; that he is constrained and out of character when he does nice things; that at bottom he is angry and loves to vent his anger.

It is a sentence about the nature of God. It's about the kind of heart God has. It's a verse about what makes God glad, not merely about what God will do or what he has to do, but what he delights to do, what he loves to do and takes pleasure in doing. Every word counts. *"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*

July 12, 2022 - Infinitely Great God

"Behold, God is great, and we know him not; the number of his years is unsearchable." (Job 36:26)

It is impossible to know God too well. He is the most important person who exists. And this is because he made all others and any importance they have is owing to him.

Any strength or intelligence or skill or beauty that other beings have comes from him. On every scale of excellence, he is infinitely greater than the best person you ever knew or ever heard of.

Being infinite, he is inexhaustibly interesting. His continual demonstration of the most intelligent and interesting actions is volcanic.

As the source of every good pleasure, he himself pleases fully and finally. If that's not how we experience him, we are either dead, or blind, or sleepwalking. It is therefore astonishing how little effort in this world is put into knowing God.

It's as though the President of the United States came to live with you for a month, and you only said hello in passing every day or so. Or as if you were flown at the speed of light for a couple of hours around the sun and the solar system, and instead of looking out the window, you played a computer game. Or as if you were invited to watch the best actors, singers, athletes, inventors, and scholars perform their best, but you declined to go, so you could watch the TV season's final soap.

Let us pray together that our infinitely great God would incline our hearts and open our eyes to see him as fully as we can and seek to know him more.

July 13, 2022 - Glory of the Blessed God

. . . the gospel of the glory of the blessed God . . . (1 Timothy 1:11)

This is a beautiful phrase in 1 Timothy, buried beneath the too-familiar surface of Bible buzzwords. After you dig it up, it sounds like this: *"the good news of the glory of the happy God."* The word "blessed" is not the one that means "praised," but the one that means "happy." A great part of God's glory is his happiness.

It was inconceivable to the apostle Paul that God could be denied infinite joy and still be all-glorious. To be infinitely glorious was to be infinitely happy. He used the phrase, "the glory of the happy God," because it is a glorious thing for God to be happy the way he is.

God's glory consists much in the fact that he is happy beyond our wildest imagination. This is a key part of the gospel, it is good news that God is gloriously happy. No one would want to spend eternity with a gloomy, unhappy God.

If God is unhappy, then the goal of the gospel — to be with God forever — is not a happy goal, and that means it would be no gospel at all. Jesus invites us to spend eternity with a happy God when he says, *"Enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:23).*

Jesus said in John 15:11, *"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." Jesus spoke, and lived, and died that his joy — God's joy — might be in us and our joy might be full. Therefore, the gospel is "the gospel of the glory of the Blessed God."*

July 14, 2022 - The Love with which You have Loved Me

"I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:26)

Imagine being able to enjoy what is most enjoyable with unbounded and increasing energy and passion forever. This is not now our experience. Three things stand in the way of our complete satisfaction in this world.

1. Nothing in this world has a personal worth great enough to meet the deepest longings of our hearts.
2. We lack the strength to savour the best treasures to their maximum worth.
3. Our enjoyment of things here comes to an end. Nothing lasts.

If the aim of Jesus in John 17:26 comes true, all this will change. God does not love the Son the way he loves sinners. He loves the Son because the Son is infinitely worthy of love. He loves the Son because the Son is infinitely lovely. Which means that this love is totally pleasure. Jesus prays that this pleasure that God has in his Son will be the same pleasure we have in the Son.

If God's pleasure in the Son becomes our pleasure, then the object of our pleasure, Jesus, will be inexhaustible in personal worth. He will never become disappointing or frustrating. No greater treasure can be conceived than the Son of God.

But add to this what Jesus prays for; namely, that our ability — our energy, our passion — to savour this inexhaustible treasure will not be limited by human weaknesses. We will enjoy the Son of God with the very enjoyment of his omnipotent Father.

July 15, 2022 - I will repay, says The Lord

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." (Romans 12:19)

Why is this such a crucial promise in overcoming our bent toward bitterness and revenge? The reason is that this promise answers one of the most powerful impulses behind anger — an impulse that is not entirely wrong.

In many cases, real wrongs have been done to us. Therefore, it is not entirely wrong to feel that justice should be done. What's wrong is to feel that we must make it happen and that we may feel bitter until it does. This would be a deadly mistake. Our very souls can be in danger if we keep on with an attitude of unforgiving bitterness.

The grace of God's judgment is promised to us here in Romans 12 as a means of helping us overcome such a deadly spirit of revenge and bitterness.

Paul's argument is that we can be sure that all wrongs will be dealt with by God and that we can leave the matter in his hands because vengeance belongs to the Lord. To motivate us to lay down our vengeful desires he gives us a promise: *"I will repay, says the Lord."*

The promise that frees us from an unforgiving, bitter, vengeful spirit is the promise that God will settle our accounts. He will do it more justly and mercifully and more thoroughly than we ever could. He punishes all sin. Nobody gets away with anything. He punishes it either in Christ on the cross for those who repent and trust him, or in hell for those who don't. Therefore, we can back off and leave room for God to do his perfect work.

July 16, 2022 - When He was reviled

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (1 Peter 2:23)

No one was more grievously sinned against than Jesus. Every ounce of animosity against him was completely undeserved. No one has ever lived who was more worthy of honour than Jesus; and no one has been dishonoured more.

If anyone had a right to get angry and be bitter and vengeful, it was Jesus. How did he control himself when scoundrels, whose very existence he sustained, reviled him? First Peter 2:23 gives the answer.

What this verse means is that Jesus had faith in God's righteous judgment. He did not need to avenge himself for all the indignities he suffered, because he entrusted his cause to God. He left vengeance in God's hands and prayed for his enemies: *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).*

Peter gives us this glimpse into Jesus's faith so that we would learn how to live this way ourselves. He said, *"You have been called [to endure harsh treatment patiently] . . . because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21).*

If Christ conquered bitterness and vengeance by faith in what God, the good Judge, had promised to do, how much more should we, since we have far less right to murmur for being mistreated than he did?

July 17, 2022 - He Himself Bore our Sins

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. (1 Peter 2:24)

What is the basis of our not holding grudges against Christian brothers and sisters who repent? Our moral indignation because of a terrible offense done against us does not evaporate just because the offender is a Christian. In fact, we may feel even more betrayed. And a simple, "I'm sorry" will often seem utterly disproportionate to the painfulness and ugliness of the offense.

But in this case we are dealing with fellow Christians and the promise of God's wrath against our offender does not apply, because there is *"no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). "God has not destined [Christians] for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9).* It looks like they are going to get away with it!

Where shall we turn to assure ourselves that justice will be done — that Christianity is not a mockery of the seriousness of sin? The answer is that we look to the cross of Christ. All the wrongs that have been done against us by genuine believers were avenged in the death of Jesus.

The suffering of Christ was the real punishment and recompense of God on every hurt you have ever received from a fellow Christian. Therefore, Christianity does not make light of sin. It does not add insult to our injury. On the contrary, it takes the sins against us so seriously that, to make them right, God gave his own Son to suffer more than we could ever make anyone suffer for what they have done to us.

July 18, 2022 - Jesus Fought Depression

And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. (Matthew 26:37)

The Bible gives us an amazing glimpse into the soul of Jesus the night before he was crucified. Watch and learn from the way Jesus fought his strategic battle against despondency or depression.

1. *He chose some close friends to be with him. "Taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee" (Matthew 26:37).*

2. *He opened his soul to them. He said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:38).*
3. *He asked for their intercession and partnership in the battle. "Remain here and watch with me" (Matthew 26:38).*
4. *He poured out his heart to his Father in prayer. "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matthew 26:39).*
5. *He rested his soul in the sovereign wisdom of God. "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).*
6. *He fixed his eye on the glorious future that awaited him on the other side of the cross. "For the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).*

In Gethsemane Jesus showed us the way. Not painless, and not passive. Follow him. Find your trusted spiritual friends. Open your soul to them. Ask them to watch with you and pray. Pour out your soul to the Father. Rest in the sovereign wisdom of God and fix your eyes on the joy set before you in the precious and magnificent promises of God.

July 19, 2022 - Lord, Lord, Did we not Prophesy

"On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'" (Matthew 7:22)

Consider the difference between a heart of "faith" and a heart of "works."

The heart of works gets satisfaction from the ego-boost of accomplishing something in its own power. It will attempt to scale a vertical rock face, or take on extra responsibilities at work, or risk life in a combat zone, or agonize through a marathon, or perform religious fasting for weeks — all for the satisfaction of conquering a challenge by the force of its own will and the stamina of its own body.

The heart with a works-orientation may also go in another direction and express its love of independence and self-direction and self-achievement by rebelling against courtesy and decency and morality (Galatians 5:19–21). But it's the same self-determining, self-exalting works-orientation — whether it is being immoral or mounting a crusade against immoral behaviour. The common denominator is self-direction, self-reliance, and self-exaltation. In all of this, the basic satisfaction of the works-orientation is the savour of being an assertive, autonomous, and, if possible, triumphant self.

The heart of faith is radically different. Its desires are no less strong as it looks to the future. But what it desires is the fullest satisfaction of experiencing all that God is for us in Jesus.

July 20, 2022 - Our Charge is Love

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. (1 Timothy 1:5)

Paul is aiming at love and one of the essential sources of this great effect is sincere faith. The reason faith is such a sure source of love is that faith in God's grace expels from the heart the sinful powers that hinder love.

If we feel guilty, we tend to wallow in self-centred depression and self-pity, unable to see, let alone care about, anyone else's need. Or we play the hypocrite to cover our guilt and so destroy all sincerity in relationships, which makes real love impossible. Or we talk about other people's faults to minimize the guilt of our own, which love does not do. So, if we are going to love, the destructive effects of guilt must be overcome.

But faith in God's grace produces love by pushing guilt and fear and greed out of the heart. It pushes out guilt because it holds fast to the hope that the death of Christ is sufficient to secure acquittal and righteousness now and forever (Hebrews 10:14).

When Paul says, "The aim of our charge is love that issues from . . . sincere faith," he is speaking of the tremendous power of faith to overcome all the obstacles to love. When we fight the fight of faith — the fight to believe the promises of God that kill guilt and fear and greed — we are fighting for love.

July 21, 2022 - Sow to the Spirit

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:8)

Faith has an insatiable appetite for experiencing as much of God's grace as possible. Therefore, faith presses toward the river where God's grace flows most freely, namely, the river of love. What other force will move us out of our contented living rooms to take upon ourselves the inconveniences and suffering that love requires?

What will propel us . . .

- to greet strangers when we feel shy?
- to go to an enemy and plead for reconciliation when we feel indignant?
- to tithe when we've never tried it?
- to speak to our colleagues about Christ when we are timid?
- to invite new neighbours to a Bible study?
- to cross cultures with the gospel?
- to create a new ministry for alcoholics?
- to invest a morning praying for renewal?

None of these costly acts of love just happens. They are impelled by a new appetite — the appetite of faith for the fullest experience of God's grace. We want more of God and we want this more than we want our private, disturbance-free security and comfort.

I think this is what Paul meant when he said that we should sow to the Spirit (Galatians 6:8). By faith, we should put the seeds of our energy in the furrows where we know the Spirit is at work to bear fruit — the furrows of love.

July 22, 2022 - Ministry from the Lord Jesus

"But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus." (Acts 20:24)

According to the New Testament, “ministry” is what all Christians do. According to Ephesians 4:11–12, pastors have the job of equipping the saints for the work of ministry. Ordinary Christians are the ones who do the ministry.

What ministry looks like is as varied as Christians are varied. It’s not an office like elder or deacon; it’s a lifestyle devoted to making much of Christ and meeting the needs of others.

It means that we *“do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).* Whether we are bankers or bricklayers, it means that we aim at advancing other people’s faith and holiness to the glory of God.

Fulfilling your ministry is more important than staying alive. This conviction is what makes the lives of radically devoted people so inspiring to watch. Doing the ministry that God gives us to do is more important than life.

You may think you need to save your life in order to do your ministry. On the contrary, how you lose your life may be the capstone of your ministry. It certainly was for Jesus — only in his thirties.

We need not fret about keeping ourselves alive in order to finish our ministry. God alone knows the appointed time of our service. He will decide when our death is not an interruption of our ministry, but the last act of our ministry. You are immortal until your ministry from the Lord Jesus is done.

July 23, 2022 - Christ Forgave You

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Saving faith is not merely believing that you are forgiven. Saving faith looks at the horror of sin, and then looks at the holiness of God, and apprehends spiritually that God’s forgiveness is unspeakably glorious, beautiful. We don’t just receive it; we admire it. We are satisfied with our new friendship with such a great, forgiving God.

Faith in God’s forgiveness does not merely mean a persuasion that I am off the hook. It means savouring the truth that a forgiving God is the most precious reality in the universe. Saving faith cherishes being forgiven by God and from there rises to cherishing the God who forgives — and all that he is for us in Jesus. This experience has a tremendous effect on our becoming forgiving people.

The great act of purchasing our forgiveness is past — the cross of Christ. By this backward look, we learn of the grace in which we will ever stand (Romans 5:2). We learn that we are now, and always will be, loved and accepted. We learn that the living God is a forgiving God.

But the great act of experiencing our forgiveness goes on forever into the future. Our joyful fellowship with the great God who forgives lasts forever. Therefore, freedom for forgiveness, flowing from this all-satisfying fellowship with the forgiving God, lasts as long as we do. How wonderful that Christ forgave and continues to forgive you.

July 24, 2022 - Hearing with Faith

Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? (Galatians 3:5)

Every Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul said, *"Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Romans 8:9).* The Spirit came to you the first time when you believed in the blood-bought promises of God and the Spirit keeps on coming and keeps on working, by this same means.

The Spirit came the first time and the Spirit keeps on being supplied, through the channel of faith. Whatever he accomplishes in and through us is by faith.

If you have strong longings from time to time for the mighty working of the Holy Spirit in your life and cry out to God for the outpouring of the Spirit in your life or in your family or church or city, such cries are right and good. Jesus said, *"How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13).*

God's Spirit is supplied in an ongoing and powerful way precisely through specific acts of faith in specific promises for specific situations. Do I trust him right now to do what he has promised to do?

This is what is missing in the experience of so many Christians as they seek the power of the Spirit in their lives. The Spirit is supplied to us "by hearing with faith", not just faith in one or two promises about the Spirit himself but about all the soul-satisfying presence of God in our future to do for us, and be for us, whatever we need as we hear with faith.

July 25, 2022 - By the Grace of God

By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I but the grace of God that is with me. (1 Corinthians 15:10)

Paul realized that the first part of this verse might be misunderstood. Paul does not trace his obedience back to his thankfulness for past grace. He traces it up to moment-by-moment, ever-arriving grace. In every instant of Paul's intention and effort to obey Christ, grace was at work to produce that intention and that effort. Paul wants to emphasize that the ever-arriving grace of God is the decisive cause of his work.

Paul wants to exalt the grace of God in such a way that it is clear that he himself is not the decisive doer of this work. Nevertheless, He worked. But he said it was the grace of God "toward me."

If we let all the parts of this verse stand, the result is this: grace is the decisive doer in Paul's work. Since Paul is also a doer of his work, the way grace becomes the decisive doer is by becoming the enabling power of his work.

As Paul faced each day's ministry burden, he bowed his head and confessed that, unless grace was given for that day's work, he would not be able to do it. It was all by the grace of God.

July 26, 2022 - God Works in You

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12–13)

God is the decisive worker here. Work out your own salvation . . . for it is God who works in you, the willing and the working. God wills and he works for his good pleasure but believing this does not make Christians passive. It makes them hopeful and energetic and courageous.

Each day there is a work to be done in our special ministry. Paul commands us to work at doing it. He tells us to do it in the power that God supplies: believe him! Believe the promise that in this day God will be at work in you to will and work for his good pleasure.

The power of grace is the power of the living Christ — always there to work for us at every future moment that we enter.

The power we need for the next five minutes and the next five decades of ministry is the grace of the omnipotent Christ, who will always be there for us — ready to will and ready to work for his good pleasure.

July 27, 2022 - Great Power, Great Grace

With great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. (Acts 4:33)

If our ministry is to witness to Christ tomorrow in some unsympathetic situation, the key will not be our brilliance; the key will be abundant grace.

Of all people, the apostles seemed to need least help to give a compelling witness to the risen Christ. They had been with him for three years. They had seen him die. They had seen him alive after the crucifixion. In their witnessing arsenal they had *"many proofs" (Acts 1:3).* You might think that, of all people, their ministry of witnessing, in those early days, would sustain itself on the strength of the past glories that were still so fresh.

But that is not what the book of Acts tells us. The power to witness with faithfulness and effectiveness did not come mainly from memories of grace; it came from the new arrivals of "great grace." That's the way it was for the apostles, and that's the way it will be for us in our ministry of witnessing.

Whatever added signs and wonders God may show to amplify our witness to Christ, they will come the same way they came for Stephen. "And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8). Grace was arriving from God for all that Stephen needed, eventually all that he would need to die.

There is great grace and power that we can count on in the crisis of special ministry need.

July 28, 2022 - God's Varied Grace

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. (1 Peter 4:10)

When we use our spiritual gifts, we are stewarding grace and this grace is "varied grace." It comes in many colours and shapes and sizes. This is one of the reasons spiritual gifts in the body are so diverse. The prism of God's gifts in your life will refract shades of divine glory that would never come through my prism.

There are as many graces as there are needs in the body of Christ — and more. The purpose of spiritual gifts is to receive and dispense the grace of God to those needs.

The next verse illustrates how this works, and the reference there is to ongoing supplies of grace. He says, *"Whoever serves, [let him serve] by the strength that God supplies — in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:11).* The word is "supplies," not "supplied." As you serve, serve in the power of the ongoing supply of God's grace to do what you need to do.

When you fulfill your spiritual gift to serve someone tomorrow, you will be serving "by the strength that God supplies" — and the supply will be tomorrow, not today.

God goes on, day-by-day, moment-by-moment, supplying the "strength" in which we minister. He does this because the ongoing, inexhaustible supplier of power gets the glory.

July 29, 2022 - The Throne of Grace

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. (1 Peter Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may find grace in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

All ministry is in the future — a moment away, or a month away, or a year, or a decade. We have ample time to fret about our inadequacy. When this happens, we must turn to prayer. Prayer is the form of faith that connects us today with the grace that will make us adequate for tomorrow's ministry. Timing really matters.

What if grace comes too early or comes too late? This promise is not merely that we find grace "to help in time of need," but that the grace is well-timed by God.

The point is that prayer is the way to find grace for a well-timed help. This grace of God always arrives from the "throne of grace" on time. The phrase "throne of grace" means that grace comes from the King of the universe who sets the times by his own authority (Acts 1:7).

His timing is perfect, but it is rarely ours: *"For a thousand years in [his] sight are but as yesterday when it is past" (Psalm 90:4). A*t the global level, he sets the times for nations to rise and fall (Acts 17:26). At the personal level, *"My times are in [his] hand" (Psalm 31:15).*

When we wonder about the timing of grace, we must think on the "throne of grace." Nothing can hinder God's plan to send grace when it will be best for us. Grace is always well-timed from the throne of grace.

July 30, 2022 - Be Gracious to Me

Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant. (Psalm 86:16)

Grace is the constant plea of the praying psalmists. They pray for it again and again to meet every need. They give us a beautiful model of daily dependence on grace.

- *They cry out for grace when they need help: "Hear, O Lord, and be merciful to me! O Lord, be my helper!" (Psalm 30:10).*
- *When they are weak: "Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant" (Psalm 86:16).*
- *When they need healing: "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; heal me, O Lord" (Psalm 6:2).*
- *When they are afflicted by enemies: "Be gracious to me, O Lord! See my affliction from those who hate me" (Psalm 9:13).*
- *When they are lonely: "Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted" (Psalm 25:16).*
- *When they are grieving: "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief" (Psalm 31:9).*
- *When they have sinned: "O Lord, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you!" (Psalm 41:4).*

Prayer is the great link of faith between the soul of the saint and the promise of grace. Ministry is meant to be sustained by faith in grace and see God being gracious to you.

July 31, 2022 - But God

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Psalm 73:26)

Literally the verb is simply fail, not "may fail." This God-besotted psalmist, Asaph, says, "My flesh and my heart fail!" I am despondent! I am discouraged! But then immediately he fires a broadside against his despondency: "But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

The psalmist does not yield to discouragement. He battles unbelief with counterattack.

In essence, he says, "In myself I feel very weak and helpless and unable to cope. My body is shot, and my heart is almost dead. I will not yield. I will trust God and not myself. He is my strength and my portion."

The Bible is replete with instances of saints struggling with sunken spirits. Psalm 19:7 says, *"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul." This is a clear admission that the soul of the saint sometimes needs to be revived.*

David says the same thing in Psalm 23:2–3, *"He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul."* The soul of David needed to be restored. It was dying of thirst and ready to fall exhausted but God led the soul to water and gave it life again.

God has put these testimonies in the Bible so that we might use them to fight the unbelief of despondency. We preach, But God, to ourselves and we thrust it into Satan's face.