

GOD'S BLESSINGS AND REAL LIFE

By William R. Cunningham

July 5, 2008, Updated January 2011

INTRODUCTION

You are blessed! You may ask, "How am I blessed." You are blessed if you have put your faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. You do not have to worry about everlasting torment. You instead have an eternity with the Father to look forward to. That good news shouldn't be a reason to remove yourself from the living now, but rather it should be a source of encouragement to endure the things that occur in everyday life—both good and bad.

It's really a great thing that we are saved. It's really a great thing that we have passed from death to life and that I have eternity with the Father to look forward to and as a source of hope. However, what about the here and now? What should I do in the mean time? What should I do when bills have to be paid and I'm short on funds? What should I do if I'm laid off from my job or a big expense arises out of nowhere, e.g. you need a new roof? This is where the rubber meets the road so to speak and where hype is shown for what it really is—meaningless.

What should we do in normal everyday situations with regard to God? Does being saved assure me of any advantage with regard to my financial situation? I would like to investigate those questions at this time. I would like to use the lessons that I have learned in my own life as a backdrop. However, we will investigate what the scriptures have to say to us to answer those questions or to at least point us in the direction to the answers.

FAITH

The bible talks extensively about faith in God. We can conclude that faith in God is very important to everyday life. Consider the following scripture.

Mark 11:22-24 (NKJV) -- {22} So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. {23} For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. {24} Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

This incident followed Jesus' cursing of the fig tree as described in Mark 11:12-14. When they were leaving Jerusalem Peter commented on the withered fig tree that Jesus had cursed the day before. This became an object lesson for Jesus' disciples. Notice what Jesus said first. He said to have faith in God. Jesus then goes on to say that they could do what is physically impossible (or seemingly so) if they believe what they say in their hearts.

Now here we have to be careful not to read more into what Jesus is teaching here. Jesus is in no way saying that if we have great faith that we can do the impossible. Remember that he said to first have faith in God. This means that we are leaning on God and putting our confidence in God for whatever it is we believe. However, that faith would be meaningless if God did not promise it or say that he would do it (what we believe him for and therefore what we say in prayer). It's like having confidence that the bus will be at the bus stop at 3:00 when the schedule doesn't indicate that it will be there at that time. True faith is like looking at the bus schedule, noting that the bus will be at the station at 5:00 and you fully expect it to be there at that time and therefore plan your travel around that. Likewise, we look at the word of God and see what it reveals to us about God's provision and grace and then we believe it and expect it to happen just as the word revealed.

Now again we have to be careful. My faith in God isn't a blanket faith. In other words, I can't blindly believe God for a new computer and expect to receive one miraculously—by faith. I can only put my confidence in God in the things that he has provided for me. For example, I can fully put my faith in Jesus Christ for salvation because the bible teaches us that Jesus is the way to the Father and faith in him is how we are saved. So I have complete confidence that my salvation is based on faith and I fully expect to be with the Lord for all eternity. I don't have to fear death, but look forward to eternal life. Again, I can do this because that is what God committed to, i.e., promised. So the point is that our faith has to be in God and based on what God has said already.

I can't dream something up and then claim to have faith in God. But how do I know when I should put my faith in God and when I should not? For example, how do I know that God will help me with my mortgage or if I should prepare to sell my house? I believe that we should simply put our confidence in God to help us in whatever the situation is. We should also watch as well as pray. Consider the following scripture.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV) -- {5} Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; {6} In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

The key word for me in the above passage is "path." Also of importance is that it says, "Your paths." What are your paths? The word path here refers to your way of life. God will smooth out your way of life, which should be centered on him and his ways. Note that it is your paths. What are you doing? Where are you going? Do you even have a path? Consider the following scripture.

Psalms 1:1-3 (NKJV) -- {1} Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; {2} But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. {3} He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.

I found it very interesting that David said, "Whatever he does shall prosper." God will prosper the things that you do. This isn't referring to salvation, but just life in general as far as I understand it. Of course we note that this happens because one does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, or sits in the seat of the scornful. This happens because one delights in the word of God and one meditates on that day and night.

One could argue that God didn't promise us a new house or a new car or a particular job. You could say that the bible does not reveal God's provision for the specific things in life. That is true. However, there is no way that the bible can reveal specifics because many things that exist today did not exist then. The bible couldn't reveal that God would provide a new car when cars didn't exist in those times. However, the bible does tell us, as we've just discussed, that God will prosper the things that you do. That tells me that we should be doing something. In addition to that we know that we have to seek God and his ways and of course trust him. This reminds me of something that Jesus Christ said.

Matthew 6:33 (NKJV) -- {33} But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

And,

Matthew 22:36-40 (NKJV) -- {36} "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" {37} Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' {38} This is the first and great commandment. {39} And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' {40} On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Our relationship with the Lord is the number one priority. Seek the Lord with your whole heart and you will be blessed. This blessing may not look like what you might expect, but it is there nonetheless. We seek the Lord and then we live according to his ways.

Another thing is that we can't just learn the word, but rather we must do what it says.

James 1:22 (NKJV) -- {22} But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

It is impossible for us to truly have faith in God if we don't know what God says. It is impossible to have faith in God if we don't do what he says. Faith in God is based on knowledge of his word and a

relationship with him. The more we do what the word says, i.e., live what the word teaches us, then the more we learn that we can depend on God.

WHAT DOES FAITH LOOK LIKE?

It is a wonderful thing when you are in a church service and the minister says to have faith in God and you will be blessed. That's great and many times we get caught up in the hype of the moment. However, when we go home we wonder what this faith looks like. What should I do to have faith in God? Should I sign the dotted line even though I can't afford it? Should I say that I will be able to do it even though I know I can't? How do I have faith in God? How would I know if I am exercising faith in God? Therefore, what does faith look like so that I could judge accordingly?

That has been a question of mine for many years. I have come to the conclusion that we need to stop spiritualizing everything and just live our lives the best we can as we pursue God. What else could we possibly do? Is God going to give you a secret message and tell you exactly what to do? Well it is possible that God will speak to you and guide you, but for the most part according to my experiences and observations, I find that we have to discern which way to go based on our relationship with God and knowledge of his word.

Perhaps you may have a dream that will provide you with a message as to what God wants you to do. However, how would you know if that dream was really the word of God or the result of anxiety or something else going on in your mind? Consider the following scripture.

Ecclesiastes 5:3 (NKJV) -- {3} For a dream comes through much activity, And a fool's voice is known by his many words.

The point I want to focus on here is that the business of our lifestyle can cause our minds to race and produce dreams. How would you know if a dream is truly God speaking to you or merely the result of your busy life? I suspect that you wouldn't know the difference. I dare say that many have wrongly interpreted dreams as coming from God when in fact they were merely the result of many things going on in the head at that time.

I think we can fall into similar traps of the mind if we do not build a relationship with God. We think faith looks like the dream when faith in God is something very different. I recall Charles Stanley of In touch Ministries stating, to the best of my recollection, that true faith is when we believe God no matter what. That is much more consistent with the bible than what I've heard from various ministers.

What does faith look like? We only need look at our bible to see what it looks like. We will find the faith of Abraham, Moses, Elisha, Elijah, the apostles, and many more. They were normal people like you and I who simply trusted God and did what he said to do. They believed God and had confidence in him. We should be the same. For example, consider Abraham's adventure.

Genesis 15:1-6 (NKJV) -- {1} After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." {2} But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" {3} Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" {4} And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." {5} Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." {6} And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

God gave Abraham a promise and Abraham believed God. Why did Abraham believe God? How did Abraham know he was indeed speaking with God as opposed to his own subconscious or some other spirit? I believe the answer is found by reading Geneses chapters 12-15. What I found was that Abraham had a relationship with God. He had experiences with God and therefore his confidence in God was established when he was ninety years old given the promise of numerous descendants. In other words Abraham didn't blindly believe God. He had a reason to believe God. He saw God as trustworthy and therefore put his faith in God's words.

Did Abraham have hardships? Of course he did just like any other person living on this earth. However, he still believed God because of his acquired confidence in God. What experiences have you had with the Lord such that your confidence in him grows? Your experiences with God come when you live according to what the word of God reveals. When you do what the word says you will build lasting experiences with God. You will grow to learn that he is indeed trustworthy.

ARE YOU WILLING TO OBEY?

What do you expect when you pray to God to heal you? What do you expect when you pray to God for a financial blessing? Many of us believe that we will wake up one morning and the illness will be gone or that a financial breakthrough will occur. Fortunately it doesn't happen that way. God has created spiritual laws that we should abide by. One of the foremost spiritual laws is that of belief. If we believe the things we say when we pray and do not doubt in our heart, then we shall have what we pray for. We have to believe. If you need a financial blessing then believe. If you need healing in your body then believe.

So what is it that you are striving for? What works can God bless of yours? If you do not work then you will not eat (See 2 Thess. 3:10). Are you willing to obey? Are you willing to do what you have to do to carry out the will of God? Are you willing to do what you have to do to obtain the blessings of God? I by no means am suggesting that we can work to receive God's blessings. My point here is that God's blessings come through work. For example, if you pray for patience will all of a sudden you have patience? Won't you have to work at being more and more patient? If you ask God to improve your marriage do you expect that you will wake up the next day and everything will be fresh and new and the troubled marriage will be beautiful? I doubt it. Instead, you will find that you will have to work at the things that you want as God has already answered your prayer. So you may say, "God please give us a financial breakthrough" and God says, "Yes. Now go to school." Do you see? The financial breakthrough is yours, but you have to go get it in the same way that the Promised Land was given to the Israelites long before they actually inhabited the land.

However, you will only go get it if you believe. If you don't really believe God then you won't do it. It's that simple. Now again I am not suggesting that we have to work to receive blessings from God. The fact is that God has already provided for us. He has already blessed us. We have to learn to abide by his way (spiritual laws for example) to receive what he has already provided for.

We have to obey, but we will only obey if we believe. Belief in this respect is something that takes place in the heart not just the head. You may intellectually accept something, but not really believe it as if you believed something you see every day. We need to get our hearts to believe the word of God. We need to transform our minds so that we think according to what the word of God tells us instead of what worldly experiences tell us. The word of God has to be greater than natural experiences. As a matter of fact, we want to get to the point where our natural experiences are supernatural because God is directly involved in our life through his word and our obedience to it.

WISDOM

Trusting God does not mean that we blindly do things. Jesus, for example, taught us to count the cost. That doesn't mean that we have to be able to afford something before we move forward to acquiring it for example. It does, to my understanding, mean basically that we know what we are getting into before we move forward. I may trust God for a new home, new car, better marriage, etc. and at the same time I recognize that I have to follow the Lord in the situation. Of course I am going to pray and commune with the Lord. However, there may be other things that God wants me to do. Perhaps he wants me to start researching, build specific requirements for whatever it is I desire, or whatever. The point that I am trying to make here is that we have to be on a path in order for the Lord to make that path straight. There is an old saying, "A parked car won't get you anywhere" or something like that. Likewise, if you are sitting around doing absolutely nothing (not even praying persistently) then you should expect to receive anything.

I find in my own life that God is actively involved in the things that I do. Sometimes he may remove things from my life because they are not consistent with where he wants me to go or they may not be good for me. There are many things that I can say were not necessities and yet God still provided. It was not necessary for my wife and me to get our second house. It was not necessary for us to get new vehicles. However, God in his grace and mercy blessed us with those things and continues to do so.

I had to use wisdom in each of the situations where I found myself actively trusting in God to provide. There were decisions that I had to make in those circumstances. In none of those situations did things drop out of the sky so to speak. Sure there were things that happened beyond our control or ability, but they happened while I was on a particular path, i.e., while I was actively pursuing the thing I was praying for. After all, if you don't believe what you pray for then why would you pursue it? Likewise, if you believe that God has provided something for you then it is quite natural for you to pursue it because you know that it is yours. During your pursuit you will have to use wisdom. You will have to listen to the voice of God and recognize the leading of the Lord.

Wisdom is very important with active faith. The wisdom I am talking about here is the wisdom that comes from God (See James 1:5-6). This is also why having a true relationship with the Lord is so important. How will you know God's voice (his leading in your life) if you rarely hear him by giving opportunity for his leading?

THE PATH

I mentioned previously about being on a path that God prospers. This is a very important concept to me. Consider the following scripture.

Proverbs 3:6 (NKJV) In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

If we acknowledge God in all of our ways then he will direct our paths (make them straight). To acknowledge means to recognize and be aware of God. We have to recognize the providence of God in our lives. This allows us the opportunity to actively pursue God in all situations instead of praying at the end when things go awry or we don't know what to do. Recognize God in your life now and learn to trust him by doing what he says and experiencing the results of his faithfulness.

What path are you on? How can God make your paths straight if you have none? Are you one of those people that just drift through life with no direction or purpose? Do you have any goals or dreams? Consider this.

Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV) {1} Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Faith is the evidence of things hoped for. To hope means that there is a goal or destination in mind. What are you hoping? This is not a wishful hope, but a goal or blueprint of what you are pursuing (or desire). For example, your hope may be a diploma with good grades. You have a goal to achieve. Again, if you are not going anywhere then there is nothing for God to prosper.

I recall when my wife and I first started looking for a house to live in. We were going to be married and we wanted to move into a house on our wedding day. I prayed to God to provide a house and believed that he would do it. We saw many houses, but none seemed to be "the one." At one point we saw a house that we both liked and were ready to complete the sales agreement. However, Carla and I prayed about it while in the realtor's office and decided not to do it. I can't really explain the feeling I had, but it was something akin to being uneasy about the decision as if something was pulling us away from it even though things looked good about it. We switched realtors later and the new realtor took us to a house that wasn't even on the market yet. I walked in and said, "My piano goes here." That was "the one." There was nothing special about the house. However, the blessings of God flowed tremendously. The seller sold us a dining room set (including large server, small server, table with six chairs), kitchen set, two bedroom sets, sofa and loveseat, and some other items. He sold us all of that for \$300. The dining room itself was worth over two thousand.

We had to do a lot of cosmetic work in the house, but it was a very good home. When my wife came home after the wedding and post-wedding activities—we were able to come home to our own home. If we had listened to so many other people who said that getting a home was impractical. They told me that I should get an apartment and get a house from there after saving some money. I chose to trust God to give me what I wanted, namely my own home. He came through for me as usual. This is how we live our lives. We trust God to provide for us whether it is a new home, new vehicles, ministry, or whatever. God provides. I assume he will provide because he said he would. However, we have to be willing to go or do it so that God can prosper us and direct our path. If you are standing still doing nothing then the prosperity of nothing is nothing.

Let me give you an example of nothing being blessed. After we moved into the house we later wanted to move to the suburbs. We knew that the current house would only be a stepping stone. We again started looking at new construction even though we had no budget for a new home at that time. There was one house that we both felt that God had provided for us. It was called the Dover. We could sense God's provision in the same way that I knew that our current house was "the one" as described previously. However, we did not move on this new revelation. We convinced ourselves that we could never afford that house. That was a mistake that set us back for years. We looked at our then current financial situation and decided we couldn't do it instead of trusting God to provide, which he had already done. We didn't realize this until God did provide the next house for us many years later.

I was asked to install a computer system at the house of a friend of mine who had moved from the city to the suburbs. I felt that God was about to do something here. There was tension in the air so to speak. I knew something was going to happen. I left my check book home for fear of making any rash decisions. We had been looking at houses again and we did have a plan when we would move. The goal was to move when our newborn son was ready for school. Well I went to the house and hooked up the computer system. My friend convinced my wife and me to go to the sales office for the development. We did and fell in love with the houses, one in particular. Again, we had no budget to get a new home at that time. However, this time we decided to pursue it since we believed that we missed God in the Dover situation described previously. We later believed that we should have gone for it when we saw how home prices rose.

The abridged story here is that God provided. Everything worked out. We were able to purchase the new home in the suburbs that we dreamed of for so long. We are to this day amazed how God moved in that situation to provide this house for us. There was no magic and money did not float out of the sky. We cashed in some investments and secured money by other means to purchase the home. It all worked out. At that same time I also acquired a higher paying job! We were on a path and God made it straight. He didn't dismiss us when we didn't move on his provision for the Dover. He provided another opportunity to bless us with a new home.

The stories I gave above from my own life are typical. God moves in my life. Sometimes I make mistakes, but most of the time I move forward only to experience the provision and therefore the faithfulness of God. I don't claim to know it all, but I am progressing in this.

CONCLUSION

There is no magic formula to faith. Just believe God and pursue what you want. God will never let you down. He will always provide for you because he has already done so. We just have to learn to receive and operate according to his kingdom, which is by faith. We have to know what he said and do it. We have to pursue what we want. In my house seeking illustration given previously, my wife and I (though we weren't married at the time) began looking at houses. I began talking to people about utility bills and other household expenses—I was counting the costs. God guided us through the whole process and we came face to face with "the one."

God works through people and through situations. It is unlikely that a bag of money will fall from the sky when you need money for something for example. However, if you trust God and actively pursue the solution then you will come face to face with the money that you need or find grace in the situation so you don't need as much money as you think.

Faith is not magical in real life. Faith isn't a formula either. It is a way. It is how we interact with God and receive from the Lord. It is indeed the substance (reality) of the things we hope for and the evidence of the things we don't see. I was watching a movie last night at the time of this writing called "Castaway" starring Tom Hanks. At the end of the movie he said that he had to keep breathing because you never know what the tide may bring in, which he learned while being stranded on that island for so long. I too learned that you never know what will happen only one second ahead of you. I recall when I was laid off from my job for over 18 months how everything changed in an instant – within two weeks.

So trust God. Know his word. Do what he says in his word and experience his faithfulness. Know that God has already provided for you and is not holding anything back from you. Count the cost, i.e., know what you are getting into instead of going blindly into a situation. Faith does work in real life because God is real and his provisions are real. We just need to learn God's kingdom in order to receive.