

Pastor's Note

Hello

One of the easiest traps we fall into is taking the blessing of God for granted. We are so blessed in so many ways and yet we often just assume that we have a right to it. We act like we have a right to beautiful homes, to landscaped cities, to safe schools, and beautiful parks. We naturally assume that it's our divine right to have good health, security, safety, freedom and all the things that we enjoy just living here in America. We often forget that most of the world is barely struggling to survive. Let's put this into perspective. If you have food in your refrigerator, [I don't. I ate it all] if you have clothes on your back, a roof over your head, and a place to sleep you are richer than 75% of all the people in the world. You're in the top 25%.

If you have any money in the bank, you have some money in your wallet, and you have spare change in a dish someplace you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy. You are richer than 92% of the people in the world. You are blessed. If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation, you are already ahead of five hundred million people who have experienced those things. If you can attend a worship service like this one - a church - without the fear of harassment, arrest, torture or death you are more blessed than four billion people on this planet. What we're doing right now is illegal for four billion people somewhere in the world. We just forget how blessed we are.

The Bible says that everything you have in your life is a gift from God. You wouldn't have it if it weren't for the grace of God. In fact, without God's blessing you'd have nothing in your life. John 1:16(TEV) *"Out of the fullness of His grace He has blessed us all, giving us one blessing after another."* Everything you have in your life is a blessing from God. We think we've earned it. We think that we deserved it. But in reality, it's all by God's grace. It's all because of God. "But I worked for what I got!" Where did you get your ability to work? Where did you get your intelligence? Where did you get your health? Where did you get your life? It's all a gift of God. It's all from Him.

Here's a short list of some of God's gracious blessings. We're saved by grace. We're forgiven by grace. The Bible says we're strengthened by grace. We're set free from problems and sins by grace. All of the talents you have were given to you. You didn't choose them. They were just gift of

grace that God gave you. You're used by God's grace. The Bible says we're kept saved by God's grace. You didn't save yourself so you can't keep yourself saved. God does it by grace. You're transformed by grace. And we grow by grace.

Robert Louis Stevenson said this, *"There is nothing in the universe but God's grace. We walk upon it, we breathe it, we live and die by it. It is the nails and axis of the universe."* What does that mean? God's grace is what holds everything together. If it weren't for God's grace your life would fall apart, your family would fall apart, this nation would fall apart, and the world would fall apart. It would stop spinning on its axis. There would be no gravity. The universe would either explode or implode. It is all held together by God's grace. Everything in life is a blessing from God.

So we're going to look at how to live a life that God blesses. The Bible is very clear that God blesses certain things. Specifically four things He blesses. If you want God's blessing on your life you need to do these four things. We're looking the first two this week and then two more next week. Do you want God's blessing on your life? Yes? And yet, God says, I'm waiting on you. I want to bless your life. But I'm waiting on you. So how does He do it?

1. You must receive God's blessing through Christ.

Everything God does for you and to you and through you and with you and in you and by you He does because of Jesus Christ. Not because you're a good girl or good guy but because of Jesus Christ. He does it because of His Son. If you want God's blessing on your life you need to learn to love Jesus. Because it's all tied up in a relationship to Christ. If you want God's blessing on your life it doesn't start with a principle, it starts with a person. Ephesians 1:3 (GW) *"Through Christ, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing that heaven has to offer."* All of God's blessings are wrapped up in Jesus Christ. He is the source. This is so important because it's the exact opposite of what every other religion teaches you. You don't get God's blessing through religion.

You don't get God's blessing through keeping rules. You do not. You don't get God's blessing on your life by following certain regulations. You don't even get God's blessing by following certain rituals. If I do this ritual then God will bless me. No! Yet that's what the entire world believes. If I just keep these rules or regulations or do these rituals then God will bless my life and God says, No, that's the wrong answer. The only way you get God's blessing on your life is through a relationship. A relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ. It says, through Christ. *"Through Christ God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing."*

Romans 9:16 (TLB) says, *"God's blessings are not given just because someone decides to have them or works hard to get them. They are given because God takes pity on those He wants to."* Another word for pity here, is "grace." God does everything in your life simply because of His grace. He wants to do it not because you deserve it. What is grace? Grace is God giving you what you need not what you deserve. Grace is everything, every blessing that God is able to give you because of Jesus Christ. GRACE is God's Riches At Christ's Expense. Jesus Christ has paid for all the blessings in your life. It's only in a relationship with God, through His Son Jesus that you can begin to have the real blessings of God in your life.

So you may think "I'm waiting on God to bless me." But the truth is you're not waiting on Him. He's waiting on you. Luke 4:19 (TLB) *"...God is ready to give blessings to all who come to Him."* God says, I'm waiting on you. I want you to get blessable. And I want you to come to Me so I can bless you. God has already taken the first step so you can be blessed. Romans 5:10 (TLB) *"Since... we were brought back to God by the death of His Son, what blessings He must have for us now that we are His friends and He is living within us!"* I don't know if you're just discovering Christianity or you've been searching for months or maybe even years. But if you don't know what it's all about let me just pause here and take ninety seconds to explain Christianity 101. If you want to know what the Bible says in a nutshell this is it.

First, God made you. You didn't make yourself. God made you. And He made you to know Him, to love Him, to serve His purposes here on earth and then to live with Him in eternity. Two, you have not done these things. You have not known God. You have not loved God. And you have not served His purposes here on earth. In fact, in the morning you don't get up and say, "God, what do You want me to do?" You get up and say, "What am I going to do today?" And when you get your check you don't say, "God, how do You want me to spend this money?" You say, "How am I going to spend my money?" And when you plan your time you don't say, "God what do You want me to do with my time?" You say, "I'm going to do my own thing with my time."

The Bible calls this sin and it says we've all done it. You've done it, I've done it. We've all done it. We've all gone our own way. I could go weeks, months, or even years without thinking about God if I wanted to. I would just go on my merry way planning my life with my dreams and my ambitions and my goals without even considering the fact that God made me for His purposes. But the Bible says that's wrong. So point three, God

sent Jesus Christ to come to earth to bring you back to Himself. He came and died on the cross so that all the things you've done wrong could be forgiven so you could come back to God. So I can't think of better time than today for you to start a new relationship with God. And you can do it right now. The Bible says, "God is ready to give blessings to all who come to Him." So why don't you come to Him right now? Why don't you come and say, "God, I want to start that kind of relationship with You."

I'm going to lead you in a prayer right now and you can follow me in it. If you've never taken this first step to the blessing of God, receiving God's blessing through Christ, pray this prayer in your heart. "Dear God, I've known about You but I've never really gotten to know You personally. Thank You for getting me here today so I can know get to know You. Thank You for making it possible for me to know You and to be loved by You. I want to understand and I want to fulfill Your purpose for my life. God, I have to admit I've pretty much lived for myself and not for You. I'm sorry. I'm sorry for that and I ask You to forgive me for the things I've done wrong in my life. I want to change and I want to live Your way. I want Your blessing on my life. So today I want to begin a relationship with You, God, through Jesus Christ. Amen."

You may have already prayed that prayer at some point in your life. Or maybe this is the very first time you prayed that prayer. I say to you, Congratulations. You just stepped across the line. You just made the most important decision ever in your life because it determines the fact that you're now going to go to heaven if you sincerely meant that in your heart. The purpose of Macedonia Christian Church is to help you grow and understand that. Here's what I want you to do. I want you to let me know that you've committed your life to Christ. If you did this for the very first time today. Get with me and I'll give you some practical steps that you can take as you begin this new relationship. Now that you've settled this first key and most of you have already done this. You're ready for the second key of God's blessing on your life.

2. Celebrate God's blessing in worship

What do I mean by that? Thank God for what He's already done for you. God loves to bless people who are grateful for what they've already got. God's not really excited about people who are always saying, "What's next, God? When are You going to bless me again?" when you're not even pausing to thank Him for what He's already given you. When you thank him, that's called worship. God loves it when we thank Him for the blessings He's already bestowed on us. And when we thank Him for what

He's given us He blesses us with even more. Because He loves to bless His worshippers.

Worship is far more than just a church service or music. Worship is a lifestyle. It's an attitude of gratitude where you continually thank God for everything in your life. That's worship. You can worship all day. You get up in the morning: "God, thank You that I'm alive. You gave me another day." You start taking a shower: "God, thank You for hot water." There are some places I've been I'm really grateful for a hot shower. You put on your clothes: "God, thank You for the clothes You've given me." You eat breakfast and say: "God, thank You for the breakfast You've given to me. You've given me food." As you get into your car and drive to work you go, "Thank You that I've got a car to drive and I've got a place to go to work and I live in a free country." You live in an attitude of perpetual thanksgiving. That's called worship.

When God sees you do that, He wants to bless you more. Because you're grateful for what you've got, He wants to give you more. If you're ungrateful why would He want to bless that? He doesn't. So you celebrate the blessings that you have through thanksgiving and through worship. Romans 5:11 (TLB) *"Now we rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God - all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done in dying for our sins--making us friends of God."* It says Jesus Christ died for our sins. He paid for our blessings with His life. Everything you have in life, that blessing is because of Jesus. Grace is free but it is not cheap. Because it cost Jesus His life. Jesus said, "I never want you to forget the sacrifice that I gave for you when I died for you on the cross. I never want you to forget that everything in your life is because I paid for it with My life. All the good things."

When Jesus died for you on the cross He solved you biggest problem, your eternal destiny, your eternal salvation. What does that mean? It means every other problem you have in life is minor by comparison. If He loved you enough to pay and solve your biggest problem He certain loves you enough to handle the little problems in your life. Romans 8:32 (NLT) says, *"Since God did not spare even His own Son but gave Him up for us all, won't God, who gave us Christ, also give us everything else?"* The answer is obvious; yes! If God loved you enough to pay for your eternal salvation He certainly loves you enough to help you with your finances and your health and your relationships and every other area of your life. So you don't need to worry. Just say, "God, thank You for Your blessing. I want to live for You."

Chuck Colson writes this story. "Near the city of San Jose in Brazil is a remarkable prison facility. Thirty-five years ago the Brazilian government gave up on this prison and turned it over to two Christians who renamed the prison and decided to rebuild the prison based on Christian principles. With only two full employees all the work was done by inmates." Chuck Colson visited this prison in Brazil and he said this, "I found the inmates smiling, particularly the murderer who held the keys to open the prison gates and let me in. Wherever I went in the prison I saw men at peace. I saw clean living areas. I saw people working cheerfully. This is the power of the gospel. The walls were decorated with Bible verses. Then my guide escorted me to the notorious prison cell that had once been used for torture. He told me that it now houses only one inmate. As we walked down the long hall and he put the key in the lock he paused and asked, 'Chuck, are you sure you want to go in?' 'Of course,' I said impatiently. 'I've been in isolation cells all over the world.' Slowly he swung open the massive door and I saw the solitary prisoner in that cell. It was a wooden statue carved by the inmates of Jesus hanging on the cross. My guide said softly, 'He's doing time for the rest of us.'"

Think about that for a minute. Jesus Christ took your place on the cross. He's doing time for you so you don't have to do time in hell. He paid the penalty for your sin. Once you're set free, once a prison sentence has been paid for and the doors open do you hang around the prison? No. You walk out into the light. I'm saying to you today, whatever has had you imprisoned in life, Jesus Christ can walk you out of it. Maybe you've been imprisoned by guilt. You can't forget what you did. Maybe you've been imprisoned by resentment. You can't forget what other people have done to you and you're still locked in the prison of bitterness and hatred and anger and resentment. Or you're locked in the prison of loneliness. Or worry and anxiety and fear. Or you're locked in the prison of addiction. You can't stop it no matter how hard you try. I want to tell you today. This power, the power of Jesus Christ, is there to help you to walk out of that prison and be free. God wants to bless your life. You receive Him through Christ. You celebrate Him through worship, just like we've done today. I want to remind you and challenge you to never let a day go by that you don't thank Jesus Christ for the cross.

Merry Christmas,

Scott

