

## 6E. Dispensing Mercy

In this day and age, mercy is seldom seen. We are taught to look out for ‘number one,’ to make sure we get what we deserve and to make sure others get what they *deserve*. It is interesting how we think we deserve the best, however, others should get what they have coming to them; justice.

Giving mercy is foreign to us and does not make sense; it goes against our natural way of thinking. However, God desires to display His grace and mercy through us.

“This is what the LORD Almighty says: Judge fairly and honestly, and **show mercy and kindness to one another.**” Zechariah 7:9 (NLT)

““Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked. The man replied, “The one who **showed him mercy.**” Then Jesus said, “**Yes, now go and do the same.**”” Luke 10:36-37 (NLT)

God is asking us to be willing agents, channels through which He is able to dispense His mercy. We see true mercy and grace so infrequently, that when we do, we are taken aback in surprise. I like this thought from Dr. David Jeremiah:

“Grace is shocking...Grace is the delivery of a jewel that nobody ordered, **a burst of light in a room where everyone forgot it was dark.**” David Jeremiah, *Captured by Grace*, (Integrity Publishers, Nashville), p. 12

When we allow God to shine His grace and mercy through us, the world will sit up and take notice. It is ‘shocking’ to them because they are not used to seeing it, and because it goes against everything we know to be right and just.

### What is Mercy?

The words mercy and grace are oftentimes used interchangeably.

For our study we will define grace as ‘unmerited favor’.

- A blessing given when **nothing** has been done to deserve it

We will define mercy as ‘compassion or kindness shown toward an offender, or enemy...’

- A blessing given when **something** has been done - something that deserves punishment or payment.

One day, as the story goes, Frederick II, an eighteenth-century King of Prussia, went on an inspection tour of a Berlin prison. He was greeted with the cries of prisoners, who fell on their knees and protested their unjust imprisonment. While listening to these pleas of innocence, King Frederick's eye was caught by a solitary figure in the corner, a prisoner seemingly unconcerned with all the commotion. "Why are you here?" Frederick asked him. "Armed robbery, Your Majesty." "Were you guilty?" the king asked. "Oh yes, indeed, Your Majesty. I entirely deserve my punishment." At that Frederick summoned the jailer. "Release this guilty man at once," he said. "I will not have him kept in this prison where he will corrupt all the fine innocent people who occupy it."

This prisoner's just punishment was serving time in jail for crimes he had committed. The king set him free; the king gave the guilty man the opposite of what he deserved – mercy.

God reveals His grace to us, by giving us His mercy

### **Mercy and Forgiveness**

When we discuss mercy we need to talk about forgiveness; they are sisters. Mercy is the outward display of my willingness to allow God to give me forgiveness.

Jerry Bridges in *The Practice of Godliness*, writes, "Forgiveness cost God His Son on the cross, but what does it cost us to forgive one another? Forgiving costs us our sense of justice. We want to see 'justice' done, but the justice we envision satisfies our own interests. We must realize that justice has been done. God is the only rightful administrator of justice in all of creation, & His justice has been satisfied. In order to forgive our brother, we must be satisfied with God's justice & forgo the satisfaction of our own." Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness*, (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1983), p. 252

Did you catch that? "We must be satisfied with God's justice & forgo the satisfaction of our own." When Jesus died, justice was served; for me, and for all those with whom I come in contact, including those I feel have wronged me. To be in a position to give mercy, we must first be willing to forgive. When we forgive we are acknowledging that God is the One who gives justice, not us.

Forgiveness is giving up my right to demand justice. God has not asked us to administer justice; He has asked us to forgive and then show that forgiveness with mercy. Forgiveness takes place in the heart – the result of my changed heart is then shown outwardly through my actions of mercy.

### **What Does Mercy Look Like?**

We may not see it often; however, when we do we recognize it immediately. We recognize it, though we may have a hard time understanding it. Mercy is foreign to our human way of thinking, it does not come naturally.

Dr. David Jeremiah related a story in a sermon that depicts clearly what it means to forgive, and to demonstrate forgiveness with mercy.

“Peter Holm was a world famous engineer, he built great bridges, he built railroads and tunnels in many parts of the world. At one time he was the most famous and wealthy engineer in the world.

Then his life fell apart and he came to failure and poverty and sickness. In this story he returned to his little village where he had been born, and together with his wife and his little girl he eked out a meager living.

Peter Holm had a neighbor in this little village who owned a fierce dog. Peter warned his neighbor that the dog was dangerous but the old man just cursed him and said “hold your tongue you cursed pauper”.

As the story goes, one day Peter Holm came back to his house and found the dog at the throat of his little girl, he tore the dog away but it was too late, the teeth of that dog had gone too deeply and had taken the life of his daughter.

The sheriff came and shot the dog. The neighbors were so angry at the owner of the dog who had allowed this to happen that they would have nothing to do with him.

They lived in an agricultural community and when the time for sowing came they wouldn't sell him any seed to sow his farm. They wouldn't sell him any, they wouldn't give him any, they wouldn't allow him any; they were literally trying to pay him back because of what he had let happen through his dog to that little girl.

Whenever the man walked down the street in the town, the people of the village would sneer at him and swear at him.

But, Peter Holm was not like that; in fact he found that he could not sleep at night thinking about his neighbor. And in the story, very early one morning he got up, he went to his shed, he got his last half bushel of barley seed, climbed over the fence into the field that had been newly plowed by his enemy, and he sowed his neighbor's field.

Nobody new about it, until the crop came. And then it was quite evident what happened because there was a whole part of Peter's farm that was bare, and there was a whole part right next to it in his enemy's field that had grown up in barley. When the seeds came up, they revealed what Peter had done, and the story ends with this lesson.

Mercy requires that we sow good seed in our enemy's field, even though it means that part of our own field will be bare.

I don't know about you, but for me that's a hard one. The only way Mr. Holm was able to sow seed in his enemy's field was because he had allowed God through His Holy Spirit to begin the process of putting His nature in him, because the way Mr. Holm responded to his neighbor is not the way of the world. The way of the world is an 'eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,' the way of the world is revenge, the way of the world is hate, the way of the world is, 'I'll pay you back for what you did,' the way of the world is justice must be served.”

Allan Knight Chalmers, *High Wind at Noon, A Case for daring Christianity*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948) – As told by Dr. David Jeremiah in a radio broadcast sermon

Mr. Holm's actions do not make sense, or seem right to me. As I contemplate this I realize I am selfish and need God to replace my selfishness with His love and compassion. The second thing I realize is that I am results oriented. When I get to the end of the story, I find myself wanting to know what effect Mr. Holm's mercy had on his neighbor. I want to see good come out of the fact that Mr. Holm sowed seed in his enemies' field. I want the neighbor to repent, to seek forgiveness as a result of the mercy shown him. If that were to take place I might feel it was worth the sacrifice.

The problem is, God does not ask us to be concerned with the outcome, He has commissioned us to dispense mercy, period. If it were any other way, we would only dispense mercy when we felt there was a good chance of it bringing repentance (or some other good). Praise God that sometimes the mercy we give does result in good, but that should not be our criteria for giving, our reason for giving mercy is because God said to.

**“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;”**  
Matthew 5:44 (KJV)

Mercy comes with no strings attached; it is given freely and without a required response from the recipient. God does not need us to convict hearts. God needs us as His hands and feet, dispensing mercy wherever we go, treating those we come in contact with the way Jesus did, with love, compassion and forgiveness. Mercy treats another as if they never did wrong. How can that be right? How will people ever learn if we just keep giving them mercy?

**“We may never know until the judgment the influence of a kind, considerate course of action to the inconsistent, the unreasonable, and unworthy. If, after a course of provocation and injustice on their part, you treat them as you would an innocent person, you even take pains to show them special acts of kindness, then you have acted the part of a Christian; and they become surprised and ashamed, and see their course of action and meanness more clearly than if you plainly stated their aggravated acts to rebuke them.”** Medical Ministry, p. 209

Mercy is responding to a person who has committed an injustice, as if they were innocent! With that response, God is able to work on their heart to draw them to His love. When we are willing to dispense mercy, God has promised He will take care of the results, in His time and in His way.

Disinterested giving is a way to show mercy. Does the client deserve what we are giving? Maybe not, however, that is mercy – giving when it is not deserved. God has commissioned us to dispense mercy, therefore, by its very definition we are going to be giving to those who do not deserve to receive.

Just how far does God expect us to go in showing mercy? Where do we draw the line? We gain a glimpse at just how far God is prepared to take His mercy through the insight given Mrs. White regarding the struggle that went on in heaven before this world was created.

“In great mercy, according to His divine character, **God bore long with Lucifer.** The spirit of discontent and disaffection had never before been known in heaven...such efforts as infinite love and wisdom only could devise, were made to convince him of his error...He [Lucifer] had not at that time fully cast off his allegiance to God. Though he had left his position as covering cherub, **yet if he had been willing to return to God,** acknowledging the Creator's wisdom, and satisfied to fill the place appointed him in God's great plan, **he would have been reinstated in his office.**” Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 39

‘Reinstated?’ Do you mean to tell me that if Lucifer had repented, he could have had his original position back? He could have stood again in his place next to God? That is mercy, that is love that will not let us go, love that has done everything to make it possible for you and me to experience the mercy of God, love that desires to show its characteristic of mercy through us – His agents.

### **Shoplifting**

Five-finger discount, coat stuffing, no paper trail self check out, price-switching; whatever it is called, it is taking something that does not belong to you without permission. There are different reasons someone may shoplift; because of a need, because of an addiction, or just for fun.

What do you do when you find someone shoplifting; call the police, tell them to never come back in the store, give them a lecture? That is what we may desire to do, however, what would a heart of mercy do, what action on our part would show mercy is our first thought?

As a ministry our mission is to give, we want to help those with a need, however, having a need does not justify stealing.

God has commissioned us to be His agents, to deliver shocking mercy, to respond to others the opposite of what they are used to or expect. Showing mercy means we treat them as ‘an innocent person,’ we give them the opposite of what they deserve. As we read earlier:

When “...you treat them as you would **an innocent person**,...then you have acted the part of a Christian;...” Medical Ministry, p. 209

Our ministry is to show people God’s grace, to give them a picture of what God is offering them – forgiveness, mercy, grace, love and a changed heart. When you respond to them ‘as you would an innocent person’ you are providing a picture of God they may have never seen before.

When you find yourself in the position of dealing with someone who is stealing, and lean to the side of mercy, you will never go wrong. When mercy is our first response, we are more open to God directing us with the appropriate way to respond in each situation.

A potential way of handling someone who is shoplifting, is to give them the opportunity to return what they took, or pay for it. When we take this approach we are reminded that our purpose is not to seek retribution or justice, but to be God's agents of dispensing mercy.

God will make the difference clear to us between a legitimate need for clothes, and stealing things that are not necessities, or, stealing just for the fun of it. There may be a situation where God directs to **give** the stolen items to the person regardless of the perceived need; now that's mercy!

If you find the same person shoplifting again, what should you do? Allow God to guide in how you respond with your first choice being to show mercy. God has not changed, His mercy endures forever. When our first response is to give mercy, we are open to God's leading if He sees that it would be best to involve the law.

It is impossible to secure every item in the store to insure that no one is able to shoplift. We can take certain precautions, but once that is done we need to leave it with God. God wants to deal with our feelings of ill will against those who steal, remove or change price tags, remove sold tags and are dishonest.

We are not able to police the entire store, we need to learn to leave it with God, to allow Him to change our hearts so that we see each person as God sees them; a child He died for. We are God's stewards, however, the contents of the store belong to Him, when we give Him permission to do what He sees is best, when we release control to Him, He is able to protect what is His much better than we are.

### **An Example of Giving Mercy**

'We have been robbed' were the first words I heard as I answered the phone, just before leaving for work the day after the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. This Thursday was not going to be typical. Someone had entered the thrift store, broken into the office, opened the locked drawer and taken everything – petty cash, the deposit, money set a side for assisting those in need – all of it gone.

The next thing I learn is that Dennis, one of our employees, has not been heard from since five o'clock the day before. As I drive to work I experience a flood of emotions – disbelief, loss, hurt, anger, resentment, to name a few. I did not want to automatically blame Dennis, however, it looked suspicious; Dennis had not been heard from all night and he had access to the key for the locked drawer.

As I drove to work the Holy Spirit was speaking to my heart, and I realized my need to forgive whoever had done this, and so I made that choice. Next was the decision of whether or not to press charges. As Roy and I prayed about it, we became conscious of the Holy Spirit's prompting, that we were not to press charges. But were we willing? Were we willing to treat whoever had done this as 'an innocent person?'

At that point I do not think we were ready to treat them as innocent, however, we did make the decision to not press charges. The police left and we gathered for our regular morning worship, I usually read the devotional, however, this morning Roy picked up the book and started reading. I was deep in thought and not paying much attention to what he was reading, when this thought came, 'you are to pray blessings on whoever did this.'

Pardon me? Pray blessings on them? Let me see, I have forgiven them, we have not pressed charges, and now You are asking me to bless them? Isn't that going just a little bit too far? As those thoughts swirled in my head, I surrendered and said 'God, if that is what You are asking us to do, then that is what we will do.' (Rom. 12:14, 1 Peter 3:9) As Roy finished reading, I shared what had taken place over the last fourteen hours and what God had just brought to me as we were having worship. As I led us in a prayer of forgiveness and blessing for whoever had done this, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit was evident. The whole atmosphere changed as if a cloud of hurt and loss had been lifted from each of us.

Concern for Dennis grew as the day progressed with no word on his whereabouts. The last time he had been heard from, was 5:00 pm the day before when he called a friend and asked for a ride, 'I'm on Bates street and there are two men with a gun chasing me, come get me and I will give you \$50.' Dennis had called back a few minutes later and said 'never mind, I got a cab.'

### **History**

About four months previous, God had literally dropped Dennis off on our doorstep. Dennis had been traveling with a carnival and had been praying that somehow God would get him out of a bad situation.

The carnival he was working with had come to our town, and in need of food, Dennis and a buddy borrowed a friend's van to come to our store to get food from our pantry. As Terry was serving Dennis in the pantry, the friend asked for the keys to get something out of the van. When Dennis came out, the van and his friend were gone.

Dennis used our phone to call around and see if there was a place he could go as a homeless person, to no avail. He spent most of the day sitting on our front walkway, and as the day progressed I had no indication from God that we were to help him further. I had to leave as soon as the store closed to attend a meeting. As I was getting in my car, God impressed me with this thought, 'put him up in a hotel for the night.' I called Roy and asked him to give the guy on the porch enough money for a motel room.

The next day Dennis showed up at the store, we gently tried to let him know he needed to be looking for a place to stay, he replied that he knew this is where he was supposed to be. Evening came, he was still there. In discussing what we should do, one of our volunteers – Kate – felt impressed to offer her spare bedroom. From then on Dennis was at the store every day, willing to help where needed and attending all three Bible study groups each week; even leading out on occasion when asked. Dennis felt we were the answer to his prayer; God had not only removed him from a bad situation, He had placed him where he needed to be to grow.

### **Back to the Story**

Four days later on Monday morning July 9, as I answered the phone, I was not prepared to hear Dennis say, 'This is Dennis. I need to tell you that I did it, I took the money.'

Using the stolen money, Dennis had gone on a binge of drugs and alcohol. He does not know how he wound up in Leesburg, about thirty minutes away, passed out behind a building. Someone found him there and took him to a men's shelter sponsored by the Leesburg First

Baptist Church. They accepted him into their four month program of intensive Bible study, instruction and healing, where he could grow in his walk with God.

### **Watching God Work**

The previous November, God sent us a gentleman to manage our growing food ministry. Terry has been confined to a wheel chair since 1972 as the result of a car accident. He had worked in a food bank in Indiana, had been in Florida for about a year, and was seeking to be where God wanted him. With his great sense of humor, his knowledge of running a food bank and his willingness for God to use him, Terry perfectly filled a need at just the right time.

As we became acquainted with Terry, he began asking us a few questions about what Seventh-day Adventists believe, and on different occasions several members of our staff discussed Bible truths with him. The truths that were being shared with Terry were foreign to him and we did not push our way of thinking on him.

As a Baptist Terry knows his salvation is sure and over the months we have rejoiced together as we experienced God changing all of us. One day after lunch we struck up a conversation, and Terry began to share his thoughts. "I have seen how you handle different situations and especially how you handled Dennis stealing all that money. I have seen a difference in how you folks handle the circumstances of life. I have been around Christians, and I have worked where we were providing people with assistance, but I have never seen people respond to life with such peace, forgiveness and mercy as I see from you folks. If this is what Adventists are like, I want to know more about them. I think I may go to your church this Saturday."

Terry had been married for just over a year. His wife is a follower of Buddha and had let Terry know she was not interested in discussing any of his Christian views. Terry went home that day and shared with his wife the same things he had told me. At the end of their conversation, Jenean said, "Would you mind if I went with you Saturday?"

That very Sabbath found Terry and Jenean in church, where she took copious notes. When they got home after church, Jenean took a Bible down off the shelf and asked Terry if she could have it. Of course he was delighted to give it to her.

Was it worth the money being stolen to see Terry and Jenean in church Sabbath? Only God knows what the outcome will be as we see Him drawing Terry and Jenean closer to His truth, as *we see it* from a Biblical perspective.

However, the story does not end there.

Realizing the money was gone, we made the choice to again acknowledge that God is our source for all things and He would see to it that our needs were met as we trusted our blessings to Him. We prayed, "God, we give this stolen money freely, it belongs to You. You are sovereign and we choose to place our trust in You, to trust in Your promise that You will bring good out of this situation as You take care of our needs." As we claimed God's promises of provision, we chose to leave with Him the when and how.

As we allowed God to give us His forgiveness and mercy, as we experienced again His ability to change our hearts, we saw the evidence of God using us to draw others to Him. These blessings cannot be measured by human standards; they are blessings that will last for an eternity.

We also witnessed God's ability to provide for us financially. Summer is traditionally our slow time, but July was anything but slow. We saw a dramatic increase in the quality and quantity of merchandise with which we were blessed – \$600 sofas, \$700 entertainment centers, and on and on. Not only did we experience a dramatic change in our donations, God provided the customers to purchase the abundance. It was going out as fast as it was coming in.

When the dust settled for the month, it was clear God had returned all that was stolen. We expect that as we continue to allow God to teach us to walk in mercy, allowing Him to shine through us, the blessings will continue in our lives and those God brings across our path.

However, the story does not end there.

As Dennis was finishing the program at the men's center, he felt God was directing him to ask to come back and work with us. He was able to come two afternoons a week, and when he graduated he planned to join us again full time. The day Dennis graduated from the program, he went out and had a drink...and broke into the store again! This time he only made it as far as the dumpster across the back alley, where the Eustis Police Department found him hiding with the money bags he had taken from the office. Just because we give mercy does not mean that everybody involved is going to choose the correct path.

When presented with the decision of whether or not to press charges, our first response was, "No." However, as the morning progressed and we continued to be open to God's leading, it became clear He was directing us to let the police department take Dennis in. Treating someone as if they 'are innocent' is foreign to our nature, however, as we are willing for God to give us His way of thinking, we become open to His leading and He is able to impress upon us the direction He would have us take in each situation. Knowing this time God was directing us to press charges, we have the assurance that it was for *his good* and that God would use this experience to continue drawing Dennis to the only Source of victory!

Dennis was released from prison and returned to the First Baptist Church Men's Program. While there he completed one semester at a local seminary. Yes, Dennis broke into the stores a third time, but that is another story. Addiction is a powerful force, however, God is greater and we trust that as Dennis continues to allow God to work in his life, he will see victory.

However, this story does not end here.

Remember Terry and Jenean? Jenean continued to look for answers to life in the teachings of Buddha. She longed for the peace she saw in Terry's life, however, the battle for the mind is real, and as she experienced the tension for mastery of her soul, and attempting to find peace, Jenean decided to move out.

During this time Jenean would occasionally attend the Mount Dora church, however, she made it clear she had no intention of becoming a Christian. Terry and Jenean had been separated for

about five months, when one evening Jenean called Terry, during the conversation she asked Terry if he thought they could ever get back together, he answered, “as long as you are not a Christian, we would be unequally yoked, and we would have no foundation to build a marriage.” Jenean responded, “I will **never** become a Christian!”

This conversation took place on a Thursday evening, that Sabbath Jenean found herself in church. At the end of the service when a call was made, Jenean yielded her heart to Christ, she chose to accept God's offer to provide all her needs. Praise God!

God has a thousand ways to reach a heart, however, we are humbled to realize He used our willingness to show mercy many months before. Our choice was for God to change our hearts, as that was taking place He was able to shine His light to Terry who began making a conscious choice for God to change His heart, which led to Jenean witnessing the peace in Terry's life, which God used to bring her to the point of yielding her heart to Him and experiencing His peace.

Jenean – “I now have the peace I was searching for, which I saw in Terry's life.” We praise God for the transformation we see in Jenean's life. God is able to take sinful humans and transform them into His agents – Hallelujah!

### **Conclusion**

In our desire for justice, we have lost sight of mercy. Loosing sight of mercy has made it difficult for God to shine His mercy through us. When our first thought is mercy, we are open to God's direction when He sees it is best for someone to experience the consequences of their actions. When God directs us to allow someone to come under the penalty of the laws of the land – because of our choice to put mercy first – the justice will be mixed with mercy.

We give God thanks for His mercy to us, in that He has not given us what we deserve. As we continue to allow God to change our hearts, to make mercy our first thought, God is able to shine His light through us more brightly.

**“The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love.”**

Christ Object Lessons, p. 415

## Further Study

### *Grace*

“Every converted soul has a work to do. **We are to receive grace in order to freely give grace.** We are to let the light shine forth from the bright and morning star, to shed forth light in works of self-denial and self-sacrifice, following the example that Christ has given us in His own life and character.” This Day with God, p. 327

“And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the wonderful grace of God **shown through you.**” 2 Corinthians 9:14 (NLT)

### *Mercy*

“Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. For it is written,

“I will take vengeance;  
I will repay those who deserve it,”  
says the Lord.

Instead, do what the Scriptures say:

**“If your enemies are hungry, feed them.  
If they are thirsty, give them something to drink,  
and they will be ashamed of what they have done to you.”**

Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good. Romans 12:19-21 (NLT)

“No, O people, the LORD has already told you what is good, and this is what he requires: to do what is right, **to love mercy**, and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8 (NLT)

“**God blesses those who are merciful**, for they will be shown mercy.” Matthew 5:7 (NLT)

“For thou, Lord, *art* good, and **ready to forgive**; and **plenteous in mercy** unto all them that call upon thee.” Psalm 86:5 (KJV)

“**I want you to be merciful**; I don't want your sacrifices. I want you to know God; that's more important than burnt offerings.” Hosea 6:6 (NLT)

“The Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.” **There never was a time when there was greater need for the exercise of mercy than today.** The poor are all around us, the distressed, the afflicted, the sorrowing, and those who are ready to perish.” The Signs of the Times, June 13, 1892

***Treating Others the Opposite of What They Deserve***

**“If we wish to do good to souls, our success with these souls will be in proportion to their belief in our belief in, and appreciation of, them.** Respect shown to the struggling human soul is the **sure means through Christ Jesus of the restoration** of the self-respect the man has lost. ...We have need of the rich grace of God every hour, then we will have a rich, practical experience, for God is love. He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God. **Give love to them that need it most. The most unfortunate, those who have the most disagreeable temperaments need our love, our tenderness, our compassion. Those who try our patience need most love.** ...The rough, stubborn, sullen dispositions are the ones who need help the most. How can they be helped? Only by that love practiced in dealing with them which Christ revealed to fallen man. **Treat them, you may, as they deserve. What if Christ had treated us thus? He, the undeserving, was treated as we deserve.** Still we are treated by Christ with grace and love as we did not deserve, but as He deserved. **Treat some characters, as you think they richly deserve, and you will cut off from them the last thread of hope, spoil your influence and ruin the soul.** Will it pay? No, I say no, a hundred times no. Bind these souls who need all the help it is possible for you to give them close to a loving, sympathizing, pitying heart, overflowing with Christ like love, and you will save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins. Had we not better try the love process?” Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 280

***Bless Them***

“Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.” Romans 12:14 (KJV)

“Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate when people say unkind things about you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God wants you to do, and he will bless you for it.”

1 Peter 3:9 (NLT)

**Mercy is putting forgiveness into action!**

## 6F. Success by God's Standard

It is important to evaluate the success of an organization. Progress should be measured so changes can be implemented or adjustments made to become and/or continue as a success. However, before we can measure growth and success, we must first define what success looks like for the organization in question.

How should a God directed ministry measure success? Is it the number of Bible studies given or how many people have been baptized? Is it based on the extent of our benevolent services, the quantity of items given away and the number of people who benefit? These are tangible things that can be tracked and usually are our focus, however, we have come to realize this is not the criteria God uses to define success. The truth is; we can give to all who ask, have a thousand baptisms, be financially solvent, and still not be a success.

God measures success in one way – our willingness to allow Him to change our heart.

When we allow God to grow our willingness to yield our nature to the work of the Holy Spirit, to receive the mind of Christ; we are a success. God measures success by our willingness to learn, grow and change.

To measure success, we ask:

Am I growing in my willingness to Learn, Grow, and Change?

As we yield our lives to God and allow Him to grow this willingness in us, He continues His process of transforming our character, and we find ourselves also growing in our willingness to:

give disinterestedly  
dispense mercy  
be obedient to God's will  
experience His peace

As we grow in these areas, God will produce fruit as a result of our changed heart. He will use us as His agents to shine His light. As we allow God to change our hearts, He is able to use us more often in His process of drawing others to Him. As others are drawn to Him it becomes more likely they will come to the place where they consciously allow God to change their hearts, and the cycle of success continues.

### **God's Gardener**

When we grow in our willingness to allow God to change us, He uses us to plant seeds, seeds of kindness and hope. God uses the time of planting and cultivating, to grow our faith, to teach us that He is in control whether we see results of our labors or not. As we keep our focus on being willing to *learn, grow and change*, God is able to bring about the outcome He sees is best in all areas of ministry, in His way and time.

God is asking us to be willing to serve as His gardeners – as we are open to His leading – He will use us as His planters, waterers, and reapers. The key is to not use the reaping process as a gauge of success. The gauge of success is – am I becoming more willing to allow God to change me; am I becoming more willing to give disinterestedly and to dispense mercy?

This is not easy, we have been taught to be results orientated, to have a goal, to achieve an end objective. God desires to teach us obedience to Him regardless of what results we see. The question is, “Am I willing? Am I willing to be used of God as He sees best?” Is it possible that God must keep me from encouraging results until I learn to trust Him without them?

Historically we spend most of our time trying to pick apples – we do not go to the orchard until we are ready to pick and then we wonder why there are no apples. We forget that someone needs to care for the orchard – watering, weeding, and fertilizing. The trees need to be nurtured before there can be any apples to harvest. The trouble we face is that it is less fun to pull weeds than it is to see the bushel basket fill up as we pick bright red apples. Getting dirt under our finger nails digging in the soil, preparing it for planting, is not as glamorous as harvesting. It is more rewarding to pick apples from a full grown mature tree, than to plant a tiny seed, and wait for it to reach maturity and produce fruit.

It only takes a few minutes to pick a bushel of apples, while it takes *years* to grow and cultivate an orchard. We want to see results so we can prove to others and ourselves that we are being successful, we want to point to our basket of apples and say ‘see, our basket is full.’ It seems much less gratifying to say, ‘We have some trees growing, however, we have not picked any fruit yet.’ We know the next question we usually hear is, ‘when do you expect to start picking fruit?’

When we are willing to be used of God – when we are willing to not gauge our success by our standards – God is able to use us in each facet of the growing process. When we allow God to take away our pride, we will count it an honor to get down on our hands and knees and pull weeds, we will count it a privilege to push the fertilizer cart and we will rejoice when there are apples to harvest *even if we are not the ones God uses to do the harvesting.*

We are a success when we allow God to create an environment in the ministry that is conducive to the entire growing process – from cultivating the soil, planting seed, nurture and care, to the harvest. Each stage in the growing process is equally important and should not be neglected. Preparing the soil is hard, hot, dirty work, it is exhausting and may seem unimportant, however, it is essential. When the soil is prepared properly, there is a much greater chance that when a seed is planted, it will take root and grow. If God asks us to spend most of our time preparing the soil, that is what we should be willing to do.

Regardless of the task, whether it seems menial and unimportant or if it is a task I feel like shrinking from because I do not feel capable or worthy, my choice should be one of willingness.

“As God called Daniel to witness for Him in Babylon, so He calls us to be His witnesses in the world today. In the smallest as well as the largest affairs of life, He desires us to reveal to men the principles of His kingdom. **Many are waiting for some great work to be brought to them, while daily they lose opportunities for revealing faithfulness to God. Daily they fail of discharging with wholeheartedness the little duties of life.** While they wait for some large work in which they may exercise supposedly great talents, and thus satisfy their ambitious longings, their days pass away.” Prophets and Kings, p. 487

Success is not measured by some great work I may do; success is being faithful in performing the task God has given me today, regardless of its perceived importance.

Again, it comes down to this question, ‘am I willing to trust God to use me each day in the gardening process in whatever capacity He sees will bring Him the most glory?’ Our ‘job’ is to be willing - willing to learn, grow and change. When that is our choice we are assured that God will provide a bountiful harvest in His time and in His way.

### **Preconceived Ideas**

When God asks us to do something, we usually move forward with our own preconceived idea of an outcome. We think we know why God has asked us to perform the task, and when the outcome is different than we thought it was going to be, we think perhaps we were not doing God's will, or that somehow we failed in what God asked us to do.

God wants to grow us to the place in our thinking where we are willing to be obedient – that no matter how the circumstances look – we are still willing to walk in God's will, leaving the outcome to Him. One of my favorite stories illustrates this thought perfectly.

“There was a man who was asleep one night in his cabin when suddenly his room filled with light and the Savior appeared. The Lord told the man He had a work for him to do, and showed him a large rock in front of his cabin. The Lord explained that the man was to push against the rock with all his might. This the man did, day after day.

For many years he toiled from sun up to sun down, his shoulders set squarely against the cold, massive surface of the unmoving rock pushing with all his might. Each night the man returned to his cabin sore and worn out, feeling that his whole day had been spent in vain.

Seeing that the man was showing signs of discouragement, Satan decided to enter the picture, placing thoughts into the man's mind such as, "You have been pushing against that rock for a long time and it hasn't budged. Why kill yourself over this? You are never going to move it?" Thus, giving the man the impression that the task was impossible and that he was a failure.

These thoughts discouraged and disheartened the man even more. "Why kill myself over this?" he thought. "I'll just put in my time, giving just the minimum of effort and that will be good enough." And that he planned to do until one day he decided to make it a matter of prayer and take his troubled thoughts to the Lord. "Lord" he said, "I have labored long and hard in your service, putting all my strength to do that which you have asked. Yet, after all this time, I have not even budged that rock a half a millimeter. What is wrong? Why am I failing?"

To this the Lord responded compassionately, "My friend, when long ago I asked you to serve me and you accepted, I told you that your task was to push against the rock with all your strength, which you have done. **Never once did I mention to you that I expected you to move it. Your task was to push.** And now you come to me, your strength spent, thinking that you have failed. But, is that really so? Look at yourself. Your arms are strong and muscled; your back sinewed and brown, your hands are calloused from constant pressure, and your legs have become massive and strong.

"Through opposition you have grown much and your abilities now surpass that which you used to have. Yet you haven't moved the rock. But your calling was to be obedient and to push and to exercise your faith and trust in My wisdom. This you have done. **I, my friend, will now move the rock.**" Author Unknown

We cannot know the outcome God intends for each act He requires of us. There are times when the only outcome God is looking for, is a change in our heart. What we can know is that He has only our best interest in mind. We can know that He is the Master Designer, He is weaving the tapestry of our life for His glory, He is using life's experiences to transform us, and in the process shine His light. We can trust that if and when the rock needs to be moved, God is able to move it.

Mother Theresa summed it up this way when she said: "God has not called me to be successful. He has called me to be faithful."<sup>1</sup>

## **Peace of God**

As we grow in our attitude of allowing God to make us willing to learn, grow and change, He will give us encouragement and evidences of the work He is doing through us.

One of these evidences is when people come to us and say, 'I find peace when I come to this store.' We know when someone experiences this peace, they are experiencing God; this peace is not something that can be manufactured or conjured up, the peace that passes understanding comes only from God.

"Peace I leave with you, **my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth**, give I unto you...." John 14:27 (KJV)

When we place our trust in God and allow His Spirit full control, the store is transformed from an ordinary building into a sanctuary. The peace of God in our store makes it a refuge from the press of life. With the peace of God filling the store great things take place.

We find opportunities to stop at any time, at any location, and have prayer with a customer or staff member. God uses us to give a helping hand or a smile to brighten someone's day. One day as I went out to help bring in some donations from a lady, she came over to me and asked, 'you don't remember me do you?' As I looked at her inquisitively she continued, 'a few days ago you called to tell me that someone had found my wallet in the parking lot. When I came to get it you were so kind and gave me the most wonderful smile. I was having a horrible day and when you smiled at me you made my day, no, you made my week! When I had some items to donate, I knew this is where I was going to bring them.'

“We should be cheerful; **heavenly peace would reign in our hearts**, not enclosed as perfume in a bottle, but like the offering of Mary to Jesus, **filling the house with its sweet fragrance. Peace would be in our homes; for wherever the love of Jesus reigns, there peace abides**; and there will be also joy; for there is a holy calm and heavenly trust in God.” The Review and Herald, April 14, 1885

As God's peace permeates the store, He will use us as a sweet aroma to bring joy and calmness to those who come across our path. What an awesome reality to know God is using the ministry of the store to bring His peace and an experience of Him to those who enter.

### **Making a Difference**

God may give us the opportunity to be a blessing in a large way, which we praise Him for, however, He also wants us to be willing to be a blessing in the small things. God wants us to understand that when we are following His will, we are being a blessing whether or not we can see it. Even if we are able to help many people we would never be able to help everyone, yet this need not discourage us. Though we can not help everyone, we should be willing to help those God brings across our path, willing to be used of Him to further His Kingdom. With that willingness, we have His assurance that we do make a difference.

A well known story illustrates this point.

“One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking something up and gently throwing it into the ocean. Approaching the boy, he asked, ‘what are you doing?’

The youth replied, ‘throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don’t throw them back, they’ll die.’

‘Son,’ the man said, ‘don’t you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can’t possibly make a difference!’

After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it back into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said... ‘I made a difference for that one.’” Hugh Duncan, *Leadership Journal* - <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/ff/faithfulness.htm>

What we do makes a difference. It makes a difference to God, it makes a difference to us as we allow Him to grow His nature in us, it makes a difference to those we serve as they see Jesus in us and are drawn to Him.

### **Our Source**

When the business is growing and there is money in the bank, it becomes easy to shift our focus from the purpose of the ministry and the things that brought us to where we are, to maintaining the blessings. We may lose sight of the **Source** of our success, and become dependent on the **avenues** God uses to flow His blessings to us.

During a period when donations had slowed way down, I was led to a verse in Habakkuk:

“Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, (*even though we have no beds, and not many sofas*) <sup>18</sup>**yet I will rejoice in the LORD!** I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. <sup>19</sup>**The Sovereign LORD is my strength!** He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains.” Habakkuk 3:17-19 (NLT)

God reminded me, that regardless of the circumstances surrounding me, He is the One who gives strength and provides for my every need, therefore, I choose to rejoice in the ‘God of my salvation.’ It is marvelous to watch God provide for us through the times when the store appears to be bare. He continues to teach us that even though the barn is empty, He has nine-hundred and ninety-nine other ways – besides selling furniture – to provide for us.

Many months later we were going through another slow time, donations were down, we were doing 3 to 4 pick ups per day, instead of our usual 10 to 15. As I looked over the pick up slips Sunday evening, I was encouraged to see we had 10 pick ups for the next day.

Monday came; they brought in the first load – junk! They brought in the second load – junk! The entire day was junk. ‘A lot of good it did to have 10 pick ups,’ I thought. Then I realized I was placing my trust in what came in; instead of God. I again chose to allow God to provide for us in the way He saw best. The sales that day? High!

We have gone through extended periods when the store appeared to be bare, I would look around in the morning and wonder “what are we going to sell today, we don’t have any beds, and only a few sofas?” however, we would have record days. God is not dependent on a stocked floor to provide for us, I cannot explain it, however, I have experienced it, as God continues to teach us He is not tied to our economy.

It is so easy to place our trust in what we can see. However, a store packed with merchandise, is no guaranty we will sell any of it. God is our provider, period. Whether we have a full store, or He is selling it as fast as it comes in, He decides how He will provide for us.

God reminds us when our focus shifts from learning to trust Him, to maintaining our success. He makes us aware when we are saying things like; “We’ve got to keep this going. I need to see what I can do to increase donations and sales.” It is not our apparent success that needs to be maintained; that is in God’s hands. However, God is able to use the experience of apparent lack, to strengthen our connection with Him as He continues to teach us that He is our source for all things.

God uses these times to remind us why we are a success.  
Because of our choice to:

- Follow God's will
- Learn to give disinterestedly

- Allow God to give us a servant heart

With our renewed choice to allow God to provide for us the way He sees best, and to walk in His will, we have His promise to provide for all our needs, both physically and spiritually. As we allow God to transform us into free flowing channels of blessings; we are a success.

### **Human Praise**

“True, heaven-born love is not selfish and changeable. **It is not dependent on human praise.**” Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 101

As we continue to serve God we realize we do not need the praise of men, our success is not based on what others think. When we are willing to follow God and allow Him to do His work, there will be success. We will be able to say with Isaiah; “Everyone will see this miracle and understand that **it is the Lord**, the Holy One of Israel, who did it.” Isaiah 41:20 (NLT)

As we continue to learn what it means to trust God implicitly and follow Him, we have His promise that He will make us a success – a success in heaven’s eyes, a success with results that will last an eternity.

“Our success does not depend on our talents or learning, but on our **living connection with God.**”

Testimonies Volume 5, p. 158

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Susan Conroy, *Mother Teresa’s Lessons of Love and Secrets of Sanctity* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2003)

## Further Study

“My job was to **plant** the seed in your hearts, and Apollos **watered** it, but it was God, not we, who made it **grow.**” 1 Corinthians 3:6 (NLT)

“Commit your work to the LORD, and then your plans will succeed.” Proverbs 16:3 (NLT)

“It is not that we think we can do anything of lasting value by ourselves. **Our only power and success come from God.**” 2 Corinthians 3:5 (NLT)

“As activity increases, and men **become successful in doing any work for God, there is danger of trusting to human plans and methods. There is a tendency to pray less, and to have less faith.** Like the disciples, we are in danger of losing sight of our dependence on God, and seeking to **make a savior of our activity.** We need to look constantly to Jesus, realizing that it is His power which does the work. While we are to labor earnestly for the salvation of the lost, we must also take time for meditation, for prayer, and for the study of the Word of God. Only the work accomplished with much prayer, and **sanctified by the merit of Christ, will in the end prove to have been efficient for good.**” The Desire of Ages, p. 362

“In this life our work for God often seems to be **almost fruitless.** Our efforts to do good may be earnest and persevering, yet we may not be permitted to witness their results. To us the effort may seem to be lost. But **the Saviour assures us that our work is noted in heaven,** and that the recompense cannot fail.” Testimonies Volume 6, p. 305

“**It is not the ability of the agent or worker, but it is the Spirit of God moving upon the heart that will give true success.**” Manuscript 31, 1890 – Colporteur Ministry, p. 107

“When you bow down before the Lord and **admit your dependence on him,** he will **lift you up and give you honor.**” James 4:10 (NLT)

“It is a great mistake to trust in human wisdom or numbers in the work of God. **Successful work for Christ depends not so much on numbers or talent as upon pureness of purpose, the true simplicity of earnest, dependent faith.**” The Desire of Ages, p. 370

“**If we wish to do good to souls, our success with these souls will be in proportion to their belief in our belief in, and appreciation of, them.**” Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 280

“When men gain success in the work of the Lord, **it is because God has given them this success, not for their own glory, but for God's glory.**” The Publishing Ministry, p. 139

“**It is not the capabilities you now possess or ever will have that will give you success. It is that which the Lord can do for you.** We need to have far less confidence in what man can do and far more confidence in what God can do for every believing soul. **He longs to have you**”

**reach after Him by faith. He longs to have you expect great things from Him. He longs to give you understanding in temporal as well as in spiritual matters.** He can sharpen the intellect. He can give tact and skill. Put your talents into the work, ask God for wisdom, and it will be given you.” Christ’s Object Lessons, p.146

**“Those with whom Christ dwells will be surrounded with a divine atmosphere.** Their white robes of purity will be fragrant with perfume from the garden of the Lord. Their faces will reflect light from His, brightening the path for stumbling and weary feet.” The Adventist Home, p. 424

“...They are to labor quietly and in humility, carrying with them wherever they go the **atmosphere of heaven....**” Testimonies, vol. 9, p. 128

### **Clarence Jordan’s Koinonia Farm**

“Clarence Jordan was a man of unusual abilities and commitment. He had two Ph.D.s, one in agriculture and one in Greek and Hebrew. So gifted was he, he could have chosen to do anything he wanted. He chose to serve the poor. In the 1940s, he founded a farm in Americus, Georgia, and called it Koinonia Farm. It was a community for poor whites and poor blacks. As you might guess, such an idea did not go over well in the Deep South of the '40s. Ironically, much of the resistance came from good church people who followed the laws of segregation as much as the other folk in town. The town people tried everything to stop Clarence. They tried boycotting him, and slashing workers' tires when they came to town. Over and over, for fourteen years, they tried to stop him.

Finally, in 1954, the Ku Klux Klan had enough of Clarence Jordan, so they decided to get rid of him once and for all. They came one night with guns and torches and set fire to every building on Koinonia Farm but Clarence's home, which they riddled with bullets. And they chased off all the families except one black family which refused to leave. Clarence recognized the voices of many of the Klansmen, and, as you might guess, some of them were church people. Another was the local newspaper's reporter. The next day, the reporter came out to see what remained of the farm. The rubble still smoldered and the land was scorched, but he found Clarence in the field, hoeing and planting.

"I heard the awful news," he called to Clarence, "and I came out to do a story on the tragedy of your farm closing." Clarence just kept on hoeing and planting. The reporter kept prodding, kept poking, trying to get a rise from this quietly determined man who seemed to be planting instead of packing his bags. So, finally, the reporter said in a haughty voice, "Well, Dr. Jordan, you got two of them Ph.D.s and you've put fourteen years into this farm, and there's nothing left of it at all. Just how successful do you think you've been?"

Clarence stopped hoeing, turned toward the reporter with his penetrating blue eyes, and said quietly but firmly, "About as successful as the cross. Sir, I don't think you understand us. **What we are about is not success but faithfulness.** We're staying. Good day." Beginning that day, Clarence and his companions rebuilt Koinonia and the farm is going strong today.” Tim Hansel, *Holy Sweat*, (Word Books Publisher, 1987,) pp. 188-189

## 6G. Trust in God

When contemplating the start of a thrift store ministry, it is important to consider the feasibility, location, personnel, etc., to a point; these things should not be the deciding factor. The deciding factor – the only thing that matters – is God's will for your church. When you move forward with the conviction you are walking in God's will, instead of your own idea of what looks like it could be a success, you are able to move forward with the assurance that God will supply what you need when you need it.

The importance of a conviction that you are walking in God's will, cannot be stressed enough. With this foundation you can place your complete trust in God's provision for all areas of the ministry, you can stand firm on His promises no matter what the circumstance look like around you. This conviction is a land mark that can be returned to for encouragement in the future.

With conviction from God of the direction He wants your church to take, you can move forward with the next steps. We cannot see what lies ahead, there is no way for us to make contingency plans for all future situations, we must move forward trusting in the promises of God knowing He will continue providing what He sees is best as we continue following His will.

**“Do not imagine that it will be possible for you to lay out plans for the future; let God be acknowledged as standing at the helm at all times and under every circumstance.** He will work by means that will be suitable, and will maintain, increase, and build up His own people.” Testimonies for the Church Volume Six, p. 396

**“God will have men who will venture anything and everything to save souls. Those who will not move until they can see every step of the way clearly before them will not be of advantage at this time to forward the truth of God.”** Welfare Ministry, p. 266

There will be many times when the future will appear unclear, this is the time to allow God to continue building His faith in us, to continue choosing to place our trust in Him.

We do not automatically have a full measure of faith, God grows His faith in us as we allow Him to guide us through the experiences of life, learning to trust that He has our best interest in mind. We learn that no matter what the circumstances look like around us God will provide exactly what He sees is best.

**“Now is the time to cultivate faith in God.”** Our High Calling, p. 357

**“Faith is trusting God--believing that He loves us and knows best what is for our good.”** Education, p. 253

As we grow in faith we learn that trusting in God to provide does not include us begging Him for what we need. God has made an everlasting covenant with His created beings, a covenant that He will provide all we need in every situation and circumstance we may find ourselves in.

“The salvation of the human race has ever been the object of the councils of heaven. **The covenant of mercy** was made before the foundation of the world. It has existed from all eternity, and is called the **everlasting covenant**. So surely as there never was a time when God was not, so surely **there never was a moment when it was not the delight of the eternal mind to manifest His grace to humanity.**” The Faith I Live By, p. 76

God's everlasting covenant is His guaranty that He will provide everything we will ever have need of. This guaranty is backed by the very throne of God.

“**The rainbow above the throne** is a token that God through Christ binds himself to save all who believe in him. **The covenant is as sure as the throne**, and his throne is established in righteousness. Then why are we so unbelieving, so distrustful? Why doubt so frequently, and trust God so fitfully? **Whenever we come to the throne of God to ask his mercy, we may look up, and behold the rainbow of promise**, and find in it assurance that our prayers shall be answered.” The Signs of the Times, October 10, 1892

When we yield our desires to God and stand on His promises, we are entering into God's everlasting covenant, His promise to us, backed by the very throne of God, that all of our needs are met.

God would have us make His promises an active part of our lives. They are not old and stale and applicable only in the past, they are as fresh as a budding blossom and apply to us this very day.

“**The promises of God are like precious flowers scattered through a garden.** The Lord would have us linger over them, looking closely into them, taking in their loveliness, and appreciating the favor that God has bestowed upon us by making such rich provisions for our needs.” In Heavenly Places, p. 125

When the hour is dark and we can see no way through, we are to stand on the promises of God.

“We are to send our petitions through the darkest clouds that Satan may cast over us, **and let our faith pierce to the throne of God encircled by the rainbow of promise...**” In Heavenly Places, p. 125

God is teaching us that His promises are sure, and when it seems there is a delay in His acting, we are to trust in His sovereignty and in the truth that He is working all things for our eternal benefit.

“...The answer may appear to be delayed, but it is not so. The petition is accepted, and **the answer given when it is essential for the best good of the petitioner** and when the fulfillment of the request will work most for our eternal interest.” In Heavenly Places, p. 125

When it appears God is not answering fast enough, “We are to come before the mercy seat with reverence, calling up to our mind the promises that God has given, contemplating the goodness of God, and offering up thankful praises for His unchangeable love. We are not to trust in our finite prayers, but in the word of our heavenly Father, in His assurance of His love for us.

Believing the promise of His unchanging love, we press our petitions to the throne of grace. **Our faith may be tested by delay...**” In Heavenly Places, p. 125

Even if it means we must endure unpleasant experiences, we are to place our trust in God.

“...if we are called to suffer for Christ's sake, **we shall be able to go to prison trusting in Him** as a little child trusts in its parents.” Review and Herald, May 3, 1892

### **Help the Way We Want It**

It is our human nature to claim God's promises to provide what we want or think we need in the way and time we think is best. God is in the process of teaching us to trust Him implicitly, to allow Him to provide for us in the way and time He sees is best.

“Many look upon the great work to be accomplished for God's people, and their prayers go up to Him for help in the great harvest. **But, if help does not come in just the manner they expect, they will not receive it**, but turn from it as the Jewish nation turned from Christ because disappointed in the manner of His appearing.” The Testimonies to the Church Volume 2, p. 142

We need to allow God to provide for us any way He chooses. I am sure you have heard the story – though theologically incorrect – of the man who prayed God would save him during a flood. The man heard that his neighborhood was flooding due to a heavy rain storm. He got down on his knees and prayed to God: “Dear God, save me from the coming flood!” The waters began to rise and a truck came by and the driver said, “Get in and I’ll drive you to higher ground.” The man said “no,” God would save him. The waters continued to rise. A woman in a boat rowed by. She called, “Jump into the boat and I will row you to safety.” The man said “no,” God would save him. The floodwaters continued to rise. The man was perched on the roof of his house. A helicopter flew by and let down a rope for the man to grab onto. “I will fly you to safety,” yelled the pilot. “No,” the man said, “I am waiting for God to save me.” Finally the man drowned. When he arrived in heaven, God asked, “What are you doing here?” The man said, “God why did you let me down? I had faith in you and you didn’t save me!” “I tried,” said God. “I sent you a truck, a boat and a helicopter!” Author Unknown

We would say the man was presumptuous in not accepting the help God sent. On the other hand was he not placing his complete trust in God by waiting? How do we place our complete faith in God and yet accept the help He offers even if it is not what we had in mind? How do we draw the line between faith and presumption?

“True faith is in no sense allied to presumption. **Only he who has true faith is secure against presumption**, for presumption is Satan's counterfeit of faith.” Gospel Workers, p. 260

What is true perfect faith?

“Perfect faith, **the surrender of self to God**, simple trust in His pledged word...” Gospel Workers, p. 260

True faith is our safeguard from presumption, we gain this true perfect faith by ‘the surrender of self to God.’ If I am wondering if I have true faith, I can to ask myself if I have surrendered to God, am I open for God to provide for me any way He sees best? With my surrender, my mind is open to allow God to bring my way of thinking in line with His, I am open for God to grow my faith and provide for me in His way and time.

An additional security from presumption, is learning to recognize the voice of our Shepherd. We should not wait for the ‘big’ decisions to begin trusting in God. We can learn to listen to His still small voice in the ‘small’ decisions of life. When we learn to recognize His voice in the day to day issues, we are preparing for that time when God asks us to do something that does not make sense on a human level. We are able to stand firm because we have learned to distinguish His voice from any other and we *know* it is the Holy Spirit speaking to us.

When we have learned to recognize our Masters voice, we will know when the Holy Spirit is directing us to take the offered help of a neighbor or wait for the helicopter. Our safety is learning now to trust our heavenly Father in all things, learning to recognize His voice.

### **Times of Darkness**

It is easy to say we have faith in God when things are going well, however, the test of our faith comes as we go through a trial, a period of darkness where we cannot see the outcome. At these times we have a choice, am I going to place my trust in God or am I going to take matters into my own hands?

“It is not a conclusive evidence that a man is a Christian because he manifests spiritual ecstasy under extraordinary circumstances. Holiness is not rapture: it is an entire surrender of the will to God; it is living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; it is doing the will of our heavenly Father; it **is trusting God in trial**, in darkness as well as in the light; it is **walking by faith and not by sight; it is relying on God with unquestioning confidence, and resting in His love.**” The Acts of the Apostles, p. 51

“To wait patiently, to trust when everything looks dark, is the lesson that the leaders in God's work need to learn. Heaven will not fail them in their day of adversity. **Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness, and relies wholly on God.**” Prophets and Kings, pp. 174, 175

The times of darkness are also the times God uses to build His faith in us.

“**When the Lord sees that we will trust Him implicitly, He will work in our behalf, and we shall see the salvation of God. The Lord proves us, He tests us to see if we will make Him our only trust. We need a much sharper, keener faith than we now have. We need to constantly cultivate an earnest, living, trusting faith,** and in cause and spiritual work keep our petitions constantly ascending, seeking the Lord for clear discernment. And sharp spiritual eyesight will be given every true seeker.... **The Lord wishes us to know Him by an experimental knowledge** as a kind, tender Father who has our interest and happiness in mind just as a loving earthly father cares for his children.” Manuscript Releases Volume Twenty-one, p. 368

Regardless of the circumstances, we are to place our trust in God. The story is told of the time Dr. A. C. Dixon, a well-known pastor in Boston, found his church needed \$5,000 to square accounts. He and his deacons prayed about it. One deacon arose and said, “Brethren, God has answered our prayers. He will send the money in next Sunday’s collection. That Sunday it rained all day and the congregation was small. A deacon suggested that they not take the collection. But the deacon who had believed for a good offering said, “I didn’t trust the weather; I trusted God!” They took the offering and it came to \$5,600!”<sup>1</sup>

God is teaching us that He is our source for all things. Selling merchandise is not our source to pay the bills, God has a thousand ways to provide for us. He uses the merchandise He provides to supply the needed funds, however, they are not our source; God is. As we allow God to make this truth real to us, we realize we do not have to become worried when the sales are down, we may need to look at our pricing or attitude of generosity, but when we have surrendered the way we think to Him anew, we can rest in the assurance that God is not dependent on sales to provide the funds needed to pay the bills.

“Our heavenly Father has **a thousand ways** to provide for us, of which we know nothing. **Those who accept the one principle** of making the service and honor of God supreme will find **perplexities vanish**, and a plain path before their feet.” *The Desire of Ages*, p. 330

Circumstances do not effect God, He is not bound by what we see around us. This truth is seen clearly in the encounter Jairus had with Jesus. When Jairus came to Jesus, he fell at His feet and pleaded for Him to come and heal his young daughter. Jesus began to make his way with the throng following, then messengers came and told Jairus not to bother Jesus, because his daughter had died.

We read in Mark 5:36 that “Jesus **ignored** their comments.” (NLT) The surrounding circumstances have no bearing on what Jesus is doing, or planning to do. Jesus does not say, ‘Well Jairus, I guess there is no reason to keep going to your house.’ Or, ‘Jairus, you should have come to me sooner.’ Instead, Jesus turns to Jairus and says, “**Don’t be afraid, just trust me.**” (NLT) Six simple words; yet these words carry the solution to all of life’s situations.

Our circumstances have no bearing on what God is able to do for and through us. He has one simple command, “Don’t be afraid, just trust me.” It does not come naturally to place our trust in God. However, as we yield our fears to God, He replaces them with His peace and the faith of Jesus. As we yield, God takes care of the circumstances in a way that will bring glory to heaven. As we grow in Christ, we more often trust God and not the ‘weather.’

**“If the work be of God, He Himself will provide  
the means for its accomplishment.”**

*The Desire of Ages*, p. 371

## Plans for the Future

Trusting in God does not mean we do not make plans for the future. We are accountable to God as His stewards, and should not waste things just because we know He will provide. We are to allow God to give us wisdom in planning for future needs, with the understanding that it is God who is providing for us now and it is God who will provide for us then.

“You have been in a business which would at times yield you large profits at once. After you have earned means, **you have not studied to economize** in reference to a time when means could not be earned so easily, but have expended much for imaginary wants. Had you and your wife understood it to be a duty that God enjoined upon you to deny your taste and your desires and make provision for the future instead of living merely for the present, you could now have had a competency and your family have had the comforts of life. You have a lesson to learn. . . . **It is to make a little go the longest way.**” The Adventist Home, p. 395

Some months have higher sales than others, stewardship is budgeting money received in the prosperous months to cover the lean months. Just because it is in the bank does not mean it has to be spent. Yes God will provide, however He also wants to teach us economy.

As we make plans for the future, they should be God directed plans. We should seek God's guidance, we should not make our own plans and then ask God to bless them. When we follow God's plans, they are already blessed.

“Gird up the loins of the mind that it shall work in the right direction, and after the order of well-formed plans; **then every step is one in advance, and no effort or time is lost in following vague ideas and random plans.** We must consider the aim and object of life, and ever keep worthy purposes in view.” Our High Calling, p. 112

“**So long as we surrender the will to God, and trust in His strength and wisdom, we shall be guided in safe paths,** to fulfill our appointed part in His great plan. But the one who depends upon his own wisdom and power is separating himself from God. Instead of working in unison with Christ, he is fulfilling the purpose of the enemy of God and man.” The Desire of Ages, p. 209

“So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans for Himself. **He accepted God's plans for Him,** and day by day the Father unfolded His plans. **So should we depend upon God,** that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will.” The Desire of Ages, p. 208

Max Lucado put it this way; “To know God’s will we must totally surrender to God’s will. Our tendency is to make God’s decision for him. Don’t go to God with options and expect him to choose one of your preferences. Go to him with empty hands – no hidden agendas, no crossed fingers, nothing behind your back. Go to him with a willingness to do whatever he says. If you surrender your will, then he will ‘equip you with everything good for doing his will.’”<sup>2</sup>

**“God doesn’t work for us; we work for God.”<sup>3</sup>**

Beth Moore

## Active Faith

Active faith is allowing God to make His will clear to us, and then moving forward taking God at His word, expecting and experiencing the fulfillment of His promises. This poem defines the difference between passive and active faith.

*Passive faith accepts the Word as true –  
But never moves.  
Active faith begins the work to do,  
And thereby proves.*

*Passive faith says, “I believe it! every word of God is true.  
Well I know He has not spoken what He cannot, will not, do.  
He has instructed me, ‘Go forward!’ but a closed-up way I see,  
When the waters are divided, soon in Canaan’s land I’ll be.  
Lo! I hear His voice commanding, ‘Rise and walk: take up your bed’;  
And, ‘Stretch to Me your withered hand!’ which for so long has been dead.  
When I am a little stronger, then, I know I’ll surely stand:  
When there comes a thrill of healing, I will use with ease my reclaimed hand.  
Yes, I know that ‘God is able’ and full willing all to do:  
I believe that every promise, sometime, will to me come true.”*

*Active faith says, “I believe it! and the promise now I take,  
Knowing well, as I receive it, God, each promise, real will make.  
So I step into the waters, finding there an open way;  
Onward press, the land possessing; nothing can my progress stay.  
Yes, I rise at His commanding, walking straight, and joyfully:  
This, my hand so sadly shriveled, as I reach, restored will be.  
What beyond His faithful promise, would I wish or do I need?  
Looking not for ‘signs or wonders,’ I’ll no contradiction heed.  
Well I know that ‘God is able,’ and full willing all to do:  
I believe that every promise, at this moment can come true.”*

*Passive faith but praises in the light,  
When sun does shine.  
Active faith will praise in darkest night –  
Which faith is thine?*

From Streams in the Desert by L.B. Cowman, February 22

This is the active faith God wants to grow in us, a faith that is obedient, a faith that moves forward with the conviction that God’s way is the best way, a faith that trusts in spite of the dark night. This active faith trusts God’s leading and His ability to *empower* us to do His will.

Active faith listens to the voice of our Shepherd.

“The Scriptures are to be received as God's word to us, not written merely, but spoken....So with all the promises of God's word. **In them He is speaking to us individually, speaking as directly as if we could listen to His voice.**” The Ministry of Healing, p. 122

## God Provides

We have seen God provide for us in many ways, from personnel, delivery vehicles, and merchandise, to space to unload a tractor trailer load of bottled orange juice. One experience that shows God has a thousand ways to provide, took place not long after we relocated the store and funds were tight as we were again building up clientele.

One day Ed brought a friend into the store to look at a cabinet. Ed had been in the store many times, and had donated some things to us in the past. Ed explained that he belonged to a gun club and his friend was the president. They were looking for a cabinet for their club. After negotiating a price on the cabinet, I asked Ed's friend if he would look at a small old hand gun we had, and see if it was worth anything.

The gun had been donated several years previous and I had not known what to do with it, so I kept it in a drawer and had just looked at it a couple of days before and thought ‘I need to do something with this gun.’ We went back to my office and Ed's friend looked at it, he showed me that the pin was stuck, the hammer bent, and it was rusted. After looking it over he said ‘I know you don't want to hear this, but, it is only worth a couple of dollars.’ Confirming my suspicion and wanting to be rid of the gun, I asked Ed if he had any interest in it. He hesitated and then said ‘well maybe.’ I said ‘good, it’s yours’ and gave him the gun as a gift.

One afternoon a couple of months later, Ed came up to the counter where I was filling out a sold tag and asked if he could talk with me. He followed me over to the furniture area where I attached the sold tag and began, ‘Do you remember the gun you gave me?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Well I oiled it, and straitened out the hammer, but I couldn't get the pin unstuck. I decided that it didn't fit in with my collection so I decided to list it on e-bay. I told myself that I was going to give you whatever it sold for.’ He then showed me the printout from e-bay where it had sold for \$92. We chatted about how we thought it was basically worthless, however, how it brought \$92 from a gentleman in New York. Ed then said ‘you must have a need.’ I looked at him questioningly and said, ‘well our truck broke down today and we had to have it towed.’ I thanked him again as he proceeded to shop.

A few minutes later Pete our mechanic stopped by to tell us what was wrong with our truck and what parts he needed to purchase. He asked if he could get some money for the parts. I asked him how much he needed. He began calculating and finally said ‘I need \$92.’ I asked ‘did you say \$92?’ ‘The reason I'm asking is that I have \$92 in my pocket.’ I then told Pete the story of the gun.

As Ed was leaving, I said ‘now *I* need to talk with *you*.’ I told him the story of the mechanic and how he needed \$92 for parts. Ed just looked at me and shook his head as if to reiterate, I knew you had a need. I said ‘thank you, God is good.’

## Conclusion

How do we practice faith and trust in God? By our surrender to His will.

“How to exercise faith should be made very plain. To every promise of God there are conditions. **If we are willing to do His will, all His strength is ours.**” Education, p. 126

As we experience the power of God at work in our lives renewing our minds, imparting to us the nature of Christ and His peace, our faith grows. If the Creator of the universe is able to change my wicked heart, He certainly can provide for my daily needs. As I continue to yield what I am to my Saviour, I can rest with the assurance that He is working out the path of my life to lead me into heaven. For eternity I will worship Him face to face and thank Him for His care and provision throughout my life.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/from-faith-to-faith-bruce-howell-sermon-on-faith-general-32871.asp?Page=3>

<sup>2</sup> Max Lucado, *Traveling Light*, Word Publishing, 2001

<sup>3</sup> Beth Moore, *Believing God*, Broadman & Holman Publishers 2004, P. 53

## Further Study

“...it is impossible to please God without faith....” Hebrews 11:6 (NLT)

“...we live by believing and not by seeing.” 2 Corinthians 5:7 (NLT)

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Have we not proved this in the past as we have moved out in faith to produce the things now seen? . . . **Faith is not only to look forward to things unseen; it is to be confirmed by looking at past experience, at tangible results, the verification of God's Word.** . . . Pray, "Lord, increase my faith." Faith quickens the senses to work diligently to produce results. Faith elevates and ennobles the powers of the soul, enabling it to lay hold upon the unseen. . . ." The Upward Look, p. 72

**“Faith is trusting God--believing that He loves us and knows best what is for our good.** Thus, instead of our own, it leads us to choose His way. In place of our ignorance, it accepts His wisdom; in place of our weakness, His strength; in place of our sinfulness, His righteousness. Our lives, ourselves, are already His; **faith acknowledges His ownership and accepts its blessing.** Truth, uprightness, purity, have been pointed out as secrets of life's success. It is faith that puts us in possession of these principles.” Education, p. 253

“Nothing can do us real good without the blessing of God. **What God blesses is blessed.** Therefore "a little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked." Ps. 37:16. The little with the blessing of God is more efficient, and it will extend farther. The grace of God will make a little go a great ways. **When we devote ourselves to the affairs of the kingdom of God, He will mind our affairs.**” Our High Calling, p. 196

**“Only by a constant exercise of intelligent faith, a faith that grows continually, can we properly develop in Christian experience.** If we will encourage that faith that grasps the promises of God, these promises will be fulfilled in our behalf.” Review and Herald, December 16, 1909

**“The reason why God's people are not more spiritually minded, and have not more faith, I have been shown, is because they are narrowed up with selfishness.”** Testimonies, vol. 2, p. 35

“In every command and **in every promise of the word of God** is the power, **the very life of God**, by which the command may be fulfilled and the promise realized. He who by faith receives the word is receiving the very life and character of God.” Christ's Object Lessons, p. 38

### *God is Our Source*

“God desires that His workers in every line shall **look to Him as the Giver of all they possess.**” Christ's Object Lessons, p. 349

“The idea that prayer is not essential is one of Satan's most successful devices to ruin souls. Prayer is communion with God, the **Fountain of wisdom, the Source of strength, and peace, and happiness.**” Child Guidance, p. 518

### ***Apparent Delay***

“The Saviour longs to give us a greater blessing than we ask; **and He delays the answer to our request that He may show us the evil of our own hearts, and our deep need of His grace.**”

The Desire of Ages, p. 200

### ***Plans for the Future***

“The **wise look ahead** to see what is coming, but fools deceive themselves.” Proverbs 14:8 (NLT)

“A prudent person foresees the danger ahead and takes precautions; the simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences.” Proverbs 22:3 (NLT)

“Be thou **diligent to know** the state of thy flocks, *and* look well to thy herds.” Proverbs 27:23 (KJV)

*It is wise to look at the balance sheet to see where things stand financially. However, we keep in mind that God is our provider, not the balance sheet.*

### ***Active Faith***

“We are to trust in His promises. When we come to Him in faith, every petition enters the heart of God. **When we have asked for His blessing**, we should believe that we receive it, and thank Him that we have received it. **Then we are to go about our duties, assured that the blessing will be realized when we need it most.** When we have learned to do this, we shall know that our prayers are answered. God will do for us "exceeding abundantly," "according to the riches of His glory," and "the working of His mighty power." Eph. 3:20, 16; 1:19.” The Desire of Ages, p. 200

### ***Promises of God's Provision***

“The means in our possession may not seem to be sufficient for the work; but if we will move forward in faith, believing in the all-sufficient power of God, abundant resources will open before us. **If the work be of God, He Himself will provide the means for its accomplishment.**” The Desire of Ages, p. 371

“**The Lord does not have to depend upon our means.** He will not be restricted by the human agent. His way is always the best way, and any help that may come to advance His cause and work in any of our institutions is to be used as coming from Him....It is now that faith must be exercised. Our sufficiency is in God.--Manuscript 47, 1899” Welfare Ministry, p. 279

“God will have men who will venture anything and everything to save souls. **Those who will not move until they can see every step of the way clearly before them will not be of advantage at this time to forward the truth of God.** There must be workers now who will push ahead in the dark as well as in the light, and who will hold up bravely under discouragements and disappointed hopes, and yet work on with faith, with tears and patient hope, sowing beside all waters, **trusting the Lord to bring the increase.** God calls for men of nerve, of hope, faith, and endurance, to work to the point.--The True Missionary, January, 1874.” Welfare Ministry, p. 266

***Recommended Reading***

Beth Moore's book "Believing God" will take you through a journey of learning what it means to have an active faith in God. I recommend it highly.

Beth Moore, *Believing God*, Broadman & Holman Publishers 2004

**“God can do what He says He can do  
precisely because He is who He says He is.”**

Beth Moore, *Believing God*, Broadman & Holman Publishers 2004, P. 58