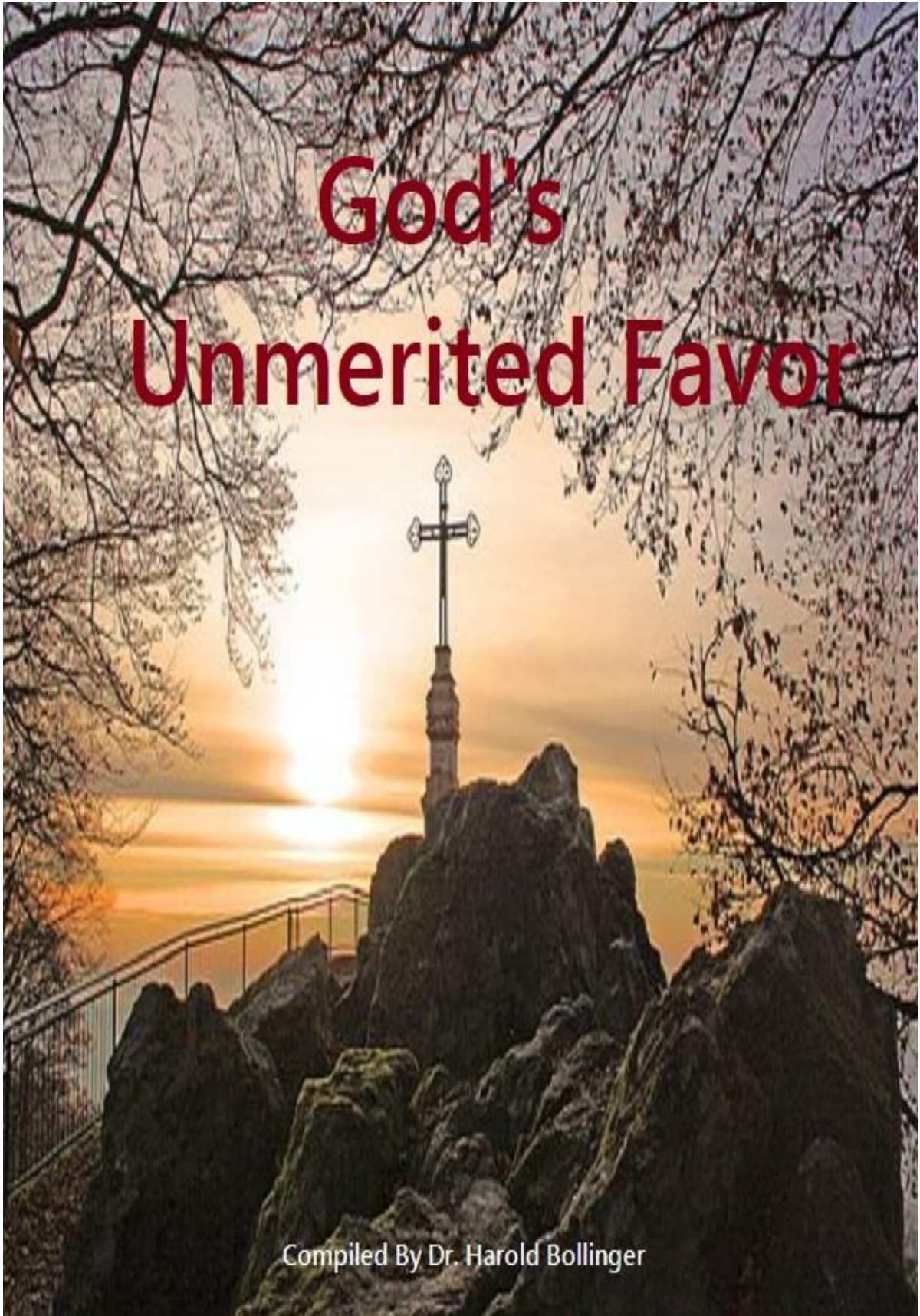


God's Unmerited Favor



Compiled By Dr. Harold Bollinger

God made all he did to prosper

And his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight, Genesis 39:3–4

The date of Joseph's arrival in Egypt is debatable. Many believe he arrived during the period of the Hyksos rulers, foreigners who came from the region of Canaan. They invaded Egypt and controlled the land for almost 150 years. If Joseph arrived during their rule, it is easy to see why he was rapidly promoted up the royal ladder. Because the Hyksos were foreigners themselves, they would not hold this brilliant young foreigner's ancestry against him.

Pharaoh was the general name for all the kings of Egypt. It was a title like "king" or "president" used to address the country's leader. The pharaoh who placed Joseph in charge of Egypt was a different person from the pharaoh who turned against the Hebrews in the book of Exodus.

Ancient Egypt was a land of great contrasts. People were either rich beyond measure or poverty stricken. There wasn't much middle ground. Joseph found himself serving Potiphar, an extremely rich officer in Pharaoh's service.

Rich families like Potiphar's had elaborate homes two or three stories tall with beautiful gardens and balconies. They enjoyed live entertainment at home as they chose delicious fruit from expensive bowls.

They surrounded themselves with alabaster vases, paintings, beautiful rugs, and hand-carved chairs. Dinner was served on golden table-ware, and the rooms were lighted with gold lampstands.

Servants, like Joseph, worked on the first floor, while the family occupied the upper stories.

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The Lord will bless the righteous with favor.

For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous; with favor you will surround him as with a shield. Psalm 5:12

All believers should strive to be more tolerant of people but less tolerant of the sin in themselves and others.

The Lord is my shepherd.



The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Ps. 23:1

In describing the Lord as a shepherd, David wrote out of his own experience because he had spent his early years caring for sheep (1 Samuel 16:10, 11). Sheep are completely dependent on the shepherd for provision, guidance, and protection. The New Testament calls Jesus the good shepherd (John 10:11),

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Psalm 23:5–6

In ancient Near Eastern culture, at a feast it was customary to anoint a person with fragrant oil. Hosts were also expected to protect their guests at all costs. God offers the protection of a host even when enemies surround us. In the final scene of this psalm, we see that believers will dwell with the Lord. God, the perfect shepherd and host, promises to guide and protect us throughout our life and to bring us into his house forever.

Joy comes in the morning.

For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Psalm 30:5

Like a shot given by a doctor, the discomfort of God's anger lasts only a moment, but the good effects go on for a long time. Let God's anger be a sharp pain that warns you to turn from sin.

The Lord will give you peace.

The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-25

A blessing was one way of asking for God's divine favor to rest upon others. The ancient blessing in these verses helps us understand what a blessing was supposed to do.

Its five parts conveyed hope that God would bless believers in these ways

- (1) Bless and protect them;
- (2) Smile on them (be pleased);
- (3) Be gracious (merciful and compassionate);
- (4) Show his favor toward them (give his approval);
- (5) Give peace.

When you ask God to bless others or yourself, you are asking him to do these five things. The blessing you offer will not only help the one receiving it, it will also demonstrate love, encourage others, and provide a model of caring for others.

The Lord has dominion over the works of our hands.

What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you visit him? For you have made him a little lower than the angels, and you have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet. Psalm 8:4–6

God gave human beings tremendous authority—to be in charge of the whole earth. But with great authority comes great responsibility. If we own a pet, we have the legal authority to do with it as we wish, but we also have the responsibility to feed and care for it.

The Lord gives believers all good things.

Who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. Psalm 103:4–5

David's praise focused on the good things God was doing for him. It is easy to complain about life, but David's list gives us plenty for which to praise God: He forgives our sins, heals our diseases, redeems us from death, crowns us with love and compassion, satisfies our desires, and gives righteousness and justice.

We receive all of these without deserving any of them. No matter how difficult your life's journey, you can always count your blessings—past, present, and future.

The Lord gives you a future and a hope.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11

We're all encouraged by a leader who stirs us to move ahead, someone who believes we can do the task he has given and who will be with us all the way. God is that kind of leader. He knows the future, and his plans for us are good and full of hope.

As long as God, who knows the future, provides our agenda and goes with us as we fulfill his mission, we can have boundless hope. This does not mean that we will be spared pain, suffering, or hardship, but that God will see us through to a glorious conclusion.

The Lord will show you great unknown things.

Call to me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know. Jeremiah 33:3

God is ready to answer our prayers, but we must ask for his assistance. Surely God could take care of our needs without our asking. But when we ask, we are acknowledging that he alone is God and that we cannot accomplish in our own strength all that is his domain to do. When we ask, we must humble ourselves, lay aside our willfulness and worry, and determine to obey him.

The glory God gave to Jesus, he has given unto believers.

And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. John 17:22–23

The Lord gave the disciples favor with the people.

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:46–47

A healthy Christian community attracts people to Christ. The Jerusalem church's zeal for worship and brotherly love was contagious. A healthy, loving church will grow in numbers.

The grace of God abounds to many.

... For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. Romans 5:15

Because of Jesus, however, we can trade judgment for forgiveness. Christ offers us the opportunity to be born into his spiritual family—the family line that begins with forgiveness and leads to eternal life. If we do nothing, we receive death through Adam; but if we come to God by faith, we receive life through Christ.

Believers are not under the law, but under grace.

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. Romans 6:14

When we were under the law, sin was our master—the law does not justify us or help us overcome sin. But now that we are bound to Christ, he is our Master, and he gives us power to do good rather than evil.

Jesus became poor that believers may become rich.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9

Jesus became poor by giving up his rights as God and becoming human. In his incarnation, God voluntarily became man—the person Jesus of Nazareth. As a man, Jesus was subject to place, time, and other human limitations.

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He did not give up his eternal power when he became human, but he did set aside his glory and his rights

God's grace will abound toward you.

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8

God gives us resources to use and invest for him. Paul uses the illustration of seed to explain that the resources God gives us are not to be hidden, foolishly devoured, or thrown away.

God has blessed us with all spiritual blessing.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, Ephesians 1:3

Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms" means that in Christ we have all the benefits of knowing God—being chosen for salvation, being adopted as his children, forgiveness, insight, the gifts of the Spirit, power to do God's will, the hope of living forever with Christ.

Because we have an intimate relationship with Christ, we can enjoy these blessings now.

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God's wisdom abounds toward us in all wisdom and prudence.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, Ephesians 1:7–8

God showered his kindness on us—this is also called God's "grace." This is his voluntary and loving favor given to those he saves.

By grace, we become heirs of eternal life.

But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:4–7

Paul summarizes what Christ does for us when he saves us. We move from a life full of sin to one where we are led by God's Holy Spirit. *All* our sins, not merely some, are washed away.

We gain eternal life with all its treasures. We have a new life through the Holy Spirit, and he continually renews our hearts. None of this occurs because we earned or deserved it; it is all God's gift.

Illustration:

During the building of the Golden Gate Bridge over San Francisco Bay, construction fell badly behind schedule because several workers had accidentally fallen from the scaffolding to their deaths. Engineers and administrators could find no solution to the costly delays.

Finally, someone suggested a gigantic net be hung under the bridge to catch any who fell. Finally in spite of the enormous cost, the engineers opted for the net. After it was installed, progress was hardly interrupted. A worker or two fell into the net but were saved. Ultimately, all the time lost to fear was regained by replacing fear with faith in the net.

Illustration

You're worried about permissiveness--about the way the preaching of grace seems to say it's okay to do all kinds of terrible things as long as you just walk in afterward and take the free gift of God's forgiveness. . .While you and I may be worried about seeming to give permission, Jesus apparently wasn't. He wasn't afraid of giving the prodigal son a kiss instead of a lecture, a party instead of probation; and he proved that by bringing in the elder brother at the end of the story and having him raise pretty much the same objections we do.

He's angry about the party. He complains that his father is lowering standards and ignoring virtue--that music, dancing, and a fatted calf are, in effect, just so many permissions to break the law. And to that, Jesus has the father say only one thing:

"Cut that out! We're not playing good boys and bad boys any more. Your brother was dead and he's alive again. The name of the game from now on is resurrection, not bookkeeping.

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Illustration

When a person works an eight-hour day and receives a fair day's pay for his time that is a wage.

When a person competes with an opponent and receives a trophy for his performance that is a prize.

When a person receives appropriate recognition for his long service or high achievements that is an award.

But when a person is not capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award--yet receives such a gift anyway--that is a good picture of God's unmerited favor. This is what we mean when we talk about the grace of God.

G.W. Knight, Clip-Art Features for Church Newsletters, p. 53.

An invitation is given to open your heart's door to Jesus

Rev. 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart, please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

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References:

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Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print