

Are You Missing Out On Blessings?

Recognizing and Appreciating Blessings

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We live in a nation of people who are brought up and continually brainwashed to think that material prosperity is the gauge of success and is the ultimate goal in the pursuit of happiness. Americans spend most of their time pursuing the American dream—the hope and desire for financial gain. No matter how much we have, we always want more. We say we don't want a lot of money—just a little more than we can spend. But, not only do we want to make a living, we want to succeed magnificently.

Solomon put such pursuit of wealth in proper perspective in Ecclesiastes 5:9-13. From his experience he learned that people who love silver are not satisfied with silver, and those who love abundance are not satisfied with abundance. He learned that the abundance of the rich keeps them from restful sleep. That is, from having peace in their lives. Is it really worth it to have material blessings?

It is often the things that we take for granted—our personal relationship with God, family, friends, our health, and serving others—that produce the most joy in our lives. Ashamedly, in the relentless pursuit of material things, we often neglect to take care of the people and those spiritual things that should have the highest priority in our lives.

It is no wonder then that people in the world are rarely satisfied with what they have. And, sometimes we in God's church wonder why we aren't being blessed, or aren't blessed more. After all, are we not dedicated and obedient to God?

God has promised to abundantly bless those who submit their lives to Him in obedience to His precepts and laws. The Bible is filled with these promises.

In Malachi 3, regarding tithing, God says those who submit to Him the part of their income He claims as His own won't be able to store all the blessings that He has to offer when we obey Him in that way. Tithing is so important in our character growth and our obedience to God that someone who isn't tithing is just knocking the nails into the coffin of their spiritual salvation.

Malachi 3:10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.

How do we reconcile the promise that "the blessings from tithing are more than can be stored," with the fact that most Christians can barely make ends meet?

Job 36:11 tells us that if any obey and serve God, "... they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures." Psalm 1:3 says of the righteous, "whatever he does shall prosper."

Sometimes we look at similar promises in God's Word and then look at our own lives and become discouraged. At one time or another we have wondered why God isn't blessing us.

Many of us have looked around and seen what the Bible calls the "prosperity of the wicked." Like Asaph wrote in Psalm 73, we know God promises to bless the righteous. But then when we observe how some of the wicked prosper, occasionally we become puzzled, almost spiritually stumbling. It affects our attitudes in a derogatory way.

Psalm 73:1-3 Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

And maybe what is even harder to endure, we may look at other Christians—maybe Christians who haven't been converted anywhere near as long as we have—and we see how some of them have prospered in a very visible way.

We are well aware we shouldn't make such comparisons. But, we may have a hard time overcoming such thoughts. These thoughts are especially hard to deal with when we are faced with a pile of unpaid bills, unexpected car or home repairs, or sickness.

By what standard are we measuring blessings?

Let's consider the possibility we are not being blessed as we could be. If that's the case, there's a reason. Since there is a cause, some thoughtful self-examination is needed. It could be that we are disobeying God in some way. We know that disregarding one point in God's laws is, in God's eyes, the same as disregarding them all.

James 2:10-12 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also

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said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.

Other questions to ask: Are we faithful in following the financial laws found in the Bible? Are we aware of the needs of others—especially the poor?

Proverbs 28:27 "He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses."

Sometimes we overlook the obvious, "Have we asked God to bless us?" And, even more important: Do we give at least equal time to praying for God's blessing on others?

God doesn't expect us to be perfect before He will bless us materially. But He does want us to be sincerely trying to put into practice the truth we know. He wants us to be working toward perfection.

But let's say we are fulfilling all these considerations—that we are growing spiritually, but we still sometimes feel we're not being blessed as we think we should be. In that case we have to ask by what standard we are measuring blessings.

What measurement are we using? Is the quantity of material goods a person possesses the Christian standard? Are physical objects the primary measure of how much a Christian is blessed?

These seem to be the criteria used by many in the Church in past years. Although in looking at the promises of the Old Covenant, it may appear to emphasize physical material blessings. But, that is not its intent, nor is it the emphasis of the New Covenant.

James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

We see there that there definitely are poor people in God's church, people who are called in that state. People who are poor as far as the world is concerned, or those who aren't wealthy should not be treated with neglect. In a general sense, God has had special reverence to the poor in choosing those who will be among the first fruits of His

Kingdom.

Verse 5 doesn't mean He's not as willing to save the rich as the poor, because we know He has no partiality; but that there are circumstances in the condition of the poor that make it more likely that they will react to God's calling than the rich.

It has been a fact that God has called the saints from those who are in comparatively humble, or you might say poor, life. One might think that once called the spiritual growth of the poor would produce material blessings. But this is not necessarily the case in every person's life. There are endless reasons why a poor person may remain poor after being called—for example, situations resulting from widowhood or persecution.

In the 1st century, the members of God's church in Judea were having such hard times they had been reduced to poverty. The apostle called for others in the church to send relief.

Romans 15:26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.

The Christians who were in Judea were exposed to special trials. They were condemned by the Sanhedrin, opposed by the rulers, and persecuted by the people. Paul's goal was not only to relieve the Christians in Judea by this contribution from the Gentile Christians, but also to promote true friendship between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. It may be that one of the reasons God caused this situation to happen was to wear off prejudice between the Jewish and Gentile members of God's church at that time.

The principle here is that we have to measure blessings by God's standards, not by our own standards, which sometimes are standards we brought with us from the world. And, even when we try to use God's standards, we still don't have the full ability to judge what we can't see—that is, the heart.

To get the right perspective on blessings let's flash back to the beginning of our lives. Let me state the obvious: We were all conceived and then born at some point in time. We didn't do anything to deserve conception and birth. We didn't do anything to earn the right to be a child or teenager, although many in the world today think they deserve everything they want now without having to work for it. In fact, many adults feel that way. Just look at the millions in our welfare system, who are fully capable of working but won't.

In reality, we don't deserve adulthood, it's given to us to use as a gift. Our bodies are on loan from God. But not in the way Rush Limbaugh means it. This is a totally different application.

However long any of us has lived to this moment, we have outlived countless other people whose lives were cut short before they reached our age. The gift of life is a wonderful undeserved blessing. Anything worthwhile we have in addition to being alive is a bonus. It's more than we deserve. Sometimes we will hear that when a person reaches 70 that they are living on borrowed time or that they have received bonus time. But we all receive bonus time each day that we live.

Humanly, we may reason that we have worked for various material possessions. But we could not have done so without the gift of being able to work. All good things that are part of our lives are unmerited gifts—blessings.

We don't deserve more. If God gives us more, that's great. But if He doesn't, we have to be careful that we don't lose the blessings we have, because if we are so blind to our blessings that we don't know we have them—that we aren't deeply thankful for them—God may have to take them from us in order to make us realize and appreciate, maybe too late, what they were.

Another reason we sometimes don't feel blessed is that quite often we make the mistake of comparing ourselves with other human beings. Paul mentions this mistake in II Corinthians 10.

II Corinthians 10:12 For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

We see a lot of self-centeredness in this comparison. They make themselves the standard, and they judge everything by it, not by God's standard. Their judgement is skewed.

Most people in the world are very jealous of other human beings. Human nature tends to lust and covet what it doesn't have. Other people always seem to have what we do not have.

James 4:1-3 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and

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do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Lust and coveting are major things that come into play when we compare ourselves with others. The human mind reasons, "Others are more blessed than me." This begins a fast-paced thought process that sees casual observation turn into envy, covetousness and dissatisfaction.

The person feels not "blessed" in comparison with how much someone else is blessed. These comparisons are wrong.

In the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus illustrated this human weakness in a parable about some employees who should have been happy with the amount they were paid for their work. They would have been happy except for one thing: They saw some fellow workers receiving a higher hourly wage than they received. Their gratitude vanished—dissatisfaction, self-pity and pouting set in.

The employer, representing God in the parable, firmly corrected them for their wrong attitudes. Jesus asked them, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?" He spoke as an employer in this parable.

Matthew 20:1-16 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.' So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.' And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us

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who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.' But he answered one of them and said, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?' So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen."

In the parable, God is asking his workers, "Are you envious because I am generous?" Envy develops from comparing ourselves with others. It's a comparison that is impossible to make accurately because God works with each person in precisely the way that will develop that person for the responsibility He has in mind for that person in His Kingdom. So not one human being can judge God's decisions in these matters.

This parable teaches that service for Christ will be faithfully rewarded, and that equal faithfulness to our opportunity will be equally rewarded. However, only God can adequately assess faithfulness and opportunities, therefore, human judgments are inadequately assessed. The result is that human comparisons with others clouds the mind to realizing true blessings that are involved.

All blessings, all good gifts, belong to God and come from Him.

James 1:16-17 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

The gifts of God are fair in the blessings that He gives. Who are we to ever question how God chooses to distribute blessings? It must really displease God to see a person pouting for lack of a better TV set or car or house or higher standard of living. If that person's mind is so set on physical things that he carries on like a spoiled child for not having more, one of the most harmful things that could happen to that person would be to be blessed with still more material possessions.

An increase such as this could become a trap, possibly causing that person to lose out on salvation. We know that it can be harder for a rich person to stay close to God than for a person who has little in the way of this world's goods.

To have the right perspective on blessings requires a total reversal of human reasoning. Living by the principle that happiness is not getting what you want, but wanting what you

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have. This is a major step to contentment and having peace of mind.

Remember the disastrous effect wealth had on King Solomon. He had abundant wealth, but it helped to ruin him spiritually because he didn't use it properly and he didn't have the right priorities.

In The Parable of the Rich Fool, in Luke 12, Jesus expressed the principle that one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he owns.

Luke 12:13-15 Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

Jesus saw there that there was an attitude of covetousness. One brother wanted maybe more than he deserved than the other brother.

Covetousness is an unlawful desire of the property of another; also a desire of gain or riches beyond what is necessary for our needs. It is a violation of the tenth commandment and is specifically called idolatry in Colossians 3:5.

Luke 12:16-21 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

There are at least 7 principles we can extract from this parable:

1. That wicked people often prosper and their land often produces abundantly. God allows them their desire, but sends spiritual leanness into their lives.

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2. Riches always bring with them an increasing load of cares and anxieties.
3. Material possessions shift the affection God deserves to material things. They are sly, insinuating, and dangerous to the human mind.
4. The anxiety of a covetous man is not what good he can do with his wealth, but where he can hoard it, and keep it secure from doing any good.
5. Riches cannot save their proud owners from the grave. Death will come upon them suddenly and unexpectedly. In the very midst of their brightest anticipations—in a moment—in the twinkling of an eye it may come, and all the wealth that has been accumulated cannot prolong life for one moment.
6. The man who is trusting in his riches in this way is a fool in the sight of God. And, he will eventually be a fool in his own sight.
7. The path of true wisdom and blessings is to seek first the kingdom of God, and to be ready to die. Then it does matter how many physical possessions we had here or how suddenly or soon we die waiting to meet our Judge.

Jesus said not to set our minds on visible, physical blessings. Instead, seek to be "rich toward God."

It takes effort and work to recognize existing blessings and to receive more. It's true in both a physical and spiritual way that blessings come from and are recognized by doing. For true Christians the proof of blessings is in the doing of what God asks and requires.

Let's look at a physical illustration first.

A manufacturer proves his product by trying it out. The most reliable products have been tested and checked over and over again. When a customer buys something and uses it he knows whether that product is dependable, accurate and true to his claims. Any quality manufacturer who cares about the integrity of his product will put the product through a meticulous testing to prove its worthiness to carry the name of the manufacturer.

When I worked for the makers of Noxzema and Cover Girl products as the Design Coordinator, I spent many hours in the manufacturing plants and the research and development laboratories designing and managing new construction and remodeling

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projects. I spent a lot of time around those who are responsible for the quality of the product.

I observed the efforts of the quality control technicians. It always struck me with a certain amount of respect for the diligence at which the company tested its product. For months and years, the company tested it to make sure the product was of the highest quality and would stand up to use and abuse by the consumer—because the consumer is the ultimate evaluator and judge in the manufacturing world. Not only did the product and the packaging have to stand up to short-term use, but also the test of time.

Even after extensive laboratory testing, quality control didn't stop there. It was common to see large boxes next to the production lines containing discarded product. These rejections failed to meet the stringent standards set by the corporation. The product that made it to the consumer through packaging, shipping and sales was not truly proven until the customer used it.

So it is with proving God's way of life and recognizing blessings. God's way of life, explained in His written Word, must be put to the test and tried—made to work time and time again until there is no doubt it will always work and that blessings always come from applying its truths in our lives.

When God commands us in I Thessalonians 5:21, to 'Test all things' (NKJV), or 'prove all things' (KJV), He's not talking about intellectual proof only. Intellectual proof is good and necessary, but the Greek word translated test or prove has a broader meaning.

We are to subject everything presented to us as truth to the proper test. The Greek word translated "test" or "prove" in I Thessalonians 5:21 usually applies to metals, referring to the art of the assayer, by which the true nature and value of the metal is tested. This trial was usually made by fire.

They were to carefully examine every thing presented to them as truth, especially religious doctrine. They were not to receive it on trust nor take it on assertion. Any time various opinions and different doctrines were presented to them for acceptance, they were to apply the appropriate tests of reason and the word of God. Whatever was true should be accepted and whatever was false must be rejected.

I Corinthians 3:9-13 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation

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can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

If we apply fire to gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or straw, many of those things will be burned up or consumed. The precious stones may be melted or they may just be tarnished.

Christianity does not require people to disregard their reason or to be gullible. It doesn't expect us to believe anything because others say it's true. We are not expected to blindly swallow whatever we are told without testing it. True Christianity, more than any other religion, encourages free and honest examination. It leads people to understand the reason behind the doctrines of Jesus Christ.

As Paul says here in verse 13, "the fire will test each one's work." Many times in our lives *that* fire is the testing of trials. Sometimes it comes in the form of persecution. Other times it comes in the form of affliction.

This is how we can prove the Scriptures and the blessings that result—by living God's way of life and not only noticing the physical blessings that result, but the spiritual blessings as well.

As an example, look at the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a wonderful blessing made for us. But it especially goes against the grain of human nature. A person who doesn't want to keep it can think of endless reasons why he wouldn't want to keep it. He thinks it interferes with his job. It would make him look strange to others. It would "ruin" his weekend. It would get in the way of all the yard work, washing the car, or "resting" at the beach.

The same holds true for the Holy Days and all of God's laws, statutes, precepts and instructions.

A person who doesn't keep them is like the one who strolls by an overstocked buffet table without trying any of the food. He doesn't know—he can't know—how good it is, nor the true blessing it holds. We have to try God's way of life in order to see the blessings that come from it. The rest of this world does not think of their lives or material possessions that they have with their families as being blessings from God. They just think they have earned it and deserve it.

Psalm 34 is a Psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed. Here, David expresses the blessings and happiness that result from trusting God and doing what he says. The issue here is "the fear of the Lord."

Psalm 34:8-14 Oh, taste and see that the LOORD is good [We see here that there is work involved. "Taste and see" involves effort.]; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! Oh, fear the LOORD, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the LOORD shall not lack any good thing. Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LOORD. Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

There, again, we see that there is work involved.

In verse 8, the phrase "Oh, taste and see" is an address to others, based on David's experience. He found protection from God. He had evidence of His goodness, and he now asks others to make the same trial he had made. The tone here is one of devotion resulting from personal experience. It's the excited, appreciative tone of a person that is young in the faith. It's a person who is filled with joy as hope first dawns on his mind. It's the attitude of a repentant person with his "first love."

A person with their first love for God's truth wants to tell his friends and family about the hope that is in him. The tone of this psalm contains the expression of one who is especially comforted, or who has experienced special deliverance from temptation or from trouble. Here we see David being very thankful for the blessings he has received.

We may relate lessons we have learned from our own experiences, we may recommend to others; the evidence that has been furnished us that God is good, we may employ in persuading others to come and taste his love. The word "taste" in verse 8 is from the Hebrew word *ta'am*. It means to try the flavor of anything.

The beasts and the birds and the fish of the earth benefit from God's blessings because they experience them.

Job 12:7-11 "But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you;

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and the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this, in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind? Does not the ear test words and the mouth taste its food?

The Hebrew word translated taste also means to eat a little so as to discover or determine what a thing is. It carries the extended meaning to perceive by the mind. We are told here to perceive in our mind, to try, to experience what God has done. The same Hebrew word translated taste in Psalm 34:8 is translated perceive in Proverbs 31:18.

Proverbs 31:18 She perceives that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out by night.

We read, in Psalm 34:8 "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" The phrase "taste and see" is used in the sense of making a trial of, or testing by experience. The idea is that by putting trust in God—by testing God's way of life as described in God's written Word—one would so thoroughly see or perceive the blessings and happiness of it that he would be led to seek his happiness there altogether.

In other words, if people would put God's way of life on trial to prove it, so as to really understand and experience it, they would appreciate it for its blessings. But the carnal mind is enmity toward God and cannot see those blessings because of the blindness. So without God's Holy Spirit, people are limited to primarily the physical blessings they receive from God in the natural course of life.

If those who are having problems would taste of God's way of life; if the afflicted would count their blessings; if those who sought in vain for happiness in the world would seek for happiness obeying and trusting God—they would all find the blessings they need right there in front of them. Of this David was certain, as he expressed in Psalm 34.

To trust in God we also have to trust in His written Word. To test His Word and His blessings we have to do them. There is no getting around that. You cannot sit at home and read God's written word and not act upon it.

In Psalm 19, David praised God's laws, testimonies, statutes, commandments and judgments. It was praise based on experience. David knew what he was talking about.

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He had tested for himself that when he obeyed God's instructions he received great benefits. We see many Psalms that express this.

Psalms 19:7-10 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes [enlightening us to see our blessings]; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

We notice very often in Scripture that blessings and prosperity are compared to gold in contrast—showing how gold is perishable where God's blessings are eternal.

Psalms 19:11 Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward.

God's ways work and they produce blessings. The laws revealed in the Scriptures are living laws. We break them and they break us, as Romans 6:23 tells us. We keep them and they keep us as Proverbs 6:21-23 explains.

How can we talk about blessings without going to the Blessings and Curses Chapter?

Deuteronomy 28:1-2 "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God:"

In verse 1, the Israelites are told they will have to work hard to obey His voice. That is what "diligently" means—to work hard. "Obeying the word of God" can be stated simply as "living God's way of life." Mainstream Christianity often limits that word "obey" to merely keeping the Ten Commandments, but it is a way of life.

The six repetitions of the word "blessed" in verses 3-6 introduce the specific forms that the blessing would take in the various relations of life.

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Deuteronomy 28:15 "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

There again we see diligence, or being careful, mentioned in regard to keeping God's commandments and statutes, by living His way of life. And if we don't *carefully*—we may just lackadaisically—keep them, then curses will come upon us.

The curses in verses 15-19 correspond in form and number to the blessings in verse 3-6, and the special modes in which these threats should be executed are described in five groups of denunciations in verses 20-68.

The blessings are stated before the curses for two main reasons:

1. To show that God is slow to anger, but swift to show mercy. He has declared that He would rather we obey and live than sin and die, and that it's His pleasure and will to bless.
2. To show that though both the promises and the threatenings are designed to bring and hold us to our duty, nevertheless, it's better that we are attracted to God's way of life by a hope of God's favor than that we are frightened to it by fear of his wrath. Obedience pleases Him best when it comes from a delight in His goodness. That in no way lessens the duty involved in keeping His way of life.

In Deuteronomy 28:1-14 God states three conditions upon which the blessings are promised.

1. It is upon condition that we diligently listen to the voice of God (verses 1-2), that we hear God speaking to us by His word, and use our greatest efforts to acquaint ourselves with His will (verse 13).
2. It is upon condition that we observe and do all His commandments. In order to obey, we need to keep the commandments of God and walk in His ways (verse 9). We should not only do them once, but we should keep them forever. We should not only set out in His ways, but walk in them to the very end.

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3. It is upon condition that we should not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. We should not turn to superstition on the one hand, or profaneness on the other; but more specifically we should not go after other gods (verse 14).

Think about the blessings for obedience and the penalties for disobedience in our own lives. Observe these laws in action in the lives of others, in the conduct of nations and groups of nations. Not only will our faith in the Bible be confirmed, but learning from the experiences of others is a wise thing to do. It is a lot less painful to watch and learn than to experience.

Solomon gained a tremendous amount of wisdom merely by observing others and discerning situations. You know of his observation of the young man and the devious prostitute.

Proverbs 7:6-9 For at the window of my house I looked through my lattice, and saw among the simple, I perceived among the youths, a young man devoid of understanding, passing along the street near her corner; and he took the path to her house. In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night.

Solomon was observant. The rest of the chapter describes the scene he witnessed: A foolish young man being seduced by a prostitute.

Many men say this could never happen to them, but many men today are seduced in a similar way through Internet pornography, breaking the spirit of God's law. If a man or woman is looking at pornography, he or she is on a collision course with a ruined marriage. And, if you are single, it is already beginning to ruin your future marriage, because it will distort and pervert your mind, so when you are married you're dissatisfied and frustrated. There is no excuse for Internet pornography.

Regarding the blessing of wisdom, Solomon concluded that wisdom and understanding raise their voices and cry aloud in the streets for those who have ears to hear. We have to make an effort to recognize blessings such as wisdom and understanding when they are staring us in the face.

Proverbs 8:1-11 Does not wisdom cry out, and understanding lift up her voice? She takes her stand on the top of the high hill, beside the way, where the paths meet. She cries out by the gates, at the entry of the city, at the

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entrance of the doors: "To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. O you simple ones, understand prudence, and you fools, be of an understanding heart. Listen, for I will speak of excellent things, and from the opening of my lips will come right things; for my mouth will speak truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are with righteousness; nothing crooked or perverse is in them. They are all plain to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge. Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her.

Everywhere around us the truthfulness of God's Word is confirmed in the rare triumphs and many common failures within a Christian's life. It's a great blessing to have confidence in God's written word and the wisdom it contains. And, by using this guide of God's blessed way of life and by witnessing from far away we may be able to avoid suffering because of the breaking of God's laws. This in itself is a blessing often overlooked.

An essential key to developing unshakable faith in the Scriptures is the same essential key for recognizing the blessings from God. Both require good works, that is, proper application of God's instructions.

In a sense, proving and testing the Bible and the blessings that result is really a matter of building faith; and faith must be built with works.

James 2:14-21 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

It just struck me that when Abraham was willing to offer his son as a sacrifice, and He

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obeyed God and had that faith, God stopped him from sacrificing Isaac. How much more of a blessing did Isaac seem to him at that point, after he had to go through the effort and the work of doing all that?

James 2:22-26 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Abraham demonstrated faith is increased—it is made perfect—by works.

Once the apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith. Jesus replied with the story of the unprofitable servant.

Luke 17:5-10 And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"

First Jesus explained, in verse 6, what is accomplished by faith that increases as a grain of mustard seed. Then, in verses 7-10, He describes how to increase faith. It is a question of faith being perfected by works. And it is through faith that we recognize the blessings that we receive—both the physical and the spiritual blessings. It takes effort and it takes diligence.

Jesus said that to increase faith we have to go beyond merely fulfilling what is commanded. We have to go beyond the letter of the law, by doing more than is

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required. We have to live by every word, every precept, and every thought of God. We have to do this to see blessings. There is an emphasis on *do*.

The more we put God's written Word to work in our lives—the more we absorb its teachings—the more confidence we will have in it; and, the more blessings we will recognize from doing what it says. Most people don't believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, because they don't test it. They don't put it into practice to prove it. But for those who do God's will, blessings abound.

John 7:16-17 Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.

The same holds true for blessings. Anyone who puts the Bible into practical application in his life will know it is of God and will recognize the incredible blessings associated with it—including the specifics of God's truth.

By faith we understand. The blessings that truly count are spiritual blessings, blessings that cannot necessarily be seen physically, but can be perceived by faith.

Hebrews 11:1-3 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

In Colossians 3:1-2, Paul admonishes us to set our minds on things above, not on things on the earth. This is not to say God doesn't physically, materially, and financially bless those who submit their lives to Him and seek the right way to better their circumstances. He does bless such efforts, just not always as we expect and not always immediately. If God doesn't bless us in the way, to the extent or at the precise time we think He should, we should still make sure we give thanks unceasingly for what we do have.

Ephesians 5:20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,"

There is no promise in the Bible that a person who becomes a Christian will

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automatically increase in great material wealth. The apostle Paul wrote, in I Timothy 6:5-6, against this type of deception that "godliness is a means of gain." In contrast Paul emphasizes that, "Godliness with contentment is great gain."

What makes an object or an experience a blessing? It promotes godly character, well-being and happiness.

The more situations a person can be happy in, the greater that person is blessed.

It's not the physical circumstances that count most. Being blessed is primarily a state of mind, because the mind is where a person decides what it is he considers enjoyable.

Hebrews 13:5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.

Paul understood about contentment. In II Corinthians 11:23-28 he wrote about events that heavily affected his Christian life—being beaten, stoned, imprisoned, shipwrecked, in constant danger, subjected to hunger, thirst, sleeplessness, just to name a few of the trials and deprivations he faced.

Many people have a hard time regarding Paul as blessed. But he believed he was blessed.

Ephesians 1:3 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,

Read in Hebrews 11 about the saints down through history who were homeless wanderers, destitute, afflicted, tormented, put on trial, sawn in half, or otherwise executed. These were some of God's own people, His called and chosen ones, individuals whom He loved and richly blessed. But to see it, you have to have a mind and eyes of faith.

They were blessed by the standard that counts most. They had a personal relationship with Almighty God. They had the priceless promise of eternal life. They received inner strength, comfort and joy (even in adversity). They had hope and all other fruits of God's Holy Spirit. There is nothing else a person can possess in this physical existence that matters as much. Everything else is expendable, and all the saints know it.

The saints mentioned in Hebrews 11 sought God's Kingdom first and trusted in Him to add the physical and material blessings when and how it pleased Him.

Matthew 6:25-30 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

There again we see faith mentioned in relation to blessings. A man of little faith does not see the blessings that he has. It is that all important element needed to see and appreciate those true blessings.

Matthew 6:31-33 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

The saints have always known that if they sought to do the will of God before all else, they would someday become inheritors with Jesus Christ of all true wealth.

Don't look too much at what we can see. Don't look too much at the things that are temporary, rather look with faith at the things that are eternal. It takes a great deal of effort to learn to see the greater invisible blessings.

II Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

For true Christians, the proof of blessings is in the doing of what God asks and requires. By living God's way of life we come to recognize spiritual blessings normally not seen with the naked eye.

Maybe it is too long over due that we take a refreshing look through eyes of faith at what we've missed and recount our blessings. We may be surprised at how much more blessed we are than we had imagined! I couldn't help but think of that hymn we used to sing 35 years ago in God's church—"Count your blessings." There are two lines that have stuck in my mind all this time:

"Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your many blessings,
see what God has done."

How much truer can it be than that!