

# GOD'S FAVOR

*Experiencing  
the Life  
God Wants You  
to Have*

**GARY WILKERSON**



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In some of the author’s stories, the names and identifying details of certain individuals have been changed to protect their privacy.

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Having just celebrated forty years of what I believe to be the best marriage ever, I could not be more thankful for God's favor in sending me the most amazing, beautiful, lovely, and God-pursuing woman imaginable. I know God's favor in a richer way because you, Kelly, are in my life. Looking forward to 2050 together at ninety-two!

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## Foreword

Having been best friends with David Wilkerson for almost forty years, I knew his son Gary as a child. I know him now as a mentor. And I hear both voices through the pages of this book. It is more than powerful.

The search for purpose in life is embedded in the very core of human nature. Ultimate dignity and peace of mind come from attaining one's purpose for living. Most people, consciously or subconsciously, search for purpose their entire lives without finding it. It is like looking for love in all the wrong places. No level of success or fame or family or accumulated wealth can fully quench the human search for purpose.

Our search for joy and purpose is simplified by understanding almighty God as the holy Trinity—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—while we ourselves are body, soul and spirit. While our body feels pain and our soul experiences happiness, the fulfillment of joy and purpose in our lives is possible only when our spirit is in alignment with God's Holy Spirit.

And guess what? Searching for God's purpose for your life is not scriptural. God does not have one purpose for you and another one for Himself. He has but one purpose: to seek and save the lost. That is why He promises in Romans 8:28 to make everything in your life work together for good when you live your life for His purpose.

Gary explains that this is the sweet spot with God, when even the little things and bad things serve to fulfill God's purpose. When things go south, know that God is up to something! He is putting you in the middle of an opportunity to lead someone—or maybe lots of someones—closer to Him. And their redemption is far more important than your temporary inconvenience or lifelong challenge.

This is where the favor of God takes over. When you live your life for God's purpose, you live in His promise to make everything in your life work for good. This is when whole-hearted, unwavering faith begins, and all the blessings that come with it. His favor is without limit, into the smallest areas of your life.

And there is more! In his last chapter, Gary takes us from God's unlimited favor in the smallest of things into God's ultimate favor that surpasses all things. You will find it hard not to moved to tears as Gary opens your eyes to the ultimate reward for living your life in *God's Favor*.

Barry Meguiar, president, Meguiar's Car Wax;  
founder and president, IgniteAmerica  
and Revival Outside the Walls

# Introduction

We hear a lot about the favor of God these days. That's a good thing. Without the Lord's favor, we would not be able to breathe, stand or find true life anywhere. Our loving, compassionate God looks to bless us with His amazing favor.

But today the teaching of favor is being twisted by some. They use it as a means to gain material, physical and emotional blessings from God. That's tragic, because it reduces the Lord to just another American commodity. They tell you to invest a little church attendance here, sow a bit of financial seed there, claim the power of your tongue to confess your way into the life you dream of, and—boom!—you're favored.

That isn't God's way. He cares for us much more than that. If we get everything we dream of, that's not favor; that's lust. So what does it mean, in actual terms, to receive God's favor?

Ultimately, true favor isn't found in tangible blessings themselves. It's found in the One who does the blessing, our loving heavenly Father. Seeking Him, not things, is the hunger that dwells at the core of every human heart. We were made to find our life in Him. And God is jealous, in a righteous way. He won't allow Himself to be used as a means

of fulfilling our lusts and self-gain. In fact, He will destroy all the idols we set up in our hearts so that He alone stands as our greatest desire.

This doesn't mean we shouldn't want to see God's blessings flow in our lives. Out of His loving grace and kindness, our Father delights in giving good gifts to His children. Just because some leaders have twisted biblical doctrines in the so-called prosperity movement doesn't mean the idea of God's favor should be thrown out. Rather, it should be rescued.

That's where pastors, teachers, counselors and parents come in. In our daily work, we see God's heart delighting in His people. He longs to demonstrate His good news in our everyday lives by showering us with His undeserved favor. He does this not because I "claim" what is mine as His child, nor because I give tithes and offerings, but because He is amazingly good.

We can trust in His goodness even when our children run away, when our marriage is failing, when our medical report is troubling, and when our soul is in despair. God's favor is with us through all of our struggles. And as we trust Him through every difficulty, we find that He leads us into greater favor than we could have imagined.

As we explore God's Word on the subject, you'll discover that His favor works in essentially two ways. First, our heavenly Father favors us with the nearness of His presence through our stormy times, commanding the winds and waves inside us to cease. I've learned a lot about God's love this way. It's a form of favor no Christian can do without.

The second way He favors us is through His tangible blessings—with power to rescue us, heal us and provide for us. I love testifying about how God has favored me this way.

He saved one of my sons from drug addiction and brought him to a renewed, deeply blessed life. That son is now happily married and serving Jesus. The Lord also healed my body after a car crash literally broke my back. That healing required surgery and a long recovery. Sometimes that's how blessings come to us—through hardships. Yet it's also how we learn that God's favor is with us in our trials. He not only healed my back but gave me a spiritual backbone, a Holy Ghost confidence that declares, "No matter what I may face, it is well with my soul. My Redeemer lives."

So, first, there's God's assuring presence, and second, there are His tangible blessings. Both are forms of His favor. And both are needed. To want only personal blessings of physical and material well-being is to limit the Lord. I believe it also grieves His heart. Yet to limit Him only to spiritual favor goes to the other extreme, denying God's role as a caring father who provides for our physical and material needs.

If I could only have one form of favor, it would always be God and His presence alone. I thank the Lord for His goodness, that in His great love He chooses to add the second form of favor: healing our bodies, saving marriages and families, providing for all our needs and lavishing His love on us, along with many things we don't deserve. Thank God He gives us both!

I pray this book will create a hunger in you for the ultimate favor of God's presence. And may it prepare your heart to receive His many blessings with joy and thankfulness. He looks to bless His people, and once you know you're in His favor, your life will never be the same.



PART I

# GOD'S PART

*Blessing Us  
with His Favor*

# 1

## You Are Blessed, Not Cursed

### *Why God's Favor Has Never Left You*

As a pastor for over three decades, I've done a lot of counseling. It's one of the roles I've enjoyed most as a minister of God's Word. I love addressing people's questions about the Lord and His ways. I've found over the years that His Word is faithful to address any dilemma of life, no matter how daunting or difficult. Almost always the answer has to do with God's goodness.

That was the case with a young man who showed up at my office one day in tears. "I lost my temper with my wife," he said, adding, with self-contempt, "*again*." It had happened many times before, he admitted: a sudden outburst, an exchange of angry words and in the end, a walkout. The young man had promised God it wouldn't happen anymore. But it did happen. And it kept happening—again and again and again.

As he poured out his heart I realized I was listening to an utterly broken man. He had struggled with anger his whole life, he told me. He tried for years to overcome it, but now he was afraid he had been overwhelmed one too many times. I saw the fear in his eyes; it was as if he sensed he had crossed a line and could never go back.

“I’ve blown it,” he said. “I think I’ve ruined my marriage. I might even lose my family.” He started weeping. Then he spoke the words he probably feared most. “I’ve lost any favor I might have had with God. His presence is gone from me completely.”

**I’ve met a lot of Christians who live with fears like this young husband’s.** Many devoted people of God believe their heavenly Father loves them and has showered them with the favor of His grace. But there’s a side of their lives they feel is unworthy of God’s favor. They’re convinced that all the blessings they enjoy come from the Lord, but then they try to partition off the part of their lives that’s marked by failure. Like Adam after the Fall, they want to cover their shame from God’s gaze.

This is the dilemma of so many devoted followers of Jesus today. They have been deeply touched by God’s grace. Yet despite years of battling to gain victory over their failures, they’re still overwhelmed by their weaknesses. After a while, they begin to assume they have lost God’s favor—forever.

I talk to these people wherever I go, and many end up telling me about a lifelong struggle they have had. They speak of the weight of their countless failures, which only continues to build up over time. Or they mention a specific burden they have carried in secret over the years or a fear they could never put behind them. In each case, the result is the same: After a while, their mindset of ongoing struggle begins to

define their walk with God. Worse, it comes to define their view of God. Somehow, they become convinced that God isn't willing to help them overcome.

At some point, these precious people give up on believing they could ever have a fulfilling life in God. They abandon trying to find His purpose for their existence beyond tithes and church attendance. Sadly, today, they no longer believe they're a worthy witness of God, whom they know to be holy and good.

**A lot of Christians have simply given up hope. Have you? Or has someone dear to you?** Maybe you have a struggle of some kind you've never been able to shake. It may not be as severe as this young man's, or it may be similar. Perhaps it's worse. Regardless of the scale of your struggle, maybe you've been left wondering, "Can I really find joy in the Christian life? Where is Jesus' victory on the cross for me? Will I ever know it, or will I be caught up in this ongoing struggle forever? When will I know true freedom in Christ, rather than constant guilt and shame? When will I finally know what it means to have the abundant life Jesus talked about? Where has His favor gone?"

As I counsel people, I get absolutely blessed to see someone set free by Christ's good news. Suddenly, they become fully aligned with His purposes for them—and they come alive. After years of carrying an impossible burden, they're finally able to enjoy life. Nothing satisfies like the sight of someone who's been spiritually crippled finally getting healed. They spring forward from their despair with newfound hope, joy and faith. For them, it's a beginning glimmer of the promise of abundant life Jesus offers.

Yet seeing this happen doesn't usually come easily. The conflicts we each face every day are serious, because the challenges

of life in a fallen world never stop. And our trials are complicated by the enemy of our souls, Satan, who works constantly to obscure God's work in our lives. At any given time, even the most devoted Christian can find himself or herself teetering on the brink of despair and unbelief.

**Our deepest trials can send even the strongest,  
most mature faith into turmoil.**

I can relate. At various times, I've had my own dark thoughts, the kind that try to convince me I'm more cursed than blessed.

After our first child, Ashley, was born, my wife, Kelly, got pregnant with our second child. We learned the baby was a girl, and both of us did a little dance. "How perfect!" we thought. "A younger sister for our strapping little boy."

But after eight months Kelly noticed the baby had stopped kicking inside. We tried not to be alarmed and instead turned to prayer. We trusted in God's goodness, believing He'd protect our child in the womb. But then came the sonogram and other tests, and our deepest fears were confirmed. Our baby had died.

By that time in my life I had been a pastor for over a decade. I thought I knew God's precious grace inside and out. But grief is a powerful force, especially when it's regarding a child, and I absorbed our terrible loss in my own sorrowful way. The first thought that came to me was the biblical story of David, who sired a son who died shortly after birth. When David learned the newborn's life was in jeopardy, he spent seven days in agonizing prayer for him, pleading, "Lord, keep my child safe. Don't let him die." But eventually the baby did die.

Scripture tells us that King David caused his child's death by his own grievous sins. When I reread that story that's

exactly where I went with my own grief. In my clouded, darkened frame of mind, I wondered what sort of sin I committed that might have caused our child to die. Though I had not committed adultery or murder, as David had, I was living in fear of condemnation. I prayed, “Lord, did my sinful thoughts make this happen? My laziness? My covetousness? My lust? What did I do that might have brought this to pass?” Our grief can be so overwhelming it sends us to places as dark as that.

Thankfully, by the powerful light of God’s grace, the pain of my grief eventually began to subside, and my thoughts about it all became clearer. I thank the Lord that happened for me. I tasted His favor in a dark place, and it pulled me from the mental quagmire I was in. He did this for me by opening my eyes to the full power of a single verse of Scripture:

But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”

Galatians 3:13

Twenty years later, this powerful truth is still with me. I turn to it regularly, along with the other powerful truths of God’s Word, as I counsel His people. Its sustaining power enables me to extend the same life to people like the distraught young husband who sat in my office despairing over his sin. As I shared it with him, I saw hope planted. His healing began.

**Jesus’ amazing work on the cross has rescued us from any possibility of a curse in all dimensions of life.**

I have to ask you, What made you open this book? Maybe you saw *favor* in the title and you reached for it with one of two motives: You wonder whether you have God's favor in your life, or you seek God's favor because you feel it's missing. Either of these motivations is a good one. The favor of God is something we're all meant to enjoy, and He wants everyone who follows Him to seek it and know it.

Now, let me ask another question: favored or cursed? Which best describes your mindset from day to day? Many Christians don't know how to answer this because they don't know they're missing God's favor. Or, if they do, they don't think they deserve it. They feel more cursed than blessed. How do you feel? Are you walking in the favor of God, or does it seem like you're watching others enjoy the blessings of His favor, just out of reach of having it yourself? Do you know it's for you, or do you, like the young husband, feel bogged down by struggle and anguish?

Today, as I read Galatians 3:13, I come close to tears, especially as I think about the scores of Christians who have endured so much inner anguish. For some, having an embattled mind is a way of life. Somehow they have come to believe God is poised over them with a hammer, ready to beat them to the ground with any misstep. They have become so mired in their struggle that they have forgotten or lost sight of the favor God has promised to them as adopted sons and daughters. They have come to believe that God can't or won't be able to look past their sin.

So, how does a holy God view a young husband who struggles terribly with his temper? What happens to the righteous wrath directed at this man's sin? Christ's gospel answers us clearly: It all goes to Jesus. He took upon Himself all judgment for our sin—that's the curse aspect of the Law.

Christ paid the penalty for it—all of it. That young husband may still have to deal with the consequences and relational impact of his sin. But his sin is nailed to the cross. Jesus paid the price for his sin—and ours—in full.

The implications of this are absolutely profound. Two things leap out immediately.

First, it means we can't be cursed. Christ's perfect sacrifice won't allow it. Nothing can diminish the full, complete impact of the work He has done for us on the cross.

Second, it means that as God's children we live and move in a continual state of blessing. Because Christ has wiped out every curse, God's favor is on our lives. Each of us is the apple of His eye, His favored one, His blessed child. It doesn't matter how fierce our daily struggle may be. No weapon can ever prosper against this powerful truth.

We see these truths confirmed even in the Old Testament. Isaiah 53 famously prophesies about the suffering servant who would bear the punishment for our sin:

All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all. . . . And because of his experience, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins.

vv. 6, 11

Every sin, failure and shortcoming we could ever imagine is covered under Jesus' glorious work.

**Some Christians see Christ's work for them on the cross as the promise of a clean slate but nothing more.** These precious people believe God forgives them, but they don't believe their lives are blessed again until they spend a certain amount

of time without struggling. It's as if they're on probation. They think, "I haven't had my same dark struggle for a week now. I must be back in God's favor." Then a setback occurs, and the cycle begins again.

So, what's wrong with this picture? It's a deadening, repetitive cycle that eventually kills the spirit. Here is the truth that's missing on this merry-go-round of despair: Christ's work for us does more than pronounce forgiveness. Isaiah 53:5 tells us it heals us, making us not only clean but whole: "He was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. *He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed*" (emphasis added).

The word for *healed* in this verse indicates more than physical healing of the body. It speaks of spiritual and relational well-being, restoration of mind and soul, and a state of health relating to all parts of life. God's healing favor applies to troubled marriages and broken relationships as well as bruised minds and hearts. He covers it all.

Again, I think of the troubled young husband. To be sure, he has some faithful work to do to see Christ's victory over his temper. But even in his angriest moments this man has not been forsaken by God. On the contrary, God is on his side, and his family's, to keep bringing healing and even blessing to their home. As you'll find throughout this book, that's God's desire for all of us: to know the fullest blessings of His amazing favor. And those blessings reach the furthest depths of our lives.

**Deep down, many of us suspect there's a  
catch to God's promise of favor.**

For those who know the Bible well, it's easy to get preoccupied with the two sides of God's promised favor mentioned

in Deuteronomy 28. For many Christians, it's a passage that's more troubling than encouraging.

As Israel was poised to enter the Promised Land, God prompted Moses to give them a two-part message. The first part was, in essence, "Obey God and your life will be blessed. If you walk in His Word you'll see blessings on your crops, your villages, your families—everything you touch" (see Deuteronomy 28:1–14). What an encouraging word! It's all about God's blessings and the abundant life He intends for us.

Then came the second half of the message, which spoke of curses instead of blessings: "Likewise, if you do not obey God, you'll be cursed in your fields, your villages, your families, everything you put your hands to" (see Deuteronomy 28:15–68).

A lot of Christians read this chapter in the Bible and think, "My life falls more into the disobedient category. That's why my life isn't blessed. It's why I still struggle, why things don't go my way." They may not say it aloud, but at some deep level these Christians believe they're cursed in God's eyes.

That's not what this passage conveys at all. God's bottom line to His people was this: "I *want* to bless your life—your parenting, your work, your relationships, your community life. Stay in my Word, live the way I've prescribed for you, and you'll have a blessed life." Still, many read this chapter and think, "The moment I depart from God's commands, He automatically moves me to the cursed category."

But Moses knew God's message to Israel was good news, not bad. A few chapters later, he addressed each of Israel's individual tribes with specific words of awesome blessings:

Let the tribe of Reuben live and not die out, though they are few in number. . . . Give [Judah] strength to defend their

cause. . . . Bless the ministry of the Levites, O LORD, and accept all the work of their hands. . . . The people of Benjamin are loved by the LORD and live in safety beside him. . . . O Naphtali, you are rich in favor and full of the LORD's blessings.

Deuteronomy 33:6, 7, 11, 12, 23

The list of blessings Moses spoke went on and on. And it wasn't because these tribes were perfect. They weren't!

Tell me, as you read this passage, do the words sound like threats? Do you picture a hammer being held over the people's heads? Of course not. Moses goes on to speak powerful words of blessing to all twelve tribes.

So what does this have to do with us today? Like Israel, we can be tempted to think of our life as continually cursed as we endure trial after trial. We might even be tempted to think we deserve our trials, that our sin has brought them on. And, yes, sin does have consequences, but it doesn't cause condemnation or a curse. Jesus already resolved that for us, once and for all.

**You may ask, "But doesn't the Bible say God chastises those He loves?"** I've heard this question from a lot of Christians. They say, "I agree that God favors us with His grace. But no Christian is free from God's discipline. Even the New Testament says He chastises those He loves." That's utterly true. But there's a vast gulf between our heavenly Father's loving discipline and the wrathful judgment of a curse.

My dad demonstrated this difference to me when I was a boy. At times he spanked me for acting up or disobeying my mom. But afterward he always made me go into the backyard and play football with him. That always seemed like a worse punishment, because I was still mad at him for

spanking me. But it was a wise strategy on Dad's part. He made sure we never went back into the house until I had a genuine smile on my face from the joy of playing with my father. It taught me that he loved me and that his correction was part of his love.

That's exactly the kind of love that's behind all our Father's discipline. If we're heading down a wrong path that leads to destruction, He won't hesitate to grab us by the collar and say, "No, I won't let you do that. I love you too much."

Yet God's favor isn't limited to the protection of an earthly father. It does something more that's absolutely mind-blowing: God's favor sets us free completely from the curse of darkness, because He paid the penalty for our sin in full.

Today when any Christ-follower reads the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28, he is given an important truth. Yes, God is holy and requires holiness of His people. But here is His promise—His favor—to you through the cross: "I'll take on the cursed part. And you take on the blessed part. I'll take on your sin, and you take on My righteousness."

Think about what an incredible promise this is. As we consider what Jesus did, and does, for us, it becomes impossible to live in defeat. Do you live as if you're cursed, doomed, having no future? If so, I fear you've been persuaded by a lie, one that's meant to derail you from the awesome truth of what Jesus has done for you.

**If you think you'll never be an overcomer, I have good news for you.** Scores of Christians fear they have to strive for every blessing. And the pressure of that burden fills their lives with stress. They don't understand that they're already blessed.

You may say, “I’m only being a realist. My life has never been any different, and I don’t ever expect it to be. Isaiah 53 has no effect on me.” Friend, those aren’t the words of a realist; they’re the words of a doubter. It’s a refusal to accept what Christ has already done for you.

You see, there’s a mental discipline that’s required of us if we’re going to live in God’s favor. By *discipline*, I don’t mean some rigid work apart from God’s grace. I’m talking about communion with the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who brings to our remembrance all truth about our Savior. We need that discipline for a crucial reason: It’s because we have an enemy, Satan, who opposes us—an adversary who constantly fires lies meant to derail us from the awesome truth of what Jesus has done.

If you need encouragement about your endless cycle of failure, consider this: God actually uses our personal struggles and long, difficult seasons to prepare us to receive the blessings of His favor.

This powerful truth is demonstrated in the life of every faithful figure in the Bible. In fact, the lives of the first Christians demonstrated it. No generation in church history ever had it harder than the early believers. With everything they faced, including bloody, horrifying persecution, the first-century followers of Christ had every reason to doubt God. But they knew a deeper reality than their outward circumstances.

You’re probably familiar with the scene at Pentecost: Under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Peter stood up and preached to a massive crowd with three thousand people getting saved on the spot. Immediately those converts of different tongues, ethnicities and nationalities began to love each other. It changed their lives completely,

to the point that they lived and worshiped together, sharing all things in common. The Bible says there was not a need among them. And all of this happened in the shadow of a cruel and brutal Roman occupation.

Then persecution followed, and it was severe. Yet the church's numbers increased daily because of the joy and love they shared despite their sufferings (see Acts 2:47). Then, when persecution intensified, multitudes of Christians met their deaths. Many believers ended up fleeing Jerusalem, scattering in all directions. Imagine the losses they endured: homes, businesses, land, possessions, family members. I think of the world's many refugees today—driven from home by wars, terrorism and persecution—trudging hundreds of miles carrying their children and their possessions in a backpack. Watching them, I better understand what the early Christians went through.

Yet in spite of these unimaginable hardships, the first-century believers were a powerful witness wherever they landed. Scripture tells us Barnabas was awed by what he saw in the scattered church: “When he arrived [in Antioch] and saw this evidence of God's blessing, he was filled with joy, and he encouraged the believers to stay true to the Lord” (Acts 11:23).

Despite their grievous circumstances, and being seen as the offscouring of the world, the early Christians became missionaries of blessing.

**Here is the core of the favored life we have in Christ:  
His favor is with us in everything, even when our  
struggle persists over a long period of time.**

Throughout the world we see the curse of sin warping humankind and wreaking chaos. But we who know Jesus

have been set free from the curse of darkness—all because He paid the penalty. Indeed, the good news of Jesus brings life and blessing wherever it's demonstrated in word and deed.

I witnessed tenacious belief and dedicated, courageous action from a couple whose faith was challenged by an undisputable reality. When their son was in second grade, a group of school officials, including a psychologist, came to them with dispiriting news. They declared that the boy had a severe learning disability. The best he could ever hope to achieve in life was the lowliest rung of manual work. They advised the parents to remove the boy from school and start training him so maybe he could eventually learn a trade.

The couple listened intently. They were in full reality about their son's condition. Yet they weren't in denial when they told the officials, "Thank you for your insights and concern. We respect everything you have to say. But we don't believe that's God's plan for our child."

The actions they took to spare their son the fate described by experts were costly. Instead of pulling him out of school, they kept him in classes and then spent long hours tutoring and encouraging him despite discouraging results. They constantly told him, "We believe in you."

Years later, what God implanted in their hearts came into full reality. The parents watched as their son crossed his high school's stage to accept a diploma. He then went to college, where he received all As. Today he pastors a thriving church.

Friend, your marriage isn't cursed. Your finances aren't cursed. Your health isn't cursed. Because of Jesus, you live in a permanent state of blessing. So, it doesn't matter what your outward circumstances may be; you're walking in God's favor, which was secured for you by Christ. That is your reality. His Word says so. And, just as He did with the first-

century Church and with the parents of a child with a disability, Jesus has made you His missionary of blessing.

I can assure you of this about God's favor: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). If you're willing to hope for that, read on.