

Chapter 7

God's Faithfulness and the Four Promises

Now that we understand that God's promises come through grace and through the sufficiency of Jesus, we can further examine the four specific promises God gives to each one of us. We can examine God's assurance of faithfulness as we pray, "Not my will but Yours be done." We can step as He leads, and we can teach others to do the same. Making a promise is easy. It is critical to know what promises He has made and that He will keep them. In the Way of Rest, we live life and make daily decisions with increasing assurance of God's faithfulness. We confidently walk in very specific ways according to His specific promises.

This chapter will examine God's faithfulness and His four promises: love, freedom, rest, and power.

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISES

Every person who wants to walk with God will have to deal with their fears of God not fulfilling His promises. Walking with God can be hard because He leads us to lives where uncertainty is normal. Isaiah 55:7-8 says, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than yours and My thoughts than your thoughts.'" God has led people to build boats, travel to unknown lands, dance around fortresses, attack larger enemies, leave their jobs, and cast out demons. These are "irrational" things the ones called to do them had never done before. Every one of these required God to be faithful to His promises. In our lives God leads us in ways where we will be unable to see around corners or control outcomes. We need assurance. If we are going to surrender our lives and follow God, we must be assured that He will deliver on His promises of life in the midst of the corruption and war of this world.

Thankfully, our Father has given us many powerful anchors that secure His faithfulness for us. Resting in the security of these anchors will help us to allay our fears and will send us in joy-filled obedience to His will for our lives. Our strongest anchor is Jesus. In Romans 8:32, Paul connects the life of Jesus to the current faithfulness of God. He states, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Paul looks at God's faithfulness in giving us Jesus and concludes that if God was faithful in Jesus why would He not continue His faithfulness with us. Jesus is the supreme anchor that demonstrates God's trustworthiness.

A second powerful anchor can be found in Abram's dream in Genesis 15. Abram is struggling with God's promise in his life to bless his family. Because he and his wife Sarah are advanced in years, Abram cannot see how God can be faithful. He needs assurance. God gives him a dream in which a smoking oven and a torch pass between two doves that have been cut in half. The oven and the torch represent God Himself. The halving of the birds represents the severity of God's oath to His promises. God says to Abram, "May it be done to Me as it was to these birds if I am not faithful to you." God puts His nature, His

very being, on the line to anchor His faithfulness to Abram. That is how serious God is about His promises and faithfulness.

In addition to Jesus' life and Abram's vision, our Father will often provide customized assurances to those who genuinely want to follow His will. The one walking in faith will be equipped to take steps forward in the uncertainty of walking with God. Over time every believer will become increasingly comfortable with uncertainty as their confidence in God's faithfulness matures. Controlling outcomes will become less and less important. "Having to know," will fade. God's absolute faithfulness to His promises will provide the security each person needs.

Filled with God's faithfulness we are positioned to obey God's word. Our confidence in God's faithfulness is demonstrated in our obedience. In the Bible, every person celebrated for their faith trusted the faithfulness of God as they walked in obedience to Him. Peter, James, John, and Andrew are four of the first twelve disciples Jesus called to walk with Him. To follow Jesus, these four had to leave their families' fishing businesses. They left the only careers they knew. They left the security those careers provided. They trusted the faithfulness of God by walking in obedience to His call on their lives. The book of Revelation says that these men will be four of the twenty-four elders sitting on twenty-four thrones around the throne of Christ at the end of days. While Peter, James, John, and Andrew did not always perfectly trust God's faithfulness, God continually gave them assurance, and they continually obeyed. Life lived in the faithfulness of God will be seen through obedience to God's leading. In the path of obedience are the promises of God.

GOD'S SPECIFIC PROMISES

In the Way of Rest, we focus on four primary promises of God: love, freedom, rest, and power. These are foundational to experience everything else God has for us. Learning to walk in these promises positions believers to walk in the other promises of God.

In these promises, we are provided release from our bondage. God has promised to love us powerfully and effectually. His love does work in us. His love frees us, gives us rest, and empowers us.

As guarantees of God, love, freedom, rest, and power become ways of evaluating the condition of our relationship with Jesus. If these promises are not a condition of our lives, then something is wrong. We may be tired or under attack. If we are right in The Lord, then we will experience these qualities in our lives as normal conditions. These are promises God gives by grace and is faithful to provide. Therefore, we can use the presence/absence of love, freedom, rest, and power as a standard to help us discern when we are under attack. We will examine each of these four promises and learn how to walk in them.

Love

Love is the motive of God. Many Scripture passages show God's love: "For God so loved the world..."⁴², "But God demonstrates His love toward us in this..."⁴³, and "God is love."⁴⁴ God's disposition toward us is love. He loves us. We are joined with Christ in becoming the "beloved" of God. Galatians 4:1-7 also shows us God's love. In this passage, Paul tells us that God sent Jesus in the fullness of time so that whoever comes to faith is adopted into God's family. The one in Christ receives the Holy Spirit who seals them in the family.

In the beginning, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit made man to enjoy perfect Trinitarian love, glorifying God through faithfulness. God walked with man in the cool of the day. God made the Garden of Eden to be an amazing place of joy, fellowship, and family-building for His children Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were to be the beginning of God's unique creatures living in unique relationship with Him. God made man because of love and for love. Unfortunately, their sin broke the relationship. Man was now separated from God. Consequently, man's greatest need is the love, affection, identity, and security that come from God.

Fortunately, since Adam's transgression, God has still pursued a relationship with His people. He still loves. He set in motion His great plan of restoring those into relationship with Him. Deuteronomy 4:37-38 says, "Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power, driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in and to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is today." God's love motivated His faithfulness to Abraham's descendants, His freeing them from Egypt, and His defeating of the nations living in His promised land.

Isaiah 5:1-2 uses the image of a gardener and his garden to show the way in which God lovingly provided for His people.

Let me sing now for my well-beloved
A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard.
My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.
He dug it all around, removed its stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
And He built a tower in the middle of it
And also hewed out a wine vat in it;
Then He expected it to produce good grapes,
But it produced only worthless ones.

What God did in the nation of Israel came out of His love for His beloved. As a faithful Father, He prepared everything for Israel to succeed. God was fulfilling His creation promise to love His people.

⁴² John 3:16

⁴³ Romans 5:8

⁴⁴ 1 John 4:10

Jesus came as the greatest demonstration of God's love. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." 1 John 4:9-10 says, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Jesus came to fulfill God's love promise by defeating sin, the world, and Satan - those forces separating man from God. So that when any person gives their life to Jesus, their sins are forgiven, their separation is reconciled, and they are adopted into the family of God.

Whatever we were before faith, we have been made a son/daughter of God. This becomes our new, primary identity. We have since died to all of the other names we have identified with before. We have been restored into the condition and position God intended in the beginning. We live as children of the God of creation. As children we learn to walk in the full truth and benefit of being a member of the family of God in the Kingdom of God. Like moving to a country that has a completely different way of life, learning to walk in the family of God will take time. His family operates in ways like no other. Being a son or daughter is unlike any other title in the world. Regardless of how clumsy we walk in our new family, our Father will graciously teach us how to receive His love and walk in all His ways.

God promises to love us. He invites us into the perfect love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father loves us. The Son loves us. The Spirit loves us. By grace we have been made sons/daughters of the Most High God!

Freedom

Freedom is the promise of God to deliver His people from the bondages of sin, the world, and Satan. Our Father has always worked to set His people free. Immediately after the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, when God cursed Satan, He said there would be a time when a prophesied son would "bruise you (Satan) on the head." This bruising would be a deathblow to the reign and rule of Satan, eternally freeing those who walk with God. Later in the Old Testament, our Father raised up Moses to deliver Israel from their slavery to Egypt. In the book of Judges, our Father raised up Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, and others to deliver Israel from their enemies and from their sin.

In the New Testament, our Father sent Jesus, the prophesied son God spoke of when He cursed Satan, to be His ultimate deliverer. Jesus declares in Luke 4:16-18 that His mission is to set people free from bondage. Jesus spent His ministry forgiving sins, casting out demons, and training His disciples to identify and renounce the ways of the world. He freed those who would follow Him from the bondages of life. The book of Revelation teaches us that Jesus will complete His victory in the last days. In the perfect timing of our Father, Jesus will return and end the reign of sin, the world, and Satan for good.

From the beginning of His preaching, Jesus proclaimed the availability of freedom. In Mark 1:15, Jesus declares in His first recorded sermon, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel." The Hebrew source of the Greek word,

translated “gospel,” was used to describe the news messengers brought to the people whose army won a war or battle. To have gospel is to declare that your side *has won*. From the beginning, Jesus has been declaring that the Kingdom of God has won!

We experience our Father's freedom as we repent and renounce all of the sins in our lives and walk in truth. Freedom comes because we respond to the power of sin, to the world, and to Satan with the greater power of Jesus. We know that Jesus has been raised and is seated far above all rule and principality. We must believe that we too, by grace, will be raised up with Him.

Freedom in Christ happens in two stages. In the first stage, we come to faith in Jesus. When we give our lives to Jesus, the control of sin and Satan is broken in us. Paul says in Colossians 1:13-14, “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” When we give our lives to Jesus, our old lives die. Who we were, what we have done, and what has been done to us dies in us. We are no longer that person. We are freed from all the attached negativity and we now walk in the love of God. Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

Oftentimes people give their lives to Jesus in a general way. They will be invited to faith with some form of this invitation, “Anyone who wants to have their sins forgiven so that they can have eternal life, you must confess that you are a sinner, ask Jesus to come into your life, and live your life after Him.” While this can be a legitimate invitation, this form fails to deal with specific issues God may require people to surrender so that they can experience the freedom Jesus gives. We have seen in the lives of Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the rich young ruler, and Zaccheus that it is common for people to have to deal with major issues of bondage if they want to be saved and freed. Jesus may require a person drowning in anger to forgive those who have offended him/her as a means of being saved. He may require another to surrender their drug use or their careers or their possessions in order that they be saved. Jesus has come to free us. Freedom happens at conversion when any person surrenders their life to Jesus, commits to follow Him, and deals with any specific areas of bondage Jesus identifies.

Jesus has the ability to free us because He operates with greater authority and power than whatever is binding us. Bondage and freedom are all about authority and power. We are held in bondage because we have believed a lie or lies and acted in sin in the power of our flesh. We may be held in bondage by the demonic that have used the lies we have believed as access points to our hearts. The demonic are using the lies to exert power over our lives. Regardless of what or who is binding us, Jesus has far greater power. We see in the Eph 1 diagram that Jesus has been raised far above all rule and principality. Where He sits is ridiculously higher than the altitude of the demonic, the world, and sin. Freedom in Christ works when the surpassing power of Jesus is unleashed on the far weaker power of sin, the world, and Satan.

The second stage of freedom happens as we continue to walk through life. During our new life, we will encounter wounds, bondage, and darkness from the old life that we have not addressed. We are also vulnerable to new attacks. Paul warns of the enslaving potential of new attacks in Galatians 5:1, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." Paul shows us that while we are freed at conversion, we will encounter ongoing threats to our freedom.

Through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit and our advancement in the Scripture, we will become increasingly sensitive to future temptations and attacks. What once blindsided us and took us down for days or weeks we will now be able to overcome as the attack is happening. In the middle of a day a man/woman is confronted with thoughts of despair as they consider their future. Instead of letting these thoughts develop, he/she immediately recognizes the "fake duck," turns into it, and rebukes it with the greater power of Jesus. What would have penetrated a life and done all sorts of damage before simply falls to the ground defeated. We see again in the Eph 1 diagram that any follower of Christ is raised to the same height Jesus was and walks in life with the same Holy Spirit Jesus did. So winning these types of battles throughout the day will be common for the one walking in the Way of Rest.

Because the battles happen throughout the day, Paul trains his disciples in 2 Corinthians 12:5 to take "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." Peter trains his disciples to "prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Both men knew that sin, the world, and Satan target our minds and emotions seeking to bind us. Even though we are seated with Christ and walking in His Spirit, we must, as He did, engage in the war. We cannot be passive and be free.

In addition to the daily attacks threatening our freedom, we may also need to deal with unresolved issues from the past. The majority of freedom work we do involves resolving old wounds. One man experienced great disappointment from his perception that God was not faithful in a desperate time. Consequently, he said that if God was not going to come through for him, then he would serve Satan. He told Satan he would give his life to him. Some years later he gave his life to Jesus. However, he never surrendered his Satanic confession to the Lord. Consequently, he was tormented. Once he was willing to surrender what he had done and repent of it, the surpassing greatness of the power of Jesus easily broke the stranglehold this incident held.

One woman was sexually active earlier in her late teens and early twenties. She came to faith at twenty five and was married at twenty eight. She experienced intimacy issues in marriage as sex to her brought shame and felt dirty. Even though she had given her life to Christ and was faithful in the Scriptures and church, she did not have freedom in this area of her life. She had never intentionally dealt with what she had done. Once she was willing to confess her sins of sexuality, their power was broken, and she was freed.

The Apostle James writes in James 4:7, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." We can continually suffer because of unresolved issues when we do not

submit them to the Lord. Issues in our lives not submitted to the Lord are like lit runways guiding the demonic into our lives. However, when we submit those areas to the Lord not only will we have the authority and power of Jesus to repel the demonic, but we will also have the power to rebuke the enticements of our own sin.

In our discipleship we have found the most common areas of bondage to be sex, money, anger/unforgiveness, the occult, believing false teachings, and fear. Regardless of whether a person has given their life to Jesus, when past issues are unresolved they can still be binding. In the Eph 1 diagram, when a person comes to faith in Christ, a big, full "X" is placed over their former life indicating the need to completely die and resolve all past issues. Jesus came to set us free from everything in our past so that we can live a new life.

Freedom is a promise of God. It is the heart of God. What father wants to see his sons/daughters languish in prison? "It is for freedom that Christ has set you free!"⁴⁵ He sent Jesus to destroy the works of the evil one, overcome the world, and put sin under His feet so that we would not sit in the sin of negativity or pride. Jesus came so that we could sit atop Grace Mountain in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and walk in the strength and power that is ours. When we surrender every area of our lives, we then experience the power of Christ blasting the power of darkness. Jesus wins. We win.

Rest

The immediate effect of our freedom is rest. Judges 3:9-11 connects freedom and rest.

When the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the Lord gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

When freedom happens rest comes. Rest is another promise our Father has made to us. Rest is the internal result of deliverance and victory. Rest is peace. God made creation to exist at rest. Stress was not a part of God's intent. Once Adam and Eve fell, the world was no longer at rest. As a result, man has been on a quest for rest ever since. Not long after the time of Adam and Eve, a man named Lamech was suffering under the constant toil of work. No matter how much he worked he never found rest in his soul. He and his wife gave birth to a son. They named him Noah. Genesis 5:29 says, "Now he (Lamech) called his name Noah, saying, 'This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which The Lord has cursed.'" The name Noah literally means rest. Noah's name is evidence of the degree of unrest that was already present in the world.

Noah became the precursor of the rest that Jesus would later show his disciples. In addition to Noah, God freed Israel from Egypt so that He could bring them to a resting place.

⁴⁵ Galatians 5:1

You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you. When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security, then it shall come about that the place in which the Lord your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the Lord.⁴⁶

God has always been working to fulfill His promise of rest for those who will follow Him. In the life, ministry, and resurrection of Jesus, our Father took a great step in fulfilling His promise. As we saw in chapter one of this book, the rest Jesus came to give was displayed in Mark 4:35-41. A life-threatening storm thrashed the boat Jesus and the disciples were on in the Sea of Galilee. While the disciples feared for their lives, Jesus slept. He was at rest in the middle of their distress.

Jesus is the embodiment of grace, love, and freedom; He is the embodiment of rest. He is the master of rest. This is why Jesus is able to promise in Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." The rest man has earnestly sought since the fall of man was and is now being offered through Jesus. What man could never achieve through any of his own efforts, whether individual or collective, has been made available by the grace of God through the sufficient work of Jesus.

As we are given to everything God has revealed in the Eph 1 diagram and practice the disciplines Jesus walked in, we will continually experience divine rest. In the pattern of Israel, God pursues us because He loves us. As God delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt, He delivers us from the bondages of sin, the world, and Satan. Freed from captivity, we experience His rest that comes from walking in His faithfulness. At rest, we are filled with His promised power, equipped to continue to walk in victory and train others to do the same.

Power

God our Father did not leave us powerless. As Christ had power we too have power. We see throughout the Old Testament the power of God in the people of God. God gave power to David as he slew Goliath and gave power to Elijah against the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel. Jesus also promises us power in Acts 1:8, "...but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

According to Trinitarian balance, as we live on our mission for Him, power flows abundantly from the Holy Spirit. His power serves to glorify God not man. The Spirit works

⁴⁶ Deuteronomy 12:8-11

in us and through us to preach, heal, crush demons, disciple, overcome sin, prophecy, and perform miracles.

In addition to the life of power Jesus led, He also teaches that His followers will live powerful lives. Jesus says in Matthew 17:20, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you." And He says in John 14:12, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father."

Paul lived in and trained believers to live in the power of Jesus. He writes in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5:

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, *so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.* (Italics are mine.)

For Paul, faith is life dependent on God's power. He attributes his strength to make disciples to God's power in Colossians 1:28-29, "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." In 2 Corinthians 10:3-4, Paul expects believers to fight in the promised power of God, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."

Finally, Paul prays in Ephesians 1:18-19 that the eyes of believers' hearts will be opened so that we will know "what is the surpassing greatness of the power of God toward us who believe." Paul then illustrates the power of God by describing what God did in raising Jesus far above all rule and principality, eternally enthroning Him. God's power, that kind of power, is "toward us who believe." Paul is praying that regardless of the power of God one walks in, he/she will be opened to even greater power!

Through Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, God has fulfilled His promise to make His followers people of kingdom power and authority. We have not been given "spirit(s) of timidity, but of power and love and discipline."⁴⁷ "We are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul."⁴⁸ As we embrace the realities explained in the Eph 1 diagram and learn to walk in the disciplines Jesus walked in, we will experience the promised power of God in our lives. No matter who we were before Christ, we will become people of great power and authority. God's power will be exercised

⁴⁷ 2 Timothy 1:7

⁴⁸ Hebrews 10:39

through us according to His will to heal, cast out demons, encourage, teach, overcome sin, walk away from the world, and make disciples who make disciples.

CONCLUSION

God responded to the war by offering to us His promise to help us overcome our bondage and reconnect us with Him as He intended. By grace through Jesus we are lifted out of the valley of works and set on the mountain of God's presence and promises. God guarantees love, freedom, rest, and power for those who walk with Him. He leads us to live lives radically different from the way of the world. We have to learn how to walk in grace and uncertainty, trusting God's faithfulness in every circumstance of our lives. Thankfully, God gives us the assurances we need to obey Him. As we step in obedience we experience His divine nature and His promised life.

Experiencing God's faithfulness gives us stories of His effectual work in everyday life. God is not removed. He is present. He works. He causes things to happen in us and in the world. As we order our lives in this way, our discipling of others will transition from just doing Bible studies to include life studies. We will not only share His Word but we will also share our stories of God's daily faithfulness. We will spend our days walking in His love, freedom, rest, and power. Then, sent of the Spirit, we will train others to do the same.

In the next chapter we will look at the practices of our faith that Jesus has given us. We will see specific techniques that we can learn, grow in, and train others to do. These disciplines are the practices God has given us so that we can experience His promises.