



**SERIES: MORE TO LIFE**

## **Finding God's Favor**

### **Life Focus:**

Everyone can feel the favor of God and experience His presence.

"That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27).

### **A Look At the Word:**

A four-year-old girl became frightened by a tremendous thunderstorm one evening. After one loud clap of thunder, she jumped out of bed, ran down the hallway to her parents' bedroom, and jumped right in between her mom and dad. Her father tried to calm her fears by saying that God would look after her. The daughter replied, "I know that, Daddy, but right now I need someone with skin on!"

Have you ever felt that way about God? If only I could feel Him. How do I know for certain that my life has the approval of God? These feelings are universal because the greatest human need is to feel accepted. We are in a lifelong pursuit for a tangible way to fulfill this need.

We crave relationships in which we are accepted, valued, and wanted; but we seldom experience the "real thing." We have believed the lie that says our value is determined by the quality and level of our performance.



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How can we end this futile quest and experience real, unconditional love? The answer is in the unwarranted, undeserved, unearned favor of God. God invites you to feel His favor—favor “with skin on!”

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is arguably the best known of all women in the Bible. Her name is recognized around the world, and the importance of her role in history is widely acknowledged. She was the first to hear that God was about to break into history with the birth of the Messiah, her son-to-be, and Mary was the first to hear His name, Jesus. The name Jesus is explained in Matthew 1:21: “For he shall save his people from their sins.” Jesus came to offer humanity the ultimate favor of God—salvation!

Let’s quickly review the story as related in Luke 1:26-56. Mary, a young woman with no great social standing or wealth, was promised in marriage to a carpenter named Joseph. One day as she went about her daily routine, an angel appeared and said, “Hail, thou art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.” The angel told her that she had been chosen to carry Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. All of humanity would receive an extraordinary gift through her.

Mary’s response was: “Be it unto me according to thy word.” She didn’t say, “Let me think about this,” or “I’ll get back to you later,” or “I’m extremely busy for the next nine months, try again another time.” Mary simply said yes to God and His plan for her life. Salvation became available to all humanity because of her trust and obedience. She accepted God’s touch upon her life.

The last mention of Mary in the Bible pictures her with other believers praying in Jerusalem after the resurrection of Jesus, waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14).

Let’s look closer at why Mary “found favour with God,” how she felt the favor of God, and the result of God’s favor in her life.

### ***Mary’s Preparation***

During Mary’s time of preparation, before she felt the favor of God, we can observe several qualities in her life.

- ***Humility.*** Probably in her early teens, the typical age for engagement in first-century Galilee, Mary had never thought of herself as extraordinary. No doubt she worshiped God and held onto the slim hope, as did every Jewish woman, that she might be chosen to bear the Messiah. But she wouldn’t have used words like “highly favoured” and “blessed . . . among women” to describe herself. Mary simply saw herself as a person who loved God and was privileged to serve Him any way she could.



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- **Faith.** "How shall this be?" Mary questioned. (verse 34). She spoke out of curiosity, not doubt. We may assume that she felt embarrassment at being pregnant while unmarried. The angel responded, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow" (verse 35).

Mary's simple faith and readiness to do God's will brought the blessing of God into her life (verse 45).

- **Obedience.** The questions that Mary did *not* ask are significant. Questions like: "What will Joseph think?" "What will people think of me?" "What will happen to me?" Under the circumstances we wouldn't be surprised if Mary had wavered at this point. If these questions ran through her mind, she quickly dismissed them. Instead she expressed her obedience: "Be it unto me according to thy word." She placed her social position, her marriage, even her way of life in jeopardy for the sake of God's will.

## Life Reflection:

If your life was suddenly interrupted by an angel's announcement, what do you think your reaction might be? Would you become excited? Shocked? Reluctant? A little of each?

If God told you today that He had a special plan for your life, how would you react? Acceptance? Happiness? Fear or doubt? Do you feel you can completely trust Him and that He wants only the best for your life?

## Mary's Confirmation

Mary received confirmation of God's favor in her life from several different sources:

- **God's Messenger.** God confirmed His will through His messenger, Gabriel (verse 26). The angel announced, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. . . . Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God." God had already extended His favor to Mary before she had surrendered to His plan, but her only proof at this point was the word of the angel, God's messenger.



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- **Inward Confirmation.** "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee:" (verse 35). The word "overshadow" means to envelop. What was going to take place in Mary's life was a direct act of God; the power of the Most High, the Holy Spirit, would wrap around and "overshadow" her. Overshadowing suggests the hovering presence of God. "The Lord is with thee" (verse 28).
- **Outward Confirmation.** Elizabeth, who was filled with the Holy Ghost, confirmed the favor of God on Mary's life. "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb" (verses 41, 42). She recognized through supernatural illumination and understanding that Mary was carrying the Messiah—the Savior of the world!

### **Mary's Participation**

After the confirmation of God's favor in her life, Mary was filled with joy, and she expressed herself in one of the most beautiful songs of praise ever recorded (verses 46-55).

- **Praise.** Mary rejoiced in what God had done in her life and what He was going to do for coming generations (verses 46-47). To magnify means to enlarge or amplify. When Mary received the confirmation of the Holy Spirit in her life, her response was for her life to draw attention to God—to make God larger.
- **Witness.** Because of the inward sign, the newborn life within her, Mary now knew the holiness, the mercy, the might, and the faithfulness of God (verses 49-55). The touch of the Holy Ghost caused her to erupt in perfect praise and thanksgiving to God.

## **The Word in My Life:**

What blessing do I need most from God? How can I feel the favor of God in my life? The Holy Ghost is God's approval, acceptance, and blessing on our life. The Holy Ghost is the very real presence of God that we can feel. When we receive the Holy Ghost, we become part of God's family; we belong, we matter, we are accepted. We are no longer outcasts or second-class citizens; we are part of His family.

Let's apply the lessons we learned from the life of Mary to determine how we too can feel the presence of God!

### **My Preparation.**



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How do I prepare myself to feel the favor of God?

Favor can be interpreted as surprising grace. If we want to feel the grace of God as Mary did, we must possess the same qualities—faith, humility, and obedience.

- **Faith—Believe the Word of God.** The first step toward feeling the favor of God is to believe what the Bible teaches. Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Humanity lost favor with God because of sin, but through Jesus Christ we can be reconnected to God. Romans 5:8 says, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Hebrews 11:6 tells us, "But without faith it is impossible to please him." Faith is taking God at His Word, trusting Him, and obeying His Word.

### Life Reflection:

What did Jesus Christ do to make it possible for me to feel God's favor?

Why do I need faith to feel the favor of God?

- **Humility—Repent of My Sins.** The second step toward feeling the favor of God is repentance. We know that there is a step beyond simply believing. Paul told the believers he met in Ephesus that they also needed to be baptized and to receive the Holy Ghost (Acts 19:1-6).

You may ask, "How could God love me? If God knew the real me, He wouldn't want to give His favor to me." The good news is that God does know you and you can still feel His favor. II Peter 3:9 says that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Repentance is true humility. When we realize who God is and what we are, we ask for forgiveness and turn away from our old life to a new life in Christ.

### Life Reflection:



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Why isn't belief in Jesus enough to bring the favor of God into my life?

What is repentance?

- **Obedience—Water Baptism in the Name of Jesus.** After you have believed and repented, the next step toward feeling the favor of God is water baptism in the name of Jesus. The word *baptize* means to immerse, and the first century church fulfilled the command of Jesus regarding water baptism by immersing believers in the name of Jesus. The proper way to be baptized is in the name of Jesus: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be save." (Acts 4:12).

### **Life Reflection:**

Why do I need to be baptized by immersion in the name of Jesus to feel the favor of God? (Read Matthew 3:16; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38, 41; Acts 8:12, 38-39; Acts 10:47-48; Acts 19:5)

What are the three steps I need to take to prepare myself to receive the favor of God in my life?

### **My Confirmation—When Will I Feel the Favor of God?**

After you have repented and are obedient to God's Word regarding water baptism in the name of Jesus, you're ready for the confirmation of God's favor on your life—the Holy Spirit. (Read Ephesians 1:13.)

- **God's Messenger.** The Bible is God's message to humanity. God speaks to us through His written Word (II Timothy 2:15). God also communicates with us through the spoken Word. Romans 10:14 states, "How then shall they call



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on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"

## Life Reflection:

How does God communicate with me today?

- **Inward Confirmation.** The Bible tells us in John 4:24 that God is a Spirit and often refers to God using the terms Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit. An individual can actually feel the power of God dwelling inside. The Holy Spirit will give you the power to live a new life. It is the guarantee of your inheritance of eternal life—feeling the favor of God for endless ages!

Perhaps you have asked yourself a question similar to Mary's, "How shall this be?" How do I experience the power of God in my life? In John 3:1-8 a man named Nicodemus puzzled over the statement of Jesus: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." To the many questions Nicodemus posed, Jesus gave this answer: "Except a man be born of *water* and of the *Spirit*, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

These verses of Scripture show us that being born of the water in baptism and being born of the Spirit by receiving the Holy Ghost are necessary for salvation—the ultimate feeling of God's favor!

## Life Reflection:

What is the Holy Ghost? (Read Ephesians 1:13-14; John 14:15-20.)

How do I know that the Holy Ghost is necessary for salvation? (Read John 4:24; John 3:3-8; Romans 8:9-11.)

In the Book of Acts chapter 2, verse 37, the people questioned Peter and the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" This question followed the outpouring of God's Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). The crowd of people that witnessed this event asked the Apostle Peter how they too could experience this



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blessing from God. Peter answered:

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:38-39).

## Life Reflection:

How do I know the Holy Ghost is for me today?

- **Outward Confirmation.** Speaking with tongues as God's Spirit gives the utterance is the first physical sign of the Holy Spirit in your life (Acts 2:4, Acts 10:45-46, Acts 19:6). Like the confirmation that Elizabeth gave to Mary concerning what God had done in her, speaking with tongues is the confirmation to you and to others that you have been filled with the Holy Spirit.

The favor of God was no more readily apparent in Mary's life than in Acts 1:14. The Bible tells us that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was in the upper room waiting for the promise of the Holy Ghost. The favor of God was upon her as the mother of Jesus, but far greater was the favor she received in her obedience to become a follower of Jesus. Mary was filled with the Holy Ghost!

## Life Reflection:

If you have not yet felt the favor of God, you have missed the greatest gift ever given—the gift of the Holy Spirit. God delights in you and desires to dwell in you.

How will I know that I have received the Holy Ghost? (Read Acts 2:4; Acts 10:45-46; Acts 19:6.)

***My Participation. What Will Happen After I Feel the Favor of God?***



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- **Praise** . A fitting response to the Holy Spirit in your life is praise. To understand God's love for you and to feel His favor in your life brings spontaneous, eruptive praise to the One who offers unconditional acceptance!
- **Witness**. Your life will be filled with joy that will overflow to others. Just like Mary, feeling the favor of God involves bearing Jesus. We must take Jesus to others who have not yet experienced His gracious acceptance (Acts 1:8).

## Life Reflection:

After I have felt the favor of God through the infilling of the Holy Ghost, what does God require of me? (Read Acts 1:8; Acts 4:33; Romans 14:16.)

## A Prayer from the Word of God:

Lord, help me to seek You, to feel after You, and to find You. I know that you are not far from me (Acts 17:27). I have read in Your Word that the gift of Your Spirit is for me (Acts 2:39). I want to respond to Your will for my life as Mary responded to You: "be it unto me according to thy word."

## More to Life...for this Week:

**Memorize this verse:** Acts 2:38-39

**Read this passage:** Acts 10

**Answer this question:** Did God hear the prayers of Cornelius? Did Cornelius receive the gift of the Holy Ghost? Was he baptized in Jesus' name?

Apply this to your life: By now you know that God is your loving Father Who hears and answers your prayers. Your Heavenly Father wants only the best for your life, and He "is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). Continue to seek Him daily. As you pray repent of any wrongdoing in word or deed; then ask Your Father for His gift of the Holy Ghost. If you ask Him, He will give it to you. (Read Matthew 7:7-11.) When you receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, you will speak in an unknown tongue, as



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God's Spirit gives you the ability. (Read Acts 2:4.) If you have not been baptized in Jesus' name, make a decision to do so in obedience to God's Word.

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