

Growing in Favor through Trust

Jeremy Weiland

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Feast of Tabernacles Sermon

Welcome to the Feast of Tabernacles 2021. I hope everyone is enjoying the Feast wherever it is in the world that you are right now. This sermon is being pre-recorded, and so far everything is looking pretty good. It looks like we're going to be able to come together for the Feast. So, that's pretty awesome especially considering last year, and well, even this year some aren't going to be able to, but I was one of those that wasn't able to attend last year because of Covid, but this year, you know, like I said, if everything goes to plan, I'll be there, or here, I guess I should say. And yeah, we just got to remember that things are going to be getting a lot worse out there, and in the time that remains that whenever we can get together, hopefully, we're all able to take full advantage of that, to be in fellowship.

Doing this recording here in this new little studio setup, and this is a first for me. It's kind of strange. The room is quite dark and there are some giant lamps here. One of them is a couple feet across. It's very bright. So, if you can imagine being in a dark room and having somebody shine flashlights in your eyes, that's kind of what I'm experiencing right now. So, if you see me squinting at some point here when I look up, that's probably why, because I don't know, hopefully my eyes adjust. So, we'll see how this goes.

Anyway, let's go ahead and jump right into the sermon this morning. The title of today's sermon is *Growing in Favor through Trust*.

It's important that as we move forward in time that we have a close relationship with God. We want Him on our sides at all times. Because what we are about to enter, like I was just saying, is going to make Covid look like such a cakewalk. Reading through the first chapter of the new book it really brings home how much of a shock this world is in for and how ugly things are going to get.

The world is going to be brought to humility, and we're going to be along for the ride. We're going to be tested. When that time comes, we want God to be able to fight our battles for us. We are going to want Him fully on our side. So, today we are going to look at how we can make sure that we are close to Him and what we need to do to guarantee that it stays like that.

We're going to look more in depth into what grace and faith are all about, and we are going to see how they play such an important role in God's plan for His Family, especially at this momentous time when the Millennium arrives, and God begins to work with a much larger number of people.

Grace and faith are two words that I don't particularly like. The world has so abused them, and sometimes if we aren't careful some of those notions can taint our own understanding, and if not taint, then at least they can take away or hide the true meaning of what the words are really about.

For those who were a part of the Worldwide Church of God, I am sure you know what I mean when you just look at, you know what the church was renamed to – Grace Communion. That should make us, yeah, want to throw up. It's just so much syrupy sweet fakeness. It's pretty disgusting.

But anyway, let's start out here by looking at how the word "grace" is used in scripture in the Old Testament. Interestingly enough, the word for grace in Hebrew was translated 38 times as "grace" and 26 times as "favor." So, that shows already how these words are very similar.

Let's look at the first instance of when it was used in the Old Testament with that of Noah. So, if you'll turn over with me to Genesis 6:7. We all know the story here; mankind became wicked and they're evil in all their ways.

When we come to **Genesis 6:7** and it says, **So, the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.** We know that this word here for "sorry" isn't really necessarily the best translation. A lot of times, you know, that it says even "regretted it," and we know that God didn't actually regret it. But it's interesting this word actually just means, that the root of it in Hebrew just means "to sigh deeply." So, you can imagine, you know, seeing God and seeing what was taking place on the earth and just letting out a big sigh, you know, like, really, "It's sad to see but..." Yeah, that's what was happening.

So, in **verse 8** it says, **But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.**

And in **verse 9** says, **This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.** So, because Noah walked with God, he found grace in His eyes. He found favor, and he and his family, as we know, were saved from the flood.

Let's look at another verse really quick here. Let's turn over to **Numbers 11:11**, and it says, **So, Moses said to the LORD, Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me?** So, here Moses is basically complaining that he has to work with far too many people, and so he's asking God, "Have I not found favor in Your sight?" Like, "What are you doing to me here? And if I have, then please give me some help!" That is exactly what God did in this instance, as we know.

So anyway, we see that these translations, whether it's this "favor" or "grace," it's the same word that was used in the Hebrew and they're used interchangeably, and we don't need to go through every instance here. But what these two examples do show, is how "grace" and "favor" are used in almost all of the instances in the Old Testament, and that is it's used in conjunction with finding it in somebody's sight or their eyes, and the vast majority of cases it's often referring to God.

So, you have these expressions, "if I have found favor in Your sight," or "if I have found favor in Your eyes," and in fact, the word is not really used outside of this context very often. I started to count through, and I saw that the first 49 of the 69 times that it is used in the Old Testament, it is used in this

combination, and it's used some more afterwards, but I just got tired of counting. But you get the picture.

So, this expression is very similar to how we speak today when we say, you know if someone is in someone's "good graces." That means, basically, that you are in one's favor, that you've earned their approval or regard.

So, based on this expression, we can see how those in the Old Testament were constantly seeking God's approval. In the Old Testament it was based on their obeying what God commanded. We know that until Abraham, only a few people walked side-by-side with God, like we just read about, Noah as well.

But afterwards, God began to work with a physical nation. The Israelites were God's special people. In other words, they were favored by God. They were favored far more above any other people on the earth. That special relationship began with Abraham and through his obedience and trust in God, and the physical Israelites were able to receive favor from God because of Abraham's actions.

Abraham earned God's approval. That doesn't mean that Abraham was perfect, by any means, but God looked into the heart, and He saw that Abraham's heart was in the right place. God recognizes that we are handicapped, so to say, and He built something into us that fights against His way of life. That is where God's mercy comes into play. Because He has to show us mercy because, "The wages of sin is death."

So, we see that God gives out His favor as a help. All of these scriptures in the Old Testament speak to that. The writers understand that they need God's help, and they are constantly seeking it. They want to have His favor, His grace, and they know that at the same time that God, the Almighty Ever Existing One, is not obliged to give it to us.

Those few that were worked with in the Old Testament are always seeking God's grace and favor. They understood that to sin was to go against God. If you go against someone, why would they give you favor? So, they really understood that what they were asking from God was a lot, because everyone sins, no one is perfect. That is why they always used this type of speech that makes them sound small. Like, "Harken Your ear onto me." This is like a sort of a plea to God, begging Him, basically, to have mercy and consider their petitions. This is the only way that God would listen to them, and they were showing humility.

Now, let's look a little deeper into this word for "favor" and "grace" that is used in the Old Testament. "Favor," of course, is a noun, and in the Hebrew, it is "hen." I believe they pronounce it "hein." Sounds kind of Dutch. But there is another version of this same word that is used as a verb and it's "hanan." What's interesting about this verb is that it literally means "to bend or to stoop." This is where you can start to have a little bit of additional or see a little bit of additional meaning in the word that comes into play. Because what are you doing if you bend or stoop to someone? Well, it's a way of showing humility.

We don't really use "grace" in its verb form, so usually when it's translated into English its translated as "to be gracious" or "to be dealt with graciously," and sometimes even as "making supplication."

That last one is very interesting. Let me read a definition really quick of "supplication." It says, "Supplication is a form of prayer, wherein one party humbly or earnestly asks another party to provide something, either for the party who is doing the supplicating (e.g., 'Please spare my life') or on behalf of someone else." So, in other words, to ask for favor or grace also means to ask it in a humble and earnest manner.

The verb of "grace" is sometimes translated even as "to have pity." Maybe that is not the best translation, but I think it shows, you know, that level of humility that the word also contains. If you ask somebody, "Please have pity on me," it can mean, "Please have mercy on me because," you know, "I am what I am." That is very much how we should be with our attitude with God as well.

We are stuck in these carnal bodies, and we must try to overcome, but, of course, you know, we are going to have times that we fall on our face. We need to ask God, basically, to understand that this is how we are and please to see us as what we are, as these weak, carnal human beings, and to show Him as well that our hearts are in the right place.

But this idea of coming before someone in a stooping manner or bending down, as I mentioned a moment ago, it's showing humility and it's showing that you recognize that there is a difference in levels. We ask God for favor; it must always be with humility. If we don't ask with a humble attitude then God will not work with us, and He sure won't give us His favor.

That is a huge point that we need to take note of, because it is exactly what happened with Satan and the demons. Their attitude changed and they raised themselves up. They thought they were greater than God and they forgot that there is a difference in positions and that they are not on the same level as God Almighty.

If we think we are something great, that, of course, can be dangerous for God if He were to give us more favor, so He won't. It's just that simple. You could say, in general, that humility is needed to receive of God's favor. Now, that doesn't mean that if you are humble God will work with you automatically. There are plenty of downtrodden and poor individuals in the world that have a humble spirit and yet God is not working with them and has not. That has not been part of His plan in the past 6,000 years. But I can tell you, that of those people that God has called, at least at the point of their calling they weren't cocky and they weren't arrogant, because if that were the case God would not be able to work with them.

Let's take a look at how this verb for "grace" and "favor" is sometimes used. I've got an example here we're going to check out in Esther 4:8. So, just to refresh in case we have forgotten, Haman is trying to have all of the Jews in the kingdom killed, and Mordecai, who is Esther's cousin, goes to her and he's telling her, "You gotta go before the king, and you gotta try to get this fixed."

So, right now we're going to jump into the story here in **Esther 4:8** and it says, **Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, and showed it to Esther, and to declare it to her, and to charge her that she should go unto the king to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people.**

So, take note this little section there where that says, "to make supplication to him." The verb form of "grace" is what's actually being used here. So, Esther is being told to make supplication unto the king and to make a special request to get this decree thrown out.

Like I mentioned just a bit ago, unfortunately for us, it's very strange to use the word in this verb form in English, and so the translations, you know, they usually just throw in "to make" to give it action. In English, it would also sound strange if we said, "to make favor," so they put in "supplication" in this case for "favor." In this case, the word "supplication" is carrying some of that meaning that the word "favor" or "grace" for us in English is actually lacking, and that missing part, again, is about bending down and having humility.

I really like this example because it's clear for us to see that, you know, if you are going before a king, well, you usually have to bow or literally get on your knee. That is a good way to visualize this attitude. Esther was going before the king full of humility when she was petitioning him. In asking for favor, she should be demonstrating a humble spirit. Esther was really needing to demonstrate humility to the king so that he would hopefully hear her petition. That is really the fuller meaning of how the word is used in Hebrew here.

There are plenty of other examples I could go into, but I don't think there is much point in it. We just need to keep in mind that favor (or grace) and humility go hand-in-hand. You can't go asking for favor without having a humble spirit and expect to receive any. Think about it with any other example in life where you might ask someone for their favor. If you are arrogant and you don't have a humble spirit, you won't get very far.

So, so far we have seen how grace and favor worked in the Old Testament. Now let's go ahead and take a look at how things progressed into the New Testament. If you can turn over with me to John 1:14 we'll pick things up there.

John 1:14 says, **And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.** So, we know that Christ received a massive amount of favor from God the Father beginning from when he was first born. Christ had the truth and knew it from a very young age. We know that when he was a kid he was dumbfounding the scholars of the time.

If we think about Abraham from earlier, he also received a massive amount of God's favor, and because of that was able to have his seed blessed above all others on the earth. The physical nation of Israel

came from him. This allowed for God's plan to further develop. But for that stretch in time, it was primarily physical.

Let's skip down to **verse 17—For the law was given to Moses, but grace and the truth came by Joshua Christ.** So, this scripture shows the maturation of God's plan. Yes, God gave the law to Moses to then give to the people, but Moses could only deliver those laws to the people by showing them and telling them what they were. He couldn't give them any more favor to help them to actually keep these laws. He couldn't place the truth in their minds, of the Israelites. The method for delivering God's truth was totally limited in that aspect.

But now with Christ everything changed; he came and died for our sins. This opened up the way to make it possible for more to have God's favor. God began to be able to show those He was working with way more favor than He did to those of physical Israel. Now we're able to have Christ living in us and have God's law come into our minds. I touched on that last year at the Feast, about how we are able to begin to have God's law written in our hearts. Christ showed that that overriding law is to love one another as he loved us. As we know, that's agape love, godly love, and if we have that, then we really don't even need to bother with the 10 Commandments, because they're basically all covered. Agape is that overriding law, and it's all about relationships.

So, look at that scripture again and see how much favor and opportunity the Church has been offered at this time, and think about how blessed you are to partake in that favor at this time when so very few have been offered what you have been offered. This is not something we should take for granted or take it lightly because we know what Christ had to endure to make it all possible.

Now, not everyone in the Church is being prepared to be part of the 144,000, but some are, of course. I don't know if anybody has ever done the math just to consider how very few 144,000 people are throughout man's 6,000 years on earth. If you were to take 6,000 and divide it by the 144,000 then you would get 24 people per year. So, if it were strictly a yearly harvest and you had the same amount of people every year, then there would only be 24 people per year that would become part of the 144,000, and if you were born in that 6,000-year time period then your odds are pretty small. I'm not saying this to discourage anyone, of course, but the reality is, the 144,000 is a really tiny number.

And you could look at it another way. If you were just to take 7.9 billion people, which is the earth's population as of today and you were to say that all of the 144,000 were to come from those that are living today (which, of course, we know is not the case), but just for example's sake if you were to do that then you would have about a 1 in almost 55,000 chance of becoming part of this group of people.

So, just to put that into perspective, I was curious of, like, you know, what would it be, how likely are you to get struck by lightning? The National Weather Service estimates that you have about a 1 in 15,000 chance of getting struck by lightning in your lifetime. So, just by that statistic alone, that means that being part of the 144,000 from today's population, 7.9 billion, means that you are more than three times

more likely to be struck by lightning than you would to become a part of the 144,000. That's not even taking into consideration, of course, all of the people who have ever lived for the thousands of years before.

So again, these statistics shouldn't discourage anyone, but instead you should consider how special our calling really is. Even if you haven't been called to be part of the 144,000, but instead to live on into the Millennium, you're still very blessed. You have a huge head start over everybody else in the world right now.

So, we should take some time and maybe just think about that a little bit during the Feast, of, you know, how grateful are we for that? And we should be grateful for it, and we should be grateful that God has offered us what He has and that He's shown us the favor that He is showing us now.

Let's turn over to **Acts 15:11**. It says, **But we believe that through the grace of our Lord Joshua Christ we shall be saved, even as they.** So again, this is saying much the same thing again. But it is through Christ that we can receive God's favor, His spirit that can live within us. Without that, we have no chance for salvation.

Let's skip over a few pages to **Acts 20:24—But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Joshua, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.**

Luke here is talking about his job as a minister, which is to testify to the gospel, the good news about the grace of God. In other words, the good news about God's favor. That favor was starting to be offered to the Church. God was giving His spirit through Christ to anyone who would become a part of the Church. No longer was it just limited to a physical nation, but everyone now had the opportunity to become a part of spiritual Israel, everyone in the Church, that is.

That's some good news, obviously. Just think how it's going to change once again when the Millennium is here. The Church is about to grow like it has never grown before. That is what the 144,000 have been prepared for. They are going to be priests of God and Christ, as it says in Revelation, and there is going to be much more of Elohim to go around and to help expand God's plan for mankind.

Let's turn over to **2 Peter 3:17-18—You, therefore, beloved, seeing you know these things before, beware lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Joshua Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.**

Peter is telling us here that we must grow in grace. So, what does that actually mean? Well, it means that if we are steadfast in our beliefs and if we don't falter, that God will continue to give us more favor. He will pour out more of His spirit on us. And is there greater favor from God that you could possibly receive

than to have His spirit dwelling in your life to help guide you? He can help us with any battles that we come up against. That's why the scripture says, you know, "If He is for us, who can be against us?"

Paul is really telling us here to take advantage of what God is offering to those in the Church. We can seek God's favor, and then through the pouring out of His spirit we can also grow in knowledge. Again, this is what the gospel of grace is all about that we just read about.

Paul is admonishing us here to grow in grace, and it's also interesting because it implies that we can do something to grow in God's favor, and that is totally true, we can. Traditional Christianity likes to think that these concepts are static, that grace is just something that God gives for free and that that's the end of the story, basically. But what we're being told here is we're being told to grow in grace, and it shows that there must be a change, that is, going from less grace to more grace.

Well, that is where we find out that it is merit based, that we must show fruit, we must grow. And if you aren't, then that grace, that favor won't be growing.

Let's see what else Paul has to say about how grace has worked in his life, and we'll turn over to see an example in **1 Corinthians 15:10—But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God was with me.**

Now, this verse perfectly explains a balanced understanding of how God's favor works. Paul recognized that by God's spirit living in him, he is who he is, "That by the grace of God I am what I am." In other words, he wouldn't have been able to grow to be where he is without God's favor. Without that favor, he would be just like the world, not having access to His spirit.

Then he says that God's grace towards him was not in vain, but that he took full advantage of that favor that God gave him. Plenty of people through time have been given favor by God and have had the opportunity to enter into the Church, but so many of them have left. The favor that God showed them did not grow. That initial favor that God gave them was, in that sense, in vain. They didn't grasp a hold of it, and they didn't take advantage. Paul says on the contrary, that he did, it was not in vain.

He goes on to say that he labored more than the rest but that the result of his labor was not of his doing but of God's favor. So how can that be? Well, it was this favor that he received from God that was able to work through him. That's what made him what he was. That is a spiritual help. He is giving all of the credit back to God here and he recognizes what he was without God.

In verse 9, he talks about how he persecuted the Church. Let's take a look at that real quick. He said, **verse 9—For I am the least of the apostles, that am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.** Paul, he had to have an awful remorse for that. He was very aware of what he was without God, and once he was called and given God's favor, I can only imagine how hard he would have worked, always thinking about what he had done in the back of his mind.

Now, he just mentioned how he was “the least of the apostles” and saying how he worked harder than all of them. He had a lot further to go in many aspects than the other apostles did. I mean, to go from being an enemy of God to being one of the apostles was the largest change that happened to any of them. The others didn’t persecute the Church.

Now, some may read verse 10 and think that because he was giving God all the glory that it was only because of God, meaning that it was out of Paul’s control. But that is not the whole truth in what he is saying here. It was indeed in his control, otherwise he would not mention how much he had labored. What he is really saying is that God blessed him with more favor because he worked so much, but that favor that came from God as a result is what brought his increase.

We need to be balanced in how we look at how this process works. There is work from our side that is needed, and the glory goes back to God, but both parties enjoy the success, both parties work.

Just look at what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:6. Let’s turn over there real quick. **1 Corinthians 3:6.** He says, **I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that plants anything, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase. Now, he that plants and he that waters are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.** So, we see our contribution is clearly needed. This scripture gives further insight into what Paul was saying later in Chapter 15 of Corinthians.

We can recognize work that we have done, there is nothing wrong in that. Paul says that he planted, and Apollos watered. That is just the fact. But we need to have a humble attitude about it and recognize that the results that come from it are because of God. Because when you get down to it, everything is from God. You can build something, and it comes out great, but where did all the materials come from? Who created them to even make whatever physical thing you built? Yeah, they all come from God.

In some ways, understanding this will give insight into how God’s government works. God is on top, and that’s always, and that is how it must be forever into the future. Because we are going to build some amazing things in the God Family, and we really have no comprehension. And what happens when you make something awesome? You think, “Oh, I’m so amazing! Look what I did.” I am sure that is exactly what Satan did as well and he forgot that the building blocks or the Legos, you could say that were used, that those were all manufactured by God. We have to always give praise back to God. It is a matter of understanding our position in the government. In God’s Family, no one will ever be allowed to be lifted up with pride.

The world has not looked to God as the creator of everything, and they’re are all lifted up with such great pride now. The world doesn’t even have God in their thoughts. It doesn’t give Him the credit or the glory that is due. That is why the U.S. is going to be one of the first nations here to fall, because it has been given so much and has not listened, and it’s been lifted up with pride, and it has forgotten that everything does come from God.

We think we are so great because we have all this technology that we have today, but the reality is that we just found a large deposits of dead prehistoric animals and dinosaurs that were covered with sand for millions of years. Then they were buried deeper and deeper, and eventually through great heat and pressure were turned into oil. And so, we have oil, and something that we can burn.

If you think about it, how advanced is that, really? Is it really any more advanced than just burning wood? We just happened to find a huge stockpile of it, and it's allowed us to do everything that we do today, and I mean everything. It is essentially free energy that we've received.

We tend to think oftentimes that it's only for transportation, as in the gas that we use to fill our cars. But it touches everything that makes our modern life possible. We have forgotten, where does the oil come from? Most of the estimates that they have for how old this is, the oil is, it comes up to be around 100 million years old. So, just thinking about how long it has taken for that oil to be created so that we can use it now, I mean, that should really humble us and to show us how small and how limited we are. Because it's difficult for us to even grasp how long a 100 million years is, let alone the process and everything that it went through to be able to become something that we can actually use today.

Now after we've had this great stockpile of free energy, we have become dependent on it, become dependent on burning it. We've been choking the entire earth, polluting it. And so, now there are a lot of people that think we're just going to automatically and quickly switch over to green energies, but we still can't figure out how to get anywhere near the amount of energy that we presently get from burning oil. We are so far off.

We haven't really even spent too much time thinking of alternatives to burning oil in these past one hundred plus years. So, with this new "green" energy, we might be able to produce a fraction of the energy that we do from oil, but how is it really going to work? Are you going to tell people they can only drive a fraction of what they do now, that they can only use the AC for a fraction of the time? Or are you going to charge people what the real price of food would be if it was produced without burning oil? And if you did that, no one would be able to buy any of the comforts that they enjoy in this modern world, no disposable income for video games or the latest iPhone.

The truth is, if there wouldn't be a 3rd world war coming and with Christ returning, then we would just burn this whole planet down just for mankind to be comfortable. And still yet, we think we are so great.

Anyway, if we remember that everything in life comes from our Great Creator, then instead of being lifted up with pride then we'll look at these things that our hands have made, and we can actually be filled with humility and gratefulness. It should make us so grateful to God for giving us these opportunities that He has.

So yeah, we can say, “Yeah, we worked on this,” or “We did this,” but we can’t create something from nothing like God can, and that’s something we’re not to forget. He is the ultimate creator, but He allows us to work with Him and that’s pretty awesome.

Well, let’s get back on this topic of grace. You know, many in traditional Christianity like to teach that grace is free and that it is a gift that keeps on giving. There are no requirements, just giving for giving. They like to say that obedience is not needed, but we know that is completely false. God will absolutely not keep giving His favor and His spirit if we do not strive to live as He has commanded. Who are we to think that we can just pick and choose the laws of God that we want to obey?

The example we saw a minute ago about Apollos and Paul working together with God shows the hierarchy of our relationship. The next examples we are going to look at, they also reiterate that hierarchy, but they also show how God works to mold us. We’ll see that the work is from both our sides, and that it is based on a relationship. God does not work by just giving grace freely to us without us making efforts to change. So, let’s have a look here.

Let’s turn over to **John 15:1**. He says, **I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. (Verse 5)—I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.**

So, I like these examples a lot that deal with fruit and gardening. It’s so nice if you have that opportunity, to be able to go outside and to pick fruit off of the tree. I don’t know why, but it is very exciting, and you get to look around, search for the good pieces, the ones that are ripe, and it feels good when you are able to find them. It’s different than if when you go into the supermarket. There is something about picking it off the tree.

I imagine God feels like that too, that He has that type of excitement when He sees a fruit in our lives, but that’s much more rewarding I’m sure than picking up of a physical fruit.

But in the scripture it clearly says that we are the branches, and we are supposed to bear fruit. In other words, God has requirements for these branches, which is, they are to bear fruit. If you don’t bear fruit, then He cuts you off from the vine. And, you know, if we have a tree and it doesn’t bear fruit, we would do the same! I mean, who wants a branch that has no purpose, no use? If that’s the case then it’s just there needlessly sucking nutrients, sucking water, and then taking away from other branches, not allowing them to make, you know, really big, nice, juicy fruits.

So, this is clear. It shows that God expects results, and the more results we can achieve, the more God will continue to work with us. Says that every branch that bears fruits, He prunes. So, this is showing, you know, that He goes, and He cuts back a little bit every time after it fruits, so that it can encourage more fruit to bear.

This is very much similar to the scripture that we read about growing in grace. As the vinedresser, God multiplies His favor. He gives us more help, and it is a type of compound interest, if you will. He invests in us. Just like if you prune a tree, that is an investment in your time and your energy. You hope to be repaid with that compound interest when you later go back, and you pick the fruit. That's the part where the excitement comes from, to a certain extent, because you are reaping the reward from what you did before, your investment. The same thing happens with God and us.

So, we have seen that we can receive God's favor, but to continue receiving it, there is work on our side that is needed. So, now let's take another look at this question that we saw in the Old Testament where it's asking, "If I have found favor in your sight," or "If I have found favor in your eyes." What they're really asking, basically is, "If I have pleased you then please do this for me." So, the question we should ask ourselves is, "How do we please God?"

Let's turn over to 1 John 3:22 and we'll have a look here. I'll look at a few scriptures about what it says about pleasing God. So, that's **1 John 3:22**. It says, **And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.** So, right now we're at the Feast of Tabernacles and we're commanded to be here. So, in that sense we are keeping God's commandment and that's pleasing to Him. But of course, there are many other ways, a lot of other commandments, and many other things that God looks for in obeying Him, so let's look at another verse here.

We'll skip down to, yeah, the next one, just go to **verse 23—And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Joshua Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.**

So, first, what does it mean to believe on the name of Joshua Christ? It is spoken often in the New Testament about believing in his name. Is it just to believe that a person with this name existed? No, not at all. Those names are important. They have meaning. We are to believe in the meaning that is behind them because that tells part of God's plan. "Joshua" means "God saves" and "Christ" means "the anointed one." It doesn't state the third name here in this verse, but we know that that third one he's also referred to as "Immanuel," which means "God is with us."

You take all three of these names, it tells us a great deal of what the role of God's Son is and why he was sent. So, if you put it all together you could say, he is the anointed one to be king. He was sent to save us by allowing for God to live in us. So, that's pretty incredible. If you just look at that right there it tells the whole story. It's pretty crazy when the world does not grasp what his true purpose was and why he even came, and it's all summed up in these names! But, you know, we, of course, know that they haven't been given the opportunities and their eyes haven't been opened yet.

We are commanded to believe on the name, the actual purpose and the process, the meaning behind His name. And if we don't then it is not possible for us to properly love one another with agape. We

don't have God's love unless we have God living in us. That is the only way that we can even be able to keep the commandment that Christ gave us, that we are to love one another. Again, if we obey God and live as He has instructed us, then we will please Him.

Let's turn over to Colossians 1. We'll check out **Colossians 1:10**. It says, **So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.**

This scripture again illustrates a process of growing closer to God. As time goes by, we are expected to bear fruit, and with that also to become wiser. As we move away from sin, away from our carnal pulls, away from Satan's influence, our minds and thoughts begin to be more like God's. As a result, we should have more fruit. God continues to prune back the vine after we bear the fruit, He tests us, and that gives us something more to overcome and it gives us the possibility to bear even more and more fruit. The cycle keeps going.

In short, we can say that God is pleased whenever we make efforts to live His way of life. He wants to see us overcome. He made us carnal, and He made us an enemy against Him. Holy righteous character has to be developed. He essentially put us into these human bodies so that we would have to fight. That's why it talks about putting on the whole armor of Christ. Because what God has given us through Christ is the complete battle kit, so to say. The whole system of baptism and having the laying on of hands and the receiving of God's spirit is what guides us and helps us to develop God's ways. Like it says, His ways can then become our ways.

Let's turn over now to Hebrews for a moment and we will look at another scripture that speaks about pleasing God. We're going to look at **Hebrews 11:6**. It says, **But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.** So, if we are looking to please God and to be rewarded by Him, in other words, to receive of His grace, of His favor, then we are told that we must have faith and seek Him. In fact, it states that without faith it is impossible to please Him.

Let's go a little bit deeper into this topic. Faith is another one of those words that to me is similar to grace, in the sense that it's been totally twisted by the world and distorted. If we're not careful some of these wrong ideas can hurt us, because they are just used in such a fake, syrupy way.

Well, let's look at the word "faith" for example. In Greek, the word "faith" is called "pístis," and if we were to translate that word into English, probably "trust" and "belief" would be the closest words. However, there are lots of small meanings that can be wrapped into the word, and this is essentially true because of how the word was used in everyday life.

Here is just a short list of words that kind of wrap up some of the meanings and nuances it has. So, we have, "trust, trustworthiness, honest, credibility, faithfulness, good faith, confidence, assurance, pledge,

guarantee, credit, proof, credence, belief, legal trust, protection, security,” and I could keep going on and on.

In Latin, the word for “faith” is “fide.” It has all the exact same meanings as it does in Greek, and the only reason I bring this up is because we have probably all heard of something being described as “bona fide,” and in that sense it’s actually meaning “good faith,” and we use it today to describe something as being an original, you know, it’s “the real deal,” it’s authentic. So, whenever somebody is using that term they are trying to express that you can trust it because it is true.

In everyday terms faith was used in any kind of transaction between people. It is basically, you know, legal mumbo jumbo that people use to form a relationship and safeguard themselves from getting burned. From that is where we get such legal instruments we know today as “trusts.” We still use all of these same legal terms today even.

Each party of a commercial transaction has to perform certain actions at certain times in a process. It can be as simple as I pay you first and then you deliver a product to me. But it can also be much more complicated. If there is a lot of money involved then maybe you get a middleman type of escrow for handling payments or maybe there are portions that are paid for portions of work that are completed.

And if someone doesn’t perform what is expected, then the trust or faith is destroyed. So, if you were to deliver, let’s say, 25% of the work and then you don’t receive 25% of the payment that you had agreed on beforehand, then your complete transaction would have a breakdown. You wouldn’t be able to go any further with it. Then you’d have complete chaos! That is why we have these types of legal systems today. Because it’s hard to trust people, and especially when money is involved!

So, trust and money, they really go hand and hand. Just look at our money in the U.S. the “greenback,” you know. It says on it, “In God we trust.” Which is actually pretty funny because we see that the world actually does not put their trust in God whatsoever, especially when it comes to the financial system. Our whole system is based on credit chains. One person or one institution will give credit to another one and then that one will give credit to another one, and then to another one, and then at some point then someone is probably investing it into the stock market to go back and then pay money back to another one. Then that one pays money to another one further down the chain. So, if there is ever a breakdown in this chain then the whole system can fall apart.

Now, the world trusts this system; that’s what they put their faith into. But it is such a fragile system and God is not involved with it, although at sometimes here He might be actually holding it up because it’s like a house of cards just waiting to fall. He’s just holding it up until it’s His timing to let it go. But this system, it keeps growing and it keeps growing. It’s really amazing to see. But we know that it can’t be trusted. And you would think, didn’t 2008 prove that? But instead, people keep putting their trust into it.

That is also why they are always speaking of confidence in the markets, because without confidence then the whole system will break down. Everyone must keep believing in it. There has to be that faith in it. Keep believing that the good times won't end. But if somebody thinks for an instance that they're not going to get their money returned in this long line of credit chains, then they are going to stop giving it out. That's what happens when, you know, there's ever any issues, then the first thing the banks do is they stop lending out money and everyone tries to gather up their money and they try to get it out of everywhere that they have it stashed in all these different institutions. But we know that that ship is going to be sinking soon, and we know that they are all going to be grasping for whatever they can as it goes down.

But, you know, faith, as we've seen here, it's really based on trust, and in a relationship with trust there are expectations. No commercial transaction is based on people just believing that they aren't going to get ripped off. Just believing you're not going to get ripped off is not going to protect you. So, there must be proofs and people must demonstrate that they can be trusted.

That there tells us that faith is something that must be demonstrated in this relationship. Like I mentioned a minute ago, if you complete 25% of a large project and that person doesn't pay you the agreed upon 25% then that payment is their demonstration of trust. If you don't get it, then how can you trust that person to pay you anything more once any more work is complete? So, the transaction would breakdown right away and that would be the end of it; no trust and the deal is off.

So, how do we demonstrate our faith? Well, there is one main step that everyone in God's Church must first take to demonstrate our willingness to live God's way of life. That is baptism, of course. That is a physical thing that shows to God what we believe and that we want His way. We ask for forgiveness of our past sins and for their remission. That demonstrates our trust (our faith) in Him. That is one of the main ways that we can begin to receive God's favor, His grace, if you will. When we come to that point, we are to bury our old selves and the way we were in the world, full of selfishness and captive to our own carnal ways. We are to come out of that watery grave a new person then. We're to walk side by side with God.

Last year at the Feast I spoke of these covenant contracts that God has made with mankind and His Church. Baptism, in many ways, is our way of signing that contract with God. First, God has to call us out of the world to offer us that contract. He offers us favor (grace), and that is not owed to us. To be called by God is to receive of His favor, and we don't receive it because we are somehow special. None of us deserve to be called. That is something we are to remember, and that should help us to continue to have a humble spirit.

Then once we sign the contract, so to say, then we start this process of growing in God's ways and growing in our goal of becoming part of Elohim. Then God will continue to give us more favor, more grace so that we can continue to overcome. But we must seek Him and ask Him for the help just as those

in the Old Testament did. They went before God in a very humble manner. Like when they asked for supplication in prayer. It is from a lowly level, looking up to God, knowing that He is all powerful and we are weak carnal beings. We are what we are, and we need His help. That type of spirit shows God what our heart is like.

That is further demonstration to Him about our character. So, if He sees that then He is more likely to answer our prayers and help us through whatever difficulties we are going through. Favor and grace will abound, as it says, if we do our part, then God will continue to pour out His spirit on us. It is pretty simple.

Again, the world's view of faith is totally distorted. They don't understand. God has not called them and opened their eyes, so how can they understand? They are not able to distinguish the context in which different apostles present the topic. If you were just to read over certain scriptures it can be confusing – one area seems to say that you're saved by faith and not by works, and then another area says that you are saved through faith and not of ourselves or by our works. Do these scriptures contradict each other? Well, hopefully, we know that they don't. But let's go through a couple of them here so that we can make sure that we have a balanced understanding of the subject.

Let's turn over to **Ephesians 2:8**. It says, **For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast.**

So, first in this whole process, God must give us favor and call us out of the world. That is a gift that everyone in the Church of God has received. What happens then once we have been given favor or grace, after we have been called? Well, God opens our eyes and our ears; He gives us truth. With that truth that God gives us, we can then begin to trust Him, in other words, have faith in Him. If we trust God then that also means we believe Him.

Then the scripture points out again that it is not because we are great. We can only have our eyes opened and our ears opened once God has called us. We all sin and we know that God cannot be around sin. So it is only by His power that He can and does call people out of this captivity.

But there is a response that is needed so that grace and favor will abound. Because there are plenty of people who have been called throughout the years and they have been able to plainly understand God's word, but many of them aren't able to make that leap forward and actually commit to this way of life. Maybe it's because of the pulls of family members or friends or maybe it's because they can't tell their boss that they won't work on the Sabbath. If they don't commit and obey what God says, if they don't keep the Holy Days, if they don't give tithes, offerings, etc., then all of their new knowledge will slip away from their minds as quickly as it entered.

That can happen as well after we've been baptized. If we stop keeping the Sabbath, for example, as we should, then God can take away His favor and He'll take away that spirit that He gives to us that helps us

out in our lives. The same thing happens with tithing or any of the other of His commandments that He's given us. This should all be super basic to us. We should learn that right away after coming into God's Church.

If we look at the scripture again though, it says that by grace we have been saved through faith and not of ourselves. The world tries to manipulate the meaning of this by saying that because it is not of ourselves that there is just nothing we can do. In other words, that grace is just given without the need of a response from our side.

But that is not what it is saying here. What it is saying is that God's favor is what saves us. That part is true; it is God's spirit that allows us to be more like God. God gives us His mind. It is God's mind that actually saves us, not our carnal physical minds. How do we receive of God's mind, of His favor to help guide us in life? From believing what God says and acting on that belief. If you believe God, then you will obey Him.

Let's turn over to **James 2:14**. It says, **What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says that he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?** So, in the last verse we just read, and it said that it is by God's grace and His favor that we are able to be saved through grace, that grace is a gift. And that's true. Because He doesn't owe it to us. Just because a child obeys a parent doesn't mean that the child deserves to be showered with presents from the parents. Same thing here.

But some in the world try to twist the meaning of that verse to say that we just have to believe that God and Christ exist, and that that is how we can be saved, because it does say it is not of works. But we know that that is not true. We see that here in James. The question is being posed, "Can you have faith without works?"

He is asking, "If someone says they have faith," in other words, they say that they trust and believe in God, but then at the same time they have no works, no fruit in their lives (if that is the case), then can just their trust or belief in God save them?

He goes on, and we'll see **verse 15** here he says, **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?**

This is a pretty funny example, because if somebody needs food and they need clothing because they're naked and you just go and tell them, "Go in peace, be filled and warmed with clothes," well, you know, you're not actually helping them out too much there. Obviously, actions speak louder than words and words alone here aren't going to fill their belly or keep them warm!

Skip to **verse 17**—**Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.** Ah ha! So very clear! You can say you believe all you want, but if your actions don't show that you actually believe then your faith

is dead. Why is it dead? Because if your actions don't demonstrate your trust or belief in God, then do you really believe Him?

Going back to that example earlier about the 25% payment. If you don't make that payment then you are not demonstrating trust in your relationship of the transaction. That is the whole point being made here. If you really have faith in God, then you will have a response and there will be action, and that action will produce fruit. Then you ask God for more favor and grace and He'll give it to you, and you get more understanding, and you act on it and you produce more fruit in your life, and then the cycle keeps on going.

Let's look at **verse 18. It says, 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 with my works.** So, he brings it home even stronger here saying that his works show his faith. It is about action and not talk.

It's sad how the world has totally messed with these ideas and how they just pick and choose scriptures to justify inaction. As we have seen today, it is all about our relationship with God through Christ. It is not a one-way relationship. We are fellow workers, as it speaks about, and the Greek word for that, if you remember, is "synergos." That's, again, where our word "synergy" comes from, and it's a perfect way of describing the kind of relationship that we do have.

None of this is really new to us. We understand how this whole process works—how God does the calling, how that is a gift and it's a pearl of great price. Then to think of how we can go before God through Christ, who paid the ultimate price, and have the possibility to have a relationship that goes both ways, it's pretty amazing just to understand that fact alone.

The world doesn't have faith in God, but they like to talk about it. When you look at what traditional Christianity believes, it's easy to see how Satan has made a concerted effort to hide the truth. This so-called faith that people supposedly have does not demonstrate actual belief in God. Instead, it's just another emotion that you are supposed to work up by itself. It becomes a mystery to people, really. I mean, how do you work up this belief, this faith that you're supposed to have?

And if you think about it, I mean, could traditional Christianity be any more confusing? Could the three-musketeer's trinity be anymore more difficult to understand? I mean, when you admit that one of your biggest doctrines is a complete mystery and that it can't be understood, doesn't that just scream out Babylon, confusion?

I, for one, can't wait until this type of confusion is dealt with in the world. Because, if it's not of the truth, then it's a lie and it's confusing, and the convoluted ideas that exist out there just give me a headache. Can you imagine believing in these kinds of off-the-wall doctrines that the world believes in? How sad would that be, to live in such darkness? How thankful are we that we have been called out of all that? It

should be really scary to think that through disobedience and not trusting in God that we could even fall back into it.

So, we need to not forget that if we ever stop producing fruit that our relationship with God will dry up. The truth that we see as obvious now, it can slip away from us, just like what happens to those that are called but they don't actually make the leap forward. For a moment in time they see God's truth, but after inaction on their part it disappears, that favor is gone.

Just like they lose the truth, so can we. And if you think about it, it's a little bit akin to suddenly losing lots of IQ points all of a sudden. Imagine that. Because if God's spirit leaves us and we can't see the truth, then we are basically becoming stupid. Seriously! And that should be scary. I don't think anyone wants to become more stupid. I sure don't!

Every year that goes by, I want to be less stupid than the year before. That's a pretty good goal I think. You think like, back 10, 20 years ago, well, I knew much less than I do now and well, I know that I sure don't want to go back then, and I am sure none of you want to go back either. That is probably one of the only good things about aging is that with time you learn more than what you did before. But if you have been in the Church for 2 years, 5 years, 10 years or more, think of how much truth God has given you in that time. You don't want to lose it! Instead, you want it to grow, and you want to, you know, "increase in the knowledge of God," as we read earlier. That is what wisdom is about.

So, how thankful are we that we understand the truth? Even more so, how thankful are we that we're able to actually engage with God at this present moment and begin to have our minds cleaned and freed?

Faith is not something that has to be worked up. That is a false protestant idea. It is not about just believing, as we know the demons and Satan also believe God, but that doesn't mean have faith. It is not about blind faith either, or just believing for believing sake. Or some in traditional Christianity also speak of faith alone. No, that relationship that trust or faith is built on is based on actions — actions from God and actions from our side.

Go back to the example about Apollos's watering. That shows, again, how that process works. It is everyone working together, a synergy where compound interest is built up. Everyone does their smaller part to make something big and grand together. Then faith, as in your trust in God, should continue to grow in this process. God gives us truths that we didn't see before. We learn about His way of life. That is God's action in the relationship. He helps open our minds.

We, on the other hand, see those truths, and that in return should allow us to trust God even more. It is a synergy in this relationship and it's circular and continues to grow. In a nutshell, that is how faith should grow. Not some fake syrupy protestant type of faith.

So, faith isn't just about saying you believe, it is about demonstrating that you believe. The old saying of "actions speaking louder than words" really apply here. Because if you truly believe God and want His way of life, then you will show it in your actions. That is the fruit!

Let's hop onto the topic about faith and doctors or medication. You know, if you refuse to go to the doctor or get help for yourself when you are sick, how are you demonstrating faith to God? How can you expect God to heal you when you are just sitting back and just believing that He will intervene? Tell me another example in life where God works like that.

If you want a better job, do you just sit at home on the couch because you have such a strong belief that God will give you something better? How does that fit into the example of Apollo's watering? Did he say "I, Paul, planted, and Apollos sat there in the field believing that God would send rain, just waiting?" No, Apollos had to water! Does that mean Apollos didn't have faith that God would send the rains? Was Apollos in error because he watered?

Now, it's a pretty good example, I think, because it shows the foolishness of any such thinking about faith. We have been made physical and we have this physical planet where we can learn from. How is doing whatever we need to do in a medical sense for the benefit of our own health any different than that of eating good physical food?

You know, you can have a small accident where your wrist gets cut, and if you don't wrap it then you could easily bleed to death. So, should you just work up some faith and believe that God is going to perform some miracle to close your wound? Or should you go and grab something and wrap it and stop the bleeding?

So, I hope no one would agree that it would be a lack of faith to stop the bleeding by wrapping it or putting it in a band-aid. And hopefully, no one else is drawing the line somewhere else and saying, "Ok, well, that would be fine to do, but going to a doctor because of some other ailment or getting some other kind of treatment is a lack of faith" somehow. Because that is not balanced. That doesn't come from the Bible. That is like the Jews who go off the wall and they start adding to the law things that were never put there in the first place and then treating their little additions that are unbalanced, treating those like they're the real law.

Now, that's not to say that if we are in an accident and in a coma, some type of a vegetative state that we need to go as far as to be hooked up to machines to keep us alive, or there are similar other circumstances that happen like that as well. But we need to have balance in this area and going to a doctor is definitely not demonstrating a lack of faith.

But what are we told to do when we are sick? Well, we are told that we're to go to an elder for anointing. Doing that is a demonstration of our faith to God.

And what does it mean to ask for anointing? Does it mean that we believe that God will heal us from whatever ails us? Well we sure hope so, because we don't like to suffer, but we know that God may or may not heal us from whatever we are suffering from. So, how then do we demonstrate our faith by asking for anointing? Well, it is demonstrated in the asking, as we are told to do so! By doing so we are being obedient to God. That is a signal from us to God that we trust in Him no matter what the outcome may actually be.

If we actually think that then when we are asking for anointing then that can be a real challenge us. Maybe the biggest one of your life. You may be fully trusting God that your life is in His hands, but it's not just your physical life. Do we really think that God knows what is best for us? If you are faced with something very serious with your health, then that can be incredibly difficult to address.

We just need to remember that when it comes to health and faith, that believing that our lives are in God's hands does not equate with the belief that God will grant us the gift of physical healing. That applies first and foremost to asking for anointing and then by doing whatever we can in a physical sense to get back to good health.

Let's look again at Hebrews 11:6. I know we already turned there but would like to look again there really quickly. That's **Hebrews 11:6**, and it says, **But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.**

Let's take notice of this word here that's used for "believe." In Greek that word is "pisteúō." And hopefully, that sounds familiar. If you were listening a little bit ago, then you would know that the word for "faith" before was "pístis." And so, "pisteúō" is just the verb that is translated as "faith" in the same verses as before.

So, this is similar to what we looked at earlier, too, in the Old Testament with the word for "grace" as a noun, and then also as a verb. So, it's technically, you know, being used twice here in this verse you could say. Here is one of the definitions I found, and it is "to believe; to put one's faith in, trust, with an implication that action based on that trust may follow."

So, many times the word "believe," when it is used in the New Testament it is actually implicating that there is an action based on that belief that will follow.

How do we demonstrate our trust in God? Well, it should be clear by now, it's by our actions. If we truly believe God, we will have a response to what He gives us. Again, it's a two-way relationship of co-workers. We are to believe in God, not just have beliefs about God as the world does. Believing in God requires us to put on that whole armor of God and go into battle. We can then go before God in a humble spirit and ask Him for more favor.

The times we are about to go into, they're going to be tough and they're going to be some of the most difficult that we have ever faced, and we need to make sure that we are close to God, make sure that our relationship is stronger than ever, and we're going to need His favor more than we have ever needed it before.

In closing here let's look at a rather different use of the word "faith" as it was used here in the Old Testament. We're going to turn over to Exodus 17:8. **Exodus 17:8—Then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand. So, Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon. And Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.**

So, this must have been quite a sight for the children of Israel. I can only imagine seeing that when Moses' hands were raised that they were winning and as soon as they came down that they were losing. It must have been something from a comedy, you know, to win something like that. So, you can better believe that they were going to do anything that they could do to make sure that his hands were staying up in the air!

Moses must have been really exhausted, too, if you think about it, even with the help from the others. I don't know if you've ever done any of those types of exercises where they have you lift up an arm or lift up a leg and for the first moment you're like "Hah, that's easy! What kind of workout is this?" But then you get into it and a minute later, you know, you're crying and you're saying, "Get me out of this position! It's really like torture."

Anyway, thankfully, Moses had some help here. So, these guys were helping hold up his arms, and they even gave him a chair, so, that was good for him. But surprisingly here in the scripture the word for "faith" is actually being used. It's translated as "steady." So, in other words, Moses' hands were faithful and true, not wavering. Sometimes the word is even translated here as "steadfast." But besides just having his hands in the air, Moses was holding a staff, and that was referred to as "the rod of God."

You don't have to turn there, I'll just read this to you real quick, as was mentioned in **Exodus 4:17**. It says here, **And you shall take this rod in your hand, wherewith you shall do signs.** This is what God did every time with Moses. That rod or staff was always around. Earlier in Chapter 9 here he struck the rock and water came out for the people to drink, but he also used it, he raised it for parting the Red Sea, and it was there at the burning bush. It was everywhere, basically.

Moses was making sure that he had this rod with him. That's why in verse 9 he was telling Joshua that tomorrow when they would be fighting, that he would be on top of the hill with the rod in his hand. This

rod was used to show a proof that the power was coming from God and that He was working through Moses.

If you remember, Moses was constantly working as a middleman, so to say, between God and the Israelites. He was always saying, like, “God, these people, they’re not listening to me,” and asking, you know, “Who do I tell them that sent me?” And in other words, “How do I get these people to believe?” God was continuously performing different miracles and signs there as a proof. The proof should have been enough, you would think, to convince the Israelites about who God was and who Moses was, but as we know, they still didn’t believe.

So, if you think about it, this event with Moses holding his hands up with the staff shows an interesting relationship between God, Moses, and the children of Israel. This is really a physical illustration of what faith is. It’s showing how Moses was working together with God and God was giving favor to the children of Israel to fight this physical battle. But Moses had to do his part. He had to keep those hands of his with the rod up in the air. As soon as his hands would come down, yeah, so would God’s favor and His grace. So, his hands in the air, you could say, were a proof from the side of Moses; this action was in many ways a physical manifestation of his faith.

So, let’s think about how this physical example that we just saw here, how that can apply to our spiritual lives. Think about how we can demonstrate our faith to God, and to do it in a steadfast manner, not wavering or faltering. That means being steadfast in our relationship with God, and know that if we do that, that God will pour out His favor and His grace on us, just as He did for Israel in this instance.

And how much more does that mean to those of us now in the Church than it did to those of physical Israel? Because the grace and favor that we can receive of now is so much more. It is a spiritual help that we can have in our lives directly from God. That is part of the armor of God that we can now partake in. Because the spiritual battle is so much more important.

So, in closing here, let’s make sure we please God through faith, through trusting in Him. The biggest way we can do that is through obedience. Because if we believe that God’s way is the right and only true way, then we will want to have His way. Obeying God shouldn’t mean that we have to do things that we don’t really want to do, and we only do them because He says that we have to. We should be in agreement with everything in God’s word. Then it shouldn’t even be difficult because our ways are continuing to become more like His ways.

Let’s take note whenever things get hectic in life and whenever drama creeps in. If our relationships are ever struggling then we need to get them sorted out right away. Do not let any of these complications in your relationships fester because they will spread like a cancer.

And, you know, I’ll give an example here. My wife and I when we first got married, we made an agreement we would never go to bed without settling a disagreement or an argument that we had had.

We did that precisely for that reason – because bad feelings and resentment complicate things and can make small problems grow into large problems.

We should have a similar way of behaving though with any relationships that we have, especially those in God's Church, and especially here at the Feast. We need to get to the bottom of any problems that we have and solve them. That way we can continue to walk side by side.

In the end, God's law is about agape love. It is about our relationships. So, let's strive to work on our relationships this Feast. You know, we've have had a difficult time this past year and a half with Covid, and in many cases we have been physically separated. Let this Feast be the time for you to work on your relationship. Don't quench that river and let's allow God to do His work in us. Support one other, like Aaron and Hur did as they supported Moses, but instead of physically, we can do that through God's love, through agape.

Let's be steadfast in our faith this coming year so that God can continue to grant us more favor, so that grace and peace can multiply, because going into the future we are really going to need it more than ever.