

## Promise Based Follow Up

How do you grow in trusting someone?

One key way occurs as you experience them being faithful to do what they say they will do.

Imagine if I told you I was going to bake a cake for you and bring it to our meeting next week. If you didn't know me very well you might think, "Wow! That'd be nice. I wonder if she really will." If I show up next week cake in hand, what will you think the next time I tell you I'm going to do something?

You'll probably be expecting it to happen. You are starting to trust me. And the more you experience me doing what I say I will do, you will trust that when I say something I mean it... that I can be counted on.

Conversely if I told you I'd deliver a message to someone, perhaps you needed to meet them at the library at 10, and I said I'd tell them but then forgot – what would you think the next time I offered to do something for you?

Would you trust me if there was something really important that needed to be done? What if your life depended on it?

Trust is eroded when people fail to do what they say they will do. Someone can be faithful to do what they say they will nine times out of ten but if they drop the ball just one time, the next time they offer to do something you will wonder...

And here's the kicker – trust can also be eroded if we think someone has said they will do something and they don't do it. Right?! Even though I am the one misunderstanding, a seed of doubt gets planted in my heart when disappointment occurs – and it can take a lot to overcome it.

**“God told me I should...”**

New believers must learn to hold their impressions with an open hand. I can't even begin to count the number of times this phrase has been used to shut down a conversation, and shut out godly advice. For example,

“But Susie, he's not even a growing Christian!”

“I know, but God told me I should date him.”

Or “God doesn’t want me going to a summer training program this year.”

End of conversation. How do you argue with that? And they miss out on a great opportunity to grow when really it was fear they were listening to.

## **What is Good?**

We grow up all our lives defining good based on how something impacts us, how it feels, what the world around us says it is. Yet even experience tells us our evaluation can be wrong. Ever think something looked so good only to get it and discover it really wasn’t?

Jesus says, “No one is good except God alone.” (Mark 10:18) He sets the true standard.

God’s will is good. Everything else is evil – no matter how “good” or spiritual it may seem. For example, if God wants you studying for a final exam but you go have a quiet time with someone – that’s evil. Why? It’s not what God wants you doing!

James 4:17 says, “Anyone then who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it sins.”

Evil isn’t defined by a particular activity. Evil is whatever isn’t God’s will. If God wants you peeling potatoes, then that is good, spiritual, beneficial – the best thing you could be doing! And to do anything else is sin!

But we don’t automatically know what God’s will is. We are told in Hebrews 5:14, “But solid food is for the mature who through constant use have trained themselves to distinguish between good and evil.”

We need to be trained to distinguish between good and evil! To discern what is God’s will and what is not. No one automatically has that ability. When a person becomes a believer they may think they know what good is – but really who defines good? God! And his thoughts aren’t our thoughts, his ways aren’t our ways, as the heavens are higher than the earth so are our thoughts than his thoughts and our ways than his ways. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

## **Trained to Discern**

So how do you get that training? How do you grow to the point where you can distinguish between good and evil? Through “constant use.”

But constant use of what? If you read Hebrews 5:14 in context you will find the solid food its referring to is the Word of God. Through constant use of the word of God! By reading

and applying (that's using it right?!) you aren't just getting to know God better and getting a head's up on how to best live each day – you are actually training yourself (KJV says “training your senses”) to distinguish good from evil!

But note that word “mature” – maturity takes time. It will take time doing this before you learn how to make this distinction. And in the process you will fail. You may read your Bible, think God is telling you to do something, you do it and it all goes belly up! Don't think God steered you wrong! You didn't distinguish rightly! But that's ok – this is how you learn.

It's like the old time radios – you had to fiddle with the dial to get a good signal. Why? Because other noises come through and it takes a lot of effort to get the exact frequency you want coming in loud and clear.

All day, every day, there are many voices speaking to us: voices from our past, the voice of our own desires and fears, as well as the voice of the enemy! He is a deceiver. How he loves to get us sidetracked, mistaking his voice for the voice of God.

So here is the dilemma – you develop discernment through constant use – and having daily quiet times is one key way to do this – as long as you are actively seeking to “use” the Word through applying it and living it out. But new believers need to hold their impressions of what they think God has said to them with an open hand.

How did you learn to walk? By falling down. A lot. Failure is a tremendous teacher. You will never learn to walk if you aren't willing to fall, to mess up! If you have the expectation that from the get go every step you take should be firm and you're ready to run a marathon – are you ever in for a big disappointment!

New believers need to recognize there is a big difference between trusting what God says and trusting in their ability to discern!

That's why it is critical we help new believers understand how vulnerable they are to mis-hearing or mis-understanding God. It is critical they realize that listening to God is something you learn how to do, something that requires discernment. And this discernment will take time to develop.

This is why it is so key they develop the discipline of daily quiet times in a format where they are reading the word and actively applying it. Being faithful in doing this, they will eventually develop discernment!

But God hasn't left them hanging in the meantime!

## **The Gift of God's Promises**

In 2 Peter 1:3-4 we're told, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

Did you catch that?! God has given us everything we need for life and godliness! Everything! We have all we need to experience that abundance of life Jesus died to bless us with (John 10:10) and to be like Him. But it's just like Christmas – there may be a ton of presents under the tree given to you with your name on it, but until you open them and use them they aren't going to be much benefit to you!

And how do you get to know God? Through His Word! And in His word He has given us his very great and precious promises.

Why are they so great and precious?

Well, let's consider – What is a promise?

It's when someone says I will do something, and you can bank on it.

Do you see, God knows it's going to take time for us to develop discernment – to learn to identify his voice and know what he's telling us he will do. So He took the initiative to clearly tell us things we can count on him to do. You don't need discernment when the message is clear!

Did you ever wonder why God makes promises? It's so we can grow in trusting him! Even as a baby believer you can do this! When God promises something you can count on it! And as you do, you get to experience Him in action being faithful to do what He has said He will do – and wow! When this happens, do you ever grow in trusting Him!

But just like those Christmas gifts under the tree, you've got to open them – know what they are! And use them – actively applying them in your life! To receive the full benefit of them!

## **Lessons on Assurance**

After I have helped a new believer learn how to have a quiet time and spent a couple months getting her established in this discipline – once she is reading the Word, meditating

on it and actively applying it daily, we will camp out in 2 Peter 1:3-4 and I will help her understand her need to be trained to discern and how God's promises can help her grow in trusting Him.

After this I will give her a copy of Lessons on Assurance. Published by NavPress, this is an excellent tool for helping someone get started on this adventure of growing in trusting God.

The first chapter is on the assurance of salvation. I explain how key this is because a promise is only valid for the person it's given to. If I promise my husband that I am going to bake a cake for him, you can't overhear me and assume I'm going to make one for you too! I promised him! So if next week comes and there's no cake for you, should you be disappointed?!

But if I tell you I'm going to bake a bunch of brownies for you... well you certainly should be expecting them.

In the same way, there are promises in the Bible which God gives to specific individuals – not all promises are for us! In Luke 1:31 Mary is told, "You will be with child and you will give birth to a son." That was a specific promise given to Mary. Women struggling with infertility can't automatically "claim" that promise as theirs. God told Mary he would do this – and it happened!

But there are many promises the Lord has given to all believers. If you are a believer – these are for you! If you're not, they're not! So starting out with assurance of salvation is a great way to identify those to whom the promises are given and affirm these are for them!

This chapter is followed by four chapters each featuring one promise: Assurance of Answered prayer – John 16:24, Assurance of victory – 1 Corinthians 10:13, Assurance of forgiveness – 1 John 1:9, and Assurance of guidance – Proverbs 3:5-6.[1]

What I find of great benefit in this book is how it breaks down each promise phrase by phrase so you really chew on it to understand it's meaning. You want to make certain new believers understand what God has promised – as well as what he hasn't.

For example, in John 16:24 Jesus says, "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete." If you don't take time to really understand this verse you might treat it as carte blanche – ask for anything in Jesus' name and you'll get it. Brand new Porsche, anyone?! :0)

But God only gives good gifts (James 1:17). If we ask for something we think is good but its not really should we expect him to give it to us?! Would you want him to?! Initially sure! But if it really wasn't good...?

Taking time to chew on this verse you realize Jesus doesn't promise "ask and you will receive what you ask for" does he?! No! He says ask and you will receive! If you ask for something bad for you – God isn't promising to give it to you, but he does promise you will receive something! And it will be good!

Do you see what a blessing this is?! When we don't yet have discernment to know what's good, God protects us while still being generous with us. Psalm 84:12 states, "No good thing will he withhold from those whose walk is blameless." If it's a good thing – he will give it to you! You can bank on it! So if you ask for something and don't get it, it will only be because it's not good for you.

But God promises when you do ask you will receive...something! You don't need to be afraid to ask because of your lack of discernment! When you ask you will receive good stuff – so ask away! And in the process will you ever experience Jesus!!!

### **Reaping full benefit**

If you take a Christmas gift, unwrap it, use it a few times, then put it on a shelf in your closet, it's of limited value to you. So it is with God's promises – You've got to know them to use them! And the best way to know them and remember them is to memorize them.

Lessons on Assurance provides a wonderful jump start into doing this very thing. Before we ever discuss the first chapter, we memorize together the first verse. Taking it one section at a time and having them repeat after me. (If you follow exactly what it says to do in the introduction to the booklet Lessons on Assurance it will walk you through this process!). I find if they memorize it before doing the study on it, they process much better – and are much more likely to remember the verse.

It may seem stilted and crazy to take your time, going back and forth memorizing each portion of the verse – but don't go on to the next segment until they have the previous section word perfect.

And have fun with this! We will often make up hand motions or a rhythm or even put the verse to music as we are doing this! It is amazing how helpful this can be.

We don't stop learning it and going over it until they can quote the verse word perfect. Even then I tell them, they don't really have it memorized until they can quote it word perfect 100 times. And I challenge them to do this in the coming week.

And it's so critical they don't just review it silently to themselves! I always encourage them to take initiative to ask others around them to hear them recite their verse and check them on it. Not only can this be a great conversation starter – I can't even begin to tell you the number of people who "had it down" when saying it to themselves, but drew a blank trying to say it for me!

Usually I have them work through the chapter on their own, then when we get together the next week we review our verse(s) and discuss the chapter... and how they have put the verse to use in their life! I can't stress enough how vital it is you encourage them to "use" it.

The book doesn't stress application enough. You have to add that in. And how vital it is you seek to use the promise yourself during the week! This really is where the rubber meets the road.

### **Very Great and Precious**

There are a lot of promises in the Bible. Promises God has made to his children. And each one is an opportunity to grow in trusting Him!

After you have worked through the five promises featured in Lessons on Assurance, it is so important to show new believers how to identify promises on their own. Books are great for initially teaching something but ideally you don't want them becoming dependent upon published materials. Ultimately, you want them to know how to identify promises on their own and be motivated to spend time meditating on them, breaking each verse down section by section to consider what it really means, then actively applying it in their life.

First, I walk them through the process using just the Bible.

How do I pick where we'll go next? Here it is critical to consider what is going on in their life. What are they struggling with? Is it fear? Check out Isaiah 41:10. Loneliness? Hebrews 13:5. Feeling overwhelmed? Philippians 4:13. Financial needs? Philippians 4:19. There are promises that specifically address each area of life!

I will usually pick out a promise that relates to something happening in their life and walk them through the same process used in Lessons on Assurance – memorize the verse, then take time camping out in each section to make certain they understand what God has promised. Then we specifically consider how it can be actively applied in our lives.

For example, an attempt was made to abduct one of our students on her way to Bible study. Did she ever wrestle with fear after that! The guys who tried to abduct her had done so right outside her apartment. They knew where she lived.

Isaiah 41:10 became a lifeline for her – each day as she came home from class or laid in bed at night listening for any sounds outside, she clung to this verse and wrestled to trust what God said. In the process did she ever get to experience Him! Today she is on staff helping others learn how to trust Him.

Ultimately, it's great to get them to read through the Bible on their own and highlight each promise they come across. It's a treasure hunt that can radically change their life – if they will take the extra steps to memorize, meditate and apply it!

### **Foundational for Follow Up**

The goal of follow up is to get someone to the point where they trust Jesus with everything. To help them progress to the place where they are ready to be a disciple – denying themselves, taking up their cross daily and following Jesus.

Trust is foundational to this occurring.

For some this is easier than others. If your mother and father were trustworthy it won't be as hard to trust God. But in a day when it's increasingly rare to find someone whose word can be counted on... this can take a lot more time to develop. (And I can't stress enough how critical it is for disciples to be faithful to do what they say they will do! Establishing a relationship of trust lays such a critical foundation.)

But the more we expose God's children to His promises and help them really understand what each means and get them experiencing Him through them – does it ever spur them on in this process!

This is why they are very great and precious. The Almighty God of the universe has taken the initiative. He has bound Himself and said I will do what I have said I will do. He didn't have to do this!

But oh the pleasure it brings him when we take him up on his offer! And help others do so too!

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[1] *It is important to note that Proverbs are proverbs (general truths) and not promises – however, Proverbs 3:5-6 represents more than a general truth because it is supported elsewhere in Scripture as an absolute truth without exception (eg., Psalm 32:8-9, James 1:5 – if we look to God by faith and ask, he will give us wisdom for life’s decisions).*