Russell Kelfer

Possessing the Promises

(Part 2)

511-A

Series: Promises and God's Word



Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly "hear" his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It's been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that's a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you "hear" as you read.

We began this series two lessons ago by dealing with the following principles:

I- THE CREATIVITY OF A CRISIS

This is the idea that God uses crises in our lives to get our attention to begin the surge of spiritual growth that seems to sometimes wane and we become complacent in our Christian experience.

II- THE AWESOMENESS OF GOD'S AUTHORITY - JOSHUA 1

We are told in this chapter that God spoke to Joshua. We sensed and we saw Joshua's immediate response. We dealt with how we respond to the Word of God? Do we recognize the Bible as the Word of God? Do we treat it that way?

III- POSSESSING THE PROMISES

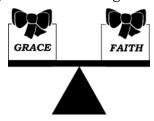
This is a two-lesson study. In Joshua 1, God was speaking to Joshua:

"Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel.

Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses.

From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory." (Joshua 1:2-4 NKJV)

In the last lesson we dealt with the first half of this balance in the Christian experience. This was the principle of grace. The fact that the land was a gift from God was grace.



If you draw a seesaw and balance it in the middle and put grace on the left and faith on the right, we will find that grace was given by the will of God. It is exercised by the will of God sovereignly. Faith, on the other hand, is given by the will of God as well. We looked at Ephesians 2:8-9,

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. (NKJV)

We can't brag about our faith. It is given by the will of God, but is exercised by the will of man. In other words, there is a degree of receiving the grace of God and entering in by faith to the promises He has given us that requires an act of our will. We cannot sit idlely by and say, "Hey, God gave us the land. That is great!"

We are dealing with two basic questions. The first is, "What is grace?" That is, "Why did God give them the land?" The second is, "How do we possess it?" That is, "What did they have to do to occupy the land?" They could do nothing to earn it because it was a gift. But, they had to enter in by faith. They had to do something to occupy it.

In the last lesson we dealt with the essence of grace. In other words, we tried to define the indefinable. We rolled out a brief definition by beginning with the first use of the word in classical Greek before Jesus came. We then looked at how it developed throughout the New Testament time beginning at the cross and through the epistles to the present meaning to us today. I will not review all of that. Simply remember that as it unfolded, it began by meaning a thing of beauty including the object of that beauty. In other words, it was the love of God given freely as a thing of beauty.

The second step was that it was freely given. The third point was that it was given by God as a gift without merit or expectation bringing joy, unaffected by guilt, characterized by forgiveness and perfectly expressed at Calvary. In other words as we concluded in the last lesson, it is the love of God unblemished, unlimited, unearned, undeserved, unappreciated, unadulterated, unhindered, inexhaustible and unbelievable apart from God. We can believe grace. We can't cope with what it really is because it is beyond our ability to comprehend; but if we simply tread softly on the promises and the Word of God, we begin to get a glimpse of something that is too beautiful and majestic for us to fully grasp. What we do know, like the glory of God that we can see, is that it simply overwhelms

us and causes us to fall to our knees and worship.

In the last lesson, we gave some definitions of grace. Though it be indefinable, we can at least catch glimpses of it like the glimpses of the rays that reflect from a diamond depending upon which side of the diamond you are standing. Remember that we decided that grace is a provision for forgiveness the nine-thousandth time. Grace is the course of history, reshaped by God as a carpenter, then entrusted to fishermen, tax collectors and persecutors. It is the majesty of the King of Kings in a crown of thorns. It is the God of the universe bleeding to death. That is grace. We cannot comprehend it, but we can receive it.

In this lesson, I want to look at the second half of the balanced, Christian approach to possessing the land. First of all, we need to recognize that it is free. Now recognizing we do not deserve it, there is something we must do to appropriate it. This is the second half of the balance, the essence of faith.

Israel had two chances to enter the land. God's grace was given to them on both occasions. The gift was never rescinded. The first time they did not possess it. They lost it. The second time, their children entered in by faith. There was no difference from God's perspective. The only difference was in the response of the one who was the recipient of a gift they totally did not deserve.

In this lesson I want to deal with some principles regarding the promises. How do we enter in and receive the promises of God?

Principle 1- The promises of God are all undeserved. All of your boldness is based upon grace. Deuteronomy 7:6-9 is a passage that we have used many times. It is also a good passage to put to memory.

"For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth."

(Deuteronomy 7:6 NKJV)

This is an encouraging verse. But before we become proud, we need to go on to the next verse:

"The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples;" (Deuteronomy 7:7 NKJV)

In other words, God didn't look around and try to find the mightiest that He could find. He looked around and said, "Where is

the weakest bunch I can find? Where is the smallest nation I can find so that I can magnify Myself?" Israel was the fewest. Why did God give His love to them?

"but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

"Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments;"

(Deuteronomy 7:8,9 NKJV)

All of the promises of God are based upon grace as we talked about in the last lesson. We must remind ourselves before we go further into the claiming of the promises of God, that you can take all of the promises of God that you deserve and put them in a thimble and still be able to put your thumb in it. There is absolutely no way that you can earn anything from God. There is nothing God does for you that you deserve. Nothing. The Scripture says that every good gift is given by God and comes down from the Father of lights in whom there is neither variableness nor shadow of turning. Everything good that will ever happen to your life comes from God. Everything good that will ever happen to your life you don't deserve, it is a gift.

There are three basic enemies to the grace of God: worthiness, works and worry. Think about those sometime. Worthiness, works and worry can destroy the grace of God in your life. What you think you are, what you think you have done, what you cannot trust to God; those are the things that destroy the grace of God in your life. Worthiness. Works. Worry.

Principle 2- The promises of God are positionally ours, but must be experientially possessed. Even those principles relating to the mind of Christ must be experientially possessed. Let's take an example. Suppose out of the goodness of his heart, a friend decided to give me his house. This is not a very likely thing to happen. This is not the kind of thing that you can just brush aside. He is a very giving person. He has a house all fixed up. Suppose, from the depth of his heart, he decided to give me his house. Maybe I like it, and maybe I don't. That is incidental. I may not even be appreciative of it because I wonder what he might have up his sleeve. Suppose he gives me the house and signs it over to me lock, stock and barrel. He comes over and hands me the title to his house. That is exciting.

Let's suppose I like my house better than his, so I continue to live where I am. Out of pride I refuse to even go over to look at the house. He leaves town and comes back two years later. He drives by his old house, and the trees are down to the ground, and the grass is all burned up. The shutters are falling, and the roof is leaking. Nothing has been done to the house. He comes over to my house and says, "Don't you appreciate the house I gave you?"

I respond, "I can't tell you how much I appreciate it."

He asks, "Are you enjoying it?"

I respond, "I haven't enjoyed it too much."

"Why not?" he asks.

"To tell you the truth, I have never taken possession of it," I answer.

It has been mine all of that time. It was a gift I didn't deserve. I probably didn't appreciate it, but that had nothing to do with the fact that he gave it to me. It was given to me by grace, but I never entered in and possessed it.

We could assume that I did enter in, and I only liked one room in the house. I didn't like the way the bathrooms were laid out. The bedrooms didn't seem big enough. It looked to me like the kitchen was shaped wrong. We took the living room and cordoned it off. We lived in the living room and let the rest of the house run down. He came by and asked, "How do you like the house?"

I answered, "It is a fantastic house, the first room that is."

"Are you possessing the house?" he asks.

"Certainly I am possessing the house. We are eating, sleeping and doing everything in the living room. We have put up a hot plate, and it is a great place to live," I reply.

"If it is so great, why don't you possess the rest of it? It is yours," he asks.

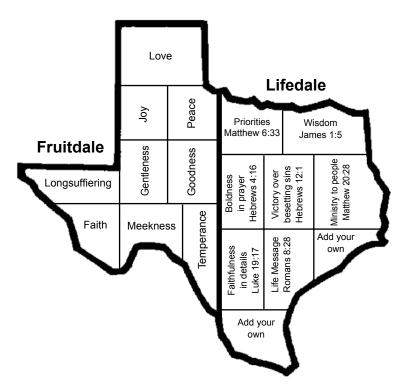
"Well, I just haven't gotten around to it," I answer.

"The title says the whole house is yours," he tells me.

The problem in the Christian experience is that you and I positionally own everything God has. There is nothing whatsoever that God has to give to the believer that he did not receive positionally in Christ the day he came to Christ. All the love, all the joy was yours the moment you came to know Christ. The problem

is, just like the children of Israel, God said, "The land is already yours, take it." It is yours as you take it, but it is also yours before you take it. Do you see the enigma there? Positionally, it is yours now. Experientially, it is only yours when by faith you enter in.

Let's assume a second illustration. Take a piece of paper and draw a country like Australia or the state of Texas. Draw a line down the middle of it. We will divide it into two states, Fruitdale and Lifedale. Divide Fruitdale into nine counties. In those counties write, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. Divide Lifedale into nine counties. Write, "Priorities - Matthew 6:33". This is land God has for you to possess. Write, "Wisdom - James 1:5". Write, "Boldness in prayer - Hebrews 4:16". Write, "Victory over besetting sins - Hebrews 12:1". Write, "Ministry to people - Matthew 20:28". Write, "Faithfulness in details - Luke 19:17". Write, "Life message - Romans 8:28". Add as many as you like.



The principle is that grace gives undeservedly all it wants. God comes to you with this map and says, "This is the Christian life. This is the land that I told My children to enter in, possess and enjoy. It is yours. If you will just please take it, it is already yours, and I want you to recognize that you have it. I gave it to you the day you received Christ as your Savior."

While grace gives undeservedly, faith lays hold of unreservedly. In other words, you still have to walk in faith and assume possession of every one of those counties before the entire land is yours. The children of Israel never fully possessed the land God gave them even to this day. They did possess most of it, but not all of it. You and I have not nearly begun to possess what is ours.

All the love of God was made available to you the day you were saved, the day you were converted. But if your life is like mine, most of the love of God that needs to be expressed through us has yet to be fulfilled. The joy of God was given to us, but oftentimes we are creatures with very little joy. The peace of God is all ours. It is all laid out. But many of us walk around anxious, worried, confused and disturbed. The patience of God was given to us as a fruit of His Spirit who was given to us at conversion, but most of us are edgy and impatient. The gentleness of God was given to us at conversion, but we have not often entered in and become the gentle people God intends us to be.

You might consider making a map like this in your Life Notebook. It will help you begin to see what areas you have not yet begun to possess by God's grace. Draw an arrow at the top of the map and write, enemy. One thing you must remember is that the enemy still lives in the land. He does not want you to possess any of it. The children of Israel were given the land. God said, "It is yours, and every place you put your foot, by faith, I will give to you." But they had to take every single piece of that land through warfare. They won so long as they remained obedient to the will of God, but there was warfare involved because the enemy did not want to give up the land that God, by grace, had already given to His children.

Principle 3- The promises of God are usually conditional. I've heard so many people in so many "spiritual" situations misuse the promises of God. All of us have done that. We believe that God owes us strength. He promised it to us. But what we forget is Isaiah 40:30. It says:

Even the youths shall faint and be weary,

And the young men shall utterly fall, (Isaiah 40:30 NKJV)

In other words, in the flesh you can't make it. But He says,

But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength;

(Isaiah 40:31a NKJV)

We go before the Lord and say, "Lord, You promised me strength. By faith I claim that promise. Now hurry up. I want to be strong, Lord. Do it now!" We become agitated. We think the word "wait" means using our frame of reference for time, so we say, "God, I've been here five minutes now, and I'm still weak." The word "wait" in Scripture literally means the relinquishing of control.

How many of you have been to the doctor lately? Most of you who have to go to a doctor realize that there is not a more helpless feeling than going to his office for an 8 o'clock appointment and finding out that he won't be in until 9 o'clock. What do you do? You wait. You become totally dependent upon his priorities, not yours. You wait. You may get frustrated. But, if you are going to remain in a state of peace you have to relax and say, "What difference does it make? I am here to see the doctor. When the doctor gets here, it will be soon enough." You wait on the doctor. It means that his timing is what is important. All you are to do is to relax until his timing comes to fruition. That is waiting.

The Scripture says conditionally, if you learn to wait like that, God will renew your strength. You will be able to mount up with wings like eagles. You will be able to run and not be weary, walk and not faint if you will learn to wait by relinquishing control.

II Chronicles 7:14 is a verse that we hear claimed in churches over and over again.

If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (NKJV)

We pray for revival. We may honesty pray, but we forget that the entirety of that passage says, If My people who are called by My name shall first of all humble themselves. This means to deal with the flesh in such a way that there is absolutely nothing that is not placed before God. In that state of mind, we are then to begin to pray. Our prayer will lead to a state of repentance and turning from our wicked ways. God says that when this kind of repentance takes place, He will perform miracles in their midst. But don't expect the miracles until you meet the conditions. There is a promise, but it

is a conditional promise.

The same thing is true in James 1:5 and John 16:24. Most of the promises carry with them a condition of asking. When we don't ask and simply claim the promises of God, who gets the credit for it? We do. James 1:5a says:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, (NKJV)

Now God gives to all men liberally and never upbraids us for asking, but He doesn't do it until we ask. It is a conditional promise. All of the wisdom of the ages is there for you if you ask.

John 16:24 says:

Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. (NKJV)

We ask for the joy of God. We expect the joy of God. But do we ask God for joy on a regular basis? On a continuing basis, do we seek to have His joy? It is a conditional promise.

Not all promises are conditional. I Peter 1 is not a conditional promise for Christians.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (I Peter 1:3-5 NKJV)

You have a place in heaven that is reserved for you that is incorruptible and undefiled. It cannot fade away. It is not conditional on anything you do. It is an unconditional promise that you can claim.

But, most of the promises are conditional. Until we grasp that, we tend to be presumptuous toward the will of God. We want what He promises without doing what He asks us to do in order to receive the promise.

Principle 4- Most promises require some action as evidence of our faith. This is what James meant when he said that faith without shoe leather is no faith at all. Faith that does not evidence itself through some form of action when called for is not really faith, but presumption.

Principle 5- The promises of God and the timing of God are interrelated, but they are not the same. This is where most of us blow it. This is where most of us lose our perspective. We come before God and we see a promise that we want to claim. We see the conditions that are to be met, and we feel like we are meeting those conditions. We say, "Lord, isn't this neat? Gimme." But we have to recognize that God often delays the answer for at least three reasons even when His conditions have been met.

1- Disobedience. Jonah is a good example. God said, "I will give you revival. All you have to do is go to Nineveh." There may be someone reading this lesson or listening on tape who ought to be on their way to one form of ministry or has been called to some specific sphere of God's realm of ministry. You are going another way because you don't want to face what God has really called you to do. Yet, you have claimed all kinds of promises, but there doesn't seem to be any real fruitfulness in answer to these promises. You may even feel like in other areas that you have met the criteria the Scripture sets up, but because of your disobedience in one area, God, somewhere along the way, might have to send some kind of fish to get your attention.

The children of Israel went through the same thing. They were given the land to go and possess. They could not enter in because of disobedience, so they lost the blessing. Their children eventually received the blessing, but there was a delay in the timing because of disobedience.

2- For more perfect glory. We think that God will be glorified if He does what we want done now. So we claim a promise and say, "Hey, Lord, now!" God says, "You don't see it from My perspective. Wait."

A good example is the raising of Lazarus from the dead. God could have healed Lazarus before he died. Jesus decided to wait until God was ready. Jesus did not fulfill the request immediately because God received more glory by raising Lazarus from the dead.

Another good example is Moses and Pharaoh. How many times did Moses have to go to Pharaoh? How many times did God harden Pharaoh's heart? It reached a point to where the maximum timing of God had blossomed like a rose. When God finally released His people nobody but God could get the credit, not Pharaoh, not Moses, not the children of Israel. At that precise moment God said, "Now is the time to go."

The same thing is true with Abraham and Isaac. God could have given Him the seed of His promise anytime in his life, when he was forty, sixty, seventy years old. God withheld that promise over and over again. Frustration finally turned into abandonment of all that the flesh had to offer. Then God said, "My timing is right. Nobody can take any credit for this deliverance, but Me." There came Isaac.

3- To build character into the Christian's life. Hebrews 10 says:

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.

For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

(Hebrews 10:35,36 NKJV)

In other words, God says that there is likely to be a long parenthesis between your having asked and having been heard and having received. God is trying to teach you how to be patient, content, excited about the future, filled with hope and developed in the faith. None of those qualities can be developed if you get what you asked for immediately. God says, "I am answering your prayer, but wait a while. I have something I want to happen that will never happen if I give it to you now." The principles of appropriating these promises really have to do with understanding the timing of God.

Principle 6- The promises of God are the boundaries of God to keep faith from becoming presumption. They are God's boundaries. I know that all of you have been in a situation where a Christian has told you, "I've got a promise from God. He is going to give me a million dollars." Or, "I've got a promise from God. He's going to pay all of my bills this week." Or, "I've got a promise from God. He's going to make me president of the United States."

I think what we don't fully realize is that all of these prayers are usually circumstantial in nature and are egocentric. They usually revolve around God doing something for us that we want. It is called the Gimme Syndrome. We have to remember that I John 5 says,

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

(I John 5:14,15 NKJV)

His will is found in His Word. The promises of God are the

boundaries of God. We often hear people say, "The Lord led me to do this." We also read articles in the paper that tell of someone who says that God told them to kill someone. That person was certainly led by a spirit, but certainly not the Holy Spirit. We begin to be moved by emotions or personal need. We are driven by something and we use God as a scapegoat. The principle is that He has given us the promises to set boundaries beyond which we do not go. That is why God told the children of Israel, "I'm going to give you the land. I will name it for you so that you will not get confused. I will give you from the wilderness in this Lebanon to the River Euphrates and all of the land of the Hittites and of the sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your coast. These are the boundaries. Mark it off on the map. Don't go beyond that or I won't protect you. It won't be yours."

Principle 7- The promises of God usually relate to the things of the Spirit rather than temporal things. This is what we don't like. The promises of God usually relate to spiritual things not temporal things. We try, as the children of Israel and the disciples did when Jesus taught them, to bring everything down into the physical realm to make application. God is Spirit.

If you look at the life of Jesus, you will see that. Here is a man who never had an unanswered prayer. He never got outside of the will of God. Yet, He never had a place to lay His head. Most of His friends rejected Him and fled when the heat was on. He had to be buried in a borrowed tomb, but He never had an unanswered prayer. His prayers were for things in the Spirit.

We need to recognize that there are some temporal promises, but they are very, very few. They are always for a purpose.

- 1-There are promises relating to character. In Colossians 1:9-11, Paul is praying for the Christians. He is praying for character to be formed in their lives.
- 2- There are promises for spiritual provisions. Isaiah 41:10 and James 1:5 are some verses that show this.
- 3- There are promises for spiritual victory. These can be found in Psalm 84:11 and I Thessalonians 4:16.

In closing, the promises relating to physical and circumstantial provisions are, first of all, minimal. The children of Israel in the wilderness, wandering for forty years, did not have promises from God for convenient food. He didn't build a hamburger restaurant

on every corner and a shoe store nearby. He said, "I am going to give you manna from heaven to meet your needs. Your raiment will not wax old upon you neither will your feet swell these forty years. You will not have a need for any more food than you have or a need for any more clothing than you have. That is how I will meet your needs." You may say, "The Lord promised me a new wardrobe." I doubt it.

Secondly, why did He do this to the children of Israel? To teach spiritual truth, He said, "This is the reason I promised you what I did. I want you to come to know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. You wouldn't learn these spiritual truths if I gave you a new wardrobe. You would just learn to become more greedy."

The third reason He occasionally promises temporal things is to benefit the body of Christ. He said, "Give and it shall be given unto you. I will return in the temporal realm in measure according to My grace of that which you give away because that is the way the body of Christ can learn to function."

Lastly, occasionally He meets circumstantial provisions to bring glory to Himself. Moses prayed a prayer of intercession. He said, "God, you must meet these people's needs, if You will. God replied, "I know." He met their needs. "Remember that Your reputation is at stake."

These are the only basic reasons that I can find in Scripture when God meets temporal needs. He has promised us two things. He has promised us food and clothes. He said we are to be anxious for nothing. He then goes on to talk about the ravens and the lilies of the field. He said, "I'm going to provide you with enough food to eat and enough clothes to wear." The inference is that He will make what you do have to last just like He did for the children of Israel.

When you go to claim the promises of God, you need to lift yourself out of the realm of this world and into the realm of the spirit. You then begin to look at things spiritual because that is where God is. That is what God's goals are. That is what God's life is. That is what He has in mind for us. He wants us to be transformed in ever-increasing splendor from one degree of glory to another. It is almost incidental to Him whether we live in a 20-room house or a 3-room house. It is incidental to Him whether we drive a new Mercedes or an old Ford. The point is that what God is after is spiritual life. His realm is the realm of the spirit. That is

the realm that will last forever. That is why He tells us to lay up our treasures in heaven where moth and rust cannot corrupt. There is no danger of having thieves break in and steal. They can take your television set. They can take your new car, but they cannot take the treasures you have laid up in heaven.

Lastly, claiming the promises provides victory, but invites warfare. If you ask God for peace, you can expect some inner turmoil so that the peace has a place to come from. If you ask for joy, you can expect some circumstantial confusion so that you have a chance to respond with joy, which is inner happiness in spite of outward circumstances. If you ask God for love, you can expect some misunderstandings so that you can learn to love, because real love is learning to give of yourself without expectation of return. If you ask for patience, the Scripture says that you will get tribulation because the trying of your faith worketh patience. If you ask for gentleness, you may get mistreatment. If you ask for priorities, you may get responsibilities. If you ask for wisdom, you may get an opportunity to make decisions. If you ask for victory over besetting sins, you may be faced with temptations; but it is worth it. That is the way the Word of God works in terms of the promises of God. It is all free. There is absolutely nothing we can do to deserve it.

In the next lesson we will look at Exodus 33. We will see how Moses claimed the promise in prayer. We will see what kind of pattern he gave us in learning to pray through the will of God by means of the Word of God and claiming the grace of God that will give us victory. It is all free. We don't deserve any of it. It is all out there. Our name is on it. The title deed is ours. But, one step at a time we have to appropriate the qualities of life that God wants us to have by faith. We ask for them. We meet the conditions. We continue to recognize that they are there by grace.

Some of us have been around a long time. We still see some areas of our lives that have never been possessed by the Spirit. This is an opportunity for us to begin to enter in and possess the land that is already ours.

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