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PART ONE

WHAT IS GOD'S FAVOR?

When James Scantlin talked to his daughter, Sarah, on the phone one winter day in early 2005, he considered it a miracle. Now, most daddies will tell you that talking to their little girls is always wonderful, but it was especially true in James's case.

Sarah, you see, had been in a coma for 20 years. The victim of a hit-and-run accident in 1984, she'd been lost to her family and friends for a staggering two decades. Medical professionals usually tell the loved ones of such cases what all of us intuitively understand: long-term comas almost always end badly.

When Sarah Scantlin began reading a children's book that her nurse was showing her "for the pictures," pandemonium broke out. Phone calls, visits, and joy unspeakable followed. Sarah gradually began recovering her memory and recognized friends who had aged 20 years.

Thousands of patients in Sarah's condition will never wake up. So her re-entry into this world begs the question: Why was she favored with a second chance?

What is the favor of God? Why should we want it? How can having the favor of God spell the difference between success and failure, hope and despair, joy and regret? In this section, as we look into what the Bible says about the favor of God, seeking to gain a solid scriptural understanding, it will enable us to begin a personal journey overflowing with His good favor.

1 GRASPING THE FAVOR OF GOD

I walked into the student center just as she walked out. I couldn't help but look, and felt an immediate attraction to this lovely young woman. Yet I was a second semester freshman, and I soon discovered she had been there longer than I. Could this slight difference in age put an end to the dreams I already had? I knew it might stop her, but I would not let it stop me.

Happily, it did not stop either of us. Our dates to the local Sonic drive-in and our late-night walks around the campus became frequent. The favor of God was kicking in.

By the next semester, I found myself falling in love with her. Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas, served as the place where God brought together a west Texas girl with this south Texas boy. On December 31, 1976, Jeana and I got married.

Although not all of our 28 years of marriage have been easy by a long shot, we never considered an alternative. Not once did we stubbornly refuse to work out our issues or allow killer conflicts to burrow deep into our hearts and begin their destructive work.

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ven as I write this book, I'm happy to report that God has given both of us a renewal of honeymoon love. I've never experienced more unconditional, sacrificial, and willing love for my wife. I sense that we're walking in an unusual season of marital life, and it thrills me. After almost 29 years together, we are empty nesters — and we love it. We loved being together before the kids ever came along, and we love it now that they've left.

What causes something so wonderful as this? What enables us to enjoy it? Nothing but the favor of God.

◆◆◆ FAVOR AND YOUR MARRIAGE ◆◆◆

What about your marriage? Does love flourish? Do you still feel honeymoon love, or does that seem impossible? The favor of God can change any marriage. You might not have started out right, or it may not be right even now, but His favor can change everything.

When we started having children, Jeana felt very concerned about creating an environment that would encourage our kids to love the Lord and His church. As a pastor's kid herself, she knew that many PKs (pastor's kids) struggle on both counts. Even before our children were born (and continuing yet today), we prayed that the Lord would give our boys a heart for God.

When people would ask, "How can I pray for you and your family?" I would always reply, "Pray that my sons will grow up loving Christ and loving the church." And you know what? The Lord has answered those prayers! So far as we know, Josh never had a moment of rebellion against God. Today, he's married to a lovely girl named Kate who also loves Christ. Nick is beginning seminary, studying to be a pastor. He just married a wonderful woman named Meredith.

Did I deserve such blessings? Hardly. So why does one faithful pastor, who loves his children at least as much as I do, lose two of his kids? Why am I so bountifully blessed? What prompts something like that? Nothing but the favor of God.

◆◆◆ FAVOR AND FRIENDS ◆◆◆

Over the years, God has blessed us with many great friends. We love going out to dinner with them, and God has been pleased to advance His kingdom through our friendship. When our friends walk through challenges, we've been there for them, and they have been there for us. I must not forget my long-time friends with whom we had some meaningful moments together in seminary. It's indescribably wonderful to have quality friends who also serve God.

Why have we been able to develop such good and healthy friendships, when so many pastors I know have not? Is it because we share a few things in common? Or is something else going on here? What makes great friendships like these possible? I believe it is nothing but the favor of God.

I relate these incidents for no other reason than to illustrate the huge difference that enjoying the favor of God can make to your life. The favor of God is not for pastors alone, but also for truck drivers, school teachers, grocery clerks, engineers, professional models, fast food cooks, salespeople, factory workers, newspaper reporters, advertising executives, postal workers, and day care providers. Favor falls on men and women, boys and girls. It's for moms and dads, aunts and uncles, grandmas and grandpas. It's for single people and married people, urban people and country people. It affects Republicans and Democrats and Libertarians and independents.

NO MATTER WHO
YOU ARE, WHERE YOU
LIVE, OR WHAT YOU
DO FOR A LIVING, YOU
CAN SET YOURSELF UP
TO RECEIVE — AND BE
BLESSED OUT OF YOUR
SOCKS BY THE FAVOR
OF GOD.

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◆◆◆ WHAT IS THE FAVOR OF GOD? ◆◆◆

How can favor make a difference to your life? To find the best answers to those key questions, we have to turn to the Word of God. You will be amazed at the answers you find there!

I began scouring the Bible a couple of years ago to learn all I could about the favor of God. The first thing that surprised me was how often the subject came up in both Old and New Testaments. Many crucial points in biblical history turn on whether someone did or did not receive the favor of God. If you read the Book of Genesis, you will see the favor of God popping up at the most important places and times.

Consider the very first time in the Bible that we see favor come into play:

In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.¹

The word translated “favor” here is the Hebrew term *sa ah*, which means to gaze steadily with interest or to regard with favor. The word never refers to a casual or disinterested glance. When God grants someone His favor, He takes a keen and lively interest in that person. He observes, watches, studies, and lovingly fixes His steady gaze on the one so favored. What an amazing privilege!

So then, the favor of God is when God fixes His gaze upon you, even the details of your life.

People want to make a difference with their life. If you want your life to make a difference, change the world of business, and make your life count for eternity, you will not be able to maximize your life without finding the favor of God.

Why did God look with favor on Abel’s offering, but not on Cain’s? We’re not explicitly told. God always wants our best, however, and God always honors wholehearted obedience. I believe God favored Abel because of two things. First, he gave God the firstborn, the best. Second, he did so with an obedient spirit. God tends to show His favor to those who eagerly obey Him.

Conversely, Cain did not choose to do right, and so presented God an unacceptable offering. He ignored God's admonition to do what was right. In the end, he committed the Bible's first murder. And so the Bible remembers Cain as someone who *"was of the evil one,"*² and contrasts him with his *"righteous"* brother.³

◆◆◆ FINDING GOD'S FAVOR ◆◆◆

When you think of Noah and the ark, what comes to mind? Perhaps you picture cute little children's books filled with cuddly animals and a quaint little boat, or an adorable, soft mobile hung over the crib of an infant. Only rarely, it seems, do most of us picture a devastated world devoid of all life except for one seasick man and his woozy family, all of whom spent almost a year bobbing on a swollen sea with a zoo full of equally seasick wild animals.

Remember the story? Humankind had grown so brutish and wicked that God was determined to wipe out the entire evil race. He decided to

send a flood that would take the lives of everyone on earth — well, almost everyone. The Bible says simply, *"Noah, however, found favor in the eyes of the LORD."*⁴

The word translated "favor" in this passage is not *sa ah*, but *hen*. This is the Hebrew word most often translated "favor" in our English versions, and it means friendly regard, approval, or gracious kindness. It is used to describe any free act of kindness toward another. The word usually describes a strong personal relationship, often between a superior and a subject.

THE FAVOR OF GOD
CAN ACTUALLY MAKE
THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN LIFE AND
DEATH! AND NOBODY
KNEW THAT BETTER
THAN NOAH.

◆◆◆

In the Bible, "to find favor" means to receive the attention and respect of another, and to receive great benefits from that person. The word often has the sense of showing kindness to the poor and needy.