



Getting & Staying Plugged In

Imagine a billionaire telling 100 people that he was offering them the time and opportunity to focus solely on their marriages, children, pursuing what they really felt they “were made for” . . . and, if they do so, he will take care of all their living costs – how many do you expect would accept the offer and be thankful to no longer be a slave to their job and money?

The rich likely would not take him up on his offer because they would resent anyone telling them “what to do!” The husband, for example, who really does not want to focus on his marriage and children, because he has a girlfriend of more interest to him, would likewise not be interested in this offer. But of us mere and lesser mortals, who have to slug it out day after day to provide for ourselves and our families, most would likely take the offer with great joy and thankfulness.

Of those who attend Church, and claim to “believe in Jesus,” how many out of 100 would we guess do, in fact, believe Jesus when He makes the same exact present promise as the hypothetical billionaire?

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ^{Mt 6:33}

Admittedly it is commonly done and fairly easy to take a single verse out of context and, in the process, distort its meaning in light of far greater *Bible* truths and themes that provide a *totally* different and fuller truth. Let’s see if, in point of fact, this is an example of a great *Bible* truth and theme or a single verse taken out of context.

Certainly a good and common example of a single verse taken out of context (and misleading many people in the process) is:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” ^{Jn 3:16}

This is THE verse for many professing Christians – they “claim” it for themselves while making it the touchstone and essence of everything Christian in their talks with other people. “Just believe!” they encourage others.

However, if we are careful to look at its immediate context (much less the key themes of the *Bible*) we find this verse alone is not the essence and hallmark of the Christian life in the way many portray it to be. For, immediately preceding and succeeding it we find Jesus saying:

“I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?” ^{Jn 3:12}

“But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” ^{Jn 3:21}

The believing faith Jesus is talking about in *John 3:16* is not a “Just believe once – repeat this little prayer after me and you are saved” – it is the believing of *Ephesians 2:8-10*:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Or, to say it another way, we have to make a real connection between what God says and what we do with this statement.

Which agrees with and ties to *John 3*. In the *Bible*, we find Jesus talks to us mostly about earthly things – if we live by His grace and truths we are told whatever we do we will do through God for, if we have been born again, we are “created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” This living and doing is the believing of *John 3:16* – a lot more and different than just repeating a short prayer! James (as only one of many examples) debunks a merely verbal or mental “faith.”

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.

You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ^{Jas 2:19 - 20}

Likewise, time after time, as we continue in *Matthew* (after His great promise of all these things being given to us) we find Jesus handling people’s earthly concerns and needs. In short, those attracted to Jesus were those looking for tangible benefits and a real relationship now, not just later – they were making a real, in life, connection with Jesus here and now!

This same paradigm is still true for Jesus can only show and prove Himself to us here and now – and this is our only real connection with Him and the only reasonable basis for faith and hope that what He says about the future and eternity is true.

A picture best demonstrates the alternatives for living our lives and dealing with what Jesus says and does:

Physical	Spiritual	Physical	Spiritual
		Spiritual	Physical

1. We cannot even connect the physical and spiritual (as the first picture shows) – they are separate, distinct and totally different (Sunday versus Monday through Friday and Saturday).

2. Or (as the middle illustration demonstrates) we make no attempt to balance them, but by design make the spiritual (what is perceived as less important, more theoretical, future . . .) subservient to our physical (“real,” tangible and here and now) needs and life.

In neither case is there any meaningful real connection between the physical and spiritual.

3. We connect the physical to the spiritual with the spiritual our intended master and focus and, even when we fail at it, we return to this paradigm again and again. In this we will find God’s grace and truth while when the physical is dominant we will not have God’s grace and truth because, as both Jesus and the first few Commandments make clear, God is not going to be subservient to the physical! Only in this, versus the other two options, is anyone truly connected to Jesus Christ.

How then can we (and what does it really mean to) make the spiritual/physical grace and truth connection – what does it mean to believe (connect) with Jesus here and now? Looking at just a few examples:

- Money, as we have already discussed as a primary example is a big deal – we must learn and live the key graces and truths about it – that we must receive all things by grace if we are to have anything to offer and give others.
- Work – is our work a slave to what God says or is our time for “seeking first” limited by the time we have to work? Have we found the grace and truth of *Matthew 6:33* so that we no longer have “all things” because we work – rather God gives us all things so that our working is in one of the good works He prepared in advance for us to do?
- Time in general (apart from work) – is our time a gift from God or do we take some of our time and grudgingly “give” it to God by going to church on Sunday?
- Marriage and children – obviously many people who go to church have never made the connection between what and how Jesus says we are to deal with the spouses and children. Believing in Jesus requires we make this connection!

Yes, Jesus is seen here and now, but only as we connect with Him through His grace and truth. And if we do so, in seeking Him first, the offshoot will be that all these things (our very real and important daily and physical needs) will be given to us (which we must then fight to keep in their proper place and perspective as subservient to our spiritual lives).

And this faith is a sure struggle and fight. As an important and helpful example, when John the Baptist, in prison awaiting execution, seems to have some doubts, Jesus didn't send a pep talk about heaven and eternity, He said:

“Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.” Mt 11:4-5

Jesus did not tell John the Baptist to “Just believe!” – He sent tangible, physical, present signs.

Not until several chapters later, in *Matthew*, did Jesus begin teaching about his future kingdom. We simply cannot disconnect “believing in” Jesus from here and now (as so many seem to think we can).

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Eph 2:10

And these are not just any “good works” (those we make up or decide we want to do), they are the specific good works God prepared in advance for us to do – on this we will ultimately be judged because these works are inescapably connected to the believing in Jesus of *John 3:16*!

“Well,” someone may say, “it sounds like you are proclaiming a ‘works’ based salvation – that is what *Matthew 6:33* sounds like to me (or at least what your interpretation of it is)! If we seek first (works) we will receive the reward of ‘all these things will be given to you as well.’” But, this would be a great and superficial misunderstanding.

To return to our opening hypothetical story of the billionaire offering to give us everything we need if we focus solely on our marriages, children, pursuing what we really felt we “were made for” . . . – we would not say we had *earned* what the billionaire offered by meeting these conditions – we would say the great blessing of giving us everything we need is the lesser of the blessings he is giving us – for certainly having the time now to fully and whole-heartedly focus solely on our marriages, children, pursuing what we really felt we “were made for” . . . is an even greater blessing!

Similarly, Jesus giving us “all these things” (all our earthly material needs) is a blessing, but the greater blessing, by far, is that in his doing so we now have the time to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” and all this means to us now and eternally. We don't earn the great blessing of all things by “doing” the even greater second blessing of seeking first – we are offered both graces or neither, we do not earn one by doing the other! And this is consistent with what Jesus said a little earlier (showing we are interpreting this verse within its greater context):

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.” Mt 6:24

The great news and mystery is not that we cannot serve both God and money, but how to serve God and still have all the money we need! Jesus gave us the only answer – have everything given to us so we can serve God only, in everything and at all times.

In a similar way, there are no “open-faced” one-sided graces in the *Bible*, they all have blessing conditions attached to them and, like a Whopper, it takes two hands to hold them. A few examples are:

Great Promises	Certain Required Behaviors
<u>Forgiveness</u> - Your heavenly Father will forgive you.	You forgive men when they sin against you.
<u>Faith</u> - Everything is possible – he is not condemned – he will believe in God.	Believe in Jesus.
<u>Perseverance</u> - There is a small gate and narrow road that leads to life.	Enter through the narrow gate, <u>stay</u> on the narrow road.
<u>Truth, Light and Freedom</u>	Come into the light . . . know the truth . . . sets you free . . . that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God. Live by the truth . . . hold to Jesus’ teaching.
<u>Peace and Rest</u> - I [Jesus] will give you rest.	Come to me [Jesus].
<u>Meaningfulness</u> - Jesus will make us fishers of men.	Follow Jesus.
Eternal Life, Blessing and Security – “I [Jesus] am going to my Father’s house to prepare a place for my children. And if I go and prepare a place for them, I will come back and take them to be with me that they also may be where I am.”	Be a child of Jesus.
<u>Protection</u> - Jesus says, “I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.”	The Father must give them to Jesus.
<u>God’s Love and Presence</u> - You will remain in my love.	Obey my commands.

Yes, there are great grace conditions to the great grace promises of Jesus, we earn neither and benefit greatly from both! And God cannot give us one side of the blessing without the grace condition being met. For just as the condition of His promise to give us all we need (the condition being that we seek first the kingdom of God) is greater than the promise to give us all we need, we find all the conditions, for the associated promises, are great blessings – we are blessed if we forgive, we are blessed if we stay on the required narrow way, if we are a child of God . . . and meeting these conditions can never be done without God’s grace. We do not earn God’s grace. Rather we find grace comes in pairs or does not come at all. The grace promises and the associated grace conditions – we take both or neither, all or nothing!

And here we find the deadly error of most false gospels – “claiming” God’s promises while ignoring or denying the related conditions:

- Many foolishly believe (and teach) a person can accept Jesus as Savior, but not as LORD (maybe losing some blessings in heaven, but not their salvation).
- Some wrongly believe in a health and wealth gospel – that God’s promise of all things being given to us is unconditional (that we do not have to seek first or use what we receive to do the good works He has prepared in advance for us to do).
- Many more think if they just do the best they can God has to be pleased.

The options are many, but at their source they believe in God’s promises (His love, forgiveness, provision, protection . . .) without considering the clear grace conditions associated with them – and grace (both in its promises and conditions) is not difficult, it is impossible unless we are “in” Christ now!

Yes, it would indeed be an interesting experiment to see how people would react to an imaginary billionaire offering them the opportunity to focus solely on their marriages, children, pursuing what they really felt they “were made for” . . . and he would then take care of all their living costs. Likely, a much greater percentage than would take the same exact real offer of Jesus! The key good work God prepared in advance for us to do is to seek first His kingdom and his righteousness – and only out of and from this key and primary good work comes the other good works He prepared in advance for us to do.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Jn 15:16

“Fruit” – the good works God prepared in advance for us to do and only here do we “find,” connect with and remain in Jesus. Seeking first is not optional, not even “just” another good work – it is the foundational good work

that gives us all things (including the time) to do the other good works God prepared in advance of us to do (focus solely on our marriages, children and pursuing what we are really made for).

In a sense we are all on a small and shrinking island, of this there is no doubt. Time is running out and money is losing any power – what we most value is rapidly dwindling. The big question is simply what are we personally going to do about it, if we can do anything? One thing is for sure, we can't find and see faith directly (no one can "just believe") – faith is, in essence, believing in the scope of the sovereignty of our object of faith.

Jesus' early promise that "all these things will be given to you" is certainly a bold, verifiable and very big promise! And it is ours if we accept the even greater grace condition associated with it – seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness.

Seeking implies a process. Who knows where it will end (for it will only end at death and, thus, no one has returned to tell us the ending), but we can certainly begin this seeking.

How and where? A good place is with *Matthew* – we don't have to read too far before we get to the great promise we started with, but even before this we find Jesus giving us great clues and truths:

- Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.
- Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.
- Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.
- Come, follow me.
- Blessed are . . . Blessed are . . . Blessed are . . . Blessed are . . . Blessed are . . . Blessed are . . . Blessed are . . . Blessed are . . . Blessed are . . .
- You have heard that it was said . . . But I tell you . . . You have heard that it was said . . . But I tell you . . . You have heard that it was said . . . But I tell you . . . You have heard that it was said . . . But I tell you . . . You have heard that it was said . . . But I tell you . . .
- I tell you, do not worry . . .

10 – 15 minutes, ALL this said, and, only then, finally to our opening verse "seek first . . ."

Where/how to begin seeking first? With the Word of God!

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. ^{Ro 10:17}

This is a great seeking first beginning! From this we will begin to learn to pray, start having confidence the voice we hear is God's, we will come into the light so we see the truth, find the good works God prepared in advance for us to do . . .

Jesus' early and great challenge (requiring much grace, much contact, from/with Him):

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ^{Mt 6:33}

This is not just one of many equal or lesser *Bible* verses, but it is key and foundational and one of the most important and vital *Bible* truths. Seek first is where we must begin (however poorly) and where we must return (repent) to when we find ourselves elsewhere (looking and seeking incorrectly – seeking other than Jesus Christ to give us all things necessary for life here and later). Seek first!

And unless we are super-spiritual we find good works are not just "big" things done for others – they are, in most cases, small and mundane, day-to-day, acts for ourselves and those close to us - our marriages, children, taking care of what God gives us (homes, cars . . .), doing a good job . . .

The big question then? Is *Matthew 6:33* enough? Are the all things offered sufficient and is seeking first adequate to ensure all these things? Based on supporting *Bible* verses, it appears *Matthew 6:33* is more than enough!

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. ^{2Ti 3:16 - 17}

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. ^{Col 1:9 - 12}

God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ^{2Co 9:8}