



**Christian Love-Part 3**  
**Loving God's Faithful Promises**  
**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

Well I think you might agree that one of the advantages for the bibliophile in the modern age is having access, 24 hour a day access, to several gigantic virtual bookstores. I went strolling through the aisles of one of those digital bookstores this week looking for titles that relate to trying to explain and clarify the meaning of the two verses we've arrived at in our study of Luke Chapter 17 verses 5 and 6. And I recognize that there is a fairly broad consensus as to what these two verses mean. That is if you look at the best selling books in the category that try to talk about what these verses are all about and let me re-familiarize you with those verses, very short verses in Luke Chapter 17, before I read you some of these titles that I came across. It simply reads this way, "The Apostle said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith' and the Lord said, 'If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed you could say to this mulberry bush, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea" and it would obey you.'" Now, understand that people today don't seem to have much interest in relocating trees in miraculous ways. You can safely understand why a lot of these titles seem to coalesce together in interpreting these texts in a very specific way. In a way that doesn't relate to horticulture or farming or trees or plants but they've replaced all of that, understanding that it is an analogy, with very popular and best selling way to look at verses like this. Here are a few titles. Title one book: "Mustard Seed Faith" which makes sense. Subtitle, now giving us a sense as to what we're trying to have faith for. Here's the subtitle, "Prosperity Rules To Life." Here's another book based on the concept found in Luke 17, "Faith-Based Wealth Building." A book all about that. Here's one from your smiley friend from Houston. Title: It's Your Time," subtitle: "Activate Your Faith And Achieve Your Dreams," which I assume have nothing to do with plants or trees. Here's another the bestselling book, "Faith Can Move Mountains," that's the parallel image and the parallel passage in Matthew, and "Create Financial Prosperity." Here's one, let's just include our health, "Faith, Health and Prosperity." Here's one, just like this bush is going to obey this title is called, a very good selling book, "You Can Have What You Say." So, if you want things done you say it and it'll happen just like that mulberry tree will uproot itself and cast itself in the sea. Here's a method and a program for people it's called, "Financial Prosperity." It's based on this verse, "Thirty Days To Strengthen Your Faith." Another bestselling book from a big time author, "Dream Big, Talk Big And Turn Your Faith Loose." You need to have that faith increased, let it go. "Keys To Faith For Prosperity." Here's one that is pretty bold. Another good seller by a very popular preacher, "How To Write Your Own Ticket With God." You got things you want to do? Write it up and God will do it.

Now if you're familiar at all with the broad spectrum of those who call themselves Christians in our day you'll know that most of these titles coalesced together under an interpretation that is commonly found in groups we would call those that adhere to and promote the Prosperity Gospel or the Word of Faith Movement or the Health and Wealth Gospel, sometimes known as Positive Confession Theology or in short, a lot of people use the shorthand, the Name It And Claim It churches, or as the more pejorative say the Blab It And Grab It group. I mean, this is very common. I wouldn't use that title but they do. Very common to find this kind of book which sells better than, I guarantee you, most of the proper interpretations of a text like this and they all are out there taking a passage like this and enlisting as the goal of what's in view here all about our health, our prosperity, our wealth, our power, our success, our luxury and our comfort.

Very common, super common, very popular. It's reached a heyday in America. It's been going on 125 years in a very large movement and it's still running and ramping up in the mission field in many impoverished countries. It is very popular and sadly, well-received theological brand. Now, it's been rightly perceived that a text without a context is a pretext. And if there's ever been a tiny little text that has been taken out of its context and used as a pretext for all kinds of selfish and

greedy things, it is these two verses that we've reached in our study of Luke Chapter 17.

Now, I don't normally give you the context printed on your worksheet but you'd see, this week, I can't even print this out without giving you the context because I don't even want you to go to your drawer down the road and pull this out six months from now and see the outline, and the title and all the rest and not see the context for this. Now we've reached this passage and we need to deal with these two verses, verses 5 and 6. But as you'll see on your worksheet, which I always assume we will safely go to the context in our own Bibles in our time of study like this, I, at least, had to put it on the sheet because I don't want you ever to divorce this from its context because how bad would it be for us to take any sentences from Jesus and to leverage those out of its context so that we might use it in some adulterated, twisted and perverted way, which is probably the most common way this verse is used by our culture today.

So let's look at these verses again and then let's quickly look at the context so that we don't create a pretext out of this passage. The apostles said to the Lord, here it is again, let's read it, "Increase our faith." So they're making a request of Jesus in this passage. It's the 12 apostles and they say we need more faith, we've got to figure out what that means, and the Lord said, "if you had faith," seems to be speaking of the volume and the size of it, "like a grain of mustard seed you could say to this mulberry bush," which you should understand is a tree that grows a very extensive root system, it can have a very large trunk, if you look this up in Google images this morning, and they can live for hundreds of years. They're big and very substantial trees in the Middle East and here. That tree can be uprooted and planted in the sea if you just speak to that mulberry tree and it would obey you, it would respond to what you've said. Now you can see, if you just take that simple response to that question you think, well they need faith and if they have faith they can do amazing, crazy things. Of course we're not talking about moving trees or transporting, you know, some kind of farm, you know, creatures or some kind of plants or, you know, produce. This must mean something but what does it mean? Well let's get the context and I think we can understand a little bit better what prompted the question and then, for sure, we can decipher what the answer is supposed to mean and how it's supposed to be used in our Christian life. First one, he, Christ, said to the disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come." Now that goes without saying. Our world is filled with temptations to sin. But he's concerned in that trying to show how urgent it is that we avoid sin and what a big deal it is to God, "Woe to the one through whom they come."

You certainly don't want to be the avenue or the conduit through which temptation comes to people, to Christians in particular, as we'll see. It would be better for him, a person through whom sin and temptation comes, if a millstone, that big cement donut, were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than he should cause one of these little ones, which is not talking about children as we saw two sessions ago, we're talking about his endearing, diminutive term for his disciples, guys with beards and grown up people, people who trust in Christ. You don't want to cause followers of Christ to sin. It would be better for you to die a terrible, suffocating, drowning death, that's how bad it would be, than for you really to stand before God as someone who's been an avenue or a conduit through which people sin.

Pay attention to yourselves. Well, I guess so.

I don't want God to have a few of me like that. I've got to be very careful about how I live my life and how I'm careful in terms of sinning. I don't want to do that. I don't want to be a cause to sin. Well, if you see someone sinning, if your brother sinning, maybe he's an avenue of sin to someone else. Maybe he's doing that, so you ought to rebuke him. Sounds like a pretty heavy word as we saw last time we were together. It is a heavy word but it doesn't have to be done in some finger-wagging way. We're basically saying you've got to stop doing that, that's a terrible thing. God hates that. He loves righteousness. You need to stop doing that. And you need to start doing the right thing. And if

he responds to that with repentance, he says you're right, I was wrong, I'll do the right thing. Then you forgive him, you let it go. Aphiemi. You release the debt as we studied last time.

And if he sins against you seven times in a day and he turns to you seven times saying, "I repent." Wow. Now you starting to stretch things pretty far. You must forgive him. You must forgive him.

Now, we've already taken sin that most of us view like this, as a pretty big problem and Jesus put it way up here. And then he says, it's such a big, big problem that if you're the cause of sin, it would be better that you drown and die a horrible death than for you to be that kind of person. So that God's looking at his beloved children and seeing that you somehow are setting them back in the Christian life or causing them some kind of detriment to their spiritual progress. Man, it's a bad problem.

Sin is a huge problem. And then he says this, "If someone sins against you," which is very hard for us to forgive when someone wrongs us, and even if they do it repeatedly so much so that in one day they have to come to you and say I blew it, I'm sorry, I was wrong, I'll do right. After three times it would be really, really hard, after five times it would be impossible. You want me to do this even if it's seven times? Which, of course, is not a number we're supposed to tally and keep track of but a concept of saying that this should be done repeatedly, as often as you have to do it even with a singular person repeatedly sinning against you.

You must do it. Now with that in view, sin is a lot worse than we think. Temptation is a lot bigger problem than we think.

Our demand to obey him and forgiveness is a huge command that is limitless in terms of how much we should do it. They stood back in verse 5 and said "whoa!"

Now we believe that that's God's standard but, man, we need more faith.

We need to really believe this. We need to believe that this is something that is actually possible of human beings to do. I can't believe that it could be done. I can't believe that I could avoid sin or avoid being the problem of sin in someone else life or forgive someone that often. This is huge.

This is very, very difficult. Increase our faith.

Let us believe this. Let us believe this is even a doable thing. This is so overwhelming for us. Now, they often had this response when Jesus talked, for instance, about going before another person and saying I make a covenant before you in marriage, this is Matthew 19, and God says, God is joining us together, no one should separate it. This is a permanent thing. This ought to be the thing that you do and live till death do you part.

The whole concept of the permanence of marriage, the disciples said, "whoa!" I can't even believe it. If that's the way things are you shouldn't even get married. That's just too much. So the disciples were often responding to the things that Jesus said this way. You look at the Sermon on the Mount, all the things that were said about "I know you've heard it said this... but, you know, this is just another version of that." Those kinds of things blew their minds.

And they often needed to say, Wow, I guess Jesus that I got to believe that that's God's standard. Man, increase our faith. We really need to... I mean, we didn't even believe that's possible. So he speaks to the possibility of that. He says, listen, if you had faith, if you just believe it, if you believe that it's not only what God demands but it's something that God will allow you to do. It's something that God will even empower you and assist you to do, as we'll see.



And you could do the impossible. You could take something and say my heart could never forgive someone seven times in one day. If it's the same person... No, you could do impossible things. Like if I said go out in the parking lot, grab that, you know, carrollwood tree, pull it up by its roots and throw it into the ocean 4.5 miles from here.

God can do things you never thought you could do. Now I've just painted for you a formula. God gives a very difficult command and establishes a high standard. You were overwhelmed by the fact that you don't think you could possibly ever do that. Hard to believe God would expect that of people. Hard to believe that anyone could ever accomplish that in obedience. And Jesus says, trust me, you need faith. You need to believe this. And then the promise is we'll get it done. It will happen. God can do it.

That formula is a formula that is completely ignored by people ignoring the context, and they say, all I'm looking at is more faith, making commands and demands and saying things I want to happen and then they happen. In other words this is no longer it's God's will for you to do this, it's a hard thing for you to do, trust him and it'll get done. Now it's what do YOU want to do. What do YOU want from God? What is YOUR will? What are YOUR desires? What's YOUR ticket that you'd like to write for God? What's YOUR definition of, I guess, success and health and wealth and prosperity. You define it and then, listen, we know the key is you need faith, more faith. If it's not happening you don't have enough faith and then, you know what, you'll get what you want. Do you see how we basically are moving in two completely different directions? One is without the context where I get to fill in what it is God is going to do, what kind of mulberry trees do I want transplanted, when God says I want this tree to be uprooted in your life and I want it to go here. The lack of forgiveness, the bitterness, the feelings of vengeance, I want that all let go so that you can be the forgiving person I'm asking you to be. That's a hard command. And there is a formula there that can be applied in several other places as it relates to God's commands and demands on our lives.

But he says, you got to know if I want you to do this you can trust me and it will get done, as opposed to I want some things and goodies in my life, I'm going to trust God and God will get it done for me. A radically different way to look at this passage. Now for me to not trust God for the wrong things that he never wants to happen in my life, that are not God's will for my life, I guess the thing I need to do is to look at the things God's promised to do for Christians, the things that he promises and commands for us to accomplish. If I learned that then I could avoid the problems of people telling me you ought to be trusting God for this in your life. So that would be where we need to start. Before we ever get to verses 5 and 6, let's start with a statement here, as you see next to point number one on your outline, which will go back to the context then at least in the context give us one example of what we're talking about and that is, here is the promise of God. Christians should forgive. They should forgive repeatedly. And of course the underlying promise is that this is God's will, this is what God wants and this is what God's people can do. Number one on your outline, let's become familiar with or learn God's promises. If you learn God's promises and you learn the data in the scripture that tells us what God expects of people and what he promises to accomplish in his people, then when someone comes along and says to you, here's what you ought to be trusting God for.

You'll say, wait a minute, God never promised that for us. And you can ignore it or you can say that is what God promised for us and that is the thing I'm trusting God for. Let me put it this way, you want to be less vulnerable to the false teachers of our day, then become thoroughly acquainted with the promises of the Bible. Become thoroughly acquainted with the commands of the Bible. Understand what the promises of God are and you will no longer be driven and tossed as it says, by every wind of doctrine that comes blowing through the pike that says you ought to be trusting God for a better situation here, here and here. You got to know the Bible. We always encourage you to





read through the Bible with us every year. I meet Christians all the time, they're new to the church or whatever, who say, hey, we're reading through the Bible. We'd love for you to do that. Tell me about your patterns of reading through the Bible. Well, I've never really done it, I do like the Bible, I read the Bible. I like the Psalms and I read through John and I like those things.

How long have you been a Christian? 15 years. So you've been a Christian 15 years, have you ever read the Bible cover to cover? Never done that, I should do that sometime.

It's amazing to me how people can think that somehow they're going to be rooted and established in the truth of God, firmly standing and holding rightly and handling accurately the word of truth if they never even read all of it. I mean this is a dangerous place to be. You need to become so familiar with the Bible, repeatedly reading and understanding what the Bible has to say will be your best safeguard against spiritual catastrophes. The hazards of false teachers, being sucked into what you're seeing on television. I was reading an Oxford study about the move of television, when it first came out and preachers started to utilize that medium to get their message out, it was, even in the beginning, it was littered with people that had this false doctrine about the prosperity Name It And Claim It stuff but it reached its fever pitch of late. In other words, we went from about 40 percent of the people claiming this kind of nonsense as a spiritual get rich or self-help program to now, I think it's up to about 90 percent, I think it was 89 percent in this study that I read. To where you're basically, if you're going to find someone talking about Jesus on the television right now you've got more people who are going to take verses like this and tell you, come up with what your ticket is for God, submit it, by faith and of course send money and you can exercise your faith by sending money into me so I can get my private jet and my vacation house in Florida. Then, you know what, you'll release and increase your faith and then God will give you what you want.

And all this nonsense that I could go ad nauseam because I read a lot this week and refamiliarized myself with a lot of this nonsensical writings that constantly sell a bill of goods to people that say, "hey I'm a Christian." We ought to become more discerning. Just because someone wears the Jesus Jersey doesn't mean they're on our team, you understand that. There are a lot of people out there that are taking the things of God and trying to utilize them as some kind of Tony Robbins seminar so that you can get whatever you want. And I do think there are spiritual forces in this world that are absolutely fine with giving you what you want as long as you keep ignoring what God commands you to do and what he commands you to be. God would have you be thoroughly acquainted with the scriptures so you don't miss what the promises of God actually are. And not to be pejorative or not to be difficult this morning, but let me say this, let's start with just a couple of the promises of God that will help to manage your expectations. Number one, let's start with this one. Genesis Chapter 3 makes very clear in verses 17 through 19, what the fundamental promise of God is regarding your life between now and heaven. Here's what he says. Genesis 3:17. "Cursed is the ground because of you." Picture the periodic table. God now says this perfect thing I created, I'm going to mess it up. How everything works in this world, I'm going to mess it up, the fabric of the universe, the material universe, I'm going to mess it up. Sinful people in rebellion against me, now we're going to deal with an imperfect world that's going to rebel along with you.

So cursed is the ground because of you. You going to have a lot of trouble, pain it says. Pain. Just to get by, just to have enough food to feed your face. You going have pain all the days of your life. Here's promise number one, verse 17, your life is going to be painful. Not many books written on that and if they are they don't sell very well. The promise of God, pain. No one wants to write that book. And then it says, two verses later as it wraps up this promise to us, you are of the dust. "You are dust," right? So we're made of the periodic table. Now, "to the dust you'll return." So here's a great promise from God, your life: pain and death. Now why aren't there books written on that? Because no one needs any faith to believe those promises, am I right? No one needs faith to believe that. I look around, empirical evidence is everywhere. I mean, think about my life as a preacher.



How many funerals do I have to go to, right? I mean, I see it all the time. Pain? Man, people come to me when they're in pain. I mean, this is what I'm exposed to all the time and, of course, you are too. And I have my own pains. I eventually will have my own death to deal with. The reality of pain and death is the promise of God. And if I understand that, then I read a book that says, no, God doesn't want any of that pain in your life.

And certainly he doesn't want you to die. Every time you get close to death you ought to be having enough faith so that you don't die. Which I always ask the question why these faith healers always end up dying. There should be three hundred year old faith healers, am I right? I should see a bunch of them. I don't see any of them. They all end up dying like everybody else. What's the point? Well, God is working out his promises and the promise is this: he's not going to continually postpone your death. And he's not going to give you a pain free life. Now, do I take a Tylenol when I have a headache? Sure. When you get sick and say, pray for me Pastor Mike, I don't go, "I know God is just keeping his promise, man, I'm not going to pray for that." No. I will pray for you and I will ask you, just like when I get hurt I say, God I'd like the pain to go away. But if God says no, this pain you're going to live with. And I start feeling now like the Apostle Paul saying, I have a thorn in my flesh, I want it removed. And God says no, no, no. Do I say, well I don't have enough faith. Is that what Paul said? No. "My grace is sufficient for you." Right? "My power is perfected in weakness." I'm going to do something in the way I'm keeping my promise in pain and even in your death.

And as Paul said, I'll glorify the Lord in life and in death. I will see God's purposes worked out in the midst of the pain and as I lived through this life, which will eventually end in my death, barring the Rapture. So I've got to come to the realization God has promised pain and death and therefore I've got to realize that whatever book tells me that that is not a part of God's plan for my life, I've got to reject it because you don't know all the promises of God. Because the first promises God ever made to mankind was pain and death. Secondly, you want to become a Christian. You want to follow Christ. So many passages come to mind but let me just start with this one, Acts Chapter 14.

When here, the Apostle Paul goes around strengthening the young churches and the young churches now are followers of Christ in a non-Christian world. They're living a Christian life in a non-Christian world. They're trying to pursue Christ in a world that's hostile toward Christ and he says simply this, "through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God." So whatever the trouble was in your life before you became a Christian, you become a Christian. Now here's the promise, to echo the words of Jesus in John 16:33, he says, "in this world you will have tribulation. But take heart, I've overcome the world." There's something better coming. Which, by the way, helps me to parlay this into another promise regarding the rewards of God.

Because I know there's no way you're gonna have any of this going on unless there are some verses that fuel these preachers. But what they don't do is they don't understand or look at the context of all these verses to tell us exactly what God means when he says, hey, if you give, you'll receive.

Hey, if you do this, I'll do that. The quid pro quo equations of God in the Bible need to be understood with the promises of God. And here are some of the promises of God when it comes to giving. When I give, whether it's time, money, effort, if I stay the extra hour, spend the extra dollar or go the extra mile for Christ. Yes, God will reward me but here are two things we often forget. We've studied one in Chapter 16 of Luke when he said to the people that loved money and all the wealth of this world, he says the things that are highly exalted in the eyes of men are an abomination in the eyes of God.

So I know this, if I sit there and say I've given you some of these things that were so precious to me, God says, yes, I'll repay you but I'm going to repay you with things that are precious to me.



It's like a little kid that's grabbing on to some gumball and saying, this is the thing that I want and I'm going to grab onto this when God has a \$100 bill, and from our economy that means something to us. But to the kid it means nothing, it is just a piece of paper with an old guy on it. So he wants his candy. And here's the thing. If we're willing to give the precious commodity of our time, our effort, our energy and our money for the sake of the kingdom and the Lord, God is going to respond and he will give. I mean he'll give it, he'll pour it out in your lap, running over, shaken together, overflowing. I get that. But you forget the fact that the things that we value are not the things that God values.

So the reciprocity of God, the repayment of God for Christians that give and sacrifice, he gives a lot of things that he values back to his servants when they're giving away things that the world values. That's very important for us to realize.

Secondly, we need to understand the timing. We presume upon what he's going to respond with. We presume upon when he's going to respond. Because it is, when it comes down to it, good health, prosperity, power, reputation, pleasure, luxury, comfort, convenience, all of those things are good. And for tactile, sentient beings like us, those are good things for us and we'll experience all of those. The question is when. And the Bible often says this: I will reward you but your reward is not the reward of giving you yachts and cars and vacation homes necessarily. That may be a nice little accouterment but they mean nothing in God's economy. What matters is what he's going to give you when this life is over. And he gives us the crown of life and he rewards us with, as he says, true riches. Now who's going to ever entrust true riches to you if you can't deal rightly with the world's riches that are going to fail. So I gotta to learn to value what these things are here and be willing to say these aren't important to me and God says, great. Even if you're willing to give up some of those things that really aren't important in God's economy, watch what God does to give you things in a place and in that time and in a measure that are going to come in some other reality.

So important for us, as Tozer like to put it and Lewis put it and all the, you know, thinkers who are so poetic in wording these things have put it, when we really look at the promises of God and we see that the promises of God in this life are always, really, when it comes down to it, dealing with the temporal nature of this life and the unimportance of this life, it makes perfect sense that we should pin all of our hopes in the next life and not in this one. And that's the Mike Fabarez paraphrase, after saying they're so eloquent. I'm just going to give you the non-eloquent version of this. It's about the next life, not about this life. And every martyr who died in the Coliseum, beaten, ripped apart by animals, they weren't losers because they didn't have enough faith. Every person that went around sacrificing their health or their time or whatever it might be as Paul said, spending and be expended for the souls of people, they weren't losers because they didn't have enough faith.

God is a rewarder of those who seek Him and we have to believe that. It's what kind of reward and when will that reward be granted. So you can quote those verses to me and I've read a bunch of them out of context this week and I've got to recognize, yeah, yeah, I understand the principle, you just don't understand the timing or the nature of a lot of those promises. Because in this life, when it comes to the life that I want in terms of in my flesh, luxury, comfort, convenience, everyone to like me, employee of the year, all that stuff, the Bible promises just the opposite for those who follow him. They hated me, they'll hate you, Jesus said repeatedly. Learn the promises of God, not to make us dour and negative but to raise our values to another level. The things that your non-Christian coworkers and your neighbors and your counterparts in this world want are not the things that really should be the loves of our lives, the interests and goals of our lives. Your aspirations, your hopes, the things you pray for ought to be on a whole different level than when the non-Christian decides to call out to God for something. Paul actually said when everyone else would be crying out for God to save their life, he said I'm hard pressed between life and death. Life's going to mean service but, you know what, "for me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Now people aren't praying that way

in the waiting rooms of hospitals right now, the non-Christians, right? They're crying out to God because they can't see it that way.

Learn the promises of God and I think you will never be falling subject to the mis-interpretation of this text. So the context can help us understand. You got to know the promises of God, which in this case are: Christians are called to obey God, hate sin and forgive their brothers and never be an avenue or conduit of temptation to other people. Those are things that God wants us to do. He said to do them and not only that the response of Christ in verse 6 makes it feel like, wow, he's going to do that in us. He's going to do that through us. Let's think about that. They wanted faith to believe it. Verse 5, the Apostle said increase our faith. Now allow me if you would, I know the answer is found in verse 6 and we're going to look at that answer but first let's just stand back and look at the question. The command, the requests. God give us more faith. Now if I were there and had time to think about it like I did this week, I'd raise my hand and say, well I know one way I can help your faith. I mean what Jesus is going to say, that's one point and it is very important, it's critical, it's the core of it. But I know I could add another one. You asked about faith and I know this about faith. Faith is something I will put in someone to the extent that I think they're faithful. I will trust someone to the extent that I think they're trustworthy.

I'll rely on someone to the extent that I think they are reliable. So I know our theology proper becomes very important at this juncture. I've got to have a very high view of God's faithfulness, his trustworthiness and his reliability. And I got to look at commands like, you ought to forgive seven times a day and I got to say, if God says that that's the right thing, it's the good thing and I know this about the promises of God, as I'm about to get into, he will make that happen because he's done things to make it happen in my life. And I got to trust that he can and I got to trust that he will. So I first have to start with the fidelity of God. I put it this way. Number two, you need to trust in a faithful God. When you look at a command of God that looks too hard, I don't think people can do that, I don't think I can consistently avoid that, and I don't think I can break this addiction, I don't think I can have the guts to share my faith with a non-Christian, and I don't think I can defend my faith, I don't think I can disciple anybody, I don't think I can step up and do that thing. Whatever it is you think it's too much, I'm overwhelmed by what God is requiring of me, you've got to know God is faithful. He's not going to give you a command in Scripture that he is not willing to supply what is enabling you to get it done.

And the Bible is so clear on this and let's start at the core of it. One passage, this is so good. Ezekiel Chapter 36 verses 26 and 27. It should be familiar to you because I quote it so often. Here's the reason I quote it. Because I know this, no matter what's happened in my life in terms of the ability that I have to follow the will of God, to fulfill the will of God, which is what this passage is all about. To believe that I can be the person God wants me to be and expects me to be and commands me to be, it's going to begin with this, knowing that whoever I am as a Christian is not who I was as a non-Christian. Whoever I am, I've got to realize this. I have something going on now I didn't have going on before. To put it in the words of a verse, I hope you learned as a kid even if you grew up in a church, Second Corinthians 5:17. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things are gone. Behold new things have come." So, old and new, I know that what I couldn't do before I can do now because of this thing called a new creation. These good works that seem so hard as Ephesians 2 says, I'm the workmanship of Christ, I'm created in Christ Jesus for these good works. So I know God has done something in me that has allowed me to do this. Now, why did I make you think about or turn you to Ezekiel 36:26? Because of this, here's how it's put. If you want to think about the center, the core, the control center, the nerve center of your life, to put it in terms of the analogy of a Hebrew idiom, it's your heart. And the heart, the thinker of my life, the core of my life, the impetus for everything that comes out of my life, the heart, it says here's the problem. When God gives you commands before you're a new creation, you've got that heart of stone. That heart of stone, it cannot beat in sync with the will of God, it cannot be even alive to God or his commands



because it's dead. And then here's the thing he promises, I'll rip that heart of stone out and I'll put in a heart of flesh. Smile at me if you remember this passage now, right? "Oh yeah, yeah, that's right." And then he says this, I'll put a new spirit in you. That's another way to talk about being a new creation. It's with a small "s" and rightly so. That's a good way to translate it with a small "s", it's talking about you will not be the person you were before. And when God says forgive seven times and you say, "why, I can't do that." Well, what do you mean you can't, when he says share your faith? "I can't do that." Yes you can and here's why you can. It starts with this: this miracle of regeneration. You have to have the faith that you're not the person you were before. You have to trust that what God has done in your life is to change the core desires of who you are that, before, was incapable of obeying and believing in God. And now, he's given this to you.

He's taken out your heart of stone that is dead to God and his commands and he's given you a heart of flesh and made you a new person. Paul said of the old man, done. I'm not that man anymore. I'm a new man in Christ. Now the problem is I'm enmeshed and encased in flesh that constantly fights, as Peter said, there's constantly, my flesh is waging war against my soul, there's a battle, that's why we don't do this perfectly.

But if you think we've got kind of a 50/50 fight here, you don't because the next verse, in verse 27 in Ezekiel 36 says this: "I'll put my Spirit in you," the Lord says. Yahweh says, I'll put my Spirit, capital "S" in you. Does that sound like a centerpiece of New Testament theology? What's the difference between me as a non-Christian and me as a Christian? Not only am I made new and my thinker, the catalyst, the impetus, the fountain of my life completely now re-done to where now I should be able to bring good things out of this good resource of my life because God has made me a new person in Christ, but he has also put his Spirit in me that's constantly working to live out the will of God that he assigns to me. And he puts it this way in the verse, I just got to read it, "I will put my Spirit within you and I will," here's how it's translated, "cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." Now what's a rule in the context of our passage in Luke 17? Someone sins, forgive them. If they're sinning, rebuke them. If you in your life, pay attention, don't be a cause to sin. You can do this. Why? Because you're new person in Christ. Yeah, you're fighting the flesh but I've given you the star player. Who's the star player? God himself is now going to have some weird relationship with you that's so hard to define that it's defined spatially like I'm some kind of cup and he's poured into me and now the Spirit is going to convict, he's going to prompt.

Here's the word translated, "to cause you," some translations translate this Hebrew word "to move you" to keep my precepts and be careful to keep my rules.

God says I will get in your life and when you are met with that seventh offense and that seventh repentance and that person says forgive me again and you look right now and say, I could never do that.

The Spirit of God is going to work in your life to convict, to prompt, to move, to energize you to be able to do the very thing you don't think you can do. To live up to the standards that God has for you. It is possible. He is faithful. "Yeah, but the temptation is strong."

I'm glad you mentioned temptation. First Corinthians Chapter 10 verse 13 says this about temptation: every temptation you have to wimp out in your evangelism, to not step up and trust that God can allow you to stand up for the truth of Christianity, to stop that habit, that sinful addiction that you have. All those things you say, I can't stop, I can't do it, I can't step up, I can't continue in this, he says there are "no temptations overtaking you except that which is common to man," right in the middle of that verse, and "God is faithful." Now why would you have to say that? Because of the next thing that's coming. "And he will not allow you..." Now you either believe this. You just need a mustard seed of faith here. You've got to believe that he's faithful. He's not going allow you



"to be tempted beyond what you're able." Why? Because you're a new person in Christ, the Spirit of God is there. He's governing that temptation. "But with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape."

Now if you think that's mystical, right?

It's a powerful promise that relates to the Spirit of God, and in that sense it seems mystical, but it is very practical. It's very practical.

You've heard the old story about the guy that drowned in the flood and for a long time praying for God to help when the boat came by and waiting on God. OK. The helicopter comes by and drops the rope, OK, I'm waiting on God, I don't need that. And then he dies, goes to heaven, God what happened? I thought you're going to save me. I sent you a boat, I sent you a helicopter, you've heard that illustration. That's a poor telling of it if you've never heard it. But most of you have heard that, right? Some of us think somehow magically, and by that I mean without any kind of method, God is going to make these things happen to where I can forgive seven times in a day, where I can do what God wants me to do, where I can step up and serve the way he tells me to, where I can read my Bible and understand, you know, all these things that are going on in ministry or be involved in saying no to sin, without the means that he's provided.

For instance I could have some terrible sin problem and God is saying, iron sharpens iron, love each other, gather together, don't forsake them and do that so you can spur one another on to love and good deeds. He says things like I've given gifts to the church to equip you to become fully mature so that you're solid and firm and strong in your faith like pastors and teachers.

I mean, God's giving you the means to get these things done and you have to utilize those means to get these things done. And he's faithful to provide that. I guarantee you, you have everything you need for life and godliness. By his great and precious promises he has given you everything there and he is faithful to fulfill those. But you've got to respond. And the response is, are you responding or do you have the accountability you need? Are you reading the books and getting the training you need? Are you reading through the Bible? Are you talking with those in small groups about your church? You utilize the means that God gives. And God says, I've given you everything internally to make that happen. You can nourish your new spirit, the spirit in my life, if you don't grieve me I'll empower you and I'll move you to do the things that I have asked you to do, no matter what that is.

God is faithful. He is faithful and he will accomplish his will in our lives because he's changed your heart, he's promised to take you all the way to the end what he begins in you, he will bring it to completion. We have to believe that he is a faithful God. This is a God that calls things before they happen. Every time he makes a promise he keeps it.

I mean 900 years before Daniel and Ezekiel, before all those things happened and the things he said he would do and if you do this I'll do that. He promised those nine hundred years before in the book of Leviticus by the pen of Moses. We had promises that he fulfilled nine hundred years later, not to mention that 400 years of silence that put a pause at the end of the Old Testament. All those messianic prophecies, here's what I'm going to do. He fulfills them in Christ, promise after promise after promise after promise. This is a God who cannot lie.

And even though he can't lie, what does the Bible say? In Hebrews Chapter 6 he's gone to such great lengths in the Bible to prove to you who doubt him. And he does it by doing things like swearing an oath, by making a covenant, by promising. I mean think about these things. God, who doesn't lie, doesn't need to swear that he'll do things and yet he does. And he says I've done that so

that you who have come to me for refuge, you've come to me for help, that you might have, let me just read this great passage to you, strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope that set before us. And that you can have, look at this, that you may have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. I know you're sitting there like the disciples going, "I don't think I can do that."

And here's Jesus saying, just have a mustard seed of faith. Here this text says, he's done so much to prove his faithfulness. You ought to have an anchor in your soul. Not a seed, not a tiny little seed you could put on the tip of your finger. God has gone to such great lengths to prove this: he is faithful. You don't think you can do the things that God is requiring of you right now?

He's put you in a pressure cooker and you think I can't live, I can't keep living the Christian life, I can't sustain that temptation. I can't continue to walk with him if the circumstances are like this.

I can't take this diagnosis and continue to be a joyful, praying Christian. God says, yeah, you can. And I am faithful to do what I say and that is I'm going to change your heart, I'm going to put my spirit in you, I'm going to give you all the resources that you need, all my great and precious promises. You just continue to supplement your faith by pursuing these virtues. I'm just quoting Peter now, you'll get this in your small groups on the back your worksheet. But if you would do that, I'm faithful, every time. I've been faithful to my kids from the beginning of time and he will be faithful to you. Trust in a faithful God.

Now that is an excursive I suppose with me raising my hand saying, "Hey guys, I know how to increase your faith. You've got to know he's faithful. Increase your trust. He's trust worthy. You can rely on him more because he's reliable." But Jesus' answer goes to his strength. He says, you know what? If you had faith like the grain of a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry bush be uprooted and planted in the sea. How hard is that? Very hard. Human people, human beings can't do that. He said but if you had faith, you could say, here's my problem, I can't share my faith, I'm too afraid, and it would happen if you just trust me. Why? Not just because I'm faithful, which is a good place for us to start when we're talking about faith, but because I'm strong, because I'm powerful. You need to trust. Let's just ended it this way. Number three, we need to trust in a powerful God. You know how strong God is to take weak things and make them useful? Do you know how strong God is to take something that really shouldn't in and of itself have any ability to do great things and to accomplish great things through you? What, for your yacht in the harbor? I'm not talking about that. You're thinking again like the tele-evangelist. What are we talking about? We're talking about you fulfilling God's plan for your life. And what is that? Open the Bible and learn it and you'll see it. Here's what God expects of you. He expects purity, he expects faithfulness, he expects holiness. He expects you to fight temptation and to take the way of escape every time you're backed into a corner. We have a powerful God that can get that done. The God that created the universe, which the Bible continually goes back to by the way. You need a little help with this? Just look around.

I love Psalm 89 where the psalmist says, you know, God is so powerful, God is so strong, why am I doubting God? He's so strong. Then he quotes two things that always remind us of God's strength: mountains. He quotes Mount Hermon. There's about a ten thousand foot mountain in Israel and he references Mount Tabor, which is a lot smaller. And when I read that passage I think about Tabor up in the north, near in Galilee, it reminds me of our little local Santiago Peak here and Saddleback Mountain. Not a big mountain but it's there and we see it all the time and certainly they did in Galilee and Jesus grew up looking at Mount Tabor. And here is the psalmist saying, look at the power of God.

Think, just imagine someone saying move that mountain, right, which is the parallel passage and that's the analogy there. Moving a mountain, it seems... I don't have a... I need a big shovel. I can't do it. I can't move a mountain. God puts mountains in place. You've got Mount Hermon, it's about



ten thousand foot mountain, like our Mount Baldy, right? That's about 10,000 feet.

And after this storm, who knows, you can look up there and you're going to see it, the clouds clear out and you're going to see this going up the I-5 and the snow capped mountain. You're going to go, "Wow, look at that big, gigantic, majestic mountain." If you come from some flat state, you come here and you appreciate those things. And we need to remember what great, majestic pictures of God's grandeur these big piles of dirt are.

It's a reminder to us, God is a big God. Do you think he can move a few things around in your life to get you to be who he has called you to be? You bet he can. As Isaiah says, the God who puts the stars in place. I think he can handle your weakness, your insecurities, your problems.

I think he can take you and whatever the barrier is between you being the person God has called you to be and what you're saying, "I can't do it" is, he can take care of that.

His invisible attributes have been on display since the creation of the world, Romans Chapter 1 verse 20 says, and he starts that list by saying, you want to know what invisible attributes have been on display in creation? He says, namely, he starts with this: his eternal power. God is a powerful God. The power that raised Jesus from the dead, it makes very clear in Romans Chapter 6, is the kind of power that can make you walk in the newness of life. You know, having someone come back from the dead is a bigger feat than you sharing the gospel with your coworker.

Having someone pop out of the grave is a much bigger exertion of power than you need to stop sinning this week in that thing that keeps tripping you up.

You've got to trust the fact that we're dealing with a powerful God. You can't take a mulberry bush, pull it out from the roots and throw it in the ocean. But God can do that and he wants to accomplish His will in your life. I talked about the revealed will of God and that's where it starts, does it not? You open up your Bible and it says, all the things I've been talking about and throwing out these examples, these are things that the Bible asks us all to do. But then there's the specific will of God. Sometimes we call that the secret will of God. You've got the revealed will of God. We can all look at chapter and verse. Then we have the secret will of God. Which is kind of hinted to for instance in passages like John 21, remember John 21? Here was Jesus saying to Peter, you're going to stretch out your arms and you going to become a martyr. And he goes, "Oh, wait a minute, what about John over there?"

And what does he say? Don't worry about John. You worry about what I have for you. You follow me.

Now here's the secret will. He wasn't even going to tell us what the will was for John. But he says, your path and his path may be different. All the revealed will of God, I want to accomplish that in your life.

But then you got specific things I want to do for you. And not to make this too personal but I think about myself sometimes on a week like this, it's been a super busy week of preaching. I've been preaching more hours than anybody should preach it seems, at least in the modern age, I know they preached a lot more in the past. But I think to myself, I've been on way too many platforms this week. And if you said, Mike Fabarez, non-Christian Mike Fabarez, teenage Mike Fabarez, you're going to one day be a preacher. And if they could take me in this little, you know, Dickens tale to this week and say here's what you're going to do, I would say, you are crazy. I'd much rather die than stand on a platform and speak in front of people.





I was a pretty dutiful kid, by the way, growing up in my house, keeping the rules until it came to going to school on days that I had to speak publicly. I hated that. I hated that. Matter of fact those were the only days I can ever think of cutting class. I couldn't do it, I couldn't stand up and talk in front of people. I was the guy and there are always those guys, remember those guys in class, you'd have a little goody two-shoes go and get the front rows? Not at church, these are my favorite people in the front here. But in class, you know, in junior high they all run up to the front. And then there always the guy that wanted to sit closest to the door in the back, hopefully never be seen. That was me. Would I ever raise my hand? Ask any of my old classmates, would I ever raise my hand? You know that only went through junior high, elementary school, high school, into college. I became a Christian in college. I did not want to say a word publicly to people.

And then I become a Christian and God says here's the revealed will of God.

And then I start to kind of bump around figuring out, as the Bible says, trying to find out what's pleasingly to the Lord as a good steward of my own life. And God starts opening doors for me to do stuff like teaching. I hated it. And yet God said, no, I think you can do this. We can do it. I have a plan. I want you to do this.

It made very clear sense to me that this is what I should be doing. And if you said, well, you're going to teaching, I said, well, I'd better have a script, man. Is there a teleprompter? I mean, I might be able to think in my wildest imagination, maybe I will speak and I will stand on the platform. Maybe, just maybe, if I have it all laid out and no one is going to ask me anything. You know how many events...? I think I've spent about five hours with unscripted time either on stages in front of people, being streamed on radio, doing live radio, without any script, without seeing any of the questions and knowing what was coming next — hours! Had you said to me, even as a new Christian, God is going to use you to speak extemporaneously and answer questions in front of thousands of people, you're going to do that in your Christian life. I'm going to go, you're crazy, you're nuts.

It would have instilled me with such fear, as a matter of fact, as God kept opening doors every time, it was fear as Paul said, came with trembling and sweating hands, I don't want to do this. And yet I recognize this, if that's God's will for my life, here's what God wants me to pray for and trust him for is that he will accomplish his will through me. Now I don't know what it is that God is calling you to do. I know the revealed will of God and all of us and the examples I've given. We have to care about putting sin out of our lives, the kind of habitual sin that trips us up, stepping up to share our faith, pray, get in the word, be the light in a dark place.

Those are hard enough but what are the specific things that you're starting to figure out this is what God would call me to do? Are you telling God, I don't think I can do that. Don't do that. You've got a faithful God that if he calls you to it he'll supply for it. How strong is he? He's so strong he puts the mountains in place. He spins the galaxies. He can take care of your little insecurities. When Moses goes, "I can't talk, I'm a stutterer. I can't do this." God said, wait a minute, you forget my power. Who made man's mouth? I can take care of your speeches.

When the disciples, a bunch of fisherman, were told they are going to be called before the educated, Ph.D., religious authorities of the day, they're going to drag you into the synagogue, you're going to stand before kings, "We don't know what we're going to say!"

I'll give you what you're going to say. You have to trust me.

"Well, that means we don't work, right?" No. You have to work.



Clearly we have to work. To uproot the tree, you've got to go out there, put your arms around it and pull.

Now you're not going to be able to do that, but God's able to do that.

My fear in preaching a sermon like this is you may stand back and say, well, OK, we're not the Name It Claim It crowd. Great, we got that little warning about the false teachers out there. And now he told me to trust the faithful God and trust the powerful God.

And it's very popular in our circles. Put your feet up and relax. "The Lord will do it. Let go and let God. I believe in his sovereignty. You just take me along on the sails of his spirit and wherever I am, this is the Lord's will."

Philippians Chapter 2 verse 12 says, you ought to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. You ought to work.

Not a chance that I'm going to get to a speaking engagement where I have to speak without working hard to prepare for that.

I'm not going to go into a situation that I know is going to be filled with temptation without working hard to prepare for that. I'm not going to sit there and see an evangelist opportunity and go, "Well, I'm not going to worry about what I'm going to say." I'm going to sit down and I'm going to work and prepare never trusting that I can do this without the intervention and support and empowerment and accomplishment of God.

I have to trust in him. But I'm going to work. But then I'm going to get to the next verse, verse 13 of Philippians 2, that says, for it's him, God, who is at work within you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. There's a bit of a mystery there in that. The synergism of a God who says I'm going to call you to obey me.

I'm going to put a spirit in you that's new, I'm going to put my spirit in you, you're going to have a heart of flesh. I want you now to forgive seven times a day, if I say that, and if I tell you to speak seven times in a week, you're going to do it.

I'm a powerful God. I can get it done. Trust me. It doesn't take much faith, as long as your faith is in the right person, to get these things done. Is this about yachts and cars and vacation houses? Of course not, that's absurd, that's satanic.

This is about you being the person God has called you to be in righteousness, in holiness, in ministry, in service. You have to trust the God who can do this, he's faithful and he's powerful.

I try to instill a robust work ethic in my kids as they were growing up. I would enlist my boys, for instance, in things I really didn't need help with, if you dads do that just to kind of teach your kids something. I mean I would have them, for instance, if I needed to slide, you know, a desk into my study or maybe, you know, a dresser into their room after I'd bought it and put it together or whatever it might be and I've got to move it. I might say to the kids, "hey, get over here, help me push this desk." Or I might, you know, have an ice chest I'm unloading from the back of the car and I can carry it, it's got two handles but, you know, "Hey, boys, get on the other end. I'm going to carry this, you can help me carry this." Coming back from home depot, I got my 2x4, I'm going to build something in the backyard for them. "Hey, get on the other end, boys. Help me carry this." I can carry it without them. What's funny sometimes is when I engage them in helping me, they get the wrong idea about how this works.



The time, for instance, moving that desk, sliding it from one room to the next and, of course, we have to turn the corner there in the hallway. I'm pushing and here their poor little bodies, their little, you know, pencil arms are pushing and we're kind of getting around the corner. And then they've got their spot and we get around the corner and our bodies start bumping, our hips start butting, and they say, "Dad, you're in the way."

"OK," and I step back. "I'm out of your way now." And they push and push and that desk won't move another inch.

"Dad!" And then they scoot over and cry out, "Help, help." So I guess you do need me there. Right? You don't recognize that, really, to get this from here to there, to accomplish the thing that I'm asking us to do. Yes, I'm asking you to push and I'm asking you to push hard. I want to see those little stringy arms start to pop out little muscles. But I know if I'm not here pushing this thing it ain't movin' an inch.

If you're pushing on the desk and it doesn't seem to be moving in the way you want it to, you're thinking I can't push anymore, I can't do it. I can't continue to wake up and get in the word and I can't trust him. Everything is so hard. That test comes back and it's still negative, I'm making no improvement and I can't endure, I can't obey, I can't fight this temptation, I can't evangelize, I can't defend the faith, I can't serve. I just can't keep going. Do you feel that way? I can assure you of this, there have been a lot of godly people that feel the same way.

You are not alone, but you're also totally wrong. Totally wrong.

The apostle Paul was totally wrong when he wrote in Second Corinthians Chapter 1, you know, I felt like I couldn't keep going. He said this, Second Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 8, "We were so utterly burdened beyond our own strength that we despaired of life itself." We're done. We can't do it anymore.

Verse 9 says, "Indeed, we felt that we received the sentence of death." "But," he says, "this was to make us not rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead."

If God can raise the dead, do you think he can get you in the word tomorrow morning? If God raises the dead do you think he can keep you from sin on Thursday afternoon? If God raises the dead don't you think you can be the person and step up and do the things he's asking you to do? If he asks you to forgive and you think I just can't forgive that person. Yeah, you can. He's a God who raises the dead. You just have to rely, not on yourself, but on God. Verse 10, for "he has delivered us from such a deadly peril." What was the deadly peril? I just don't think I can go on anymore. We're done. "And he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope and he will deliver us again." I don't know what I'm going to hit next. That's a biblical optimism right there. Another word for that, faith. It's faith that God is a God who will accomplish in us and through us what he commands for us to do.

You have to believe that. You have to trust Him. God knows what he's doing. He's trustworthy and he's omnipotent. Don't say you can't. Keep pushing.

Let's pray.

God, help us in a day where pushing in the Christian life is certainly getting more difficult. It seems because of our culture it's harder and harder for us to tow the line in what the Bible has to say, to be obedient in sharing our faith with the friends and neighbors and coworkers around us.



Being a kind of person that's willing to stand up for the unalterable truth of your word. It's hard for us to even to fight our own internal temptations when we look at a world that's constantly fanning them into a flame. And this kind of temptation in our day, for whatever it is we're struggling with, and there are options everywhere around us to indulge in a flesh. God, we can sit there and say how can we do this? We can't live a godly life in such an ungodly place. We can't step up and be bold in a place that keeps knocking us back. We can't forgive in this situation when these people are so bad toward us. God, I pray this morning we would remember that you can do the impossible, which is not having that formula begin with a list of things that we're writing, writing our own ticket for God, that has nothing to do with this passage. But trusting that if you command us to do something, no matter how tough it may seem, and even if it's beyond the revealed will of God, if it's the secret will of God, as we like to say. The plan that you have for our lives, like you had a plan for Paul, you had a plan for John, you had a plan for Peter, I pray that we'd have the kind of faith that says we know you can accomplish that through us. We just going to keep working and keep pushing.

God, I pray that you do this for us, that this church might be filled with people that are activating their faith, not to get rich or to be comfortable, to have more luxury in their life, but to be more fruitful Christians that honor you by what they do and what they don't do. So God, empower us here today as we trust you, a powerful God.

In Jesus name. Amen.