

Overcoming Unbelief (Part 2)

by Bayless Conley

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Hello, friend. We are talking about something that will either hinder God or invite His presence and His power. I'm serious. Something in the Scripture that we're taught about, that we're warned about, that will actually keep us from inheriting God's promises, and there's something else that will open the door for God's promises to flourish and come to pass in our life. You're going to love this. So grab a Bible, sit down, let's get into the Word together.

I am so glad that you have joined me. I want to start by just telling you a story. Back in the early days of our church, probably within the first, I'm going to say, a year and a half of us having started the church, and right now, we've been going about 40 years, so it was a few decades ago. A woman that attended the church, she made an appointment, and she came in to see me. I had my secretary there, the door is open, and so she comes back in the office, and she says, "Pastor, I battle with this depression." And my heart went out to her. I know that's a very real thing. Listen, in no way do I mean to make light of that. I think some people that haven't experienced that don't know the depths of depression that some people can sink to. They don't realize what can happen.

And so, I share this to bring forth a principle. Now, as she was there talking to me, sharing about what she went through, I felt like the Holy Spirit gave me a word for her. It was a word that I believe would have unlocked her situation, and I'm not just saying that I was going to share a principle that works. It certainly is, was, and is a principle that works. It's a truth from the Scriptures. But I really felt like the Spirit gave it to me to give to her.

And I opened my Bible, and I began to share with her from Psalm 22 how God, in the literal Hebrew, He enthrones Himself upon the praises of His people, literally the singing praises of His people. God inhabits the praises of Israel. And I began to share with her that when we praise God, His Spirit comes. And I talked about Paul and Silas. They're in prison in Macedonia. And at midnight, they prayed, and they began to sing praises. And there was an earthquake. Everyone's chains fell off, and everyone's prison doors opened. I shared that thought. And then in Isaiah, "God meets the one who rejoices," Isaiah promised.

And I said, "Listen, I just feel like if you will lift your hands, and if you will sing, and if you will praise God, that God's presence will come and this cloud that's been over you will be broken."

I said, "Look, I want to show you what I mean." And I literally, in front of her, I lifted my hands, and I stood up, and I began to walk around the office, and I began to say, "Lord, I thank You. I praise You. I worship You." And I began to sing, and I began to worship, and I began to thank God for probably about five minutes, right in front of her. I just walked back and forth. And I tell you, I got in the spirit of it.

I said, "Now if you will do that, God's presence will come." I said, "You can do that in your home, but I'll tell you what, I want you to do that right now." She wouldn't do it. I got her to stand up. I couldn't get her to lift her hands. She wouldn't do it. She basically said, "No, I can't do that if

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I don't feel like it." I said, "Well, you can. It's something you do by faith." She said, "No, I can't do that. No." And I tried, and I tried, and I tried, and she refused to respond.

I mean, right there, I said, "Look, I'll lift my hands with you. We can do this together right now." She refused to do it.

Friend, unbelief is having an unpersuadable attitude about the Word of God. It's choosing to believe something other than what God says about us and our situation.

By contrast, I have a friend. He called me one night, and he said, "Bay," that's what some of my friends call me, short for Bayless. He said, "Bay, I'm in trouble. Man, I screwed up." And he shared with me what happened, and man, he was in trouble. He said, "I don't know what to do." He said, "I feel like my world's falling apart. I don't know what to do."

I said, "Look, what you need to do, you need to lift your hands and walk around in your kitchen praising God at the top of your voice." I said, "That's all I know to tell you." He said, "Okay." He hangs up the phone.

I talked to him the next day. He says, "Bay," he called me, he says, "Bay." He said, "I did it. I felt like I'd lead weight on my hands, but I lifted my hands, I began to walk around the kitchen, and I just began to shout and praise God, and thank God, and I began to worship Him, and I did that for about 10 minutes." He said, "Suddenly, that oppression off of me broke." He said, "It's like God's presence filled the room." He said, "And the Holy Spirit spoke to me, and He showed me what I need to do." He said, "I know what I need to do in this situation." He said, "I screwed up, but God showed me a way out." And he did what God showed him, and everything worked out, actually, amazingly. God turned what could have been a great curse into an amazing blessing that has actually been a blessing in his life to this day, some 40 years later.

Now, in the New Testament, in the book of Hebrews, we're told that the Israelites never entered into the promised land, even though God had told them that it was theirs. God had promised them that every place the sole of their feet would tread, it would be theirs. God said, "I will put the fear of you in all the inhabitants of the land. I'll drive them out from before you."

And so, Moses sends 12 spies in, and they come back, and 10 of the spies disagree with God. Two of them agreed with God, Joshua, and Caleb. And the entire congregation agreed with the ten spies who spoke contrary to God's promise. And as a result, that generation never entered into the promised land. For 40 years, they did laps around Mount Sinai until that whole generation died off. And the Scripture in the book of Hebrews says that they didn't enter in because of unbelief. And that we're told not to fall after the same example of unbelief or to have the same unpersuadable disobedient attitude towards God's words and His promise.

Now, just listen to this. This is from Numbers chapter 13. This is what the spies said when they came back. They said,

²⁷ Then they told him, and said: "We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. ²⁸ Nevertheless . . .

Oh, that can be a bad word—Nevertheless. In other words, everything God said, but.

I remember I was actually speaking in a little community one time many years ago, it was sort of gang-infested, and it was a church that ministered to a lot of gang people. And so, I was invited

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to come and preach, and it was an interesting service. Right before I started, this guy, they call him a “veterano”, he was an old gang member, one of the guys that just sort of just lived longer than he should have. He had been involved in all the gang stuff.

And he walked with a cane, had a limp because somebody had snuck into the house where he was, put a 38-caliber gun to his head, and fired it to execute him when he was sleeping on the couch. And he survived but had some of the tell-tale signs of that. Anyway, after he was shot, he'd been saved.

And he showed me he had a whole bunch of gang tattoos. It was interesting because there were scars on top of a lot of them. I said, “What happened there?” And he says, “Well, I didn't like those anymore,” so I put a butter knife in the fire, got it hot, and I got rid of those tattoos.”

So, anyway, this guy, I'm talking to this guy, he's got a thick accent. You can tell he's lived a wild and wooly life, but now he's a Christian. And he looked at me, and with his thick accent, he said, “Hey, Pastor. Do you know what the uncompromised Word of God is?” I said, “No. What's the uncompromised Word of God?” He said, “The uncompromised Word of God,” he's got a Bible in his hand, he said, “the uncompromised Word of God means there are no “buts” in this book.” I thought, “Brilliant.” It's not, “Well, God said, ‘but.’”

The Israelites, “God said—nevertheless. God said—but.

. . . the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. ²⁹ The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.” ³⁰ Then Caleb . . .

(now he's one of the 12 spies)

. . . quieted the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.”

Caleb saw the same giants. He saw the same armaments, he saw the same walled cities, he saw the same inhabitants of great stature, he saw it all, but he said, “Look, we're well able. Let's go up at once.”

And Joshua—you can actually read it in the next chapter. Joshua said, “Hey, don't rebel against the Lord. Their defenses have departed from them. The Lord is with us. Fear them not.” Only Joshua and Caleb agreed with God; the other ten spies didn't. They went on in verse 31. It says,

³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.” ³² And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. ³³ There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”

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Well, that actually wasn't true. You can actually read later what Rahab the harlot said to some spies that went into the next generation. She said, "Look, soon as we heard about you, no more courage remained in any man. Every man's heart melted with fear because of you."

But the Israelites, they believed a lie. It says, "Oh, when they see us, they think, 'Ah, those tiny grasshoppers, we'll just squash them,'" wasn't true. They believed a lie. They believed the testimony of their own five physical senses instead of what God had said. And because of that, they never entered into the promised land, and the Scripture calls that unbelief. And again, we're warned not to fall after the same example of unbelief.

Now in the book of Psalms, in Psalm 78, we're given a blow-by-blow description of what happened, how they entered in. And it puts things in a very interesting light. I want you to listen to this. I'm telling you this is worth the price of your ticket and then some. You need to hear what I'm about to say. Psalm 78:40, speaking about those very same Israelites. It says,

⁴⁰ How often they provoked Him in the wilderness . . .

(that is, they provoked God in the wilderness),

. . . And grieved Him in the desert! ⁴¹ Yes, again and again they tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.

They limited God. The Scripture says that this generation of Israelites limited God, and the Hebrew word for "limited" literally means to scratch out a line, to scratch out a line. Literally, they marked a boundary as to what God could do for them.

Like, okay, here's the boundary, God. This is what You can do for us, but nothing outside of that. Man, the line that they scratched was very close to home. The line that they scratched, the boundary that they marked out, didn't include the promised land. It didn't include the things that God had promised to them.

Now, the Bible calls that, again in the book of Hebrews chapter three and chapter four, calls that unbelief. How did this kind of unbelief, how did it gain such an ascendancy in their lives? Are you ready?

The next couple of verses there in Psalm 78.

It says,

⁴² They did not remember His power: The day when He redeemed them from the enemy, ⁴³ When He worked His signs in Egypt, And His wonders in the field of Zoan

Zoan was an Egyptian city also known as Tanis. So literally, they did not remember. That is why they limited God. That is how this unbelief gained ascendancy in their lives. They didn't remember God's past miracles. They didn't remember God's past goodness. Now that doesn't mean that they forgot. It simply means the reality and the significance of what God had done for them escaped them. They had ceased to be thankful, and they no longer praised God for what He had done in their lives.

Now listen, before they went into the promised land, God warned them about this. Listen to this. The Lord is speaking to them in Deuteronomy 7:17. The Lord says,

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¹⁷ “If you should say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?’

Okay, this is before they ever got to the borders of the promised land, before they ever sent the spies in God says, “Okay, listen, this might happen, and if it does, here’s what you need to do.” Now He said,

¹⁷ “If you should say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?’— ¹⁸ you shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt: ¹⁹ the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and the wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm, by which the Lord your God brought you out. So shall the Lord your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid.

Now God said you need to remember well, not just to remember, but God said you need to remember well. That literally means, that phrase in the Hebrew language literally means to bring to mind on purpose and to mention. It carries with it the thought of speaking about those things, of mentioning them, purposefully remember well what the Lord did to the Egyptians, remember well His outstretched hand. Remember well how God worked for you in the past. Bring it to mind on purpose and rehearse it.

My friend, that is a great cure for a fearful heart. God said, “Look, if your heart is afraid, if the thoughts come to you, ‘We can’t do this. The people they’re too big; they’re too strong. We can’t dispossess them.’” God said here’s the cure; here’s what you need to do to ward off that unbelief; you need to remember well.

I had a gentleman come to me one time, a member of the church, and I knew him fairly well. I knew his wife. And he was in a near panic. He had just lost his job. He had had this job for many years. It was actually the only field he was trained in. There weren’t more jobs in that particular industry at the time available. So he’s in, literally, a near panic when he comes into the office. “Pastor, what am I going to do? I’m not going to be able to make my house payment. I’m not going to be able to take care of my wife. I’m not going to be able to support my kids. We’re going to lose the house, and what am I going to do? What am I going to do?” And he’s just going on and on. And I said, “Stop.” And I asked him a simple question. I said, “Has God ever done anything for you before?” He said, “What do you mean?”

I said, “Well, has He ever answered any prayers or worked during a tough time in the past?” He said, “Oh, yes.” I said, “You got stories?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “Let me hear one.” So he launches into this story how he was in a real rough patch years ago, and he prayed, and God opened an amazing door, and it worked for him. And I said, “Really?” He said, “Yes.”

And he says, “And there was this other time . . .” he launches into another story, an amazing story of answered prayer, a story of the mercy of God being displayed. And then he shares a third story. And he goes on and on talking about things. And I didn’t say a whole lot during our little session.

But we got done, he jumps up, and he grabs my hand, and he starts shaking it like he’s going to pull my shoulder out of the socket. And he goes, “Thank you, pastor, thank you, pastor, thank you, pastor. Praise God, praise God. I know everything’s going to be okay.” And he marches out of the office with his shoulders back. A completely different guy that came in as the one that left.

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What happened? Well, he remembered well. He shook off that unbelief that was assailing his mind because he remembered well.

The disciples of Jesus had an interesting thing happen. Jesus has just multiplied loaves and fishes and fed 5,000 men besides women and children. Amazing. And then, right after that, he fed 4,000 besides women and children. In one case, I think there were a dozen baskets of leftovers. In the other case, I think seven baskets of leftovers. And it's just happened, and the disciples were a part of those miracles. They're the ones that distributed the loaves and the fish to the thousands that were there.

So I imagine them out there, and they're distributing the loaves and the fish. And it's got to be multiplying right before their very eyes. The basket they're taken out of and distributing from just is never getting empty. Whether they were in holy awe or they were laughing hysterically at what was happening before their eyes, we don't know, but they saw it happen. They participated in both of those miracles.

And then, right on the heels of that, we read in Matthew 16:5–11,

⁵ Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.
⁶ Then Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." ⁷ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have taken no bread."

(Oh, we don't have anything to eat.)

⁸ But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? ⁹ Do you not yet understand, or remember . . .

(Don't you remember)

. . . the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? ¹⁰ Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? ¹¹ How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

Now, Jesus was talking about something else, but they misinterpreted it. They thought, "Okay, Jesus is upset because we've forgotten to take bread. What are we going to do? We don't have anything to eat." And Jesus said, "Boys, you've got to be kidding Me. Is your memory so short? Don't you remember what I've just—you're worried whether we're going to be able to come up with bread? Hey, if you got a crumb in your pocket, I can multiply that enough to feed the nation." Their memory was so, so short.

We need to remember well the things that God has done for us.

I would suspect that He's helped you. I mean, listen, if the devil could have killed you, he would have already done it, but here you are listening to me right now. I've made it through a great many trials and storms in my life, and I'm still standing thanks to the grace of God, the mercy of God, and His promises, which are yes and amen.

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I constantly, to this day, rehearse how I was saved and what God did for me. I remember one time I'm driving with my family, the kids were all small at the time, and we're driving by a cemetery. And I go, "Kids," I said, "you see all those headstones out there?" I said, "Your dad would have one of those, and he would have gone to an early grave, except Jesus rescued me."

And I started to launch into my testimony, they go, "Dad, we know, we know. You used to be on drugs, and a little boy shared Jesus with you in the park, and you end up in a street mission, and you got saved. And Jesus delivered you and turned your life around. Dad, we know." And I had to laugh and said, "Well, yes. And I'm not going to stop telling the story. I'll just rehearse it again and again and again." I'll tell you what, He is merciful, He reached down, He knows my name, He rescued me. And I remember well what He did for me.

Our oldest son, Harrison, who's the lead pastor of our church right now, when he was a little boy he lost his hearing; I'm going to say probably 80% of it. And it was heartbreaking for his mother and I. We would stand behind him, just a few feet behind him, and say his name in a normal tone of voice, and he couldn't hear us. We'd have to literally yell at him to get his attention, and he would turn around. And we prayed and got no results. We took him to the doctors, no results. There was nothing the doctors could do. The prognosis was basically, "Thank God he's got some hearing. He's going to have to learn to live with this."

And I was standing over his bed one night watching him sleep, and I think he was probably, I'm going to guess, four years old at the time, something like that. And the Holy Spirit spoke to me. And the Spirit said, "Sing over him." Oh, I didn't feel like doing that, but I did. I lifted my hands, and I just began to sing and worship God. And I sang, and I sang, and I worshipped, and there's his little sleeping figure in front of me. Five minutes, about 10 minutes into just singing and singing, suddenly, the atmosphere changed, and something in me changed. I don't know how I knew, but I knew that the issue with my son's ears was taken care of. I just knew it. I don't know how. I just knew.

I got a smile on my face. I had this note of inward victory, and I went to bed. The next morning when Harrison, our son, woke up, his hearing was completely restored. He's almost 40 years old while I'm taping this right now today, and he still has 100% of his hearing.

And you know what? I have rehearsed that story to him again and again and again. He knows it well. One of his own sons had a similar issue with his hearing, and I'll tell you what, that helped Harrison and his wife, Bethany. They prayed, and God brought deliverance and restored our grandson's hearing as well. We need to remember well, to rehearse, and to bring to mind.

Now, listen. The Scripture is filled with promises for us as believers. It's filled with promises for us and our family, promises for us having peace; promises for us when we need guidance; promises for us when we need healing; promises for us in every arena of life to be strengthened spiritually. And faith brings God's power and His presence on the scene. Unbelief limits Him.

One of the great cures of unbelief is to remember well what God has done for us in the past. Now, certainly, there are other things. Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the Word of God. We need to have a love affair with God's Book.

But for today's lesson, I just want to encourage you, remember well what God has done for you. In fact, some of you watching me right now, I'm telling you, I think you should do this, get yourself a pencil and a paper and mark down one, two, three, four, maybe five, and you think

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back on your life, answered prayers, things that God has done for you, times when you didn't think you were going to make it and you made it through and write it down.

And then, when you get that little list done, hold that paper up before God and thank Him, and then tell someone else what God has done for you. In fact, I would love to hear what God has done for you.

We get letters from people around the world sharing things that the broadcast has done for them. Those things always encourage us. And it may have maybe connected directly to something that you learned through the teaching that you get from this program, or it may not be related at all, but we would love to hear from you.

I would love to hear your story. It will strengthen your faith, it will strengthen your heart, and it will strengthen us on this end.

Listen, as I close, I just want to tell you; you are loved by God. I hope you know that. You are not some endless number on a list to Him. You're not a faceless person in a crowd. He knows you personally. He knows you intimately, He knows the thing that you're facing, and He wants to help you. He loves you more than you have the ability to understand it. I pray that you would put your trust in Him today.

And then, finally, I just want to say if these programs have been a blessing to you, please pray about supporting what we're doing. The lion's share of what we do is international. Most of what we do on television isn't in our own country. We do this in various languages around the world to tell the untold and to reach the unreached the good news about Jesus Christ, and we only do that because people pray with us and partner with us. So pray about becoming a partner and helping us take the message of God's Word around the world. God bless you.

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