

# BELIEVE

Week #4 of a 6-Week Lenten Series, "Prepare the Way"

March 26, 2023

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*So this pastor was visiting members of his congregation, going from house to house one Saturday afternoon. And he came to this one house where he knocked on the door, and he could tell that there were people in there, but they weren't answering the door. Even though he knocked several times, they didn't respond.*

*And so he decided to take out one of his cards, and he wrote something on the card and put it in the door. And what he wrote was, "Revelation 3, Verse 20." And here's what it reads:*

*"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me."*

*The next day his card appeared in the offering plate, and a message was written below it. And it said, "Genesis 3:10."*

*The pastor looked it up, and this is what it said:*

*"I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked and I hid myself."*

[Congregation laughs]

So ... [Laughs] Alright. One of those delayed reaction kind of jokes, apparently. Okay. [Congregation laughs and applauds]

So the author Claude Bristol said he had gradually discovered that there is "a golden thread" that runs through all teachings on success, achievement, prosperity and positivity. A golden thread for all the good we could ever wish or desire. And he said that golden thread could be expressed in one word, and that word is "believe."

He said that what we believe absolutely influences and affects every area of our lives. What we believe can lift us and liberate us. What we believe can actually limit us or keep us down.

Bristol was so inspired by the power of believing that he actually called it "the magic of believing." And he wrote the book of that same title in 1948, and it's still considered a classic in personal development.

How many people would agree that what we believe influences so much of what we experience in life? You know, the Bible mentions believing 280 times -- 280 times! -- with lines like, "*If you believe, you will receive.*" "*All things are possible to those who believe.*" "*Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*" So we can see the power and even the magic of this incredible gift and practice of believing.

So my question is: What do you believe? What do you believe is going to happen in your life? What do you believe is possible for you in your career? With your finances? In your relationship? With your family? For your health and well-being? For your level of peace, happiness and fulfillment? Because what we believe absolutely impacts all the experiences in all the areas of our lives.

So today we're in Week #4 of our six-week Lenten series called, "Prepare the Way." And we're using the 40 days of fasting and prayer that Jesus utilized to prepare himself spiritually to begin his ministry and do the incredible, miraculous things he did. This 40-day period really represents an opportunity of inner spiritual preparation for any of us who want to have a breakthrough or to transform our lives or bring forth a greater version of ourselves in some way.

A great spiritual truth is: You can have anything you want, but you must become it in consciousness first. That you must be willing to do that inner work -- the spiritual work needed -- to be the foundation which is the springboard for us to bring forth greater things in our lives.

In Week #1 we looked at the first practice that prepares us for a breakthrough, and that was to **RETREAT**. Instead of rushing forward to go at it, it is to step back and to re-evaluate; to reconsider; to reflect and recharge. When we retreat, we're able to open some space and have some quiet; we're able to center through our breath and connect with our true self; and it opens us to be more willing to do God's will.

Week #2 was about **FASTING**: about abstaining from things that take up energy. To liberate the energy to go deeper spiritually. And so we talked about fasting from food; fasting from negativity; fasting from clutter to free up that energy to go deeper spiritually.

Last week it was **FEASTING**, and it is to feed our mind on God. To feed our mind on love and particularly with a sense of compassion and kindness to all people and all living things. And also to feast our mind on growing: that we are here to expand our consciousness; to expand our faith; to expand our love and compassion.

So today we're going to look at the fourth practice to prepare for a breakthrough, and that is to BELIEVE. You know, this power of believing is amazing, because when we believe, it opens our minds up to the unlimited possibilities of good for us. When we believe, it creates an attracting force to create and manifest more good in our lives. It creates more optimism and enthusiasm; it motivates and inspires; it gives us confidence and resilience. Amazing things happen when we believe!

But it isn't always easy to believe. Sometimes we can be like the guy in Mark Chapter 9, Verse 24, when he says the words, "God, I believe, but help my unbelief." And it was a man asking Jesus to cast a demon out of his son.

*"And Jesus was saying, 'With God everything is possible.'*

*And [Jesus] said, "Do you believe?"*

*And [the man's] response is, "I believe ... but please help my unbelief."*

Anybody ever have something you believe in, but a part of you doesn't quite fully believe it? Anybody ever have that? And so the importance here: that there is power in believing, that there is magic in believing -- but we need to practice believing. We need to improve our belief. And we need to strengthen our believing.

And so we're going to look at three areas of believing that we need to practice to prepare ourselves for a breakthrough.

And the first one is **TO BELIEVE THAT, WITH GOD, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE** as it says in Matthew 19:26. And to show that, I just want to illustrate the story from the Book of Ezekiel of the Valley of Dry Bones.

So there's Ezekiel, who's a priest, and he is ministering to the Children of Israel who are in exile and displaced. And they are lost; they're feeling absolutely hopeless and helpless and thinking that there will not ever be a reunification of their nation. And then God gives Ezekiel a vision of this Valley of Dry Bones to help him believe that, with God, that and all things are possible. Let me read from Ezekiel 37, 1 to 11. Here's what it says:

*"The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and sent me in the middle of a valley. It was full of dry bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great*

*many bones on the floor of the valley. These bones were very dry. He asked me, 'Son of Man, can these bones live?'*

*I said, 'O Lord, God, only you know.'*

*Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Lord says to these bones: 'I will make breath enter you and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin. I will put breath in you and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'*

*So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.*

*Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'*

*So I prophesied as I was commanded, and breath entered them, and they came to life and stood up on their feet -- a vast multitude."*

Clear, simple message is that, when we believe that -- with God-- all things are possible, then amazing things can happen. Even in an area of our lives that feels like it's dry and lifeless and hopeless, we can prophesy -- speak words of positivity and faith and intention -- and when it's grounded in a belief that, with God all things are possible, amazing things can happen.

The prerequisite to be able to prophesy and have a vision is the underlying belief that it's possible. That absolutely, with God, it's possible. We don't have to know how! We just have to believe that it is possible.

Another fabulous example of this is the hemorrhaging woman: the story of the woman who is hemorrhaging for 12 years. And she'd seen many doctors, and it wasn't helping ... in fact, she was getting worse. Imagine for 12 years -- suffering 12 years -- something not going well in your life and feeling in a weakened state for that long. And she heard about Jesus, and she woke up and she absolutely believed that she could be healed. She made that trek to where Jesus was preaching. And it says that there was a crowd around him, and she pressed through the crowd and touched the hem of his garment. And she was healed!

She absolutely believed -- after 12 years of something not going well -- and this is how powerful it is to believe! No matter what has happened in the past, if you believe today and are willing to keep believing, miraculous and amazing things can happen.

So I want you to think about an area of your life that isn't going as well as you'd like, or an area that you'd like to go better. And the question is: Are you willing to believe that, with God, all things are possible? Are you willing to believe that that situation can improve? That it can get better? That it can change? It can be transformed? That there can be a better outcome than you can even expect? Are you willing to believe? Because all things are possible if we're willing to believe! To believe in God; to believe in possibilities; and to believe that, with God, all things are possible. You don't have to know how; you just have to be willing to believe. That's how powerful believing is!

The next thing I want to talk about in practicing belief to have a breakthrough is **TO BELIEVE THAT GOD HAS A PLAN AND A PURPOSE FOR YOUR LIFE.**

As a minister, one of the most consistent questions I've been asked over the years is, *"I don't know what my purpose is; how do I find out what my purpose is? How do I know what I'm supposed to do with my life?"*

And the fact is, it says in the Book of Jeremiah:

*"For surely I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, "plans to prosper you, not harm you; plans to give you hope and a future."*

And the fact is: God has a plan and a purpose for our lives. The question is: Do we believe? Do we believe that our lives have meaning and purpose and value? Do we believe that God has a plan for our lives -- to make a difference?

You know, one of the things we get caught up on in figuring out our purpose -- the biggest thing we get stuck on -- is we think it has to be our job. We think if it's not our job, then I can't figure out what my purpose is. But there are other aspects and dimensions of having a life of purpose -- having a life of sharing our gifts and talents -- that are beyond our job. Yeah; it can include our job. But it doesn't necessarily mean that it's only that. That would mean when we retire, then suddenly all purpose is gone ... and that's just not true!

And so we need to expand our minds into the awareness that God has a plan and a purpose for our life and it may not necessarily be my job. Or my job might just be a part of it.

And then the other way we restrict ourselves is: We judge and compare whatever we do to what other people to determine the value of our own purpose. And it is just one of the saddest things that we do to ourselves.

Here's how I think we figure out our purpose. One is to believe that God has a plan and a purpose for our lives. And then it's to ask ourselves two questions: What brings me joy? What is my passion? What is a thing that I really like doing? And the second thing is: How is this helping other people? How is this making a difference for other people? And how is this bringing a sense of meaning to my life?

You know, we just need to believe! Because the purpose is there; God has a plan for our lives. Our lives have value and meaning. But we need to use our belief to open ourselves up to find what that purpose is.

And sometimes it's a combo of jobs. You know, I read a book and somebody said that sometimes we don't just have a job; sometimes we have a "slash" job. Like, I've got my brother, Brian. He's a professor/poet. He loves both of them! I know someone who's a lawyer/children's play director. I know someone who was a bus driver/stained glass artist. Because both of them brought them immense amounts of joy!

And so we really need to be able to connect ourselves and reframe what we think our purpose is. Because it is probably bigger and greater than we realize. And it isn't always glamorous. But for whatever it is, it makes a difference.

Let me give you an example. Both of my parents did not finish high school. Both of my parents didn't write any books; they didn't make a lot of money. They weren't known by very many people other than their 10 children. My dad worked for the Department of Streets and Sanitation as a bookkeeper, and he had a tax job on the side. And my mom worked at home. But I'll tell you, 10 people adored the heck out of them. And because of them -- who didn't finish high school -- all 10 of us have at least one degree. We have five master's degrees and just about a third PhD. [Congregation applauds] .... And, for me, they fulfilled ...

And so sometimes we can get stuck and caught up in the fact that our purpose isn't as "whatever" it should be. But the fact is: It adds value! It makes a difference who we are! And if it's for one person or five people or 10 people or a thousand people, it's still valuable! That God has brought us here with our unique, amazing and individual talents ... and just because they're different doesn't mean they're less.

And so it's an important thing for us to believe that there's a purpose for us. Find out what brings you joy; notice it! And notice the way that it helps, and the meaning and value that it brings to you and others. Because it's an important thing. Because I've met way too many people who don't believe that their lives have a purpose or feel like they haven't found it.

And then the last one I'll introduce by asking you a question: What do Walt Disney, Thomas Edison, Helen Keller, Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan, Taylor Swift, Lizzo and Jeff Bezos have in common? [Congregation laughs] Okay; I'll tell you. They believed in themselves. Even though all the ways they did their life, they absolutely believed in themselves.

Sometimes we think the most important thing in success is your level of intelligence or your talent or the opportunity or the amount of money you have. Or just doing it flawlessly or not making mistakes. It isn't! The key common trait is absolutely **TO BELIEVE IN YOURSELF**. Believing that you are capable. Believing that you are worthy. Believing that you are meant for greatness and to make a difference in this world.

Reminds me of this little boy who was sitting on Santa's lap. And he looked up at Santa and he said, "*Do you believe in yourself?*" [Congregation laughs]

So the question is: Do you believe in yourself? Do you believe that you're destined for greatness? Do you believe that you're here to make a difference? Do you believe that you have what it takes?

And do you believe that you're worthy of that level of greatness? That you're worthy of that level of love? You're worthy of that level of success? How we feel about ourselves is one of the greatest indicators of the level of love and happiness that we experience in our lives. Because when it says, "*It's the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom,*" it means God isn't withholding anything from you. But the only thing that limits it is how much we're willing to take in, and that is an indicator of how much we love and believe in ourselves.

How many people have heard of Rowan Atkinson? Okay; great. Lots of us. So Rowan Atkinson had a stuttering issue when he was a kid. He got teased horribly; he was bullied horribly. They called him an alien. And he was considered strange, and he absolutely withdrew and did not have very many friends. So he focused on science. He focused on his studies. The teachers didn't believe much in him, but his grades kept going up and up, and he ended getting into Oxford for engineering. He got a master's degree.

But along the line, he knew that he could make people laugh. He really liked the idea of acting and performing, but with his speech issue, he really couldn't. And he would try sometimes; he wouldn't get gigs. So he joined this comedy troupe, and they started writing all these sketches ... all these little sketches that didn't have speaking. Then he got a gig with his ... what was the show called? "Mr. Bean"? And so "Mr. Bean."

And what he noticed was: He kept believing in himself and, over time, he was actually able to speak at times without stuttering. That eventually, he overcame that. He didn't have the classic looks; he didn't have the classic anything, or opportunities and breaks. But you know what he had? A belief in himself. His belief in himself lifted him through all the teasing; all the name-calling; all the embarrassments about his speaking, and helped him raise to incredible heights.

Freddie Mercury had way more teeth in his mouth than he should have had. [Congregation laughs] His nickname in school was "Bucky." They used to laugh and tease him. But because he had so many teeth in his mouth, his mouth was wider than it should have been, and his range of singing was astounding. There are people who would say to him, "Hey; you've got lots of money! Why don't you fix those teeth?" He's like, "What? This is my goldmine!" [Congregation laughs] And the point I'm trying to make is: He believed in himself.

You know, sometimes we're going to have stuff in our lives that does not look perfect. That isn't as pretty as we'd like, or isn't as ideal as we'd like. But you know the thing that will help you overcome? Believe in yourself. God made you that way! God made Freddie Mercury that way and Rowan Atkinson that way. And they took those things; they accepted it; they appreciated it; they used it; and they brought it forth and celebrated it. Freddie Mercury had way more teeth in his mouth than he should have had. [Congregation laughs] His nickname in school was "Bucky." They used to laugh and tease him. But because he had so many teeth in his mouth, his mouth was wider than it should have been, and his range of singing was astounding. There are people who would say to him, "Hey; you've got lots of money! Why don't you fix those teeth?" He's like, "What? This is my goldmine!" [Congregation laughs] And the point I'm trying to make is: He believed in himself.

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Everyone is gifted in a unique way. You have a smile; a look; and an energy and a personality that no one in this world has. You have gifts and talents and abilities to bring to this world that no one else can. The question is: Are you willing to believe that you are gifted? You are God's beloved child? That you are a light in this world? And to let that shine? It's there! But are you willing to believe it's there? And to believe in yourself?

Probably one of my favorite lines in all the Bible is when Jesus said, *"He who believes in me shall do the works that I have done and even greater things than these."* And what he is saying is: *"If you believe that the Spirit of God is in you the way that I believe the Spirit of God is in me, through that belief and that Spirit, you shall do even greater things."* But you've got to believe! You've got to believe!!!!

There's magic in believing! But you've got to be willing to believe that, with God, all things are possible. Even if you're in the "Valley of Dry Bones," just believe! Believe that God has a plan and a purpose for your life. Don't compare yourself to anybody. Just notice the joy it brings and the difference it makes. And then believe in yourself; let your beauty and the greatness in you shine brightly.

The fourth practice to prepare ourselves for a breakthrough is to BELIEVE.

God bless you all!

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