

STUDY 16

A Second Touch

1. Why do you think Jesus chose the word 'leaven' as a teaching illustration?

Making bread was something everyone was familiar with in those days.

Leaven (yeast) works invisibly, gradually, powerfully.

2. Michael Eaton speaks of a 'second touch'. What about a third, fourth and fifth touch? Do you think this is something that Christians should seek and expect?

Christians should always be thirsty for more from God. Jesus said if we thirst and drink from Him, then **"rivers of living water"** will flow from our innermost beings (*John 7:38*). There is always more of God. When Jesus says we will **"never thirst again"** (*John 4:10-14*), He means thirst for *anything else*. But this is not the same thing as thirsting for *experiences*.

Followers of Jesus live by faith, not by sight nor feelings. God does sometimes graciously give powerful experiences as an encouragement but these are exceptional rather than everyday occurrences. They tend to come in times of challenge or at the beginning of something new. God will respond to our thirst for more and maybe we will have second and third touches. But our thirst is for Jesus and the Holy Spirit, not for experiences.

In recent times, there have been special outpourings of the Holy Spirit in particular places. These are seasons of refreshing. Interestingly, mature and spiritual leaders sometimes say that they have not had powerful physical experiences, yet young and relatively immature Christians have. Perhaps the former did not need them? Jesus said, **"...blessed are those who have believed but not seen!"** (*John 20:29*).

3. It is sometimes said that "The Lord helps those who help themselves." Is there any truth in this and how does it fit with the teaching Jesus gives here?

The gospel is that Jesus helps those who *cannot* help themselves. Isaiah the prophet said, **'He gives power to the weak. To those who have no might He increases strength.'** (*Isaiah 40:20*).

In situations where common grace (what God, in His kindness, supplies to all people) provides what we need, we should take this as the channel of God's provision. If there is food in the cupboard we do not need God to multiply loaves and fishes.

Sometimes God takes us beyond the place where we have everything that we need. When the children of Israel entered the wilderness and had no food, then God provided manna and quails. Once they entered the land, they lived off the food of the land (described as milk and honey).

This balanced approach is probably the best way to tackle the matter of healing. If medical help is at hand and is capable of meeting the need, unless God clearly shows otherwise, it is appropriate to seek that help trusting that this is God's provision. But if it is not available or it cannot deliver the help we need, then we can seek God's help through special grace (*James 5:14-16*). The woman with the haemorrhage in *Mark 5* had sought help unsuccessfully for 12 years and only became worse. Jesus healed her because she could not help herself, nor could anyone else.

So properly understood, the Lord does help those who receive the benefits of common grace as His provision, *but God is not limited to that.*

4. Read *Philippians chapter 4*. Are there any conditions, stated or implied^g attached to God's promises relating to provision?

The key verses are *Philippians 4:4-7 and 4:19*, which state that we should make our requests known to God who will meet all our needs. This wonderful promise is made in the context of 4 chapters written to followers of Jesus in Philippi. There are some clear and specific instructions in *Philippians 1:27-30, 2:1-18, 3:1-4, 15-21, 4:1, 8-9.*

God provides for His children. The usual Bible word for children is 'sons' which includes both genders. The defining characteristic of a son is obedience.

This is not to say that our obedience earns us the right to be blessed. Obedience positions us so that we are in the place where we can receive God's blessings, in the way that stepping into the sunshine enables us to receive the sun's warmth.

5. Why do you think Michael Eaton, in expounding and applying this passage, wrote that Jesus provides for us '*...in His time and in His own way.*'

He probably had in mind those preachers of what has become known as the *prosperity gospel*, who distort scripture to a *name it and claim it* message.

God cannot be reduced to a formula nor prayer to a technique. Approaching God with faith is essential. *Without faith it is impossible to please God (see Hebrews 11:16).* But we must always allow God to be sovereign and to choose how and when He provides for us.

Whatever Paul's thorn in the flesh was (and of course the *prosperity gospel* preachers have to claim it was not a sickness), it was not removed when Paul prayed. God answered in another way, by giving special grace which was sufficient. Paul was still able to continue his ministry very effectively. It seems that Paul, who had been used by God so powerfully and who had experienced exceptional God-encounters, was somehow kept earthed and grounded before God. He knew that God was the potter and that he was the clay in His hands.