



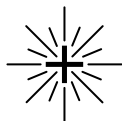
THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

GROWING IN GRACE



KURT GEBHARDS

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INTRODUCTION

It's said that the average adult has a vocabulary of somewhere around 30,000 words. The Bible adds a few more essential words to that count for Christians. Our theology has its own jargon — words that are precise and profound. But these words are often not fully or adequately understood. This lack of attention is not intentional; these words are simply too familiar. If we're not careful, we can start using the language fundamental to Christianity without understanding its depth. Phrases like “the glory of God” and words like “gospel” and “sanctification” become buzzwords — used regularly without adequate knowledge or understanding. Consequently, their meaning, so rich in depth, can be neutralized and diminish our awe of Christ and ultimately our growth as a believer. In our Christian culture, with these great words, we risk having the husk instead of the kernel.

The word “grace” is a good example of this. This poor word has been battered and beaten and stays in our language by way of a female name, a short prayer before a meal, a teacher's kind response to a late assignment, a song sung at a vigil, or even the name of a church. And because of its overuse, it may have lost its meaning, its power, and even its function in our lives. Perhaps we have become bored with “grace” because we have misapplied or misunderstood what it is, how it functions, and how absolutely essential it is to the life of a believer.

Ephesians 2:8 states, “By grace you have been saved through faith...” In other words, grace is not the domesticated attribute of a kinder, gentler God that mitigates his wrath, but rather the effective battering ram he used to break our stony hearts. There is nothing mild about grace. It is God's power to save us, change us, and deliver us to heaven.

When Paul, the letter-writing apostle, used the word “grace” as a closing greeting, he was not just signing off with a throw-away phrase. He was leaving his readers with a powerful benediction of truth that punctuated all the breadth and depth upon which he had just elaborated. In other

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words, he says, “if I could leave you with just one or two words that encapsulate all that I have said to you, it would be summed up in the word, ‘grace.’” And it wasn’t just saved for the end of his letters; this word is woven into the fabric of his letters more than one hundred times. Its significance demands that we dust off this glorious concept, restore its beauty in our minds and allow it to pulsate through our veins and become amazing once again.

In this field guide, you will learn 1) what grace is, 2) how grace saves a sinner, 3) the necessity of growth in grace, and 4) how to grow in grace. You will understand what grace is as defined by Scripture, gifted by God to sinners for salvation, and enjoyed through every hour and in every pursuit of the Christian journey. Each chapter builds on the preceding to fully flesh out the beauty of the trajectory from salvation to the grace that “leads us home.”

The Scriptures use the word grace in many different, wonderful ways. For instance, grace is used in terms of salvation, but it’s also involved in sustaining a believer in sanctification and suffering. Careful students of Scripture will notice that its meaning depends on distinct theological contexts. The breadth and depth of the word “grace” is an invitation by God to eagerly pursue a comprehensive understanding of all of grace.

Yet, regardless of its context or use, grace functions as the undeserved favor of God. Like a kaleidoscope, every which way you turn it, there’s beauty, complexity, and nuance. Paul describes this abundant generosity as “the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7). This chapter will 1) define grace, 2) establish that grace is an intrinsic aspect of God’s character, and 3) underscore the generosity of grace offered to undeserving sinners. Let’s begin our study by defining the grace of God.

Defining Grace

While all the attributes of God are worthy and beautiful, special consideration is made throughout the Scriptures to attach adjectives to grace. It’s as though the authors took out a thesaurus and looked for every word they could find to extol the virtues of grace.

Consider Paul’s celebration of God’s grace: “to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight” (Eph. 1:6–8). Praiseworthy, glorious, rich, and lavish — these are extraordinary terms to describe the features and properties of grace.

1

THE GOD OF ALL GRACE

The language grasps at the extreme nature of this wonderful, amazing grace. And then consider that the recipients of this grace are creatures most unpraiseworthy — far from glorious, poverty-stricken, and destitute sinners. In contrast to its recipients, God’s grace is set on beneficiaries who are the most unworthy. Therefore, unfathomable generosity is an essential component to its definition.

Matthew Henry offers this: “Grace is the free, undeserved goodness and favor of God to mankind.” Jerry Bridges defines it this way, “Grace is God’s free unmerited favor shown to guilty sinners who deserve only judgment. It is the love of God shown to the unlovely. It is God reaching downward to people who are in rebellion against Him.”

Definition: Grace is God’s unwarranted and staggering generosity that saves rebellious sinners through the gift of salvation then grow them in holiness for his glory.

Grace, defined biblically, includes four essential features:

- unending and extravagant generosity
- unmerited favor
- the gift of salvation
- the power that drives spiritual growth

God’s Grace on Display

The book of Exodus is clearly ensconced in episodes marked by the grace of God. Israel’s cycle of faithlessness and failure was met time after time with abundant generosity. Perhaps no one saw it quite as clearly as their leader, Moses. Exodus 33 recounts a turning point in Israel’s dramatic march toward the long-awaited Promised Land. Grab your Bibles and read Exodus 33:7–34:9 to follow this dramatic story.

True to Israel’s pattern of foolishness, they had faltered, and Moses

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desperately needed the assurance that God himself would accompany them in the final leg of the wearisome journey. Moses was depleted of strength, barren of courage, and broken in spirit (33:12). He needed a visual aid to assist his confidence and assurance that God's presence would go with them. He demanded that God visibly escort them before he would take one more step (33:16). This audacious request — “show me your glory” — if granted, would assure them of God's character and covenant partnership in the mission ahead (33:18).

In an act of incredible kindness, God granted this extraordinary appeal. God took great care to position Moses in the cleft of the rock, with his eyes shielded so that Moses would only be exposed to the back portions of God's glory (33:23). In a grace-saturated moment, God provides Moses with unmitigated evidence of his presence, all the while protecting Moses from an experience that would have otherwise killed him (33:20).

Israel had experiential knowledge of God's well-deserved wrath and justice, and what it is like to stand in opposition to a holy God (Ex. 19:16; 32:10, 35; 33:5). The construction of the golden calf (which had just occurred) was fair evidence that he would not tolerate being marginalized or replaced, which makes this act of kindness even more astonishing. Moses makes this desperate petition of God, and God responds with an act so generous, manifesting his compassion, patience, lovingkindness, constancy, forgiveness, and steadfastness. This is grace! Moses puts pen to paper in praise to describe God's “unfailing love,” “splendor,” and “favor” (Ps 90).

And this manifestation was not limited to a single occasion for Moses because grace is deeply embedded in the character of God. Moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament, we read of God being the source and fullness of “grace upon grace” (John 1:16). Paul describes grace as it functions to bring sinners to life in Ephesians:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:4–9)

The key feature in our salvation is grace and Paul is properly redundant in

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this passage to celebrate that fact.

One passage after another affirms that grace is central to God's character:

- He is a king whose throne is called "grace" (Heb. 4:16).
- He is a kind and gracious benefactor, making his grace "abound" for his people (2 Cor. 9:8).
- He is the God of all grace (1 Pet. 5:10), in stark contrast to earthly kings who flaunt their position with cold, unbending power.
- He loves to display "to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you" (Isa. 30:18).
- He is a king who will not "turn his face from you" because he is "gracious and merciful" (2 Chron. 30:9).

Our own "Moses moment" came when God revealed his glory in the person of his Son, a fully embodied display of grace and truth (Titus 2:11). Jesus' life is all the visual aid we need through which we begin to receive "grace upon grace" (John 1:16). And in an ultimate act of benevolence, God superintended the death of his very own son for rebels and insurrectionists (Rom. 3:24–25). Truly, he is the God of all grace.

Undeserving Sinners

The beauty of grace is that it glistens against the backdrop of total darkness. In the case of the Israelites, a long history of stubborn, egregious disobedience made God's kind response to Moses all the more stunning and magnificent. In our own case, our total depravity and rebellion accentuates not only the need for and depth of grace, but also the brilliance of grace being offered to us.

I could tell you exactly where I was standing when I saw the beautiful diamond I would present to my wife, Julie. I had worked hard to custom design a stone that represented my commitment to and passion for her. My friend, a diamond broker, procured the gem and eagerly brought it to me for inspection. We stepped outside on that sunlit day.

With great expectation I watched him pull out a cloth of black velvet and lay the stone upon it. The stone refracted every color of the rainbow. It glistened and sparkled, and I was delighted. The diamond was all that I had hoped for — a fitting gift for my bride to be. But its beauty was highlighted against the backdrop of blackness. Grace is the gleaming diamond that sparkles brightest against the backdrop of the sinfulness of man.

To understand the magnificence of God's grace, we must first roll out

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the black backdrop of our sin. This biblical view is imperative if we are to appreciate grace, and more importantly to fully enjoy it with humility and gratitude. Without an accurate assessment of our dire position, grace would be relegated to a mere accessory in our otherwise comfortable lives. And because we don't grasp our unworthiness, apathy marks the hearts of many professing Christians.

We use the label "sinner" to imply the need for forgiveness, for salvation (Rom. 3:23). However, the Bible uses far more insulting language to describe our condition: "enemies of God" (James 4:4), "alienated and hostile in mind" (Col. 1:21), "hostile toward God" (Rom. 8:7), and "stubborn children" (Isa. 30:1). Jonathan Edwards accurately said, "You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that makes it necessary."

Man's complete lack of merit is what exalts and magnifies the generosity of God. Our miserable condition underscores his extravagant response and enlarges our gratitude for his amazing grace. Phillips Brooks reminds us that we are all undeserving recipients of extravagant grace: "One who has been touched by grace will no longer look on those who stray as 'evil;' or 'those poor people who need our help.' Nor must we search for signs of 'loveworthiness.' Grace teaches us that God loves because of who God is, not because of who we are."

Grace is God's unwarranted and staggering generosity that saves rebellious sinners through the gift of salvation then grow them in holiness for his glory. Christian hearts should be moved by God's abounding generosity toward his faithless creation. And to think that this grace flows from within God's character to our needy lives is simply astounding.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. What is "grace" in your own words? What makes grace challenging to live out?
2. Consider a moment when, like Moses, you needed the assurance of God's presence in your circumstances and in grace, God spoke to you through his Word.
3. Psalm 103 states that it is good in thankfulness to "remember all of his benefits" and to declare those moments as testimony of his grace to others. Share this list of blessings with your mentor.

2

THE GRACE THAT SAVES

Though grace is one of the bedrock attributes of God, sinners don't encounter grace personally until salvation. Yes, there is common grace that all people enjoy. But the grace that will usher us into eternal relationship with himself is reserved for those whom he has chosen and justified (Rom. 8:30). We are awakened to see, enjoy, and benefit from the abundance of grace when it is breathed into us through saving faith.

Grace: Death to Life and Eternal Riches

Great stories often involve a rags-to-riches arc, with a dramatic turn of fortunes. It is God's grace though, that authors the most dramatic transformative story ever told. This is better than rags to riches; it is the grace that brings the dead to life.

The second chapter of Ephesians explains every salvation story as the supernatural move from being "dead in our trespasses and sins" to having "life in Christ." As sinners, without hope or life, we are lifted from the wicked, devious dominion of the devil to the heights of heavenly glory and seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:1, 2, 6). The author and agent of this transformation is "the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7). We are saved by grace through faith, and that grace and faith are gifts from God (Eph. 2:8). Our works and failed attempts at righteousness contribute nothing but deeper indebtedness and greater condemnation (Eph. 2:9). But grace is the conduit through which saving faith travels and delivers salvation to undeserving sinners (Eph. 2:8–9). All souls languish in need of God's grace by virtue of their total spiritual bankruptcy. We have nothing to offer him to commend ourselves. We need the generosity of his grace to overwhelm our incapacity and deliver us to salvation.

In the early days of the burgeoning church, the Jerusalem council pronounced plainly: "but we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 15:11). Salvation is delivered to sinners as an expression of God's unfathomable compassion and grace in the person,

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life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That is precisely what Paul states in Romans 5:20, that grace abounds, overwhelming any and all sin, for the repentant sinner. Through his grace, God is able to save to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). Spurgeon paints a picture of grace and its many saving gifts:

Observe adoringly the fountainhead of our salvation which is the grace of God. By grace are you saved. Because God is gracious therefore sinful men are forgiven, converted, purified, and saved. It is not because of anything in them, or that ever can be in them, that they are saved, but because of the boundless love, goodness, pity, compassion, mercy, and grace of God.

Grace Is a Gift

For Christmas in 1978, I was given a Millennium Falcon — perhaps the greatest present I had ever received. I remember flying that YT-Correllian light freighter throughout our apartment imagining the impossibility of navigating the Kessel Run in under twelve parsecs. The radar, the ramp, the cockpit, Han and Chewie — all the feels of one of the greatest Christmas gifts ever. But in some ways, I may have deserved that gift. I was an obedient and loved son who expected that I would not receive coal in my stocking, and I had dreamed of the likely possibility of receiving something spectacular.

And that is what makes the grace of salvation exquisite. Electing grace leaves no room for any expectation based on who I am or what I have done. A shockingly generous gift, completely unexpected, and utterly undeserved — we didn't even have a desire for the gift as I did that Christmas for what I received. All of salvation, including the desire for it, is part of the gift of grace (Rom. 3:10–12). Paul accentuates the freedom of God's dispensation of grace when he says that we are “justified by his grace as a gift” (Rom. 3:24; 4:4). Salvation includes the “free gift of righteousness” (Rom. 5:17). Not only does justification save us from the rightful wrath of God, but it includes the gift of the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). And in addition to the righteousness of Christ, we are also now heirs of eternal life, “so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7). The expansiveness of this gift of grace is incomprehensible.

Since we are trained to contribute some merit, pedigree, or self-righteousness, Paul is quick to highlight that grace is not associated with the works of the law: “if it is of grace, it is no longer on the basis

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of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace” (Rom. 11:6). God makes salvation inaccessible outside of his gift of grace so that no one can boast except in him (1 Cor. 1:30–31). God protects his grace from any assumption of assistance from the sinner. The gift of salvation is not a choice for this reason. Derek Thomas stridently states, “If you believe that salvation is all your choosing, have the courage and conviction to stand before God and tell him you would like to pause from thanking him, and thank yourself.”

And the Gift Goes On

Incomprehensibly, many Christians assume that the grace that brought them to salvation has done its work and is no longer practically useful. They are content to have had the “death to life” transformation, but now must find a way to white knuckle the rest of life. But that is a gross underestimation of the trajectory of grace in the life of a believer. To be fair, much of what is written in Christian literature places heavy emphasis on salvific grace and focuses less on growth grace.

But God’s grace saves and keeps. The Christian both obtains access to God by grace (gift grace) and is given perpetual power by standing in it (growth grace). Grace facilitates the flourishing that Scripture describes as “abundant life” (e.g. John 10:10). This is what the Apostle Paul has in mind when he links gift faith to growth faith, “for if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17). Paul artfully differentiates between the kindness of God to save (“free gift of righteousness”) from the abundance of growth grace (to “reign in life”).

The Bible doesn’t normally use terms to separate gift grace from growth grace since it is viewed as one cohesive deposit of God’s generosity — grace to save and grace to sanctify. Gift grace and growth grace begin and sustain the Christian’s life to glory. Paul envisions a life of grace reigning in abundance (Rom. 5:17; 6:14–19). He even chides the reader for attempting growth outside of the grace given through the work of the Holy Spirit: “Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit are you now being perfected in the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3).

What a kindness of God to extend the warranty of salvation to the end of the believer’s life as they navigate the complexities of living worthy of the gospel in a fallen world. Understanding this growth grace is essential to living a life to the glory of God.

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Discussion & Reflection:

1. Think about and write out the depths of your bankruptcy and unworthiness. Consider Mark 7:20–23; Romans 1:29–32; Ephesians 2:1–3 and 4:17–19. Before Christ, how were the words in these verses representative of your heart? How does an estimation of our unworthiness drive our passion for what he has provided for us?
2. Consider the many grace gifts of salvation that are given by God. Read Romans 3–8 and Ephesians 1–3 to discover these amazing gifts of saving grace, and spend some time making a list of all that God graciously gives in salvation.

3

THE GROWTH OF GRACE

Obviously, not all gifts are the same. They vary in size and shape, which is what gives mysterious delight to Christmas morning. The same is true of our experience of grace as Christians; it too varies in shape and size.

Which raises two questions:

1. Do all Christians have access to the same amount of God's grace?
2. Do all Christians experience the same portion of grace from God?

Scripture answers this with a clear "yes" to the first question; and the answer to the second is "no." Let me explain. One of the significant distinctives between gift grace and growth grace is the manner in which they are received. Gift grace, or electing grace, is delivered to the sinner who is chosen by God (Eph. 1:4–5); growth grace (in its depth and breadth) is chosen or pursued by the believer (1 Pet. 4:10). And to the extent a believer desires, pursues, and practices the means of grace, he will be filled, and filled to overflow.

Not all Christians access the same portion of grace from God. Consider the idea that Christians can augment their experience of God's grace. Think about that. You are able to grow and enhance your experience of God's grace, not just a deeper understanding, but a grander experience, a greater quantity (James 4:6) and higher quality (2 Cor. 9:8) of his magnificent generosity.

In fact, Peter plainly commands us to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). Christians are called to nurture and develop their experience and enjoyment of God's grace. Having defined the greatness of saving grace, this chapter explains the concept of growth grace and how we cultivate it.

The Privilege of Growing in God's Grace

The believer should view saving grace as the first of many grace gifts. Saving grace is the gate through which Christians pass to then walk daily the path of grace. Without understanding this fuller view of a life of grace, a believer will limit his experience of God's limitless generosity. Gift grace

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serves one moment (the moment of conversion) and one purpose (to justify us before God). However, the grace of God is wonderfully expansive — a gift intended to reach into every part and moment of the believer’s life.

Several verses highlight this truth that Christians can cultivate the amount of grace that they experience in life. Peter concludes his second epistle with a benediction to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). Our lives are intended to be filled with the abundance of grace that has been lavished upon us (Rom. 5:17; Eph. 1:8). Through our various needs and limitations, “God is able to make all grace abound to you” (2 Cor. 9:8).

So, let’s consider these two aspects of grace: gift grace and growth grace.

Gift Grace and Growth Grace

One of the great misunderstandings about grace is that it is a static gift. The truth is that grace is an extraordinary, dynamic force. It is made available as much as the believer is desiring to utilize it.

Let’s consider different functions of gift grace and growth grace.

Gift grace is a one-size-fits-all saving act of God’s sovereign generosity. Christians enjoy the same quantity and quality of grace in the gift of salvation. Grounded in the merit of Christ and the unassailable fortress of justification by faith alone, the Christ follower is saved into a life of grace (Rom. 3:24). As mentioned earlier, the gift of salvation involves a multitude of graces (e.g., forgiveness, adoption, redemption, cleansing, Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, etc.). Gift grace is an extravagant and glorious expression of God’s generosity to undeserving sinners and measured out equally to all who receive it. All the merit is Christ’s; all the glory is God’s (2 Cor. 5:21).

However, what we are learning in this field guide is that growth grace includes the privilege of every day, every hour provision of bounty for every need in life (2 Cor. 9:8–15). Growth grace is the grace that sustains and keeps, allowing the believer to be established and to yield fruit to the glory of God. Growth grace is grace that works, runs, and empowers righteous living and holy effort.

The implications of both graces are vast and wonderful. God graciously saves the sinner, subduing his rebellion through the reign of Christ’s righteousness. Then, as if that generosity (undeserved forgiveness and a promise of heaven) wasn’t enough, God places the converted soul under the rule of grace (Rom. 5:17). That rule of grace leads the Christian down the path of sanctification.

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Sanctification: Cooperating with God in the Growth of Grace

Progressive sanctification teaches that Christians grow in their faith and faithfulness as they mature in Christ (Col. 1:28; Eph. 4:14–16). In many ways, this growth is the growth of grace. Grace is a catalytic force moving, growing, and motivating the Christian to honor and serve God (Titus 2:11–14).

The grace of God is a dynamic power that saves in order that it might reign in the Christian's life. The salvation of God's gift grace (Rom 5:20) leads to the establishment of growth grace (Rom 5:21). Grace overwhelms sin to justify (Rom. 5:1) and to sanctify (Rom. 6:15–18).

The Christian is privileged to function under the power, authority, and sanctifying influence of grace. Law no longer has dominion (Rom. 6:14). The talons of the law no longer has a hold on the Christian. Now we are empowered with freedom to serve God and others (Gal. 5:13). The

GIFT GRACE

Grace saves
Grace pardons
Grace transforms

GROWTH GRACE

Grace cultivates
Grace serves
Grace produces

Westminster catechism puts it well when it says, "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness."

Having established the distinctions between saving grace and growth grace, we want to highlight the beautiful dynamic that saving grace chooses us and we choose growing grace. To choose growing grace requires a cooperative effort between the resources of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to exert ourselves in using them (1 Cor. 15:10).

God's grace has a developable quality, where the believer can mature and enjoy more of his grace. Stewarding that grace is the next challenge — let's discover practical ways to grow in grace.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. What are some ways that we might neglect the experience of God's grace in our lives?
2. How do Christians receive God's saving grace?

4

TEN WAYS TO GROW IN GRACE

The beauty of grace has been illuminated. Against the backdrop of our sin and alongside the growing believer, grace has saved and led. But many Christians have an inadequate view of God's grace in terms of sanctification and fruit-bearing. Consequently, those believers have a limited experience with the grace of God. Christians are designed to receive God's grace, respond to God's grace, and see its effectiveness increase in daily life

God commands you, believer, to grow in grace. These ten pursuits offer the Christian the joy of maximizing his experience of grace. Let's strive to grow in grace through these ten encouragements.

1. Steward God's grace

Christians need to realize that God has given them grace to steward for the purpose of utility and benefit. It seems that Peter was especially aware of the privilege of growth grace. In his first epistle he commands believers, "as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pet. 4:10). "Varied grace" in this passage doesn't refer to quantity but rather the differing gifts that Jesus Christ sovereignly dispenses (Eph. 4:7). The remarkable concept here is the call for Christians to "steward" or "manage" God's grace. Growth grace includes our action and development as we seek to "fan into flame" the gift of God that has been received (2 Tim. 1:6).

Stewards of grace have been given a treasure to oversee, with careful deliberation, for the purpose of encouraging and blessing others. This is not a suggestion or addition to our busy life — it is our life. God has genuinely overwhelmed every believer with a vast array of talents, skills, and resources. One specific area where believers are called to steward God's grace is with spiritual gifts which are designed for each believer.

"Charis" is the New Testament word for grace. God's grace gifts (charismata) include the spiritual gifts. Ephesians 4:7 states, "grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift."

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Consider your complete gift mix. Every Christian has five sources of gifts:

1. Natural gifts from birth (innate aptitudes)
2. Experiences and learning in life (where you lived, language studied)
3. Developed life-skills (playing an instrument, achievement in service)
4. Professional skills developed (training and accomplishments)
5. Spiritual gifts (teaching, encouragement, giving, leadership, etc.)

Consider the many gifts you have been given (and every believer without exception is the recipient of spiritual gifts) and look with earnestness for ways and places where those gifts can bless and serve others to the glory of God (Rom. 12:6–8). Christian, you are called to effectively manage the fullness of God’s vast and wonderful grace. God has overwhelmed every believer with an array of gifts. Enjoy the fullness of God’s gifts by stewarding them.

2. Bask in the vastness of God’s grace

Christians must consider the limitless nature of God’s grace — the immense wonder and awesome reach of his generosity. As stewards of God’s grace, Christians should bask in the impossible task of attempting to quantify it.

Paul says it this way: “In the coming age he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved...it is a gift from God” (Eph. 2:7–8). When you consider his creation, the massive oceans, galaxies of space, the complexities of billions of molecules and atoms in a single creature, can you imagine the expanse of his grace that has no limitations or boundaries?

Earlier in the same book, Paul speaks again of the limitless grace available to the Christian, “to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved...according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us” (Eph. 1:6–8). The word “lavish” means “beautifully unrestrained, limitless, and extravagant.”

Spurgeon highlights the expansive glory of God’s grace: “What an abyss is the grace of God! Who can measure its breadth? Who can fathom its depth? Like all the rest of his attributes, it is infinite.” All grace is available to the humble, hungry Christian (2 Cor. 9:8).

3. Stand in grace

Grace is the Christian’s foundation. It is the beginning of the journey and the power for our ongoing spiritual life, accomplished through the Holy

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Spirit (Rom. 3:24; John 1:16). Peter ends his first epistle with a rousing encouragement that “the God of all grace will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Pet. 5:10, 11). Immediately, he exhorts Sylvanus to stand in the true grace of God (5:12). God is establishing us in grace, and we are to deliberately choose to stand in the grace that God has provided. Here is the beautiful synergy of sanctification (Phil. 2:12, 13; Jude 21).

To stand requires establishing and maintaining a fixed position. The Christian’s life should be rooted and grounded in God’s grace. Christians enjoy the privilege of continuing in his grace (Acts 13:43).

What does it mean to stand in grace?

- 1) Recognize that God authored our salvation by his grace
- 2) Depend on his grace for provision and power
- 3) Pursue the avenues of God’s grace
- 4) Avoid the corruption of the world

Pursue the streams of God’s grace, including spiritual disciplines, God’s Word, the fruit of the Spirit, and investment in the local church. Avoid the defilement of the world, including lusts, fleshly desires, and worldly entertainment, etc. (2 Tim. 2:22).

The Christian’s life should be rooted and grounded in God’s grace, which means we acknowledge God and continually praise him as we move from grace to grace (John 1:16). Our experiences are repeatedly understood, whether in suffering or success, as grace on display.

Exercise: Identify the spiritual disciplines that you need to improve to be better

established in God’s grace. Talk with your mentor about how to build more deeply-rooted biblical habits.

4. Humble yourself for more grace

Gift grace comes when a penitent sinner acknowledges his pride and self-sufficiency before a holy God (Mark 1:15). That posture of humility is also necessary for the Christian desiring to live a life worthy of the gospel (Eph. 4:1–2). Humility is the conduit through which grace flows freely in the life of a believer (1 Pet. 5:6). There can be no competition in the heart of a believer for the throne that belongs to the king. If the Lord chooses to exalt us, it is up to him to choose when and how; any other priority is idolatry. Our sin nature will continually desire to advance our status and success, and a believer is

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watchful for those instincts and eager to return displaced glory to its rightful owner. Pride is a grace killer, but “the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down” (Ps. 146:8). It isn’t just a sinful bent that must be checked; pride must be routinely and aggressively eradicated from the life of a believer who wishes to grow in grace (1 Pet. 5:5).

God gives greater grace to the humble Christian. Consider James 4:6: “But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” What a remarkable assertion: more grace! How is it that a believer has access to a greater amount of God’s grace? The answer is through the humble acknowledgement of our needs and limitations. The nearness of God and his great grace is for those who distance themselves from sin in repentance (James 4:8, 9). The lowly posture of contrition and mourning attracts God’s attention, just as Isaiah says, “But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word” (Is. 66:2).

Isaiah further accentuates God’s particular care for the humble believer:

For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.” (Isa. 57:15).

What remarkable grace to be received and pursued: the intimate presence and revival of God’s Spirit. The Scriptures consistently teach that the grace of God comes to those who are dependent and lowly (Matt. 5:8). God’s attention is drawn not to the flash and arrogance of our earthly posturing, but to a humble and lowly heart that is honest with failures and shortcomings and eager to repent. Like the crushed and contrite tax collector, crying out in desperation for mercy, so Jesus Christ commends those who humble themselves (Luke 18:13–14).

Peter also argues, “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet. 5:5). So while gift grace is a one-size-fits-all dispensing, growth grace varies based on the believer’s intentional choice to humble himself.

With striking repetition, the Scriptures command the believer to humble himself (e.g. James 4:10). Jesus Christ says, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 14:11) These scriptural calls repeatedly command believers to humble “themselves.” (1 Pet. 5:5–6). This is called reflexive action, or an action that

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the Christian is required to do to himself. We have a carnal bent towards being self-referential, self-indulging, and self-aggrandizing (Prov. 16:18). And because the enemy is subtle, we may even be unaware of that predisposition within ourselves. Our rebellion began with a seed of pride and it's difficult not to trace every other sin and find pride at its root (Obad. 3).

It is the clear testimony of Scripture that when the Christ-follower adopts a posture of lowliness and humility, God's attention is captivated and grace has room to move freely in his life. Phillip Brooks beautifully describes, "Grace, like water, flows to the lowest part." Oh, that we would crave humility and make room for grace to fill us.

5. Learn the lessons of grace-filled obedience

For so many people, grace is a synonym for license, being nice, or even compromise. However, grace, biblically understood, promotes righteousness and hates sin. It pursues obedience and honor. Grace promotes godliness and a hatred of worldliness. So, instead of grace giving room to flirt with the world, grace teaches us to renounce lusts.

Paul's words inform us about the powerful, sanctifying influence of God's grace:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Titus 2:11–14).

Grace trains the Christian to:

- 1) renounce ungodliness
- 2) reject worldliness
- 3) be self-controlled
- 4) pursue righteousness and godliness
- 5) love good works

This is the power of growth grace.

It is remarkable that the primary implication of living under the dominion of grace (Rom. 5:17; 6:14) is that Christians should submit themselves to obedient lives. In fact, when grace rules in our lives, we will present every

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part of our lives as slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:18). That dedication will promote sanctification and lead to eternal life.

Perhaps in our weaker moments we've requested grace from others to overlook a fault, but this is a misapplication of its function. Rather than understanding grace as merely a "pass" for wrongdoing or even a license to continue in sin, it is the jet fuel that drives us to holiness. John Piper has said keenly, "Grace is power, not just pardon." Far beyond the assumption that grace gives ground for compromise, grace instead cultivates a hunger for holiness and obedience.

Exercise: Talk with your mentor about areas of life that call for greater attention and higher levels of righteousness and obedience. Where is God wanting you to experience more of his purifying grace?

6. Find your strength in God's grace

In a culture obsessed with the pursuit of identity, the grace-filled believer knows exactly who and whose he is. Today's psychologized society is averse to anything that would underscore a sense of infirmity, weakness, or guilt. Our culture tells us to run from those things. Safety is the priority of our self-protecting, individualistic culture. Conversely, the believer celebrates his lowly estate, understands that "his power is made perfect in weakness," and finds himself in the reality of his sin, shame, shortcomings, and suffering covered by a gracious Savior (2 Cor. 12:9–12). The believer is strengthened by grace as it provides all that we lack in wisdom, patience, endurance, and hope (2 Tim. 2:1).

Grace is well-timed help for the believer (2 Cor. 9:8). Faithful witnesses to this are found in the lives of men and women like Elisabeth Elliot, John Paton, Ridley and Latimer, and Amy Carmichael. So many saints drank deeply from the well of grace to sustain them in their suffering and allow them even to rejoice in the pain. First Peter serves as a dynamic manual for the Christian facing trials. Each chapter includes a passage to instruct its readers how to navigate storms, not just for survival but for sanctification. If we believe that all circumstances flow from the loving hand and providence of God, we can be assured that we will have help to be steadfast, strength to endure, and comfort for rest.

Apart from grace, our suffering will seem pointless, our trust may falter, and our hope will extinguish. Grace holds all the truths of Christ in place in our hearts, in our minds, and in our memories as we recall his unflinching faithfulness. Christian, remember that it is the God of all grace who serves

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you in the middle of the trial (1 Pet. 5:10).

Samuel Rutherford, a Scottish Reformer who knew trials well, says succinctly, “Grace grows best in winter.” Don’t despise your difficulties. Our weaknesses are the open hands in which God places his surpassing grace. Recognize that your weaknesses are empty vessels for him to fill to the overflow (2 Cor 9:8).

The author of Hebrews highlights the grace that is available from the throne of grace: “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Perhaps no greater promise encourages the beleaguered soul as 2 Corinthians 9:8: “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every work.” What extraordinary scope and breadth of grace that is available to you. The key is your willingness to acknowledge your need and humbly seek his help in prayer. D. L. Moody meaningfully summarizes the posture of the Christian who receives the fullness of God’s growth grace, “A man does not get grace till he comes down to the ground, till he sees he needs grace. When a man stoops to the dust and acknowledges that he needs mercy, then it is that the Lord will give him grace.”

7. Eagerly speak the word of grace

The gospel is the word of grace. In Paul’s final sermon to the Ephesian elders, he told them, “I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). The gospel of the grace of God is a message of his generosity to undeserving mankind. We should be similarly eager to live and preach the gospel of grace. Later Paul simply refers to the gospel as, “the word of his grace” (Acts 20:32). In Galatians, “the grace of Christ” is used synonymously with “the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:6–7). Furthermore, Paul commands to speak only words that provide grace for need of the moment (Eph. 4:29).

8. Work by God’s grace

What Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 can be life-changing for our understanding of the power and value of grace. Paul writes, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Cor. 15:10). He humbly acknowledges that grace is the reason anything good and redemptive has occurred in his life. And he acknowledges that grace invigorated within him this drive to work. In fact,

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he said that grace caused him to work “harder than any of them.” Grace motivated Paul to work robustly for the Lord.

For too many Christians, spiritual work is drudgery, something to be aggressively avoided. The gift of saving grace ought to lead to a life devoted to work and service (Eph. 2:10). For Paul, caring for others was the apex of his life (2 Cor. 12:15). He devoted all his energies and efforts to gospel progress so that he could participate further and more meaningfully in the gospel of grace (1 Cor. 9:23). Grace appears from God to “purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works.” (Titus 2:14). The good works flow out of a dependence on God’s supplying grace.

It is the power of the Spirit that energizes obedience (Col. 1:29). The Christian’s obedient work is not a self-willed performance to pay God back for salvation. Christian work is an adventure of ever-deepening dependence and indebtedness to his grace so that his fruit can be produced in us (John 15:7–8).

Grace encourages work. Follow the impulse of his grace and exert yourself — not for the purpose of earning God’s love — but in response to it, work for his purposes and enjoy the thrill of functioning by his power (John 15:5).

9. Treat others by the principle of grace, not of merit

Christ’s instructions regarding loving our enemies scandalized the religious elite. Luke 6:27–36 brings together Jesus’ teaching regarding how to treat those who seem undeserving. He begins with the jarring “love your enemies” command and completes his lesson with “he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:35–36).

The Christian’s capacity to love undeserving people is derived from a life filled with grace. The word for “grace” occurs three times in this passage of Christ’s teachings but is translated in an unusual way. Christ asks his followers about the “benefit” (6:32–33) of loving those who love you, and “if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is it to you” (6:34)? We have had our lives changed by mercy and grace; we should share that grace with others, even those who might seem unworthy in our eyes.

In other words, when you love those who might not reciprocate, you evidence that your life has been overwhelmed by grace and that you have generosity to give to others without repayment. When Christians function out of the deep well of grace received, God is honored and

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reward is prepared (Luke 6:35–36).

Exercise: Consider three people in your life who should receive more grace from you. It is likely that you are treating them according to what you think they merit. Rethink your treatment of these candidates of grace.

10. Submit to the reign of God's grace

What a merciful sovereign who sits on a “throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16)! God's nature and impulses cause him to rule with grace so that believers are privileged and welcomed to live all our days under the dominion of grace.

Paul calls us to realize the enormous privilege it is to live under this reign: “For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17).

Because God's grace in Christ by his Spirit has neutralized the power and effect of sin, a believer is free to pursue a life with a purposeful commission. Living under the rule of grace allows the Christian, who outside of Christ is hostage to self, to serve righteousness with devotion and vigor. (Rom. 5:21; 6:6). And so finally, “Sin will no longer have dominion over you, since you are not under the law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14).

Holiness now becomes the chief pursuit, objective, and reward. Obedience fueled by grace rejects the burden of the law and enjoys the freedom bought by Christ. God's grace ushers in the ability to pursue our original design and purpose. It is the glorious echo of Eden!

Discussion & Reflection:

1. If you are in a season of significant trial, read 1 Peter and list the truths concerning suffering in every chapter and how those truths should impact your suffering.
2. Who in your life needs the gospel of grace to be expressed to them in word and in deed? Talk with your mentor about a plan to extend the saving message of his grace.
3. What good works should you pursue by God's grace? Where should you offer more of your time and energy?
4. What areas of your life may still be held hostage to the law rather than freed by grace (areas where you're living to earn God's favor, rather than live in response to it)? How should you present your life more faithfully to God as an instrument of righteousness?



CONCLUSION

God seeks to pour out the fullness of his grace abundantly on every Christian's life. Grace is God's unwarranted and staggering generosity to sinners, it saves rebels through a gift and then grows them in holiness for God's glory. While it is astonishing that God would commission his grace to save us, it is imperative that the Christian realize the completeness of grace ordained to fill his days. The expansive goodness of gift grace and the greatness of growth grace are both freely offered by God in Christ.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones summarizes the glory of grace with these words:

It is grace at the beginning, and grace at the end. So that when you and I come to lie upon our deathbeds, the one thing that should comfort and help and strengthen us there is the thing that helped us in the beginning. Not what we have been, not what we have done, but the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. The Christian life starts with grace, it must continue with grace, it ends with grace. Grace wondrous grace. By the grace of God I am what I am. Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

May our hearts respond to his glorious, surpassing grace with the sentiments of Paul,

"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift" (2 Cor. 9:15)! And so God's written word of grace concludes with this benediction:

"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen" (Rev. 22:21).



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