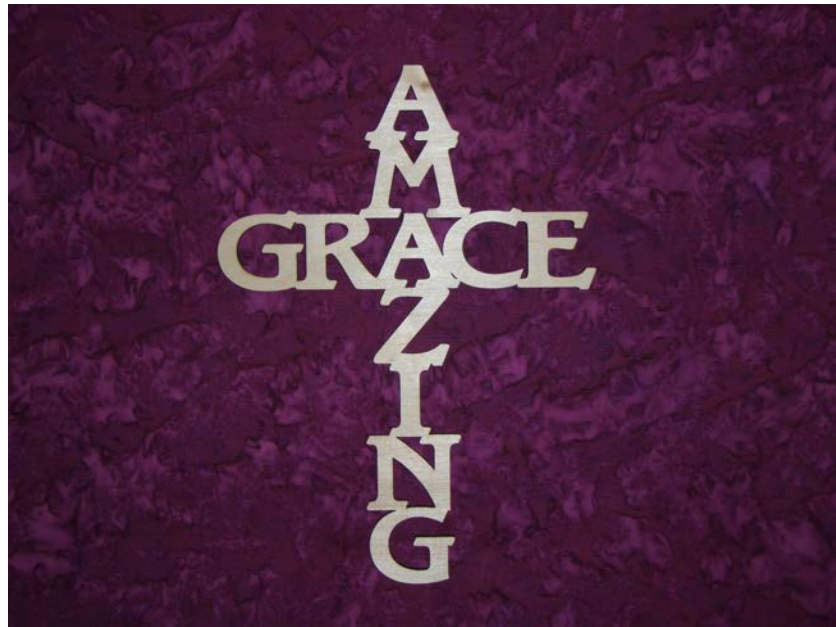


WHEN WE NEED IT



GRACE FOR YOUR TIME
OF NEED: PART 4

T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

When We Need It
Grace for Your Time of Need: Part 4
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Welcome to *When We Need It*

The thing we typically fail to see is that we need grace all the time. Every moment. In every situation. For everything. We are never at a place where we don't need grace in some form.

The better we understand this, the greater will be the likelihood of our not taking grace for granted, but of seeking it as God intends.

God gives grace, and He longs to give us more grace, that we may fulfill our calling to His Kingdom and glory. But we need to make sure we understand just how great our need for grace is, so that we will seek it as God intends.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

And if you find this study helpful, please let us know. How have you benefited from this study? Go to our website, www.ailbe.org, and use the Contact Us button to share your story.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 A Grace Review

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4.16

Divine disposition, communication, and power

We're cruising along the backstretch of our series on "Grace for Your Time of Need", but before pressing on to look more specifically at those times we *need* the grace of God, let's review our progress to this point.

We began this study of grace by describing it in relation to God, rather than to ourselves. While grace is something we experience, grace comes to us from God. Its origins are in God, in His being kindly and lovingly *disposed* toward us. God looks on all His creatures with favor. He loves the world which He made, and He even loves those who deny and despise Him.

But He especially loves those whom He has set apart for Himself to be the people through whom He will fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory. Grace begins in God, in the attitude of His heart – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – by which He is disposed with favor, generosity, kindness, patience, and love toward everything He has made, but especially toward His chosen people.

To them God *communicates* His grace. He explains to them His love for them, by enabling them to see His glory in created things, and by speaking to them through His Word, to tell them of His great love. God explains the bounty and beauty of the world, and the many blessings His people know, as tokens of His great love for them. He does this to provoke His people to love Him in return, and to live for Him so that the world will be compelled to see the goodness and glory of God; and every knee will bow to Him and confess Him as Lord. Humankind's fullest joy and satisfaction come in knowing, loving, and serving the God Who made them. God's people have come to know this eternal life, and God sends them to the world as agents of His grace, that others might know, love, and serve Him as well.

By His grace, God *empowers* His people to be agents of grace to the world. We bring the Good News of God's special and saving grace to people who all their lives have taken God's grace for granted. In proclaiming the grace of God to lost men and women, we long for the Spirit of God to strike a spark of saving grace in their hearts, so that thanks and praise to God may increase on the earth.

Grace abounding within the framework of grace

This grace agenda is a sure bet. God has set up the world so that His grace cannot fail, and the ends He seeks in showing grace to the world must be fulfilled.

He has entered a covenant of grace with His people, taking an oath and swearing upon Himself that His promises to them will not fail, and the wrath they deserve, He will bear Himself. We are in league with God in an eternal pact of grace and glory, and He calls us to live each day with increasing vision and vigor toward the precious and very great promises of the Lord.

To implement that covenant and secure the fulfillment of those promises, God has sent His Kingdom to the world, in the Person of His Holy Spirit. He has turned loose the *power* of grace unto righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit; and He calls His people – as agents of grace – to seek that Kingdom as their first and highest priority in all things.

And God is building His Church as the temporal embodiment of His grace, a community of people saved *by* grace and *unto* grace in the world, that the grace of His Kingdom and covenant might become visible to all.

When We Need It

Within this strong framework of covenant, Kingdom, and Church, the grace of God cannot fail to accomplish His eternal purpose of filling the earth with His goodness and glory.

Grace above all in Jesus

To secure the promises of grace for His people, to show them the way into His covenant and Kingdom, and to engage them in the work of building His Church, God sent His own Son, the Word of God, even our Lord Jesus Christ, as the true and faithful embodiment of His grace. In Him we see grace lived, fulfilled, enlarged, and set down before us. By Him we increase in grace and are restored to His very image. By Him the Church grows in grace to become the true Body of Christ on earth. In the contemplation of Jesus – in all phases of His Being, life, ministry, exaltation, rule, and return – we see the fullest picture of grace, and engage the rich potential of grace for making all things new.

By the grace of God through Jesus Christ, the faithful people of God cannot fail to realize His promises, achieve His Kingdom, build His Church, and glorify our Lord Jesus Christ in all their words and works. Grace abounds to us daily, grace sufficient for all our times of need (Heb. 13.20, 21). But we must diligently seek the grace we need, lest we rely on our own strength or the strength of others to achieve the ends we seek.

And we must be alert to those times when we need the grace of God, so that we might cast ourselves entirely on the Lord Jesus, pleading with the Father that He might increase in us and we might decrease, that grace may abound through us unto the praise of the glory of our Father's great grace and love.

We turn, therefore, to consider those times when we need to have the grace of God at work in our lives, so that we might know to seek that grace, and so that grace might abound to us and through us in all our times of need.

For reflection

1. How would you explain the grace of God to an unbelieving friend?
2. Why is it important that we understand the framework of grace God has established for His grace agenda?
3. Why is Jesus the Centerpiece and Cornerstone of the grace of God?

Next Steps – Transformation: Share what you have been learning about the grace of God with a couple of your Christian friends. Encourage them to [download the previous studies in this series](#).

2 Grace to Be

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. Ephesians 1.11, 12

“Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.” Acts 17.25

Not just in times of crisis

We recall the scene in “A Wonderful Life” when George Bailey, at the end of his wits and desperate for direction, turns to God and pleads with Him for grace to help in his time of need.

I suspect that for many of us, this is what we understand the writer of Hebrews to have had in mind when he instructed us to come boldly before the throne of grace, there to find mercy and grace to help in our time of need (Heb. 4.16). We’ve made a terrible blunder. Our marriage is on the rocks. We’ve lost our job, endured some physical catastrophe, have a child who’s gone astray, or just can’t figure out what the next steps should be. So we come to the Lord in prayer, claiming the promise that He will supply the grace we need, just when we need it.

And He will do so, just as He promised; although, very often, grace may come in some guise or form other than what we thought we needed. Our Father knows our needs before we ask them; we don’t (Matt. 6.8).

But we will get to this issue in due course. For now, a more looming need for grace presents itself for our consideration.

This may come as news to some: The universe does not run on cruise control. There is nothing automatic or inherent about the operations of the cosmos. Such elemental physical realities as atoms, molecules, and cells; and such basic life principles as gravity, osmosis, respiration, and the circulation of blood; the motions of stars and planets, the changes of season, day giving way to night – none of these things “just happens.” Physical reality – galaxies, stars, human bodies, oceans – contains no inherent properties or powers to make things operate over and over again just so.

The so-called “laws” of physics are not laws in the strict sense as we tend to think about them – that, given certain properties and conditions, matter always operates just so, because that’s what matter does. The cosmos does not run under its own power.

And neither do you or I.

Taking grace for granted?

Everything that is, everything that happens, is “energized” (Greek: ἐνεργουῦντος, *energountos*, “works”) by God Himself. Personally. Continually. Unfailingly. Orderly.

He Who made the world, keeps the world. Whatever exists is kept in existence by the superintending grace of God. He made the world, and He loves it, and what God loves, He cares for with all the power and wisdom and grace His creatures require.

The air around us every day is filled with marvels: photons of light, waves of sound, movements of air, creatures and culture and people of wondrous diversity. All this exists and continues because God works all things according to the counsel of His will. Our universe is not a wind-up toy, set in place, started, and running by some quantum mainspring while God attends to more important matters. The cosmos – and all

its creatures – are what matter to God, and He attends to every aspect of it, every particle and place and power and pattern and protocol. The “laws of physics” are, more correctly, descriptions of the way the all-wise, all-powerful, unfailing God works all things according to the counsel of His will.

We have been schooled all our days to think of the cosmos and its marvels as material givens. They just are, and they just continue. It’s no wonder we tend so easily to neglect or ignore or abuse the creatures around us. Perhaps if we understood each of these as being and continuing in existence because of God’s constant attention and care, we might marvel and be humbled a bit more, and give thanks to God for the infinite variety and power of His common grace.

If Jesus Christ were for a moment to withdraw His Word of power from any aspect of the cosmos, it would not simply fall apart, it would cease to exist (Heb. 1.3).

Grace to you

We need grace to exist. To draw breath, feel the beat of our heart, see or hear the world, get ourselves up and ready for the day, carry out our responsibilities, do our work, nurture our relationships – all of it, every bit of it. All that we are and do is possible only because of the grace of God, Who gives to all human beings and every living creature life and breath and all things.

The grace of God comes to us like the rays of the sun or the fresh air of the new day. We are suffused with, supported by, and sustained in grace every moment of our lives. We exist because God insists it should be so. And He insists it should be so because He loves us.

But have we presumed on His grace by failing to acknowledge it with wonder, gratitude, and praise? Ancient prayers, such as the Jesus Prayer, that seek to fit communion with God into the rhythms of our body or our daily life, can help to make us more mindful of the ways His Presence and power continually work for us. Many old songs – spirituals, chants, and travel and work songs – also invite us to consider the ways God grace is working for us in our time of need.

In short, because each day we simply need to *be*, we need the grace of God. And God abounds His grace toward us for all the business of living, so that we are never without opportunity to wonder at His greatness, kneel before His unfailing love, and pour our hearts out in thanksgiving and praise for His tender, efficacious, and continuous care.

What do you need grace for today? You need grace to *be*. And if you’ll take the time to reflect on the wonder which is your life, you may see more of God’s grace than ever, and then you can give Him more of the thanks and praise He is due.

And that would fulfill the purpose of His grace, precisely as He intends.

For reflection

1. The cosmos, and everything in it, cannot exist apart from the grace of God. Explain.
2. We are continuously surrounded by and immersed in grace. Why do we so often take it for granted?
3. What can you do to be more aware of and grateful for the grace of God that allows you to exist?

Next Steps – Transformation: Share this article with a Christian friend. Then follow-up, and consider ways you might help each other be more conscious of and grateful for the grace of God.

3 Grace for Salvation

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Ephesians 2.8, 9

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Titus 2.11-14

... *how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation...* Hebrews 2.3

Saved by grace

Apart from the grace of God, we would not exist. This form of God's grace – this divine disposition of favor, love, compassion, kindness, and goodness – is the remarkable possession of every person, every creature, and every thing in the vast cosmos. Everything needs grace simply to *be*, and we can increase in that abounding grace as we acknowledge, appreciate, and celebrate God's grace in all our waking moments.

To be *saved* from sin and condemnation, we need more than the common grace of God. We need *special* grace, *saving* grace, grace that comes with holy spiritual power to renew us in all the ways [we discussed earlier in our study](#). When God communicates this grace to someone – *irresistible* grace: ask Saul of Tarsus – we are helpless to do anything other than to resign ourselves to His unfathomable love, and be swept up into the arms of our Savior and seated with Him in heavenly places (Eph. 2.6).

Nothing you or I or anyone could do would make us worthy of such grace. Not even believing the Gospel. By the time someone confesses faith in Jesus Christ, the initial work of saving grace has already been accomplished. Faith, and confessing faith, are the *result* of saving grace, not the *means* of it.

Paul said that his experience of the grace of God set the pattern for all who should believe after him (1 Tim. 1.12-17). He was not seeking the Lord. He was an angry, proud, violent man, doing his religious duty to impress his peers and superiors, and he didn't care who got caught up in his sinister web. He hated the Name of Jesus. He was self-righteous, self-reliant, and self-serving – and so is every person who has not come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

And yet, “the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” for the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 1.14). You can say that again. The transforming power of God's saving grace was so complete and stunning, that it took even the most seasoned believers off guard, gave them pause, filled them with wonder, and only after Barnabas intervened, led them to praise and honor God for His saving grace (Acts 9.26-30).

We were all like Saul of Tarsus before God communicated His special and saving grace to us in Jesus Christ.

Salvation greater than we know

We need to be clear about this new condition into which we have been ushered by the saving grace of God. God has not merely saved our soul, granting us forgiveness and securing a place for us in heaven. Yes, He has done that, but the salvation that has come to us by grace is far greater than that. We are the recipients of [so great a salvation](#) that it leaves nothing in our lives, and nothing throughout the vast cosmos God loves, untouched by the power of His grace.

What makes our salvation so great is that it enfolds, encompasses, empowers, and transforms everything

about us, all the small and seemingly insignificant aspects and details of our lives. All our thoughts are subsumed into the mind of Christ, so that we begin to see the world, think about things, plan and operate according to the patterns of thought we see exhibited in the incarnate Christ of the gospels (1 Cor. 2.16; 2 Cor. 10.3-5). All our affections are transformed, so the things we formerly loved and cherished now seem unimportant in the light of the knowledge of Christ, His Kingdom, and His glory. Our priorities are turned rightside-up, so that seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness dominates every moment, activity, word, and deed of our lives.

By grace, God's great salvation is making all things new in our lives. Nothing remains the same. Suddenly every single aspect of our lives, every task, all our time and responsibilities, every word and deed – all of it – becomes invested with power and significance as a means for showing the grace of God to the watching world. Peter exhorts us to grow in such grace (2 Pet. 3.18), so that we will know the power of grace operating in every situation, and marvel at the willingness and ability of God to adorn the Gospel with good works through silly people such as we.

By our great salvation, we have become charged with the lightning power of God to ignite salvation in others, and to make all things new, whatever we may be doing (1 Cor. 10.31).

Grace unto greater salvation

It is to such a great salvation that we aspire. Think of the wonder and joy of it! Every word conveying grace and edification (Col. 4.6; Eph. 4.29). Every gesture one of sympathy, compassion, assistance, and love. Every choice a match struck for the glory of God. Every work a work that restores a measure of that pristine goodness that filled the cosmos in the days before our first parents fell into sin (Gen. 1.31).

To want this great salvation, and to make progress in it, we need grace. Only by the power of grace can we know the increasing reality of Jesus increasing in us, and us being His witnesses in the world. We need grace, and the way to get grace is to seek it in the throne room of God in prayer.

Pray about your salvation. Give thanks that God has saved you, and that He has so great a salvation, waiting to be known and enjoyed, and so many good works of grace and truth to shine into the dark world through you. Ask boldly for grace each day, to go beyond where you have ever been in your salvation before. To know more of Jesus, to see Him more consistently and clearly, to desire His Kingdom, to bear gracious witness to His resurrection, and to show His self-denying and sacrificial love to everyone around you. Make it your goal to increase in our great salvation every moment of every day, become a new person more and more, over and over, in every situation.

Pray this way, and eagerly seek the grace of God for salvation, and you will be amazed to the point of giddiness to see how God will respond.

For reflection

1. As Christians, we say that we are saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved one day. Explain.
2. How does grace operate to help us grow in our great salvation?
3. What are some things that would allow you to see more of the grace of God at work in your life?

Next Steps – Transformation: Make praying for a greater measure of salvation a part of your daily prayers. At the end of the day, think back over any ways you have seen God answer that prayer, and give Him thanks and praise.

4 Grace to Serve

But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Mark 10.42-45

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us... For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. 2 Corinthians 4.7, 15

Our narcissistic age

When Rick Warren began his book, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Zondervan, 2002) with the sentence, "It's not about you", he was acknowledging a condition in the Christian community which has leached into it from our narcissistic age.

We actually think that everything in our lives is supposed to be all about us.

I mean, if we don't look out for ourselves, who will? We need a church that cares for us, meets our needs, helps us make Christian friends, provides a satisfying worship experience, and doesn't demand too much of us.

The rampant narcissism, which has inundated the unbelieving world around us, has washed over the decks of the Church; and we are in danger of being submerged in mere self-interest and self-indulgence. If my church is not sufficiently about me – my interests, concerns, needs, comfort level, and so forth – then I will find a church that is. And churches are competing with one another for narcissistic attenders, positioning themselves as "full service" congregations, by which they mean something like, "providing everything you need or think you'll need".

But narcissism is a dead-end street, as can be easily seen by Solomon's testimony in Ecclesiastes 2. Here the wisest king ever reports on his campaign of self-indulgence and self-satisfaction, only to end up regarding his life as vanity of vanities and feeding on the wind.

All this thinking that churches exist to serve us obscures our true calling, and makes it very difficult for us to realize the true, powerful, and joyful nature of the life of discipleship.

The joy of following Jesus comes as we serve others, not as others serve us. And if we are to realize this incomparable joy, and fulfill the calling Jesus has appointed to us, then we shall need grace.

Called to serve

We are called to serve, following the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus served by setting aside certain divine prerogatives and perquisites (Phil. 2.5-11). He denied Himself, chose the way of hardship and suffering, and moved continuously throughout the land of Palestine, looking for people in need of His service (Lk. 19.11).

The nature of Jesus' service is perhaps best understood by contemplating the scene in the upper room, just prior to Jesus' Passover meal with His disciples (Jn. 13.1-15). Jesus understood that He had the right to expect others to serve Him, since "the Father had given all things into His hands" (v. 3). He was the King. He was the Lord and Teacher (v. 14). People should have been doing for Him.

Instead, Jesus surveyed the situation, discerned the need, equipped Himself for the work, humbled Himself

before His disciples, and washed their filthy feet with His soon-to-be-nail-scarred hands. Not even the looming crisis of the cross could get Jesus thinking about Himself rather than about His friends. He loved His own to the full extent of His love, and He explained that this is how they were to relate to one another and to the world.

But when we're stuck on ourselves, thinking only about what we need, what we want someone to do for us, and how we're going to be encouraged or strengthened or provided for, the virus of narcissism will prevent us from knowing the joy of service that Jesus knew (Heb. 12.1), and that He intends for us as well.

We need grace to overcome our narcissistic tendencies so that we look out on our world like Jesus did, full of compassion and a readiness to serve (Tit. 3.1).

Only grace

Only the grace of God can fit us for service. To serve others we must deny ourselves, empty ourselves of our sense of privilege, and take up the cross of suffering. We won't have to suffer like Jesus did. Mostly our suffering will be a matter of inconvenience. We'll have to give up some time, invest some strength, learn some new skills, become more attentive, risk rejection, and set to one side our own needs and concerns.

When we empty ourselves like this, we make room for Jesus to fill us with His thinking, His compassion and love, His priorities and designs; and then His power can flow through us – frail vessels though we are – to bring grace to those who are in need. And as Jesus fills us with Himself, He brings the joy of God to greater fullness in us, so that, even in all our being inconvenienced, we are filled with the joy of the Lord.

The Kingdom of God is joy (Rom. 14.17, 18), and the joy of the Kingdom is known as Jesus knew it, by serving others.

Grace can empower us to serve, because Jesus is all grace, and all of Jesus indwells everyone who believes in Him. Jesus was sent to this world to serve our greatest need – the need for redemption. The redemption of the Lord aims to bring wholeness, newness, life, hope, and peace to every aspect of our lives – so great is the salvation we have in Jesus! And Jesus said that, as the Father had sent Him, so He has sent us – in precisely the same manner, to bring the Good News of God's love and salvation to the lost world, and to build up our fellow believers for good works of love (Jn. 20.21; Heb. 13.24).

As Christians, as those who know and are increasing in the great salvation of our Lord, we are called to serve others with Jesus' love. And grace is ready and ample to empower us to do so.

For reflection

1. How can you see that narcissism has infected the Church?
2. Opportunities to serve others are all around us, every day. Explain.
3. We must love our neighbors as we love ourselves, and our fellow believers as Jesus loves us. How can you prepare each day to be a vessel of God's love for serving the people in your world?

Next Steps – Demonstration: Think of two people you will see today. How will you serve them? How will you demonstrate the love of Jesus to them?

5 Grace to Overcome

*But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:
“God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble.” James 4.6*

Our not-so-gracious world

Sometimes the grace-filled world can seem not very gracious.

The more we understand of God’s grace, and the more consistent we are in acknowledging that grace, and giving thanks and praise for it, the more we realize the effects of grace. We experience a deep assurance of being loved and secure. Peace fills our mind and joy floods our heart, putting a song in our mouth and a spring in our step. We feel confident, but not in ourselves; rather, our confidence comes from knowing that grace attends us all our way, and will be available to help us in whatever time of need we may encounter. Knowing that God attends to and cares for us at all times, knows what we need before we ask Him, and supplies all our needs through His riches in glory by Christ Jesus – this is for all who know it a source of great comfort, encouragement, hope, boldness, and joy.

In general, the experience of grace creates a kind of *buoyancy* in our souls, that is uplifting, sustaining, safe, and peaceable. We can almost feel like we’re floating on air, being carried along by strong but gentle spiritual breezes that empower and direct our every next step.

Grace is a good feeling, a feeling of wellbeing which Old Testament saints summarized in the word *shalom*. In Hebrew, that word means something like health, peace, prosperity, wellbeing, and salvation, all at the same time. It is the result of grace, and when we are basking in the abounding grace of God, *shalom* is our experience, and leads us to adore, worship, give thanks, and bear witness to our gracious God.

But the grace-filled world we inhabit is not always so cordial. Spiritual forces of wickedness seek to discourage, defeat, and destroy us continually. People who don’t know the grace of God frustrate, betray, or affront us with their self-serving ways. And our own lingering sinfulness often leads us to depart the path of grace into the jungles of mere self-interest, with outcomes that are very often the opposite of *shalom*.

Which explains why, for most believers, *shalom* can be an elusive sensation. More than we would prefer, we are troubled, doubting, fearful, angry, resentful, conniving, lustful, depressed, and sad (Jms. 4.1-4). We begin to languish in troubles, setbacks, disappointments, deprivations, hardships, temptations, and assorted trials. And at such times, the abounding grace of our loving Father can seem very far away, indeed.

Why this happens

The grace of God is a spiritual boon, and the effects it creates are spiritual as well. Knowing God’s *shalom* does not depend on external conditions; *shalom* enters the soul with the grace of God, and establishes its presence in our heart, mind, and conscience. Nothing can deprive us of *shalom*, except corrupting spiritual influences that insinuate themselves into our soul, distract us from devotion to God, and lead us to chase vain notions about what’s best for us, as if the life of faith really was all about us after all.

We become alienated from the *shalom* that accompanies God’s grace because we hoist our sails into false winds – gentle, lying breezes that promise short-cuts to wellbeing, exciting side-trips in our journey of faith, or boosts to grant us some advantage over people we are called to serve. At such times, if we would look into the wheelhouse of our soul, we would discover that the one who is directing our journey is not the Father Who abounds in grace toward us, but the father of lies, who seeks only to rob, kill, and destroy.

Imagine Peter's surprise and chagrin to have Jesus rebuke him as though he were Satan himself (Matt. 16.23). He was not Satan at that moment of course; but, by giving into the thinking of fallen men, and choosing a course contrary to the revealed will of the Master, Peter had become momentarily an agent of the very one who sought to destroy him and his Master, and who was operating from within the soul of the foremost of Jesus' disciples.

And that is precisely what happens to us whenever *shalom* eludes us and grace seems unavailable, unreal, or unlikely to be sufficient for our need.

What then?

The way back to grace and *shalom* is clear. James lays it out: "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (Jms. 4.7-10).

To get back in the jet stream and reliable winds of grace, we have to submit to God, rather than to our own best ideas about how we ought to live. We must recognize the devil's role in our malaise and resist him, by refusing to consider that anything other than God's truth is the path of grace and *shalom*. Turn to the Lord in prayer, and wait there earnestly, drawing nearer to God through meditation and pleading. Confess your sins, repent of every wickedness which the Spirit brings to mind. Cry for mercy as you weep because of your rebellious inclinations. Mourn to realize that you can be so easily duped and so ready to depart the path of salvation for the ways of the flesh. And humble yourself before the Lord, repeating every step of this process until that old, delightful buoyancy begins to return.

Understand that only grace has enabled you to steer out of the doldrums and crosswinds of the lie, and to recover your proper course in the wind of God's Spirit. Praise God for His grace! Sing to Him of the wonderful and amazing grace of Jesus! Throw yourself headlong into whatever fount of grace appears to you – a story in one of the gospels, a favorite psalm, a prayer rehearsing your testimony and all the grace of God shown to you, a song celebrating the grace of God – and then sink in, deeply, until renewing and abounding grace brings *shalom* to your soul and renewal of your course once again.

We will all experience such times of need. What a joy to know that grace, which has brought us safe thus far, will be there to lead us back on the path toward our home in God.

For reflection

1. God's *shalom* does not derive from external conditions; it affects them. Explain.
2. What might be some indicators that you were beginning to be blown off the course of God's grace? How can you know when you are beginning to prefer your own ideas and ways to those of the Lord?
3. What preventive steps can you take throughout the day to prevent the father of lies from taking control of the wheelhouse of your soul?

Next Steps – Transformation: Write a prayer that you can use whenever you feel your shalom is beginning to wane. What should that prayer include?

6 Grace for Witness

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1.8

Holy Spirit power

We said that grace is not only a divine disposition of favor, which God communicates to us by His Word and in our Lord Jesus Christ; but grace is also divine power – real, albeit spiritual power, which operates from within the soul, through all our words and deeds, to shape us for good works and true words.

This is real power, and it’s a good thing it is. For being witnesses to Jesus Christ is not something we are naturally inclined to do. Jesus recognized that bearing witness to Him can be intimidating. He taught us not to fear what others might say about or do to us, but to hold fast our testimony as often as we can. He said we shouldn’t even get worked up about what to say when an opportunity for bearing witness arises, promising that the Father would give us the words we need, and they would be the words of the Spirit Himself. And He warned us against failing to bear witness when we should, saying that all who deny Him in this world can expect that He will deny them before the Father. At the same time, all who faithfully confess Him before men, He will joyfully, proudly, and continuously confess before the Father.

We need power to be witnesses for Jesus, as He Himself explained. And the Holy Spirit is that power, that Dynamo of grace, Who excites our mind with the truth that is in Jesus, ignites our hearts with fervor to make Him known, establishes being witnesses as a constant priority in all we do, and actually creates the opportunities for witness and gives us the words we need.

Who me? A witness for Christ?

You may not believe this can actually happen in you, that you could be clear as a bell about the Gospel, eager and enthusiastic in proclaiming Jesus, daily consistent in doing so, and effective in leading others to salvation by grace through faith.

If so, if you doubt God’s ability to use you as a witness for Christ, it’s only because you’re relying on yourself, rather than on God’s grace, to empower you for this work. You don’t have the power to be a witness for Jesus, and if you’ve concluded that, then you’re in a really good place. You’ve got both feet planted in the starting-blocks for the greatest race of your life!

You *don’t* have the power to be a witness for Jesus; the Holy Spirit has the power. He flows the living water of God’s grace through our words and deeds, as these are shaped and formed in the forge of God’s Word, and in prayer in the glorious presence of our reigning Lord (Jn. 7.37-39; 2 Cor. 3.12-18; Heb. 4.16). The Holy Spirit is all the grace you need to be an effective witness for Christ. He wields power like you won’t believe, exceedingly abundant power, power beyond anything you’ve ever dared to ask or think (Eph. 3.20). He has power to make you willing and able to do that which God approves and has appointed to you (Phil. 2.13).

The power is there, and the power is real. But you must be willing to engage that power by walking in the Spirit, not in the flesh, and thinking with the mind of Christ, rather than with your own best ideas. God is spreading His saving grace over the whole earth, increasing praise and thanks to His Name from people who come to know His grace in our Lord Jesus Christ. The vessels by which that grace is being distributed in the world may be frail, but because the power is of God, grace is spreading to more and more people, day after day (2 Cor. 4.7-15).

Grace for our witness to Jesus

How do we engage this power? That is, how do we connect with the flow of divine power that is the grace of

God working in and through us to make us witnesses for Jesus Christ? Let me suggest five steps – to be repeated continuously – that can get us into the slipstream of the Holy Spirit’s power for witness.

First, accept that you have been appointed to be a witness for Jesus Christ. Every day, Jesus sends you into the world as He was sent (Jn. 20.21), to people you see over and over, day after day. Some of these people are believers, and they need you to witness to the grace of Jesus, to encourage them in love and good works (Heb. 10.24). Some are unbelievers, and you need to so live the hope of grace that, as they see the difference this makes in your life, they will be open to your sharing the Good News with them (1 Pet. 3.15). But you must first accept this as your primary calling in life, and you must accept it anew every day, and in every situation.

Second, seek the filling of the Holy Spirit in prayer. Jesus promised that God will give us the Spirit if we ask Him (Lk. 11.13). Paul said we should be careful to fill our thoughts, affections, and priorities with the Spirit, so that words of grace will issue from us more naturally and consistently (Eph. 5.18-21). Being filled with the Spirit is just another way of seeking the grace to help you bear witness by your life and words. Seek His filling often throughout the day. As you are filled with the Spirit, work to bring forth the fruit and gifts He bestows, and walk the path of *holiness*. He’ll begin to stretch out in you in surprising and transformative ways.

Third, banish every thought and lay aside every practice that hinders your witness for Christ (Eph. 4.17-24). Look for opportunities to ask questions or initiate conversations that can allow you to bring up Jesus in an informal, non-preachy way. Rehearse often the many ways the grace of Jesus has blessed you. Observe the ways God’s grace is at work even for those who do not know Him. Start conversations based on such things as these, and banish fear, doubt, or indifference, so that you can follow the Spirit into the place where He wants to shine the light of the Gospel.

Fourth, remember that being a witness for Christ is a *process* and not an *event*. It’s not a one-and-done proposition, but a way of life, a way of being before others, of serving and caring about them, and of making the most of all your time to bring out the grace of God in people’s lives, especially as that grace is communicated in Jesus. Being a witness is a “here-a-little, there-a-little” calling. Discover new ways of pursuing this process with all the people in your Personal Mission Field, and work your plan with each person prayerfully, faithfully, and expectantly.

Finally, talk often about Jesus and His wonderful, amazing grace to you. Talk with Christian friends. Talk with God. Sing of His grace, and remind yourself how great a debtor you are to the grace that sustains you every moment of every day.

Get grace into the grooves of your everyday thoughts and words, and you’ll be surprised to see how the Spirit will use your words to help others see Jesus more clearly.

For reflection

1. Why do we need the grace of God through His Spirit to enable us to be witnesses for Jesus?
2. Being a witness is a matter both of how we live and what we say. Explain.
3. What can you do to begin being more consistent as a vessel of grace and a witness for Jesus Christ?

Next Steps – Transformation: Begin putting in practice the five steps outlined in this article. Pray daily that God would give you grace to be a witness for Christ. Encourage your Christian friends to join you in this.

7 Grace to Keep On

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. Philippians 3.12-16

The end of grace

Christians are who we are, and we do what we do, because we are responding to a call. God has called us to His Kingdom and glory, and He enables us by His grace to pursue that calling as our highest priority in life, the overarching and defining priority of every aspect of our lives (1 Thess. 2.12; Matt. 6.33; Phil. 2.13).

Paul refers to this as an “upward” call (v. 14). The sound of God’s voice lifts us above this temporal sphere into eternal corridors and spiritual resources, beckoning us to feast and grow strong on eternal truths. So strong is this upward call, that it allows us to forget everything we held so dear in our former life, before hearing this call, and to move forward consistently toward the Voice that calls us from His high and holy, heavenly realm.

The end of grace is Jesus Christ. The grace that enables us to exist, that has come to us with our great salvation, and that empowers us to serve, overcome, and bear witness, will carry us all the way to the very Presence of the embodiment of God’s grace, Jesus Christ the Righteous One. One day we will see Jesus face to face, and then we will be as like Him as each of us individually can be (1 Jn. 3.1-3). We will see His face in glory. We will experience the power of His cosmos-sustaining strength. We will be warmed in the light of His radiant eyes, cauterized and healed by the power of His two-edged Sword, and received to our seat at His right hand, at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. We will be one with Jesus and with the Father and the Spirit in an existence of glory and joy that we can barely imagine at this time. But as we fix our minds on this end of God’s grace (Col. 3.1-3), we move forward toward it day by day; and our sense of the reality and beauty and inevitability of that destination grows as we do, so that we increase in confidence and consistency in our journey toward Jesus.

Paul insisted that this work of pressing on toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus was the “one thing” to which he was devoted. For Paul, the end of grace was never out of sight. He allowed nothing to obscure it, distract Him from it, or compete with it. He looked to Jesus, considered Him day by day, kept the Lord always before his mind and foremost in his heart, and laid aside everything that hindered him from realizing more of the upward call of God’s grace.

And it was this grace, and this gazing upon the end of grace, that strengthened Paul to persevere through much adversity, and to increase in Jesus day by day (2 Cor. 4.6, 16-18).

The road of the upward call

One of my favorite book titles is Eugene Peterson’s, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. It is a study of the life of discipleship, explaining the goals, means, trials, and progress we may expect along the way. The direction our discipleship is taking us is into Jesus, the end of God’s grace. That end is unchanging, and it is the same end for every true believer. The road on which we journey toward that end, however, is a long one – as long as our lives on earth. It is littered with obstacles, intersected with detours, fraught with dangers, invaded by brigands and con artists; yet it is clearly marked by the twin railings of the Word of God and indwelling Spirit of holiness.

We must not depart from that road, lest we find ourselves serving some end other than the grace of God. The key to remaining on that road is obedience, obedience to the vision and Word of Jesus Christ. Daily obedience, in all the small stuff and large matters of life. We make progress toward the end of grace as we embrace this journey and devote ourselves to it anew every day.

This, Paul insists, is the way of life that characterizes mature believers (Phil. 3.15). Grounded in grace, immersed in grace, seeking grace, aimed at grace, and growing in grace, mature believers take up their journey of discipleship afresh every day, determined that by day's end they shall be just that much closer in their being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18). We will not be perfect, and we will not attain the fullness of this upward call in this life (Phil. 3.12). But we must press on, persevere, and strain to continually hear the voice of grace as He leads us, step by step, toward our ultimate destination.

Make up your mind for grace

Make up your mind to know and live by the grace of God, and to strive toward the upward call of the grace that is in Jesus Christ (v. 15).

It won't be easy. Life in pursuit of the upward call in Christ Jesus requires discipline. Paul says we must *walk*, but that word (*στοιχεῖν*, *stoichein*) implies living in conformity to expectations, following clear guidelines, and remaining within certain prescribed parameters of soul and body. When the eye of our heart – the desires we desire most, and which we embrace by faith – are for the grace that is in Jesus, then we'll invest our minds in the task of understanding the life of grace. We'll set in place in our consciences those priorities that enable us to make the most of our time; and we will deploy all our words and deeds as agents of grace along the highway of grace that leads to the end of grace in Christ Jesus.

It won't be easy. But remember that, at the end of the journey, and on every step along the way in that long obedience, the nail-scarred hands of the King of grace reach out to sustain and receive you. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His glorious face. If you will make this the defining orientation of every moment of your life, your heart will never fail of love for Him, your mind will seek more about Jesus than you've ever known, and your life would show His grace to the world. The things of earth, that seem so important to us when we divert our gaze from our beautiful Savior, will grow strangely dim and unappealing, in the light of His glorious, all-surrounding, life-giving, sin-overcoming, soul-transforming, all-things-renewing, cosmos-reconciling...

grace.

For reflection

1. Why does Paul refer to our calling as “upward”? In what sense is Jesus the end of that calling?
2. Why is life toward the upward call a difficult road? How can we look to grace to help us along it?
3. What will it require of you for you to “press toward” the goal of grace day by day?

Next Steps – Transformation: What is hindering you in your journey toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus? What can you do to remove these hindrances, so that you make steady progress in grace and toward grace?

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What constitutes our “time of need” when it comes to the grace of God?
2. Believers are saved, they are being saved, and they will be saved – by grace alone. Explain.
3. How does grace work to help us fulfill our calling as witnesses for Christ?
4. Why do we need grace to persevere in our calling? How can we get the grace we need?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned about grace from this series? How are you putting that lesson to work? Share your experience of this study by going to our website, www.aibe.org, and using the Share Your Story button. Let us rejoice with you over what God is doing in your life.

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Thank you.