

Dear Friend,

I notice that the apostle Peter closed out his second epistle with the exhortation to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2Peter 3:18 But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen.

It is pretty easy for me to understand about how to grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we study the Word of God and spend time in worship and prayer, we definitely increase in our knowledge of Him. But the phrase ... "grow in grace" stumped me for many years. I think part of the reason for my lack of understanding was because of the standard way most preachers define the word "grace." Most people say it is "the unmerited favor of God." That is true. No denying that. But if that is all it is, then it seemed to me a pretty finite thing. By that definition alone, you either have God's favor in Christ, or you do not. So, to my limited understanding at the time, once I became a Christian I had God's unmerited favor and that was that. But I have since learned grace is so much more than just God's unmerited favor. As I studied the Word I found out:

1. We can grow in grace. (2 Pet 3:18)
2. We can receive the abundance of grace. (Rom 5:17)
3. To the humble, God gives more grace. (James 4:6)
4. God is able to make all grace abound toward us. (2 Cor 9:8)

And that is just a partial list. It became obvious to me that God's grace was not a static, one-time thing that a person received when he was born again. My journey into understanding God's grace continued. One glorious day the following verse became alive to me:

Heb 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

"Grace to help." What a powerful thought. God's grace is there to help us every time we have a need. The Holy Spirit gave me an illustration of the grace of God using my own family. I have three daughters and all them love the Lord. I see the fruit of the spirit manifesting in each of them. At various times, they have all three worked with me in the ministry. Currently, my middle daughter Angie is the administrator of Gary Carpenter Ministries.

Angie, like all of my daughters, has a nature to "help" anybody who needs it. If she sees anybody struggling with a problem, her natural tendency is to add her ability to help them solve their problem. For example, if she saw a person in a wheelchair struggling to open a door, she would immediately hurry ahead and hold the door open for them (if they allowed her to do so).

I was watching her helping a person one day and I heard the Lord say, "*Angie is giving them her 'grace to help' in their time of need.*" Wow! I got it! That's what grace truly is. It is God giving us His strength where we are weak. For many years I thought my weakness repelled God. My tendency was to hide my weakness from Him. But now I see it is just the opposite. My weakness attracts Him to help me, just like other people's weakness attracts Angie to help them.

At every moment of our lives, God is standing there, full of unlimited power. He is hoping for the opportunity to supply His strength where we are weak. Even the apostle Paul finally understood the power of God's grace when he wrote,

2Cor 12:9-10 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Think about it. One of the most fundamental truths of the bible is that man could not stop sinning in his own strength. For hundreds of years not a single person could keep the Law of Moses, no matter how much they loved God. It did not matter how hard they tried to keep the Law, there was a weakness at the core of man called the sin nature passed down from Adam. No man was strong enough on his own to overcome the sin nature. So, God, because of His love for man, sent His Son ... first to provide mercy by paying the price for sin that we could not pay ... and second to provide us with the very nature of Christ to provide the strength to do what we could not do before ... to be free from sin. The nature of Christ in us is God's grace ... it is the very strength of Christ Himself to empower us against sin.

Rom 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Php 4:13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

I have learned that growing in grace means God is willing to supply much more than freedom from sin. He wants to use His ability to help us with ... EVERYTHING! In Philippians chapter four the apostle Paul tells us to not worry about anything, but to pray about everything, and to give God thanks when we pray. Why? Because God is still giving us His "grace to help in our time of need."

Your friend and co-laborer,

GARY