

Russell Kelfer

Growing in Grace

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Series: The Character of God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD,

For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, Which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, And will not be anxious in the year of drought, Nor will cease from yielding fruit.

(Jeremiah 17:7,8 NKJV)

Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,...

He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatsoever he does shall prosper.

(Psalm 1:1,3 NKJV)

Like a tree, God's man will be
Planted by the river's shore
Spreading out its roots to drink
Its refreshment o'er and o'er.

Like a tree, God's man will be
When the storms of life assail
Nor will dreaded summer's heat
Cause his leaves to drop or fail.

Like a tree God's man will be
Though no water soaks the land
Even in the darkest drought
Like a mighty oak, he'll stand.

Like the poem of old has said
Only God can make a tree
Likewise, only God's sweet grace
Can enable you and me.

The tree! It is a perfect illustration of the divine combination of grace and truth. Only God can grow a tree; only God can sustain a tree. If those who tend that tree follow principles of growth, it

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stands a better chance. By the river, it will grow better. Planted in deep soil, its chances are increased. Given enough time, the odds are better. But given all those things, without the creative hand of God and the sustaining hand of God, it would be dead before ever a leaf formed on its tender branches. It exists because God is. It grows because God is. It lives because God is. It belongs to God, and so do you.

Apart from God, you have no breath. Apart from God, you have no life. Apart from God's divine, free, unmerited, eternal, supernatural, sovereign act, you would be dead in your trespasses and sins. But you He made alive. "Not by works of righteousness which you have done." "For by grace you were saved." It was not of anything you could do; it was a gift from God, lest you should have something to boast about.

Like that tree, you exist because God planted you in the vineyard of eternity, pouring His own precious blood into the ground beneath you to act as the only catalyst that could bring you to life. That's how much He loves you. But even beyond that, your ability to grow tall until your arms stretch out like the branches of a giant tree rests only in the hand of God. Growth is of grace. It is never deserved, never repayable, never temporal, never of man's doing. By grace, you grow; even from grace to grace; even from one degree of glory to another.

Grace: it is God's power implanted in a human body for divine purposes. It is the energy of the Creator poured through the vessel He created in order to return to the Creator glory that is rightfully His. It is the life of God giving life to man, so man's life can give honor to God.

Grace: it is God alive in you. It is God alive in me...doing what we cannot do; saying what we cannot say; being what we cannot be...till only He can be seen. It is the transparent power of the Father poured through the Spirit to those who belong to the Son. It is all you need to live the Christian life and all you need to grow into His likeness.

But grace is such a general term. So often we talk about it as though we understand it; yet even as we appropriate it, we fail to recognize it; and as we take it for granted, we lose the meaning of what it is.

The grace of God is the nature of God relinquished by God into the life of an undeserving child of His. It cannot be earned,

cannot be presumed upon, cannot be captured in the physical realm. It is the enabling power of God reduced in the crucible of eternity until it exactly fits the need in your life or mine; and then by divine decree, it is released into our hearts in such a way that we cannot help but give glory to God.

It was His grace that saved us. His holiness was bruised by our sins. His mercy arrested His judgment and allowed His grace to flow into our lives, enabling us to actually become children of God. That same grace guaranteed us an eternal dwelling place where we will be in the presence of God forever, free from sin, free from pain, free from death.

Until then, that grace is being poured into us day by day for a variety of purposes and in a variety of ways. One of those ways is the subject of this study. It is the grace of God that enables us to grow spiritually.

THE SPIRITUAL SWITCH

To best understand the issue of spiritual growth, we must first come to see the matter of growth itself and then make the “spiritual switch”. The “spiritual switch” is the process by which we take a physical truth or physical illustration and make application to the spiritual realm, as God did in Scripture. In the matter of growth, there are obviously two basic Biblical picture books that translate into the realm of eternity. Both are specifically applied by the Holy Spirit in Scripture so we can never question their use.

The first is our old standby, the tree. The passages we read in Jeremiah and Psalms at the outset of this study are two of the most familiar ones. They illustrate growth in the spirit to the way a tree grows, acknowledging that trees grow stronger under certain circumstances, and that individuals who appropriate spiritual truth properly will be like a tree that’s planted under ideal conditions. It will flourish even when the winds of adversity blow against it; even when torrents of rain beat upon it; even when the drought comes and the needed moisture is nowhere to be found. The secret is in the root system, and the fact that it is constantly being nourished. That gives us one principle of growth. It is this: we can, by doing certain things, enhance or allow growth to take place. The second principle, however, is equally important. Even when we do our part, we are not responsible for the growth; God is. Never forget that. Growth will always be supernatural, eternal, undeserved and free. If we want to be like a tree, we have to

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remember Genesis 2:9. It reads like this:

And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.

(Genesis 2:9 NKJV)

It is God who plants the tree, and it is God who makes it grow. The water that makes it grow comes from Him. The balance of nature that uses its fruit comes from Him. He is the author, originator, source of power, and source of strength of all living things. Apart from Him that tree can do (just what you and I can do)...nothing. Another illustration is found here:

Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;

and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (Matthew 6:26-29 NKJV)

In another side of growth there are things we can do and must do or we will impede the process, but growth ultimately is of God. To sit and struggle and worry over whether or not we are growing, provided we are doing the things God called us to do, is sin. Look how the trees and the flowers grow. We will find some of them in far away places where man has never been. We'll find others in the midst of what seems like a tropical paradise that are dying. We don't always understand. But one thing we know: All growth ultimately is of God...and God alone.

The second illustration is that of a child. All through Scripture, God likens spiritual growth to physical growth. The process of redemption He likens to birth, calling it being "born again". We are told like newborn babes to, "*desire the sincere milk of the word that we may grow...*" (I Peter 2:2). Paul told the Corinthians in I Corinthians 3:1, that he "*could not speak to them as to spiritual people, but as to babes in Christ.*" In Ephesians 4:14-15, Paul said, "*we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro*"...but rather "*grow up in all things*". We were admonished in I Corinthians 13 "*to put away childish things.*" In I Corinthians 14, Paul asked the Corinthians not to be "*children in understanding*".

So the Christian process of spiritual growth is a parallel to the physical illustration of growth from childhood to adulthood.

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Physical growth was given to us to teach us how the spirit grows in Christ. Now we all know that children who receive no nourishment at all wither and die. We know that those who are unable to exercise their bodies often become weak and fail to develop normally. These are the principles we so often teach where growth is concerned. The Word is God's milk and God's meat. The exercise of being used of God and tested of God develops the spirit and stretches us until we grow. That is the part we often hear.

But the second side of the coin is equally true. Apart from God's supernatural, eternal, undeserved, free, sovereign grace, you and I would remain as we came from the womb. Some grow tall. Some don't. Some mature quickly; others don't. Some require special exercise and diet; others seem to be destined to become professional football players from birth. We cannot explain it. Part of our potential for growth comes from our parents. Their genes exist in us; and if they were tall, we are more likely to grow. But even that is not always true. A sovereign God determines, in the final analysis, how tall you will be, how strong you will be, how much endurance you will have, and how touched by illness and weakness you will be.

In the spirit realm, the same is true. We all have the same spiritual Father, and His size in the Spirit is beyond measure. Unlike our physical bodies, in the spirit, our potential for growth is unlimited. We take in the Word; we breathe in His presence; we deal with the deadly disease of sin that chokes our ability to grow. But ultimately, having done that, we rest. How tall we will become in the Kingdom is God's doing... and His alone. Christians have for years developed formulas for growth, measuring sticks for growth, and finally categories for those who meet their man-made criteria. What they fail to count on is the sovereignty of God, and thus the grace of God. If you have an abnormal hunger for spiritual things, thank God; don't glory in it. He placed it there. If you are being mightily used as a young Christian, don't compare yourself with others and exalt yourself as though God has chosen you because you are so special. God chooses the weak things, the foolish things, the things that are nothing to bring to nothing the things that are. Therefore, Paul added,

“He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.”

(I Corinthians 1:31 NKJV)

Growth is of grace. He does it. He does it all. If you understand the Scriptures beyond your age, praise God, He is a miracle-

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worker. If you have discernment beyond your years, praise God, He exalts one and sets down another. But it's not your doing. Oh, you are accountable to do what the Scripture commands. But God is accountable for the results. And like that tree, you cannot always see growth. The slow and awkward ways of God often let you appear to be nothing more than a straggling bunch of twigs, trying to stay alive, all the while nourishing you from within for that day to come when the storms of life will test not how strong you look, but rather how strong you are.

Oh, Beloved, only God can grow a tree.
Or a flower...or you...or me.

And the minute we begin to think we are growing because we're so special, or we're doing something special, we're about to stunt our growth by denying God's grace. He will not share His glory with another.

THE SEVEN-FOLD CHANNEL OF GRACE

To further prove His point, God decided to place in each of us, at birth, a unique measure of grace, peculiar to us. Through it we would grow, and through it we would minister. He called it our "spiritual gift". As He described it in Scripture, He used the very same root word for that gift as He did for the grace from which it flows. In each passage where those gifts are mentioned, His grace is mentioned as well.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: [then he lists the motivational gifts].

(Romans 12:6 NKJV)

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

(Ephesians 4:7 NKJV)

As each one has received a [the] gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

(I Peter 4:10 NKJV)

The spiritual gifts are free, undeserved, eternal and sovereign. God gives them as He pleases to whom He pleases for the purposes that please His heart. Each has a supernatural result:

Prophecy: supernatural discernment

Service: supernatural availability to meet needs

Exhortation: supernatural encouragement of believers

Teaching: supernatural insight into Scripture

Giving: supernatural generosity and stewardship

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Administration: supernatural oversight of details

Mercy: supernatural compassion and love

That simply means that as these qualities surface in your life as a believer, depending on your particular gift, you have no right to accept glory for their attributes. You had nothing to do with it. When Christ came into your life, He gifted you supernaturally by means of giving you grace in that one area of your life, so that for your place in the body of Christ, you might demonstrate the awesomeness of who He is. They are seven channels through which His grace flows into the church, but they are all of grace. The Greek word for grace is the word “charis”. The primary word used to describe the spiritual gifts is the word “charisma”. Its literal meaning is “the gift of grace” or the “free expression of the grace of God”. So if you are demonstrating the mind of Christ in the area of your spiritual gift, who is to be applauded? Certainly not you. It is all of grace, Beloved. It is all of grace.

So we can grow into the likeness of Christ in “ever-increasing splendor” as Paul’s words in II Corinthians 3:18, but it is a delicate balance of receiving truth and receiving grace. Our part is to consciously allow God’s Word to be administered to our hearts. His part is to do with it whatever He pleases. Thus, the unusual commandment in II Peter:

but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever.
Amen. (II Peter 3:18 NKJV)

If grace is free, then how can we grow in grace? I believe understanding the balance between those two commandments is the key. We are to grow in knowledge (the receiving of the engrafted Word of God which is able to build you up) and to grow in grace (the understanding that the Word is only able to equip us when accompanied by grace). In other words, we spend more time in the Word in order to grow, but if we are not careful our time in the Word can become Pharisaical head knowledge and can result in a new kind of pride that says to God, “You owe it to me to make me mature, I spend so much time in the Scriptures”. Beloved, God doesn’t owe you anything. He gives you everything. But He does so as a sovereign, free, undeserved, eternal gift. That’s why the Scripture says “knowledge puffeth up”. Left to itself, it will destroy faith. Coupled with grace, it will “build you up”. It is a delicate balance, one that the enemy constantly tries to destroy. I Corinthians describes it like this:

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,

that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, (I Corinthians 1:3-5 NKJV)

Grace is a gift from God that takes knowledge (an understanding of the Word) and enriches you by it. To the degree you revel in the knowledge, or to the degree that you believe the knowledge itself enriches you, you frustrate the grace of God. Beloved, knowledge is a tool which a sovereign God uses to enrich your soul. By itself it tends to ferment and causes swelling of the head. Infused into your life by the sovereign grace of God, it works its way into your experience and changes you. But as long as you think the knowledge itself changes you, you will begin to create doctrines and a theology that exalts information at the expense of transformation. Grace without knowledge has little to work with. Knowledge without grace destroys it and you. So,

Be diligent [study] to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (II Timothy 2:15 NKJV)

That's a commandment. But, Beloved, remember,

for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13 NKJV)

The question then arises, "Is there a key to that delicate balance, so I can continue to grow in both grace and knowledge?" In other words, "How can I know when learning is becoming an end within itself?" I believe that God, knowing how difficult it would be for us to keep that in perspective, gave us a clear Scriptural absolute, so that we can never ever wonder again. Proverbs is the first place we see the truth surface. It says:

Surely He scorns the scornful, But gives grace to the humble. (Proverbs 3:34 NKJV)

Here we see God giving an extra measure of grace to those who are in a special category, "the lowly", those who view themselves as nothing, either because of their lot in life or the devastation of their circumstances. James explains it more fully:

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

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Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
(James 4:6,7 NKJV)

It comes to its glorious conclusion:

Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,

casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

(I Peter 5:5-7 NKJV)

Look at the absolutes; and look for the principles those absolutes spawn:

Absolute 1- God resists the proud. These are those who think that in and of themselves they can do anything, or they can have anything. They believe that the spirituality in their lives is either deserved or can be earned. They associate their relative maturity with something they did or earned. They went to that school. They studied that book. They attended that seminar. They go to that church. God not only withholds grace from them; He resists them. He stiff-arms them. He is repulsed by that quality in them that attempts to deify self at the expense of His grace.

Absolute 2- He gives grace to the humble. It is free and undeserved; but as we are humbled by its presence, and as we come to feel increasingly less deserving, rather than more so, He multiplies grace. The less we claim it by worth, the more we receive it by grace. As long as we are continually reminding ourselves of His grace, we are in a position to appropriate it the more. But the moment we begin to share the glory, grace quietly steals out the door. It is still free. It is still undeserved. It is still sovereign. But God will not release it into a proud vessel. In fact, He resists having fellowship with the proud, because they try to become co-gods with Him, and He will have none of that. Those two absolutes must be memorized. God resists the proud, and He gives grace to the humble. Always. So if we desire more grace, we have the right to ask for it, but we will “ask and receive not” if we “ask amiss” that we may consume it upon our lusts. In other words, if we request more grace presumptuously, our prayers are not heard. God heeds our desire for grace proportionate to our humble assessment of our unworthiness to receive it.

The principles that surface are these:

Principle 1- We are to submit ourselves to God. That is another word for the Christ-controlled life. We do not present ourselves to God, we submit ourselves to God. Submission is a process by which one who is in subjection humbles himself before the one who reigns, and makes himself available for whatever the ruler chooses. There is total deference. No pompous demands. No self-serving expectations. It is a privilege just to be in His presence. We aren't to come with a list of demands, but with abandonment and a desire to please. When you approach a monarch like that, he is prone to give you grace. When you approach God like that, He has promised to give you grace.

Principle 2 -We are to resist the devil, and he will flee. The "therefore" in the verse gives a clue as to how to do that. Remember, whenever you see a "therefore", you are always to ask what the "therefore" is "there for". It says: "God gives grace to the humble, therefore submit yourself to God and resist the devil." In this context, at least, resisting the devil involves two things: humbling yourself before God and yielding to His total authority. As you do, you are resisting the devil, and he has no choice but to flee. This verse has often been used to encourage believers to garner up all their energy and fight off the devil's onslaughts. Not so. It says the opposite. It says, in effect, you can't fight off the devil. The battle is not yours; it is God's. Every time Satan attacks, your job is to approach the throne of the Most High, fall down in utter abandonment and submission before Him and ask for grace. As you humble yourself, God pours grace into your life, enabling you to stand against the wiles of the devil; and Satan, seeing that you are not coming to him in your strength, but in "the name of the Lord God of Israel" will head south in his Honda, pronto.

Principle 3- Practice submission. The younger are to submit to those who are more mature. In fact, all believers are to always be in the process of demonstrating submission one to another for two reasons: 1) the practice teaches us how to submit to God, and 2) it reminds us that if we are nothing in the presence of men, how can we stand before God in pride?

Principle 4- Exaltation is God's job. If we practice humility, the grace we receive will build us up, and we will be exalted in due time. It may not be on this earth. Most of us can't handle

that. But if God chooses, we have to ask for the grace to handle it. Either way, the exaltation is up to God. “He sets down one and puts up another” (Psalm 75). He goes so far as to say that “He who exalts himself must be put down; but he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11). It will be done in due time. That literally means in God’s time, and God’s time is simply different than ours.

Principle 5- The key, then, is in the casting. Like a fisherman, if you know what to cast and when to cast, your chances of coming up with something good are enhanced. Peter tells us we are to cast our cares on God, because He cares for us. Read the passage carefully. The casting is part of the process of humility. It is the outward expression of the inward attitude. It says, “God, I can’t; here...You take over.” He will always take the bait, so to speak, because He loves us so much. He cares...Oh, how He cares. He cares so much that He waits for us to humble ourselves before He pours out His grace, knowing then that His grace will accrue to us eternal rewards, the more with which to worship Him.

What grace! What love! What power! We do the humbling. He does the rest. That is the essence of the “grace life”. That is the missing ingredient in most of our lives. We often begin reasonably humble, having been saved from a deserving fate in hell by the hand of a gracious, sovereign God. But then comes the rub. We begin to grow. By His grace alone, we begin to grow. And suddenly, we begin to think we deserve His grace. Having begun in grace, we come back under the law and assume that God’s favor is relative to what we do, rather than who He is. The very moment we do, Paul says, we “fall from practicing grace”. We don’t fall from God’s favor. We can’t. It’s all of grace. He chose in His free, undeserving, sovereign will to choose us and receive us and keep us. We won’t “fall from His grace”; we will fall from the joy of living the grace life.

What about you? Are you living in the sheer freedom of God’s grace? Are you totally aware when you awaken in the morning that you can’t live for God, that God has to live through you? If not, you have replaced the grace of God with the energy of man, and the very best you can hope for is a life of frustration, anxiety, and failure, for you cannot do for God what God wants to do for you. What He wants to do for you is live through you His amazing life of grace.

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No, you don't deserve it. If you did, it wouldn't be...grace. No, you can't pay Him back. If you did, it wouldn't be...grace. No, you can't become busy or active or religious and grow from your efforts. If you did, it wouldn't be...grace. And no, you can't just accrue knowledge, and by that knowledge experience growth. That isn't growth, it's spiritual pride.

All you can do is practice the process of humbling yourself and casting all your cares upon Him, letting Him take your knowledge of God's Word, and by His grace alone, turn it into spiritual maturity. You can't dictate to Him how or when you'll grow. If you could (you guessed it), it wouldn't be...grace. But rest assured, He gives grace to the humble. That is an absolute.

That, you see, is why God so often moves into unexpected places and uses unlikely vessels to glorify His name. Those whom He has blessed and have grown by His grace, often overlook His grace, and begin to claim credit in varying degrees for what He has done. God has to withdraw His grace and even resist their fellowship, because their pride in what He has done has turned to self-exaltation. He will not share His glory with another. That is why you see church after church, denomination after denomination, leader after leader, Christian after Christian begin in grace, humbled by the very fact that God could use the likes of them, and end up on the scrap heap of religious uselessness because as they experienced His grace, they began to take it for granted or assumed they deserved it. The moment they did, the moment we do, the glory departs, and the grace diminishes; and we are left to live in our own energy to try to accomplish the things we have claimed credit for.

The children of Israel tried again and again. God would do for them what only He could do. He parted seas, brought water from a rock, rained down manna from heaven, and saw that their shoes never wore out. He sent them the cloud of His presence to lead them where they could not go; sent angels before them to defeat enemies they could not conquer; and always did it, not because they deserved it, but as He said, "*they were the least of all people, but because He loved them...and wanted to keep His word.*" (Deuteronomy 7:7). Over and over they scorned His grace, tried to do it on their own, and failed. Then they would fall down before Him like disobedient children who have no way out and ask for mercy and grace. He gave it again and again and again. But oh, the joy, the peace, the power they missed because they

scorned His grace.

We are no different than they. When the bullets are flying and there is no way of escape, we piously ask God for the “grace to endure”. We have the right to do that. But, oh, what we miss by waiting until there is no hope before we let Him live through us. He wants to extend His growing grace day after day after day. He wants us to waken every single morning, humbling ourselves in His presence, and asking Him to do what we cannot do...live the Christian life. He wants us to grow from “grace to grace”.

Strangely enough, it’s not difficult. Like growing up physically, it requires nourishment, exercise, and certain experiences that require us to make decisions and live by the results of those decisions. But we make it so unnecessarily complicated. We want a formula, and by our filling in the right blanks, we want God to give us marks commensurate with our effort, or our intelligence, or our importance. Fools. God will give us marks commensurate with His omniscience and will give us growth commensurate with His grace. The more we think we deserve it, the less we will. The more we think we can earn it, the more we interfere with the only thing that can cause us to grow...His amazing grace.

Oh, dearly beloved, let’s stop frustrating the grace of God. Let’s stop trying to put Him in a man-made straight jacket and then expect Him to operate as God. Let’s just set Him free to be Himself, and then just rest knowing that to the degree that it pleases His sovereign will, we are growing in grace.

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Growing in grace,
What a precious thought!
That we, who by grace
Through His blood have been bought.

Might, hour by hour,
As grace He’ll bestow
Into His Likeness
Actually grow!

Just as our new life
In Christ has begun
Yet still by His grace
We become like the Son.

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Oh, how awesome!
How humbling to know
That grace and grace only
Allows us to grow.

And, oh, what a joy
When we see His dear face
Having grown to be like Him
...strictly...by...grace!

Father,

We realize afresh this morning it's all of God and none of us. We're not the ones who can, we simply belong to a God who can and who already has and who is.

An some of us, Father, are so busy trying to scratch up points in spiritual warfare and trying to earn Your favor by doing things and being places, that we forget what You want us to do. You want us to humble ourselves in the presence of an almighty God and recognize it's all of grace.

May we be obedient, Father, in the things we know to do that help us to keep from stifling the grace of God. But, Father, may we not glory in what we do, may we simply glory in who You are. May we not glory in the organizations to which we belong, or the ministries You have given us, or the church we belong to, or the books we've read, or the seminars we've attended, or the experiences we've had. May we only glory in You. And may we realize that if it were not for the grace of God we would have nothing.

Take us through this week, Father, and teach us as we go and at every turn to humble ourselves and recognize our nothingness before a mighty God. And we thank You for all You are and all You are going to do.

Some of us, Father, need to realize that we are not the spiritual giants we think we are. We are still just twigs waiting for the power of the Holy Spirit to pour through us to do whatever You want us to do. Stop us this week, Lord, when we start to glory in ourselves, or glory in our accomplishments, and just teach us to glory in You.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen

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A Challenge to Further Study

1- Prayerfully study Jeremiah 17:7,8, and Psalm 1. Put the two passages together in a paraphrase. Personalize them by inserting your name. Pray them back to God with thanksgiving for the promise of spiritual growth to those who rest beside the water of God's Word.

2- Consider the lilies of the field (how they grow). To what do you attribute their beauty? What do they do to make it happen?

3- Do you know your spiritual gift? It is a channel through which God pours grace into your life. If you have never studied this topic, make a covenant with God that you will investigate your spiritual gift in the next three months. It could change your life.

4- What ways do you take in "knowledge"? What subtle kinds of pride accompany those activities? If it were not for the grace of God operating in your life, what good would that knowledge do?

5- Do a study of humility, using a concordance or a topical Bible. Ask God to help you assess your own spiritual pride and its effect on receiving the grace of God. Study I Peter 5:5 in depth, looking up the meaning of each word. Personalize it and pray it back to God. Practice "casting your cares on God". How can this affect your spiritual pride?

6- What do you think "God resists the proud" really means? Are there areas of your life where God must "resist" you rather than extend His grace? What are they? What are you going to do about it?

7- Find three ways to "practice submission" this week.

8- Spend time thanking God by faith that you are "growing in grace".

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210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778
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