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Lest Any Man Should Boast

#1347-A

Series: God's Amazing Grace

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Our Father and our God, we love You. That love is but a tiny reflection of the love You have given to us. But we return that love, Father, by choice, and ask Your Holy Spirit to simply infuse us with grace. Supernaturally allow us, Father, to have Your mind, and as we do, to lift up the name, to worship You; to worship You in our hearts. We pray that our hearts may literally sing with joy as we think of the incredible things You have done for us. Most of all, the incredible thing You did for us on that cross.

In the next few lessons, Father, we would specifically ask, that You would open the door of our hearts to understanding the subject of grace in a fuller, richer way because You desire that we understand. We humble ourselves before You; we recognize our need, and we ask. You have told us, if any of us lacks wisdom, we can ask You; that You love to give it to us and You never scold us for asking. So, we come and ask. We recognize the frailties and weaknesses of the teacher, and pray that You would be our teacher. We recognize our need to be taught, and we ask that You will open our eyes that we might behold wonderful things out of Thy Word.

Now, Father, we come to You, we give ourselves to You and give this time to You. Amen.

Well, it was a humiliating experience. You've had one or two of those, I'm sure, maybe even this week. His name is Joseph, and he had planned for nearly a year for this event. This was a big deal to him. He had this vintage sports car. He had rebuilt the engine, he had reconstructed the suspension system, and he tuned the engine a couple thousand times. You know how that works. He was getting ready for what he construed to be, the event of his lifetime—the antique car race classic.

The prize was \$10,000, but the money was not the issue. He had been living for this for years. He wanted to make his mark in this car, which was an extension of his life. He had taken this sleek, slick, speedy rebuilt Chrysler, and done everything he could to make it perfect. He wanted to be able to run this race, and have everyone look at him and say, "Wow! What a man. What a car."

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Even as they lined up at the starting gate, he was overwhelmed with confidence. None of the opposition's cars looked as good as his, and none of them measured up as far as he was concerned. And certainly, none of them had the power that his vintage 300 had. Four hundred horses were under the hood...somewhere. None or the other cars had engine or the lines his car had, he thought. And certainly as the gun sounded, he knew he was in business. He slipped it into gear, and began what was going to be his "ride for the roses."

Immediately, he took the lead. The back wheels spun and off he went. He was so far in front that he looked into his specially constructed rearview mirror and could barely see the next car back, a black vintage Cadillac that belonged to his neighbor down the road, Jed Simpson. So, smugly, he gunned his crafty Chrysler just a little bit more, to see if he could put enough distance between his crown jewel and his best competitor, so that he couldn't even see them anymore. That was his mistake.

As he was looking in the rearview mirror to be sure that he had outdistanced the competition, he misjudged the edge of the road ever so slightly. It only took a minute. Joe and his jewel went careening down a grassy slope, finding their waterloo to be a huge oak tree about 500 yards downhill from where the other cars could still be heard zooming by. The front end of the car was a mess. Joe was trapped behind the wheel with what appeared to be a broken leg—you know they didn't have airbags then. And he could do nothing but pray and wait, but prayer was totally foreign to him, so he decided to wait.

He called out for help, but of course, nobody heard him. "What happened?" he said. "Where did I go wrong?" His visions of winning now turned to something a little bit more practical—how to get out of the car and how to get what was left of the car back up that grassy hill and back home to its garage where both of them were going to need a little rehabilitation. There seemed to be no good answer.

Surely, he thought, if I don't appear at the finish line, they'll miss me. Or will they? No one had seen him go out of control. He felt so lonely; he felt so abandoned. Hours went by. It seemed like days. The pain he felt in his leg was nothing compared to the pain he felt in his ego, because he had emailed all his friends and said, "I'm going to win!" Now he would have to admit that both he and

his Chrysler were not invincible.

It was nearly sunset when the Barnett family came walking by. They were one of the families from the low-income housing project down the road; families that really wouldn't have even been there if Joe and his friends had won their battle at city hall. But they lost, and these poor, but hard-working neighbors seemed to hold no grudges. Seeing what had happened, they rushed to his side, helped him out of the car. Bill Barnett was about to lift him up on his shoulders and carry him up the hill to safety when Joe protested. He said, "I can't leave my Chrysler. I have to get my car home."

It was a sight to behold. The Barnetts went and got their vintage pickup truck—it really wasn't vintage; it was just old. And they tied a chain to the front of Connie Chrysler, and they towed both it and its reluctant loser up the hill toward Joe's house. Here was an old beat-up truck with no paint that barely ran, pulling Joe's jewel up the hill to safety.

As fate would have it, just as they got to the top of the hill, the victors and their families were coming back from the celebration just in time to see Joseph and his beat-up baby, back on the highway. Not only did he not win the race, he was humiliated in the process. And had it not been for this unlikely savior of a neighbor, he might have stayed at the bottom of that hill forever.

"I guess it was just grace that we came by," Bill Barnett mused as he unchained the once graceful Chrysler, while his two oldest sons carried Joe into the house. "Just grace." Joe opened his billfold and was about to peel off three \$20 bills, an amount of money that would have meant a lot to the Barnetts at any time, but especially at the end of the month before payday at the railway depot. "Oh, no way," said Bill Barnett when he saw the money. "Didn't I tell you it was grace? And you can't pay for grace. It is undeserved. It's free." With that, he and his boys climbed in their noisy, battered truck and drove back down the hill.

You can't pay for what? What did they mean—grace? What is that grace stuff, he muttered to himself. Well, the next day he was recuperating at St. Jude's hospital from his knee surgery, and he noticed a small Gideon Bible on the table. Grace. I think I heard that term as a kid in Sunday school. He looked in the back of the Bible and found a list of words, something called a concordance—he didn't know what kind of dance it was—but he figured he ought

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to look at it. And he kept looking and there it was—grace. Of course, that sent him searching for Ephesians 2:8-9. That took a couple of hours, but he finally found this Ephesians thing, and he began to read. I think you know what he read.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8,9)

Not of yourselves, lest any man should boast. Something happened to Joe when he read that. His whole life had been a life of boasting. “I’ll get that job at the computer company,” he boasted. “I’m the best engineer in town.” Sure enough, he did. “I’ll get that house cheap; they’re desperate.” And sure enough, they were, and he did. All of his life, he had called the shots, predicted victory, and won. Now, like Babe Ruth, he pointed to the fence in left field and struck out. Grace? Undeserved? What did that mean?

It was the next afternoon when he found out. Of all people, the Barnetts came to the hospital with a bunch of flowers they had pulled out of their neatly groomed yard. They crowded around the bed to wish Joe well, and Joe just blurted out, “What is this grace thing you told me about yesterday?” They were all but expecting the question, and they were ready with the answer. About fifteen minutes later, Joseph McDaniel, already in the hospital for a broken knee, went into God’s delivery room and came out a new child in Christ. For the first time he understood sin; he heard about a Savior, and he accepted God’s amazing grace.

It was a most unlikely place and a most unlikely group of people. But, later, as he gave his testimony to the little church up the road, this is what he said. “I’m so glad I didn’t win that race. It wasn’t until I became a loser that I understood grace. My Chrysler and I might have won the race and lost everything. But by losing, I had to be lifted up and carried by someone else, someone who had no reason to help me. I had only done harm to him, but they understood grace. So, they gave me what I didn’t deserve, love, so I would come to understand what I didn’t have, Jesus.”

He closed with this. He had to lose in order to win. He had to go downhill and let someone carry him up to understand grace. I guess there ought to be a better way. But at least for Joe, the road down led up. Joe was beginning to understand grace. The question I ask you is, do you? Do you really understand what the grace of God is? Take a minute and think about it.

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In a sense, grace is one of life's great mysteries. It is something you need more than you will ever need anything else. You have to have it or you'll die, and yet you don't deserve it and never will. It's free, but it cost somebody something. If you've never experienced it, you probably don't even know you don't have it.

Once you receive it, you need more, but you'll only get it as long as you realize it's a gift. If you try to pay for it, you can't have it; if you try to work to pay it back, you lose the joy of giving it.

It is one of the supreme expressions of the nature of God, but only He determines when and if and to whom He gives it. And when He does, it is usually to those you and I wouldn't choose. He seems to give it away more freely when we're in trouble or in need or desperate. It's elusive, but it is the fuel that makes the Christian life run, the Christian grow, and the Christian message real.

It is indeed, amazing grace. There have been more songs written about it than all of God's other attributes combined. It is mentioned in virtually every sermon you hear, and referred to in almost every Christian book in some way or another. It is the key to our salvation. Without it we are lost and bound for an eternity in hell apart from God. Yet once we experience that grace and are born again into the family of God, we become vessels hooked up to an unceasing flow of it. And the more of it we allow to flow through us, the more filled with joy we become, the more filled with peace we are, and the more we are able to be changed into the image of Christ.

It produces spiritual fruit, we know that, but to whatever degree we revel in the fruit, we steal the rewards and lose the grace. Most Christians understand saving grace, but beyond that, it seems a mystery to many of us. So, for the next few lessons, we are going to ask God to reveal the mystery. It requires something supernatural for it to happen. We are asking:

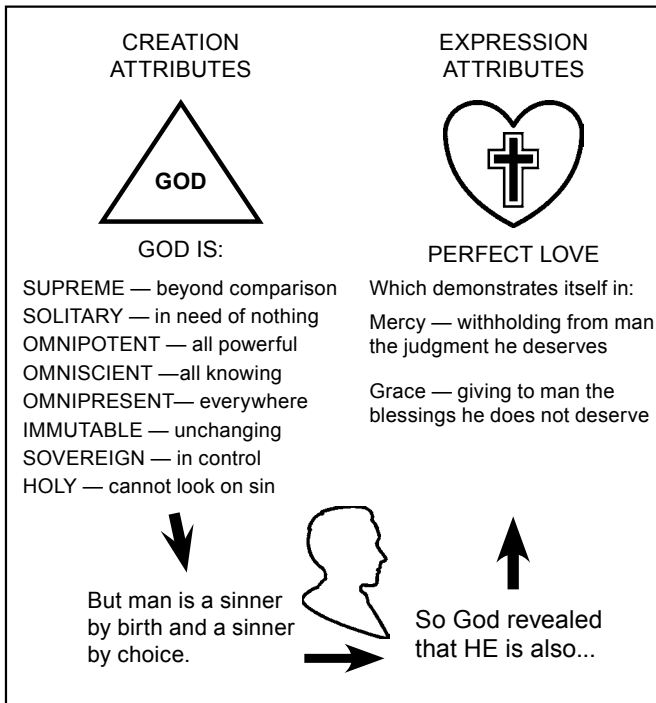
- 1- That He will teach us through His Word what the grace of God is all about.
- 2- That He will lead us by His Spirit into a life more grace controlled.

We are going to approach it, by asking you to bear with us for just a few moments, as we deal with some rather doctrinal issues. We're going to ask you to look at the attributes of God, from a slightly different perspective. We are going to group them a little

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differently. We are first going to look at the attributes that make God who He is and separate Him from us. Then we are going to expose a need we have, and look for the “expression” attributes of God, those characteristics of His nature that allow Him to reveal Himself to us the way we are. If we ever get that, I think we begin the process of walking through the tunnel to the light at the end, that says, “grace.”

Now let me ask you a question as we begin this portion. How much time do you spend each day simply meditating on the nature of God? First of all, I’ll tell you that it’s not enough. Secondly, I’ll tell you, if you are not doing it at all you are missing the supreme blessing of the Christian life.



If you are prone to demand things of God that you think He owes you, or you’re prone to whine at God for things He hasn’t done for you, or has allowed to happen to you, it might be good for you to spend a year or two or three on each of these attributes. The more time you spend beholding who God is, the more perfectly you understand grace. So, this morning, we’re going to go through

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some of those attributes again. And I am going to ask you as we do, to stop and simply thank God for who He is.

1- He is supreme. Do you know what that means? It means He is incomparable. It means He is beyond comprehension. You cannot compare God with anything you know about and draw a conclusion. He made it all. It all came from His mind, His heart, and His hands. You cannot take the most loving person you know of and say that God is so much more loving than that. You can't do that. You can't look at the reflection and define the reality by the reflection and multiply it times infinity. You can see a little bit of who God is by looking at His creation. The Scripture says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork."¹ But this world has been so corrupted by sin that even our ability to see God through the universe has been dampened by iniquity. But you can understand it through His Word. Jesus said:

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. (John 5:39)

God cannot be measured by human measuring sticks. He is supreme. He is incomparable. Do not fashion any of your concepts of God by enlarging your concepts of man. He is incomparable.

2- He is solitary. Not only is He incomparable, He is in need of nothing to sustain Himself or to satisfy His needs. He doesn't need you. He doesn't need me. He doesn't need the angels. He doesn't need the earth. He doesn't need the universe. He does not even need our worship, though it is like sweet incense to His nostrils, the Scripture says. But, were it to be removed, His nature would not be changed one iota. He does not need our gifts. Whatever we give Him, He gave to us in the first place. He wants our gifts because of what giving does for us, not what it does for Him. He is without need of anything; therefore, all of His decisions can be made based on what is best for His creation, not on meeting His own needs. He has none.

3- He is omnipotent. That simply means there is nothing He cannot do. He can make the sun stand still. He can make clouds disappear. He can make a river part. He can bring water out of a rock. He can carve out the waters of the earth with His hands, and the Scripture says, He needs only to speak and the earth will crumble. Therefore, whatever need we have is no problem for God. If He does not meet your need with the show of power you are praying for, it is not because it is too difficult, but because it is not
1 Psalm 19:1

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best for us. There is nothing He cannot do.

Now I wonder when was the last time you stopped, bowed your head and just thanked God that you have a God who is completely and perfectly omnipotent. Because we get our problems so blown out of proportion, and look at life when things don't happen that we think should happen, that maybe God would like to do something about it, but can't. Oh, we won't say that, but it's the way we pray and the way we think.

Let's bow for just a moment, quietly in our hearts, and thank Him for who He is.

Dear God,

Though art omnipotent! The heavens declare it. Your Word declares it. There is nothing You cannot do. You can speak and one day this world will be set aflame in a fire and a new heaven and a new earth will descend from heaven.

The problems we are facing today, Father, and the struggles and the pain and the fears are not too great for You. The issue is Your will, never Your power.

May we surrender afresh to that will, this morning, and worship You, that You are the God who can.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

4- He is omniscient. There is nothing He does not know. He knows the past as though it were the present; He knows the future as though it has already happened. He knows everything you do, but more than that, beloved, He knows everything you think, everything you have ever thought, everything you ever will think. He knows what goes on in the secret places of the mind, and that's how he measures our spirituality. It is not by what we do.

For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord
looketh on the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7b)

He has a stethoscope. He looks on the heart.

5- He is omnipresent. There is no place He cannot be, and no place He isn't. He is everywhere all the time, and there is never a time when you call on Him that He is not there. That means two things. There is no use trying to run from Him or hide from Him the way Adam did, because the truth of the matter is, "Whither can I go from His presence?" And the answer is nowhere.

Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from

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Thy presence?

If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there.

If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

Even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.

If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee.

(Psalm 139:7-12)

Conversely, it means there is never a time you'll need Him that He's not right there. And this week you may have felt, for some reason, that when you cried out to God, He wasn't near. Beloved, He was near. Maybe your feelings did not recognize it. But He was near. Let's stop and thank Him.

Heavenly Father,

We thank You that You are omnipresent. That there will never be a time when we can get as much as a millimeter away from You. And there will never be a time when You will stray that millimeter away from us. Always, You're there; always waiting to meet our needs. We worship You. We thank You for who You are. Amen.

6- He is immutable. He is the only thing that will not and cannot ever change. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.² We can adjust our methods to a changing world, beloved, but never change the message, because He is the message, and He can never change.

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

(Isaiah 40:8)

7- He is sovereign. He is not only omnipotent and omniscient, He is sovereign. Not only can He do anything He chooses, He does whatever He chooses. No one, not even, and especially Satan, can stop Him. He will choose what is best for you; He will choose what is best for me, and once He has chosen, He will do it.

There are many other aspects of His nature: His perfect goodness, His perfect righteousness, His perfect truth. But there is one more attribute that creates a problem for us, and that's where

² Hebrews 13:8

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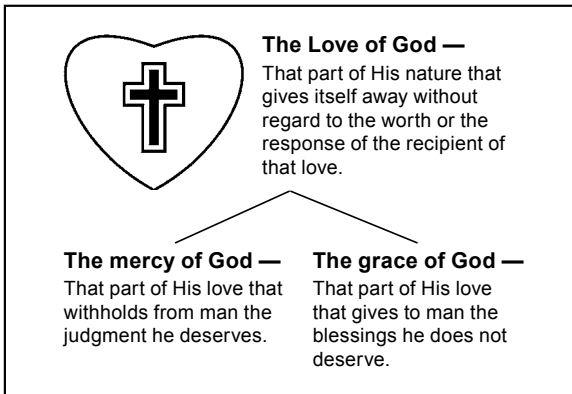
grace comes in.

8- He is perfect holiness. That means He cannot look upon sin, participate in sin, tempt man to sin, or derive pleasure from sin. Sin is the antithesis of God. It defies His supremacy. It denies His omnipotence, scorns His omniscience, and elevates the creature to the role of the Creator. God hates sin. When He is confronted with sin, He has two choices, and this is where we get into today's lesson.

1- He can judge the sin and destroy the sinner.

2- He can exercise another attribute of His nature called love. Love, remember, by definition, is the active expression of God's nature that gives itself away without regard to the worth or response of the one being loved.

I want to explain that you can take the love of God and divide it into two parts. There is the mercy of God; that part of His love that withholds from us the judgment we deserve, and forgive sin. And there's the grace of God; that part of His love that gives to man the blessings he does not deserve—the negative and the positive.



When was the last time you just worshipped God for the matchless love He has for you? Because of love he has come up with a way to deal with the sin, and restore His relationship with the sinner. Calvary was the expression of His love. He gave Himself to those who didn't deserve it, couldn't earn it, and He said,

Greater love hath no man than this: that he would lay down his life for his friends, (John 15:13)

But God commendeth His love toward us in that while we

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were yet sinners [stinkers—loose translation] He died for us.

(Romans 5:8)

It was an act of supreme mercy, because He created a way for our sins to be forgiven, and it was an act of perfect grace, for not only did He create the perfect vehicle, He enabled us to choose to be saved and exercise that choice. That's grace. It would not be of works, lest any man should boast. His mercy made a way to remove the offense; His grace gave us the ability to choose the way. And it was all undeserved.

There are a lot of ways to define grace, and I'm sure many of you have your own pet definitions—God riches at Christ's expense—and so forth. But I want to give you a definition to chew on for the next few lessons, and we will go through Scripture and try to validate that definition in two ways.

Grace is God doing supernaturally what we cannot do naturally, knowing we do not deserve it, cannot repay it, and may not appreciate it.

There are four characteristics of the grace of God I would like you to learn. This is a little factual, but I hope you will listen and put these in order. F-U-S-E, if you will.

1- Grace is free. It is a gift. You cannot earn a gift or it's no longer a gift. You cannot pay for it; it's been paid for. Any attempt to repay someone who has given you a gift is an insult. And to whatever degree you attempt to earn grace, to that degree you break the heart of God.

2- Grace is undeserved. Not only is it free, it cannot be effective unless you realize that it is totally, completely, without exception, undeserved. The big problem most of us have is, we don't get more grace than we deserve. We don't deserve any. What Satan tries to do is incorporate a mixture of grace and works into our lives so that we will believe, "It's true. It really is of grace. God, I just really don't deserve as much as You have given me." That's not true. You don't deserve anything He has given you! That's grace. And that is key. That's why grace and humility are so closely linked in Scripture.

3- Grace is sovereign. God gives it to whom He chooses, when He chooses, as He chooses and if He chooses. It is seldom given the way you and I would do it, if we were God. Therefore, you can never presume upon it, never demand it, and never program it.

4- Grace is eternal. Everything God gives is eternal because

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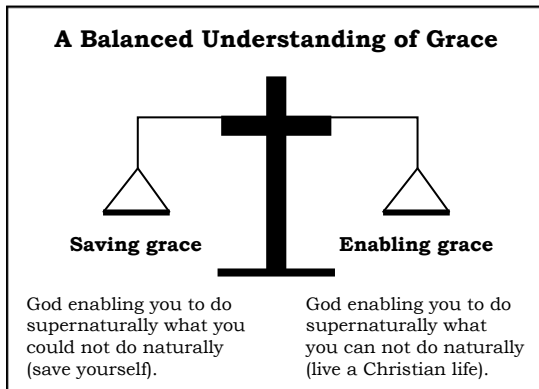
God is eternal by nature. What that means is that grace will be in the spiritual realm, for only that which is spiritual is eternal. More about that later.

If you want to remember those four qualities, think about grace as the fuse that links His love to man. Once that fuse is inserted at conversion, several things can blow the fuse and stop the flow of grace, but as long as the fuse is intact, the grace flows.

Free **U**ndeserved **S**overeign **E**ternal

We're going to be looking at this incredible thing we call, saving grace. That's what we sing about, isn't it? Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. And we are going to look at God's provision to give us the faith to believe, and having believed, to receive the free gift of salvation. It is free, undeserved, sovereign and eternal. But saving grace is only the beginning, and this is where so much, we as Christians miss; that is, the second aspect of grace that most seem to either overlook or misunderstand. It's called enabling grace, if you can give it a title. The definitions are the same, with one minor exception. Let's define them both. Saving grace is God, doing supernaturally what we cannot do naturally (save us from our sins), knowing we do not deserve it, cannot repay it, and may not appreciate it. Enabling grace is God doing supernaturally what we cannot do naturally (live the Christian life), knowing that we do not deserve it, cannot repay it, and may not appreciate it.

We will find some big differences in how we appropriate the two. But a balanced understanding of the two is tremendously important if we are going to live a victorious Christian life and the grace of God is going to flow through us and enable us to live in victory.



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Saving grace has been often described as:

God's **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist's **E**xpense.

Enabling grace might be defined as:

God's **R**edemption **A**ctive in the **C**hristian **E**xperience

It is God enabling you, minute by minute, to supernaturally do what you cannot do on your own. And you cannot do anything on your own in the spirit realm. It is totally undeserved. It is completely free. It is absolutely sovereign. It is always eternal.

You say, "Well, explain it to me." Okay. It takes grace for you to exhibit agape love. You can't do it apart from God. Agape love allows you to love the unlovable. You can't do it. Agape love allows you to love your enemies and pray for those that spitefully use you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely.³ You can't do it. Agape love allows you to love your mate as Christ loved the church. You can't do that naturally. You can artificially manufacture some of the outward attributes, but they will be phony. The only way you can love someone who is not loveable, is for God to give you the grace to do so. He enables you supernaturally.

We're going to find in a future lesson that you have to ask for that grace. You come to something called the throne of grace, and you seek mercy and grace to help in time of need.⁴ That is not saving grace. That was written to believers. Saving grace isn't grace to help in time of need. This is enabling grace. This is God empowering you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.⁵ When you ask, God will not only give you the ability to love, He will even impart the desire to. It's grace.

However, there is a catch. You have to ask humbly. Though you are told to ask for it, it is still free and undeserved. One reason you are told to ask is to remind you that you do not, in and of yourself, deserve it, you can never earn it, and you can never pay God back for it. Therein lies the terrible tragedy of the mixture of grace and works that's entered into the religious establishments that have kept the name of Christianity through the years. So, the minute you presume upon grace or assume you deserve it, or exalt your position in the eyes of God because of who you are or what you've

3 Luke 6:28; Matthew 5:11

4 Hebrews 4:16

5 Philippians 2:13

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done, or you think God is obligated to do it, you will not receive it. God doesn't want your help; He doesn't need your works, your worth or your worry. He only wants you to humble yourself the way you did when you were saved.

As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him. (Colossians 2:6)

How did you receive Him? You realized you were a sinner who could not save yourself. There was nothing you could do naturally to be saved. God had to do it; you couldn't. You had to ask. You became nothing; He became everything. You acknowledged you were lost. He found you. You cried out. He saved you. It was,

Not by works of righteousness that we have done but according to His mercy He saved us... (Titus 3:5)

You became the servant. He became the Master.

That's how you receive Christ Jesus, and only when you keep that mindset can the enabling grace of God continue to flow through your life. You cannot have agape love unless the grace of God enables you. You cannot have a pure heart unless God's grace enables you. The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.⁶ God said so. Yours is, mine is. And left to our own devices, we will still be drawn to that which is impure. As believers, we have the Holy Spirit and the Word, but we still sin. What is the key? Grace. Only God can enable us to withstand temptation, choose obedience, and live in victory.

Only grace can allow us to endure suffering and glorify God. He wants us to understand that,

tribulation worketh patience (Romans 5:3b)

Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. (James 1:3,4)

Paul didn't like that idea. He said, "God if you get rid of this problem I have, I'll have the strength to serve You better." God said, "No, you don't understand. My grace is sufficient for you."⁷ This was not saving grace; this was enabling grace—the grace that enabled Paul to grow by appropriating God's power to suffer and rejoice at the same time.

The key to it all, beloved, be it saving or enabling grace—for

6 Jeremiah 17:9

7 II Corinthians 12:9

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it's all one package—is for us to come to realize how undeserving we are. Until we grasp that, we will not communicate grace to the measure available to us. God gives grace. It is free. But He gives it to the humble, those who know they are nothing, can do nothing and can become nothing apart from...grace. That's why He said, "He resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble"⁸. We need to spend some time understanding what grace is and how to appropriate it. I think it could change the rest of our lives and I think it could change the rest in our lives. So, I'm going to ask you again, this week, to ask yourself for some one-line definitions from your own heart. "What is grace?" I'll give you just a few to get started:

What is grace? Grace is all that God is, providing all that God does, for someone who has no right to it at all.

What is grace? It is total pardon to a convicted criminal because the father of the one he killed dropped the charges.

What is grace? It is a beautiful flower blooming in the midst of the desert just because God decided to water it.

What is grace? It is a thief on a cross on his way to paradise seconds before he should have died.

What is grace? It is eleven losers entrusted with eternity.

What is grace? It is green leaves on a once dead tree.

What is grace? It is a prodigal welcomed home with no basis for his welcome but that he came home.

What is grace? It is letting Lazarus die so he could come back to life; it is letting Jesus die so we could come back to life.

What is grace? It is God saving the likes of you and me.

And, beloved, to whatever degree in your experience, you have come to feel that you deserved to be saved to any measure, you have broken the heart of God. You have trampled underfoot the grace of God. If it ceases to be 1,000 percent undeserved, it ceases to be grace.

Oh, the pride Satan infects into our bloodstream; the spiritual pride that has eaten into the fiber of our lives and our churches. We advertise our goodness. We advertise our programs. We advertise our giving, and we close the valve on the grace of God and make it a joke.

8 1 Peter 5:5b

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What do we have that God did not give us? And if He gave it to us, what right do we have to boast about it? Here is the second set of memory verses for this week, if you can handle two.

But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth. (II Corinthians 10:17,18)

We are embarking on a journey that I pray will take us closer to the heart of God. But, if we're going to take that journey, we need to be willing to walk down a path that leads to total surrender and complete dependence. The grace of God is the heart of God transplanted into your spirit, allowing Him to literally become Jesus Christ in your body, speaking, responding, giving, loving, serving, even as He did 2,000 years ago in the body the Father gave Him. These are eternal things. I would remind you it was not necessarily a beautiful body that He gave Jesus. He had no beauty that men should desire Him.⁹ It was not a self-image success story. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.¹⁰ He was the King, and He thought it not robbery to be equal with God, because He was God.¹¹

But He made Himself nothing. He lived a life of perfect grace. Never did He try to do in His own energy naturally, what only God could do supernaturally. He accepted who He was. He accepted His body, His rejection, and His lack of physical benefits. He had no place to lay His head. And He appropriated a kind of power that made even being nailed to a Roman cross, a joy.

...who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2b)

Then He turned to us and said,

I am the vine; ye are the branches. He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing. (John 15:5)

And then He added,

My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. (II Corinthians 12:9)

And, beloved, it is, but only when we let it. Only when we look in the mirror and stop admiring what we see, can we access the

⁹ Isaiah 53:2

¹⁰ Isaiah 53:3

¹¹ Philippians 2:6

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grace as it was meant to be. Only when we look in the mirror of the Word and see our sins the way God sees them, will that grace be able to flow, and only then will this church and every church in this country be able to experience real revival, real renewal, and real transformation. Only when that happens, will a lost and dying world wake up and realize Jesus is the Son of God.

We can't do it by playing church. We can't do it by pretending to be holy when our hearts are hotbeds of impurity. We can't do it as long as we allow a bitter spirit to fester in our souls, buried beneath a self-righteous facade. We can't do it as long as we are clinging to legalistic limitations that bind God to our way of doing things. In fact, we can't do it...period. But God can, and God will, if we'll get out of the way and let Him. You may have to lose one of life's races the way Joseph McDaniel did in the opening illustration, to really understand grace. If so, it may be the greatest moment of your life, but the hardest.

My challenge to you and to myself, is for us to ask God one on one, to begin the process of revealing the debris of self we are still carrying around in our spiritual knapsacks. It will mean taking on the mind of Christ, and that means humbling ourselves until we become nothing, so He can become everything. It means asking God to do whatever it takes to give us an understanding of grace. For Jesus, it meant a cross. According to Luke 9:23, it will mean a cross for us, too. A special cross.

I read a story this week and some of you may have read it as well. It was about a woman who was tired of bearing a cross she thought God had given her to bear in life. And she decided to exchange her cross for a prettier one. She went to where all the crosses were and found one that was heavy gold. It was ornate and it had jewels and she thought, this I can handle.

So, she laid her cross down and began to carry this one. And suddenly she realized all the weight of all the gold and the jewels was weighing her down. So, she went back and decided to exchange it again. She found a beautiful cross that was ornate and was covered with this beautiful vine and she picked it up and began to carry it. She said, "Oh, this is lighter." But it scratched her and tore her skin and so she said, "I can't carry this cross either."

And she went back and looked again and looked again and looked again. Finally, she found the perfect cross. It was the one she had laid down in the first place.

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You see God has a cross designed exactly for you.

And He said to them all, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”
(Luke 9:23)

The grace to do that is all free. But, beloved, ask God this week for your cross. I know that’s not an easy prayer to pray. Many of us won’t want to pray it at all. It wasn’t answered easily for Jesus. But because He said, “Thy will be done,” and took that cross, you and I are in the family of God, redeemed, transformed, and guaranteed eternity in glory. And when we begin to make up our minds that we want that kind of grace to flow through our lives whatever it costs—free, undeserved, sovereign, and eternal—we will see the world around us changed by the incredible grace of God. But I remind you in closing, only if you remember,

It is not of works, lest any man should boast.

(Ephesians 2:9)

Our Father and our God,

What a difficult subject, but what an awesome thought. That we can become so infused and empowered and enabled by Your grace; that the living Jesus Christ, living in our bodies, and living through us, can literally transform the world. And we can continually be reminded it is free. It is undeserved. It is sovereign. It is eternal. It is wonderful.

To that end may the weeks to come unfold for us the magnificence of Your grace, all to Your glory, not of works lest any man should boast.

In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

For Focus and Application

1- Why was it important to God for Joseph McDaniel to lose that race? What had that car and that race become to him? Why did he have to fail before he could understand grace? What do you think is the greatest enemy grace has?

2- Find the six most important words in Ephesians 2:8,9. Define them. See if you can see the relationship or the progression in that verse that reveals the heart of God.

3- Why could it “not be of works?” What would happen? Why is

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that such an affront to God?

4- Study this week at least three of the attributes of God by searching the Scriptures for descriptions of those attributes. What would be different if any of those qualities did not exist in God?

5- God's holiness is the attribute that creates a problem for man. Why is that? What quality of his nature does God exhibit in order to deal with man's sin? Explain the two-fold expression of that quality.

6- Do you think we make it clear to those we seek to win to Christ how undeserving they are of salvation? Why not? What aspect of man's nature does this offend? Man is willing to take something free, but he wants to feel he's getting it because he deserves it, at least in part. Why can't God allow that?

7- How would you explain the difference between "saving grace" and "enabling grace?" Do you ever pray and ask God to "give you the grace" to do something or to bear up under something? Do you pray for others that God would give them the grace to repent or to bear the loss of a loved one or to endure persecution? Do you understand what you are praying for? For God to give them or us that grace, what must our mindset be?

8- Memorize Colossians 2:6. Write down how you viewed God when you received Christ. How did you view yourself? How should that affect our search for enabling grace?

9- Write out your own "one-liner" descriptions of grace this week and ask God to give you fresh insights on His precious gift to us.

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