

Russell Kelfer

Possessing the Promises

(Part 1)

510-B

Series: Promises and God's Word



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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

Possessing the Promises

(Part 1)

We began the last lesson with two basic principles. The first principle is found in Joshua 1:1-2. This is the creativity of crisis. We looked at how God wants to take the crises of our lives and use them to spur us upward to spiritual growth. We looked at why God allows crises and deep traumas to come into our lives and how they are the springboards to spiritual growth.

The second principle that we dealt with was the awesomeness of God's authority. We looked at how God spoke to Joshua. Joshua stood up, paid attention and said, "Yes, Sir." We looked at how you and I feel about the Word of God, and we discussed how we look at the Bible, how we should take it seriously and how we should respond when God speaks. The outline looks like this:

I- The Creativity of Crisis

II- The Awesomeness of His Authority

III- Living the Life

A- The glory of God's grace

B- The source of our strength

C- The prerequisite for prosperity

D- The power of His presence

In this lesson we will begin our third section called "Living the Life". It is entitled, "Possessing the Promises". Our text will be Joshua 1:2-9. We will look at four segments in this section.

The first part of our outline is the glory of God's grace. It is a study of the balance between grace and faith. Grace and faith are not the same. You can't have one effectively without the other, but they are not the same. This is found in verses 2-5.

The second portion is found in verses 6-7a. This portion is called the source of our strength. We will find that God commanded the children of Israel to be strong and very courageous. He said, "I want you to have strength, and I want you to have courage." He gives the reasons they need to have strength and courage and

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tells them what their roles and responsibilities are. Strength and courage are different. Strength is an inner quality that God builds into a person's life that allows him to handle the pressures of life. Courage is the outpouring of that strength in the response to those situations. Strength and courage are not the same, but strength is required to exercise courage.

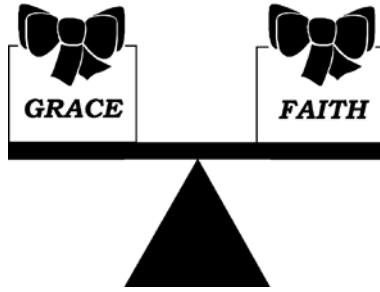
We will also look at verse 8 which will show us how we get that strength. The Scripture gives us a process that I will call saturation with the Word of God. It also involves meditation. The Word is supposed to be in your mouth. It is supposed to be like chewing gum. It is always there, and you are always exercising it.

We will find the next section through verse 9a. This is the prerequisite for prosperity. It is true that we are to be strong and very courageous. The way to get that courage is to meditate on the Word; but if we want to be prosperous and have good success, we must adhere to what God told Joshua. God told Joshua that he had to do one thing. He had to do as he was told. He had to have total, implicit obedience. God said, "I don't want you to turn your head to the left. I don't want you to turn your head to the right. I want you to be like a horse with blinders. You look straight ahead, and you do exactly what the Word of God says, and you will eliminate a large portion of your problems."

The last point is the power of His presence. He said, "Now with all of these things in mind, I want you to relax. The Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. I want you to understand what it means to have the presence of God in your life." These are the four points we will be dealing with in our lesson.

I want to begin now with the glory of God's grace. In other words, is it the source of our possessions? How do we claim the promises? Draw a triangle. Draw a straight line at the top so that it is balanced like a seesaw. Put a "G" on the left and an "F" on the right. The "G" stands for grace. The "F" stands for faith. The idea is that grace and faith have to be balanced in the Christian life. Grace is given by God and is exercised by God. It is a gift. Not only is it a gift from God, it can only be exercised by God. You cannot have grace apart from Him. He doesn't need you to exercise it. In fact, the more you stay out of the way, the better off it is.

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Faith, on the other hand, is given by God. It is a gift, too. But, it has to be exercised by your will. So both grace and faith are given by God. One is exercised by Him, and one is exercised by us. One is the gift itself, and the other is the ability to receive, enjoy and participate in the gift. Ephesians 2:8-9 says,

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.

(NKJV)

The grace we are saved by is the source. By faith it is exercised. They are both gifts. Faith is a gift from God. So both grace and faith are gifts from God. One is totally without need of our response, but the other requires a response on our part.

Hebrews 4:1-3 talks about the truth being received by the believer, but it also says that grace does not profit a person if it is not mixed with faith. I want to give you an example. Let's assume that someone invited all of us for lunch today. We all accepted. We all headed for his house after church. Let's assume that someone doesn't know how to get to the host's house. He stops and uses the phone to ask directions. The host gives the lost guest directions, but the guest decides to sit in his car and wait. Another guest sees him along the way. He stops and asks if there is anything wrong with his car. He replies, "The Scripture says that if I have the faith of a mustard seed, I can say to that mountain, 'Move' and it will go into the sea. I believe that either God is going to move my car to take me to the right house or bring that house to me."

I replied, "I don't think that is fair to our host. Imagine if they are waiting for everyone to get to their houses, sitting at their tables when all of a sudden their houses begin to move, and they see the trees passing by. They realize that a guest had the faith to bring their house to him, but that might not be the will of God."

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The guest replied, “I called the host, and he told me how to get to his house and faith comes by hearing.”

I replied, “You have forgotten one thing. This lunch is a gift from our host. It is grace. You don’t deserve it. You didn’t earn it. It is his food and his house. He has given you instructions, and all he wants you to do is to exercise enough faith to follow the instructions. Turn on your car and put it in gear. Follow his instructions by faith, and you will get to the right house.”

This is a comparison that you and I need to make in our day-to-day relationship with Jesus Christ. Faith apart from grace is presumption. Grace apart from faith is stagnant. It produces nothing. It is like having a big storage tank with no pipe connected to draw anything out.

We are going to ask ourselves two basic questions during the course of this study. The first one is, what is grace? In other words, “*Why did God give the Israelites the land?*” You could put many inflections on that question, and it would still be the same question, *why* did God give them the land? They certainly hadn’t done anything to deserve it. Or you could say, why *did* God give them the land, look at their rebellion? Or you could say, why did *God* give them the land? He knew many people who deserved so much more. Or you could say, why did God give *them* the land? Or you could say, why did God give them *the land*? It was the most priceless possession, the total promise.

The second question we will ask a little later is “*How do we possess the promises?*” Since God gave them the land, what did they have to do to occupy it? We learn in verse 3 that every place that the sole of their feet tread upon had been given to them. I think there is a terrible misunderstanding attached to this verse, if you don’t consider the grace part of faith. I’ve heard people say, “Do you want to make money this week? Believe God. Do you want to get rid of your illness? Believe God.” There is some truth in those statements, but you have to be careful because you are dealing with grace. You don’t deserve to make the money. You don’t deserve to get well. It is all grace, and it is on God’s terms. Faith without grace is presumption. Grace without faith is nothing. We have to find a balance between the two,

Have you ever stopped to realize how often we quote a verse with a promise and tell God, “Here is a promise You made.” Have you ever stopped to realize that the rest of the Bible is attached to

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that verse? The verse, “Every place the sole of their foot touched,” described a situation that everywhere they went there was warfare. They had the Amorites and the Hittites and all of the rest of their enemies all around them. They didn’t just stand up and say, “God, we want this land.” God said, “I’m going to check your faith. Do you want this land? Believe Me and walk forward.” They looked up into the mountains and saw the Amorites coming down with weapons in their hands. The Israelites turned to God and said, “We thought this land was ours.” God said, “Yes, take it. Do you believe Me?” They replied, “We don’t like this warfare. We don’t like all of this blood.” God says, “It is My land. I gave it to you. You take it on My terms. I’m going to develop character in you.” This is what this is all about.

In the two areas we are going to be dealing with in this portion of the study, grace and faith, we will be finding the answers to the following questions:

- 1- Why did God give us the land?
- 2- What do we have to do to possess it and enjoy it?

The children of Israel didn’t deserve what they got. In a passage in Deuteronomy, God spoke to them and said, “I want to remind you that I didn’t give you this land because you were more in number than anybody else. In fact, you are the fewest of all men. I didn’t give you this land because you were faithful.” He then went on to describe them as stiff-necked, stubborn and rebellious. He continued, “I gave you this land because I promised it to you.” This takes the pride out of it, doesn’t it? This is grace.

Just as the children of Israel didn’t deserve the land, we don’t deserve the promises that are given to us in the Bible. They are by grace. They are a gift. Before we can enter in and possess the promises, we have to have a clear understanding of the grace that underlies it. Evangelical Christians, myself included, remind me of a group of people at the reading of a will. They didn’t earn any of the money to be distributed. They don’t really deserve the money. The person who earned it all is now gone. He has by grace given it to somebody else. The grieving family is sitting around thinking, “I hope I get my share. I want the house. I want the jewelry. I want the four Mercedes.” Their attitude is, “Gimme, gimme, gimme.”

The reason we can’t discuss the claiming of the promises until we come face to face with the realization of grace is that, we don’t deserve any of it. We sit around as God reads his eternal will and

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says, “I promise to you this. I promise to you that. I give you this. I give you that.” We have to bow humbly before Him and say, “Oh God, I don’t deserve it. It is only by faith that I exercise and begin to take a step toward the possession of what You have promised, not because I have it coming, but because You are so gracious to me.” Do you see the difference?

A good exercise for us is to take a piece of paper and on one corner write “My Sins.” On the other side put “The Cross.” Draw a line between them and try to justify that cross in the light of your sins. You can’t do it. That is grace.

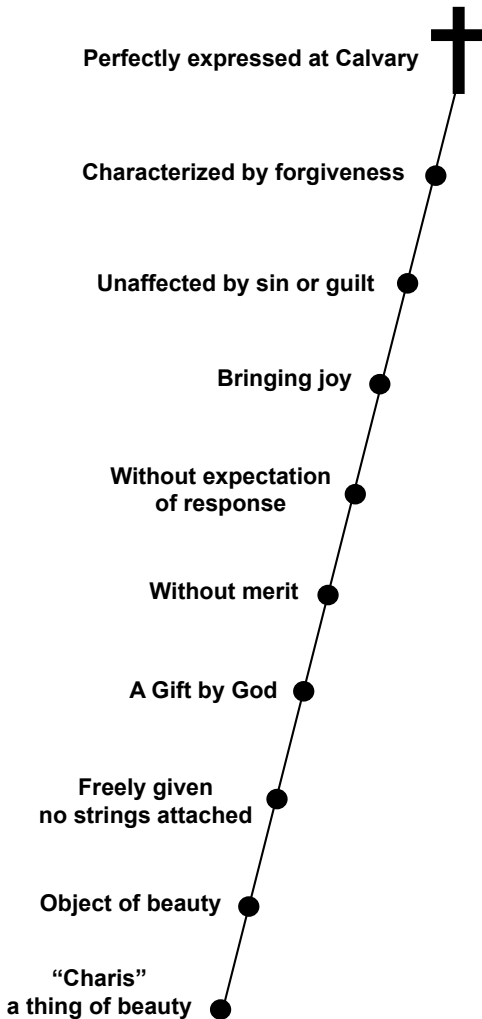
Grace is the least understood, but most used word in evangelical Christianity. I am reminded of an after dinner speaker who stood up and said, “Words cannot express what I have to say to you today.” About that time the master of ceremony then stood up, pushed him back into his seat and said, “In that case, this concludes our speaker’s remarks. The meeting is dismissed.”

There is no way that human language can define all that lies within the context of grace. If I were to ask most of you what grace is, particularly those who have been Christians a long while and those of you who have been to seminary or studied the Word for quite a while, you would come up with the stock answer, “unmerited favor.” I have talked with seminary graduates regarding this question asking them, “What is unmerited?” They give me a definition that is incomplete. I then ask, “What is favor?” It is even harder to define because we don’t use it now like we used to. You can ask for a favor, can’t you?

Trying to define grace is going to be much like trying to capture the glitter of a diamond in order to see all of the facets of its light shining down through it. You have to stand in different places to look at it in different ways. You can never catch it all in one spot.

Trying to define grace is like digging for hidden treasure. You are never going to get it all. You know there is more there than you can possibly get to. You don’t just sit down and give up and say, “I’m not going to work at it.” You start digging, and with every spade of the shovel, it gets a little richer and a little brighter, and you get a little more excited. But, you are never going to uncover it all until you get to heaven and behold the glory of God and understand the grace of God. Until then, we can’t understand it all because “now we see through a glass darkly, but then we will see face to face”. But, we can sure understand more of it than we do.

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In the lower left hand corner of a piece of paper put a dot. As we try to define grace, we will start in the lower left hand corner and draw a line to the upper right hand corner with some "dots" in between. We are going to take the progression of the word "grace" as honestly as we can from the beginning of the use of the word in classical Greek. The Greek word is "charis". Put it in the very bottom left-hand corner. In the classical Greek, this word was used primarily to define things of beauty. Write next to "charis", "a thing of beauty." It was the quality of the beauty of something that

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would set it apart. You would say, “My, what a thing of grace. How graceful it is. What a beautiful portrait of grace.” It was beautiful, such as a flower we consider to be a thing of beauty.

You can draw a line slightly toward the right-hand corner and put another dot. It became possessive of the object of the grace. So write, “object of beauty.” Something was beautiful, and the object of that beauty came to be called graceful or gracious. Some men tell their wives that they are graceful. This pleases them a great deal. You can draw a line between the two because they are really the same thing, a thing of beauty and the object of that grace.

Go up one step further and put another dot and write “freely given.” This means no strings attached. As the word developed, it began to mean a thing of beauty that was given freely. It was given without any strings attached.

So far, grace is a thing of beauty, freely given with no strings attached. Then Jesus came into the world, and the Greeks began to capture the reality of how God intended to use that word. Continue your line and write, “New Testament.” Then put another dot as you go up the page and write, “As a gift by God.” The word took on two new meanings in the New Testament times. It meant that this thing of beauty that was given was a gift. You cannot have something freely given that has strings attached to it. You can have things that are earned, but this was a gift given by God. The word in the New Testament church began to mean something God was bestowing on men. Grace was a thing of beauty, freely given as a gift by God.

Go up one step further. The word began to fully take on another connotation. Write “without merit.” As the writers of the New Testament began to unfold the word, it began to claim that there was no deserving grace. Grace began to mean a thing of beauty, freely given, as a gift by God without merit or without deserving it.

Then Paul came on the scene and the New Testament epistles were written. The word took on a deeper meaning. Draw another dot further up and write “without expectation of response.” It is one thing to give something freely as a gift, but it is another thing to give a gift if the person you give it to doesn’t appreciate what you have just given them. How many of you have those you like to exchange gifts with because they get so excited. But what if they say, “Oh, no thanks.” You are not as motivated to give the next gift. That is not true of God. Grace is totally unaffected by the response

of the recipient.

Go up one step further and write, “bringing joy.” The same root word that is used for grace is used to denote joy. There is a freedom in it. Grace is a thing of beauty, freely given as a gift by God without merit, without expectation of response bringing joy.

Go up one step further and put another dot. Write, “unaffected by guilt or sin.” This is a hard one. Paul had to write to the church in Rome in Romans 6:1 about the fact that they were taking the grace of God foolishly. They were using it wrongly. They had an immature conception of it. They were using it unwisely. They felt that they could sin that much more and get that much more grace. That is not the concept here. But, grace is unaffected by guilt or sin. Guilt is your inability to relate to your sin. In other words, grace doesn’t stop when you are guilty.

The next to the last dot going up the page is characterized by forgiveness. Grace is a thing of beauty, freely given as a gift by God, without merit or expectation, bringing joy and is unaffected by guilt and is characterized by forgiveness. We will deal with this more in the next lesson. If you want to really understand the grace of God, study the forgiveness of God. It is totally without merit, and it is totally without response. God forgives freely. His forgiveness is based upon His character.

At the very top of the page put a cross. Write, “perfectly expressed at Calvary.” Grace is a thing of beauty, freely given as a gift by God, without merit or expectation, bringing joy and is unaffected by guilt and is characterized by forgiveness and perfectly expressed at Calvary. God, who was everything, gave up everything for man who deserved nothing, expecting nothing in return. That is grace.

We make a mockery of the cross if we do not understand grace. The song says, “It was not nails, but His love that held Him there.” I don’t know when the last time was that you simply took time off to behold the cross of Jesus Christ. If you don’t understand grace, you need to study the cross in the light of Phillipians 2, then just bow before Him and worship.

We take the cross so lightly. We wear crosses and put them on the bumpers of our cars. We put them on our books. There is nothing wrong with those things. We will be sitting in church singing, “The cross upon which Jesus died is a shelter in which we can hide and His grace so free...”. We start looking at our watches and picking up our books and purses as we are anxious

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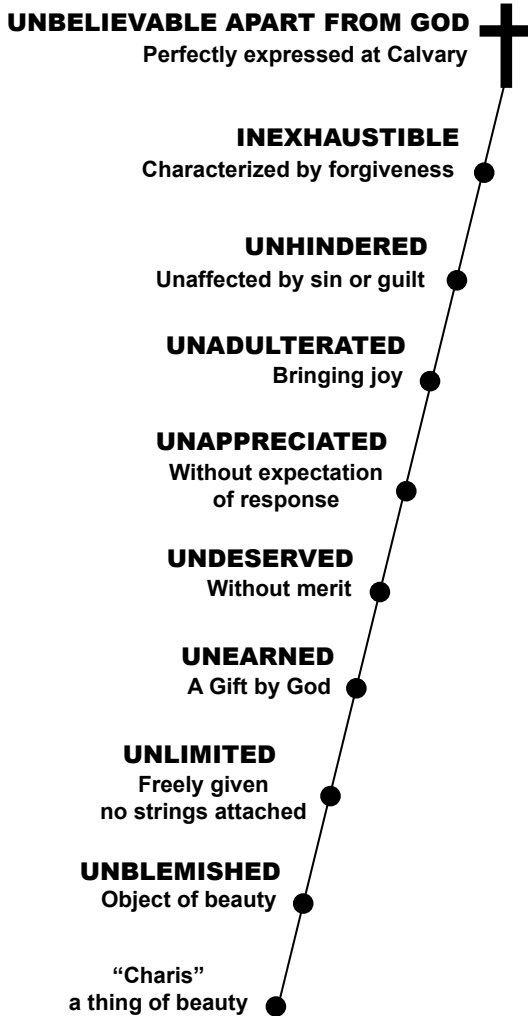
to leave. We think, “The pastor sure talked a long time today. He is getting long-winded.” We begin to squirm as our minds begin to think about where we are going to stop for lunch. We don’t pay any attention to the fact that what we are singing about is the cross that took everything God was and everything God had and allowed it to be slain.

We would think more of the cross if we would consider how we would feel if someone came to us and asked us to take our child, that we loved so much, and allow that child to be slain for someone on skid-row who had tried to kill us. Think about it. What if someone came up to you and asked you to take the child that you love, especially if he is your only child, and asked you to allow that child to be executed in the electric chair for a bum on the street who tried to kill you. That is what the cross was. That is grace. We take it so lightly.

We can’t talk about claiming the promises until we come to a realization that the cross of Jesus Christ and the grace of Jesus Christ means everything. It is all His. We deserve nothing, yet He gives it all. Whatever we get is grace. We need to enter into the receiving of the promises without a presumptuous spirit of, “Gimme, gimme what is mine.”

If you can contemplate the cross of Jesus Christ without tears, you either do not fully understand it or you are not alive. As Jesus looked on the sins of Jerusalem, He wept. You and I ought to look at the cross in the same way and weep over our own sin. We’ve become so hardened and calloused that we take things for granted. We talk and sing of the cross, but the cross becomes just a symbol. We lose its meaning.

On the diagram from above, write over “beauty” the word “unblemished.” Over “freely given” write the word “unlimited.” Over “given by God as a gift”, write the word “unearned.” Over “without merit,” write “undeserved.” Over “without expectation of response”, write “unappreciated.” Over “bringing joy,” write “unadulterated.” Over “unaffected by guilt,” write “unhindered.” Over “characterized by forgiveness,” write “inexhaustible.” Over the cross, write “unbelievable apart from God.”



What is grace? It is unblemished, unlimited, unearned, undeserved, unappreciated, unadulterated, unhindered, inexhaustible and unbelievable apart from God. This is grace. We still haven't even started to define it.

Someone said that grace is the love of God with no spigot to turn it off. Grace is the judge on the gallows satisfying the sentence He had to execute for your crime.

What is grace? Grace is the person of God placed in the life of

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one who has no merit and made continually available to that one without limit or reservation irregardless of worthiness, loveliness or responsiveness; but which is, in fact, more earnestly bestowed in proportion to tribulation, weakness, failure or sin so that maximum glory might be accrued to God. The bigger the need is, the greater the grace.

To understand grace, imagine that you take the most admirable characteristic you have, the best accomplishments you ever had or ever will have, the most self-abasing, the most self-sacrificing deeds or attitudes, the most faithful or noble religious or social involvement and magnify it ten-trillions times ten-trillion with the most powerful microscope in the world, then lay it at the feet of God. He will have to turn His back because He cannot look upon sin.

What is grace? Grace is forgiveness based upon who God is, not who you are. What is grace? Grace is power based upon God's strength in spite of yours. What is grace? Grace is transformation based upon God's eternal desire to have you become like Him in spite of your natural rebellion and instinct to become like Satan. What is grace? Grace is provision to forgive you the nine-thousandth time. What is grace? Grace is the realization that there is nothing in you or in me, though it be our best, to draw the attention of a holy God. What is grace? Grace is the dead end of human worthiness only to discover the superhighway of divine availability. Grace is the love of God in swaddling clothes in a barn. Grace is the course of history reshaped by God as a carpenter, then entrusted to fishermen, tax collectors and persecutors. What is grace? Grace is the majesty of the King in a crown of thorns. Grace is the God of the universe bleeding to death. Grace is the availability of resurrection power to a cursing, insensitive fisherman, a prostitute in fear of being stoned; an adulteress with no husband but a new life; a threatening, vengeful, blaspheming persecutor on the road to Damascus. That is what grace is. It is God giving you everything He has because you don't deserve anything. If we can come to grips with what grace is, we can better come to grips with how to exercise faith in claiming the promises.

Let's deal with some principles involving the grace of God.

Principle 1- The characteristics of God's grace.

There are three basic characteristics of God's grace.

1- It is eternal as we see in II Timothy 1:9. Do you know what

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that means? It means God's grace never began, it has always been. From before the foundation of the world, God had equipped Himself to bestow upon you and upon me everything He had. God's grace will never end. It is timeless. It had no beginning, and it has no ending. It is eternal.

2- It is free as we see in Romans 3:24.

3- It is sovereignly given by a sovereign God.

Principle 2- Grace is given by God only to His elect, only to His children, to those who have received Him, but His mercy is over all His creation.

Psalms 145:9 says that His mercy is given to all. But, we learn in Romans 8:28-30, Romans 9:21 and Romans 11:1-7 that God's grace is given only to those who receive His gift properly. His mercy is over all His creation, but His grace is available to whosoever will.

Principle 3- God's grace is the positive element of His love while His mercy is a negative element.

His grace is giving us what we do not deserve. His mercy is withholding the judgment we do deserve.

Principle 4- Grace is imparted proportionate to need.

The greater the need is the greater the grace. This is why when you are really in a time of deep trouble or grief or hurt or pain or distress that you feel His grace even more. I've heard many of you say, "In that particular time, I could just sense God's grace." This is what it says in Romans 5:20-21 and I Corinthians 1:26-31. The greater the need is, the greater the grace. This is the reason that Paul said in II Corinthians 12:1-10, "My grace is made perfect in weakness." The greater your need, the more grace God gives you. Paul says not to go out to sin intentionally in Romans 6:1, so that you will get more grace. This is not the point. But if circumstances come into your life that create a greater need, get excited because that means there will be more grace to meet the need. The greater the need is, the greater the grace.

Principle 5- Rejecting the grace of God leads to a bitter spirit.

We see this in Hebrews 12:15. When you begin to be angry with God because you think you deserve something more than you got, or you didn't get the best deal, or you ignore the fact that you deserve nothing; this passage illustrates how it leads to a bitter spirit.

Principle 6- There is a direct relationship to God's creating needs in our lives in order for Him to meet those needs with more grace.

This principle is found in Ephesians 2:8, Deuteronomy 8 and the first two chapters of Job. He told the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 8 that He made them hungry so that He could give them manna. The children of Israel said, "That doesn't make sense, because we weren't hungry before it all started. We didn't have a problem." But God said, "I took away your food so that I could give you manna. I created a need so that I could meet it with grace." The children of Israel said, "God, why would you do that? Why don't You just leave us alone?" He said, "I did that to produce character in your life that you might know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of My mouth."

So every need that you have in your life in the week to come is God's design to bring a deeper dependence upon Him. Be careful with this. If you really want to understand the grace of God, go before Him and say, "Lord, give me a greater understanding of Your grace." Plead with Him to answer your prayer. I can warn you what might happen. You might have some new needs. I guarantee you one thing, you will not have a need that He does not supply abundantly.

As we get into the promises of God, we are going to see that part of the problem of our understanding of the grace of God is that we have a misunderstanding of what God promises to give us. Our expectations are in the physical realm, and His promises are in the spiritual realm. Oftentimes He has to destroy the physical things to give us the spiritual things. Our minds, like the people who Jesus preached to continually, particularly the Pharisees, are in the physical plane; and we want God to give us physical things. We claim a promise, and we develop a bitter spirit toward God because we don't understand His grace.

If you are going to plead with God this week for a greater understanding of grace, let me ask you to do one more thing. Go out and get a spiritual bucket and not a thimble. Expect Him to really show you a new insight concerning His grace. Say, "Lord, I don't understand it, and I'm not sure I want all of the circumstances involved for You to prove it, but I am going to hold up a big bucket. I want You to fill it with Your grace." He will do it because He is in the grace business.

Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

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