



GLOBAL GRACE NETWORK

GGN is a fellowship of ministers and churches that advocate the gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ – Jesus alone, grace alone, faith alone. Our purpose is twofold: to help the church rediscover Jesus and to take this message to the world.

MARCH 2009

Dear
all of you!

We are grateful to the Lord for being connected with each one of you! We believe that God uses Global Grace Network to add revelation, encouragement and increase to you and the people you are ministering to. God has already freely given us everything with Jesus, and He will continue to reveal to us how we can live in and experience the reality of this enormous truth.

This newsletter focuses on Grace and Faith, and includes solid teachings by Pastor Joseph Prince and Pastor Peter Youngren, as well as a wonderful testimony on being a leader by Pastor Tom Lipkin.

A member from Kinshasa, D.R.Congo, wrote as a response to the January newsletter: *"You cannot imagine how these newsletters and the articles in Global Grace Network are a big help for us."* He also wrote that they are using the teaching articles in the training of their leaders.

A member from Hong Kong wrote: *"It is so good what you write in the GGN newsletters. I have copied the outline about Righteousness from August, distributed it and taught it in our groups here. We will use much more of the teachings too. Next week we will start teaching about how to read the Bible, and then the January newsletter will help us a lot."*

We are grateful to receive these responses, and we are thinking of all of you while we are preparing and sending out these monthly newsletters.



Mary Felde
Editor

Grace Flows in Worry-Free Areas Of Your Life

by Pastor Joseph Prince

God faithfully supplies His grace to every area of our life. His grace is flowing freely... until we choke the flow by allowing the devil to get us worried and troubled!



In the night that our Lord Jesus was betrayed, on the night that He entered into His passion and suffered for us, He said to His disciples:

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Jesus' last will, and the greatest gift, that He wanted to leave behind for His disciples before His crucifixion was the gift of peace.

Our Lord is called the King of Salem (Hebrews 7:2). "Salem" means "peace." He is also called the Prince of Peace. When He was on earth, He walked in such peace that He was always in control. They tried to stone Him once, but He just walked through the midst

of them unharmed (John 8:59). No one could touch Him. He had perfect and absolute peace.

The devil ruffled up a storm in the Sea of Galilee, but Jesus just continued sleeping in the boat. The devil's attack did not wake Him, only the cry of His disciples did (Mark 4:35-41). Even in His death, He was in control. No one took His life from Him. He laid down His life (John 10:17-18). He made the choice in the garden to lay down His life for us.

The Shalom (Peace) Of God

Jesus was and is always in perfect control. And one of the reasons He was so powerful was that He walked in the shalom (peace) of God. The word "peace" in John 14:27 is the word "shalom" in Hebrew. It means wellness, wholeness, completeness, as well as peace of heart and mind. So having shalom means

having every part of you — spirit, soul and body — well.

So what did Jesus mean when He said, “Shalom I leave with you. Not the world’s shalom, but My shalom”? This is what He meant: “The shalom you saw Me living in; the shalom you saw Me sleep in, in that boat; the shalom you saw Me walk in, in the midst of the people who wanted to stone Me; the shalom that renders the devil powerless to touch Me; this shalom, My shalom, I give to you.”

This is the peace that Jesus has bequeathed to us. It is not a worldly peace that comes through soothing music, meditation, or deep breathing. It is more robust than that! It is not dependent on circumstances and it works in the midst of the storms of life.

Guard Your Heart Above All Else

“But Pastor Prince, if Jesus has given me this peace, why am I still so troubled and worried about many things?”

It is because you have allowed your heart to be troubled. Notice that immediately after Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you...”, He said, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” You have to let not your heart be troubled or afraid. The Lord cannot “let not” for you. Your wife cannot “let not” for you. I cannot “let not” for you. You have to “let not” yourself!

Many people are guarding their finances, careers, children, health and so on. But the Lord does not want us to guard these things. Instead, He wants us to guard our hearts:

Proverbs 4:23, NIV

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

We are to guard our hearts above all else. If we will guard that which is inside (He cannot guard that for us), God will guard all the other things on

The devil cannot get you in the areas of your life that you are not concerned about.

the outside. If we will let not our hearts be troubled or afraid, righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit will start flowing in our hearts. That is actually seeking first the kingdom of God, and all those things on the outside that we need will be added to us! (Matthew 6:33)

This should bring us relief. We don’t have to worry about so many things. We just have to guard our hearts. People make foolish decisions when their hearts are troubled. They do things that they would otherwise not do. So guard your heart. The Lord said to me once that if we will guard our hearts from being troubled or afraid, then if it is a miracle we need, a miracle we will get!

The way you guard your heart from being troubled and afraid is to quote John 14:27. Whenever trouble comes to your heart or you feel fearful, say, “Let not my heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” And you will release the power for the fulfilment of the verse. The peace of God will start flowing in your heart.

His Grace At Its Best

We all have our areas of weaknesses and strengths. What troubles me may not trouble you and vice versa. The devil knows which buttons to push for each one of us.

For example, while I may at times worry about my daughter because I love her so much, I am just not worried about my finances. Even when I was a student and my family was not well off, I was not worried about money. God gave me a grace ever since I was

born-again to not worry about money.

In fact, the Lord said to me recently, “Son, have you noticed that the devil cannot get you in the areas of your life that you are not concerned about? The areas that you are not troubled about are the areas where you see My grace at its best, My blessings at their richest.”

When He said that, I began to realize that there were other areas besides finances that I was not troubled about and where God’s grace flowed freely.

Some people think that their problems are too small for God to handle. “I am too embarrassed to tell God what troubles me. It is just a pimple that has been there for a few weeks.” Listen, if it causes your heart to be troubled, it is not a small thing! God wants you to cast it on Him. He does not want your heart troubled by anything, either big or small. And if you will cast it on Him and let not your heart be troubled, His grace will flow freely in that area of your life.

The Spirit Teaches Us On The Wavelength Of Peace

Another thing I want you to notice is that just before Jesus talks about giving His disciples His peace, He talks about the Holy Spirit’s guidance:

John 14:26–27

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. Peace I leave with you...

Jesus is telling us that the Holy Spirit teaches us all things on the wavelength of peace. In other words, if you guard your heart from being troubled by a problem, if you refuse to worry about it and just abide in His peace, the Holy Spirit will “teach you all things.” He will show you the way out of the situation!

My Experience With Stomach Pain

A number of years ago, I experienced some pain in my stomach, and finally went to see a specialist. Convinced that I needed to have a scope, he told me, "You never know, these symptoms that you have, you may think that they are nothing, but..." I looked at him and, you know, faith comes by hearing, but fear also comes by hearing!

After the consultation, I told myself, "Nah, forget about what he said. I am a man of faith!" But his words kept coming back to me. And as long as the symptoms were there and I had not had the scope done, I continued to be concerned about my symptoms. So I finally went for the scope. "Why not just settle it once and for all?" I told myself.

As it turned out, there was nothing wrong with my stomach. The pains

I did not exercise or eat so well! And they were for other reasons, not my stomach.

The Devil's Modus Operandi

Now, when I look back, I can see how what the Lord said is so true. When I began to worry about a particular area of my life, problems started popping up in that very area.

As I was meditating on all this, the Lord began to show me the modus operandi of the devil, the way he operates. First, he comes to you and he sees an area of your life that he wants to attack. But he knows that he has no power to harm you — Jesus stripped him of all his power (Colossians 2:15). So the only thing he can do is to get you to worry.

Do you remember what 1 Peter 5:8 says? *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about*

many pipes coming down from heaven. These are flexible pipes and they are all ministering God's manifold grace into every area of your life. There is a grace for healing flowing into your life, a grace for prosperity, a grace for your marriage and so on.

Once you are a believer, you are righteous by faith and you have "access by faith into this grace in which we stand." (Romans 5:2) When it comes to the benefits and blessings of God, all of us, whether we are pastors or ushers, enjoy the same inheritance. We are all on equal footing on the ground of grace.

When Jesus died on the cross, there was an earthquake and God's heart burst open, and streams of His love, grace, mercy and blessings just flowed out. And since God is eternal, these streams are eternal. They have been flowing ever since Jesus died. They are flowing all the time.

But what happens is that when we worry, it is as if we are grabbing hold of those flexible pipes, and hindering the flow of God's grace into those areas of our lives. The more we worry, the tighter we grip the pipe and the more it becomes choked. Is His grace still being supplied from heaven? Yes, but the

pipe is clogged with our worries and cares. Conversely, in the areas that we are not worried about, His grace flows freely, producing thirtyfold, sixtyfold and finally hundredfold results.

So when you are ruffled, troubled, worried and fearful about a particular area of your life, say your finances, you are giving the devil access into that area. The devil has no power to just stop the grace that is flowing into your finances. He cannot touch that pipe. God will not allow it. The only one who can touch it is you.

Lying Symptoms To Get You Troubled

Since the devil knows that he has no power over you, what he will do is

Your Father wants you living life carefree, enjoying His love and knowing that He watches over you.

were just lying symptoms! But do you know what happened during those months? I watched what I ate very carefully. I was fearful for my health for the first time, so much so that I began to eat organic food and drink carrot juice every day! I told my wife, Wendy, that I had to have brown rice — no white rice for me. Even when we ate out, I would bring along my brown rice! I was that radical. I also began to read Christian books on dieting. And I ran for about 45 minutes almost every day until I was so skinny!

Yet, with all that organic food, carrot juice and regular exercise, I went to see the doctor more often during those months than all the years when

like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." What is the preceding verse? *"... casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."* (1 Peter 5:7)

In other words, whenever you are full of cares and are not casting your cares on the Lord, you become "devourable" to the devil. But the opposite is also true: The devil cannot manage a peaceful Christian! No, he has to get you ruffled, troubled, worried and fearful first before he can touch you.

Worrying Hinders The Flow Of Grace

Here is an illustration that the Lord gave me to help you understand what I am saying. Imagine that there are

“ “ The devil cannot manage a peaceful Christian!

give you lying symptoms to make you worry. Take your health, for example. The devil cannot just put a disease on you. He has no right to do that to a child of God because Jesus has borne your sins on the cross. He has taken your punishment and borne your diseases and pains. By His stripes you were healed (Isaiah 53:4–5). You also cannot be cursed with any curse because Christ has redeemed you from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13).

All the devil can do is give you lying symptoms and hope that you will be troubled. Once you are troubled and worried about those symptoms, and start thinking about them all the time, you begin to hinder the flow of God's grace into your health. Again, God is still supplying the grace. He is faithful. It is your worrying that is clogging up the pipe.

Bring It To The Lord In Prayer

So refuse to worry. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. When there is something you are concerned about, bring it to the Lord in prayer:

Philippians 4:6–7

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Don't be anxious. There is no use praying worried prayers. Just tell the Lord about the problem and cast your cares on Him, knowing that He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7). Let it go. Then thank the Lord that He has heard you and is doing something about the problem. If you do this and refuse to be troubled, *“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”* Remember: The devil cannot handle a peaceful Christian.

The Father Wants Us Carefree

When my daughter, Jessica, started Primary 1, she would miss her mother and call home during recess. One day, she could not get through to her mother and became very anxious. It was a traumatic experience for her.

When she came home that day, I spoke to her about what had happened. I was very concerned about her. It hurt me to see her so troubled. She kept saying, “I don't want to go to school. It is like a nightmare. I want to be with Mama.” I tried to reason with her, but it was like she was just not listening to me.

I finally left her with her mother and went to my room. I was frustrated that my daughter was worrying at such a young age. I was even feeling a little angry towards her. So I sat down and told the Lord, “Lord, I don't want her to be troubled. She is so young. And I just feel bad about being angry with her. I am confused, Lord.”

The Lord said to me, “Son, why are you so concerned about her?”

I said, “Well, I just don't want her to worry.”

“Is that the real reason?”

“Yes.”

There was silence for a while. Then, He asked, “What is the reason you don't want her to worry?”

I thought about it for a while and then like a flash I saw the real reason: I love my Jessica so much that I want her to

be carefree! I want her to enjoy life. I don't want her, at such a young age, to be thinking, “What if tomorrow I call and Mama is not there? What if... What if...” I don't want her to worry because I love her so much.

It gives me a big thrill to hear her break out in a belly laugh when she is watching her favourite TV program, or when Wendy and I are kissing her belly on the bed. It makes us happy to hear her laugh. But it makes us sad to see her cry or even worry at that tender age. So it is not that I don't want her to worry because I just don't want her to worry, or because I am a pastor. I don't want her to worry because I love her very much and I want her to be happy.

When I realized that, the Lord said, “Son, now you know how I feel towards you. I am not telling you not to worry for the sake of not worrying. I am telling you not to worry because I love you so much and I want to see you happy. I want you to enjoy life and, most of all, enjoy My love in your life.”

Beloved, I hope that you will not forget what the Lord said to me. Your Father wants you living life carefree, enjoying His love and knowing that He watches over you. He really loves you. And perfect love — knowing this perfect love — will cast out every fear in your life (1 John 4:18).

Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to your stature? (Matthew 6:27) So let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid, and the grace of God will flow freely in your life, causing you to see His blessings at their richest!

JOSEPH PRINCE
Senior pastor of
New Creation Church
Singapore
www.josephprince.org



Faith or Mental Believing

By Peter Youngren

A truckload of mental believing produced by human effort and struggle will do nothing, but a teaspoonful of the faith of Jesus will move mountains every time.

There is a huge gap between mental believing and the God-kind of faith. Mental believing is natural. It comes by repeatedly telling our mind it is so. True faith is supernatural. It moves mountains and is only found in Jesus.

The four Gospels give us many case studies that contrast mental believing with the God-kind of faith. Matthew chapter seventeen begins with Jesus and three of His disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. When they come down from the mountain, Jesus quickly encounters human pain and suffering. We read, "And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, 'Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him.'" (Matthew 17:14-16)

Can you see the desperation? It's obvious Jesus' disciples believed in healing, otherwise they would not have tried to cure the boy. The father must have also believed in the miracle-working power of Jesus, because later he says, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

We don't know all the details, but

we can well imagine the disciples gathered around the boy while he was rolling on the ground, foaming at the mouth. Maybe they rebuked the devil or commanded the demons to leave and nothing happened. Possibly they tried repeatedly praying, interceding and pleading with God. Maybe they encouraged the father to believe more fervently, putting the onus for more faith on him or on the boy. Did the disciples try to discern the cause of the boy's sickness? Maybe they tried to research what had been the entry point for the demons to begin to oppress the boy and his family. We don't know exactly how they attempted to cure the boy, but we know they tried. Still, after all the prayer, rebuking and crying out to God was done, the result was dismal. The boy was as sick as ever before. Now some may conclude that this indicated it was not God's will to heal the boy. We know that's not the case because when Jesus came, He said, "Bring him here to Me." (Matthew 17:17) After a short conversation with the father, Jesus heals the boy. Jesus' action proves that it was God's will to heal the boy.

Later on, the disciples wonder at what they have seen and why they could not cure the boy. Jesus explains, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard

seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:20)

A Truckload or a Teaspoon

Do you see the distinction between mental believing and mountain-moving faith? The disciples had exercised mental believing. No question! They believed in healing or they would not have attempted to cure the boy. Jesus shows that if they had real faith instead of mental believing, they would only need a mustard seed of that kind of faith, and the miracle would happen.

I cannot brag of a single good thing about myself, including boasting of my faith. Instead, I simply come asking for God's mercy.

A billion dollars worth of mental believing and nothing will happen, but a penny of faith - the God-kind of faith - and nothing is impossible.

What we call "faith" is often only mental believing or "mind over matter." People may be heard

repeatedly saying, "I'm healed, I'm healed, I'm healed," or "I got it, I got it, I got it," or "It's mine, it's mine, it's mine." It is as if we thought that by repeating something enough we'll convince our own minds that we believe it, and then we'll get it.

The faith that Jesus gives, the God-kind of faith, is alive, vibrant and powerful. Let's never reduce faith to "five steps, ten keys, seven clues, or ten secrets." Faith can never be reduced to a mere principle or a "step." It is much more than affirming a doctrine; it is the energy of Jesus Himself flowing through you. Faith is not a condition of our mind; it is a divine grace.

Faith is not a method - faith is a person.

A truckload of mental believing produced by human effort and struggle will do nothing, but a teaspoonful of the faith of Jesus will move mountains every time. The good news is that Jesus makes this faith readily available. You only have to come to Him, call out for Him, and draw near to Him. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." (John 1:12) It's all wrapped up in "Him," "He" and "His." He does the work and we receive the benefits.

Just as I Am

In every Billy Graham crusade when the invitation for people to come to Christ is given the choir sings, "Just as I am without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me." I love those words, "without one plea." That means that I have nothing to plead of my own. I cannot brag of a single good thing about myself, including boasting of my faith. Instead, I simply come asking for God's mercy.

Remember the prayer meeting in the temple in Jerusalem with the publican in the back crying out for mercy, and the self-righteous Pharisee in the front of the sanctuary thanking God that he was not as "other sinners." Whose shoes would you rather be in: the publican sinner or the self-righteous Pharisee? There was no blessing in coming to God presenting something of ourselves, but mercy and grace flowed freely to the one who came "without one plea." All our mental attempts at faith will avail nothing. When we come to Jesus without anything of our own, the floodgates of His mercy and love open wide to us.

Peace In The Storm

On another occasion when Jesus and the disciples were in the boat, a raging storm threatened to drown them. The disciples were on the deck crying out to God, commanding the winds to be calm, but nothing happened. Obviously they believed that God could calm the storm, but it was a believing produced of their mind. Jesus simply spoke the words, "Peace be still," and there was a great calm (Mark 4:39). This is the distinguishing mark between mental believing and the faith which comes of Jesus. Mental believing is our effort to believe and see something happen. Jesus' faith comes with great peace.

Believe & Speak

Someone may ask, "Isn't it important that we speak in faith?" Yes, faith speaks and confesses God's Word. Our positive confession of God's Word comes from faith, but faith doesn't come from positive confession, for faith comes from Jesus. That's why the Scripture says, "I believe, therefore I spoke," not I spoke until I believed. You may ask, "Doesn't faith act?" Yes, action comes from faith, not faith from action - for faith only comes from Jesus.

Vasco's New Shoes

While preaching in the central square in Plovdiv, Bulgaria a mother brought her five-year-old son, Vasco, who had been born paralyzed. The mother had heard of the wonders of Jesus that had happened in our previous meeting in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. She was overwhelmed with what she had heard, and now certain that her son would walk she bought him a pair of jeans, a jean jacket and a brand-new pair of sneakers. The boy had never owned a pair of shoes; he had no need for them as he could neither stand nor walk. However, Vasco's mother was sure he would need shoes because Jesus would heal him. As I preached Jesus that night a beaming five-year-old and a crying mother came on the platform. Vasco ran back and forth showing the people the wonder that had happened. The people were beside themselves with joy. That's the faith of Jesus in operation. He gave Vasco's mother mountain-moving faith.

Now I could tell that story and someone else who was lame could also buy new shoes and come to a meeting and nothing would happen. To the one person this was a living vibrant reality; to another person it may only be another faith technique. Faith is not a method - faith is a person.

The more we look at our own effort the worse it gets, while the more we look at Jesus the easier it becomes.

The Man Who Crawled

In one of our Gospel Festivals in India, a man paralyzed from his waist down was lying on the ground listening as I spoke of Jesus Christ. He pushed himself up leaning on his arms all the while inching his way around the crowd to get a closer view of the platform. When I spoke in the name of Jesus for the lame to rise up and walk, he tried to get up but fell down. He did it again with the same dismal result. I would never have known these details unless a friend of mine, Pastor Frederick Mwassa from the east coast of Kenya, had been present. He was standing looking at this pitiful sight of a man trying to get up and walk. He told me after the meeting, "Peter, I approached the lame man saying, 'Shall I help you?' The man responded, 'No, I believe the word of Jesus that I have heard preached. I believe it more than I believe in my paralyzed condition. I will walk on my own.'" Again he tried, and this time life flowed to his limbs. He jumped to his feet and came running to the platform while all the people who'd seen him began to weep and cry, and were beside themselves at what they had just witnessed. The Holy Spirit had revealed Jesus to that man. Jesus had given him faith, and no one was going to talk him out of it.

I could relate this story and another person in a similar condition could say and act in exactly the same way, and nothing would happen. It is true that faith responds by acting, that faith without works is dead. But faith doesn't come from imitating the action of someone else - faith comes from Jesus. Don't try to imitate or copy what someone else has done, instead just draw closer to Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus to you more everyday. Jesus' faith, assurance and peace will come into your heart. This is why every miracle testimony

is unique, whether a testimony from the Bible or a current one. As each individual connects with Jesus, that person will act out their faith in Him.

Jesus is the key to everything. Our miracle is in Him. The more we look at our own effort the worse it gets, while the more we look at Jesus the easier it becomes. I have increasingly made my whole focus to lift up Jesus. The apostle Paul writes, "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?" (Galatians 3:1) Faith, miracles, healings and wonders are not produced by methods or faith techniques. These blessings come when people fully see Jesus portrayed. This was Paul's preaching style: to vividly paint a picture of the awesomeness of Jesus.

It Is A Gift

Mental believing comes from within ourselves. We try to achieve a level of soulful concentration where we think we believe something. This is the complete opposite of the faith of God. Look again at this scripture: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

This means:

1. Faith is "not of ourselves;"
2. Faith is "a gift of God;"
3. Faith is "not of works;"
4. If faith came from our works or ourselves we could boast, but since it doesn't, all boasting goes to Jesus.

The next verse sheds light on how real faith comes. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared

beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10) Everything we have is because we are new creations in Christ Jesus. We are believers because Jesus Christ, the Author and Finisher of faith, is in us. We nurture and grow this God-given faith by continually looking unto Jesus.

We nurture and grow this God-given faith by continually looking unto Jesus.

Do you work for a "gift?" Obviously not! A gift must be free or it is no longer a gift. Faith is a gift of God.

At times we hear people say, "I have seriously studied and prayed and my faith is growing. I believe I can do great things for God now." This type of speaking is an indication that faith's not at work, because we cannot work for faith and consequently we can't boast in it.

Now, don't misunderstand me. I practice Bible reading, prayer, and spiritual discipline with all my heart. Still we may read and pray diligently and yet not have the faith that moves mountains. Only Jesus can give us this faith. When His peaceful presence touches you, another world will open up to you. It's no longer you trying to have faith. Instead, His faith, the faith of Jesus, is flowing through you. He is our TOTAL MIRACLE SOURCE.

PETER YOUNGREN

Senior Pastor of
Celebration Church, Canada
Founder of
Celebration Ministries
Member of
GGN Board of Directors
www.peteryoungren.org



Experiencing Grace Ourselves

CHANGES OUR MESSAGE AND LEADERSHIP

In Luke 15 we have the story about the prodigal son. You have surely heard the story. But let us think about this story from a leadership view.

We surely all agree that the father (representing our heavenly Father) did everything right. He is the ultimate leader. He could speak into the lives of his sons and deal with them in a loving, forgiving and uplifting way. He did not condemn either of his sons. The younger son's problem was his attraction to the world. The older son's problem was his tendency to self-righteousness and his condemning attitude towards others.

I realized that the only thing I needed to do was to step into God's peace and rest from my own works.

From a human standpoint we might think that the older brother could have been a good leader. It seems like he was dedicated to his task. At least he tried to follow the rules as well as he could. He wanted to do well and impress his father. From a moral standpoint he thought that he was blameless. But would he have been a good leader? A good pastor? Let us not judge the older son too harshly – he made some mistakes – I have made mistakes as well!

Trying to make an impact on God

Like the older brother, it is so easy to base our life on performance. If we are insecure, we have a tendency to measure ourselves against others. We easily feel we are doing better or worse than the neighbor church. We try to make an impact on God, as if he did not know us already. Being a leader or pastor becomes a burden, not a gift that we enjoy. I made these mistakes. I did many things just like the older brother.

But God spoke to my heart from Hebrews 4. I understood that in a leader's life there is only one thing one has to strive for. I realized that the only thing I needed to do was to step into God's peace and rest from my own works. Though I was a Gospel preacher I needed to embrace the goodness of the gospel for myself! I do not say I was doing everything wrong, but obviously God was trying to get my focus on the free gift of grace again.

An inner change

Let us go back to the two sons in Luke 15 again. Would the younger brother have become a good pastor? The story does not tell, but it is obvious that the father's grace and mercy became an experience for him. After all that happened he would never talk about the father's grace just as a theory. Grace would always be a very vital part in his whole being! I believe the older brother needed this experience of the father's grace just as much as his younger brother did. Without an inner change the older brother would easily have become a demanding, performance-

oriented leader with little mercy for his followers or co-workers!

God also wanted the messengers themselves to grasp the grace in their own personal lives.

Now I can realize that understanding God's unmerited and free grace is the fundamental qualification for any Christian leader. How could we as leaders help others to find grace if we have not experienced God's grace ourselves? The older son had just the outward nice behavior. He could only pass behavior to others. The younger son realized some of the depths of the Father's unconditional love. That became the gospel he could give to others. "Freely you have received, freely you give" - how true that is!

Grace in your personal life

Why do we have such a strong emphasis on the grace of Jesus in the New Covenant? Why is the gospel simply called "the gospel of grace?" One reason is that grace and performance religion are opposites. When time was fulfilled and religious traditions were to be replaced with the Gospel, the transition was not easy for the human mind. God wanted His message of grace to be clear for all to grasp and understand. But God also wanted the messengers themselves to grasp the grace in their own personal lives. We can see that

the apostle Peter made mistakes many times. Even after being mightily used by God he let the old way of religious thinking come back (read Gal 2). He became afraid of the Jews. But God's grace never left him, nor did he fight against God's grace when he realized his mistakes. If there was enough of God's grace to put Peter back on track, don't you think there is enough grace also for you and me?

We can see that the leaders in the early church had experienced the grace of Jesus themselves.

If there was enough grace for the apostle Paul (who was persecuting the church), does God have less grace for us? It is obvious that Paul was very conscious about the grace he needed himself. We can understand that grace was not just "a topic" or something he needed only for his salvation, but the fountain of every good thing that came out of his life.

We can see that the leaders in the early church had experienced the grace of Jesus themselves. Personal ambitions were replaced by the passion from God's heart. I believe God is doing the same things in our hearts!

According to the Gospel of John we understand that Jesus came to give us grace upon grace. In the Amplified version we read, "For out of His fullness (abundance) we have all received [all had a share and we were all supplied with] one grace after another and spiritual blessing upon spiritual blessing and even favour upon favour and gift [heaped] upon gift."(John 1:16)

From this scripture I understood that God's unmerited grace is the only foundation I can stand on when facing challenges in life or ministry. This scripture says clearly that grace, spiritual blessings, favor and gifts will always be ours. I can refuse to receive what this scripture is promising, but I can never nullify God's heart and His promise. Before I often wondered, "do I measure up to God's standard and expectations?" Now I understand that God intended this scripture for me personally.

When we talk about favor we understand that Jesus walked all his life under the favor of his heavenly Father. The same Jesus is living in you and me. I understood that I was favored because of Jesus, not because of my own performance as a pastor or preacher. Of course, God's favor does not mean that everything is easy. In one verse in Acts chapter 14 Paul was considered to be a god in the eyes of the people. In the next verse the same people stoned Paul! We can see that God's favor is much better than popularity which so easily changes.

Whatever circumstances we might go through we understand that there will always be enough grace to see us through. Before, I used to depend on "how I felt the anointing." Yes, it's good to "feel" the anointing, but it's better to know that God will never leave me. The promise in Heb. 13:5 has nothing to do with my feelings. No part of the Trinity will ever leave you. The Father's unconditional love will always be with you. The presence of Jesus will be where you are! And the help and anointing of the Holy Spirit will always be assured to you!

Tom Lipkin
Pastor of Vaasa City
Church, Finland



DYNAMIC, JESUS-CENTERED TV **WatchCelebrate.tv**



tv available online 24/7

*with T.L. Osborn, Peter Ljunggren, Åge Aleskjær, Joseph Prince,
Linda Bergling and more!*

EDITOR: Mary Felde, GRAPHIC DESIGN: Lindsay Allison

For more information on GGN visit www.GlobalGraceNetwork.org
Global Grace Network, P.O. Box 490, Niagara Falls, NY 14303, US



Please send comments and feedback to the attention of the editor at
info@globalgracenet.org