

Bible Distribution Update at VCU

Good morning, saints. Before I get into what I want to share, I want to give you an update for many of you who prayed for the Gideon distribution that we did at VCU this week.

We had close to 2,000 of these little testaments and had asked you all to pray. A couple of churches in the Richmond area were praying as well. The student groups on campus were also contacted, including Chi Alpha and Crew. I found out that there is a Fellowship of Christian Athletes down there that I missed, but I met one of those students on campus.

Thank you for your prayers. On the first day, we gave out 1,400 of these little Bibles and did not encounter any hostility. I personally did not encounter any, and the others basically reported the same. We had some hostility in past years, with people saying, "I do not need that because I am a Muslim," or "I am an atheist," or there would be two young ladies holding hands who would walk by and say, "You Christians hate us. Do not speak to me." We did not have any of that this time. Thank the Lord, He covered our presence there in a very special way, and thank you for your prayers. The next day, before 11 a.m., they had all been given out. So again, the Lord was merciful.

Personal Encounters

The Flower Lady

VCU is full of city sidewalks, so there are vendor stands with hot tamales, chili, and sub sandwiches. The lady next to me set up a beautiful display of flowers and potted plants. She was the flower lady. I was there, and she was there, and she said, "Well, I have kind of heard you talking to people. What do you have?" I thought, "Praise the Lord, there is an opening." So, I walked up to her with one of these little Bibles and showed her that it was a Bible we were giving to students. I said, "You do not have to be a student to get one. Are you a Christian? Would you like a Bible?" She said, "Well, I kind of think I am a Christian. I am Catholic." I said, "Well, answer me this: If on the way home today you got in a car wreck and died, where would you be?" She just kind of stopped and said, "Well, I have done the catechism, been confirmed, but I do not really know." So, praise the Lord, I had a chance to witness to her and give her a Bible as well.

A Prayer Request

Another Gideon had the opportunity to speak with a young lady who was walking by. She saw that we were believers and approached him. She said, "Sir, I see you are handing out Bibles. Can I ask you to pray for me? I have a test right now, and I am so nervous, I do not know what to do." So, he laid hands on her and prayed right there. The Lord provided opportunities for witnesses, which were so precious.

I am so grateful to be able to do this, and thank you for your prayers. As I was holding these little Bibles, there were kids walking by. One of them I remember in particular said,

"I really do not need one of those, I have a big one in my room." I said, "Well, that is fine, but this will fit right in your backpack." She walked past, turned around, took it, and went on her way. Thank the Lord, He is wonderful to serve.

Growing in Grace

Introduction

Thank the Lord, the matter that has been on my heart is that we grow in grace. II Peter 3:18 tells us, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." These two things are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Savior.

For years, what the Lord had on my mind was Ephesians 2:8, where it says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:" So, salvation and grace are linked together. For many of us, probably when we came to the Lord, it was the first time we heard the word "grace." We may not have known quite what it meant, but that is what I wanted to share about a little bit this morning.

One final scripture before I get started is in John 16:15. These were among the Lord's last words: "All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you." The Amplified version uses that word "shew" a little differently: "He shall take of Mine and shall transmit it to you." So, we thank the Lord for His words.

Let us pray.

Lord, how we thank You so much for a time of worship this morning. We thank You for Your love for us. We thank You for Your grace and mercy that You show us each and every day. Lord, we pray that You would cover our time now. May the words that are shared be only from You, nothing of me. I pray that You would be glorified in this time and that You would be pleased with all that is said. I offer this to You and thank You, Lord, in Thy precious Name. Amen.

When we come to the Lord, the Scripture says, "For by His grace you are saved through faith." I thought, well, what more could there be about God's grace other than salvation? Look at what He did to accomplish that. He suffered a horrible, cruel death for me. He died to save me from my sins. He died so that I would have life everlasting with Him. What more could He do? How glorious! How much grace was shown in that.

Grace for Transforming into His Image

But thank the Lord, as we go on with the Lord, we see that beyond that grace for salvation and justification, there is grace to continue on in our walk with Him in sanctification—grace to be transformed into His image. And what does that take, saints, to be transformed into His image? Think about the Lord. Think about ourselves. Think about our flesh. Holy mackerel! So much of us needs to die so that the Lord may come through. Being transformed, being conformed to the image of Christ is my burden—to share a little bit more about that.

And saints realize this as well. Many of these ideas, as I was meditating on this word, other brothers' ministries quickly came to mind. Mac shared about grace, the Lord Jesus being the personification of grace. Our brother Jim recently talked about being obedient to the things that the Lord has told us. How can we be obedient? By His grace. Last week, our brother Madhu talked to us about the importance of repentance, particularly at the table. We need to be obedient to what the Lord says, and we cannot do it in ourselves.

So, we need to realize that the idea of grace is not just the undeserved favor that brought us to the Lord, but it is also a working of power in our lives to follow His leading to be more like Him. The power that works in us is also the Lord's grace. Praise the Lord for that.

A Parable of Grace - The Prodigal Son

When we think again about coming to the Lord, we consider examples that we see in Scripture about the Lord's grace. We all know the parable that the Lord gave about the Prodigal Son. So bear with me, it is long, but it is familiar. In Luke 15, I would like to review that for us as a way of getting started. The Father is presented in this parable as the Lord, and the prodigal son is presented as the sinner, which could be any one of us.

In chapter 15:11, He said, "A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. So many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants in my father's house have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."

"Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, 'Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my

friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.' And the father said unto him, 'Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found.'"

What a wonderful picture of the father's love and forgiveness! The brother squandered what his father gave him. He did not earn it; he did not work for it. It was a free gift. He just squandered it on riotous living. He went against what he was told, no doubt, by his father, and lived in sin. When we think about other aspects of the father's love, look at the timing of the father's approach to the son. He saw him from a ways off. No doubt the father had been watching, waiting, and praying for that son to return. And when he saw him, what did he do? He ran to him, and he fell on him. He kissed his neck, and told the servants to bring the robe, the sandals, and the ring. He would not let him go into the house until he was dressed as his son again. What love, what forgiveness he showed him! Killing the fatted calf and that kind of banquet was reserved for special guests, so that was done. "Let us kill the fatted calf and be merry!"

Then we see the brother who would not go in. This reflects his refusal of the grace of the father. The father went out, it says, and entreated him. The father did not get mad at that son for his stubbornness; he entreated him to come. However, that elder son was very hard-hearted. We do not know how he ended up, but we see in this picture that he refused the father's love, the grace that the father was extending to the younger son.

And the customs of the time show a little bit more of the father's love. Our brother Enoch shared on this a while back. The custom, at that time, when a son had been so rebellious, he would not be reinstated to the family. He would be brought before the elders at the gate, publicly shamed, and maybe even stoned. Noblemen, as this father was, did not run. Children ran; noblemen did not. But this father, when he saw his son coming, praise God, probably hiked up that robe and ran to him.

We see that he fell on him and kissed his neck, not regarding how he was being perceived. That did not bother him. All that mattered to him was the love that he had for his son and that he was able to display it. So, the ring, the robe, and the sandals showed true sonship. The father forgave all of that, brought him into the house, and made joy and merriment, thanking the Lord, no doubt, for his return.

So, we clearly see that the favor the younger son received was undeserved. But the grace of the father, the mercy of the father, was shown to him. So that is the picture of unbounding love, never-ending grace and mercy that our Father shows us.

Grace - The Working Power in Our Lives

As we think about that, we see how the son was truly overwhelmed by the father's love. The grace that he received was undeserved. The father basically showed delight in giving that to his son. So, praise the Lord for that wonderful picture. Now, that is a beautiful picture of us when we come to the Lord for salvation. We did not earn anything; by His grace He brought us to Himself.

Remember, grace is that working power in our lives. It is a power that is seen in our walk with the Lord, and not only in our walk, but in our service to Him. We cannot serve the Lord in our own strength, but the Lord gives grace, He gives us that power and ability to serve Him. We thank the Lord for that power because when we yield to it and acknowledge that we cannot do it ourselves, that is when we receive the Lord's grace. Praise the Lord.

The realization that I cannot, but the Lord can, is growing in grace. That realization is oftentimes the first step in being able to receive more grace. Father, I cannot do it. Lord Jesus, help me. I cannot do this in my own strength. When we ask with a sincere heart, the Lord gives more grace. He enables us to work.

When we think of this process of sanctification, growing in grace and becoming more like Him, it enters into a different element than when we think of salvation, where everything is fine, and lo and behold, I am going to be in heaven singing songs forever. No, there is more. The Lord expects us to be transformed into His image. He wants us to crucify ourselves, as it were. He wants us to be able to be more like Him. And the only way we can do that is to put the old man to death. So, when we think about that picture, we have to realize that we need the Lord's grace to be transformed into His image. We need that continually. As we serve Him, we will come across situations in our lives that are beyond us. But thank the Lord, what does the Scripture say? The Lord is at hand. He will be right with us.

When we think about that, we realize that Matthew 26:41 basically says, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." So here again, you cannot outgive the Lord. The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. We realize that as we are beyond ourselves, we cannot do it. Thank the Lord, He can. This is the first step in growing in grace.

Our brother Sparks basically wrote about it this way: "Grace not only receives us in the position of acceptance without merit as the son, but grace is also a working power to make us correspond into the position into which we have been brought." Let me read that again. "Grace is a working power to make us correspond to the position into which we have been brought." Thank the Lord for that.

Costly Grace

The Danger of Cheap Grace

When we think about free salvation, doing nothing to receive that grace other than ask for it, the doctrine of grace can be abused. How many of us have had friends, maybe when we first came to the Lord, who said something like this: "Well, I can do that because I am saved by grace. I can go on living as I have been living because God has saved me already." So that kind of grace is basically what Bonhoeffer called, "Cheap grace." Grace that costs nothing and does not make a difference. People do not know the Word of God when they say they can go on sinning. Grace is abused in that way.

Bonhoeffer also said that we use the doctrine of grace as shallow discipleship and an acceptance of sin in the body of Christ. Think about that. “We use the doctrine of grace as a shallow discipleship and acceptance of sin in the body of Christ.” It says, “I am a sinner, saved by grace, but I can sin because of grace.” May the Lord never allow us to think that way again. I am saved. Jesus loves me. We do the minimum to appear Christian. This is Bonhoeffer: “We go to meetings on Sunday and follow certain rules, but we do not really allow our lives to be changed.” Saints, what a mistake that is!

Bonhoeffer also said: “With cheap grace, forgiveness comes without requiring repentance; baptism without church discipline; communion without confession. It is discipleship without the cross, grace without Jesus living and incarnate. It denies the word of God.” That is what cheap grace is. Our brother Stephen Kaung basically said this. “Today is the day of grace. But people do not understand grace. They abuse it. They think that because we are under grace, there will be no judgment. Now, if there is no judgment, God is not just.” Think about those things and basically how distorted that thinking is.

Now I want to contrast costly grace; the grace that we enter into, the power that the Lord gives us to be transformed into His image. Jim recently shared about obedience. When the Lord tells us something, we need to do it, right?

Madhu shared last week about taking communion carelessly. Therefore, may we examine ourselves, and do not take those 10 minutes that we have been given before the meeting lightly. Let us use that time to prepare our hearts for the table. Maybe we should come earlier; I do not know. The fellowship is wonderful, and I enjoy connecting with brothers and sisters at that time. But if we have not already examined ourselves and prepared our hearts when we come to the table, we could do it then. That is why we encourage folks to come early for the table time. Remember what Jim said about obedience: there are consequences. The Lord has told us to do that, and when we do not, we have consequences. Things can follow that become a danger to us.

Cheap grace is so dangerous that the practice itself is a downward spiral. We enter into cheap grace thinking that it is free, so we can do what we want to do. It is a trap. It definitely is a trap that leads us into that downward spiral, causing us to sin and sin and sin. When we think about that, how many of you have had friends, maybe when you first came to the Lord, who mistakenly said, “I can do that because I have already been forgiven. The Lord has forgiven me, He will forgive me, and therefore I can go on living as I was living?” It is a trap.

The Call to Sacrifice

When we think about growing in grace, we need to be able to make sacrifices, even when it goes against our natural tendency to simply be comfortable. Now think about that for a second. Crucifying self is not easy. Giving up things that we like or stopping certain activities can be grievous. We miss those things and chafe under the discipline. But when we consider how this comes about, folks, we need to realize that sometimes we simply have to fight against being so comfortable in our lives. And that does take the sacrifice

that the Lord is asking us to make. So, I want you to think about this. Certain elements of cheap grace, where you can do what you want to and not have to make any extra effort, has kind of drifted into our culture. What do I mean by that? Well, consider the way our values are formed, basically, when we are growing up.

Here is the way many of us were brought up. I am a boomer. I was brought up by parents who went through the Great Depression. Raise your hands if you are in that boat. So, we know what kind of life they had. Life was not easy; it was hard. Think about that generation which won World War II. That generation lived through the Depression. After the war, us boomers were born, and the parents looked at us and said, "My kids are going to have it better than I did." So, saints, that is the trap.

Think about that as being kind of our national mentality that we have had for years. Let us not overexert because we do not need to. Mom and Dad are going to give me that. The mentality at that time, as far as parenting was concerned, basically consisted of overindulging the kids. When parents were able to do that, they gave freely. My child is going to have it better than I did.

Think about what a lifetime of that leads to when we think about making personal sacrifices that crucify our flesh. We do not want to do it. That is not the way we have been brought up; it is contrary to our old nature. But praise God, He lets us realize that it must be done. So, when we think about that in terms of the way we have been brought up, think about other aspects of our culture.

Think about kids in school these days. Now, I am a career educator, so I am not going to criticize education per se. But folks, over the years, kids have had it easier than we did. Think about that! In this generation, one of my students said it well last term, "Why do I need to learn this stuff when I can just look it up?" Where is the discipline that we need for Bible study, for meditation, for considering God's word, for applying that to ourselves when all we have to do is push a button? Folks, that is wrong thinking. And we need to pray for this generation that they would not be so prone to being so comfortable with learning. Learning takes effort as well as Bible reading takes effort.

The Need for Discipline

When we think about the benefits of children in school and being diligent, it is a discipline that we had. We did not have computers; we had to learn things the hard way. Reading, writing, and arithmetic aside, it taught us discipline which is something we need to ensure our children have. Having that discipline and bearing the fruit of that discipline is growing in grace. We realize that things take effort like Bible study. Our brother Lenny talked about getting up an hour and a half early and devoting that time to the Lord. Praise God for that!

That shows us the fruit of a desire to serve the Lord and to not be so comfortable with our lives. The idea of personal accountability and artificial intelligence is a scary thing. In my class I required term papers. I made the term paper requirement such that they had to bring together elements of the course, they had to interview people, they basically had

to work. I was the only professor who required that. One young man decided he was going to put one over on this old man, and he just kind of clicked something in AI; it was absurd. He was offended when I pointed out to him that this was not acceptable. But he thought he could get by with the push of a button. How many of us think we can get by doing less, because that is the way we were brought up. We are not doing as much as we used to in terms of generational differences.

By the way culture has developed, we have been lulled into thinking that we do not have to work that hard for it. Do you see what I am saying? The idea of kids not having that discipline is concerning. Praise the Lord for teachers who require kids to work these days. And again, I am not criticizing education, but Jim, I taught one of your students. For those of you who do not know, I was a professor at VCU and Brightpoint.

So, I often hear comments about teachers. One student said he had Mr. B. and I said, "I know Mr. B.; we go to church together." And the student looked at me and said, "Yeah, do you know what? He made me think." Praise the Lord for that! "He made me work." How strange. Probably that child had been spoon-fed a great deal in his life. Where is Bob? I taught one of Bob's kids, the English professor. Bob is not here. Bob's student said, "Yeah, I had Mr. D. in middle school. He was my English teacher, and do you know what? He made me speak correctly. None of this slang stuff." But the point is, folks, the kids had to get out of their comfort zones, and that was not normal for them. They remembered it being different in their school careers. It transfers to us being soft with ourselves. "I did not have to work in school. Things were given to me as a child, so why should I have to work now The Lord has done all and given me all." Boom! Cheap grace. It is so dangerous when we think about the implications of it.

The Evolution of Convenience

When we consider it as a societal issue, think about how much these products have transformed our thinking in terms of having to work for things.

In the early 1950s TV dinners came into our homes; pop them in the oven, pop them out. Therefore, you do not have to work that much. What about transistor radios? Weren't they cool? You could carry one with you because you did not have to plug it in. It had batteries. Boom! There was music wherever you wanted it, whenever you wanted it. Does anyone know about microwave ovens? Weren't they great? You could do things without a great deal of effort. But guess what? They have been around since the late forties. They were not really commercially available then for kitchen use, but they have been around.

It has become part of our makeup to do things easily, quickly, and with little cost. This has been around for that period of time. Think of the implications that it has on us as believers. Push-button telephones—weren't they great? My first phone number when I was growing up just had four digits—3860. That is all you had to dial. It was on a party line, and you had to wait. Does anyone know what a party line is? Some folks do.

But as we grew older, things became easier. All we had to do was push a button. Jack, when was the first home computer? It was commercially available for home use in 1975.

I had 1977 in my notes; that is close enough. Think of what that did for our children. Not only that, but when the Internet came along for general, public access in the 1990s, think of how much that has eased the burden on students to have to work hard for things. Does that translate into working hard for us to be transformed into the Lord's image? It is a trap; it is a dangerous trap into which we can fall.

Smartphones came in 1992. Ah, the bane of my existence, Siri. 2011, Alexa 2014. If you do not know something, just ask Siri. You do not have to do research or cause yourself any grief, just ask Siri. The other thing that I have already mentioned which is not one of my favorites is AI.

But how many remember going on vacation some place where you had never been and you had to have a road map? And it was impossible to look at it when you were driving because you had to unfold it and it was so big that it would cover the whole windshield. But now what do we have? We have Siri or the thing on our screen in our car to direct us. What I am pointing out is the ease that our society has brought to our lives that makes us, in the flesh, reluctant to be uncomfortable. And being uncomfortable is what we need to do if we really and truly are being transformed into the image of Christ.

Costly Grace – a True Way to Full Salvation

But thank God, this idea of His truth and growing in grace has been revealed to many, and we have had teachings about it. Thank the Lord for that. We have learned that costly grace, if you will, was a true way to full salvation.

When we think about grace in the Bible, read about Paul and his life. Think about how he was rescued from being the persecutor of the church, and then on the Damascus highway that whole situation that brought him to the Lord. Did it cost him? He was blind for three days. His sight was restored, and he went on to serve the Lord. But in II Corinthians chapter 11 is the scripture that talks about him being in the deep so many days, and being beaten with rods, and so on. We know that he suffered, but we also know the fruit. He was transformed more and more by the things that he suffered.

When we think of Peter in the Scriptures, we know he was a fisherman, and he was unlearned. Nevertheless, he got great grace from the Lord. With that grace He walked on water. He saw the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration. He saw the glory that was present in the Lord. Was he willing to make sacrifices? He was imprisoned, but the Lord used that to bring about fruit in his life. Was he being transformed to the image of Christ? Little by little was he becoming more like Christ? Was Paul becoming more like Christ? Yes! The things that they suffered, the Lord used to bring them to Him.

When we think of, again, Paul's basic instruction to us, in Romans 6:1-2, what does it say? "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

The fruit of what Paul went through is seen in his writings. He talked about the grace of God being something that was so lavishly bestowed upon him. Thank God for that! Thank the Lord for his testimony!

So, when we think about the need for ourselves to know Him more and to be more comfortable in His dealings with us, that is growing in grace as well. May the Lord help us not to get angry with Him when things do not go our way. That is growing in grace as well, and we will get into that.

When we think about abandoning those things again that we love so much such as sleeping in late, the recliner, all of those things that we have been conditioned to make us more comfortable, we can make some sacrifices, Saints. We can spend more time with the Lord rather than in that recliner, watching TV, or scrolling through on our cell phones. It is a terrible waste of time. May the Lord discipline us in that way.

Grace Changes Life

What is wonderful is when we are able to break through our flesh, come to the Lord, and see change in our lives. How many have had the experience of saying, "Last year I would not have responded that way; but thank the Lord, this year I did not blow up at so-and-so. I did not yell at the child when he broke a vase," or something similar? I had a friend who told a story about God's work in a life that was shown to this person to be an encouragement to him. Again, that is God's grace.

This particular gentleman came to the Lord, but before he came to the Lord, he cursed horribly. He would embarrass not only a sailor but an army drill instructor. It was just horrible. So he was well known for this by the people who knew him. He came to the Lord, and very soon after, maybe even going home from the meeting that night, (I do not know that part of the story) but he had a car. Back in those days, when he was saved, cars had metal dashboards. They did not have nice padded, soft things. Remember those metal dashboards? They had seams where two pieces of metal came together. He had a new car, and where those seams came together on one side of his dashboard, it rattled. It drove him crazy. He spent all that money on this car, and now this dashboard is rattling. So, he figured out that if he hit it in a certain place, it would stop rattling.

He chewed toothpicks because he was trying to stop smoking, so that gave him something to do. He learned that if he took that toothpick out of his mouth when he was driving and the dashboard started to rattle, he could stick that toothpick in that little crack. Bingo! Problem solved.

You get the picture? So, he was going down the road one day and it started rattling, and when he went to hit the dashboard, he impaled his hand on that toothpick. Do you know what came out of his mouth? "Praise the Lord!" Before, it would have taken reams and reams of paper to write all the curse words he would have said. But that became part of his testimony, and God allowed him to see His grace at work. "I have changed. I do not need to curse anymore." Praise the Lord! Often the Lord will let us see things in our lives that have been changed as a result of His grace, and that is an encouragement.

James 4:6 says, “But He gives more grace.” When we need it, He gives more grace. Because that gentleman did that to his dashboard that one night, he did not run out of grace. The Lord gave him grace and more grace, just like us.

In reference to our own capabilities of growing more like the Lord, Spurgeon said, “Every virtue should be traced to grace. If we fail anywhere, it will be our wisdom to ask for more grace.” We cannot do it in our own strength. So, if we fail, it is our wisdom to ask for grace. See the bounty of God, ever giving and ever ready to give more. Praise the Lord. We cannot run out of the Lord's grace.

God Gives Grace to the Humble

I Peter 5:5 basically says, “He giveth grace to the humble.” So, when we are in the midst of a change, we have to be careful. “Oh, look at what I did.” We cannot take the credit for ourselves because that is not what the Lord is asking of us. He gives grace to the humble, and we need to be humble. We need to admit to the Lord, “You got me out of that trouble once, Lord. You can get me out again. Praise the Lord. I cannot do it on my own.”

God also gives us grace to witness. Think about that. How many of us are generally shy and have difficulty approaching people or even witnessing to others? So, may it not be that we are so comfortable that we cannot witness our faith to others. I have a dear friend who basically does this. I was with him at a restaurant. Now picture this guy. He is older than I am, and he is from Alabama, so he has a nice Southern drawl. The waitress came up to take our order, and he said, “Ma'am, we are fixing to pray for our food. How might we pray for you?” Think about that—asking a waitress that! It has opened so many doors, just that simple request. There was a willingness to die to self, perhaps to be embarrassed. But folks, we have prayed for waitresses who just found out they were pregnant. We have prayed for waitresses who have just gotten married. What a special opportunity the Lord will give if we overcome that fear, that embarrassment, and be obedient to the Lord, and venture out. The Lord will give us opportunities.

I am so thankful for the network that our college folks have, in terms of being able to hold each other accountable, check in with each other, and their Bible readings and so on. Folks, that is a discipline that will yield fruit. Again, in terms of being ever ready to speak that word, I will never forget the first time I heard Ed Miller. I was in awe of Ed. He gave one of those messages for the first time on a Friday night, then on Sunday at the men's retreats that we used to have up in Maryland somewhere.

Ed gave one of those messages that, at the end, my spine was just tingling. I was so convicted by what our brother had said. When lunchtime came, he sat down beside me. He did not know me from Adam, looked at my name tag, and said, “Glen Miller, tell me what the Lord has been showing you.” I thought, “what can I say to this man?” But ever ready, ever willing to share testimony, to be in the Word enough to be able to share. That requires death to self, the sacrifice of time, and laboring in the Word, and how it will bear

fruit. And Ed brought that to my attention. I thank the Lord for that. We need to guard against being offended when people ask us things like that.

One of the things related to that, folks, is when we pray about a matter and do not get an answer. Our brother Enoch shared about that this morning, how the Lord prayed and needed to pray again. Then the Lord, in His wisdom, brought forth what He did.

But when we pray and do not get an answer, we grow in grace when we do not get offended by the Lord, and we persevere in prayer. Think about the examples of those who prayed for a long time. When I think of saints persevering in prayer, I think about the sisters who were here and prayed for years for an assembly to be raised up here in Richmond. They prayed for years without seeing anything, but God gave them grace to persevere in prayer.

When we are able to persevere, and able not to be offended in the Lord, but push on in Him, we know He hears our prayers. Praise God. That is another sign of growing in grace. So, we continue to pray and do not give up. That is an important part of living this life. The Lord is not going to give us things when we need them. However, that is part of the way we have been socialized, part of our growing up, and part of what we cannot do anymore. Just because there are push-button things and so on, we are used to that.

But the idea of waiting, on the Lord, being patient with the Lord, and loving the Lord more is a part of growing in grace when that happens.

The Nature of God's Discipline

Recently we have talked about, and many have spoken about, not letting our sorrows be wasted, and there is a book with that title. When we get through a rough spot, we need to realize that God is sovereign and there are things going on that we do not need to know about. There are things that He is working, maybe in others, maybe in our own lives. The point is, God gives us grace to persevere in prayer. Even though we might be used to having something at the snap of a finger or the push of a button, that is not the way the Lord always works. It is just fine for us to persevere in prayer. It is death to self. It is crucifying the old man. That is costly grace.

Let us look at I Peter 5:10: "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." He has called you unto eternal glory after you have suffered a while. Well, the Lord knows our sufferings, but the Lord will give us grace. The Lord will enable us to come through that as long as we have our heart right before the Lord. It is not easy to do if we are used to cheap grace.

We want it right away, as I have said. But thank the Lord, He is faithful. God is more forgiving than we can imagine. His continuing grace can take people like Paul, people like Peter, and people like us, and transform us into His image.

The idea that sometimes change occurs related to prayers not answered; it might be that the Lord is teaching us more that will not be revealed until later. So, we need to be

patient with Him. Our brother Stephen Kaung said, basically, "When God's hand of discipline comes upon us, it is for restoration and not destruction." We might think it is destruction, and we might not want to be destroyed. So we revert to not doing it, "I can go on the way I used to," which is cheap grace, and that is a trap. When God's hand of discipline comes upon us, it is for restoration and not destruction. Hebrews 12 basically says that chastening is to conform us to the image of His Son. His discipline is to perfect you, to mature you.

Folks, when this happens, when we are put in a situation that we find unpleasant, how do we respond? We grow in grace when we say, "Lord, what would You have me learn?" rather than, "Why did You do this to me, Lord?" it is a different heart attitude. And when we are able to do that in the midst of all of this, praise God, He has given us more grace, and we can respond in love.

Hebrews 4:16 is a real treasure: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Thank the Lord He will give us grace when we need it.

The Role of Friends in Growth

Another way we grow in grace, as Jim spoke about, is when we listen to the words of a friend that are not too pleasant for us to hear, and we change. The Lord can bear much fruit in our lives; we can gain much joy from listening to the Lord through a friend. What are they doing? They are showing us our blind spots, something for us to pray about.

Jim spoke about Proverbs 27:6. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." That is basically what I just said. What I would like to share is another part in Proverbs 27:9: "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel."

Grace to Forgive - Personal Testimony

Pray for me. When I was a kid, a little kid, I was a skinny little kid. That is hard to imagine. I had a big mouth, so that often got me into trouble. But the Lord's provision was that I had a big brother who was a moose. He was a football player and a wrestler. My dad was 6'4", and my brother could pick him up and carry him around the front yard.

He got me out of many scrapes because I was Eddie's little brother. One particular time, we had been fighting. And I want you to understand how much of a hero he was to me. I was a kid, and we had been fighting, and my mother separated us. I will never forget it. Eddie stayed in the house while I went out into the front yard feeling sorry for myself, and the neighborhood bully came by on his bike.

I honestly do not know who said something first, whether it was me or him, but words were exchanged. The next thing I knew, I saw him get off his bike, throw it down on the ground, and come up to me. Before I knew it, he had grabbed me by my shirt, thrown me down on the ground, and had his knees on my shoulders, getting ready to clean my clock. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw my brother. He came flying down the steps, three steps,

and he just cleared them. One jump, boom, he was on that guy. He picked him up by the shirt collar, yanked him off me, and gave him a good thrashing. He never bothered me again, but that was the kind of brother I had. He would even pay for me to go to the movies with him. He had a paper route; I just cut lawns for money. But he would do that for his little brother. He was not ashamed to be seen with me.

That was when we lived here, when I was a kid. We moved from here to Virginia Beach when I was twelve; he was sixteen. As I said, a he was a football player, a big moose and that sort of thing. He came home from football practice one day with a pain in his side, and we took him to the hospital. There was only one doctor in this small hospital, believe it or not, in Virginia Beach. It used to be at 25th and Arctic, just a small cinder block, two-story building. The doctor was a friend of my mother's, and they went to high school together. And he said, "We have to get that appendix out, or it is going to burst, and it will be bad if that happens." They wheeled him into surgery, and folks, he died. They got the appendix out, and it had not ruptured. The operation was a success, but he died.

There was an automobile accident, and a pedestrian was hit by a car. They came to the hospital, and there was only one doctor there. I do not know what happened, but I believe my brother was left alone.

The pedestrian, who also happened to be a friend of our family's was standing on the island in Pacific Avenue. He was just standing there, waiting to cross the other lane, and a tractor trailer came by. And the draft from that tractor trailer blew him into the street, and he was hit by a car. He was taken to that same hospital, which by then was only three blocks away.

We will never know what happened to my brother; the appendix was out, maybe he was not stitched up, I do not know. Maybe they had to give him more drugs to keep him stable until the doctor could attend to this other person. We never knew what happened. But I know that after that night, I was so hurt and so bitter.

Thank the Lord, He healed me of my relationship with Him. But saints, I could not forgive the doctor. For years, I held that in my heart. But the Lord convicted me as an adult after I came to Him. How is your heart towards Dr. So-and-so? Praise God, He enabled me to forgive him. And when I did that, it was a sign of God's grace. I felt like I had just come out from under a horrible burden when I was able to do that. Thank the Lord, at that point, I was obedient and obeyed the Lord. The result was that I grew in His grace, and I understood more about it.

The Call to Obedience

In this matter of obedience, think about other things we are told to do that we prefer not to do. When it gets in the way of our walk with the Lord, we simply need to pray and ask the Lord to give us the grace to overcome our reluctance.

What about fasting? Fasting is not fun. When we think about it, praise the Lord, our brother Kumar has mentioned it. We need to realize what fasting does: it is death to self.

May we take advantage of those opportunities to fast. In Matthew 6:16 it says, "Moreover when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, ..." Not *if* you fast, saints, but *when* you fast. It is a discipline of putting the flesh to death. Many times, the Lord can use fasting as a way of reminding us not only of the need to be obedient to His Word, but it is, in a sense, dying to the pleasure of eating. It is making that sacrifice for the Lord.

This idea of fasting is basically outlined in Matthew 9:15: "And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast." It is not a suggestion from Him; it is "when you fast."

So may the Lord help us. Personal fasting, prayer, and fasting disciplines are important. Again, we need to grow in grace, and we can when we resolve to do what the Lord tells us to do.

Conclusion

Finally, this growing in grace is not the practice of developing routines, thoughtless habits, or religious habits. We grow by appropriating Christ by faith to be our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption, our High Priest, our King, our hiding place, our shield, our defender, our exceeding great reward. Praise God! When we appropriate, when we realize, when we talk to the Lord as those things in our life, we see Him being so much more all-encompassing. It is a wonderful perception of the Lord to have. We cannot see enough of Him. Those are just some examples.

Titus 2:11-15: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee."

So again, folks, praise God. We cannot expect that the Lord will run out of grace. His supply is limitless. He will delight to give us grace. When we are in need, God will give the grace, but we need to ask, not to be proud. God resisteth the proud and gives grace to the humble. So, the third verse that I read earlier from John 16:15, I want to end with that.

John 16:15: "All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall transmit it unto you." His love and His mercy are everlasting. Thank the Lord.

Lord, we thank You so much for Your grace. We thank You so much, Lord, that You love us with an everlasting love. So, Lord, we do pray that You will strengthen us in Your ways, that we would desire, with all of our hearts, to be transformed into Your image and will not shrink back from making those sacrifices. Lord, what could we sacrifice when You have

sacrificed all? How we love You. We praise You. We thank You for Your great love. In Thy precious name, Amen.

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