

3

The Gift of Grace



If you could have a lifetime supply of any product, what would you choose?

QUESTION 1

#BSFLbroken

THE POINT

God's grace allows me to face anything life throws at me.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We can get too much of a good thing if we're talking about ice cream, coffee, or roller coasters. One thing, though, stands out as something we all could use in an endless supply.

Grace.

An unlimited supply of grace is available—and fully accessible. We're just not always aware of it. When our lives are going great, we often rest in those things that appear to make life great. But when the circumstances of life knock those props out from under us, what's left? Grace. Grace is there. God's grace was always there, but we become more acutely aware of it.

The life of the apostle Paul exemplified this awareness of grace. He faced numerous challenges and hard times, but he found great strength in the grace God poured out on him.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

2 Corinthians 12:2-7a (CSB)

² I know a man in Christ who was caught up to the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether he was in the body or out of the body, I don't know; God knows. ³ I know that this man—whether in the body or out of the body I don't know; God knows—⁴ was caught up into paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a human being is not allowed to speak. ⁵ I will boast about this person, but not about myself, except of my weaknesses. ⁶ For if I want to boast, I wouldn't be a fool, because I would be telling the truth. But I will spare you, so that no one can credit me with something beyond what he sees in me or hears from me, ⁷ especially because of the extraordinary revelations.

"Who do I have in heaven but you? And I desire nothing on earth but you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, my portion forever" (Psalm 73:25-26). Recently as I was reading and meditating on that passage, I found myself at peace. I experienced a genuine sense of joy in my heart. I wasn't faking it, nor was I trying to stir up emotions in my heart. Instead, I was deeply grateful that I could pray that passage as my own prayer.

Without God's grace, we would not know such joy, gratitude, or praise. Without God's grace, we would not be able to experience true and lasting joy in Christ. We would instead be endlessly seeking the next thrill—to our own demise. Without God's grace, greed—not gratitude—would fill our hearts, causing our attitude to be a desire to take from others, rather than giving out of our fullness in Christ. Lastly, without God's grace, we would be perpetually looking for ways to appease our guilt and remedy our stained conscience, rather than rejoicing and expressing gratitude because Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

How would you summarize Paul's experiences in these verses?

QUESTION 2

Without God's grace, Paul would not have experienced the visions and revelations of the Lord that he described in 2 Corinthians 12. False teachers were trying to convince the Corinthian church to follow them based on their own claimed visions and revelations of the Lord (2 Corinthians 11:4-14). Paul responded by sharing his own experience with visions and revelations, but he refused to boast about it. It would seem this was not an experience Paul talked openly about, since it happened 14 years earlier, and this appears to be the first time he spoke of it. And even now in telling of it, he spoke in the third person voice as though he were talking about someone else.

While describing this amazing experience, Paul—not wanting to boast—shared only the briefest of details. He did not elaborate on what was a private moment between him and the Lord. By doing so, Paul demonstrated to the Corinthian church that experiences like these are not prescriptive for all believers. This was a unique event and not one that others should necessarily expect to experience in order for God to use them in ministry.

Certainly, we should rejoice in any “mountaintop” moments where we feel especially drawn into the presence of God. But God's grace also comes to us in other ways. In fact, as we will see in the next section, it may be more typical to experience God's grace through difficulty and hardship.

2 Corinthians 12:7b-8 (CSB)

^{7b}Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not exalt myself. ⁸Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me.

Pride is a double-edged sword and the Bible has a lot to say about it. For instance, James 4:6 says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” So, how can we keep ourselves from landing on the wrong side of pride? How can we prevent pride from overtaking our hearts and infiltrating our souls?

What are some reasons God allows us to go through hardships?

QUESTION 3

For Paul, God used “a thorn in the flesh,” a “messenger of Satan” (v. 7). Paul gave us no more details regarding this sharp, painful, and persistent issue in his life. This thorn could have been his adversaries or the persecution he endured, but most scholars believe it was some type of physical condition ranging from eye or ear problems to malaria. We just don’t know. Whatever it was, this thorn was a hardship to his ministry at times (see Galatians 4:13-14). It was more than a mere annoyance because three times Paul prayed for God to take it away. The bottom line is that, while we don’t know just what this thorn in the flesh was, we do know it kept Paul humble before God. Therefore, Paul’s thorn in the flesh brought good into his life.

God can use adversity to bring about something profitable. This is hard to realize when the ground is falling out from underneath you. When your job is “downsized” just after you’ve relocated to a new state for it or your car breaks down for the third time in as many months, it’s difficult to see how God is going to use it for His good. But He does. He always does (Romans 8:28). You might not see the results immediately, but God, in His providence and sovereignty, will strengthen you through these hardships. He walks with us and comforts us. That’s grace.

God allows us to go through hardships because He has a plan and wants to do something in our lives. He wants to remove the pride from our hearts and replace it with His love, mercy, and goodness. In light of this truth, how should we approach hardships? We can pay attention to what God is doing in the midst of that situation.



"If the Lord be with us, we have no cause of fear. His eye is upon us, His arm over us, His ear open to our prayer—His grace sufficient, His promises unchangeable."

JOHN NEWTON

What are some appropriate ways to respond when God says "No" to our prayers?

QUESTION 4

HIS GRACE > OUR NEED



In what area of life do you most need God's grace right now?

What truth from today's study helps you trust in God's grace for this need?

In the space below, write out a brief prayer giving this need over to God.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (CSB)

⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.” Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may reside in me. ¹⁰ So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

We have a natural aversion to pain. In fact, we want to prevent all pain, not simply reduce it. Pain, however, can actually be a good thing. For example, the pain you feel when you touch a hot stove is a good thing because it causes you to jerk your hand away and out of danger.

Pain can also throw us into the arms of God. When we experience the pain of hardship—whether it was our fault or not—we discover God never leaves us (Hebrews 13:5). In fact, God often uses the pain of hardship to get our attention and reveal His grace and presence to us. After all, when Paul turned to God and pleaded for Him to remove his “thorn in the flesh,” the Lord responded, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness” (v. 9).

God’s grace is always sufficient. When you go through hardship, the same grace that was with Jesus (Luke 2:40) is with you. God’s grace and His power are bigger and greater than any evil, hardship, or trial that may come your way.

As a result, instead of boasting in your strengths, it is actually more advantageous to boast in your weaknesses. Paul came to this conclusion: “So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (v. 10). Paul’s is no false humility. Rather, this passage is actually exhorting you to accept hardships when they come because God wants to shape you through them and use the difficulties to make you strong in Him.

Through God’s help that comes by His grace, He will give you the strength to endure anything.



What has helped you discover that God’s grace is sufficient for your needs?

QUESTION 5

LIVE IT OUT

How will you choose to respond to God's grace?

- » **Give thanks for grace.** What hardship are you currently experiencing or have you most recently experienced? Thank God for His presence and grace in the midst of that difficulty.
- » **Look for grace.** Consider a recent hardship you encountered. How did God work in your life while going through that difficulty? Identify how God displayed His grace in that situation.
- » **Share grace.** Who in your life needs to experience the grace of God? Pray that God would intervene in the situation. Ask God to break the false hopes and false securities in that individual's life. Pray that God would use you to share the amazing message of the gospel's grace with him or her.

In Christ, we find an endless supply of grace. **And this grace is sufficient to meet all our needs.**



My thoughts