

Grace in the Christian Life

Grace—part 7

August 11, 2019

Of course grace is most often associated with salvation. But grace is also crucial for living the Christian life. This week, we'll discover the wonder of grace that makes our life distinct.

DAY 1: God's Purposes Through the Difficulties of Life

2 Corinthians 4:7 (RSV) But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.

⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;

⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

1. This life is sometimes very difficult! In vv.8-9, Paul gives us four examples of the types of difficulties we face. What are they?

2. As Christians, it's easy to wrongly assume that God will "fix" all our difficulties. Sometimes, He fixes our difficulties. But at other times He doesn't.

3. In the four examples of difficulties Paul mentioned, he tells us what his responses to each of these difficulties are. What are they? (Vv. 8-9)

4. You may wonder why God just doesn't fix all our difficulties. Is there something else God is trying to do through our difficulties? Besides the four items mentioned in vv. 8-9, Paul says there are two huge purposes God is achieving through your difficulties!

5. What is the first purpose? (v. 7)

a. Difficulties lead us to discover God's power for ourselves.

b. Difficulties lead others to discover God's power in us that is available to them!

6. What is the second purpose? (v. 10)

7. Here we learn that the life of Jesus is known through our difficulties! The life of Jesus is alive in every believer.

8. Through our difficulties we discover (1) the power of God, and (2) the life of Jesus.

DAY 2: The silver lining of “unanswered” prayer: discovering God’s power

2 Corinthians 12:7 (RSV) And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated.

1. The apostle Paul was shown aspects of heaven no one else has seen. He, like we, would be tempted to strut like a peacock. In order to help Paul be humble, Paul was given a hard difficulty.
2. Paul doesn’t spell out what his suffering was. Instead, he is descriptive. Notice his response.
2 Corinthians 12:8 (RSV) Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me;
3. It seems like a good prayer, doesn’t it?

2 Corinthians 12:9a (RSV) ...but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

4. This is all Paul records of God’s answer to his prayer. Nothing is said about the “thorn in the flesh.” Nothing is said about the “messenger of Satan.” Nothing is said about being “harassed.”
 - a. Instead of relief or a “fix,” what does God give?

b. What do you think God means by, “my power if made perfect in weakness?”

5. You’ve likely had similar answers to some of your prayers. Does an “unanswered” prayer come to your mind? What was your response?

6. Here’s Paul’s response, likely after initially being perplexed and confused.

2 Corinthians 12:9b (RSV) I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

7. Instead of the problem “thorn” being removed, what did Paul realize?

8. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 3: The silver lining of feeling weak...

1. This response to the thorn and “unanswered” prayer (unanswered in the way he initially wanted) had a wide-ranging effect on Paul!
2. It must have stunned him. Instead of just thinking about his “thorn in the flesh” he realized that God was pointing Paul to a principle that had a wide application, not just to his thorn!
3. He realized a deep truth that he could apply to virtually any difficulty he had! Notice the various kinds of difficulties he now associated with this truth!

*2 Corinthians 12:10 (RSV) For the sake of Christ, then, I am **content** with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

4. What did Paul realize?

5. Why was this more valuable than the eradication of his “thorn”?

6. And here is the astounding paradox. It’s not until we **feel** weak that we are motivated to rely on and lean on God for strength.

7. It is feeling weak that gives us “access” to God’s power!

8. Here’s the rub. I hate feeling weak! I see it as a “problem to solve”. I see it as a “spiritual deficiency”. “There’s something wrong with me!” RARELY DO I SEE IT AS PAUL SAW IT—AN OPPORTUNITY!!!!!!

9. How do you normally respond when you feel weak? What do you think? What do you do?

2 Corinthians 12:7 (RSV) And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. ⁸ Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me;

⁹ but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

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DAY 4: An eternal perspective, enabling us not to give up

1. When it comes to living life we “naturally” assume that we know what’s best, have an accurate perspective on God, on ourselves, on others, on life and relationships. We assume we don’t need anyone to tell us anything different than what we “know” and observe.

2. But the bible says that we are fallen. Our faculties to observe and draw accurate conclusions are faulty. (We are blindly biased).

Proverbs 26:12 (RSV) Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

3. The bible says we are “foolish” by nature.

4. Our human nature sees reality with distorted eyes. We see reality with finite eyes, not infinite.

1 Corinthians 13:12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

5. Jesus gives us this “heads up.”

John 7:24 (RSV) Do not judge by appearances but judge with right judgment.

6. Unfortunately, we are quick to judge by appearances, by our feelings, by our desires.

7. In contrast to this, notice how Paul sees reality.

2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

8. Upon what does Paul “fix his eyes”? (v. 18)

9. What is most important? What is only temporary or what is eternal? (vv. 17-18)

10. What is most important? How our body is “aging”, or what God is doing to shape our hearts and character? (v. 16)

11. All of this is important. One of those ways is that it allows us “not to lose heart” (v. 16). The inference is that it is much easier to lose heart trusting in your own, flawed perspective.

12. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 5: Our endurance allows others to see the power of Christ in us.

1. As Christians, we tend to unintentionally believe that now that we are Christians life will go well for us.

2. But that is not an ironclad biblical truth. Though in many instances our life is better because of knowing Christ, that does not necessarily mean that we will steer clear of hardships or suffering! In fact, we have scriptural promises guaranteeing difficulty.

2 Timothy 3:12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...

Philippians 1:29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,

3. These are a few scriptural promises we are not so quick to claim!

4. How should we think about difficulties?

2 Corinthians 4:7 (RSV) But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.

⁸ *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;*

⁹ *persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;*

¹⁰ *always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.*

5. We “naturally” see our difficulties as problems to solve, as dilemmas to fix.

6. Instead, what does Paul understand about difficulties?

7. There are two HUGE truths in this passage!

a. Truth #1: The treasure we have is **not** problem-free living. It is Christ living inside us! More specifically, His power resides in us (v. 7).

b. Truth #2: The reality of Jesus can be made known to others as they see us “navigate” our difficulties!

8. How do these two truths change how you should see your difficulties?