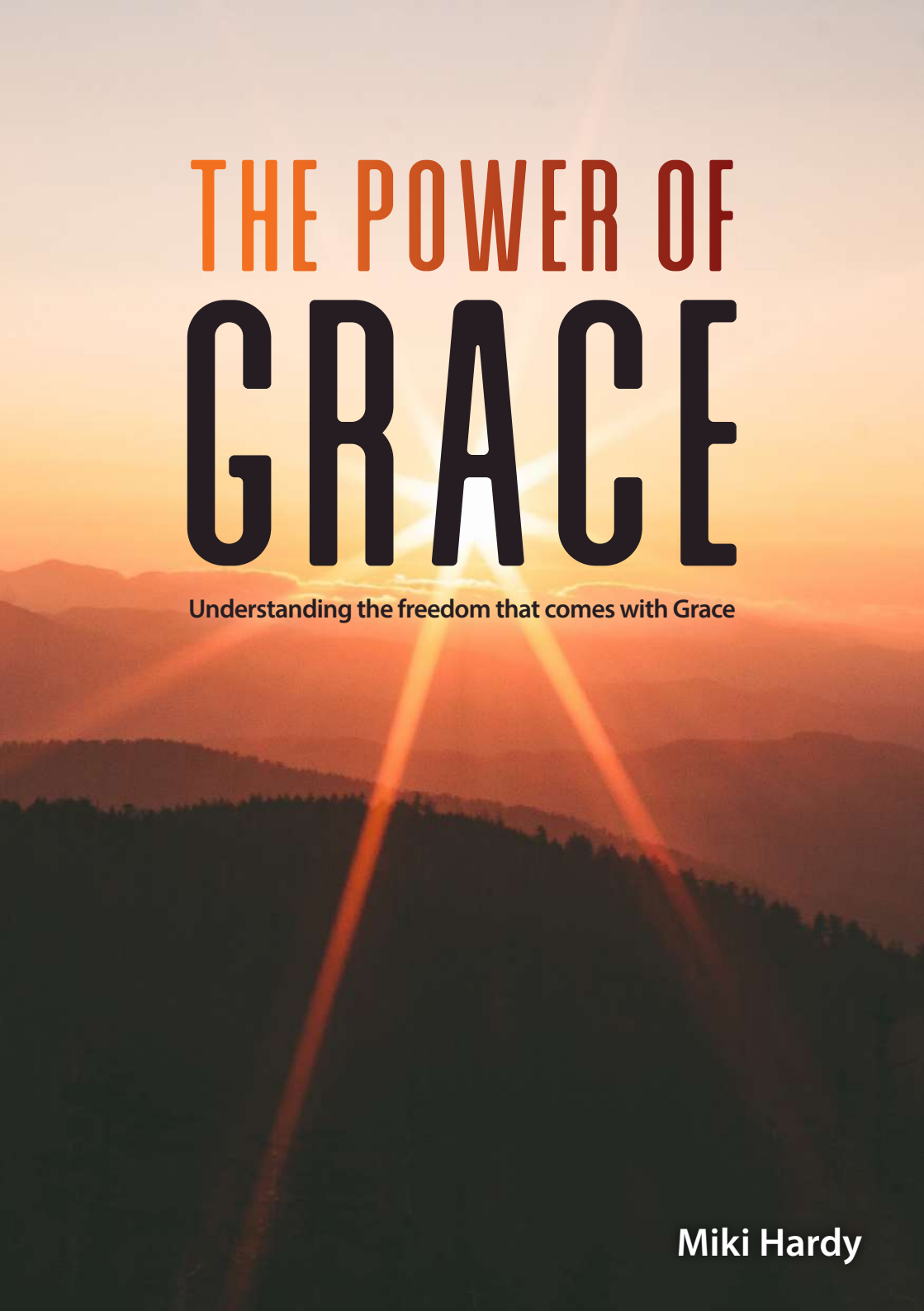




THE POWER OF GRACE

Understanding the freedom that comes with Grace

Miki Hardy

The Power of Grace

by Miki Hardy

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Chapter I

The Gift of Grace

All believers know the definition of the word 'grace' as 'unmerited favour from God', 'a gift that we do not deserve'. God does not need to save us and pour out His grace on our lives even though we may think we are good people.

Ephesians 2:8 says: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith"*. This scripture does not say that we are saved by faith but rather, by grace through faith *"and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast"*. There is no one, therefore, who can say that he has been saved because he was good, or has done something good, or because he himself looked for God. The gift of salvation is a grace from God. It is sad to see the number of Christians who have no gratitude for their salvation. They lead their lives as they want, even though they know that they have been chosen and called by God.

It was God who hand picked and chose us from a multitude of people; it did not require any effort on our behalf. Some of us are from families where we are the sole member who is saved. This is the grace of God. God in his mercy chose us and called us. Salvation comes entirely by grace. It is an election, a choice!

The apostle Paul confirms this in Philippians 1:29 when he says, *“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him...”* In other words, grace was given to us to believe in Christ.

Salvation is always the result of a choice on the part of God. It is difficult for us to understand why God would choose to save us, and yet there are no coincidences with God.

The Bible is clear. In Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul writes, *“We are saved by grace”*. Grace is the choice of God - and this is what is so difficult for us to accept, that one cannot believe and be saved without grace. Faith is the means to salvation. God needs to choose us first, for Him to give us the faith to believe. For all of us believers, God chose us first, He called us, set us apart, and then He made a way for us to hear the gospel. He gave us the desire to hear the gospel, to hear the good news.

The apostle Paul did not choose to be saved. He was a persecutor of the church. He was on a mission to persecute the church on the way to Damascus. He had no idea what salvation was all about and was certainly not looking for it! After being saved, he himself declares in Galatians how he was conscious that God had chosen him from his mother's womb. The choice of God was upon him and on the road to Damascus God powerfully saved him.

In 1 Timothy 1:12-14 we see how Paul acknowledges that his salvation came by grace followed by faith. He says, *“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus”*. Here is the man of God acknowledging that God has poured out His grace upon his life for him to believe. Isn't that wonderful?

It is very clear that grace is the source of salvation and that one cannot be saved without grace.

We need to understand the grace of God so that we can also understand what true salvation is. Wherever we may be, whoever we are, whatever ministry we might have today, it is purely because one day God chose us, poured out His grace on our lives, and we entered the kingdom of God, by Him and through Him.

In Ephesians 1:4 we read, *“...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved”*. The NIV puts it this way, *“...to the praise of his glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves.”* We see here that Paul declares that God chose us in Him before the creation of the world, and predestined us and that this choice was all by grace. It is difficult for us to understand that long before we were born, the hand of God was upon our lives, but it explains experiences we may have miraculously come through before we were saved, even potentially fatal accidents, where the protection of God was clearly upon us.

John 6:44;65 *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him [...] No one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father”*

Therefore we should never be tempted to believe that we have done anything to deserve our salvation or that we have played even the smallest part in it. It is not because we have helped people in the past, or been involved in a few goodwill associations, or done many good things in our lives, that we are saved. This would be deception.

Our salvation has nothing to do with us. We are saved by grace, and grace alone!

Chapter II

Depending on God's Grace

Having looked at the grace of God as a gift, we now need to look at the power of the grace of God.

Man has a natural tendency to do things in his own strength and trust in his own ability, but we as Christians need to learn to depend on the grace of God and understand that in our Christian life, there is nothing we can do without God's grace.

Today there are many humanistic teachings, which encourage man to trust and depend on his own ability. Even in the church, Christians are encouraged to rely on themselves, their intelligence, their Bible knowledge, and their organisational skills. We can also see a tendency in the church to imitate the world's way of doing things in order to accomplish God's work. This is certainly not the way of Christ, nor the plan of God for His church.

The power of grace is a divine strength, the miraculous intervention of God in our lives to enable us to do that which He has called us to. This grace is part of our inheritance, and experiencing the power of God's grace should be an everyday reality for Christians. This was a reality in the life of Paul who fully understood that if he wanted to do something for the Lord, it would have to be by God's grace. That is why he had such great success in his ministry. Paul owed his entire ministry to the grace of God and he had no problem in acknowledging it, as we see in 1 Corinthians 15:10, *"But by the*

grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me”.

As Christians we have to learn to depend on the grace of God, especially if we are ministers, pastors or leaders of churches. We also need to learn to relinquish control in every situation and allow the grace of God to take over.

Too often in the ministry, we have a tendency to rely on ourselves to undertake what God is asking of us, even in small things, instead of depending on His grace. As a result we end up using our own strength, capabilities, and knowledge, to accomplish what God has called us to. The result is that we are depriving ourselves of His grace, which is the worst position to be found in. It is therefore hardly surprising that before long we find ourselves with no more strength, burned out and not achieving the desired results. The reason is simple, we cannot build God's kingdom in our own strength because His kingdom is spiritual, and we cannot use natural ways to build a spiritual house. God gives us His grace to carry out and accomplish what He places in our hearts to do.

Remember what God said in Zechariah 4:6, *“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit”*. This scripture is followed in the next verse by the words *“Grace, Grace to it”*. One of the reasons God said this is because He knows that each time He gives us the opportunity to do something for Him, we tend to do it in our own strength. The apostle Paul understood this truth. His life demonstrated his total dependence on God's grace. In Corinthians, Paul recounts his discussion with God about the thorn in his flesh, and his plea to be delivered. Three times he cried to God. The third time God reminded him that there is only one way to serve Him, and that is by His grace.

I personally believe that the apostle Paul was fearful at times during his ministry. It is clear in the scriptures that he had a thorn in the flesh. In his

desire to serve God, which was his only purpose in life, he felt that this thorn in the flesh might somehow be a handicap to him, and he cried to God to deliver him. However, God allowed situations to occur in Paul's life and wanted him to understand that it was by grace, and grace alone, that he was called to serve Him. When God said to him, *"My grace is sufficient for you"*, He was in fact telling him, 'I have called you, and even if you carry this thorn in your flesh during the whole of your ministry, My grace, My divine strength, will always be there for you to accomplish that which I have called you to'. Paul reminds Timothy, in 2 Timothy 2:1, *"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"*. He was saying to Timothy, 'don't rely on your own strength when you know there is a reservoir of grace for you'. Paul knew what Timothy would have to face. Every Christian will have to face difficult times and experiences in life if he wants to serve God in the Spirit. He will need to draw from the reservoir of God's grace to go through these times and accomplish whatever God calls him to.

There is a world of difference between doing God's work in the Spirit and doing it in our natural strength. When you draw from God's grace, you accomplish His plan in the Spirit. The moment you cease to depend on the grace of God, you are in the flesh; then your mind and your strength take over and you will soon be at the end of yourself. Trying to accomplish the work of God in your own strength is guaranteed to draw more from you than you have in reserve. The many pastors today who suffer from burnout are evidence of this fact.

I believe that God wants to restore the revelation of His grace to the church in a deeper way. There is a very fine line between the spiritual and the natural realms. If you draw from, and depend on your own strength, you walk in the flesh. If you draw from God's grace, you walk in the Spirit. This is a revelation that the church needs to catch, to start and then continue depending on the power of His grace. It is also important to distinguish between this grace

and grace as a gift. Grace, as a gift, is for those who do not know God to receive salvation. They need the gift of grace to enter the kingdom of God. Once we are in the kingdom of God, we become children of God, we are part of the family of God, and now the power of grace is available for us to walk with Him and to serve Him.

The Bible says in the gospel of John 1:17, *“For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”*. So when Jesus died on the cross, grace was given. Until then, grace was only available to a few and for specific purposes. Now, under the New Covenant, the power of grace is available for every Christian to draw from, and to enable him to serve the Lord in the way the Lord wants. How does God want us to serve Him? In the Spirit! I believe that when the church and every Christian serve God by grace, and grace alone, things will be very different.

If we look at 1 Corinthians 15:10, we see that Paul had fully grasped this revelation and this ensured the success in his ministry. *“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain”*. He carries on with this statement, *“But I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me”*. Here is a mature, spiritual man who is fully aware that he is who he is by God’s grace alone. He says that he works harder than anyone, yet not him, but the grace of God with him. There cannot be many who are unaware of the success of the apostle Paul in the ministry. We know about his life from the Bible, and the epistles to the Corinthians give many details. Paul needed the grace of God in his ministry to face everything he had to go through, as well as to be able to preach the word of God with power.

Paul also says about his ministry in 1 Corinthians 2:4, *“And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power”*. In other words, he is saying

that he does not depend on his knowledge or his natural wisdom when preaching the gospel. Paul carried divine revelation and his attitude was, 'I'm not interested in coming to talk to you about God or Jesus with my human wisdom, but I am coming to you with a demonstration of the Spirit and power', *"that your faith might not depend on the wisdom of man, but on the power of God"*.

It is so easy to preach the gospel in our own strength. Once we have preached the same sermon five times, we virtually know it by heart. We just have to go through it step by step! Even if we were under the anointing of God the first time we preached it, the second time it is so easy to depend on ourselves and on what we know we have preached before.

As preachers we can keep all our sermons together, neatly filed, and sit back and depend on all those notes. There must be many preachers who have already experienced and felt that somehow there is not much life in their preaching. The reason is simple; it is because they have failed to draw on the reservoir of grace. They have not depended on their inheritance (the power of the grace of God) but on their notes, their natural talents and abilities.

There are also many people who are gifted in speaking well and their audience enjoy listening to them. However, the kingdom of God cannot be built by charisma; only the Spirit of God can build it. Do you see how one can depend on so many things other than the power of grace to minister?

Listen to what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:6, *"... who also made us sufficient as Ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life"*. Paul talks here about ministering in the Spirit instead of ministering the letter of the word. The moment that one ceases to draw and depend on the Spirit and on His grace, one moves from the spiritual realm to the natural one. Thus we find ourselves serving

God, preaching the word, talking about God without transmitting life, and without anointing. The apostle Paul had caught that revelation, and we too are called to experience the same thing; the power of grace in our lives and in our service for God.

This is an exciting way to live; yet the church has so often drawn from the world and from its own natural inheritance instead of from the power of God's grace. A person can be very talented, but talent in the natural does not bear fruit in the Spirit.

So let us acknowledge our need to stop serving God and doing His work in our own strength, but learn to depend on Him and on His grace instead.

Chapter III

The revelation of God's Grace produces faith

Faith is what rises up in us when we believe and know that God's grace is available for us. It is the assurance that when we step out in faith, God will release His grace to enable us to do what He wants us to do.

Many times we do not have enough faith for lack of the revelation of grace, and it prevents us from moving and living by faith. We cannot trust God fully until the revelation of grace catches hold of our hearts. When grace becomes real, we know that every time we need something extra from God, that divine intervention, we can step out in faith and serve Him wholeheartedly. Grace is something that our minds cannot comprehend. It needs to become a revelation, and when that revelation comes into our hearts, nothing can stop us.

When we look at the life of the apostle Paul, we see that the revelation of grace in his life enabled him to do things that in the natural he would never have been able to.

In the previous chapter, we talked about grace in the ministry, how when we serve God we need to depend on His grace. However, not only do we need grace while serving the Lord in ministry, we also need it each day of our lives for everything.

How many of us are tempted in life? How many of us go through testing and trials? How many of us go through suffering? Without the grace of God, we cannot go through these times. It is impossible in our own strength. We need to understand that we cannot separate the Christian life from testing and trials, suffering and persecution; all these form part of the Christian life.

In Hebrews 10:32 the author of the book reminds the Christians of their state of heart when they were first born again. *“But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings; partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion in me on my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven”*. They were ready to face persecution, to suffer with Christ and to put their lives on the altar. They did not hold onto their lives. For these Christians what they experienced was normal and natural. They knew how to draw from the grace of God that was being manifested all the time.

It is amazing how many Christians today understand the Christian life to be only good, happy and easy times. We need to understand that the Christian life is a mixture of easy and hard times, of good and bad times. That is why we need the grace of God.

A careful reading of the New Testament shows us that we cannot separate the Christian life from hard times, suffering, difficulties and times of testing and trials. Even in the Old Testament we see that those who served God had to face the same thing. Their lives were completely given to God, and the grace of God was always there to help them obey Him right to the end.

How much more are we able, under the New Covenant, to overcome when we know that grace came through Jesus Christ, and that this grace is

available to us? Surely this is what Paul was talking about in Romans 8:28 when he said, *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God"*. I believe that in this passage Paul is clearly saying that all things will come right, that He will turn everything around for good. For God to turn a situation around for good, it obviously must have been bad in the first place!

Today the church needs to understand that the Christian life is not just being happy all the time, going to church and praising the Lord, but also having to face hard times. The apostle Paul knew this. He says in 2 Corinthians 12:9, *"I will rather boast in my infirmities"*. How can we depend on God's grace, if we believe that we are strong and that we can do it? If we can do it ourselves, then why would we need the grace of God? Yet Paul says, *"I will rather boast in my infirmities"*. The NIV says, *"I glory in my weaknesses"*. Here is a man who knows that in every situation he faces, he cannot depend upon himself.

Two verses earlier, in verse 7, Paul states *"And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong"*.

How many Christians today boast about their weaknesses? How many declare 'I am weak, but His grace in me makes me strong'? So many Christians are taught and believe that admitting their weaknesses is a sign of defeat. In verse 9 Paul says, *"And He said to me 'My grace is sufficient for you'"*. God's grace is sufficient in all dangers, troubles and circumstances. His grace enables us to stand in these times. His strength and power are

made perfect and complete and show themselves to be more effective when we are weak in ourselves. This is the state we need to be in, so that His grace may be manifested.

In verse 10, Paul continues his argument by saying: “*Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses*”. He is basically saying, ‘I’m content in them; I don’t try to evade them. I know that through them the grace of God, this divine power and strength from God, will be available and will give me the victory’. This is the same point that Paul is making in Romans 8:28 “...*all things work together for good...*”. What is this ‘good’ he is talking about? It is the victory!

What deception it is just to pretend by so called ‘faith’ that we are strong. Our strength should be in the grace of God, which will be manifested every time we need it. Paul is essentially saying that he glories in his difficulties; he is at peace in them and embraces them, because he knows that he can trust God in them. He can trust God to give him the strength and the power to accomplish what He wants him to do, and to go through, and emerge victorious from whatever situation he finds himself in. He is saying, ‘when the enemy surrounds me, when persecution hits me, when I am insulted for the gospel, when I am opposed, when everything goes wrong, I glory in all these things’. Somewhere in his heart, the apostle Paul knew that when these things came against him, because of the gospel, it confirmed that he was in the will of God.

If we go back to the passage in Hebrews 10:32-34, the same point is emphasised. The Hebrews were ready to suffer for their faith because of “*a better and an enduring possession*”. This word ‘suffering’ is a word that we hardly hear in the church today. Very often the attitude is, ‘Why should I suffer? Why should I go through hard times? Why? He’s done it all! The Bible says He has accomplished all!’.

Yes, this is the victory, the fact that Jesus has accomplished all for us. However nothing in the Bible supports the view that the Christian life is easy. The apostle Paul declared that in every situation and circumstance there is victory. By 'victory' he does not mean a trouble free life, but on contrary, overcoming trouble. There is a vast difference between accepting the will of God, allowing His grace to carry us through, and just declaring or confessing something positive.

We need to understand that we are called to serve the Lord in every circumstance, whatever it may be, whether good or bad, whether it makes us rejoice or cry. Whatever the situation we should serve the Lord willingly. There are many circumstances that we cannot run away from, or try to bypass. It is so easy to regard them as the work of the enemy. However we should know that when we serve God, the enemy is not in control. When we serve God, take up our cross and follow Him, we are walking in victory no matter what the circumstances of life. We can rejoice in them because we are standing in the grace of God.

It is almost impossible to have faith in every circumstance without the revelation of grace. For without it, we would often be unable to take a step forward, because fear would overcome us. The understanding that the grace of God is always available gives us the confidence to say, 'yes it is hard, yes we cannot do it on our own but by His grace we have faith in the final outcome'. Faith, therefore, is the revelation that we can draw from His grace. You cannot separate faith from grace. If you only have faith without grace, you enter into the natural realm. You will then believe that you must confess things to make them happen!

The Christian life then becomes very difficult. You already have burdens to carry, but now you add to them by having to memorize scriptures and confess them! We cannot learn to live the Christian life; neither can we use

the wisdom of man to accomplish what God wants. It is a life that is lived from the heart out of a true relationship with the Lord, depending on His grace. Good organisers are not necessarily men of the Spirit, if they rely and depend only on their organisational skills. The only way to serve God is to depend on His grace at all times.

How many of us believe Paul was a man of faith? Yet when we study his life it might appear to be a defeated one. Looking at it we may be tempted to be afraid. Who would want that kind of life! Yet at the same time the man is saying in 2 Corinthians 12:10, 'I rejoice, I glory in these weaknesses. I'm glad when I'm weak, because when I'm weak I can't depend upon myself, I need to depend on Him. I need to stand and trust Him and draw from that grace'. This is the wonderful grace of God in action. This is the Spirit of Christ and the heart of the apostle Paul. This is what he wanted to convey to the church.

The heart of his understanding was that the true Christian life is one where you cannot separate walking with God from testing, trials, sufferings, persecution, and whatever comes your way. When you walk with God, your life is on the altar, and you need the grace of God in every situation. These things are part of the life of the church, and I honestly believe that if they are not, we are missing it somewhere along the line.

We need to ask God to help us understand and accept that the Christian life is not always about good, happy times, and the blessings. It is a life that you lay on the altar, knowing that God's grace is right there.

Chapter IV

Divine Strength from God in times of need

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Christian life will never be easy. It will never be the kind of life where we just have to press a button, or say a word, or learn a few scriptures and everything will be fine.

We do not see this in the life of Jesus, his disciples, the apostle Paul or the church in the book of Acts. When you feel the heart of Paul in the scriptures, it is clear that the man is encouraging the church to trust God as they will need His grace today, tomorrow, next week, and every day of their lives.

Once again we cannot believe that we can just press a button, or even cast out a demon somewhere, and it will make everything okay. The church needs to accept the fact that grace is there for the purpose of helping us through these times, because God will use these times to break us, change us, equip us and strengthen us for His service.

The church cannot carry on serving God by choosing the easy way out. We need to learn to serve Him with His life, not by manipulating scripture or trying to make things happen. It is time for us to understand that victory comes when we have faith in the grace of God, faith to step out knowing that His grace is there. It is a great key to overcoming in everyday life.

In our daily life we are continually tempted, and anyone who pretends that he is not, deceives himself. We only have to look around us at what the world can offer. God has made provision for us to live victoriously in the 21st century where sin abounds as never before!

We need to be careful not to become discouraged or envious, comparing ourselves to the Christians of two centuries ago when iniquity was not at work to the extent it is today. It is more of a challenge today, and yet God is restoring His people to understand the revelation of grace, so that every time we face temptations we are confident that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear. What good news!

In 1 Corinthians 10:13 Paul declares, *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man”*. Why does Paul say that temptation is common to man? Because we live in the flesh and the same temptations are common to all flesh. Sin dwells in the flesh, and the temptations of the flesh try to draw us away from God and into sin.

But here is the good news! We must look at the grace that God provides instead of looking at the temptation. Consider what Paul is saying, *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.”* This is exciting! *“...beyond what you are able...”* It is clear. We can do our part, but it is limited because of the flesh. We can have the desire to walk in the righteousness of God but at the same time our flesh desires to sin and go the way of the world. The reality is that temptation is all around us.

The world entices us all the time with offers appealing to the flesh but dangerous to our spirits. Temptation becomes a natural part of life for us as Christians. We are not called to run away from the world but on the contrary, we are called to be in the world without being of the world. We cannot avoid these temptations we need to face them. But praise God, we are not called

to face them in our own strength or depend on our knowledge of the Bible. Even if we know a verse of scripture that applies to that particular situation, it will not help us much at that moment, if we are depending on our strength. We will still need the power of His grace to see us through. Just as we see that we are going to stumble and sin, what do we do? I believe that every Christian, if he is sincere with God, will feel the Holy Spirit there, telling him 'no', every time the flesh is saying 'yes'.

This is the time for us to turn to God and go back to the reservoir of grace. Look at what Paul says in the second part of verse 13, *"But with the temptation (God) will also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it"*. What do we do? We can run away, as Joseph ran from Potiphar's wife. It is fine to run away but there's a better way under the New Covenant. The way of grace! Grace, this supernatural strength that God gives us when the flesh wants us to take the way of sin. When the Spirit of God in us says 'no' and the flesh says 'yes', we can cry to God and ask Him to give us His strength at that moment. When it is too hard and we cannot stand anymore, when the world is right there, what do you think God will do? The God of all compassion will pour out His grace and you will feel that strength, that divine power, enabling you to overcome. The grace of God will take over and help you make a one hundred and eighty degree turn and say, 'No I won't do it, I want to please God'.

What does God mean when He says that when you are tempted He will also provide a way out? What is that way? It cannot be a natural one, because whether you turn to the left, to the right, or look straight ahead, the same thing will still be facing you. You can turn your back on it, but it will still be there. This is temptation and you cannot avoid it.

The way that God provides is a spiritual one. He is the One who provides it. Grace came through Jesus Christ. The reservoir is there. Remember what Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1 *"...be strong in the grace that is in*

Christ Jesus”, that divine power, the grace of God! I am sure that we have all come through situations and afterwards asked ourselves in amazement, ‘How did I do it? In the midst of that situation, others fell but I stood?’. It was God who gave you the grace to overcome. This is the true victory that God has for all of us!

You may ask, ‘Preacher, does this mean we will never sin?’ No, of course not. You will not always win, but you must remember that the grace of God will always be there.

I am sure you have had the experience that I have had many times. You switch on the television and are faced with an immoral scene. What do you do? What does your flesh tell you to do? Your flesh starts to react and even though all you need to do is change channels or turn off the television, you find you cannot do it in your own strength, because when the flesh takes over, you do not stand a chance. There is only one thing you can do, cry out to God and say, ‘God I need you now!’, turn to Him and cry, ‘Lord, I need you, give me your grace’. At that very moment something rises up in you and you become like a lion, because the grace of God, that divine power of God, has empowered you, and you are able to turn that television off.

Let us look at the situation from another angle. As soon as you watch the television and see these things going on, if you believe you are strong enough in yourself to resist and overcome it, before you know it, you’ve lost the battle and find yourself still watching. If you think you can do it on your own, you are a loser. If you know you cannot, you are a winner. The moment you realise that you are unable, and understand that you are weak and cannot depend on yourself, the grace of God takes over, and you become strong. That is your strength. When you are weak, it is then that you are strong. His strength gives you the victory and the glory goes to Him. It is exciting when we no longer have an attitude of heart that says: ‘I can do it’.

Let us look at another aspect of the strength that God's grace supplies. In Philippians 4:11 Paul says, *"Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content"*.

'What is this now?' you say. 'I've learned to be content in all circumstances in life? I know what it is to be in need? To be in need? No way! I cast out the spirit of poverty! Me, lacking something? I resist that demon! To be in need? Me? A child of the living God? A King's kid! To be in need? I won't accept that! I rebuke that spirit of need in the name of Jesus, right now!' This is not the Spirit of the gospel.

This is the kind of Christianity that just wants to press a button! You press the button and think everything will be fine. No partaking in, or fellowshiping with the sufferings of Christ, no identification with His death. You only want the good things because you are 'kids of the King'. Yet what does the man who carries the revelation of Christ, the man who writes the epistles to the churches, have to say? As we read in Philippians 4:12, he says, *"I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound"*. The NIV says, *"what it is to be in need and what it is to have plenty"*. At this point there is something that needs to be made clear. We cannot make a doctrine either about prosperity or poverty, or about need or plenty. Need or plenty, which one would you choose? Of course you would choose plenty, but at times the apostle Paul had to live without.

Let us look at how he dealt with that. He said, 'God, I am in need, but at this time, I know your grace is sufficient for me'. This is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of the New Covenant. This is the Spirit that was in Christ, and that motivated the disciples, the church of Jerusalem and the churches of the New Testament, and enabled them to carry on serving God regardless of their circumstances. Therefore we cannot make a doctrine about either prosperity or poverty. Our doctrine should be this: God is on the throne,

and if He decides to bless and prosper us, praise Him, but this does not mean every Christian will be rich. With so much emphasis being placed on prosperity in the church at large today, this may sound a little strange to some people, but it is the truth of the Bible.

Paul goes on to say in verse 12, “... *I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content*”. This is an interesting statement coming from a man who is in prison. Look at how he reacts to this situation. Does he enter into a spiritual warfare? What do you think he does, this man of faith, who understands the grace of God? He praises the Lord because he knows that the Lord will deliver him. Does he not say boldly to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:17-18, “*But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me... And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me...*” And indeed God did deliver him!

In all circumstances Paul’s heart is content. He goes on to say, “*Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need*”. Here is the key... “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*”. In other words, I can accept having nothing. He is saying, ‘I can trust in the grace of God to carry me through this time of need. I can stand firm in all situations, I can be content in every circumstance of life’.

This is the spirit of Christ. What a wonderful way to live in victory!

Chapter V

His Grace is sufficient

I believe the church needs to understand that without grace believers will never be able to reach the goal of their Christian life. In the same way that without faith it is impossible to please God, without grace we will never finish the race. We need the grace of God every day.

In the previous chapter, we studied Philippians 4 where the apostle Paul talks about his experiences. When we look at the way he lived, it is clear that it was the fruit of the revelation of the gospel that he carried in his heart. His life was an expression of what he believed and preached so much so that he could say to the church, in 1 Corinthians 11:1, *“follow me as I am a follower of Christ”*. (NIV)

Not only should we study his life but we should also desire to follow his example and have the same attitude as he had towards the Christian life. With such an attitude of heart towards all he faced it is not surprising to hear him say in Philippians 4:13, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”*. He knows that the grace of God will be sufficient for him to face the testing, trials and hardships of life.

So often our attitude is the opposite. Let us take a very simple example. We need something, and our first reaction is to cry to God and expect Him to give it us immediately. It does not even cross our minds that it might not be the will of God to give us; in which case He might have a purpose and a

plan in the situation. We can even go as far as using scripture to justify our attitude in assuming that God is obliged to meet that need. Our first reaction therefore is to seek God so that He might provide for us. Paul, who is man of faith, knows that God can provide, but he also knows that sometimes God will give him the grace to go through a time of need instead of providing for the specific need at that time. Hebrews 4:16 declares, *“... that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

This is a wonderful part of God’s truth, but because of our lack of revelation, we want God to meet that need NOW, and often without realising it, we act as if God were a bank! When we need a hundred dollars, we go to the bank or ATM and withdraw the amount. It is simple! But here, we are looking at the grace that God gives us, instead of meeting the need itself at that particular time.

There are also occasions where it is not yet the time for Him to give us what we need and He gives us the grace to wait until His perfect time comes. Our most common attitude is to want it now. It is so much simpler and easier to have it now. Press a button and it comes instantly!

In Philippians 4:10-13 we saw the apostle Paul saying, *“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things...”*

It is clear, therefore, that there are times that God will give us the grace and strength to go through a time of need, but what counts during this time, is keeping a joyful heart that praises Him. The Christian life does not depend on whether I have or don’t have, whether I am rich or poor, living in Europe or Africa, have an empty or full bank account; it should make no difference, as the important thing is Christ living in and through me. God is not looking

at our bank accounts, though He does bless people so that they can in turn bless the Kingdom.

Of course, there are times when God provides immediately and we are grateful for His provision.

When you look at the life of the apostle Paul who says, *“Follow me as I follow Christ”* (NIV) you can see that his life and his understanding are quite different from that of the average Christian in this day and age. We need to grasp how God wants us to live our Christian life today, with all that is going on around us in the world. We are living in a time where Satan is making plans to deceive Christians. We must be wise, as we are warned in the epistles that deception will be one of the greatest attacks on the church in the last days. The church should be careful not to put the emphasis on miracles and healings as this can be dangerous, and Christians will not grow and mature.

When we look at a man whose life is changing, a man who is being shaped into the image and character of Christ, a man who is following God and experiencing His grace, we can follow and imitate him because it is evident that he is following Christ. He has obviously caught the Spirit of the gospel.

We must also be careful today that we are not just busy organising our church, building our facilities, and feeling so comfortable, that we evade the real purpose of the Christian life. We need to catch the revelation of the true gospel that draws men and women to give their lives to Christ, and to serve Him by His grace. We can be so busy building our little kingdoms, our own churches, being so happy about what we have and looking at outward appearances, that we forget that God looks at the heart of man. That is why it is challenging to work in places like Africa and India. You go to some places where there isn't even a roof over your head while you preach the gospel. Yet the wonderful thing is, the hearts of these people are so open

to the true gospel, that we see God doing great things in their lives. Despite their poverty and all it entails, they find their joy in serving the Lord. However, so many Christians, even leaders, are thrown when things don't work out as they want and they panic. This is a clear sign of immaturity.

Let us take another look at the life of Paul. Does he seem to you to have had a successful life? Was he a man of faith? Did he live a defeated life or was he a victorious man? He suffered for the gospel, he was persecuted and constantly opposed, and yet he defended the gospel. When you carry the true gospel of the cross of Jesus Christ you will always be opposed. Always! We have had times, as a church, when we were very persecuted for what we preached and the way we lived. The truth is, when you are preaching the message of the cross, you are doing God's will, and people will be challenged. Lives will be confronted and changed. Therefore, it is not surprising that you are persecuted, and surrounded by enemies with people talking against you as it was in Paul's case. But His grace will be sufficient and you will stand strong. When your life is on the right foundation, drawing from the grace of God, keeping your heart right before God, His peace and joy will fill your heart. This is one of the greatest revelations that Paul carried in his heart. He had the full revelation of the power of grace.

In 2 Corinthians 11:21 Paul writes, *"To our shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold – I speak foolishly – I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? – I speak as a fool – I am more: in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the*

wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness – besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.”

In essence he is saying ‘I am more of a servant of God than all of them’ and he explains why, *“I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently... I have been cold and naked... in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently,... in cold and nakedness.”* I don’t know about you, but that is not what I would call a life of prosperity, and yet Paul says ‘I am more of a servant of God than all of them’. He is actually saying here that his life and the very things he went through qualified him to be more of a servant of God than the other apostles. That must be new to many of you!

“...besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.”

Paul is saying that if he has to boast, he will boast in the things that expose his weakness. We must beware of teachings that do not allow us to admit our weaknesses, because it is in our weaknesses that God shows Himself to be strong. It is in our weakness that God’s grace takes us and gives us His victory. Therefore, it is never you, or I, but always Him. His grace is always sufficient.

When Paul says, *“I can do all things...”* you now understand the heart of the man, and the gospel he carried, his attitude. He does not boast that he can do things in his own strength. He says, *“I can do all things through Christ*

who strengthens me” or in other words, because God’s grace was sufficient for him.

In 2 Corinthians 6:3 we read, *“We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness...”* What a life! Yet this man says, ‘Follow me because I’m following Him’. He invites believers to imitate his lifestyle, encouraging them to understand that God’s grace will always be sufficient.

In Philippians 3:10 he says, *“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.”* Paul knew the power of the grace of God. He was opposed and persecuted for the gospel that he not only preached, but also lived.

When we look at 2 Corinthians 6:9, *“...as unknown, and yet well known, as dying, and behold we live, as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things”*.

He says that viewing the Christian life in this light, it may be regarded as defeat, but in reality it is a victory. How rich to experience the grace of God as we live a life in the Spirit! Here is a man who knows what he carries in his heart and truly understands the provision of God’s grace, unending, unfailing and always there!

Chapter VI

Serving God in freedom

God is calling us to obey Him but this will be difficult if we have not caught the revelation of grace in our hearts. Real freedom is serving God in obedience even though we face difficulties, hardship or need. We can still have joy because of the knowledge that everything has a purpose.

Let us look again at the example in 2 Corinthians 6. One of the arguments people have about the sufferings of Paul is that he was able to face hardships and persecutions because he was called as an apostle, so what he went through was unique to him. However, we need to understand that it is not the experiences of Paul that we are speaking of, but the attitude that he had towards them. We are all called to have the same heart attitude in order to live this kind of life. There is great freedom in accepting the purpose of God for our lives. The key is to have the assurance that we are taking up our cross and following Him whole-heartedly. On this road the devil cannot touch us and God is in full control of our lives. It is true that most of us will never be shipwrecked or beaten the way he was but that is not the issue. The point is that in our Christian lives we will have to face difficulties and we must always bear in mind that if God allows them, they are for our good.

It is such a shame to miss out on the blessing of God because we have run away; how much better it would be to draw on His grace in those hard times, so that when we come through them, we are stronger in Him. We need to go through these times of hardship with God to experience the reality of His

grace. This was not just for the apostle Paul or ‘super spiritual’ men of God but it is for every Christian. We must know and accept the Christian life in its fullness, and not just desire the good things.

Philippians 1:27 says, *“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries...”*

The apostle Paul encourages the church to keep the faith, carry the gospel and not to run away from trials, but to stand firm in the true spirit of the gospel. He continues in verse 28 by saying, *“...which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear in me”*. Paul encourages us to have the same heart as he has and to be ready for anything. He is urging us, the church, to have an attitude of heart where we are ready to partake in Christ’s sufferings in whatever circumstance or situation God allows to come our way. This is important for every one of us to understand because as soon as we accept this truth we become free and so are able to rejoice in our identification with Christ.

If we sincerely want to serve Jesus we must take up our cross and follow Him. We cannot avoid difficult circumstances; suffering is part of the normal Christian life. The plan of God is different for each of us. We can never compare ourselves to others, thinking our life is more difficult, because God knows what is good for us as individuals.

It is amazing that God instructed Abraham to take Isaac, the son of the promise, and to sacrifice him on the altar. God asked Abraham to sacrifice the very son in whom the promise dwelt. Hebrews 11:17-19 tells us that Abraham obeyed because he had faith. It also says that Abraham believed that God would resurrect Isaac from the dead, if he were to die, and that somehow the grace of God would be manifested.

Each one of us has his own time of testing, trial, or suffering to face. We need to partake of His sufferings in order to know Him, and for our fellowship with Him to be deeper. Paul says in Philippians 3:10, *"I want to know Him"* (NIV) Do you want to know Him? Paul shows us the way - in the fellowship of His sufferings. I do not know what you are going through at present but you cannot run away and say, 'Suffering is not for me'. You need to be ready to deny yourself, take up your cross, and walk the road that God has purposed for you. That is the simplicity of the gospel. I strongly believe that the church must come back to the reality and simplicity of the true gospel.

It is also an honour to share in the sufferings of Christ. This is mentioned concerning the disciples in Acts 5:41 *"...so they departed from the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."* It is a privilege to identify with His death so that we can partake in His life. You will never experience the resurrection life until you partake in His death. With His life you can serve Him. You cannot put a price on this experience. With this truth in your heart you can face things that are impossible for a man to face in his own wisdom or strength.

There was a time when the apostle Paul did not know what he would have to go through, even though from the time of his conversion, he knew he was called by God to serve Him and preach the gospel. However, in the course of his life, revelation came to his heart about the way in which he needed to offer his life and to identify with Christ. He was ready to accept this. In Acts 20:22-24 we see that Paul was prepared to travel to Jerusalem and face imprisonment, even though he had been warned beforehand of the implications. He was ready to die because he had come to the point where the revelation in him was so strong that it consumed his whole life.

In Colossians 1:24 Paul says, *"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the Church,"*. The NIV reads *"If I have to add to the sufferings*

of Christ ... for the sake of His body, which is the church". Do you realise what he is saying here? He knew that Christ's sufferings were complete and that He had accomplished everything on the cross. But he was willing, if it were necessary, to take part in further suffering, and even lay down his life, for the benefit of the church. This was the extent of his heart and life for the gospel.

We must return to the true, simple gospel, where our lives are no longer ours, and we depend completely on God's grace. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:10, *"who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us"*. He knows that it is not finished.

When we experience God's grace, it is one of the closest times of fellowship we can have with Him because our life is in His hands. We are totally dependent on Him, and He pours out His grace and strength upon us. What an experience! I believe that the church has left the true and simple revelation of the gospel, and that Christians no longer like to hear about suffering and hardship. Some of us have become so accustomed to receiving, receiving and receiving, and live in such a comfort zone today, that just to think of partaking in the sufferings of Christ and His death, is something that blows our minds. I want to encourage you to understand that God will never give us things to do that are beyond our strength. He gives us the desire, and He also gives us the power and strength to do them. I believe that church leaders need to rise up, so that the true gospel can catch the hearts of God's people once again.

I want to encourage you not to be afraid to accept that there are things that God will put before you, which you will not like. This will be the way for you to partake in His sufferings. As we catch the revelation of grace, we will know that we are not alone in what we are doing, and that we cannot accomplish anything in our own strength. We will not have to go through the fiery trials in our own strength because His grace will be there. We are not alone when we do the work of God.

Paul talks to the church in 2 Corinthians 1:3–7, *“Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of mercies and God of all comfort, Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us...”* He is saying, ‘through the sufferings that we have endured, the grace of God has been manifested, and we were comforted in our hearts. We went through those sufferings, and because we were comforted in our hearts, we can now comfort you in your sufferings’. And the verse continues, *“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same suffering, which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings so also you will partake of the consolation”*.

Here is the man who is sharing in the sufferings of Christ, saying, ‘We have been comforted, and now that you are sharing in these sufferings, we in turn can comfort you’. What exactly is he saying to these people? He is telling them, ‘we suffered; the grace of God was manifested and we were comforted. You then suffered and were comforted by us, so that in turn you can comfort others’. How can we help others who are going through hardship and encourage them to trust in the grace and strength of God, if we ourselves are not ready to accept hardship?

He continues in 2 Corinthians 1:8, *“For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble, which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength...”* or as in the NIV, *“Far beyond our ability to endure”*. Can you see what he is saying? The situation that God allowed Paul to face was beyond his ability to cope with. So many times we attribute things to the devil, and do you know what we do? We rebuke him, cast him out and then enter into all kinds of spiritual warfare. We need to start

recognising that the things God puts in front of us are for our good. We need to start discerning and not just responding automatically to the situation. 'A problem?' you say, 'Which demon is that now?' It is so easy to believe all problems come from the devil. Yes, there are times when the devil will come and attack, but we need to understand that there are things that God puts before us so that through them He can mould and equip us for deeper things ahead. We need to be careful that we do not become like robots! The Christian life is lived from the heart.

In this passage we also see some further truths, *"We were under great pressure. Far beyond our ability to endure..."* (NIV). I like that. I like this man who acknowledges the fact that he cannot cope with his circumstances. *"So that we despaired even of life."* This man knew at that time that, if the grace of God had not been manifested, he would have died. But now look at the outcome: *"who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us..."* Just before that it says, *"Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that he will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many"*.

What a wonderful testimony! This is the Christian life! It is clear from this passage that there is no reason for us to fear. So, never be afraid of what God puts in front of you. The reservoir of grace is far too big for it ever to run out!

If you do not accept this truth you will not understand why things happen in your life and you will be easily discouraged. But if you accept it you will walk in freedom.

Chapter VII

God's Grace for our Maturity

Being born again is the beginning of the Christian life, but we all know that after a baby is born, it needs to grow. It cannot remain a baby all its life.

I remember periods in my life, even in the ministry, when years went by without any real spiritual growth in my own life. I knew the Bible, I could quote verses, I could even quote half chapters by heart, but when I looked at my life, it was not what I wanted it to be; there was no real growth. Each of us knows where we are. We can hide it from others, but we cannot hide it from ourselves and we cannot hide it from God. If we are honest, we know when we are truly serving the Lord, and we know when it is not real. We know when things are not what they should be.

I believe that many pastors and Christians are experiencing the same thing. I bless God for the grace He somehow gave me to grow in my Christian life. I allowed Him to touch me and change me. However let it be clear right from the start that I could not have done this by myself. It was not by the strength of my will. All I had was a desire to change and a willingness to accept what God needed to do in my life. I could only take that step because I knew that I would experience the powerful grace of God during this process of change that had to take place. There was one particular verse of scripture that spoke very clearly to me during that time. It was Isaiah 43:1 which says, *"...the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel"* One was created (Jacob) but when God forms what He created, the result is

a new man in the Spirit (Israel). Let me tell you, you need the grace of God to accept this. Once you have accepted that your life is on the altar, that you are going to take up your cross and follow Him, and that you will allow the Lord to deal with your life, you need His grace, because everything in you will oppose what God wants to do. Everything in you will resist the work of God in you. I have experienced this! But praise God that His grace was always there to enable me to keep that attitude of heart and stay on the altar, to form me and do what He needed to do in me. And praise God, He is still at work in me. The key to spiritual growth is not how much you know of the Bible, or how much scripture you can quote, or how much you pray and fast. It is the state of your heart. It is who you are, how much of Christ is living in and through you. This is how you evaluate spiritual growth.

Every one of us is called to grow. Growth comes from the desire to seek after spiritual things and making that our priority. I believe that the church needs to experience more growth in the Spirit. For that to happen God needs to break us and mould us. The idea of this is not very exciting, but the reward, the genuine spiritual life that we will have in return, is the true Christian life. The wonderful thing is that God provides His grace during that time so that we can accept what He does. Growth can be painful. It is God dealing with us and it is not pleasant at the time.

In Ephesians 4:12–13, Paul says, “... *for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*”. Verse 11 talks about the ministries that Jesus gave to the church and verse 12 talks about attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, which is His life. This is the will of God for every one of us, individually and collectively.

Paul touches on this again in Colossians 1:27-28. He talks about the mystery of the church, which is “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*”, meaning Christ

living His life in us. Thus maturity is becoming a whole man in the Spirit, as Christ is being formed in us. It is not a matter of how long you have been a Christian, how big your church is or how successful you are. God is looking for spiritual men and women, who are ready to take up the challenge to represent Him in these last days, who are ready to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him. As I have already said, growth can be painful, yet it is so rewarding. In Colossians 1:28 Paul says to the church, *"Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus"*. Paul is working to present every man perfect in Christ. That includes you and me. Growth, perfection and maturity are reaching the fullness of Christ, which is not something we can simply learn. People cannot be taught to grow, even in Bible School. The road to maturity is God dealing with the heart of man and the issues of his life. The born again experience does not deal with that. It simply enables us to enter the kingdom of God, and receive forgiveness for our sins, past, present and future. When we enter the kingdom of God, Jesus becomes our Saviour, and He delivers us instantly from certain things, but we are still living in the flesh. And, being in the flesh, we need the grace of God to touch our lives and change us. This is how we grow. This should be the aim and vision of every Christian.

God is seeking men and women to represent Him, men and women who carry His life as a result of allowing God to deal with their lives. Growth is a work of God and we need His grace to grow. Remember how God said, 'Jacob I created, Israel I formed'.

For many years I did not have this revelation. I was the same person year in and year out, and I came to a point where I was very discouraged in the ministry. I was seeking for deeper things and for the reality of the Christian life. Reading the book of Acts, I saw true men of God, I saw the church, and I could see that somehow these men were mature, they were able to work together, they were united, they loved one another and were ready to give

their lives for one another. I had worked in the ministry for many years, I had taught and preached, I had travelled many miles around the island over the years, but deep inside me I knew that there was something missing in my life and in the church. God blessed me in many ways, and I was certainly not the same person I was when I was born again, but there were many important areas of my life that had never been touched by God and that were hidden.

Without the revelation of grace, we will not be willing to allow God to mould us as the potter moulds his clay. It will seem too painful and hard. But when we catch the revelation of grace, and we realise that we are not alone on the altar, it is an entirely different matter. He gives us the strength and faith to accept it, and to go through it. And what follows is the life of Christ! Isn't this what we are looking for, His life, His anointing in us? But once again, it does not happen just like that. We cannot press a button and believe that from one day to the next, we will be a changed person. No. We will have to accept the work of God in our lives for us to become an Israel. In this way, we will leave our Jacob behind, and become Israel. This is the process of spiritual growth, God forming you and me. This is the simple, true gospel.

We can spend our time running around doing things, being involved in building programs, organising conferences, and believing that we are effective in the kingdom of God; yet our lives stay the same. Often the lives of God's people stay the same because they are never faced with the cross or confronted by the power of God. Many Christians are taught to desire more, seek more, claim more, and possess more. There came a day in my life when I was sick and tired of that. Deep in me I was looking for something more real in my life and I believe that thousands of Christians and leaders are in the same state today. Christians must know that grace, God's grace, is available for them to accept what He needs to do in their lives.

It is sad that many Christians never experience the touch of the power of the cross of Jesus Christ in their lives. Somewhere we have left the cross behind

us. And yet, Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 1:18, *"the message of the cross... is the power of God"*. It is the only power that can change us, the only power that can deal with our sin, and the only power that can deal with our pride. The power of the cross is the only power that can deal with everything that is not of God in us. We cannot be taught how to remove these things from our lives, they will just come back tomorrow.

Seven years after entering the ministry, I started to experience the dealings of God in my life. God had given me a marvellous family, healed me, blessed me and done many wonderful things for me, it is true. But I am not talking about this. I am talking about the state of our hearts. God is the One who gives us the grace to repent, to humble ourselves and forgive. I am talking about true forgiveness, true repentance, and true humility. Not just as an act of obedience to what the Bible says, but true repentance and forgiveness that can be felt in the Spirit. When we feel this coming from a person's heart, then we know that the grace of God is being released, his life is on the altar, and that he is taking up his cross. It is not just a matter of doing what the Bible says. That is religion.

Therefore let us not hold on to our lives but instead experience His grace as we grow into His likeness!

Chapter VIII

Allowing Christ to live through us

We have looked at the power of God's grace and its many applications for our lives; to be depended on, to produce faith in us, to give us strength, to free us and to bring us to maturity.

God gives us unlimited divine strength when we serve Him. Our abilities are limited but when we obey God He will step in at the right time and do what we cannot. As we continue to depend on His grace, faith and trust will grow in our hearts in greater measure. We can do all things in the freedom of knowing that all things work together for our good, and that God allows us to face trials, difficulties and persecution, to bring us to full maturity in Christ. This is our destiny!

In Galatians 4:19 we read, *"My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you."* It is clear that Paul is working, teaching, preaching and admonishing the church for one thing: for believers to become like Jesus. Maturity means change; us changing from the person we were when we were born again, to become more and more like Him. That is what Christianity is all about, becoming like Him, so that He can live through us. We need the grace of God for this. It is crucial.

In the church today, thousands of Christians are discouraged because their lives remain the same. They have been serving Jesus for years, they know the Bible and many things, but their lives have not changed in the way that

they had hoped. They know it must be possible for them to serve the Lord, to mature and grow and to please God. But so many Christians today are discouraged because they have not reached a place where they feel they are pleasing to God. They are asking, 'How long can we serve the Lord while we are struggling, defeated, and unable to have the victory over sin? How can we carry on?' I personally believe that today there are more Christians outside the church than inside, Christians who have finally given up and left. I believe that when we enter the kingdom of God, He gives us the desire to grow. Christians, however, must be in contact with the gospel that gives them the ability to grow in the Spirit, and to become mature, spiritual men and women who are worthy of being ambassadors of God. It must be terrible for Christians to feel that victory is not within their reach and yet everything has been given to us as Christians through the gospel. There is no other way to grow but through the way of the cross, the way of death. Paul says in Galatians 2:20, *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me"*. The goal of every Christian must be to come to the place where he feels that Christ is living His life in him. We cannot serve God with all that we are naturally. He must be the one living in us in order for us to serve Him with His life. Then His life that flows out of us becomes the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ, which Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 2:14, *"...and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place"*.

How do we reach that place? How do we become spiritual? How do we grow? Often we hear that Bible School and Bible teachings will help us. These have a place but there is only one-way to grow, the way of death, the way of the cross! I want to encourage you to understand that, when we take up our cross and follow Jesus, there is the provision of grace, which allows us to accept what God wants to do in our lives. We then become more and more like His Son.

There is an interesting scripture in the gospel of John in 12:24–25, *“Most assuredly, I say this to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life”*. If we read carefully we will see that there is no life without death in our Christian life. There can be no life in the Spirit if we are not prepared to identify with and partake in the death of Christ. In other words, as we lose our life, in return we receive His life to serve Him.

Have you ever realised that most of the New Testament talks about life on this earth and not in heaven? Yes, the apostle Paul does talk about the coming of the Lord Jesus and the time when we are all going to be taken up to be with Him. But in most of the epistles of Paul, Peter, and James, the writers talk about life on this earth as Christians, and what God expects of us. In fact the main thing that God expects of us, as Christians, is to become more like His Son. He made provision for this by sending His Son in the flesh to conquer sin in the flesh, and die for us, so that we who believe in the sacrifice of Jesus, might grow every day and become more like Him. But we need His grace. We have already seen that growth can be painful. It is not always easy when God puts His finger on areas of our lives that are great obstacles, preventing us from serving Him the way He wants. We are able to take up our cross and follow Him because we know God will provide His grace for us to go through these times of change.

We cannot change ourselves; it is God who changes us. It is a work of the Spirit in our hearts. As we comprehend the revelation of grace, we can venture onto this road, deny ourselves, take up the cross, and be prepared to change. Therefore, we can accept the pain that goes with the change and transformation that takes place in us.

Paul says to the Galatians in chapter 4:19, *“My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you.”* I would not presume to think that Christ could be formed in me without His grace and without His help and strength. To accept what needs to happen at the time when God’s hand is upon my life, I must depend on Him and trust Him.

In the book of Revelation we read about the vision that the apostle John had on the island of Patmos concerning the return of Jesus, the state of the church, the events of the last days, and the judgement of God.

John prophesies in Revelation 3:15, *“I know your works, that you are neither cold or hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked – I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

It is sad to admit, but we must be honest, one of the great tragedies in the church today is that the church believes it is well and on the right road. Things may look good from the outside, but we cannot judge merely from outward appearances, with all that is happening these days, and all the sin that exists in the church, even at leadership level. We must not be deceived by what we see with our natural eyes. I believe that when God spoke to John

in Revelation, he was also referring to the state of the church in the days in which we live. But there is hope, because God wants to refine, purify and make the church into a spiritual house, rather than one based on emotional experiences. Today, many churches are governed by emotions, which have often replaced the true anointing of the Spirit of God, and Christians come to church just to be happy and feel good. What is happening is shocking, and yet the church thinks it is fine. 'We've got this building, this structure, this department... we've got this, and we've got that...' Outwardly everything looks fine and yet Christians are suffering. Deep in their hearts they know that there is something more to this life in the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's grace is sufficient and we have no reason to be afraid of laying down our lives. The revelation of grace is so powerful when it comes to our hearts, that when we catch it, we realise that, with God, we can accomplish anything.

Let us not be deceived into thinking that we are okay. The apostle John is very blunt here as he talks to the Laodicean church, 'You think you are rich, you think you see...' But the Lord is saying to them, and to us today, 'Come to me, I want to refine you, I want to give you eyes to see, so that your life can change and become an asset to the kingdom.'

What does the world see when it looks at the church today, with all the emotion and emphasis on outward appearances? It sees a church that is immature, carnal, and not much different from the world. I remember the days when, as pastors and elders, we used to sit around the table and could never agree on church matters because we were so immature, though we always found another excuse or blamed the church. The simple truth is that immaturity prevents pastors and elders from working together in harmony without strife and competition. It is hard to accept when God points the finger at you and I, and says, 'you are the problem! It is not the church, or somebody else'. We

as the leaders need to change because only when we mature and become spiritual men, will we be able to work together.

There has been fear in the hearts of many Christians and church leaders, fear to come down from their pedestal, lay their lives on the altar, and change. We are so proud of our accomplishments, our beautiful church and the material things we own. We are so convinced that we are clothed with the righteousness of God, that we are spiritual and seeing everything the right way. Where is the church? Is it just a lot of beautiful buildings, natural achievements, and material possessions? Do these things determine the success of a church? Do you know, it breaks my heart to see how the western church and its various questionable teachings, such as prosperity, have influenced the church in Africa. No wonder it is disillusioned! Many have put their faith in having what the western world has, and today in the African church a great number of leaders are discouraged, disappointed and disillusioned. Deep in their hearts they are seeking something real, new life, new faith and a fresh anointing for their ministry.

A few years ago when God started to show me who I really was as a preacher, a pastor, a man who had gone through two years of Bible school, a man full of knowledge, I was ashamed of myself. Suddenly God pointed His finger at me and said, 'You are so proud my friend, and now is the time for me to deal with you.' I was afraid. It was a challenge, but at the same time, the Lord opened my eyes to see His grace and the powerful strength that He would give me while my life would be on the altar. The revelation of His grace was my strength and I accepted what He wanted to do in my life at that time.

When Abraham brought Isaac to the altar, he knew what would happen to his son if God did not intervene. I knew what would happen to me. I knew what I was and I knew what was in my heart and what I was hiding. But it was the time for God to say 'Stop hiding. I want you to know who you are and I want

to deal with your life.' Praise God that I did not continue without seeing the power of God's grace.

I started to see the grace of God as a never-ending reservoir that I could draw from. I had thought I was rich in the Spirit, I had thought I had plenty, and was doing fine, but when God started to deal with my pride, and many other things in my life, I, as a preacher, came down from my pedestal very quickly! Yet, I was not alone, God was with me. His grace was there for me. Bless the Lord for His grace. Praise God for the abundance of His Grace that shakes what needs to be shaken, changes what needs to be changed, and brings maturity to our lives.

May His grace be poured out upon us as we are challenged to change and become all that He, in His glorious wisdom, has planned for us to be.

The Power of Grace

Understanding the freedom that comes with grace

For too long now, Christians have been bound by religious principles and techniques as they attempt to lead the victorious life promised in scripture. The result is the weakened and divided church of today, in which the power of the gospel to transform lives seems sadly to be lacking.

This book truly brings to light the revelation of the cross of Christ and His matchless grace. The church needs to hear this message and revelation, which will liberate Christians to stand on the right foundation, and walk with the Lord in true freedom and victory.

The Power of Grace will enable you to discover the heart of God and equip you to serve Him in rest by trusting in His grace for everything.

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Church Team Ministries International (CTMI) is a Christian network, formed in 2001 by a team of leaders from various African countries who are united by the message of the cross and the work of God in their lives.

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