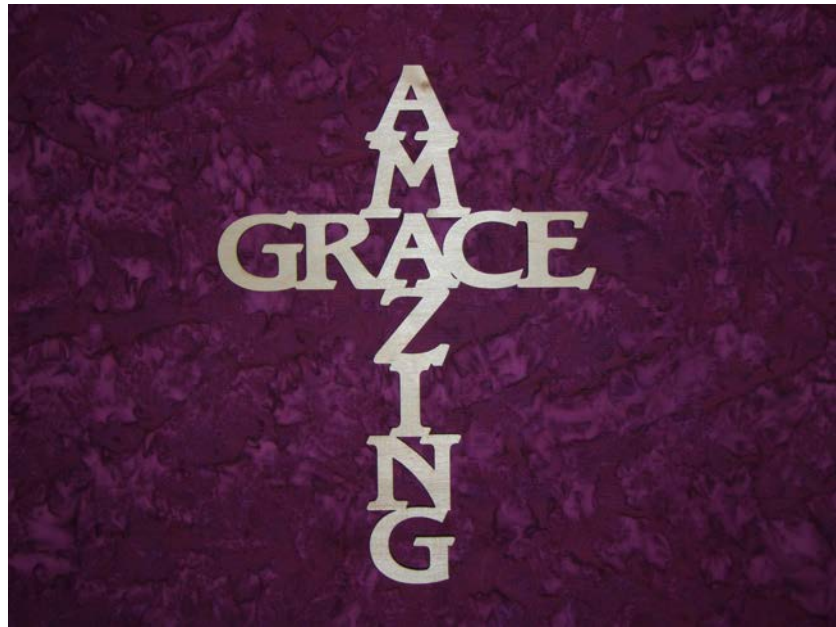


# ABOUNDING GRACE



GRACE FOR YOUR TIME  
OF NEED: PART 3

T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

*Abounding Grace*

Abounding Grace  
Grace for Your Time of Need: Part 3  
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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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*Abounding Grace*

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## Welcome to *Abounding Grace*

All the grace we'll ever need is abounding all around us.

God is continuously communicating His favor to us, both in His Word and through creation. His desire is to cause grace to abound to us so that we are transformed into the image of His Son, and abound in good works.

The more we avail ourselves of God's abounding grace, the more we will realize our reason for being, and find our fullest peace and joy. Grace is to be known primarily through our Lord Jesus Christ, so we need to seek Him and see Him more clearly.

*ReVision* studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

And if you find this study helpful, please let us know. How have you benefited from this study? Go to our website, [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org), and use the Contact Us button to share your story.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 Seeing is Believing

*Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. Acts 11.22, 23*

*Can you believe it?*

Acts 10 and 11 report the coming of the Gospel to Gentiles – unbelieving, non-Jews, were professing faith in Jesus, quite apart from any previous commitment to Judaism.

In Acts 10, Peter had to be exposed to a curious vision three times before he was ready even to consider entering the home of a Gentile. Every Jew knew that the Jews were God's chosen people and the Gentiles, well, they were the Gentiles. Outsiders. Dogs. Unclean. Lost.

It's no wonder the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were not a little put out with Peter when they learned he'd led a bunch of Gentiles to the salvation which is in Jesus Christ (Acts 11.1-18). Only after Peter carefully explained what had happened – how he'd come to be in that Gentile's home, and what the Lord did while he was there – only after he explained that, and had it corroborated by those who were with him, did the Jewish believers in Jerusalem admit, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

Well, *some* Gentiles. Cornelius, after all, was what the Jews referred to as a "God-fearer", a friend of Judaism, and one who was open to being taught the Jewish faith. So he must have been an exception.

Then the word trickled down to Jerusalem from Antioch – that grossly Gentile city in Syria – that Jews *and* Gentiles were coming to faith in Christ. Those who had been chased out of Jerusalem by the ferocity of Saul in Acts 8 were now preaching the Gospel to people everywhere, and in such Gentile lands as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. And the report was that "a great number" of the Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord (Acts 11.21).

The Jewish Christian leaders in Jerusalem had just agreed – reluctantly – that Gentiles could be saved. But now *lots* of Gentiles were reported as being saved, and not just God-fearers, but outright pagans. Well, you can't just take someone's *word* for that, can you? So they sent Barnabas up to Antioch to check out what was going on.

And Barnabas came, and Barnabas saw, and Barnabas affirmed the faith of those Antiochene believers, and encouraged them in the Lord. Seeing was believing for Barnabas, and he saw the grace of God at work in Antioch among the Gentiles, just as he had seen it in Jerusalem among the Jews.

But what did he *see*?

*What Barnabas saw*

In short, Barnabas saw grace, grace, all over the place. Grace was abounding throughout the Gentile city. Grace so vibrant and expansive that Barnabas knew right away he was going to need some help in making the most of this grace-full situation (Acts 11.25, 26).

Barnabas observed the grace of God issuing in lives that were being powerfully and permanently transformed. He saw people from Jerusalem, who had fled their homes to this new, strange city, actively bearing witness to their neighbors, treating the Gentiles in Syria like fellow image-bearers of God, boasting of Jesus and His love, to pagans who had never thought for a moment that any god might love them.

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He saw those same Jewish believers opening their homes to their Gentile neighbors, and entering the homes of their new Christian friends to share a meal, enjoy conversation, and learn together about the grace of the Lord. He saw all the believers sharing of their possessions to meet one another's needs. He saw them worshiping and praying together, taking the Lord's Supper together, introducing unsaved neighbors and friends to the new reality of the Kingdom community of God, and standing boldly together in Christ against all detractors.

He saw people who looked like Jesus in their commitment to righteousness and their concern for their lost neighbors. He saw people responding to the Gospel in significant numbers – unbelievers caught up in the joy of salvation, filled with the Spirit, and getting to work serving the Lord and one another.

Barnabas saw the *power*, and he knew the only explanation for this was the favor of God, communicated through His Word, and applied by the Holy Spirit – grace! He saw, and he believed, and got busy to make sure that the abounding grace of God in Antioch continued to abound. He must have thought to himself, “Wonderful, the matchless grace of Jesus!” For wonderful it truly was.

### *What we should be seeking*

The grace of God abounds within the grace framework He has established. Where believers unite to seek the Kingdom and righteousness of God, to lay hold on His precious and very great covenant promises, and to pursue His agenda of making disciples and building Christ's Church, there the grace of God will be greater than all our sins, deeper than the mighty rolling sea, sparkling like a fountain, and making all things new in our lives.

God communicates His grace to us for precisely these purposes. But are they our purposes as well? Or do we prefer merely to be “grace-takers” who are content for God to affirm and reassure us from time to time, and to help when we feel like we need it, but not to demand anything of us?

We need grace to be anything more or other than the same, self-centered people we've always been. We need grace to motivate us to grow, empower us to serve, embolden us to bear witness, and humble us to build up our brethren in the Lord. Happily, the grace we need is always abounding around us, for the Spirit and Word of God are lively and active, and the King of grace is ruling on His eternal throne in glory.

The true believer will seek the abounding grace of God, and not merely enough grace to satisfy or to assure us that we are forgiven and on our way to heaven. God intends His grace to abound in the world, and He will do that, as He did in Jerusalem and Antioch, in and through His children, who seek grace to help in all their times of need.

### *For reflection*

1. Grace changed the Jews and the Gentiles of Peter's day. Should we expect that same grace to wield that same transforming power in our own day? Explain.
2. The grace of God issues in power. What kind of power? For what purposes?
3. In what areas of your life would you like to know more of the abounding grace of God?

*Next Steps – Transformation: Begin praying for more of God's grace in the areas of your life you identified in question 3. What steps of faith will be needed for you to realize more of God's abounding grace in these areas?*

## 2 Growing in Grace

*We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth... Colossians 1.3-6*

*... but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3.18*

### *Grace first*

What happens when someone comes to faith in Jesus Christ? We have said that grace is a *divine disposition* – God looks on us with favor, compassion, and love. Grace is further a *divine communication* – He tells us of His love by one means or another, especially by showing us the work of Jesus. And grace is *divine power* which accomplishes God’s good and gracious purposes. Ultimately, it’s the power of grace that makes life-changing impact on us. But we will never understand the wonder or power of grace until we’re clear about the question of how grace works to save us. We insist that salvation is all of grace (Eph. 2.8, 9), that no work on our part – not even the work of believing – brings us to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s grace first, and grace always.

Theologians refer to grace as *prevenient* – coming before. Grace comes before faith, igniting faith, depositing the gift of salvation, and beginning the work of making all things new in our life.

But the wonder of this, the marvel and majesty and mystery of it, is so glorious, that in a series such as this, on grace to help in our time of need, we must not overlook this most fundamental application of grace to a believer’s life.

So what happens when we’re saved?

### *When grace invades*

First, by His grace, God *sends the message of Good News to our ears*. We’re not looking for it, although we may be searching for something more meaningful and permanent than whatever flimsy worldview we’re clinging to at the moment. But we’re not looking for *God* – no one ever is (Ps. 14.2, 3). God sends us a Philip (Acts 8.26-40) to lead us into His Word, and to unfold the Good News in terms we can readily understand. Could be a preacher, someone we hear on the radio, a friend or co-worker, or even a member of our family. Someone, moved and empowered by grace, brings the *communication* of grace to our hearing. That’s grace at work, getting our attention.

But it doesn’t stop there. We can understand the Gospel and still not believe it. We need more than just understanding.

Looking down upon us with a gracious *disposition*, and *communicating* grace by the Gospel, *God sends His Spirit, Who is the power of His grace*, to open our ears and eyes and heart – our soul – and enable us to believe and confess belief in the Good News. Paul outlines this part of the process in Galatians 4.3-7. To us, who are slaves to sin and self-love, God sends His Spirit, on the wings of the Gospel, straight into our heart – not the beating one, but the spiritual one from which flow all the issues of life (Prov. 4.23). Once there, He performs an act of circumcision and excising in our heart. He cuts away the lusts of the flesh, exposing the heart to the pure joy of the Gospel (Deut. 30.1-10); and He tears out the stony, hardened heart that has resisted God for years, and gives us a living heart, beating with new spiritual life (Ezek. 36.26, 27). Then – and Paul makes this very clear – the Holy Spirit Himself assumes our voice, empowering us to call God our Father, thus confirming that He has adopted us through Jesus Christ as His own dear child!

And still there is more. Grace continues to work powerfully from within our soul, *implanting the seed of the Gospel as the first sowing of God's Word* into our soul. That seed, firmly planted, can never be removed; it will, by the mystery of grace, work in us so pleasingly, that we will want to sow more of the Word in our hearts. Thus the Word begins to dwell in us richly. And the Spirit cultivates that Word in us, bringing us by it into the presence of God's glory, and transforming us increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ (Col. 3.16; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

Finally, by the grace of God at work within us, we receive a new citizenship. We are conveyed out of the kingdom of darkness – where Satan rules by the lie and people rebel against the knowledge of God (Rom. 1.18-32) – into the Kingdom of God's own dear Son, where righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit become the new air we breathe and agenda we seek (Col. 1.13; Rom. 14.17, 18).

This is how grace operates to bring us salvation. But it doesn't stop there. Grace implanted becomes empowering grace, which, as it grows and takes deeper root in our soul, brings forth the fruit of grace in the good works for which we have been redeemed and saved (Phil. 2.13; Eph. 2.8-10).

When we are invaded by the grace of God, everything changes – and continues to change.

#### *Bringing forth fruit*

Paul saw the evidence of grace at work among the Colossians, just as Barnabas had seen it among the believers in Antioch. Indeed, Paul saw grace at work in every place where the Gospel was being proclaimed. The Gospel was bringing forth fruit throughout the Roman world, Paul insisted, and this was nothing other than the work of saving grace in those who believe.

Paul talks about the fruit of grace in various terms. He mentions the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5.22, 23) as evidence of the grace of God at work within us. The gifts the Spirit gives us for serving others also begin to appear and blossom because of grace (1 Cor. 12.7-11). We become empowered in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ to set aside all our old ways and learn Jesus, increasing in all the tokens of love as God by His grace works powerfully within us (Eph. 4.17-24; 1 Tim. 1.5; 1 Cor. 13.4-7; Phil. 2.13). Grace flows from the Word of God to our heart, mind, and conscience, equipping us for every good work (2 Tim. 3.16, 17), and empowering us to imitate the apostles and Jesus (1 Cor. 4.20; 1 Cor. 11.1). Grace empowers us to take our place within the framework of God's grace, pressing forward toward His promises, seeking His Kingdom and righteousness, and contributing to the building-up of our fellow believers and our church.

Thus Peter, acknowledging the importance and value of Paul's teaching (2 Pet. 3.15), urges his readers to *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*, so that the grace that abounds *to* us might abound *from* us to bring the light of the glory of God to light wherever we go, whatever we're doing (1 Cor. 10.31).

Grace is amazing! Grace is wonderful and matchless! Grace pardons and cleanses us within, but it is greater even than this: Grace fills and overflows from us, by the inward work of God's Word and Spirit, so that wave after wave of grace issues to and from within us, to fill the parched, dying world with the presence, promise, and power of Jesus Christ (Jn. 1.16; Eph. 4.8-10).

Thus the abounding grace of God abounds to us, in us, and through us. Wonderful grace of Jesus!

#### *For reflection*

1. What do we mean by saying that grace comes first and always in the life of faith?
2. Grace works to transform us from the inside-out. Explain.



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3. How would you counsel a new believer to grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ?

*Next Steps – Transformation: How have you seen the grace of God at work in and through you of late? Send me a note at [tmmoore@ailbe.org](mailto:tmmoore@ailbe.org), and share your experience of the wonderful grace of Jesus.*

### 3 Abundant unto Faith and Love

*And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.* 1 Timothy 1.14

#### *Abounding grace, increasing fruit*

Within the framework of God's covenant, Kingdom, and Church, grace abounds as divine communication and working power. The first fruit of the Gospel is eternal life, that is, knowing God and Jesus Christ. We have seen all the wondrous, transforming effects grace brings with it as someone comes to faith in the Lord. From that beginning, God works by grace to bring forth the fruit of Jesus in us, transforming us increasingly into His likeness (2 Cor. 3.12-18). The effect of abounding grace is to bring forth fruit and increase (Col. 1.3-6) in those who truly believe.

Thus, abounding grace becomes visible; it can be *seen*. The increase of grace is what all seek who have truly come to know the Lord. They want more of God's grace so that they might know more of Jesus, more of the Father, and more of the Spirit; and so that they might have increased faith and love to serve Him well.

The more grace abounds, the more faith and love increase.

Let's look more closely at this fruit.

#### *Faith*

What is faith? I suspect that most Christians would answer by saying something like "Believing in Jesus" or "Believing in God". That would be true, as far as it goes. And, frankly, that's as far as faith does go with far too many of us, which is why thinking about faith *increasing* as a fruit of grace rarely comes to mind for most of us.

The writer of Hebrews defines faith: "Now faith is the *assurance* of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen" (Heb. 11.1, my translation). Three things immediately stand out about this definition.

First, faith has *an object*: "things hoped for" and "things not seen". What true faith hopes for is neither temporal nor material in nature. It is unseen and spiritual. We do not see such things – God in His glorious heaven, Christ exalted at His right hand, an infinite spiritual space filled with joyful, worshiping saints and angels – except with the eye of the heart (Eph. 1.18). If our minds are not framed and filled with such a glorious vision, it is probably because we have not set our hope on the right objects. We're hoping for a happy life, or safety in a crazy world, or a good job, or a faithful relationship. These things are important, but if they are the commanding vision that fills our thoughts and stirs our heart, we will never realize the kind of assurance God intends by extending His grace to us.

Second, faith has an *inward* dimension. Assurance is an affection of the heart – a sense of wellbeing, peace, and joy. Assurance that comes from the vision of *faith* is unshakeable. Whatever assurances we may obtain from temporal items or circumstances are always fleeting and changeable. But changes in material circumstances do not affect the assurance which comes from true faith. This assurance can grow, as our vision grows and becomes more truly that which we focus on and aspire to in life. The more we are assured about the object of our faith – the more *real* and *constant* we are about that unseen, hoped-for goal – the more our faith increases, and the power of grace comes through in our lives.

Finally, the power of grace, which faith ignites and sustains, brings forth the *evidence* of faith in the form of good works of love. Thus faith is not merely inward and assuring in nature; it is also outward and working. Where grace as *communication* is truly operating in the soul for assurance, grace that *can be seen* flows in *power* as good works of love.

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God gives abounding grace to *increase* faith in us, as we sharpen our vision of and hope in unseen things; and increased faith generates increased evidence of faith in good works of love – the power of grace at work.

But what forms of evidence does that love assume?

### *Love*

We all have a sense of what love looks like as it is expressed: Love is patient, kind, never jealous or envious, boastful or proud, and so forth. But how do such attributes of love become part of our working and gracious character?

By keeping the commandments of God: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 Jn. 5.3). This should be obvious. Imagine a world where everyone loved God, never looked to idols, never took the Lord’s Name in vain, and honored the Lord’s Day. Imagine a world where parents and other authorities were properly honored; where people did no harm to one another, and hated no one; where lusts were controlled and marriage honored; and people respected the private property of others, always told the truth, and were content without coveting what others possessed. Would that be a loving world? It would, indeed.

How does such love come to be more present in the world? By grace, working through faith, to engender assurance about unseen realities, and good works of love. Faith and love increase where abounding grace does its work in our lives. God communicates grace to us by His Law – and all His Word; and He works the power of grace in and through us by His Spirit, empowering us for obedience and good works of love.

We need grace to abound within us, so that we may be firmly and unshakably convinced about the unseen things we believe, and can demonstrate the power of abounding grace in works of love for God and our neighbors.

And where we have such a need, God has grace to help, if only we will seek it as He commands.

### *For reflection*

1. How does grace engender faith in the soul? Why is it important that our vision of unseen things be clear and expansive?
2. True faith has both an inward and an outward component. Explain.
3. How can we have access to abounding grace for increased faith and love?

*Next Steps – Transformation: How can you nurture a clearer and more compelling vision of unseen things? Why should you? Talk with a Christian friend about these questions.*

## 4 Words and Deeds

*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.* 2 Thessalonians 2.16, 17

### *A grace summary*

Our text provides an excellent summary of the nature of grace and of how it abounds to us within the framework of grace God has established.

We said that grace is a disposition of God toward us, an attitude of the divine heart by which He looks upon us with favor, compassion, mercy, and love. Paul notes this here by saying that God the Father and our Lord Jesus “loved us”.

But this disposition is of no value to us unless God communicates it to us, unless He tells us of His love, and of all the benefits that attend to that, all of which are comprised in our Lord Jesus and the work He has done for our salvation. As God, by His Word and Spirit, communicates His love to us, we are overwhelmed with “everlasting consolation and good hope”.

But grace goes beyond even that. Grace infuses courage to our hearts, the effect of which is to move us to action “in every good word and work”. Grace abounding in faith and love thus comes to clear and ever-increasing expression in our daily lives. Grace abounding *to* us, within the framework of God’s covenant and Kingdom and Church, becomes grace abounding *through* us, touching others by words and deeds and pointing them to Him Who is the Source and Power for good works.

I’m merely trying to refine our focus here, so that as grace abounds to more faith, assurance, and consolation in our soul, and begins to flow through us unto good works of love, we’re not thinking in abstract terms. The more concretely we can envision and prepare for God’s grace to abound in and through us, the greater is the likelihood of that actually happening.

So let’s look more closely at the words and deeds which are the vehicles by which God’s grace spreads out in the world.

### *Gracious speech*

It’s surprising how much the Bible has to say about the way we use our words. Paul says that our speech should always be seasoned with grace (Col. 4.6). That is, the words we speak should be as if they came to those who hear us from God Himself. Such words will be always truthful and loving (Eph. 4.15). They will convey the priorities and perspectives of God’s Word in a gentle and affirming manner. This does not ensure that our words will be received with gratitude; it does go a long way, however, in making sure our words convey the grace of God into our Personal Mission Field.

We want our words to be edifying as well, spoken in a manner, and with such content, as to build others up in Christ and His love (Eph. 4.29). We have to be good listeners to do this well (Jms. 1.19, 20), so that we understand people’s needs, desires, hopes, fears, and aspirations before we try to counsel, advise, or recommend some course of action.

We could say much more about this, but the point is that we must take care with our words and how we use them (Prov. 4.24). Words can be conduits of grace, but they can also clog the flow of grace when they are merely flippant, trivial, criticizing and condemning, demeaning, or merely self-serving. Think of your words as instruments for turning people’s thoughts, desires, and lives toward Jesus. It is quite true, as the hymn has it, that “you’re the only Jesus some will ever see” – or hear. The more our words can be like the very words of

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Jesus, the more God's grace will flow through our words to direct attention to Him.

### *Gracious deeds*

Christians understand that doing good is a calling for which we are to be equipped, ready, and constant (2 Tim. 3.16, 17; Tit. 2.14; 3.8, 14; Eph. 2.10). It is possible, however, that in our minds we have created a category of "good works" that limits rather than facilitates the power of grace. I mean that in our preaching and teaching, we tend to emphasize as good works those things we do either at or through our local church. We teach, or give, or work with the children, or serve at the rescue mission, or go on a short-term mission trip, or help maintain our church's property. These can certainly be good works; but if we make these the *primary* good works we are called to do, then we will limit the flow and power of grace, rather than enhance it.

The good works to which we are called are those daily, small, routine gestures, tasks, practices, and disciplines that fill up the time of our life throughout the day. These are the works which are truly like salt and leaven, which, though small, have powerful transforming effects, especially the more consistently they are applied.

Each day affords many opportunities for doing works that can bring the grace of God into our world. We must not overlook nor downplay these everyday works, for these are the frontlines of Kingdom advance in the world. Rather, let us learn what the opportunities of our daily lives requires of us, and let us seek the Lord day by day to establish those works that will honor Him, convey His grace, and advance His Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the world (Ps. 90.16, 17).

What I mean is that we must think, plan, and pray in specific details about our words and works. We must be ever in communication with the Source of grace so that we might speak and do as He would, since He dwells in us, and we have the insights of His Word and the power of His Spirit working for us. All our words and every single one of our deeds can be vehicles of truth, love, hope, and light in a dark and self-centered world. But this will only be so if we prepare well and act in faith and love to allow grace to abound through us in all we say and do.

### *For reflection*

1. How would you explain grace to a new believer?
2. How can we prepare so that our words and works serve as true and effectual conduits of grace?
3. Who are the people who should expect to benefit from grace abounding through your words and works?

*Next Steps – Preparation: How do you prepare each day for good words and good works? Can you think of any way to improve this preparation, so that you can be a more effective agent of grace?*

## 5 Grace Multiplied

*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord... 2 Peter 1.2*

*...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3.18*

### *Grace, peace, and joy*

The grace of God is the only reliable source of peace. In our text, Peter links the two. The peace people in our day so urgently desire – in relationships, among races, between nations, and in the hearts of every person – is an elusive state. People everywhere continue to cry, “Peace! Peace.” But there is no peace. The *desire* for peace indicates the grace of God at work in the souls of all people, wooing and enticing them to a greater sense of wellbeing and safety. The continuing *lack* of peace reminds us that the peace we need cannot be obtained by material things or changes in circumstances. It must begin in the soul, where the grace of God is multiplied to all who know and love Him.

As God communicates His grace to us – supremely by His love for us in Jesus Christ, and by extending the horizons of our experience of His infinite goodness, loving kindness, and power – we realize that inward sense of assurance and wellbeing that allows us to say, “It is well with my soul.” This peace passes understanding (Phil. 4.6, 7), because people who try to explain it by material causes or conditions simply cannot make sense of it. It’s a peace that persists through adversity, loss, setbacks, and suffering. No one can understand that peace apart from the grace of God.

Grace and peace are the hallmarks and privilege of those who have eternal life, that is, of those who have come to the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ (Jn. 17.3). Peter indicates that we may increase in grace and peace by increasing in the knowledge of God and Christ. Increasing in *grace* fits us for service, so that we may channel the grace of God to the people around us in words and deeds of love. Increasing in *peace* brings that inward assurance which leads to joy, and which endures regardless of outward circumstances.

Increasing in grace and peace leads to increased joy. Since we can grow in the knowledge of the Lord, and thus in grace and peace, and it would seem to be a sin, at least a mark of folly, not to do so. We may think we can shortcut our way to joy by surrounding ourselves with adoring friends, material things, or favorable circumstances. But these are not where lasting joy is found. Lasting joy comes only from dwelling in the presence of God, increasing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ (Ps. 16.11). And the way to that joy is not through things or experiences, but through increasing in God’s grace and peace.

But what precisely does it mean to increase in grace?

### *Grace communicated*

Grace is not a commodity, like protein or vitamin C, that we build up in our body to strengthen it. All the grace we’ll ever need is available to us at all times; it is infinite grace, that brings greater peace and joy to every area of our lives. This is because God is continually and infinitely disposed toward us by grace, and He never ceases to communicate that love to us. The daily patterns of the world and the mere fact of its many creatures and glories declare the goodness, wisdom, power, and kindness of God – all aspects of His overarching disposition of grace toward His creatures. That we breathe, that blood courses through our veins, that our cells continue to renew themselves, and that we can know how to live in this world because of its orderly and bountiful nature – these are all tokens of the grace of God.

Even more pointedly and effectually, God reminds us of and expounds the broad scope of His grace in His Word, where everything points us to Jesus, into Whose image we are transformed from glory to glory by the Spirit of God (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

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So the grace is there. We do not have to go up to heaven to obtain it, and we don't need messengers from that realm to bring it down to us. Jesus both embodies all the riches of God's grace, and has opened the ears and hearts of all who believe in Him, that we might better know the grace of God around, within, and toward us day by day. Like the rays of the sun that perpetually pervade the space around us, grace is always there, always accessible, and always amenable to increasing in and through us.

### *The way to increased grace*

Peter links increasing in grace, peace, and joy with growing in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ is more than just going to church, being active with Christian friends, or beginning your day with Bible reading and prayer. John the Baptist put it succinctly: Jesus must increase in us – all His attitudes, understandings, priorities, practices, and skills – and those which we have previously looked to for joy must decrease (Jn. 3.30). Paul said the same thing. We must *learn Jesus* by setting aside everything we have ever hoped in or held precious for achieving peace and joy, and we must *put on* the Lord Jesus Christ in all aspects of our thoughts, feelings, values, words, and deeds (Eph. 4.17-24). The old hymn “More about Jesus” says it well:

*More about Jesus I would learn,  
More of His holy will discern:  
Spirit of God, my teacher be,  
Showing the things of Christ to me.*

We must increase in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The more we know Him, the more we will become like Him: think what He thinks, desire what He desires, value what He values, and say and do what He says and does. We cannot increase in the knowledge of the Lord, and thus have access to more of His infinite grace, apart from being with the Lord to hear Him, see Him, converse with Him, learn from Him, and submit to His Spirit for being remade in His image.

Don't just read your Bible: Seek the Lord Jesus there (Jn. 5.39):

*More about Jesus in His Word,  
holding communion with my Lord,  
bearing His voice in every line,  
making each faithful saying mine.*

Ponder your reading, saying to the Father that you want to see Jesus throughout the Bible. Pray to Jesus, describing, as John does in Revelation 1, His glory and His many excellencies, reviewing with thanksgiving all His goodness to you, and praising Him for all His saving and reconciling work.

Make this your daily prayer:

*More about Jesus would I know,  
More of His grace to others show,  
More of His saving fullness see,  
More of His love, Who died for me!  
More, more about Jesus!*

Because as you increase in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, you will find grace, peace, and joy increasing and overflowing from you to bring God's infinite grace to bear on others through all your words and deeds.

*Abounding Grace*

*For reflection*

1. Is it possible to be faithful in going to church, reading the Bible, and praying each day, and still fail to increase in the grace of God? Explain.
2. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in helping us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ? Write a brief prayer to the Spirit, to remind you of your daily need for Him (Phil. 2.13).
3. What's the difference between knowing Jesus and knowing *about* Jesus? Can you increase in each of these? Can you increase in knowing Jesus without knowing about Him? Can you increase in knowing about Him but still not know Him? How can we make sure to gain the maximum benefit of each of these – knowing Jesus and knowing about Him?

*Next Steps – Transformation: What can you do to seek Jesus more intently in your time in Scripture and prayer? Ask a few Christian friends what they do. Adopt some practices – like learning to sing the entire hymn, “More about Jesus” – and begin keeping a journal of your experience of seeking to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.*



## 6 Grace to the World

*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us...For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. 2 Corinthians 4.6, 7, 15*

### *Grace to the world*

But for the grace of God, the cosmos and everything in it would cease to exist.

By the Word of His power, Jesus Christ upholds the universe and all things (Heb. 1.3). God sends the weather, causes the plants to grow and the rivers to flow, feeds the creatures, maintains the seasons, empowers people to make culture, sustains the systems of our bodies and the patterns of creation, enables communications and relationships, and keeps in check the evil inherent in human souls and throughout the fallen spiritual world (cf. Pss. 147, 104; Acts 14.17; etc.).

Why does God do this? For the same reason that He sent Jesus, the quintessence of grace: God *loves* the cosmos which He has made (Jn. 3.16); and in His love, He channels His goodness and grace continuously throughout the whole vast cosmos.

Theologians refer to this as [the common grace of God](#) – common, because everything that exists is upheld, enriched, served, enhanced, and sustained by it. The cosmos is charged with the grace of God, like electrical charges that pervade the ground and air, and which, when they line up just right, can discharge heat and light in the form of lightning.

Similarly, when the *special* grace of God connects with His *common* grace, sparks of awareness can fly, and the lightning bolt of salvation can bring life to a dead soul.

Lightning needs an agent to connect the charges in the ground and air – typically a thunderstorm. The lightning of saving grace requires an agent as well, and we who have come to know the saving grace of God are called to be those agents of grace to the world. We are the earthen vessels through whom *saving* grace can reach those who are pervaded by *common* grace.

### *Agents of grace*

What's involved in our being agents of grace to the world? First, we must have the experience of saving grace ourselves. As lightning illuminates the surrounding darkness, saving grace illuminates the dark, allowing the common grace of God to come to our awareness; and we are overwhelmed with gratitude for all the evidence of God's love, continuously attending to us.

The more we experience of the grace of God – the more we receive His many and constant communications of grace – the more our gratitude and awareness increase, and we become charged with grace for the world.

But grace does not begin in words and deeds; it issues in them. We must make sure that we are *disposed* toward the world as God is. God *loves* the world, even the lost and those who despise and reject Him. He continues to do good for them in ways they utterly disregard. But because He is love, He can only love that which He has made.

That does not obligate Him to *save* all His creatures. He loves fallen human beings enough to allow them to choose their own destiny. Yet He warns and woos and pleads with them to reject the folly of rejecting Him, and to position themselves for the lightning strike of saving grace.

## *Abounding Grace*

And He does that through people who love the lost like God does. When, infused and charged with grace upon grace, we channel that grace in love for the people around us, grace will flow like lightning toward the lost people in our lives, spreading the saving grace of God to more and more people, and increasing thanks and praise to Him for His love.

But this will happen only when we set our hearts to love the lost as God does.

### *Fields of grace*

God's grace is active at all times in all places in the world, including those spaces and people to whom God sends you every day. The world is comprised of myriad fields of grace! In your home, at work or school, in your neighborhood, among your friends and associates – the people you see week after week after week – God's grace is a pervading presence in their lives. You see it, even though they don't. And God hovers over them all, at all times, ready with the potential for a lightning strike of saving grace.

Which He may be pleased to discharge through you.

Think of the people you encounter each week. Can you see the common grace of God at work in and for them? Have you ever thought to point out to them how good the Lord is to them, like Paul did in Acts 14.17? Like Joseph did (Gen. 41.25-32), or Daniel did (Dan. 2.27-38)? You are God's agent of grace to the world, the means whereby He connects common and saving grace to bring the heat and light of salvation to the lost. We are called to be witnesses to Jesus, and that includes proclaiming not only the Good News of the Gospel, but pointing out the inescapable, undeniable, and everywhere-in-evidence grace of God, inviting the people in our field of grace to join us in thanking and praising Him.

The followers of Christ today are sent into fields of grace, as agents of grace, to celebrate the common grace of our loving God, and to set up the conditions – by our love and witness – for saving grace to strike like lightning in the soul of a lost neighbor, co-worker, or friend.

Do you love the people in your grace field enough to be God's agent on their behalf?

### *For reflection*

1. What is common grace, and what does this have to do with helping others come to know the Lord?
2. Why is the pervasiveness of common grace a good starting-point for setting up the conditions that bring saving grace to the lost?
3. How can Christians help one another increase in love for the lost people in their lives?

*Next Steps – Transformation: Make a list of all the people in your field of grace. Start praying daily for opportunities to point out the grace of God that pervades their lives.*

## 7 Wave upon Wave of Grace

*And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.* John 1.16

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.* Ephesians 3.14-19

*Grace is a living Person*

Grace can seem like an abstract idea, and it can be easily misunderstood. We discussed this earlier in this series, when [we explained what grace isn't and what it is](#). Obviously, grace is much more than many of us realize, or most of us experience. There is power in grace – power to glorify God, penetrate hardened hearts, and move us beyond our comfort zones in good works and true words for the glory of God. Grace abounds in faith and love, and thus grace fits us as agents of grace to the world. And as believers fulfill their callings as agents of grace, they can turn their world upside-down for Jesus Christ.

Believers in Jesus Christ are saved by the grace of God alone. We also live only by the grace of God, and we realize more of our great salvation by the grace of God. We are sent to the world as agents of grace and ambassadors of the Kingdom of grace. The grace to love God in worship, witness, and work; and the grace to love our neighbors does not originate in us. It flows *to* us by the Word of God, and it issues *through* us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And, at the end of the day, what grace *is* and what grace *accomplishes* in and through us is nothing other than the reality of Jesus Christ Himself. As John explained, when by grace we believed in Jesus, we received *all* of Jesus in His resurrected glory: “of His fullness we have all received”. And that fullness of Jesus is never topped-off in us; instead, by wave upon wave of grace, we are filled and refilled with Jesus, and gradually and increasingly transformed into His image. Grace is a living Person. Grace – and the love and communication and power it entails – consists in Jesus Christ, Who dwells in power in the hearts of all who believe in Him.

The more Jesus grows to fullness in our lives, the more His grace will be present in, with, and through us. We must have more of Jesus, and we must have more of Jesus every day. Christ in us is our only hope of glory (Col. 1.27). For us to live – truly, fruitfully, and eternally – is Jesus Christ (Phil. 1.21). The life that we as believers live, to the extent that it flows grace to the world and brings glory to God the Father, is nothing other than Jesus Christ living in and through us (Gal. 2.20).

As Jesus increases in us, and we in our old ideas, feelings, and ways decrease, grace floods our soul and increases into our Personal Mission Field. Thus, the world continues to be filled with the Lord Jesus Christ, in the wave upon wave of grace that moves, transforms, and empowers us day by day.

*Realizing our potential?*

Even a cursory consideration of the life and work of Jesus will reveal, for most of us, that we are not realizing the full potential of His presence in us. We are still too filled with ourselves. We think our own thoughts; give in to our own affections; cling to our self-interested motives and priorities; and thus generally do not bear the kind of fruit we might expect from those who have the Son of God dwelling within them. We don't have the same compassion that we see in Jesus, or the same boldness, confidence, joy, or power. We *believe* in Jesus, but we're not much like Him, at least, not as much as we could be.

What keeps us from knowing the abounding grace of Jesus, forming us increasingly into His image and

deploying us as His witnesses in the world?

I suspect that the greatest obstacle to increasing in Christ and His grace is that we have never become entirely refocused in our salvation. The grace that brought us to saving faith came with such a rush of joy, such relief of guilt, and such lofty prospects for eternal wellbeing, that we became enthralled more with the *benefits* of knowing Jesus than with *Jesus Himself*. We're grateful and long for continuous peace. We soar during those periods of joy that we know from time to time, particularly in public worship. And we rest in the hope and assurance of eternal life, of being in heaven one day. These great gifts – peace, joy, assurance, hope, and many others – have become the goal of our faith. We go to church, join this or that group, take up certain ministries, and so forth, because we believe these will maintain and augment those conditions of peace, joy, contentment, security, and so forth which we have come to love about being Christians.

Meanwhile, the *Giver* of all these good and perfect gifts remains in the background. We delight more in the *conditions* He provides than in Him as the *Provider* of all things. We find whatever brings us peace and contentment more desirable than the One Who is all peace and contentment. We want grace to help us in our struggles and times of need, but we want the *grace*, not the One Who is all grace. It's why our prayers are always filled more with requests and supplications than with silence and praise.

It's not that we don't love Jesus. We do, we honestly do. But we have come to rely on and delight in the *gifts* of Jesus, rather than in Jesus *Himself*. And we will never realize the full potential of God's abounding grace as long as this is the case.

*Seek grace, seek Jesus*

Here's a simple test that will allow you to see whether this is true in your life. David said: "One *thing* I have desired of the LORD, that I will seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire (meditate) in His temple" (Ps. 27.4). The test: Reflect on your own prayer life – what you prayed this morning, your most recent prayer, what you pray when you're with your Christian friends, what you typically pray at night before retiring. *Does this "one thing" dominate your prayers?* Is your great desire in prayer to see Jesus? To meditate on the beauty of Jesus? To settle into your seat with Jesus at the right hand of the Father (Eph. 2.6)? To have Jesus formed in you more and more? To know Him increasing and you decreasing as you meditate on and seek Him?

Or are you seeking in your prayers more of what Jesus gives than of Jesus Himself?

We will never know the abounding grace of God to the extent He intends, until seeking Jesus, seeing Jesus, being filled with Jesus, and increasing in His beauty, goodness, truth, and power becomes the consuming passion of our souls. Abounding grace is concentrated in Jesus Christ. And when we concentrate our attention, affection, and devotion on Him, and not just to what He does for us, wave upon wave of grace will well up in us and overflow from us to show the reality of Jesus to the world.

*For reflection*

1. What is meditation? Why should we meditate on Jesus? How would you explain the importance of meditating on Jesus to a new believer?
2. Is it possible that the gifts Jesus gives us by grace could become idols, keeping us from knowing Him? Explain.
3. How can believers help one another keep more consistently focused on Jesus?

*Next Steps – Transformation: What can you do to bring more focus on Jesus into your walk with Him?*

*Abounding Grace*

*Questions for Reflection or Discussion*

1. Why do we say that all the grace we'll ever need is ready to hand?
2. How should we expect to see grace when it is present?
3. What are the effects in our soul as grace abounds to us?
4. How can we know more of Jesus as our primary means of grace?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned about grace from this series? How are you putting that lesson to work? Share your experience of this study by going to our website, [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org), and using the Share Your Story button. Let us rejoice with you over what God is doing in your life.

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.