



Grow in Grace: How do I apply this to my life?

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Build the lighthouse before the storm Practice the disciplines as the storms of life are going to come! Set goals, decide to enlarge your territory, decide to grow in grace!

1) EXPAND YOUR AREA OF DISCOMFORT: Purposefully allow yourself situations of discomfort.

I began to feel sorry for myself one Sunday morning when my husband and I had to walk to church. The Bishop didn't have a problem with it, but after all, God was still working on the character of his wife. But an evangelism student with polio walked over one hour to church.

There is a "delicate balance," as E. Stanley once described the activity of God and the response of His children in the establishment and cultivation of conversion. Yes, conversion is "a gift and an achievement, the act of a moment and the work of a lifetime." He also challenges us to "constantly enlarge the area of your conversion."

If you only allowed yourself to be in comfortable situations, then how would you grow in grace?

While in Kenya, I took up golf. I learned to play the same course over and over again. I enjoyed the long walk on the beautiful green course in Limuru. Golf can become easier (I'll never say it is easy!) if playing the same course over and over. Then we know what to expect, we know yardages, clubs to hit, way putt breaks. But golf becomes a challenge when we change the course. I went from the long course in Limuru, Kenya, to the par 3 at Mt. Kenya Safari Club. Being a novice, I thought, "Oh good! It will be easier!" But to my surprise, it was shorter, but not "easier." There were new distances, new greens, new breaks. My first time playing it was quite intimidating. Sometimes we would have to hit over brush and couldn't even see the hole. On top of that, I didn't

know anything about a short game! I depended upon my caddie every shot on the course. He gave the distance, and even chose my club. To me, this was a word picture of the grace of God.

Such is the game of life. Sometimes we get too comfortable and play the game on our own strength. Then God might bring us a challenge, a new course, to cause us to grow in our game, to work on new areas.

We have to be creative in our spirituality and decide to grow in grace. Make yourself uncomfortable! Next time you are in the grocery store, purposefully get in the longest line! Or allow a mother with children and a large grocery cart to get ahead of you! And then you can pray for her and her family while you are waiting! These are practical ways you can grow in grace!

2. SECONDLY, OUR GRACE NEEDS TO BE TESTED THROUGH SUFFERING

(Story of my watch - it used to have a black band, but it melted in Toliara; it was not a true black) Romans 5:1 "Since we have been made right in God's sight..." (That's grace) It continues in verses 3-5: "We can rejoice too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us - they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation. And this expectation will not disappoint us. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love."

- Paul wasn't going through an easy time when he wrote this! He wrote several of his books while in prison.
- Peter wrote in circumstances of persecution
- I write while living in a slum of the 9th poorest country in the world.
- Ask yourself questions: What are our circumstances that, by the grace of God, we endure for Christ?
- Think of gardening--strong plant, good soil, water, sunlight oxygen. But what is missing? Every plant, in order to grow to its full potential, needs to have a bit of...fertilizer!

There is a story of a man who was a prisoner of war during the Korean War. "I was in the camp for two years. The winters were the hard part. In North Korea the winters are very cold. It snows. The ground freezes. We had to sleep in drafty barracks on thin boards with one thin blanket. In winter, the guards would make charcoal fires in these barracks. They stood around the fires, warming themselves, in front of us. If you wanted to, you could take your blanket and go sleep by the fires. The guards didn't mind.

"You could always tell the prisoners who had given up hope. They would go sleep by the fire. It was warmer there. You could make it through the night without shaking from the cold. But being warmed that way lowered your resistance. The ones who slept by the fire would get sick, pneumonia or flu, or God knows what. They'd last for a while, but they wouldn't make it. They would die.

“Those of us who survived--we were the ones who never went to sleep by the fire.” (Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*)

As Christians, we need to remember that sleeping by the fire of comfort and security might just be a shortcut to spiritual apathy and perhaps even death. Being soothed by the fire of coziness and wellbeing will lower our spiritual resistance. The blessed opportunity of joining in suffering for the Lord will cause our spiritual immune system to be strong, healthy, resisting unwanted disease. It will give us the opportunity to grow in grace! Our grace will be tested and grown, through suffering!

I have developed a saying when enduring difficult circumstances. This seemed to be my theme when traveling on public transportation, otherwise known as a "taxi-busse" from Toliara, where we live in Southwest Madagascar, to the capital, Antananarivo. It is a 17 hour trip, with very few stops, none of them being at McDonald's, or even to use a proper toilet. On top of the long hours, I tend to get motion sickness, especially from the narrow, windy mountainous roads in the highlands of Madagascar. It is expensive to take the one-hour flight, which my husband allows me to do from time to time. My husband and I think differently. I look at the expense as a way of saving our bodies from long, tiresome hours of travel. He looks at the amount of money (\$150 one-way) and realizes it is a month's salary for one of the evangelists. But this time, the three of us were traveling; Todd, me and Charese, our youngest, who is still in boarding school in Kenya and was home on break in Madagascar for one month. So, before our taxi-busse journey, Charese and I walked to the pharmacy and picked up motion sickness meds and made sure we had some peeled garlic to chomp on to keep our stomachs at rest. My theme during the journey, which took as many hours in the car as it did to fly to Miami was: "OH GREAT! O GRACE!" (I had already prepared for this talk so now I had to walk my talk!) "OH GREAT! O GRACE!"

Finally, GRACE WILL GROW THROUGH OUR WEAKNESSES. Nobody really wants to admit their weaknesses. But I think if we did, we would be more open and vulnerable and life would be a lot less stressful. As Winston Churchill said, “We are all worms. But I do believe I am a glowworm.”

1 Cor. 1:27: “God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.” The Corinthian Christians themselves were living proof that salvation does not depend on anything in man, so that when someone is saved, he must boast in the Lord.

Paul continues in 2 Cor. 12:9: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” God's grace upon Paul was a better solution than removing Paul's thorn in the flesh. Human weakness provides the ideal opportunity for the display of divine power!

Let us go back to the golf analogy. The second time around the new golf course, I could learn from my mistakes. I still missed hit a few shots (well, maybe more than a few), but at least I knew where the flag was! At least I knew the direction I wanted to go and what club would take me there. I

learned from the mistakes I made the first time around. What was it that Thomas Edison said when someone mentioned to him that he failed over 2,000 times when trying to invent the light bulb? He said, “No, I didn’t fail. It was just a 2,000 step process.”

Romans 5:6- 11: “When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, no one is likely to die for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's judgment. For since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be delivered from eternal punishment by his life. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God--all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God.” Wow. That is grace!

Jesus calls us to a life of servanthood. But that does not mean we are only serving in our strength but only in our weaknesses. Todd and I have the joke about he and I on the mission field. Todd is a natural. He is gifted and wise missionary. One could say he is fulfilling his purpose in life. That God has specifically ordained him for this purpose. He is a natural. Me? I am a supernatural. It is only by the grace of God that I am on the mission field.

John Ortberg, author of *The Life You Always Wanted*, writes, “We must minister out of weakness. The reason we help others is not because we are strong and they need us, it is because if we don’t help them, we will end up in a hopeless relic.” The primary reason Jesus calls us to servanthood is not just because other people need our service. It is because of what happens to us when we serve. Ortberg encourages us, “Give yourselves to those who can bring you no status or clout. Just help people!” (p. 108-109)

My dad is a good reflection of using his gifts of service to the surrounding community. He doesn't wait for a big need to come up--he helps in the little things. Wherever anybody needs help, he is willing to volunteer. One of his gifts of service is allowing a friend of his an afternoon out every Tuesday. My dad's friend is a fulltime caregiver to his wife, who suffers from Alzheimer’s Disease and needs constant assistance. He hardly gets relief except for the Tuesday afternoon my father comes over to his house to give him relief. And what kind of service does my father offer? Most of the time, he sleeps on the couch! This is also nap time for my father's friend's wife, so dad, many times, sleeps away the afternoon!

To my amazement, just a few weeks after I arrived in Toliara, I met a 25-year-old girl who was wearing a tennis skirt. “Milalao tennis, ve ianao?” I asked her in Malagasy if she played tennis. “Eny, Tompoko!” She replied. Since that day in November we have been playing tennis. A few weeks ago I was playing tennis with Judia. It was a dry, dusty and very windy day. The courts were slippery and I slipped. Boom. Right on my bum. Feet went right out from under me and before I knew it I was on the ground. I took a hard fall, right on the place where I fell off a horse 24 years ago. Interesting how the injuries never seem to go away, just get worse with age. Anyway, I got up and began to play again. But I noticed my game changed. My confidence disappeared. I was no longer playing with the confidence I had before the fall. I realized I was playing in the fear of the fall, rather than to my full potential.

As Christians, I think we tend to do the same. Rather than living into the victory of the cross, we tend to play the game of life in the fear of the fall. Our confidence slacks. We wonder about ourselves. What gifts and services could we ever offer anybody? But that's the problem. We need to get our eyes off of ourselves and on to Jesus. Off of our weaknesses and on to the Living God! Off of the fall and on to the grace of God! His grace is sufficient for me!

Grow in Grace: How do I apply this to my life? Part 2

("Charese, I need to speak for 4 hours on the subject of grace. What do I say?" Her response, "4 hours? BooooooING!")

2 Tim. 2:1, 2: "Be strong with the special favor God gives you in Christ Jesus...Teach these great truths to trustworthy people who are able to pass them on to others."

First we grow in grace ourselves. We saw 3 ways on how to do this:

- 1. EXPAND YOUR AREA OF DISCOMFORT**
- 2. GRACE NEEDS TO BE TESTED THROUGH SUFFERING**
- 3. GRACE WILL GROW THROUGH WEAKNESSES.**

Secondly, now that we know, we have the responsibility to teach them onto others. "Teach these great truths to trustworthy people who are able to pass them on to others."

The Apostle Paul is giving a commission to his young disciple, Timothy. Paul is depositing or entrusting that which he has received to Timothy, so that he may reproduce something good in others. You might be able to describe it as: Pay it Forward.

A common saying for Americans when someone has done us a special favor is, "I'll pay you back." God has also done us a special favor (translated as grace in the New Living Bible) But with God, we will never be able to "pay him back." He wants us to pay it forward--to pass it on to someone else. He give us free grace and does not expect anything in return, but he does expect us to take up the responsibility to pass on what we have learned to others.

The word entrust comes from *paratithemi* from *para* = beside + *tithemi* = place.

Literally means to place something beside, to set alongside or place before someone. It was used in the Greek meaning to give someone something in trust and so to "deposit" with another. It conveys the picture of a precious treasure being deposited as a trust into the hands of other persons. Those to be entrusted with the message must be "faithful" persons who are reliable and trustworthy "who will not swerve aside because of fear or favor, who will not compromise with the spirit of the age through which they are passing."

It can convey the idea of investing or charging someone with a duty or responsibility. It can convey the idea of putting something into the care or protection of someone. This is very similar to use of *paratithemi* in classical Greek to describe anything being deposited with a friend for the purpose of safekeeping.

You might be saying to yourself, "This is all Greek to me, go back to the KISS method and put it into lay-terms, sister!" Ok. Bear with me one moment. In the secular Greco-Roman world, *paratithemi* was used as a banking term meaning to deposit something valuable as a trust or for protection. The point of this specific verb is that truth is not something simply to be given away but is to be carefully deposited, much like we might make a monetary deposit in a promising investment.

Now I have your attention back because I am talking money!!

For us to entrust this investment to others, we are to look for people who have certain characteristics or qualities. This passage gives us a hint of what we are to look for in people. There are at least three qualities we are to see active in our potential leaders before we entrust our lives into them as potential Christian leaders. As women in the church, we need to be looking for women with these qualities to carry on the task ahead. What are these qualities? They all begin with "C."

1) We are to be looking for godly **character**. The passage challenges young Timothy, Paul's protégé, to entrust these great truths of the gospel to trustworthy people. Some of the other Bible translations say reliable, faithful, dependable people. So we are looking for people who can be trusted, who we can rely on and are faithful to God.

Paul is commanding Timothy with a sense of urgency to entrust to someone who is trustworthy (*pistos*--trustworthy, dependable, reliable, worthy of placing one's confidence in) people. These are not just any believer, but were to be people who could be trusted, who would pass the gospel "deposit" on to others. These were to be people Timothy could place his confidence in...people who would be sure to follow through to the end, even if it cost them their life. They must prove themselves worthy of this eternal investment by their faithfulness, the dividing line between mediocrity and excellence in Christian living. Note that the requirement is not eloquence, charisma, intellect, or natural talent, even though these tend to attract people's attention and praise. Instead, Paul commanded Timothy to look for faithful men and women, through whom there is no limit what God can do.

2) We are looking for people with **competence**. This is different from confidence, as confidence might be in themselves, rather than in God. We are looking for those who are able. The Greek word refers to one who is able, sufficient, qualified, competent. *Hikanos*, from the root *hik* = to reach (with the hand), "to attain," "reaching to," "attaining to"--hence, "adequate") reaches or arrives at a certain standard. In this context it refers to people who meet the standard; they are adequate (sufficient for a specific requirement), sufficient (enough to meet the needs of a situation or a proposed end), enough (in or to a degree or quantity that satisfies or that is sufficient or necessary for satisfaction), qualified (fitted as by training or experience for a given purpose), competent (having the capacity to function or develop in a particular way) to do something.

3) We need to look for people with the right **chemistry**. We want people who work well with others. The passage challenges Timothy to pass these truths of the gospel on to others. It means that the person is not a lone ranger but works well with others.

My daughter is taking chemistry in college. We all know that the right ingredients have to be mixed correctly in order to get the desired product. Women are chemists in the kitchen. We make a recipe and mix ingredients. Even though the ingredients might be good, they might not taste good together.

Several years ago Charese wanted to make us something. So she put all her favorite ingredients together, including Kiwi fruit, corn flakes and ketchup. At her young age she thought that if she liked all the ingredients individually, then why wouldn't she like them all together? But as you know, that is not always the case. People need to work well with others to be able to reproduce spiritual leaders.

In this verse Paul gives the formula for spiritual multiplication. Paul is urging Timothy to pass it on to others, just like Paul has passed it on to Timothy. I notice four generations mentioned in this passage: "And the things you (second generation, Timothy) have heard me (first generation, Paul) say in the presence of many witnesses entrusted to reliable men (third generation) who will also be qualified to teach others (fourth generation)." This is what reproducing leaders is all about: Spiritually reproducing ourselves in spiritual reproducers.

William Barclay observes that the teacher is a link in the living chain which stretches unbroken from this present moment back to Jesus Christ. The glory of teaching is that it links the present with the earthly life of Jesus Christ.

This is the way to pass on the torch of the light of the knowledge of God in Christ. Paul taught Timothy who will teach others who will teach still others, an endless chain.

A dramatic example of the power of the principle of multiplication and linking this chain begins (as far as we have record) with a Sunday school teacher named Mr. Kimball, who in 1858 was burdened to lead a Boston shoe clerk named D.L. Moody to new life in Christ.

Dwight L. Moody became a faithful evangelist, and while in England in 1879, God used his message of sound doctrine to awaken an evangelistic zeal in the heart of F.B. Meyer, pastor of a small church, who later visited America and while preaching on a college campus was used by the Spirit to bring a student named J. Wilbur Chapman to saving knowledge of Christ. Chapman, engaged in YMCA work employed a former baseball player, Billy Sunday, to do evangelistic work and while leading a revival in Charlotte, NC, so stirred the hearts of a group of local (faithful) men that they prayed and planned another evangelistic campaign, which came to fruition when God brought Mordecai Hamm to preach. During this revival, a young man named Billy Graham heard the gospel and yielded his life to Christ. It may be that you, dear listener, are one of the tens of thousands who has been led to Christ through the ministry of Billy Graham. Only eternity will reveal the tremendous impact of that one trustworthy Sunday school teacher who invested his life in the lives of others. All he did was speak to a shoe salesman!

Strong leadership is not enough to create healthy ministries: handing over the mantle to new leaders must also be a part of ministry development. Leaders must create a system to reproduce and train other leaders to perpetuate the ministry. This teaches leaders how to pass along what they have learned to others.

How are the leaders of ECW going to pass the mantle onto the next generation? Are you looking for leaders who have godly character, are competent and have good chemistry with others?

JUST THIS DAY

Just this day, dear Lord
I pray You give me strength.
To do the things You've asked of me
To embrace the day at length.

To encourage the broken hearted
Pray for those who are weak
Feed God's people with Your Holy Word
Be humble, courageous and meek.

To live up to the challenges
You bring to me
Not to hide my face
But with the confidence of Christ on Calvary
Walk Your path and GROW IN GRACE.