

# Take It To The Limit – A Caveat

The Eagles' Greatest Song - *Take It To The Limit*, a very good objective (within the context of an important caveat).

During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" Mt 14:25 - 31

There are 2 ways to look at Peter in this familiar *Bible* passage – either self-righteously (the way I have typically heard this passage preached) – "Look at Peter, he failed because he did not have enough faith . . ." or in awe, knowing he at least tried. When have we attempted the impossible?

Peter walking on water, indeed the whole book of *Galatians*, shows faith in not always success, rather it is persistence and repentance in the face of trying the impossible.

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. 2Pe 3:17 - 18

Those looking for grace when they die only have real hope if they have sought grace when alive. For if we expect life to get easier, if this is our measure of grace, we will be very disappointed. Look around! Be realistic! This is not how life, faith or grace work.

There are at least 8 major truths about grace often missed:

1. We cannot separate Jesus Christ from Grace – the former is who He is while the latter, in relation to us, is what He does for us. If we do not have His grace we are not His people!
2. Grace typically rescues us *through* trials and difficulties, not *from* them. When our focus and effort is the avoidance of problems ("My will be done . . ."), at all costs, we will be defeated!
3. Grace is typically the catalyst, the beginning, of help and hope, not the end. On-going grace is maintained through the persistence of accepting it; the temptation is to stop seeking and accepting it when we over the worst of a trial or difficulty, falling back on our own abilities.
4. Grace is not always, but more often than not, active – not passive; what God does *through* us in the way of doing *for* us. We should not sit and wait for grace, but pursue it – step out, often fail, evaluate why we failed (did we fall back AGAIN on ourselves . . . did we find where we were going/what we were doing was not supported by grace, not God's desire for us?). It is fine to see Peter's failure if we use this to help us when facing similar trials.
5. We can and should do the possible; grace expects and does the impossible. Even an average person, when sharply focused on a goal, can achieve much; the problem is that they cannot maintain and retain anything – they will die and lose it all.

6. Grace changes us; while He “accepts us as we are” God (thankfully!) does not leave us this way. Those looking for grace to confirm them, where they are and how they are, will not receive grace! Grace, in the words of Charles Dickens, has Great Expectations.
7. Grace *will be* evident, if not to others at least to ourselves. “News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad . . .” *Ac 11:22 – 23* Again, we must be seeing grace now if we expect to see it later – when we die!
8. Real grace ensures we will do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” *Eph 3:20 - 21*

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“At that time [the end of time – or for a person, when we die] the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

“‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

“Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’

“But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’” *Mt 25:1 - 12*

Death may be so quick upon us, it may then be too late to seek and find grace.

Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”

He said to them, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’

“But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’

“Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’

“But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’”

*Lk 13:22 - 27*

If religion was only a concept that someday the world will end, we will die and a judge returns to see how we did during our life . . . maybe people could be rationally forgiven for ignoring this possibility. However, the reality, not the threat, of death is imminent for everyone! A child will have difficulty grasping this concept, but to any adult, this should be a (if not the) guiding force of life; we will die, so as the wise have said: “How should then should we live” in the face of this truth?

Even for those considering themselves religious what is too frequently overlooked is that, though faith is a gift of grace, we are responsible to maintain and develop it, not neglect it and expect it to flourish.

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property [grace] to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

“The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

“ ‘Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ <sup>Mt 25:14 - 30</sup>

The One who gives grace does so with the intention that we use and grow in it. There is nothing more distressing than giving a gift where the person is careless about, and seemingly uncaring for, it; this is a sure sign they don’t really appreciate the gift. And at the other extreme is the one who is selfish and will not share – either of these makes the giver sorry they gave the gift in the first place.

Faith (which, itself, is a grace) is one of the key spiritual muscles (love, joy . . . being others) built only by tension and persistence – perseverance and diligence under pressure. And we learn this best in the everyday, even mundane, issues and tasks of life. Those who are saving their faith for the big issues and trials of life (or the time of death) are going to be sorely surprised when they find they do not have spiritual strength because they neglected, day-to-day, this gift.

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The Eagles’ Greatest Song - *Take It To The Limit*, a very good objective within the context of an important caveat – that we seek and find the “narrow way,” God’s Will; and then take His Grace as the only hope of doing what He requires of us, the impossible! The broad road to inevitable destruction is hard, and many do an “admirable” job on it – but it still leads to death! The narrow road, on the other hand, is impossible (without God’s grace); but only, on it, is there hope! My chances are certain and pitiful – I prefer the chances and promises of grace!

## Our reasonable goal? - Take Grace To The Limit!