

Maybe the best measure of success in any life is the extent to which an individual seeks and takes the grace prepared by God in advance for them. Every person, at all times, has grace available to them that they are not taking and likely are not even aware of.

But to be more aware of these potential blessings requires we dispel common false notions about grace:

- Grace is not, as most people think, a gift we passively accept, when offered, not requiring anything of us. Grace requires much from us! We must seek and take it and give up everything that keeps us from protecting, keeping and growing this grace. All grace, by definition, is a gift, a gift given for a specific purpose, to use and improve what/where we are without it to Better. The great challenge with grace is not having it offered, but in our willingness to give up what is hindering our taking it.
- Grace works through (not apart or “around”) us. Want to find the blessing and grace of being more blessed in giving than receiving for example? We must be willing to give, by grace, what we have received by grace otherwise we will not find and experience this grace.
- We must, by grace faith, understand grace is NOT bound by normal physical and material constraints. If we think and say: “2 plus 2 MUST equal 4” . . . “if we want to get somewhere sooner we must go faster” . . . we will not accept most graces because the vast majority of graces are counter: intuitive, cultural, “common-sense” . . . – it takes grace faith to reach out and take any grace because, without grace, they typically appear foolish and even stupid.
- Grace is not (NOT!) a “boost,” a last resort, to get us over a “hump” in life – it is not what God offers and gives us after we have done all we can do, completed most of the work and just need a little help to make the finish line. Grace requires us to repent (see the errors of our current ways), turn and take the different and FAR Better paths He has prepared in advance for us.
- Grace requires we understand the very important reality of “practical impossibilities.” We see others do something so if we are having difficulty doing the same we assume we must try harder and harder to do it instead of realizing it may be a practical impossibility for us (yes, we are all born different – to overcome our gene deficits requires grace, not more and more beating and bleeding our heads trying to do what we have tried and cannot do)!

2 Practical Examples of these Truths

Truths are often best understood in analogies – good examples are helpful analogies.

Example 1

Jesus, in a single sentence (*Matthew 6:33*) makes a very bold, precise and concrete grace offer: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things [everything we need here and now materially] will be given [the simple word for grace is gift] to you as well” – by taking this grace (and only by taking this grace) will we have the greater gift and blessing of seeking first God’s kingdom and His righteousness while also being assured of the lesser (but nonetheless important and necessary) gift of all our material needs.

- This grace is not a gift we can passively accept. To experience it we must seek and accept it and, at the same time, give up everything that keeps us from protecting, keeping and growing this grace – we must repent from dependence on ourselves for what we need in life, giving up the bird in the hand for the eternal and temporal blessings Jesus offers here and now. The challenge with this grace is not having it offered, but in our willingness to give up the supposed “security” we cling to that is hindering our reaching out and taking Jesus’ gift of “all things.”
- This grace certainly works through (not apart or “around”) us. It is a grace that requires work – work that is by faith and, in the end, rewarding unlike our current futile work. We know this is a correct interpretation of this grace offer because elsewhere in the *Bible* Jesus further enlightens us on this grace: “Do not work for food that spoils [the primary reason most people work], but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you . . . The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” ^{Jn 6:27–29} Jesus offers grace and tells us what we are and are not to do with this grace.
- It is obvious that to receive this grace we must, by grace faith, understand and accept that this grace is NOT bound by normal physical and material constraints. Who could reasonably believe that if we want and expect to have all we need we can make something else (requiring our first and best time and greatest attention) primary? It is certainly highly counter: intuitive, cultural, “common-sense” . . . – it takes great and continuing grace faith to reach out and take this grace (and to return to it when we find we have AGAIN returned to self-reliance and self-dependence and forsaken this offer).
- This grace is not (NOT!) a “boost,” a last resort, to get us over a temporary shortage or bad financial “patch” in life – it is not what God offers and gives us after we have done all we can do, most of the work, and just need a little help to make the finish line. This grace requires we repent (see the errors of our current self-dependent ways) and turn and take this different and FAR Better path – that we seek first, and in the process, realize and live in the truth we are told for which we are saved: “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” This seeking first (including the good works God has prepared in advance specifically, precisely and individually for each Christian to do) is more than a full-time job requiring we not look to a “secular job” to support us. Yes, God will direct most Christians to “normal” jobs where they earn a salary, but their “boss” must be God and they must be open to doing what He says, when He says it.

- Grace requires we understand the very important reality of “practical impossibilities.” We see others do something so, if we are having difficulty doing the same, we assume we must try harder and harder to do it instead of realizing it may be a practical impossibility for us (yes, we are all born different – to overcome our gene deficits requires grace, not more and more beating and bloodying our heads trying to do what we have tried and cannot do)!

If we are in God’s grace we may find we really cannot provide for ourselves, we are simply incapable of doing what others can do. But if we are in His grace we will be doing what He prepared in advance for us to do and, as a result, receiving the best possible grace so we can give our best possible effort in faith and anticipation of the looming and long eternity facing each of us very soon! That eternity is coming (and coming soon) is not in doubt – the issue is if we are living in anticipation of this, of all, most important truth – the kingdom of heaven is near!

Example 2

Our first example is admittedly very big and radical so a more “pedestrian” example may better elucidate these Grace Is – Is Not principles.

The *Bible* tells us: “Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”
1Ti 4:7-8

In Example 1 above we looked at a godliness grace, now (even though undeniably not as important as Example 1 it is of “some value”) let’s take a quick look at the issue of physical training to help us better understand grace is and isn’t . . .

- The grace of good health is a great grace, but it is not, as most people think, a passive gift. In the area of health, it is obvious to everyone that we decline physically as we age (and increasingly so as we get older and older). As we age we should mature, meaning consider and see if it is reasonably practical to mitigate and slow this decline. Sadly, in too many cases we age, but do not mature.

If we live in a first-world country we have the added grace of “modern medicine” that can help lessen some of the issues associated with aging. But the single greatest grace offered to maintain and improve health is exercise. The challenge with this (like other) grace is not having it offered, but in our willingness to give up what is hindering our taking it: our not thinking combined with laziness (a very bad combination)!

- And this is another example of where we can likewise clearly see the principle that grace works through (not apart or “around”) us. The great grace for exercise is in providing the greater mental and lesser physical disciplines and stamina since exercise is typically 90% mental and 10% physical. Few people give up exercise because they are not physically able, they are not mentally able! And Christians are often the worst because they too often mistakenly think of grace as what God does for us apart from any work or effort on our part – they can feel entitled to grace, erroneously believing (although they wouldn’t say it like this) they can be lazy and slothful and still receive grace – we can’t and won’t because God gives His grace to work through, not around or apart from, us. Grace makes the otherwise hard possible and easy. But we still have to put in the grace-provided time, make the grace-enabled effort, sweat . . . to obtain the great benefits from it.

- We must, by grace faith, understand that grace to exercise is NOT confined within normal physical and material constraints. Even though scientific studies show the superiority of exercise as the “best medicine” available, it is certainly counter-cultural in its acceptance. The fact is that relatively few older people (those who benefit the most from physical activity and have the greatest “free” time for it) exercise to any meaningful degree or in a disciplined and consistent manner.
- Grace is not (NOT!) a “boost,” a last resort, to get us over a “hump” in life— it is not what God offers and gives us after we have done all we can do, most of the work, and just need a little help to make the finish line. Grace requires us to repent (see the errors of our current ways), turn and take the different and FAR Better paths He has prepared in advance for us. The fact is that, as we said earlier, very few people exercise to the ideal level necessary to significantly improve their health – we don't need a little boost, we need very much grace to exercise (adequately and consistently)!
- Grace likewise requires we understand the very important reality of “practical impossibilities.” We can see others exercising, but try as we may we can’t (or not on a consistent and long-term basis). We can butt our heads against a wall wondering what is wrong with us or we can admit it is a practical impossibility for us and see God’s grace to develop this discipline to stay as healthy as our only possible option.

In summary, yes, every person, at all times, has grace available to them that they are not taking. Thus, maybe the best measure of success in any life is the extent to which an individual seeks and takes the grace prepared by God in advance for them. Seek grace. Read the *Bible* (especially the *New Testament*) to find God’s great offers of grace and His great Grace Is – Grace Isn’t Principles and Truths!