

Legacy of **EXPONENTIAL GRACE**

2 Peter 1:3-15

³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. ¹¹ For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

¹² Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. ¹³ I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, ¹⁴ since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

32,768. Last week I discovered how good at math so many of you are. 32,768 is 8 raised to the power of 5, the example I used last week. I was thinking exponential growth but my mind mistakenly jumped to scientific notation. I don't think in the 500 sermons I have preached at this church that I have ever heard so many comments on a single sermon let alone a single illustration, so I guess the good news is that at least you were listening. Furthermore, since you are all so good at math, I will give a prize to the person who can explain this mathematical formula, which is the formula for exponential growth

$$x(t) = x_0 \cdot e^{kt} = x_0 \cdot e^{t/\tau} = x_0 \cdot 2^{t/T} = x_0 \cdot \left(1 + \frac{r}{100}\right)^{t/P},$$

Speaking of the number eight, out of all of the comments I hear about the message, my favorite came from eight year old Levi Hamilton who came up to me after the service and said, “God’s supplies are not like a supply of soap. Soap will run out but God’s supplies last forever.” Isn’t that awesome?

Remember that we are using the backpacking trip as a type of parable for the Christian life. We have our supplies, we take the journey and we arrive at our destination. Levi is right—the supplies will never run out, especially these supplies. Once you know that you have these supplies, you know what the supplies are, the key is not forgetting about them. What if someone on the Glacier backpacking trip became hungry—what should they do? They should check their supplies because there is plenty of food in the pack. What if they were to get cold? Check your supplies and pull out your fleece jacket? What if they could not see in the dark? Grab your flashlight from your supplies.

On a week of backpacking it is not likely that the hiker would forget what is in his supplies but this is the number one stumbling block for the believer. *For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.* Romans 1:18 says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes.” We can all say a hearty “Amen” to this truth. We can also agree that there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. We can gladly and joyfully agree that salvation come s through Christ alone. We will never forget these truths but we do forget to apply them to our daily lives. We forget that the gospel is the foundation of all spiritual growth.

If you are my age or older you may remember the old Minute Maid orange juice commercial with the tag line, “Orange juice—it not just for breakfast anymore.” The commercial was sending the message that you should drink orange juice any time of the day. I could adapt that commercial and state: “The gospel—it’s not just for salvation anymore.” Too many Christians get saved and then proceed to live the Christian life on their own power. This is what Paul fought against in his letter to the church in Galatia when he wrote, “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”

The list of Godly character qualities in this chapter is attainable by exponential grace through the work of the Spirit but there are two equal dangers that lurk around the corner. The first danger is that you would not attain to these character qualities. If this is true of you then at the very least Peter says that you are nearsighted and blind, you are unfruitful and unproductive and the worst, you may not receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom. It is possible that a lack of these qualities could represent a lack of saving grace.

Verse ten states, *Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.* What does it mean to fall? It certainly cannot mean that we will never sin because we know that is not possible. If it said you will fall less often it could mean that you will sin less often but it plainly says you will never fall.

Furthermore, the phrase “you will never fall” is contrasted with the next verse. *For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* If you possess these qualities you will enter the eternal kingdom of Christ and you will never fall so it stands to reason that if you do not possess these qualities, you will fall and not enter the eternal kingdom of Christ.

Now since a true believer cannot lose his or her salvation then it means the person who falls away was never a believer in the first place. Jesus described this scenario in the parable of the wheat and the tares. The enemy sowed weeds in with the plants of wheat and while the two plants grow side by side it was not possible to distinguish the wheat from the weeds but over time the two plants were easily distinguishable from one another. In a similar way, within a church you cannot always tell just by looking if a person is genuinely saved or not. We all live out our lives and we look very similar in so many ways, but over time the person who is living a Spirit driven life will begin to, as Peter writes, possess these qualities and increase in them. But in every church in the world, there will be some people who are going through the motions and may have the appearance of being saved but are simply not bearing spiritual fruit over time. So this is the first danger—that you would not develop these fruits of the Spirit over time.

But the second danger is that you would develop these qualities but through your own hard work. Now here’s the tricky part. Peter told us that we are to make every effort. Paul used all sorts of metaphors that had to do with great effort, like a hard working farmer, a faithful soldier or an elite athlete. We are to spare no effort in growing spiritual fruit in our lives, but here’s the thing—it is possible, through hard work, to grow in these character qualities. As I said last week, there are unbelievers and lukewarm believers who are really nice people. They are self-controlled, patient and loving people. You can counterfeit a lot of these qualities, but you can’t counterfeit godliness. So it’s tragic if you don’t develop these qualities and it’s tragic if you do develop them but you do it in your own strength.

But because grace is multiplied to you, you have everything you need for life and godliness. You began in grace. You have been walking in grace and you will finish in grace. It’s one thing to be assured that I have all that I need, but what happens if I don’t grow in these qualities? What if I fail? What if? What if? Of course you will fail. How do I know you will fail? Because you are alive. You will fail but what are you going to do about it? Is God’s exponential grace sufficient for your failure? Expand...

¹² *Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have.* This verse is a sort of transition between Peter’s list of character qualities and the next topic which is the inspiration of Scripture. He has extremely important reminders for his readers. Everything he has said thus far and everything he intends to say are all important topics. But right in the middle of his reminders he says this—*though you know them and are established in the truth that you have.* Just a few verses prior Peter held out the very real possibility that some who read this letter were in danger of being ineffective and unfruitful in their Christian walk. Some were in danger of being nearsighted and blind and having forgotten that they ever cleansed from their past sins. Perhaps even some were in danger of falling away from the faith. These are all serious and dangerous places to be Peter did not want to soften his words at all.

However, in the midst of the warning he gives this wonderful encouragement—*you know them and are established in the truth*. I see in this comment the amazing power of an encouraging word. I spoke with two different people this past week who are not part of our church but are part of our denomination. One conversation was very encouraging and I felt energized by it but the other conversation other felt like it was more shame based, that I did not measure up to this person's expectations. I felt depressed for about a day after that conversation.

Now you could argue that I placed too much emphasis on what these men think of me. In general, I feel that I am pretty free of the opinion of men. I can take a lot of criticism and keep moving forward without much effect. But while I live in this body I will never be completely free. There is no doubt that my pride got in the way in both conversations. In the one my pride was somewhat wounded and I responded accordingly and in the other my pride was slightly boosted and I responded accordingly. But the fact remains that encouragement is stronger than shame. For a donkey, the dangling carrot is more effective than a whip and this is all the more true for you and me. There is tremendous power in a single encouraging word.

What if you set a goal of giving away at least three encouraging words this next week? They're cheap to give, are they not? Now some of you might be thinking that three is an awfully small number but you might be surprised at how little we actually encourage one another. After all, which flows more freely from our lips—encouragement or criticism? Generally, criticism flows like a dam that has burst and encouragement trickles out like a leaky faucet. So even three genuine encouraging words may be more difficult than you think.

One of the ways I do this is to try to catch my kids doing things well. If they tend to be rather sloppy at completing a certain chore, if I see that they made a little extra effort I will pull them aside and let them know I appreciated what they did. So there is your challenge for the week—give three encouraging words to others. And make sure it is genuine encouragement and not mixed with flattery. Flattery is much easier than genuine encouragement.

We know that this letter was Peter's second and last letter but Peter himself was also aware that this would be his last letter as verse 13 makes clear. ¹³ *I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder,* ¹⁴ *since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.* What was this message that Jesus told to Peter about his death? Peter was most likely referring to the conversation on the beach following Jesus' resurrection.

Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God. (John 21:8-9) There are two things we learn from Jesus' words. First, the comment about "stretching out your hands" probably meant that Peter was to be crucified and tradition tells us that Peter was crucified upside down. The time of Peter's death is also mentioned—when you are old. Was Peter an old man by this time? When he was martyred he could have been in his early 60's. Not too old by our standards but enough for Jesus to have called him an old man.

Peter knew that he was to be martyred as an old man and he was now an old man. But do we get any sense that he was worried about his impending martyrdom? On the contrary, he was all the more eager to keep on sharing the good news until his dying breath. *I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder,* ¹⁴ *since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.* Peter's desire was to continue to stir up his fellow believers. Who among us does not need to be stirred up by way of a reminder?

Moreover, Peter shows us how to finish strong in the Christian life. We do not have nearly enough models of men and women who finish strong. Many of you know John Eumarian, a retired pastor who is in his 80's and refuses to slow down. That's all he does all day is stir up people by way of reminder, in addition to praying for hundreds of people. Many of you are on his prayer list. Our church is on his prayer list and I am grateful to be on it as well. He prays for local pastors every single day.

Another man who is finishing strong is the senior pastor who I served under at my former church. He retired from Sauk Prairie about a year after I left and for the following seven years he served as an interim pastor in several churches. He served at a church in Richland Center and during his interim period helped to bring this church into our denomination and it is now known as Grace Community. He served at the West Salem Free Church and more recently at the one in Prairie du Chien. He told me that some of the most fruitful and enjoyable years have been in his so-called "retirement" years. Many of you have met him as he has preached here twice and he will be filling in for me on the last Sunday of April.

But Peter wanted even more than just to finish strong. His great desire was to leave a legacy of exponential grace after he was gone. ¹⁵ *And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.* First of all, Peter gave a perfect definition of a legacy. A legacy happens when the people left behind are still impacted in some way by your life. And you need to know that that this transfer of a legacy does not happen on your deathbed. It's not about the last few months, days or hours of your life. A legacy does not happen in the last few, words of wisdom that you share on your deathbed. A legacy is built one day at a time. A legacy is built under pressure when you are at your wits end and you realize, "Lord, your grace is enough for this day. Your grace has carried me this far why should tomorrow be any different?" Your legacy is built brick by spiritual brick, day by day when spiritual fruit is born in the small things of a hum drum life.

Also, by definition, a legacy is exponential. In order to leave a legacy of faith you, must multiply that legacy to others. It is exciting to see the Spirit bear fruit in your life year after year but a legacy cannot be merely about your own spiritual development. We grow in Christ so that we can help others grow in Christ. Take one of Peter's qualities—steadfastness. How does one grow in steadfastness and perseverance? As I keep saying, you start by looking in your supplies.

But you also grow in steadfastness by being surrounded by people who are also growing in steadfastness. The opposite also tends to be true. If I am continually surrounded by people who are dying on the vine and are crushed by the worries and cares of the world, then I am more likely to go down with them. This is another layer of exponential grace. Exponential grace

begins with what God's divine power has given you for life and godliness. In other words, if you were alone on a deserted island, you would have everything you need for life and godliness. But God hasn't put us on a deserted island, has he? He has created us in community.

Notice I did not say that he has created us to *be* in a community but rather he has created us *in* community. In other words, when you are saved, you are saved into a community. If you are a believer, you cannot **NOT** be in community because every believer is in the community of the body of Christ. Now you can choose to not participate in a given local community of believers. You can choose to hang in the periphery if you wish, but you cannot exist outside of the community of believers in Christ. To be in the body of Christ is to be in community.

Therefore, why would you want to even try to grow in these spiritual fruits outside of the local community of Christ? Why would you want to be a lone ranger Christian trying to live life on your own without any help from other believers?

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April 1, 2012