

## “GROW-OLGY”

2 Peter 3:18

### INTRODUCTION

1. Would you agree we live in a culture fascinated by health? The surest way to earn millions is to develop a pill, a potion or a plan that will guarantee physical health. Almost every day we are inundated with information about health foods, healthy living and health insurance.

2. Today, we begin a new series designed to take a look, not so much at our physical health, but our spiritual health. In the weeks to come, we'll focus on five major areas that reveal our spiritual health.

Here at Grace, we believe that genuine spiritual health grows from an understanding of the grace of God. An author named, J. I. Packer, calls “*grace*” the

*“key word of Christianity.”*

In his book, “*What’s So Amazing About Grace?*” Philip Yancey calls grace the “*last best word.*” He says it is a

*“force stronger than vengeance, stronger than racism, stronger than hate.”*

John Piper said it like this:

*“After Jesus, there is ‘no sweeter word in all the Bible than grace.’”*

Eg. Another author wrote that,

*“It’s the greatest unused resource in all the world.”*

3. The good news of the grace of God in Christ is the central message of the entire bible. It’s one of the reasons why I’m so thrilled that Grace is the name of this church.

In fact, several months ago, our church leaders articulated the crucial ideas that summarize who we are as a church. All of them are connected to the idea of “grace.” They form an acrostic that spells the word, “grace:” G-R-A-C-E.

In the weeks to come, we’re going to study these pivotal ideas so important in our relationship with God. I hope you’ll be here for every single week. Today, you’ll find a set of notes. They really are your own spiritual medical file. If you’ll study with us, you’ll begin to grasp how grace influences every major area for your own spiritual health. You will find a place for your own prescription.

4. To launch this study today, we want to examine the “G” in the word, “Grace.” The “G” stands for “*growth.*” If you have a copy of the Bible, I invite you to turn with me to 2 Peter 3:18. The Bible tells us that a relationship with God begins when we are spiritually born-again through faith in Jesus Christ. That’s called, the “*new birth.*” Jesus said to Nicodemus:

*“Except a man is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of heaven.”*

But, after birth comes growth. If a baby doesn’t grow, it’s a tragedy. The same thing is true spiritually. If there is no growth, there is no life. Peter talks about that in 2 Peter 3:18. Look at what he says:

*“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen” (2 Peter 3:18).*

What does it look like to grow in grace? What are the evidences that I am growing in the grace of God? I want to talk about five of those evidences today. First, there will be a growing...

### 1. HUMILITY BEFORE A HOLY GOD

In other words, the more I understand about the grace of God, the more I'll be gripped by the holiness of God.

The Bible tells us about a moment when the prophet Isaiah saw the Lord. We read these words in Isaiah 6:

*They were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.’  
‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined!’*

- After Isaiah caught a glimpse of God's holiness- he was sick about his own sin!

*For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty” (Isaiah 6:3,5).*

Paul wrote...There is no one righteous...not even one!

One author had this in mind when he wrote,

*“None of us comes close to satisfying God’s requirements for a perfect life. If paid on the basis of fairness, we would all end up in hell” (Philip Yancey).*

Eg. In the movie, *“The Last Emperor,”* a young child is anointed as the last Emperor of China. He lives a magical life with thousands of servants at his command.

His brother asks, *“What happens when you do wrong?”* The boy emperor replies, *“When I do wrong, someone else is punished.”*

And to demonstrate, he breaks a jar and one of his servants is beaten.

It's just the opposite with God. Jesus reversed that ancient idea. When we failed to meet God's holy standard, the King was punished on our behalf!

2 Corinthians 5:2 God made Jesus to become sin for us (satisfaction) so that we might become the righteousness of God (justification).

Growing in Grace begins...I humble myself...and place my faith in Jesus-I am saved.

When I'm growing in grace, it means I have a growing humility before God Himself because I understand I will **never** deserve His forgiveness.

James says it like this.

(SLIDE 10)

*“But He gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:6,8).*

Eg. Many years ago, Bill Russell was the star of the world champion, Boston Celtics. He led them to a series of championships because of his defensive abilities. The whole team revolved around Bill Russell.

Sports fans respected his ability on the court. During an interview, a reporter asked him if he ever got nervous before a game. Russell's answer was surprising. In his own blunt honesty he said, *"Before every game, I vomit."*

The sportscaster was shocked and asked what would he do if they played two games in the same day? Russell didn't even blink, he said, *"I vomit twice."*

That's a little bit of the sense of awe that Isaiah (physically sick) experienced when he saw God. It makes him tremble! It's no wonder that James calls us to personal holiness.

When I get a glimpse of what God is...I am motivated to personal holiness!

Paul writes it like this to Titus.

(SLIDE 11)

*"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age"* (Titus 2:11-12).

Paul says it like this to the Corinthians.

(SLIDE 12)

*"Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God"* (2 Corinthians 7:1).

In other words, when I've really come to terms with the grace of God, I'll have a growing sense of how little I deserve God's forgiveness in my own life. An understanding of grace means I have a brokenness before a holy God.

Eg. There is an old song that says, *"Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling."*

The first evidence that I'm growing in grace is a growing humility before a holy God. The second evidence that I'm growing in grace is a growing...

## 2. HONOR FOR THE WORD OF GOD

You know, the Bible is under constant attack in our culture. There are those who believe the Bible's view of morality is outdated. Others diminish the authority of the Bible by suggesting their own ideas are as valuable as what the Bible says. Many professors attack the historical credibility of the Scriptures.

Do you know what Jesus said about this?

*"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4).

Jesus knew the Scriptures!

In other words, a study of the Scripture was central to the life of Jesus Himself. Peter says it like this:

*“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation” (1 Peter 2:2).*

To grow in grace means that I grow in my respect for my understanding of the Word of God.

Eg. That’s one of the reasons we provide these daily Bible reading guides for you. In fact, I want to challenge all of you in this room to use this reading guide during the next 5 weeks as an outline for your own study in the Scriptures.

Eg. Read devotionals online-every day!

Paul told Timothy the Scriptures *“are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”* (2 Timothy 3:15).

If you’re not making the study of the Word of God a central focus of your life, the Bible says you’ll be like someone tossed by the waves of the ocean and blown by every wind of teaching that comes along.

In fact, the writer of Hebrews even challenges us to move on through the basics truths of Scripture to deeper understanding of what God has for us in His Word.

If I’m growing in grace, I’ll have a growing honor for the Word of God in my life. (growing humility before holy God) I’ll also experience a growing...

### **3. HARMONY WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

It’s no wonder that Paul writes to the Romans:

*“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”* (Romans 14:19)

I love what C. S. Lewis said many years ago:

*“To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”*

An author named, George Herbert, wrote,

*“He who cannot forgive another breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself.”*

Another author named, Mike Yaconelli, wrote these strong words many years ago:

*“Petty people are ugly people. They are people who have lost their vision. They are people who have turned their eyes away from what matters and focused, instead, on what doesn’t matter.*

*It is time to rid the church of pettiness. It is time the church refused to be victimized by petty people.*

*Pettiness has become a serious disease in the church of Jesus Christ - a disease which continues to result in terminal cases of discord, disruption, and destruction. Petty people are dangerous people because they appear to be only a nuisance instead of what they really are - a health hazard.”*

That’s right.

If I’ve really experienced the grace of God, it will lead to harmony in my relationships with others. Paul wrote it like this to the Ephesians:

*“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).*

Eg. Ten years after the end of World War II, two peacemakers visited some Polish Christians. They asked, *“Would you be willing to meet with other Christians from West Germany? They want to ask forgiveness for what Germany did to Poland during the war and build a new relationship.”*

At first there was silence. Then one of the Polish Christians said, *“What you are asking is impossible. Each stone of Warsaw is soaked in Polish blood! We cannot forgive!”*

Before the groups parted, they started to say *“The Lord’s Prayer”* together. When they reached the words, *“Forgive us our sins as we forgive...”* everybody stopped praying.

Tension swelled in the room. Finally, the one who had spoken earlier said, *“I must say yes to you. I could no longer call myself a Christian, if I refuse to forgive. Humanly speaking, I cannot do it. But God will give us His strength.”*

Eighteen months later, Polish and West German Christians met together in Vienna and established friendships that continue to this day. (Humility before holy God. honor for the Word of God)

When I’ve experienced a growth in the grace of God, it produces harmony with the people of God. Furthermore, growing in God’s grace produces...

#### 4. A HUNGER FOR GIVING TO GOD

Look at these words of Paul to the Corinthians:

*“I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints” (2 Corinthians 8:3,4a).*

Did you catch that phrase: *“They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of giving.”? \*Wait...can we give another offering? IMAGINE!*

What caused that spirit? I only have one answer: These people were gripped by the grace of God. They were growing in their understanding of grace.

Live with an open hand

Anybody who is growing in grace develops a hunger to give.

Eg. Have you ever bought a gift for somebody you loved that was a perfect gift? (I’m not a great gift buyer) I don’t know about you, but when I buy a gift for Roxanne that I know she’s going to like, I can’t wait to give it to her. It’s hard to wait to give her a birthday or anniversary gift because I want her to enjoy it right now. That’s what real love does for you. The more you love somebody, the more you want to give to them. The more you and I grow in our understanding of the grace of God, the more we’ll give to Him.

I love what Paul wrote later in this same section to the Corinthians:

*“Just as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us - see that you also excel in this grace of giving” (2 Corinthians 8:7).*

\*That’s one reason for Dave Ramsey simulcast next Saturday.

Eg. In a book called, *Human Options*, Norm Cousins writes,

“The cash lost each year in the United States amounts to about \$75 per capita - money that has fallen out of pockets is misplaced, and so forth. The total average income for most of the human occupants on this planet comes to about \$69 per person annually. The average American thus loses more money each year than almost anyone else earns...”

The essential problem in a computerized age remains the same as it has always been. That problem is not solely how to be more productive, more comfortable, more content, but how to be more sensitive, more sensible, more proportionate, and more alive.”

I know how that happens...when we develop an increased hunger to give to the work of God, we become more alive.

There is one more evidence of what it means to grow in grace. We not only demonstrate a growing humility before God, a growing honor for the Word of God, a growing

harmony with the people of God, a growing hunger for giving to God, but we’ll also demonstrate a growing...

## 5. HEART FOR THOSE WITHOUT GOD

Look at this next verse on your outline.

*“With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33).*

One of the characteristics of early followers of Jesus Christ is they were attractive to others because of the grace they demonstrated. One of the root meanings of the word, “grace,” is a verb that means, *“I’m glad or I rejoice.”* In my experience, gladness and joy are not the first images that come to mind when people think of the church. We think of the church as a place to go after you’ve cleaned up your act, not before.

Eg. One prostitute said, *“Church! Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They’d just make me feel worse.”*

Yet, the mark of the Early Church is that the grace of God was upon them all.

Paul writes to the Ephesians:

*“In order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7).*

Eg. Gordon McDonald said it like this:

*“The world can do almost anything as well as or better than the church. You need not be a Christian to build houses, feed the hungry, or heal the sick. There is only one thing the world cannot do. It cannot offer grace.”*

That’s one of the reasons we have a ministry like, “Feed the Need,” that’s just around the corner. The week before Easter, we hope to provide boxes of food for around 350 families in this area who don’t have enough to eat. Now, we could provide the food and never introduce them to the grace of God. But that’s what makes the Church what it is. As a part of that food distribution, we’ll share with people the great story of Easter!

If you participate you might meet someone when you think...they don’t deserve this...that’s grace!

That’s what Paul had in mind when he wrote these words to the Corinthians:

*“For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life” (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).*

## CONCLUSION

Simone Weil was a French intellectual who died at the age of 33 during the Nazi occupation of World War II. She was a Jew who followed Christ and left her notes and journals as a record of her pilgrimage toward God.

She concluded there were two great forces that ruled the universe: gravity and grace. Gravity causes one body to attract others so that it continually enlarges by absorbing more and more of the universe into itself. Something like

that operates in human beings. We want to expand and acquire and swell in significance.

She concluded that we operate by one of these two laws: gravity or grace. She said:

*“All the natural movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity. Grace is the only exception.”*

An author named, Eugene O’Neill, wrote these words:

*“Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is the glue.”*

If I’m growing in grace, I’ll have a growing humility before a holy God, a growing honor for the Word of God, a growing harmony with the people of God, a growing hunger for giving to God and a growing heart for those without God.

Eg. 23 years ago, an IRA bomb buried a man named, Gordon Wilson, and his 20-year-old daughter, under five feet of rubble. Her last words to her father were, “Daddy, I love you very much.” She died a few hours later.

Speaking from his hospital bed, Gordon Wilson said,

*“I have lost my daughter, but I bear no grudge. Bitter talk is not going to bring Marie Wilson back to life. I shall pray tonight and every night that God will forgive them.”*

One reporter said the world wept as Wilson gave an interview about that incident to the BBC radio.

Upon his release from the hospital, Gordon Wilson led a crusade for Protestant-Catholic reconciliation. He wrote a book about his daughter, spoke out against violence and constantly repeated the refrain, "*Love is the bottom line.*"

Ultimately, he met with members of the Irish Republican Army, personally forgave them for what they had done and asked them to lay down their arms. He said, "*I know that you've lost loved ones, just like me. Surely enough is enough. Enough blood has been spilled.*"

When he died, the Irish Republic, Northern Ireland and all of Great Britain honored this extraordinary man who demonstrated uncommon grace and forgiveness.

God may not give you and me the opportunity to impact the world like Gordon Wilson has. But when we're growing in grace, it will make a difference in the lives of people around us.

Would you bow your head with me?

- What evidences are there in my life of growth and grace?