

## God's Grace ~ Part 16

**"Perhaps there is no word in the Bible more precious than Grace."**

~ Rick Countryman, Senior Pastor, Big Valley Grace Community Kehilah  
Modesto, Ca.

### "The Sufficiency of God's Grace ~ Part A"

So far in this series we have explored what is God's Grace; how we appropriate God's Grace and the associated stumbling block I called the performance trap; how amazing God's Grace really is; how we are compelled to live in God's Grace by love; and, the proof of our love for God. Over the next several posts, I want us to understand the sufficiency of God's Grace to get us through our life on planet earth.

**"But He [Yeshua] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Yeshua's power may reside in me."** ~ 2 Corinthians 12:9

We live in a fallen and sin-cursed world and Believers are not immune from the frustrating and often overwhelming circumstances of life resulting from that curse. Start your day reading the morning newspaper or your favorite news outlet on the internet or turn on the evening news and it doesn't take but a few seconds to realize the time of Yeshua's return appears to be approaching at warp speed.

But for almost two thousand years, multiplied thousands of Believers have found comfort, encouragement, and the strength to endure from God's words to Sha'ul, **"My grace is sufficient for you."**

We know from the book of the Acts of the Apostles and his own epistles that Sha'ul was no stranger to adversity. Earlier in 2 Corinthians he had spoken of his troubles, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, and hunger (see 2 Corinthians 6:4-5). Yet one particular affliction apparently caused him more pain and grief than all the others combined. **"Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so I would not exalt myself."** (2 Corinthians 12:7) We have no idea what Sha'ul's "thorn in the flesh" was and it is foolish to speculate.

### The Thorn in the Flesh

Sha'ul needed grace, **BUT** he also needed the thorn in his flesh. Like us, he was susceptible to the temptation of pride (or exaltation) and the thorn was given to check that temptation. As if to emphasize the need of the thorn, Sha'ul twice stated the Lord's purpose in giving it to him. It was to keep pride at bay. Sha'ul was a humble man. He considered himself **"the least of all the saints"** and the worst of sinners (Ephesians 3:8 and see 1 Timothy 1:15); yet he knew he was susceptible to pride, given the right circumstances.

All of us are susceptible to pride. And pride stands in direct opposition to grace, for **"God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble."** (James 4:6) Pride is often reflective of a self-righteous attitude. We begin to grow in the Messianic life, and we see other Believers who are not growing as we are. We are tempted to become proud of our spiritual growth. Or we see a Believer fall before temptation, and instead of being concerned, we become critical because of our own self-righteousness.

Most of us are familiar with the often used but very true expression, **"There, but for the grace of God, go I."** Perhaps you've even uttered it on occasion. But do we sincerely believe it? I think not. If we truly believed it, we would be far less judgmental, much more compassionate toward, and quick to pray for our brothers and sisters in Yeshua. God had a beneficial purpose in giving the thorn, whatever it was, to Sha'ul. And it *was* God who allowed it. God never allows pain without a purpose in the lives of His children. He never allows Satan, or circumstances, or any ill-intending person to afflict us unless He uses that affliction for our good. God never wastes pain. As Pastor Rick Warren frequently says, **"God never wastes a hurt."** He always causes it to work together for our ultimate good, the good of conforming us more to the likeness of His Son (see Romans 8:28-29).

## My Own Thorn in the Flesh

Sometimes God's purpose for allowing pain in our lives is clear; more often, it seems, it is not. In fact, frequently a great part of the pain is the sheer irrationality of it. God never explained to Job the purpose of his unbelievable pain. He left Job to suffer in the dark, so to speak. That is usually our experience as well.

I have been over weight for as far back as I can remember. In elementary school, my nickname was Porky. Over my adult life I tried numerous diets, diet pills and exercise programs. I would have some success for a time, but then would relapse and gain back more than I had lost. Thanks to one medication I was taking at this time (that is no longer on the market), I have an irregular heartbeat and will have to take "rat poison" for the rest of my life under current protocols.<sup>1</sup> By 2010, I was in pretty bad shape and was morbidly obese. Complications from my excess weight were taking a toll on my body. I couldn't walk short distances without a cane and could not even go to the break room or restroom at work without the use of a motorized wheelchair. I had become totally disabled and moved back to California to escape the severe humidity in Florida.

I started to explore a surgical solution to my problem. On January 5, 2012, I began my pre-op diet for gastric by-pass surgery. The diet consisted of 4 oz. of protein, 4 oz. of vegetables, 4 oz. fruit and one 8 oz. glass of fat free milk for the **entire** day. That is approximately 400 calories to see me through the entire day! Surprisingly, I wasn't hungry as I consumed those calories over 6 mini-meals throughout the day. About half-way thru the pre-op diet my family came down with the flu so I called and postponed the surgery. I continued on with the pre-op diet anyway and lost some significant weight. My blood sugars also plummeted so I was able to stop taking my diabetic medications (pills & injections). I was so pleased with the immediate results that I decided to continue to follow the prescribed diet as if I had the surgery. I did skip the clear liquid and baby food portions of the post-op diet since my stomach had not changed. I continued to lose weight and eventually lost 105 pounds. I was eventually able to increase my calories to 1600 per day and still maintain.

Now came the "thorn in my side." I don't want to tell you all the gory details, but a little explanation is necessary. I began to have ulcerated lesions under the resulting loose skin and required plastic surgery to remove about 7 pounds of excess skin and some fat. I had the surgery on October 14, 2013. Within five days, some stiches on my right side opened and I began to drain bodily fluid. I had to change a dressing five or six times a day on my right side. Several days later, my surgeon removed the rest of the stiches from my incision. I went home and took a nap. I awoke with the bed drenched. I was told to go to the Emergency Room. Thank God my wife is a retired Registered Nurse and was able to stem the flow. However, the next morning I was still draining significant amounts of fluid so we went to the ER. My doctor met me there and after examination decided that I would have to let that open incision in my left side heal itself just as the open incision in my right side would. Now I have dressings on both hips to change constantly; not to mention doing a load of laundry every day. The only pants I could wear were an old pair of sweats. It took three months for those incisions to heal and countless trips to the doctor's office to ensure that there were no infections. Needless to say, I was not having fun. **But, to God be the Glory.**

During this ordeal, I was able to carry out my responsibilities as Congregational Leader. Most importantly of all, however, God taught me the importance of patience. I had never been patient at all before my surgery. I wanted it all and I wanted it now. It didn't take me long to realize that there was **absolutely nothing** I could do to make those open incisions heal faster. And rather than praying for a divine healing, I thanked God for getting me safely through the ordeal and teaching me the liberating effect of being patient and waiting on Him.<sup>2</sup>

In my next post, I will finalize this topic on the sufficiency of God's Grace by looking at the pride of self-sufficiency in contrast to God's sufficiency.

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<sup>1</sup> Yes, I have seen the TV ads for a new medication that doesn't require constant blood tests, but as a new drug, Medicare will probably never authorize its use in my lifetime.

<sup>2</sup> In the aftermath of the surgery I was unable to go to the gym and I did gain back some of my weight loss, but that is slowly being reduced to my pre-op weight. I'm sure that I will never see the results of the "7 pound surgical loss;" but I will be satisfied with the pre-op weight.