



**GRACE**  
*Great Good News!*



August 2003

It is difficult for me to articulate why I do this newsletter. However, I recently found words by someone else that well describes my heart. Following is a quotation by A. W. Tozer regarding his book "The Pursuit of God."

**The Purpose of this Newsletter**

*This book (and my newsletter) is a modest attempt to aid God's hungry children so to find Him. Nothing here is new, except in the sense that it is a discovery which my own heart has made of spiritual realities most delightful and wonderful to me. Others before me have gone much farther into these holy mysteries that I have done, but if my fire is not large, it is yet real, and there may be those who can light their candle at its flame. – A. W. Tozer (1948)*

*Jesus said, "I pray...for those who will believe in Me...that they all may be ONE, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be ONE in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20-21).*

Recently, I was provided another opportunity to study for a week at Luther Rice Seminary (Atlanta) as part of a Christ-Centered Counseling training program. I started training part-time through this seminary in 1989 through a recommendation by Pastor Charles Stanley of First Baptist Church Atlanta. The teaching/counseling ministries at Christ Life Ministries and First Baptist Church Atlanta are based on the counseling program at Luther Rice Seminary. Christ Life Ministries is available to help churches establish discipleship counseling ministries.

For a long time, I couldn't articulate my heart for the reason for enrolling in a seminary while having a full-time job. I really wasn't sure myself. I did not sense a call to be a pastor. But now I know it was Christ in me that compelled me (2 Corinthians 5:14) in my search for true life and freedom. I found out later that I was responding to the only true CALL there is: *"It pleased God, who called me through His grace, TO REVEAL HIS SON IN ME" (Galatians 5:15-16).*

Now I have surrendered my life to be an ambassador through whom God heralds this one call to others. This is a call to be ONE with Christ. This is the heart of the gospel...it is not about going to heaven later, it's about heaven coming to us NOW in the real Person of Jesus in the midst of the real things of earthly life. I have only one message to herald and it is this: *Jesus is alive! And He's alive in me, and He can be alive in you when you receive Him as a gift!* There is not one issue in life that this ONE truth is not sufficient to address. I have witnessed many people set free when they embrace this truth. It is all about making Jesus real to others by being ONE with Him, an answer to His prayer (above).

Charles Stanley's teachings focus on this truth. He writes daily devotionals in the monthly magazine *In-Touch*. President Bush recently said, *"When you realize that there is an Almighty God on whom you can rely, it provides great comfort. That's why I read every morning the Bible and scriptures and Charles Stanley devotionals. It matters a lot to me personally."* [USA Today, August 20, 2003] Here is an excerpt from the *In-Touch* devotional for August 27<sup>th</sup> that our President likely read:

*When we recognize our ONENESS with Christ, we discover life is not about "trying and doing" – it's about "receiving and responding." When we lose sight of Jesus, we think it's up to us to accomplish the day's tasks...asking for His help, of course. That's self-effort. But, when we understand our ONENESS with Christ, we choose to rest in Him and let self-effort go. Instead of thinking, "I can do it," we depend on the Lord and receive from Him all we need (Philippians 4:13). Our lives become a response to Jesus' ONENESS with us. His peace is ours to experience, no matter what happens in life; and His reactions are ours as we release control to Him. If we try to manufacture those responses or reactions, it is self-effort. Learning to let Him be in charge is a supernatural process directed by the Holy Spirit, and it results in our living above our circumstances. – Charles Stanley (2003)*

[Simply amazing. There is more on the back.]

## ONENESS with Christ

Being ONE with Christ doesn't mean you become a little God. It does mean that you never again are an independent person who needs to take on the responsibility to contribute to your relationship with God. That was the original temptation Adam and Eve fell for in the Garden of Eden.

Your life now is God's sole responsibility. It is difficult for us to think that way because our minds have been so programmed by the world for DOING our part in life. Some people respond, "Well, I just have to DO something...I just can't sit around and be passive." And that's so true. That's the same question people asked Jesus in *John 6:28*, "What shall we DO, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus clearly answered them and us in *John 6:29*, "This is the work of God...[are you ready for this?]. BELIEVE in Him (Christ) whom He (God) sent." That's it. Believe Jesus Christ is alive and He is living in you. Simple, yet profound.

When I focus on my responsibility to live the Christian life, I focus on my ability. There's no real freedom and no abundant life in that because deep down I know I can never be that responsible. However, when I focus on MY RESPONSE TO (MY BELIEF IN) Christ's life in me (oneness), then I focus on HIS ability and HIS love. That frees me up to experience His abundant life!

My activity is a response to His initiatives. It may seem as if I am initiating activities, but the truth is that Jesus is now the sole source of my life. It's an amazing ONENESS...He initiates and I respond to manifest His life, moment by moment. If you believe this is true, you will be more active than ever. Why? Because Christ is living and active mightily in and through you. "Him (Christ) we preach...to this end I also labor, striving ACCORDING TO HIS (Christ's) WORKING WHICH WORKS IN ME MIGHTILY" (*Colossians 1:28-29*). I DO very much labor and strive, but it is in response to His life. Otherwise it is only busyness.

This ONENESS is pictured in the parable of the vine. Jesus said in *John 15:5* that He is the life (sap) of the vine, and we are branches for that life to flow through. A branch cannot initiate life. A branch is not the root. Life is indeed God's sole responsibility. By His grace, we can now receive and respond to His life. This truth is the heart (root) of my teaching ministry.



Here is a group of special people at Saluda United Methodist Church (North Carolina) where Bob Stacy (director of Christ Life Ministries) and I recently taught a series of Grace Life messages four consecutive Thursday evenings, three hours each evening. It was a fun time of sharing and learning. My mother (mama) and I are shown at the far right. She was my first picture of grace in my life, and that grace still supports me.

*"You therefore, my son, be strong (not passive) in the grace (not in your efforts) that is in Christ Jesus (your life)"*  
(2 Timothy 2:1).

## Next GraceLife Conferences

**Hendersonville, NC – October 3-4**  
**Simpsonville, SC – October 24-25**



My mother being with me in Saluda reminded me of Joy's mother always being there for her, too. Here is Joy with her mother when Joy was nine years old. Joy's daddy knelt and prayed with her when she first received Jesus as an eight-year old. Two months later, Joy hurt her back in a playground accident. She wore this back brace through being 12 years old.

This has been the most difficult year of our lives because we did not have her mother and father with us during and after Joy's back surgeries last summer. Joy's "mama" died in 1997 and Joy's "daddy" died one year ago. However, they both left us with a heritage of grace that sustains us.

Joy has had some leg pains this past month as she is slowly becoming more active. These pains have kept her from sleeping well, so she stays pretty tired. She does not have any strength to do many normal enjoyable things. And that wears on her. One recent restless night for Joy, we were reminded of the last prayer we heard her daddy pray, "Dear Lord, I come to You as I have a million times before asking You to heal my little girl." We were reminded that God is answering that graceFULL prayer whether we can see it with our eyes all of the time or not, and in perfect ways only God knows.

*"By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I LABORED (persevered) more abundantly than they all, YET NOT I, BUT THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH WAS WITH ME" (1 Corinthians 15:10).*