



February 2002

### God gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5).

I have recently witnessed several special people undergo tremendous hardships. Their circumstances appear to be hopeless, but they really are not. I am learning that everything in a Christian's life is ordained by God to lead us to totally depend on the indwelling life of Christ. God's way is brokenness.

Brokenness is not a negative word...for it is rooted in grace. Brokenness is not punishment...for all our punishment was placed on Christ on the cross. And brokenness does not require catastrophe...for many have experienced catastrophes without drawing nearer to God. Brokenness is the loving work of God as He uniquely strips each of His children of his or her self-sufficiency so that the beauty of Christ's life shines through. Isaiah 33:17 promises that "Your eyes will see the King (Jesus) in His beauty."

Prior to brokenness, we may have known about the many Bible verses that say Christ lives in us. However, as long as we depend on our self-sufficiency, these verses are only information. Our own good self-efforts have no true beauty, for "all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). But when God strips us of our self-sufficiency, these verses become revelation...our very life-line in our union with Christ!

God foreshadows this brokenness in the Old Testament. The Hebrews were miraculously freed from the bondage of Egypt through Moses and the Red Sea. This is God's picture of a Christian being miraculously freed from the bondage of sin through Christ on the cross.

The freed Hebrews were promised by God a land of rest, yet they wandered in the wilderness and did not enter this land. Why? Self-sufficiency. They based their whole lives on second-hand information from the spies and they believed they had no ability to enter. They believed more in themselves than in God. Yes, they still lived on God's provisions physically, but in their hearts they did not really depend on God.

When we are saved by God, He allows each of us to be broken in the wilderness for one special reason: "For the Son to be revealed in me" (Galatians 1:16). Then, and only then, can we enter into the rest of growing in the grace and knowledge of the indwelling Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

Hebrews 4:1 describes this entrance as "a promise of entering His (Christ's) rest." On the cross, Christ cried out for me and for you, "It is finished!" We can now rest in the fact that Christ has finished all that we need. We can finally rest from trying to live for God and from trying to get closer to God...we can now rest in Christ alone.

I began to experience this rest when God led me to begin taking Him at His word. It seemed reckless at first, but I was willing to be "out of control" and I simply trusted what I read in the Bible...and I began seeing absolutely amazing truths in the Bible in their true context. The Bible became a living Word to me. I can truly be myself and entrust my life to Christ! I had been basing my life on second-hand information...on what others told me and what I read as principles in the Bible to live by. By God's grace, I believe I began receiving truth first-hand from Jesus Himself who lives in and through me! Now, I want to grow in the knowledge of Christ Himself, not just in knowledge of the Bible.

It's like I reached a point in God's breaking process in "my wilderness" and I found myself "on the banks of the Jordan River" dearly wanting to cross over into the promised land of Jesus' rest. Joshua 3:15 says that the Jordan River opened up AFTER the priests stepped into the water with the ark, with the ark being a picture of the presence of God. I now know God the Father was with me on those "banks." I envision His compassionate eyes assuring me to walk safely and secure in the life of His dear Son. This is a beautiful picture for me as the presence of Christ in me led me to take the step of faith into His Word...and the water of His Word opened up and He began to reveal Himself to me!

My heart is to share Christ Himself, and to trust Him to reveal His life in me and in others through our circumstances. Beholding Christ is the only way of true transformation (2 Corinthians 3:18). Some ministry news are on the back that I hope will be encouraging to you.

#### GRACE NOTE

*It does not matter how it hurts as long as it gives God the chance to manifest Himself in our mortal flesh.*

*He will make us broken bread and poured-out wine to feed and nourish others.*

*by Oswald Chambers (1874-1917), from the May 15<sup>th</sup> devotion in the book My Utmost for His Highest*

## MINISTRY NEWS

I am tempted to use this newsletter to focus on results to "justify" this ministry. However, I believe the desire of my heart is one with the heart of Christ, and this desire is to always "behold the beauty of the Lord" (Psalm 27:4). So, my prayer is that you will not perceive human results in this newsletter, but that you will be truly encouraged solely by the glory of Christ's life testified throughout this newsletter...and then in your own life.

Joy and I spent February 23-27 in San Francisco seeking medical advice for Joy's chronic pain. All of our needs were provided by a very special family. And the doctor and his staff were so compassionate to Joy. This doctor performed Joy's last back surgery in Minneapolis 20 years ago. I believe he has been drawn to the light of Christ in Joy, as I have always been. Joy's curve in her back is increasing significantly, which has caused a 20-year old fusion to break and the support rods to move. A day-long surgery is scheduled for June 6<sup>th</sup> to re-structure her back. She will be in the San Francisco hospital for up to two weeks, and then in a brace at home for several months.

Sometimes I sense panic-like emotions thinking about what we need to do to prepare for this and what Joy will have to go through. However, despite my emotions, God's grace keeps me in His word: "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). Often I don't understand how to help Joy, then I am reminded that Christ does...and He will... through me and others.

The following letter is from a friend in Tennessee.

*"Joy & Gregg, thanks for sending us the Grace newsletter. It is helpful and encouraging. I volunteer as a spiritual counselor at the Free Medical Clinic about every two months. Your newsletter helps me understand more fully and clearly the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ so I can share it with others."*

Bobby Richardson was second baseman for the New York Yankees from 1955 to 1964, and was my boyhood hero. I wanted to grow up to be just like him...second baseman for the Yankees! And you know what? My prayer was truly answered! [No, no...not the Yankee part ☺!] God has shown me that Bobby's identity is not in what he did as a Yankee or what he does now. Bobby is who God re-created him to be in Christ. Identity is determined by what Christ has done for us through the cross, not what we could ever do. And by God's grace, I have indeed become just like Bobby Richardson...a new creation in Christ (Galatians 2:20, 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Recently, I sent Bobby Richardson a copy of a booklet I compiled on behalf of Christ Life Ministries entitled "Grace Life Testimonies." This booklet summarizes testimonies of 22 fairly known people (including Bobby Richardson) who have come to know Christ as Life. Here is his reply:

*"Gregg, thanks for the booklet. Very much a blessing and a real ministry. Praying that 2002 will be a great year in the Lord. In Christ, Bobby"*

Bob Stacy (director of Christ Life Ministries) and I taught the first Grace Life Conference in the little Simpsonville office on February 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. Three special friends attended. The next Conference in Simpsonville is scheduled for May 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. Christ Life Ministries is also teaching a Conference at Brevard Community Church on March 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>.

I led a Bible fellowship based on Philippians 4:4-7 with ten precious men at Henderson County Correctional Center on February 21<sup>st</sup>.

verse 4: **Rejoice in the Lord always.** "Rejoice" and "grace" come from the same root word. So, true rejoicing is a lifestyle as you rest in God's grace instead of striving by self-efforts. True rejoicing is IN THE LORD, not in anything else (e.g., accomplishments, circumstances, etc).

verse 5: **Let your gentle spirit be known by all men.** You can surrender your true identity to everyone, not just to a select few. You can be open and secure, even vulnerable, because your true identity is in Christ.

verse 6: **Let your requests be made known to God.** You can surrender your true heart to your loving Father, approaching Him boldly with all your pains and questions. God knows all of this already, He just wants you to stay in dependence on Him. He loves you so much.

verse 7: **And the peace of God will guard your hearts and mind in Christ.** Peace is God's promise to protect your mind, where truth is the defense against Satan's deceptions. Peace (and joy and gentleness) is a fruit of Christ living through you (Galatians 5:22-23).