

Ephesians Quiet Time Series

Grace Inspires Growth

Introduction - Ephesians 1:1-2

“Grace and Peace”. As part of Paul’s introductory greeting, it may be easy to overlook the significance of his words. But these 2 spiritual blessings – grace and peace - set the tone for the message of Ephesians, so let’s take a closer look at these two ideas.

Grace – unmerited favor, a gift. The Greek word is “charis” and is the root for the English word “charity”, which aptly portrays the idea of grace. When we give charity, we choose to give at our own expense for the benefit of the recipient without expecting to be repaid. It is a gift. However, when we give to a charity, we expect that the gift will be used for the purpose given. Grace and love (agape) are intimately connected, as gracious acts are the characteristic hallmark of agape-love. God, in His love, has gifted us more things than we can imagine. While God cannot be repaid, the gifts that he’s given us have been given with a hope and expectation to be used toward the purpose for which He gave them. What is that purpose?

Peace – Many of us may think of “peace” as simply an absence of conflict, but the Biblical idea takes things a step further. The Greek word is “eirene”, and in Hebrew it is “shalom”. Much more than simply an absence of conflict, “peace” is the fellowship of harmonious cooperation. It is working together to bring about mutual security and benefit. In this notion of peace, there is prosperity and growth. Since the advent of Christ, his legacy has been alive in the Spirit-infused gospel and church. This legacy has been on a “growth mission” to bring about peace and spiritual prosperity in the world.

Put together we see the intent of God: He gives us grace, so that we realize growth. Grace inspires growth. God’s love and the abundance of His gifts equip us with what we need to have peace and work together, with each other and Him for the growth of the church.

If we use the twin concepts of “grace” and “peace/growth” as a lens to view the book of Ephesians, we can divide the book into 2 basic sections:

- Ephesians 1-3: Perspectives on Grace
- Ephesians 4-6: Essentials for Growth

The following QT series works in tandem with the preaching series recently completed. There is enough room and flexibility in this series to go at a pace that works for you. A single QT study can happen in one day or several, depending on the time you take to meditate on the passage/questions, refer back to online sermons, or even study other related passages that may come to mind.

Let the Holy Spirit lead you and take to heart the core lessons that He would have you learn from all that we’ve covered.

Section 1 – Perspectives on Grace

Study #1 - How does God love me? Let me count the ways...

Ephesians 1:3-14

Have you ever tried to actually “count your blessings”? In these verses, Paul begins to list all of the powerful and gracious ways that God has shown love and undeserved favor toward those who are in Jesus Christ. Paul boldly declares that God has given “every spiritual blessing” to those in Christ. God has held no spiritual blessing back from us! How incredible is that?

- How many different spiritual blessings or examples of God’s grace can you find listed in 1:3-14?
- Start your own “count your blessings” log. Reflect on all the ways that God has shown kindness, favor or blessing to you in ways both big and small. Add to the list as things come up, and use your list to begin prayer times in the morning.

Study #2 – Channeling the power of God’s grace.

Ephesians 1:15-23

In these passages, Paul challenges the audience to grow in their depth of insight into the power of God’s blessings and promises. If we truly understand the enormity of God’s power (like the power of resurrecting the dead!) then it opens our eyes to a world of new possibilities in our faith. Key to this understanding is perceiving how God has worked in time and history to channel his grace into the human experience. Those channels, specifically, are Jesus and the church.

- As you have started to compile and pray through your “count your blessings” list, what kinds of insights have you had about the power and promises of God? What is it teaching you about God’s nature and character? Start logging those insights along with any new blessings that you think of.

Study #3 – Channeling God’s grace through Christ

Ephesians 2:1-10

In the previous passages, Paul specifically identified Jesus and the church as conduits for God’s grace in the world. In these passages, Paul explores that thought by describing the miracle of our salvation: being saved by grace through faith in Christ. Once saved, we are also given new life in purpose and destiny to fulfill the plan and good works that God had in mind for us when he made us. How amazing is that?!

- Take some time to meditate on your personal conversion/salvation experience. How does Paul’s general description of conversion/salvation in these verses mirror yours specifically? In what kinds of ways were you “dead in sins”? In what ways did God show grace to you to give you a chance to be saved?
- What are some things – good works – that you see God calling you to take up? What kinds of dreams and ambitions do you have for your life as a Christian that you can strive to fulfill as a response to God’s grace in your life?

Study #4 – Channeling God’s grace through Christ in the church

Ephesians 2:11-3:13

Paul continues to delve deeper into the power of God’s grace manifested in the church by looking at the history of Jew-Gentile relationships. For centuries hostility had grown between Jews and Gentiles, as the Gentiles were “outsiders” and the Jews viewed themselves as privileged. But in the church, the division was broken down and all can share in the promises of Christ equally. The power of God’s grace in the church brought complete reconciliation between people who were enemies. Paul expresses gratitude that he was able to witness this great miracle and be a messenger of it in his generation.

- In what ways have you experienced reconciliation and relationship with people in the church that you would otherwise not know or, perhaps, be hostile towards? How has God’s grace and the power of the church’s influence in your life helped you become a more open, accepting and gracious person toward those who are different from you?
- As someone who has experienced this profound impact in the church, how can it help motivate and inspire you to be a messenger of its power?

Study #5 – The best is yet to come!

Ephesians 3:14-21

Paul closes out this portion of the book with a reflective praise-infused prayer of worship. He is so inspired by the power and enormity of God’s grace – personally and generally in history. He knows that growing in understanding of Christ’s love is the key to accessing and experiencing ongoing growth and power in God, the likes of which cannot even be fully imagined. When Paul wrote these words, the church was a relatively small fringe-group in the Roman Empire without socio-political clout, wealth or established tradition. It was sometimes persecuted and often overlooked – but it was on the move! Think of all the ways that the church and Christianity have impacted history and the world over the last 2000 years. I bet Paul and the first century Christians would have had a hard time imagining that!

- Take some time to think through the prayer that Paul is describing in this passage, how can you apply that same prayer that Paul has for the Ephesians to yourself?
- Paul’s declaration that God’s power can do more than we ask or imagine prompts the question: How much can we ask and imagine of God? Meditate on what you’d like to see the church look like a year from now.

Section 2 - Essentials for Growth

When we properly grasp the immensity of God’s grace as described in chapters 1-3, we realize that we have been gifted by God with everything that we need to live a godly life in ways that exceed imagination. The sky is the limit on our potential in Christ! God’s plan and vision is for the world to be impacted by Christ’s gospel through the church. God has given us gracious gifts for a purpose: to use them in the church’s mission of spreading the gospel throughout the world and its generations. The “peace” (shalom) that we enter into by God’s grace is nothing less than devoting ourselves to realizing that vision and being part of its growth; working in mutual harmony with others and God to see His kingdom prosper and grow.

Study #6 – The Blueprint

Ephesians 4:1-16

In these passages, Paul gives us a template for a growing church and its purpose. It is essential that the members of the church forge unity in some important ways – doctrinally, relationally and functionally. Within the church, God’s plan is for individuals to express their personal gifts and work together harmoniously in various roles. Ultimately this kind of unity will help the church and its members grow and mature to a fullness in Christ, realizing its full potential.

- In what ways do you need to strive to forge unity within the church? Are there certain people that you need to make peace with? Seek them out and be resolved in a spirit of humility, patience and love.
- What are some of the gifts/talents that you have to offer the church? Are you expressing them as fully as you can? How can you work within the structure of your small-group and with the leadership to give/express your gifts to build up the church?

Study #7 – Living in Truth

Ephesians 4:17-32

In the next set of passages, Paul describes the kind of lifestyle that Christians need to strive after in order to stay spiritually unified, healthy and growing in the church. Knowing the truth about God and His righteousness, and leaving the sinful life in the past, is essential for spiritual growth and health. Sin stunts and perverts our spiritual growth like a cancer. Being made new in Christ, and living according to his truth, keeps us on a path of maturity where we can grow to be more and more like Christ.

- Are you still growing into the “new person” that Christ made when you were first saved? In what ways have you been tempted or given in to old habits of the sinful life?
- What are some things you can do to take responsibility to keep changing in accordance with God’s truth in Christ?

Study #8 – Living in Love

Ephesians 5:1-2

Spiritual growth and health has in view the goal of becoming more like Christ. As children of God, we should strive to imitate our Father! We are taught in many places in the Scripture that God is love, and so to be like God, we are called to live lives like Christ, who was the perfect example of love. The word translated as “love” in these passages is “agape” – a proactive, selfless and sacrificial kind of love.

- What are some ways that I can be more proactive in loving others? Take some time to write a list of the people you know at church, in your neighborhood, workplace, school, etc. Take initiative to formulate ways that you can show or express love to them, and pray for opportunities to make an impact on them.

Study #9 – Living in Light

Ephesians 5:3-14

The challenge to keep growing like Christ, in accordance with the truth, is beset by temptations and pitfalls. When we stumble in sin, it can be easy to hide it in the “darkness”. It is even easier to fall into the influences of others who live in the dark. In these passages Paul reminds us of the essential need to live in the light. We cannot fear exposure of sin, rather we need to be aggressive in exposing it. We cannot be perfect, but if we are committed to living in the light, then sin will not have a chance to derail us from the growth and prosperity of becoming more like Christ.

- What is it that we can fear about coming into the light and being exposed? What are some things that you fear in particular about that?
- Connect with someone in your small-group and have a time of confession and coming into the light regarding any sin, attitudes, or temptations that have been happening – big or small. Have a conversation with them about living in the light together and ongoing openness.

Study #10 – Living in Wisdom

Ephesians 5:15-20

Wisdom is the capacity to anticipate what is coming in the future, and prepare accordingly today. Since the future for Christians is “eternal life with God”, then living in wisdom means living for eternal things today. Paul reminds the audience to be careful and thoughtful about this and to strive to find the things that please God. There can be a lot of foolish living in this life – debauchery and drunkenness. Wise Christian living means filling ourselves with gratitude and thanksgiving and seeking spiritual things.

- What kinds of things do you think please God? Are there Scriptures you can find to tell you?
- What are some ways that you can put into practice the charge that Paul gives to “make the most of every opportunity”? What opportunities exist in your daily/weekly routine to be spiritual, show love, share the gospel, and otherwise do the things that are pleasing to God?

Study #11 – Everyday Relationships

Ephesians 5:21-6:9

Finding peace, harmony and mutual encouragement in relationships begins with the life right in front of us. In these passages Paul gives instructions for healthy harmonious living in the “everyday” relationships of a first century Roman empire household. The key is mutual submission – where both parties in the relationship understand the other’s needs and give way humbly to meet them. If we are to help the world realize growth and peace through the gospel, it is critical that we model it ourselves in the relationships we encounter everyday.

- What do you think of the idea of “submission” toward others? Is it a positive or negative thing? The passage says we should submit out of reverence to Christ, so in what ways does Jesus example inspire us to have a submissive attitude toward others? How did Jesus do so?
- What are the “everyday” relationships in your life at work, home, school, etc.? How can you practically apply the advice and instruction given in these passages to those relationships?

Study #12 – Spiritual Battle

Ephesians 6:10-17

Faithfully forging unity, peace and realizing growth in the church is not an easy task. It is a battle, and so Paul's closing thoughts are a call to stand strong in the fight. The battle is spiritual and waged with spiritual armaments, which Paul describes in the array of a Roman soldier. Paul describes the fight as one against spiritual forces – there are no human enemies in Christianity! The spiritual battle happens everyday whether we like it or not. God gives us what we need to be prepared for it, will we take advantage?

- In what ways can the devil manipulate us to view people as enemies and ignore the spiritual reality of the situation? Are there people in your life right now that you view like an enemy? What is a more spiritual way to view that relationship dynamic?
- Take some time to meditate on the separate facets of the spiritual armor. How can that metaphor become reality? How can you take the time every day to put on that armor?

Study #13 - Prayer

Ephesians 6:18-20

Spiritual battle requires a spiritual approach to life. Of utmost importance in a spiritual fight is the call to prayer. In prayer we move God to move on our behalf. Going to God to find the righteousness, faith, peace, salvation, etc., that we need is essential, for we cannot find it in ourselves alone. Paul reminds the audience to pray on all occasions. There is no situation in life that does not require a spiritual mind, and therefore does not require prayer. His final thought on the matter is to ask for prayers for himself for courage and confidence in the mission – a reminder that so long as we live, the mission, the battle, the vision for growth and peace in the church does not stop.

- As we approach 2016, pray consistently for the GlasGROW vision. Read through the different elements of the plan and goals. Pray that you, the church and the Lord can work together from His grace to realize growth and full potential for God in 2016.