

How God Prepares Us for Supply

It is so wonderful to know what God is doing over our lives — in our environments, in our situations day by day. He is just preparing us, even setting us up, to be supplied by grace. The greatest revelation of the Christian life is that it is a supplied life. It is a life that has already been lived. It is a life furnished by God and then given to us. The Christian life is not something originating out of ourselves, but it is something received, participated in, and enjoyed by us. The Lord becomes our portion. This is summarized best in John 1:16, which says, “Out of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.” Here is a very simple word — we are before Him, receiving out of His fullness. And that receiving is just grace upon grace, indicating that from beginning to end this life is a life of supply — the supply of the grace of God.

That is why in the New Testament the word “grace” is everywhere. It is at the beginning and end of all the letters. The Spirit is saying, “Before I utter a word to you, before I write anything to you, I want you to know that whatever I am about to say here is all going to be supplied by grace.” “Grace be to you” — this is the way all the letters begin. And then at the end of the letters it is always “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit” or “Grace be with you all.” By observing this, it is clear that the New Testament writers are virtually saying, “Now after you have read this letter and the light has come — there has been exposure and you have seen yourself in this respect and in that respect — I want you to know that the sum and substance of the light and exposure is that now grace will supply you to carry it out. Grace be with you.” So the word “grace” is a word that means supply.

Grace is commonly understood as God’s unmerited favor, which includes God’s attitude toward us because of Christ, because of what He did on our behalf. God has an eternal attitude toward us. This is God’s grace. Yet grace is not only God’s attitude; it is also God’s power. It is one thing for God to have an attitude toward us, and it is another thing for God’s power to be toward us. Yes, God has an attitude, a view toward us, where our standing is no condemnation, no judgment, and we are free and justified. This is God’s grace. We are under God’s attitude: “There is now then no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

We have been justified by grace. Not only so, but this grace has now come into us because this grace is just Christ Himself in His resurrection power. Grace is Christ available to be supplied to us, to do a work in us to make us want God, to make us inclined toward God, to tear down the hardness in our heart, to deal with all the frustrations in our being. For example, to love the Lord we need to be inclined that way. To love Him and to love others is not to go against the grain. It is to flow with the grain. And what grace does is that it operates in us and works in us to actually give us a heart toward God. So grace is not only God’s attitude, but it is God’s power, God’s life. It is the dynamic of all that He is, to every bit of the work over us, to do an inner work of conforming us to the image of Christ and producing His eternal purpose.

By a standard of life over and above our capacity

Matthew 5, 6, and 7 is a description of the kingdom life on earth. And the kingdom life is especially related

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to our disposition. Notice all the *blesseds* in Matthew 5 — “Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness.” From these and more we can see that all the blessedness is related to a kind of disposition. And then after these *blesseds* or Beatitudes, the rest of Matthew 5—7 is a detailed application of that kind of disposition. It is a kingdom life — a life that can be inconvenienced, a life that does not hold grudges, a life that even prays for its enemies. It is another kind of life — a transcendent life.

The way God prepares us for supply is by stunning us with His demand in Matthew 5, 6, and 7: “Go the second mile. Turn the other cheek. Love your enemies. Forgive one another. Live one day at a time. Live without anxiety, without any worry. Trust Him to take care of your food and your clothing.” In other words, He stuns us with a kind of living that seems to be unreal. It means not having any cutting remarks out of our mouth like “Raca” or “Empty-headed fool.” It is also a life without lust in the heart. This kind of life the Lord speaks of is His kingdom life. And we discover that in the church life it is this kingdom life that is required. Why? Because it is inevitable that offenses come. It is inevitable that certain things will rub our disposition the wrong way. But the revelation of a standard that is over and above our capacity should do one thing. It should so humble us that we say, “Lord, without You I can do nothing.” So it prepares us for supply. It prepares us for what the Lord says in Matthew 5:17: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill.” That means “I am the fulfillment, I am the supply.”

Also Romans 8:4 says that the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled *in* us, not by us. It is fulfilled in us “who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.” This indicates that the supply comes by being a person who is just reduced to telling the Lord, “Lord, I love You. Lord, today, because You live, I live also. Live in me, Lord. Be in me the husband. Be in me the wife. Be in me the student. Be in me the brother. Lord, You live in me.” This means that the righteous requirement of the law would be fulfilled *in* us. It means He is just reproduced, reproduced, reproduced. Out of our enjoyment of Him, out of our contact with Him, out of that supply, He is reproduced. We just tell Him, “You’re on today, Lord. You have to live. You just live in me. Be this in me. Be that in me.” Instead of being thrown back on ourselves, we are turned to walk according to spirit.

The standard is always over and above our capacity because this is how God prepares us to live a supplied life for His purpose, His building. So whatever demand comes in these dimensions — with the revelation concerning the church and with the standard revealed in the Word about the kingdom life — that demand can only bring us to the supply again and again. This kind of fellowship renews our mind. It is light. It helps us to see from God’s point of view how He ingeniously engineers our environments — what we pass through, how our disposition reacts, the condition we find ourselves in. Whatever state we are in, God, in His design, is preparing us for a deeper supply of grace into our being. This is seen throughout the entire New Testament.

By being confronted with impossibilities

In Romans chapter 4 Paul shows us another example of being prepared for supply. God gave a promise to Abraham and Sarah, an old couple — a couple that was too old to have children. Paul quotes God’s promise to Abraham in verses 17-18: ¹⁷ “(As it is written, ‘*I have appointed you a father of many nations*’) in the sight of God whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls the things not being as being. ¹⁸ He beyond hope believed in hope in order that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, ‘*So shall your seed be.*’ ” So here is this word of impossibility, and yet this word of impossibility was God’s way to prepare Abraham for a great supply of *El Shaddai*, for God to be his full source and supply. The very impossibility itself was the preparation for God in His grace to do something out of Himself.

Then verse 19 tells us what Abraham did: “And not weakening in his faith, he considered his own body as already dead.” This means that on one hand, Abraham looked at his body. $2 + 2 = 4$. Conclusion: It’s already dead. Maybe in your own experience you have felt that way — “It’s just dead. There is no response. There is no inclination in me toward God. There is just a ball of inertia. It just doesn’t move.” Sometimes we don’t understand when things like this happen. We just think, “If somehow I could squeeze a little bit of energy out of this dead thing.” But it is there in its raw form — nothing.

Abraham considered his body. It was a settled conclusion: It is now dead. Yet his eye was not on that. God had said, “You are going to be a father of many nations, you personally.” How is this going to happen? The body is dead. And then verse 19 brings out more of the impossibility of Abraham’s situation: “...being about a hundred years old, as well as the deadening of Sarah’s womb.” There they were. Yet listen to Abraham’s

response in verses 20-21: ²⁰ “But with regard to the promise of God, he did not doubt in unbelief, but was empowered by faith, giving glory to God ²¹ and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to do.” This means that Abraham’s eye was not on their “dead” bodies, but his eye was on the promise, on what God said He would do.

This environment with Abraham was an environment of impossibility, something that did not make sense, something that was just not reasonable. Yet that prepared Abraham for grace. It took a few years. Though Abraham produced a son out of his own body with a maidservant, nothing happened with God’s promise. Thirteen years passed by. Then God appeared to him as *El Shaddai*, which means “I am the divine udder supplying all your need.” So the impossibility prepared Abraham to learn how to draw from another source. This is how God does it with all of us.

By God allowing our weaknesses to show up

In 2 Corinthians 12 the Lord was doing something over Paul’s life to deal with his pride. He was tempted to be lifted up because of the abundance of the revelations he had received. In verse 7 he says, “And because of the transcendence of the revelations, in order that I might not be exceedingly lifted up, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, that he might buffet me, in order that I might not be exceedingly lifted up.” And in verse 9 he uses the word weaknesses: “Most gladly therefore I will rather boast in my weaknesses.” Paul’s weaknesses were showing up, and these weaknesses were even related to a messenger of Satan. God was preparing Paul for a larger measure of grace so that this member would be supplying not just a little trickle of God into the church, but he would be a pipe through which a huge channel of grace would be supplied throughout all the ages to give us fourteen books of the New Testament that we are being nourished with every day.

How did God prepare Paul for a greater supply of grace? He did it by allowing Paul’s weaknesses to show up. Yet Paul prayed that the enemy would be discharged. But the Lord came back and said, “No. My grace is sufficient for you” (v. 9). This indicates that when tendencies and weaknesses manifest themselves in us, they are neon lights. God is announcing, “I am preparing you for more grace, for you to live off of Me, for Me to become your everything so that grace would be supplied to the church.” This is the renewal of our mind. This is the divine point of view.

God is preparing each of us to live by the supply of grace. How does it happen? It doesn’t happen in a

vacuum. It doesn’t happen by the snap of our fingers. It happens in the nitty-gritty experiences that we are going through right now, at the point where our weaknesses are manifested. Yet we often despise our weaknesses, and we want to get out of the situation, and we wish we didn’t have them. But all the time God has an intention in allowing the manifestation of these weaknesses, even when the enemy is involved. He comes with an overarching word: “My grace is sufficient.” An old hymn says it well — “All-sufficient grace! Never powerless! It is Christ who lives in me, in His exhaustlessness.”

This shows us how God keeps us dependent. What He is doing is bringing us back to His original thought in Genesis 1 and 2 — the tree of life, a man dependent upon God, a man supplied, living from God, a man who is not independent. Yet in the fall we have all become independent. As a result, we live our own life. But thank God that He has a way in His dealings with us and over us to prepare us once again for supply.

By God allowing us to fail at our best

What does it mean when we say, “To fail at our best”? This is a summary of Romans chapter 7. Paul was at his best in Romans 7. He marshalled his will. He propped up his emotions. He even thought right, that is, he wanted to keep the tenth commandment — You shall not covet (v. 7). So he marshalled his whole being to carry it out. He apparently had no problem with all the other commandments, because concerning the law he said he was blameless (Phil. 3:6). Of course, this was in an outward sense, because they were commandments on deeds, on actions: “Do not kill. Do not commit adultery. Do not bear false witness.” So Paul said that he was blameless in this respect. But the last commandment is the one commandment that causes everyone to throw up their hands and surrender, because it is a commandment not on *actions*, but on *reactions*. That means “You shall not *feel* the way you feel right now. You shall not *desire*, you shall not *lust*.” This has to do with our responses. It is a commandment on our inner reactions.

So Paul thought, “Oh, I want to keep this commandment.” And he was at his best in Romans 7 to try to somehow carry it out in his own energy. And God was allowing Paul to try. It seems that he was able to do it for a period of time (vv. 20-21). But eventually when he chose, when he willed, something else took hold of him. And he realized it was “sin that dwells in me” (v. 20). So God allowed Paul to fail at his best. And this prepared him to say, “Wretched man that I am!” And to say, “Who will deliver me from the body of this death?” (v. 24).

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Christ as the Brass Serpent: Look and Live

Perhaps the most well-known and well-loved verse in the Bible is John 3:16. Many of us could quote it:

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

I believe we love this verse so much because of the good news it so plainly and succinctly proclaims. But have you ever noticed its context? Rarely is this verse quoted with the surrounding verses. In fact, many of us would probably be hard-pressed to state the context of this verse. Yet this well-known verse is presented in the Gospel of John within a definite context which, when understood, greatly enriches and enhances its meaning to us. In the two prior verses, verses 14 and 15, Jesus says,

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.” Then verse 16 continues, “For God so loved the world . . .”

Here Jesus mentions Moses who “lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.” What is Jesus referring to? He is referring to a specific account depicted in the Old Testament. In Numbers 21, God had called the children of Israel out of Egypt with the intention of bringing them into the good land which He had promised to them. However, to enter the good land, they had to pass through the desert-like wilderness which was very hot and dry. After some time of wandering in the wilderness, the people became impatient. They detested their living conditions and began to complain and murmur against Moses and God. Rebellion started running through the camp and they began to accuse Moses saying, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?”

God responded to their rebellion and lack of faith by sending fiery serpents throughout their camp. These serpents bit the people with a poisonous bite so that many began to die. After a short time, the people came running to Moses and cried out saying, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord that He take away the serpents from us.” In other words, they were poisoned by the serpents’ bite, they were perishing, and they were desperate to be healed. So Moses prayed to the Lord and the Lord spoke to him saying, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” So Moses made a brass serpent and put it on a pole. Then he told the people to look

upon the serpent, and just as God had promised, whoever looked upon the serpent was healed of the poisonous bite. The poison was neutralized and they did not perish.

Now fifteen hundred years later, Jesus comes on the scene and declares, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man (referring to Himself) be lifted up.” That is, Jesus directly applies this incident to Himself. This is truly remarkable! Not only is the incident with Moses rather obscure and difficult to understand, but now many centuries later, Jesus declares that He is the fulfillment, the reality, of that serpent on the pole. What did Jesus mean?

Bitten with Sin

First, Jesus meant that all of us have been bitten. We are what Jesus refers to as “the world,” which is a collective term for all humanity. And Jesus declares that the world is perishing. Why? Because the world has been bitten with a poisonous bite. The Bible tells us that Adam disobeyed God in the garden, and by his disobedience, sin entered into the world (Rom. 5:12). This means that sin, like a poison, was put into the human race soon after its creation. Thus today, as Adam’s descendants, we have something in us called sin. We have been bitten and poisoned with a sin nature that has dominion within us. This is why sinning (committing acts of sin) is not an accidental matter. We sin because we all have a sin nature. The poison of sin is in our system, with the result that we spontaneously sin.

Just consider our children. We don’t teach our children to be self-centered or disobedient. We don’t instruct them to be mean to each other or to hoard their toys and refuse to share. All of that comes most spontaneously. Why? Because they were born bitten. They were born with a sin nature. I remember when two of our own children were very young. The three-year-old had a nice set of building blocks, and he would sit on the floor of his room and patiently build a high structure out of his blocks. Then his little sister, who couldn’t even walk yet, would crawl into his room and go right for the building blocks and smash them down. She knew that it frustrated her brother and made him cry, but she didn’t care. Even after many warnings, she would still go straight for the blocks to knock them down. As her parents, we never taught her to do that. She did it because of a sin nature.

Today the world is in such a miserable condition. Sin abounds in countless forms, and none of this is accidental. No — we have all been bitten with sin. And as a result, we are perishing. Just as the children of Israel were perishing because of the serpents’ bite, so also are we. The Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). This speaks not merely of physical death, though that is included. But more importantly, it speaks of spiritual death, of spiritual separation from God. When man sinned, God was forced to distance Himself from man. As the righteous and holy God,

He could not have contact with sinful man. Hence, man died spiritually — he became alienated from the life of God (Eph. 4:18). He was removed from the presence of God and could not draw near to God. Indeed, man was in a state of perishing.

God Loves Us

Though we have been bitten with sin and though we are perishing, there is good news! And the good news is that God still loves us! Yes, He has been forced to distance Himself from us because of His righteousness. But He still loves us. How much does He love us? He loves us *so* much. “God *so* loved the world.” This little word “so” reveals the infinite depth of divine love for man. It’s impossible to measure. It can only be demonstrated — and demonstrated it was: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”

Often God is viewed as someone cold, remote, and indifferent. He is seen as either disinterested or too busy to be bothered with you or me. But this is a false picture of God. God *so* loves the world. God loves you. In fact, God knows you by name. He knows everything about you and is intently interested in you. Perhaps you feel that God could never be interested in you, much less love you. You may feel that you have lived too sinfully and done too many awful things to be worthy of God’s love. But we must realize that God’s love is unconditional. He loves us regardless of our condition — no matter how bad it may be. The Bible says that *while* we were sinners, ungodly and unlovable, He loved us (Rom. 5:6-10). And the greatest demonstration of His love, the greatest proof of His love, is that He gave up His Son on our behalf. What a revelation of His heart toward us! God gave up that which was of greatest value to Him — His Son — to be a sacrifice for the sins of the world. Such an act of sacrifice demonstrates the depths of divine love.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was sent by the Father into this world to become a Man, to live for 33 1/2 years, and then to die on the cross. It was at the cross that Jesus was “lifted up.” When He said that He would be lifted up, this is what He meant — He would be lifted up on the cross and nailed there. Just as the brass serpent was lifted up on the pole, so too would He be lifted up on the cross. In other words, the pole is a type (a symbol) of the cross and the brass serpent is a type of Christ. The Bible tells us that God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). While Jesus hung on the cross God transferred all our sins upon Him so that He became sin — a brass serpent — in the eyes of God. Brass in the Bible represents God’s judgment. Thus, Christ bore the divine judgment for our sins. He stood in our place and took our punishment. He became the brass serpent. And because He stood in our place, He enabled us to stand in His place — to become the righteousness of God in Him.

Look and Live

We have been bitten by sin and we are perishing. But God loves us and has sent His Son to be lifted up on the cross on our behalf. Now what are we to do? Consider again the picture in Numbers 21. God told the children of Israel to do one thing — to simply look at the brass serpent. That’s all. Just look. And by looking, they lived! The fulfillment of that picture in Christ is absolutely the same. God tells us to look at the crucified Christ. That’s all. Just look. And the equivalent of looking in John 3:15-16 is to believe: “Whoever *believes* in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” To look is simply to believe. Don’t do anything. Just look to Christ. Just believe in Christ. And by looking, by believing, you live! Could anything be more simple? You don’t have to work. You don’t have to improve yourself. You don’t have to get your act together. You don’t have to perform a set of religious duties. All God asks of you is to look.

You may say, “But I want to understand it first. If I can’t understand everything first, then I can’t look.” But consider the children of Israel. When they were bitten and dying and running to Moses, I seriously doubt that they said, “Moses, what you are asking us to do is a little strange, a little different. You want us to look at a brass serpent on a pole? Please first explain this to us in more detail, will you?” They did not have time for that. The situation was too grave. When Moses said, “Look,” I believe that right away they looked. They gazed intently at that brass serpent. They did not understand it all, but they looked nonetheless. In the same way, we might not have all our questions answered about Jesus Christ or about the gospel or the Christian faith. But that is okay. God will answer all those questions in time. He certainly did for me. I had many questions. Yet one night I knew that I had to set aside all my questions and simply look. I had to put my faith in Christ. And by putting my faith in Christ and by opening my heart to Him, Jesus came into me and I received eternal life. It was so simple.

Now, the result of looking to Christ is this: *we live*. When the children of Israel looked at the brass serpent, their temporal, physical life was restored. They did not perish physically. But when we look at Christ, we receive something much better. We receive *eternal life*. That is, the life of God comes into us. It is another life, the divine life, that we receive. Eternal life is not merely a perpetual existence. It is receiving the life of Christ — a life that happens to be eternal. This is what it means to be born again. The life of Jesus is born within our spirit. By this birth we are no longer alienated from the life of God. We are no longer separated from Him. Rather, He lives in us. And from that day forward, we can fellowship with Him and come to know Him in a personal way. It is not a religion. It is a relationship with the Person of Christ. I dare say He is the most exciting, the most desirable, the most enjoyable, the most enthralling Person you could ever know. And it is by a simple look at

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Then he was just throttled right into grace, into the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. So this is the way God took to prepare Paul for grace and supply.

Now consider Martin Luther. Consider John Wesley. Read their biographies. This is exactly what happened to them. Luther was a monk. He was at his best — praying, fasting, trying to do everything. But God prepared him for grace by allowing him to feel so wretched and so miserable when he failed. Has God done that with us? Has He allowed you to fail at your best? This is why we pass through things — God is preparing us to be like a little child, dependent upon the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This is renewal. This means I don't despise what I pass through. I don't blame. I tell my Father, "Father, You're preparing me by stretching me beyond my limit for a larger participation and supply of Your grace."

*By being brought into environments
that make us dependent upon others*

In Philippians 1:19 Paul says, "For I know that for me this will turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." This had to do with Paul's environment, his circumstances. He was brought into an environment that made him dependent upon the prayers of the saints and the bountiful supply of the Spirit. So here we see another example where Paul, under God's sovereignty, was forced into an environment that he would not have chosen. He would not have selected or picked this one out. But unexpected things happened that forced him to be in prison. And not only that, persecutions were mounting while he was in prison. But he says, "For me this will turn out to salvation." So Paul's whole attitude was that God would be manifested out of his mortal body as a testimony and a supply to the church.

Again, this is the renewal of our mind — to see that God brings us into environments where we are dependent upon the saints, the prayers of the saints, and the bountiful supply of the Spirit. Unexpected things happen many times. For example, financially, we don't like to be without. We don't like to be dependent upon someone else. But I have watched it happen over the years with different saints. It seems the Lord purposely allows loss of job, and a sense of dependence happens as a result of that kind of environment. A person with high standards and high discipline and high values is now in a situation where he needs to ask for prayer, for fellowship, for supply. And it is all for God's purpose, for His building. Things like that don't just accidentally happen. God has an eternal goal, and that is His building. And I am part of that

and you are part of that. And we are being built up together. And oftentimes the way it happens is that through these kinds of preparations under God's sovereignty we are led into the supply of grace for God's building.

By God allowing us to be under the demand of the law

Galatians 3:24 says, "The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ." That means the law is an escort. God's intention with the law is to drive you out of your self. His intention is to so expose you that you feel miserable and wretched and so full of bondage that it is just a beautiful escort to lead you to Christ. By this we can see that God prepares us for grace even by allowing us to be under the demand of the law. Some of the greatest enjoyers of grace in church history were ones who were once under the most strict observance of the law. For example, John Wesley was under William Law's influence. This was before William Law saw the Spirit and became the "new" William Law. His well-known book entitled *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* is a minute, detailed description of how to live the Christian life: You live according to the demand of spiritual principles and practices. And Wesley sought to carry it out to a tee. Yet he had no heart peace. But later, in the middle of a big storm on the Atlantic, he saw some saints whose faces were shining and he wanted what they had. These saints were in the front of the ship during the storm. They were singing and praising the Lord, and there was no fear. They were enjoying God. But Wesley was fearful. All these things caused Wesley to be driven out of his own religious mentality to find Christ. So we can see that the demand of the law, under God's sovereignty, is preparing us for grace.

*By God allowing us to pass through
frustrating experiences*

In Colossians 2 the saints were being frustrated in their spiritual experience. They were under ordinances — touch not, handle not, taste not (v. 21). These ordinances have to do with spurious things related to the complications and the deceptions of religion, such as false humility, the worship of angels, and all the other things mentioned in this chapter. They were passing through these frustrating experiences, all hemmed in by these little demands — Don't touch, don't taste, don't handle — asceticism. And they were also getting involved in some kind of ethereal dreams or false visions. All this was over these saints. Yet passing through chapter 2 with all these frustrations, Paul comes into chapter 3 and prepares the saints for the simplicity: "If therefore you were raised together with Christ, seek the things which are above."

Some of us may have a background that has been complicated — we have been frustrated, we have been in religious bondage, we have been deceived by evil spirits, we have been under other things. Many times if the ministering of the Word is clear to us, it is a preparation to bring us into the simplicity of the enjoyment of a living Person who becomes everything — Christ, who is our life. You died and now your life is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). So even our background and our religious complications and the frustrations that come with them can prepare us to be reduced to Christ, because what happens through all this is that it only produces confusion and perplexity, and then you find your relief in a wonderful call — “Lord Jesus!” Just in that name you find the flow, the peace, and Christ becoming everything.

By God allowing things to affect us

What affects you? Did anything affect you this week? Someone’s word? A letter you received? Someone’s comment? A sudden drop in things? Take note of what affects you. In 2 Corinthians 7:8 Paul speaks of a letter that he sent to the Corinthians. He was probably referring to his first letter to them. That letter caused sorrow in their heart. They had two possible tracks when the sorrow hit. One track was sorrow according to the world, and the other track was sorrow according to God. The letter came, and the letter produced a reaction of sorrow because of what was in it. When they read the letter, it may have caused them to feel exposed. It affected them. Paul had said some frank things. But we know they took their sorrow to the Spirit, because Paul says, “You were made sorrowful *according to God*” (v. 9). So their sorrow, that is, how they were affected, actually prepared them to be according to God and to be supplied with His grace to clear up so many things and to experience God’s salvation in the church life there. This shows us that what affects us is under God’s sovereignty as another kind of preparation for us to humble ourselves and say, “Lord, unless I live off of You, this thing is going to trouble me all day long, all night long. It will drive me to depression. It will drive me to the world. It will drive me to something that I think could somehow eradicate it.” So we see that these kinds of experiences are just preparations for grace. Is this not renewal? This is the renewal of our mind in our daily living, because this is the divine point of view. This is how God prepares us for supply.

Prepared for the supply of grace for God’s building

God’s goal is His building. It is the church as His corporate dwelling place. The building of the church

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happens by all of us as “living stones” being prepared over and over again to be persons supplied by God’s grace (1 Pet. 2:4-5). So God prepares us for supply for His building. Second Timothy 1:9 says, “God who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the times of the ages” or “before the world began.” This verse shows us that we have been saved and we have been called with a holy calling. There is purpose over us. And it specifically says that it is not according to our works. It is not something originating out of us, but it is “according to His own purpose and grace.” So along with the purpose comes the supply of grace for the fulfillment of the purpose.

God knew that to carry out His purpose, to make us living stones for His building, He had to do one thing — “I’ve got to supply My people. I’ve got to be their supply, because it’s not only about carrying out My purpose, but it’s carrying it out by My grace.” So God knew in eternity past that the kind of life that needs to be lived on this earth by all of His redeemed is a life coming from a constant influx and supply of the divine grace energizing, motivating, propelling, changing, and transforming our whole being into His very image. God knew that this is the kind of life that will carry out His purpose. So no one could offer himself for God’s building without being a supplied person. Why? Because what God wants is beyond our reach. It is not something that is within the reach of our natural ability. What He wants is something that is beyond our ability. The ability has to be supplied and has to flow in and has to be received by us.

God is very wise in doing this, because in this way He gets fellowship, He gets our time with Him, He gets enjoyment for Himself. And it is by this fellowship and enjoyment and opening of our being that God flows into us grace upon grace. So we have intimacy with God. We open to Him. We cry out to Him. We put our head in His bosom. We weep to Him. We moan to Him. We cast all our anxiety upon Him. Whatever state we are in, we come to Him, and He keeps giving a greater grace, a greater grace. That means more and more fellowship for more and more supply. So this life is a supplied life.

By a revelation that is beyond our reach

We have seen that the divine point of view from eternity is that grace is God’s way to produce His purpose. So in our experience things that happen, things that come to us, are all preparing us for more supply, for more opening, for deeper opening, for deeper fellowship, for a deeper turn in whatever we are passing

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through. And God also prepares us for supply by a revelation that is beyond our reach. He gives us a revelation in Ephesians chapters 1—3 of a church that is according to His eternal purpose. It is a church that is a demonstration to the principalities and powers of God's manifold wisdom. It is a church where there is no more Jew and Gentile, but one new man, one Body. It is a church where everything is nailed to the cross, where the old creation is terminated, and now we are the building of God, accessing God together in the Triune God and being built together as His habitation. The very God of the universe presences Himself on this earth in the churches that are being built up.

By going through Ephesians 1, 2, and 3, you see a revelation of something in God's heart that He wants. And it is actually called "the eternal purpose" — singular. Out of eternity past for eternity future, God has one, unique purpose and it is defined in Ephesians 3:10 — "Now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies the manifold wisdom of God might be made known through the church." And then verse 11 says, "according to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord." So God's eternal purpose is to have such a church. This is a revelation of something so high that it is far beyond the reach of what we could do in our natural selves. We are stuck in all our ruts — our personal ruts, our social ruts, our cultural ruts, our racial ruts, our dispositional ruts, our cliquish ruts — all kinds of ruts that divide humanity. And yet Paul is talking about such a church.

The revelation of the church is so high that it almost seems that it is not real. How could it be practical? Yet this is what Paul describes in Ephesians 1, 2, and 3. This revelation itself, being so high, so beyond our reach, prepares us to stop in our tracks and realize, "Lord, it has to be Your grace, it has to be Your supply, to fulfill what You want." This is the meaning behind Paul's words in Ephesians chapter 3. At the beginning of his prayer in verse 14 he says, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father." What cause, Paul? The cause of this eternal purpose, this revelation of the church. For this cause he bows his knees. And then in verses 16-19 he prays, ¹⁶ "That He [the Father] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are ¹⁹ and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God."

The revelation is beyond our reach, so Paul bows his knees and says, "For this cause." The only way the

church could come into existence is if God's people could be supplied into their inner man so that Christ could make home in their hearts. He could actually have the say-so in us. He could totally rule my being and totally rule your being, so that we only consult with the Head of the house. If I have reactions, I don't handle my reactions. I consult with the Head of the house. He is my life. He is my sum and substance and essence to enjoy and participate in, so that I would be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints. This shows us the way God prepares us for more grace — He keeps lifting our sight to see the church with a spirit of wisdom and revelation (Eph. 1:17). So the more we see the church and see an unveiling of what God wants and desires, the more we realize, "Lord, there's not any other life but Your life that can supply this." So revelation prepares us for more grace and more supply.

— Bill Freeman

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this Person that we live. We do not perish, but we receive eternal life and begin a relationship of knowing Him (John 17:3).

Finally, God's offer to look at Christ is universal. Note the Lord's word: "whoever believes in Him." Whoever means whoever. There is no restriction. There are no chosen or special people according to nationality, color, or race. Of course, we know that in the Old Testament times God worked exclusively with His people Israel. But with the coming of Christ, God opened His salvation to whomever. His offer is as broad as the serpents' bite. Whoever has been bitten — and that is everyone — can look to Christ. This is how broad His salvation is. If you're a bitten one, as I am, His salvation is available to you. "Whoever believes should not perish but have eternal life."

— Kirk Eland

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