

THE
GRACE
BASED
LIFE

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T O M G O E T Z

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INTRODUCTION

IF YOU HAVE felt discouraged, disillusioned, or defeated because your efforts to live the Christian life have ended mostly in frustration and failure, this book is for you.

I hope that by reading it you will be able to quit trying so hard and will take the first step in letting God do for you what you are trying to do for yourself. In short, I want to introduce you to the grace-based life, the life God had in mind for you when He created you.

God never intended for you to live on the basis of your own strength and resources. From the very beginning, He planned to do for you those things you are unable to do for yourself and to provide for you those things you are unable to provide for yourself. That's the essence of the grace-based life—living in

the authenticity of God's provision rather than in the counterfeit substitutes of our own creation.

Legitimate human needs fill every life, and we spend much of life attempting to get those needs met. But when God created us, He also created the means to meet our needs. For example, everyone needs love, and God planned to meet that requirement through our parents and other significant people in our lives. Sometimes it doesn't work the way He intended, and a vacuum develops in our lives. If God's authentic provision of Himself and other believers does not then fill the void, counterfeits or substitutes will almost certainly fill it, which leaves us with another problem: counterfeits and substitutes simply don't satisfy. So we are left with at least part of our need still unmet. When people go from one unsatisfying relationship to another, for example, they are simply trying to fill the emotional vacuum that still exists from the last unsatisfying relationship. Many people attempt to build their entire lives on a foundation of counterfeit and substitute provisions, until at some point something happens that causes their whole life to come crashing down.

In the same way, many Christians attempt to build their spiritual lives on counterfeit and substitute provisions by building on a foundation of self-effort rather than on a foundation of grace. If you are one of them, you will eventually become exhausted, begin to lose hope, and probably reach the conclusion that you cannot achieve the results you desire. Before you reach this point, let me

encourage you to read this little book and discover the possibilities of a grace-based life. God doesn't want your efforts to end in frustration and failure. I don't want that for you, and I know you don't want it either.

When God entered your life, He began the process of replacing the substitutes and counterfeits in your life with His authentic provision. As you cooperate with Him, you will progressively begin to live the life God designed for you—built on a foundation that consists of the power of His promises and the promise of His power. Living the grace-based life is about building on God's authentic provision rather than on a foundation of counterfeits and substitutes. It's about moving past the frustration and failure of self-effort into the freedom and power of allowing God to provide what you can't provide for yourself as you live out God's design for your life.

When God created you, He planned for you to enjoy an abundant life under His care. Have you settled for a life of counterfeits and substitutes, or are you depending on God to fill your every need? To find out, let's examine what it means to live a grace-based life.

A decorative flourish consisting of two curved, overlapping lines that frame the chapter title.

CHAPTER 1

THE LOOK OF THE GRACE-BASED LIFE

THE ESSENCE OF the grace-based life is found in two transformational spiritual dynamics: the power of promise and the promise of power. We need both of these to live life as God designed it.

To live with the *power of promise* means to live with the strength and perseverance that come from hope and vision. It means living in the realm of possibilities, daring to believe in destiny and potential. This kind of life results from doing things God's way and finding solutions to the challenges of life that produce lasting results and give hope and strength for the long haul.

The power of promise whispers this life-shaping secret to your soul: your life is more than the sum of your actions and struggles, for you are a person with a God-designed future. You are a significant member

of His family and part of His plan for creation. The power of promise energizes you and transforms you into the essence of what it means to be “a new creation in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17), but you need more than this to live the grace-based life.

While the power of promise represents the possibilities of life, it is the *promise of power* that transforms those possibilities into reality. Promise without power will produce frustration, but promise with power is God’s design for life. It’s God saying, “I have a destiny for you, and I will use my unlimited power to see that your destiny becomes your reality. I will do for you what you can’t do for yourself so you can live life as I designed it.” That’s grace at work.

Grace is that supernatural touch from God that enables us to become what we could never become without His help. Grace is God’s attitude toward us turned into action for our benefit. Since He is *for* us, He helps us do what we are unable to do through our own strength and efforts.

The foundation of the grace-based life is the power of promise and the promise of power. Before you begin to build on that foundation, however, you need a vision of what you are building. In other words, you need to know the look of the grace-based life.

THE GRACE-BASED LIFE IS FREE OF COUNTERFEIT MIRACLES OR PROVISIONS

Our lives are shaped by a combination of predominant influences that determine the kind

of life we will experience. Some are shaped by the influence of their relationship with Jesus Christ and the provisions of God in every area of life, while others are shaped by the combined influence of the “four Ss”—Satan, sin, society, and self—and what they provide. Can you identify which has the most influence in your life? Since each of these influences produces very different results, you need to be able to recognize which is predominant in your life.

In reality the four Ss are nothing more than four false gods that we turn to with the mistaken idea that these gods can provide everything we need to live a meaningful, significant, and satisfying life. Nothing could be further from the truth. Whatever we worship will ultimately shape our lives, and whatever we grant godlike power we will worship. Giving godlike power to a false or counterfeit god results in a life filled with counterfeit miracles and provisions, which in turn are indicators of a life being shaped by the influence of the four Ss.

For example, consider technology and wealth, two areas of life to which many people in our culture have given godlike power. More and more people are placing their hope and faith in technology and wealth with the idea that these will provide what they need to live a fulfilled life. Technology and wealth are vital areas of modern life, but each has a downside.

It's one thing for nonbelievers to turn to these false gods, but when the people of God do the same thing, we force God's hand. He has told His

people we are not to have any other gods before Him. Probably nothing illustrates my point more than the deceptive thinking of those who turn to the lottery gods in America, hoping that somehow this idolatrous relationship will provide everything they need.

Believers who turn to the false gods of the lottery for provision are in reality attempting to bypass the laws of creation set in place by the Creator from the beginning. One of the laws of creation is the law of the harvest—sowing and reaping—and as we sow our financial seed in accordance with this spiritual law, we will receive a harvest in due season. However, many of God’s people plant some of their financial seed in accordance with the law of chance, hoping the lottery god will reward their worship with a great harvest. They fail to understand that if they win, they have received a counterfeit provision from a false god, and at the same time have opened the door to real spiritual consequences. Playing the lottery is an attempt to create our own miracle with the help of a false god, and that is not a wise thing to do.

So if you don’t mind counterfeit miracles in your life, and if you don’t mind putting yourself in a position where God has to remove them to show you that you have indeed been experiencing counterfeit provisions, and if you don’t mind giving your worship to a false god that will eventually be challenged and destroyed by the one true God, and if you don’t mind risking the displeasure of the God who will have no other gods before Him, and if you don’t mind

bowing down at the altar of the lottery gods—then by all means play the lottery. But understand this: it is not an innocent game. Worshipping false gods does have spiritual consequences.

THE GRACE-BASED LIFE IS FILLED WITH SPIRITUAL STRENGTH AND ENERGY

Freedom from counterfeit miracles and provision is only one of the benefits of living a grace-based life. Living life the way God designed it also means we will develop the strength and stamina necessary to finish in victory.

People whose lives are built on a foundation of promise and power will always have enough spiritual strength to finish their race. This is not the case with a life under the influence of the four Ss. When Satan, sin, society, and self are the primary influences in a life, we soon find ourselves relying on personal strength and human wisdom to manage life's challenges, which always results in spiritual fatigue and exhaustion. There is a reason this happens.

The Bible tells us there is a way that seems right to people but leads to death. (Prov. 14:12) All of the ways that can seem right to us have two things in common: they promise quick answers and results, and they promise easy answers and results. As members of the microwave generation, that's what we are looking for, quick and easy. We don't want to wait for anything. We certainly don't want

anything to be difficult; we don't want to struggle. If something involves sacrifice, we aren't interested.

If we want to live life the way God designed it, we have to do things God's way, and His ways are not like our ways" (Prov. 14:12). His ways also have two things in common: He is never in a hurry, and his way is almost always the more difficult option.

Take marriage, for instance. God's plan calls for a man and a woman to enter into a covenant with each other, and until they do, they are not to enter into a sexual relationship. When the struggles and challenges of marriage come, this covenant will hold them together. Man's way focuses on the quick-and-easy approach to marriage. People who follow this way ignore the element of covenant and opt for "living together," not understanding the eventual consequences of this decision. Since living together is quick and easy, splitting up when the challenges come is also quick and easy. The relationship never has a chance to become what God intended and designed it to be.

In marriage the husband and wife become one, but that transformation doesn't happen quickly, easily, or cheaply. For a man and woman to become one as God intended takes time. The qualities needed result from choices each makes that might require considerable struggle and change. First, of course, they must choose to stay together through the process of transformation.

Now here is the irony of turning to quick and easy solutions for our problems: human

thinking says that the struggle and difficulty of doing things God's way will wear us out—it's too hard and we won't survive the process—but in reality the opposite is true. The struggles and challenges that often accompany God's ways make us stronger and transform us into people of endurance. Doing something God's way when our way would be quicker and easier builds character and produces long-term strength. God's way trains us, gets us into shape, and gives us the ability to finish the race.

The irony is that the quick-and-easy approach doesn't build anything in us for the extra mile. We discover that in trying to protect ourselves, we have in fact weakened ourselves, so that when the struggles and challenges continue, we are left standing in our own inadequate strength and wisdom. We don't have the extra measure of strength we would have gained from doing things God's way, and we are left in a place of emotional and spiritual fatigue. The irony is that quick and easy produces overload and exhaustion! Quick and easy is the way of the false gods of our culture.

If you want to remain strong to the end, choose God's way to handle the challenges and issues of life. Even though it is almost always the more difficult way, it is also the only way to develop the strength and stamina needed to finish the journey well and ensure success in the challenging arena of human relationships.

THE GRACE-BASED LIFE ENJOYS SECURE RELATIONSHIPS

Another part of the promise and power of the grace-based life is the security found in the relationships that develop because they contain a built-in covenant factor.

When we approach relationships with the quick-and-easy, no-struggle method, we don't develop relationships strong enough to stand in the face of challenges. Quick and easy produces tremendous insecurity, and insecurity prevents a relationship from becoming the kind of personal bond most people strongly desire. Insecure people feel the need to protect themselves and to hold back. When one or both partners hold back, they are not able to become one the way God intended. Apply this to the number of people living together without the security of a covenant-based marriage and it becomes easy to understand why we are becoming a generation of dysfunctional marriages and families.

For a relationship to prosper, whether a marriage or a friendship, it must have an environment of security—without fear of rejection—in which to grow. If you take security out of marriage, one of the partners will become a performer, acting out a role and never feeling free to develop and grow as an individual. A fragile, shallow marriage is the result, which is unsatisfying to both partners, and the marriage becomes a house of cards that can tumble down at any moment. Because the partners

don't want to bring their house of cards tumbling down, they will withdraw and hold back even more. In the end they are left with a marriage that has been shaped through the influence of the four Ss instead of God's perfect plan.

A GRACE-BASED ALTERNATIVE

If you don't want to live life with counterfeit miracles and provisions, and if you don't want to go through life with no security in your relationships because they have no covenant factor, the alternative is the grace-based life, lived through the influence of a relationship with Jesus Christ and shaped by the power of promise and the promise of power.

If you're ready to embrace a life characterized by these two transformational spiritual truths, then let's get started by examining the foundation on which you are building your life.