

Growing in the Grace of God

Lesson 5 **Grace for Knowing God**

By
Bob Hoekstra

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Opening Prayer

Lord, we humbly come—needing You, hungry for You, and thirsty for Your truth. We pray that You would keep working in our lives and humbling us before You. Nurture our faiths. Give us more reason to trust You, to count on You, to believe in You, to hope in You, and to expect You to work. So we come to Your word that way, humbled under Your mighty hand and expecting greatness in the glory of your word. Teach us. We also ask You to build us up in the faith. Strengthen us. Encourage us. Prepare our hearts to acknowledge the need for changes in our lives; may we humble ourselves, admit the need, face the need, and take joy in Your grace as it works mightily. By the work of Your Holy Spirit, guide us in Your truth we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction

Welcome to the fifth session in our series of studies on, *Growing in the Grace of God*, entitled Grace for Knowing God. God's grace is available to us in order that we might get to know God better and better and better.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness
of sins, according to the riches of His grace. (Eph 1:7)

The shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ provides forgiveness for sin. That is all a part of the riches of the grace of God. God is very rich in grace. No matter our employment of His grace, it remains undiminished. We have not drawn on the bank of heaven, the resources of grace, until

they are kind of low and depleted—they are undiminished! The riches of His grace are keynote in the command of Christ's shed blood. God's grace for us is seen in that death of Jesus Christ.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been
brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph 2:13)

By this shed blood of Jesus Christ we are given the opportunity of an intimate relationship with God. While once we were far off from God, separated greatly from Him by our sins, now through the shed blood of Jesus Christ we have been brought near—near enough to talk to God and to listen to God and to fellowship with God and to walk with God.

Getting to Know God

We shall see in part of our study, that the intimacy available between the Lord and us is absolutely astounding. It goes beyond anything that could possibly develop on even the human level—even in the marriage relationship where two become one. Even though husbands and wives in Christ are a picture of Christ and His bride, the church, there is something unique about the relationship we can have with the Lord Jesus Christ. I mention this to remind us that we are still dealing with the grace of God and the grace of God has brought us close—close to God where we can really get acquainted with Him.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

(2Pe 3:18)

God's grace and knowing God: they go together. "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." We are to grow in grace—in the understanding of it and in the

experiencing of it. And we are to grow in knowing the Lord. The more we know about the grace of God, the more we know about one of the great, great truths of our Lord God. He is a God of grace.

But it is not only learning about grace that lets us know God better, but it is the fact that the grace of God is at work in our lives that allows us to know Him better. Not just understanding grace, but recognizing God's grace at work, opens our hearts, opens our eyes, and opens our minds to a fuller knowledge and relationship with Him.

“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” God's grace and knowing God go so beautifully together. In fact, we shall see that the highest use of God's grace is that we may grow in the knowing of Him. There is no greater way to appropriate the grace of God than to use to know better the Lord of our salvation.

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true
God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (Jhn 17:3)

What would we say if someone asked us, “Tell me, what is eternal life? Define it for me. Describe it for me.” Most simply, we might answer that we shall forever miss hell and forever we get heaven. That is good. But it does not get at the heart of it. That is not wrong. But it is not eternal life itself. Everlasting heaven is certainly included. Eternal life is really so much more. Just going on and on in existence forever—that is not eternal life.

Forgiveness of sins is also involved but is not the heart of eternal life either. Jesus tells us, “This is eternal life.” *This is eternal life.* He doesn't merely say, “This is included in eternal life.”

According to the very Son of God, eternal life is that they, people of God, might know God the Father, the only true God, and His Son who was sent. Coming to intimate acquaintance with God is what eternal life is all about. Building an on-going friendship and acquaintanceship.

Too many Christians, after meeting God, do not grow in acquaintanceship with God. And for some reason modern Christianity has become for too accepting of this trend, as if it were the norm. God never intended us to meet Him in salvation and then be strangers until we stand before Him in glory.

The marriage relationship is to picture the relationship between Christ and His bride. A man and woman do not marry and then go through life happily apart for years at a time, visiting only frequently enough to come to a vague recognition and catch up on the latest news. No, marriage involves *really, really* getting to know each other as servants. We should be filled with the Lord's Spirit, abounding in grace, and serving one another while coming into intimate knowledge of the Lord.

Just as the Lord Jesus Christ is not accusing us all the time, putting us down, condemning us, using us, and wringing the life out of us, neither should we react so amongst one another. He came, the King of Kings, to be the servant of all. Therefore, we ought serve in grace as well—for a servant is not greater than his master.

This is eternal life: knowing God. Just like a marriage is all about knowing our mate, so our relationship with God is a relationship of knowledge. We know our mates in order that by knowing them, we would bless them (not simply to use them). So it is with God. We come to know Him in order that we might bless Him. We never come to Him, asking to know that we

might use Him; when we truly know Him we will, rather, seek to be used by Him. “This is eternal life, that they might know You, God the Father and the Son who was sent.”

Just as it would be tragic, pathetic, and heart-breaking for two people to unite in marriage and then never get acquainted after that, so the tragedy would be magnified by operating such in our marriage to He who is infinitely worthy of love. We are the bride of Christ. We met Him when He called us to His side. Our sins were forgiven and new life was ours. We were brought into the family. We were introduced to the Lord God Almighty. This is what eternal life is all about— “that they may know You.” Coming to know God in intimacy is the purpose and drive of eternal life.

As God is of infinite depth of character, it will take the entirety of eternity to appropriately get acquainted with the Lord God Almighty. Therefore, what better purpose for that life eternal?

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the
knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. (Phl 3:8)

Paul was willing to lose everything that would come between him and knowledge of Christ and the Lord Almighty. He counted it all loss. “The excellence of the knowledge of the Lord” could also be translated as, “the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” In other words, there is no value in any thing, person, or activity that obstructs one’s knowing of Christ for He is the most worthy of our focus. The inherent value of knowing Christ passes far beyond anything else life has to offer. This is life’s highest priority. There is nothing that measures up to this.

The highest use of God's grace the effecting of growth in the knowledge of the Lord. This beautiful reality is held out in 2 Peter 3:18. This is the surpassing value in life. This is the greatest thing to invest the grace of God upon. Seek Christ daily in His word and through prayer that you may know him intimately.

Paul adds in Philippians 3:10, that the reason he counts all as loss is "that I may know Him." This was the purpose, calling, and drive of the Apostle Paul. Recall Paul's later words to the Philippian church:

¹³Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

(Phl 3:13-14)

Paul said he did one thing in and with his life. In fact, Paul was a very busy man: evangelist, missionary, teacher, short-term pastor, church planter, maker of disciples, and a builder of leaders. He did all kinds of things: traveler, adventurer, and visionary. But in spite of all this, he says, "One thing I do." He never mentions these here because all were related to that one central thing: getting to know the Lord.

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. (Eph 1:17)

This is a prayer for spiritual enlightenment unto a greater knowledge of the Lord. I pray that the Lord Jesus, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. It takes a holy, heavenly spirit of wisdom and revelation to know God. We cannot figure God out on our own—this is a goal to which our abilities were never intended.

But He can reveal Himself and give us wisdom in knowing what He is like and who He is. We can teach us of His character, His works, and His ways. If God reveals Himself to us—if God gives us spiritual wisdom to understand Him—then we shall certainly get to know Him. We cannot get to know God any other way. Again, this is the grace of God at work. Again, this is the Holy Spirit at work.

God has been building us in our faith and knowledge since our conversions; that is likely why you are interested in this study. The Lord has been revealing Himself to us, giving us wisdom and understanding Him. And this serves to make us hungry for more. Getting to know God, we are to grow in it. It is what eternal life is all about. It can become, and should, the one passion that drives our entire lives. And we can consistently address God in prayer that He would let it be taking place. All of this is the grace of God.

The Believer in Christ

And how intimate, how close can we come in this knowing of God? The next focus of our study will be the phrase, “in Christ,” for in it much is revealed. Part of the intimacy of the relationship that is available to us is seen in this great phrase. Also, the resources and realities of the grace of God are unfolded in this reality—in Christ.

Again, early as a believer, before I was pastoring, I never even noticed the phrase, “in Christ,” though I was beginning to read the Bible a lot and teaching Sunday school. Then I became a youth pastor. And then I was pastoring. And still I did not pay attention to this phrase. Oh how blind I was. This is one of the most glorious truths in all of the New Testament. It has great insight concerning the knowing of God.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision
avails anything, but a new creation. (Gal 6:15)

In Christ Jesus is where we now live and it also is how we now live. As certainly as a fish lives in the ocean and depends on the ocean, even so do we live in Christ and depend on Christ. Now seeing a fish in the sea is not that hard to do. You can see it. But we are called to walk by faith, not by sight. Relationships like this are even more powerful and more real and more significant than the relationship between fish and ocean could ever be. More real than any relationship evident to our eyes is the heavenly and eternal reality of our new and eternal recreation in Christ!

In Christ Jesus we now live. We cannot see Him. But we do indeed dwell in Him and take our identity in His life, death, and resurrection unto glory. God has told us in Scripture that is where we now make our habitation—in Christ Himself. That is how we live in, on, and by the life of Jesus Christ—the life shared with us just like the vine shares life with its branches.

Here is great truth: we are in Christ Jesus. He is our spiritual dwelling place. And right now He is sharing His life with us. By Him, life eternal is made ours. Through Him we shall continue to grow and flourish in the image of our Creator. Just like a branch lives by the life of the vine, we live in Christ and sharing His life. It is so glorious.

“In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.”

Note the connecting and joining and contrasting words: *neither*, *nor*, and *but*. In Christ Jesus, *neither* circumcision, *nor* uncircumcision avails anything. For those of us who are in Christ, human circumstances, being circumcised or uncircumcised, or religious rituals and religious situations, mean nothing. With such rituals, one is no worse off for having taken part; but neither is he the better off for having abstained. Such avails nothing and causes no spiritual reality to become yours. It is *in Christ* that we benefit and not of human circumstances.

Then what does avail? What does matter? What does cause changes to take place? What does bring blessing? We who believe look to a new creation. One can be young, old, educated, uneducated, red, white, black, or black and blue, and such avails one nothing. Yet being created anew is the true gift of habitation in Christ. In Christ Jesus we are granted new life. We are born again. We are not the people we were before we came to Christ.

What matters in Christ? Being a new creation. Everyone in Christ is a new creature. This is the grace of God. It is the grace of God that you cannot get merits or demerits from all these human circumstances or religious conditions. All that matters with God is this: are you a new creation or not? If not, God will not do anything in your life. If you have come to faith in Christ, you are made new in Him. You are a new creature and He continually makes all things new. He builds the lives of the new creation to make them like Jesus Christ, His Son. What better use of grace?

How closely can we relate to the Lord? I've never gone through this experience for obvious reasons, but I've understood that mothers carrying yet to be born babies get very acquainted with those babies. Whether or not they hiccup. How much they move. Whether they stretch lightly or

whether they thump and kick. It is quite an intimacy there between a mother with child and the child. The baby is, after all, inside of her. That is pretty intimate. That is a pretty close relationship that she shares with that child. We are in Christ Jesus and as close as the intimacy between mother and infant, our relationship with Christ is so much closer. We are sharing His life. That is how intimately we can get to know Him. “In Christ” defines our relationship.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has
blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in
Christ. (Eph 1:3)

Oh, how God has blessed us already—how fully! He has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Every spiritual blessing that heaven has to offer for life here on earth now is already ours in Christ Jesus. Whether we have come to experience and make use of every spiritual blessing or not, they are truly ours. The possessing of them and the experiencing of them are two different things. He is already blessed us with them. They are ours in Christ.

Too many of us know too little about what is already ours in Christ; and so, we have too little experience in these things. That is where we want to grow in knowing the Lord and become more acquainted with what God has already given us. Can we even comprehend that? That God has blessed us—past tense—with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

A man said one day when I was teaching this, “Brother, Pastor, but what I need is these blessings here on earth, not in heavenly places.” I said to him, “Brother, that is why we are connected to Jesus Christ. That is where the blessings are! And we can draw on those now and walk in them here on earth. Heaven is not four trillion light years away. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is at

hand! Where the King is, the kingdom is also. As we are in Christ the King, so Christ the King is in us as well. The kingdom is not way out there; Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is among us. Or it could even be translated, ‘within you.’”

The resources heaven offers that we need for living here on earth to the glory of God are as close to us as the Lord is. We are in Him. They could not be closer to where we are even in this moment! They are right there to draw on. Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places is made ours!

This is expanded in verse 7. We are given this vast trove of riches “according to the riches of His grace.” God has forgiven us according to the riches of His grace. He wants to grow us up, to transform us, and to use us according to the riches of His grace. And all of these are a part of every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places—those are the riches of His grace. We are to draw on these. We have a tremendous bank account in heaven with our name on it. In it are the resources of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

And in prayer and faith and service, in communion and fellowship with the Lord, we are to be drawing on that account daily. We cannot overextend the bountiful grace of the Lord. There is an infinite supply of grace to be had; it is never diminished.

Years ago in the days of the Civil War, there was a slave who, like virtually every slave, had a very, very difficult existence. Somehow, one day he came in possession of a signature of Abraham Lincoln. And for obvious reasons, like most of us, he loved and respected that man. He carried that signature of Abraham Lincoln with him everywhere he went. He loved to show it to people, so much did he love the man. He carried the signature of Abraham Lincoln right in his

pocket everywhere he went. This dear man did not know how to read, but many told him that was Lincoln's signature. They could tell. One day someone who could read looked closely at that signature and said to the slave, "Do you know what you have in your pocket?"

"Oh, yes! The signature of the man I love the most on the face of the earth and respect deeply. I've got his signature."

And they said, "Oh, no, no, my friend. You've got far more than his signature. You're carrying around a document for most of your life here, that set you free."

Many a Christian is in that dilemma. We have been given already every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, but we do not know (or do not trust) what God has already given to us. Many Christians do not know what is theirs in Christ. They carry the Bible and love it dearly. But it is as though they are illiterate in some places of the Word—Ephesians 1:3 in this particular. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Are we drawing on those? If we do not know that verse, if we do not know that truth, if we do not know God that well, then we do not know how much grace is available. We will not be drawing on that grace. We might hold up our Bible, like that man living in slavery held up Lincoln's signature. But do we know that we no longer have to live as slaves? We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. The riches of the grace of God are ours. God wants us to know that. That is part of knowing Him. He wants us to live by these resources of grace—not for the indulgence of the flesh, but for the glory of God. He wants us to grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord.

Christ in the Believer

Look how this intimacy builds. It is not only us in Christ, but Christ in us. The end of Colossians 1:27 says the great mystery that God wants to reveal among the nations is, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” This is not just Christ creating you. This is not just Christ coming to earth for you. This is not just Christ dying for you. This is not just Christ forgiving you. This is, however, Christ in you. Christ died for us that He might come to live in us. And living in us, He is our hope of glory.

We can know the Lord intimately. We live in Him, but He also lives in us. And He is our hope of glory. Living without hope, spiritually, is like trying to exist physically without oxygen. Hopelessness is spiritually smothering. We need hope. You know that we have a glorious hope. Our hope is a person and He lives in us. The more I study this the more it thrills me. The more I study it, the more I am staggered at the majesty of it. Christ lives in me? Can we believe it? The Father tells us time and time again in the Word that Christ lives in us. “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” What a tremendous thing.

Hope is not wishing. Good synonyms for hope in the New Testament include expectation, guarantee, confidence, and certainty. That is New Testament hope. *Christ in us* is our guarantee of glory. He is in us and we are going to make it to glory. We need to see glorious things take place now. Christ in us is our hope of glory. You want to give glory to God? Christ in you can bring forth glorious things that glorify God. Any way you look at it, we have a glorious hope. Our Creator, Redeemer, and our Firstborn Brother lives in us.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but
Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live

by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for
me. (Gal 2:20)

You and I, who know Jesus Christ, have been crucified with Him. That person we were— that man of nothing but sin and guilt, nothing but alienation and separation—died on the cross with Jesus Christ when we were granted the faith to believe by the grace of God our Father. Here is the simple truth of the believer's life: "It is no longer I who live." It is no longer just I in this life. The life that I had, died on the cross. The life I live now is no longer me living—so much better, it is Christ who dwells in me.

This is a mystery; this is a great truth unveiled at last by the words of the Apostle. "Christ lives in me." Love to meditate on that. Be more encouraged and come to greater wisdom and greater revelation, apprehending the extent of Christ's influence on the believer. The Creator of the universe, the Redeemer of men's souls, lives in me!

"And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God." We get up each morning trusting in Him. We face the things that confront us, trusting in Him. We go through the obvious and the perplexing and the unexpected, the routine and the impossible, all the while, trusting in Him. The Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for our lives grows and develops us so that we might trust him daily and work unto righteousness by our knowledge of him.

The intimacy of these truths are staggering, mind-renewing, and faith-building. Christ lives in and through us. What riches of grace that is! It defies imagination that God would come to live in and through a person like any of the sons of Adam! Words to describe our joy for our position in

Christ slip and slide from our grasp. There is nothing like our relationship with Christ save for the Godhead itself: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

To Conclude

To conclude let Jesus remind us of how He lived on earth. It is so similar to the manner in which He longs for us to walk now in Him.

Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?

The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.

(Jhn 14:10)

I can still remember when God first caught my attention with that verse, and said, “Slow down. Sit down. Listen up.” I had always pictured Jesus, God the Son, visiting earth. How easy for Him to walk on water and raise the dead, He is God after all! I missed the whole point. Philippians 2 said He laid aside all those prerogatives. Not that He became other than God, rather He just did not exercise His deity. He became a servant. He was showing us how man should live with God. And as He trusted in God, He could say, “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father. “ So there is Jesus revealing how man should live perfectly while He is perfectly revealing who the Father is. The Father dwelling in Jesus did the works.

Do you know Jesus then takes that same truth and applies it to you and me? He does so as recorded in the Gospel of John

As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so
he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. (Jhn 6:57)

The living Father, the Father of life and light, sent the Son and He lived because of the Father. He did not live because He was the Son. He laid that independent generation of life eternal that belonged to His very nature aside to draw on the Father. “The living Father sent Me and I live”— He lived out His life on earth because of the Father. As with the Father and Christ, so it stands with Jesus and us. That is the parallel that Scripture holds forth. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.

We do not live the Christian life because of us. Our resource is not *me, myself and I*. Our unfailing resource is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If we shall feed on the Son like the Son depended on the Father, we shall live even as the Son lived on earth. Jesus depended on the Father; the Father worked through Him. We now feed on the Son; that is, we find our nurture and nourishment in the fruit of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection to glory for us. We believe in and count on Jesus Christ to be our all in all. We live because of Him. Just like the Father worked through the Son, so now the Son wants to work through us. He wants us to get to know Him in that same manner. As the very one who lives in us, Christ will glorify His Father by His work of redemption in us.

The veil has been pulled back. The children of God can live as lived the first Child of God. We depend upon Him the way He depended upon the Father. We do not have to be God to grow in godliness; we simply embrace godliness through grace even as Christ did. He fully depended on the Father. What a glorious life He had unto the Father. We can depend on Him.

²Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, ³as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue. (2Pe 1:2-3)

The grace and peace of God can be multiplied toward our lives—multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. The more we get to know the Lord, the more His grace and peace are multiplied toward us. God has given us everything that pertains to life and godliness. We are already given all we need to live life God’s way and to grow in godliness. But how do we avail ourselves of all of that? How do we tap into all of that? How do we draw on that? Note verse 3, “through the knowledge of Him.”

The more we get to know the Lord, the more we draw on, and live by, all things that He is given that pertain to life and godliness. Knowing God is all about the grace of God and it is by grace that God even allows us to know Him. By understanding His grace, we naturally grow in knowing God He and rejoicing in God. And it is the grace of God at work on us, in us, and through us that make us to abound in the knowledge of the Lord. We are to grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord; they go together. They are a mutual growth experience and the highest calling we have on earth.

Closing Prayer

Father, we thank You for Your grace that has drawn us to You. Please work by Your grace, to help us to know You better and better. Work Your grace in and through our lives. Lord, by Your grace, for Your name’s sake, let us get to know You more and more. Thank You for revealing the amazing truth that we are in

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You—and even more amazing, that You are in us. Unfold this for us. Let us live this way more and more. Remind us of these truths. Give us more and more of the life of Christ—a life lived in dependence on God above. Use us, Lord. Work in and through us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Grace for Knowing God

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Ephesians 2:13

Getting to Know God:

2 Peter 3:18

John 17:3

Philippians 3:8, 10

Ephesians 1:17

In Christ:

Galatians 6:15

Ephesians 1:3

Christ in Us:

Colossians 1:27

Galatians 2:20

Conclusion:

John 14:10

John 6:57

2 Peter 1:2, 3