

DEVELOP YOUR POTENTIAL IN CHRIST:

Partakers of Grace

By

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August 3, 1974

Introduction Partakers of Grace Summit Grove [tape one]

It is a pleasure to have seven days with you here at Summit Grove. I've come expecting God to speak to my heart and meet me. I trust you have. I want to be my best for Christ. I think this is the desire of everyone who has been born of God. I want Him to get all that He can out of my life. Another put it, "That from my ransomed life the Lord Jesus Christ may receive the full reward for His suffering."

Now if that is the common concern that we share this morning, if there is something in what I've just stated that finds its way into your heart, and that you, too, want to be at your best for Christ, then those of us who by His grace who have been pardoned of past sins and born into His family are here with eagerness, with expectancy, with openness, anticipating that God is going to speak each day in every service to us.

Undoubtedly in a company this large, those of us on the grounds and those who will be joining us there are those who do not know Him whom to know is life eternal. And we are deeply concerned about them. The first cry of the one who has passed into life from death is a cry of concern for family and friends and loved ones who do not know Him.

But sometimes in our concern for those who do not know Him, we forget how concerned He is for those of us who do know Him. It's interesting to hear Him say in His High Priestly prayer that He does not pray for the world. We know that it was out of love for the world that the Father gave His Son. It was out of love for the world that the Son gave His life. And then to hear the Lord Jesus say that He's not praying for the world, sort of surprises one at first. Why is it that

He is there at that place of intercessory ministry, and He can say that He is not praying for the world? Well, it's a simple reason if you see it. He is praying for us, those who know Him and love Him because the only means He has of reaching the world for which He died is through us. Now if this is His concern it also ought to be our concern.

When you find out that the Lord Jesus is there with that unchangeable priesthood that continues ever, praying for you, then you ought to find out what He's praying for and begin to pray with Him. Make a check list and not stop praying about point 1 until point 1 has become an experiential reality in your life. Meanwhile, while you're praying about point 1 you're praying for all the other points, too. We ought to be joining Him in an intelligent, cooperative effort to have His prayer answered in our lives.

Now, I believe that the little epistle to the Ephesians is the summary of the teachings given in the Word that would enable a Christian to be at his best for Christ. I think this is the reason why in the part of so many Bible students' you look at their Bibles, and almost invariably the dark place in the gold pages, if you'll open to it, is Ephesians. Because we find ourselves going back again and again and again to refresh and instruct our hearts and nourish our spirits. And I've had Bibles through the years that broke the binding would break, it always broke in the same place. It broke in Ephesians. Because this was the place I was being brought most frequently in my hunger to know Him better. Now, if I were to write a book and I don't write books. But if I were, it would be on the subject of Ephesians. There is only one title I could give that little series of studies. It would be "Developing Your Full Potential in Christ." Because I think that's what the epistle is about.

Now, that doesn't mean for a moment that the many fine studies that have been made on Ephesians as the handbook of the church are incorrect. Not at all, because it has much to say

about the church. And those who have talked about various aspects of Christian warfare seeing it in the epistle to the Ephesians have been right.

But just an overview, just the way I read it when I sit down and read it as I would a letter from our son or daughter away from us, just as a love letter, I find that He is speaking to me in terms of bringing out of my life in which He has made such a big investment, His poured out love, His given life. Tremendous investment! And, He's looking for dividends. He's looking for returns. He wants something to come to Him from all of this. I think the little epistle to the Ephesians is the manual that He has given to me whereby I can become what He wants me to be, a little handbook, if you please. It's simple, and it's plain. So we're going to be looking at Ephesians from these morning studies from that point of view.

Now look at how the little epistle begins: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, faithful in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 1:1) Well, obviously this has to deal with something beyond our being forgiven and pardoned from the past, because it's written to people who have been forgiven and pardoned from the past. It has to have that which is going to instruct and assist and develop the Christian in his life and walk.

Now, it's important for us to understand that Ephesus was not historically a saintly city. If you have that in mind, please correct it right away. It was a mercantile city, a business town. It was an idolatrous town given up to drunkenness and immorality associated with the local goddess Diana. It was a town in which immorality was the norm, and purity was considered a crime. So much so that the city fathers on a certain occasions drove out of their precincts those who did not subscribe to and participate in the orgies of lust and immorality and drunkenness that characterized the social life of the town. Now into such a foul, poisoned, fetid swamp, if you can get my picture, God's grace, which was sung to us so beautifully a few moments ago, came,

“the grace of God that bringeth salvation.” (Tit. 2:11) And here on this pond of iniquity are some lilies growing. All around is just death, and yet floating on the surface of this social death are these bright pure flowers of God’s grace. Saints! At Ephesus! Of all places!

Now, you might say these were the Jews at Ephesus. No, because in the second chapter he says, “the middle wall of [partisan] has been broken down between us and you.” (Eph. 2:14) The us are the Jews, and the you are the Gentiles. A few months before this letter was written, the people to whom it was sent were groveling in front of the statue of Diana in the temple, indulging in all the immorality, all the sensualism, all the drunkenness, all the bestiality, all the cruelty that was associated with that town and that culture. And yet, God has come by His Spirit through the preached Word, and miracles of grace are now there in that community, testifying that the Gospel is indeed the power of God unto salvation.

Now how did it happen? Well, just briefly, because this is not the main point, let’s see something of what God does when He wants to turn a savage, cruel, immoral citizen into someone who is going to be properly described as a saint, faithful in Christ. Obviously the first thing He does—and maybe that’s the reason why you moved where you are, maybe that’s the reason why you work where you do or go to school where you do. The first thing that God does when He wants to save a sinner or turn a cannibal into a Christian is to put a sample of His grace up next to that person. That’s His first strategy. He puts someone there who is just a living witness, a living sermon, who is by his life saying this is what I am, and I am this by God’s grace. That’s the first thing he does. That may be the very reason why you are where you are, because He wants you to be there just so you can be a testimony to His love and His grace and His power, in that school, in that shop or factory, in that office or store, in that community where you live. That’s what He did here.

And the second thing He does is to get the one that is there to start praying, interceding for these who are living still dead in their trespasses and their sins. And that's what He wants you to do. You see, God gave the sinner the right to go to hell if he's determined to do it. He said, "turn ye, turn ye, for why will you die?" (Eze. 33:11) Now if you are determined to die, then because of the means of grace that He's ordained, even God in His sovereignty who can make worlds by His spoken word will not interfere with your right to be damned if you have decided to do it. And He doesn't interfere with that sinner's downward course, it seems, until someone asks Him to, either the sinner or the sinner's representative, which could be you. That's why you're living next to that person, and perhaps that's why that person is bugging you so much and making so much trouble for you. Because they're really screaming out and saying, "I need help! I need what you've got." Now, instead of being resentful and asking for a transfer why don't you use this as the cry of a wounded heart and begin to intercede, to legally represent that sinner. "Oh, God, he's no worse, she's no worse than I was. But for your grace that could be me. You've worked in my heart, work in his; work in hers." Intercede! Legally represent the sinner. You know, you're the kinsman, if you please, —using a restricted sense—you're the kinsman redeemer of that sinner. You represent that one. You have a legal right. You've been made a priest unto God. Now, go into the presence of God on behalf of that person. Now that's the second phase.

The third phase of human responsibility in divine operations is that you witness to the sinner. Now this is a very subtle and difficult thing because give us an inch, and we'll take a mile. Usually that's the case. The Scripture says let your conversation be seasoned with salt. But I know as a zealous Bible school student that there were times when it wasn't seasoned with salt. If I were given an opportunity I'd drive my ten ton truck of Bible hermeneutics and doctrine and

synopsis up and they gave me half an inch and I'd tip the whole ten tons of salt on them. They would worm their way up and shake it out of their ears and blow it out of their noses and flip it out of their hair and say, "Whoa, wait, I'll tell you, that fellow sure knows a lot of theology, but I don't ever want to get cornered by him again."

Now, witnessing is merely asking the question, answering the question that has been asked or implied, simply and directly. The tendency we have is to answer questions nobody's gotten around to asking yet. And if we could just restrain ourselves and witness. A witness tells a very restricted. I've never had the responsibility to go to court to be a witness, but I've read of and talked with those who have. The witness can only tell what he has seen with his own eyes, heard with his own ears, or he has personally experienced. If he goes beyond that it's hearsay. When He said, "ye shall be witnesses," He was really suggesting that we should just tell what we had seen and heard and experienced. (Acts 1:8) Witness appropriately. What did you hear of God's Word? What did it do to your heart? That's the best thing in the world to use with somebody. Well, these are three things.

When we have done those three things, then God begins to do some things. The first thing He does is to awaken that sinner. This is an operation of the Holy Ghost. When the person begins to feel distressed, unrest, unhappiness with his present situation, what he thought would satisfy doesn't satisfy. What he thought would bring peace and wholeness and completeness doesn't bring it. There's a distress there. There's an unrest there. He's awake. Awakened is the word we use. It is a work of the Spirit of God.

We have a point in history in Massachusetts during the time of Jonathan Edwards¹ called the Great Awakening. When there in that little pioneer community the Holy Ghost settled down

¹ Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) A Christian preacher. America's most important and original philosophical theologian.

on North Hampton, Massachusetts largely through the preaching, perhaps the praying of Jonathan Edwards—but others as well. People who hadn't been in church for months or years were getting up in the middle of the night with a strange sense of distress and unrest, groping in the chimney corner, hunting for that dusty neglected Bible, flipping through it vainly trying to find something that spoke to them. They were awake, awake.

Now, we see that happening more recently than time in North Hampton, in the islands of the Hebrides north of Scotland where the Spirit of God moved across the islands bringing this awakening ministry. We haven't seen that in the United States since the time of Charles Finney², I suppose, when an area was awakened, but God is still doing it to individuals. Back in the time when this happened everyone there were Anglo-Saxon and they were protestant. They were all in one church, one community. They were neighbors to each other, and it was like grass that could catch fire and could go and spread itself. But now you live in a community of different racial backgrounds and cultural backgrounds and religious backgrounds. We have no instance in that mix, that hydrogenous kind of community where the Spirit of God has fallen upon a city like Baltimore. Even in New York City in 1851, when in response to the Fulton Street prayer meeting, there was a pouring out of the Spirit of God. It was still a community of protestants that were there, close to each other, and culturally with affinity and with understanding of their backgrounds. So we don't expect this to happen necessarily in Williamsport or Wilmington, but it does happen in individuals. It happens in people, and it's happening today. They're awakened by the Spirit of God where the Word is applied, where someone has been living Christ, where someone has been interceding.

² Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) An American Presbyterian minister and leader in the Second Great Awakening in the United States.

Then the next phase awakening goes into another phase called conviction where the Spirit of God reveals to the sinner that he is a criminal. That he is a criminal because he made a criminal choice to live to please himself. That was done at the age of accountability when he confirmed everything he had inherited. By saying in effect, "I'm going to live to please me." He made the supreme choice of his life to please himself and govern his own life.

Conviction flows into another phase called repentance. When having discovered that the essence of sin is I'm going to do what I want to do, there is a change of mind or purpose from that to something else. That to as expressed by one, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" A change of direction and attitude and purpose.

Repentance then issues into the third phase of this work called faith, saving faith. Faith that reaches from 2000 years ago into yesterday, and lays hold of Jesus Christ. Faith that is released by the Holy Spirit of God. "I know not how this saving faith to me He doth to me impart, or how believing in His Word brought peace within my heart, but I know whom I have believed."³ There is a faith that believes the Word of God is true, even concerning sin and the work of the Savior. But there is that which God releases. That's why Paul says he was at Ephesus with these very people teaching repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then of course, the next aspect of it is the witness of the Spirit within and without. Within, where the Spirit of God directly speaks to the person who savingly embraced Christ enabling them to call Him Abba, Father. And the witness without, that changed life, that first fruit of the spirit.

Now, friends, all of that has happened to these people at Ephesus. They're there. They're at that point. They've arrived at that place. Have you? There are some here this morning who

³ "I Know Not Why God's Wondrous Grace" By D. W. Whittle, 1883 and Music by James McGranahan.

haven't. I'm sure of that. The greatest act of wisdom on your part would be to become transparently honest with your own heart.

I've found several different kinds of faith in these years of going about serving the Lord. I've found that some have a head faith, just an intellectual assent to what's written. Oh, they see it all in the Scripture, but that's where it stops. Others have a dead faith. They've appropriated the doctrine, the rituals, the taboos, all of that, but it stops there. And yet others may have a devil's faith, the response to the beauties of heaven and the horrors of hell. Of this James says, "You say you believe, and you do well, but remember, so do the devils. They believe and they tremble," but devils they remain because it's just at that level. (Jas. 2:19) Then there's that heart faith. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." (Rom. 10:10) That faith where one has been awakened and convicted, and brought to repentance, and then savingly reaches out and embraces the Son of God. Knows and knows because God tells them. How do you know? Well, you know because you know, you know. He tells you.

The lost note in modern preaching seems to be that which characterized the times of Wesley⁴. We meet on ground that was set aside for holy purposes by those who were almost the direct descendants of Wesley. 1816 was the first time this Grove apparently heard the sound of the gospel roll among the trees. And those dear people, they were the ones that had followed on hard after John Wesley. And John Wesley dared to shake his nation by saying that because their names were written in the Anglican church record did not mean they were Christian. Because they had been baptized did not mean they were Christian. They had to pass from death to life. The only one in the universe that had a right to tell one that they were born of God was the God who did the birthing. God the Holy Spirit who would bear witness with our spirit. That's why

⁴ John Wesley (1703-1791) Anglican cleric, Christian theologian, and founding the Methodist movement.

the churches of England closed against him. Not because he preached the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. That was one of the 39 articles of the Anglican church. But because he said no one dared presume he was a child of God unless the Spirit of God bore witness with his spirit that he had passed from death to life. And for THAT reason they closed the doors to him and drove him out. Because it upset the economics of that church. It disturbed the methods by which its activities were being pursued.

Now, these people have borne witness. Paul said in the 15 verse he declared “I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and your love unto all saints,” (Eph. 1:15) I knew you had passed from death to life. Nothing spurious and cheap and false and substitute here! This is real! This is real! These people have everything they’re talking about. They have experienced everything that they’ve learned about. Isn’t it marvelous to that group he could say in the preceding verses that the salvation of which you’ve been studying is no new thing. Why, before God made the world, He purposed your salvation. He knew everything you were going to need. He knew all about you. He knew how hopeless and helpless and sinful and defiled you were. He knew that, and so God the Father purposed a full and complete and perfect salvation before the foundation of the world.

And then there was the Son, in the fullness of time, purchased everything that the Father had purposed. We find these words given to us here in such a way that “we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace.” (Eph. 1:7) What the Father purposed the Son provided with His poured out life.

But then we don’t stop there. He says, God the Father purposed your salvation; God the Son provided everything the Father purposed, and now God the Holy Spirit, God in His omnipresence wants to perfect in you, and make real to you, vitally, experientially, dynamically

real to you everything the Father purposed and everything the Son provided. So the Trinity is involved in this redemption. Father purposed, Son provided, and Holy Spirit now will perfect. All the Father purposed, nothing more, and oh, how tragically so much less because we do not permit Him, the Spirit of God will do in us everything that the Father purposed and the Son provided. Nothing more, but oh, how much less. Because we are content with so much less than the Father purposed and the Son provided. That's why he said, "when I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love unto all the saints I ceased not to pray for you making mention of you in my prayers"...what? (Eph. 1:15,16) "That the God of our Lord Jesus, the Father of glory will give unto you the Spirit." Whom? "God the Holy Spirit in His omnipresence will give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ." (Eph. 1:17) What is he saying? Why, he is saying that the only one who knows everything the Father purposed and the only one who knows everything that the Son provided, is God the Holy Spirit. "I am praying," said Paul to the church at Ephesus, that this will mean so much to you, this will become so important to you, that you will not be content until you have personally asked "God the Holy Spirit to become unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, that the eyes of your understanding may be opened that you may know..." (Eph. 1:17,18) What are you to know?

Writing to the church at Corinth, I Corinthians chapter 2, verse 9: He said "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the mind of man the things that God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed *them* unto us by His Spirit" which He has given us. Oh, how important it is for us. Oh how important it was for this church at Ephesus, that the people should want everything the Father purposed. That they should hunger for everything the Son provided enough to ask the Holy Spirit to show them what the Father purposed and the Son provided and to make it real to them.

Let me illustrate it in closing. I am sure I have used this in the past year, but probably you weren't here anyway at that time, so who cares. It still illustrates what I want you to see. We were living in Chattanooga, Tennessee and my secretary brought me a bulletin from a church in town at the Moody Corral was going to be having a concert at this particular church, some two months hence. Well, the director of Moody Corral at that time was Donald Hustad, whom you've known more recently as the organist for Billy Graham. Now he is a professor of instructor at Southern Baptist Seminary, but then he was at Moody Bible Institute and directed their splendid corral. We had been at school together in Iowa at the old John Fletcher College years ago.

I wrote to Don and said when you are in Chattanooga, Marjorie and I would love to have you stay with us. Will you do it? Please do if you can. If you don't have other obligations. He wrote back and said he was pleased to accept and we would be together that night. So they got in just in time to set up the risers for the corral and to have a little brief practice. They had some sandwiches brought in. We planned dinner following the program. We sat around and talked until quite late. I think it was after 12 the guests left and we were able to get to bed. And the next morning we didn't have breakfast until nearly 9am. And after we had eaten we just sat around the table and talked. We were reluctant to move. You see first we were talking about things we had done in college. Pranks that had made an impression on our memory. People we'd known and loved. But then soon we began to talk about the Lord Jesus. And the time just sped by. I looked at my watch and it was after 11. And I said Don I hate to suggest this, I've enjoyed this so much, but in less than an hour you're going to have to leave your concert tonight in Nashville. There is no way you can get apart from that flight, so we are just going to have to have you there on time. But I said before you go, it has been so wonderful talking about the Lord, before you go could you play for us?

Now, here we had been enjoying time together, remembering school days. He was the husband of Ruth, father of the girls, so many other things in common. Director of the corral, but he was also a pianist. And we could have him in all these other ministries and not have had him play. Because you see, he had no compunction to play. It wasn't a tick? He didn't have to play when he saw a piano. He could look at a piano and not play it. There was no obligation to play. No force on him to play. He was a pianist however and I said, "Don, we just can't let you without having you play for us. Would you?" So we went down into the living room and he sat down at the piano. His eyes closed and I noticed a tear glisten in the light and he didn't open his eyes. And he said, "You know it has been indeed a great thing just to talk about the Lord." He said, "In so many places, we just talk about people, but we have been talking about Him. Refreshing our hearts in Him. I'd like to just play. Just play for you what I feel. As we talked I began to think about getting back home and working on an arrangement of this which was inspired by our conversation. Let me play it now." So without opening his eyes, he put his hands on the key board and he began to play. "My Jesus, I love Thee"⁵ I know Thou art mine. And it seem to me as I heard him play this that I could see some, some lonely pilgrim that was making his way up through the hail of storm, spear, club and stone. Crawling out of the village where he was persecuted for Christ's sake. And into the arms of the Lord Jesus. "My Jesus, I love Thee" And so he didn't fear the club, or spear, or stone. He was going toward one who loved him. Then it seem to me that he changed. And it was as though there was an echo from the presence the Lord as the redeemed were there rejoicing in Him. The rest One. Then it was as though the churches, he seemed gather something of the spirit of the church out in the far east and we heard them singing "My Jesus, I love Thee." Then to India then to Africa then to South America, as he

⁵ "My Jesus, I love Thee" Words by William R. Featherston, 1864 and music by Adoniram J. Gordon, 1876.

blending in all the cadences of the different music. And gave to it that universal ring of the believers in time.

And then it was as though all the ransomed of all the ages gathered around the Lamb upon the throne. Triumphant voice saying to Him who now they saw “My Jesus, I love Thee”. Tears were running down my cheek. I didn’t dare look at Marjorie. I found it was the same in a moment. And when it was over no one could speak. We were in one of those glorious moments of creation when worship almost becomes tangibly real.

When I could trust myself to speak without sobbing. I turned to Marjorie and I said, “Just think dear we almost missed it.” She said, “What do you mean?” I said, “Don is a gentleman. He never would have played if we hadn’t asked him. He waited to be wanted.” And that’s what I want you to see today.

God the Holy Ghost, may I use it respectfully, reverently, as a gentleman, He is not going to force on you the things that the Father purposed. He is not going to crush as a heavy undesired burden of things that the Son provided. He died out of desire for you, did the Lord Jesus. And He waits to be wanted. He loves to be longed for. He yearns to be invited and the wise prayer from your heart this morning at the begin of this week together is, oh Father of Jesus, cause the Holy Spirit to come unto me the Spirit of wisdom and revelation and the knowledge of Christ. Show me my need and give me the courage and honesty to face the worst about myself. Because in Your love You provided everything I need to be all that You want me to be. And then Lord Jesus the Holy Spirit can gently and tenderly take me by my hand lead me into the provisions of Your grace. And bring me to that place where all that the Lord Jesus purchased for me can in time become real in my life. For His glory. For His praise.

This is the message at least at this point in Ephesians. Developing our full potential in Christ. To be everything that the Lord Father wanted us to be and the Son made possible our becoming. It all waits with you now. Do you want? Are you hunger? Do you yearn? Do you long? Enough to say oh Father of Jesus, show me my own need and the provisions of Your love to meet it. And lead me gently into everything that you wanted me to be. Everything the Lord Jesus purchased with His blood.

With that in mind, let us bow our hearts in prayer and take just a moment to look at ourselves. Wouldn't we do well together in these hours we share, just 168 hours till it's time for the next Lord's day. These few brief fleeting hours will so soon be out of the future and joined to the past. Can be filled with meaning and blessing for us. You know today His Word to our hearts is, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." (Matt. 5:6) Are you hunger? Are you thirsty?

Father of Jesus, Thou who art presence with us, ministering to us, there are some among us dear and precious to us who do not know Him, whom to know is life. And how we long for them to open their hearts and to receive Him. We pray for them. Lord it is such a gracious thing of You to awaken. In that awakening takes rest and peace from the common comforts and it gives distressful that is painful for a while, but issues into joy eternal. We would ask this for them. And then Father for those who do know and love Thee who want to be at their best for Thee want to have everything You intended for us to have and be everything you planned for us to be. Stirs us up with hunger. Don't let us become content until we awaken as likeness till he sees the travail of his soul and is satisfied. So to that end Father, stir us.

There may be some here today, our Father that have pressing business to deal with Thee. Great needs that must be meant. And they're saying oh that today I might seek Him my heart

yearns for Him. And should there be such with us now, Father who have been stirred up by Thee and have business they need to deal with Thee before they deal with lunch or dinner or family and friends, we give them opportunity. Speak to their hearts. Make it easy for us through every service this week mind Thee.

And now dear friends we are going to sing in just a moment and the invitation is so simple. You're here and you have need and it is the most pressing business on your heart, while we sing we invite you to come. We aren't going to prolong the invitation. But we aren't going to allow you to leave this service without knowing that if God has stirred your heart, our purpose in being here is to be of any service that we can through Him to you and we urge you to come as you may sense His directing, leading pull on your heart. Shall we stand together as we sing.