

Grace

Living testimonies from a pilgrim's journal.

JULY/AUGUST 2005

The Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me (2 Timothy 4:17).

Paul wrote these words in 2 Timothy 4:17 to testify of Christ's faithfulness in preaching the gospel message through him. Ponder that a moment...the God of this universe preaching through an earth-bound human! That's grace!

This is not the preaching that only a few select people do, but what everyone in Christ is called to do. "Preach the Word. Be ready in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). "Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15).

And this is not necessarily preaching from a formal pulpit...in fact, it is more the preaching from the pulpit of one's heart and life. I am the pulpit, and Christ is the preacher! What a gracious privilege!

And this is not preaching *at* others. It is a supernatural preaching *from* one's heart to minister the living Christ *to* others. "Him (Christ) we preach...according to His working which works in me mightily" (Colossians 1:28-29). We are not called to preach principles for living moral lives...we are called to preach Christ with our lives. We don't have to be burdened to do Christian things...we have the freedom to manifest Christ in all things.

God nurtures His children to know Christ as we stand up in any circumstance, lift up our heads (often with tears), and preach from the pulpit of our lives. Three profound aspects of this nurturing are described in 2 Timothy 4:17:

1. We experience the **Lord's presence** ⇒ *The Lord stood with me...*
2. We experience the **Lord's power** ⇒ *...and the Lord strengthened me...*
3. We experience the **Lord's passion** ⇒ *...so that the message might be preached fully through me.*

I don't know of anything else that better nurtures a person in Christ more than spending quiet time with Christ and then standing up to preach hope from his or her heart. I have a vision of people in churches and small groups around the world being nurtured with opportunities to speak their hearts, verbally or by writing. May churches not be content with having one really good preacher, but may churches be filled to overflowing with preachers...or better yet, be filled to overflowing with pulpits!

JESUS PREACHING THROUGH A LITTLE BOY

Thirteen year-old Tim (not his real name) wanted to speak a message from the pulpit during chapel at the Boys Home of the South. I will never forget Tim entering the chapel that evening...with beads of sweat on his forehead and with an old crumpled-up spiral-bound notebook with one page half-filled with notes written with a blunt pencil. We elevated where Tim stood so he could see over the pulpit. His voice quivered at first, and he needed an adult to help him with some words from the Bible...but he was just like a flower blooming. He spoke from his heart, and even asked questions to engage the other boys. He spoke for 5 to 10 minutes, and all of us and the other boys (about 30) in the chapel listened intently. When he finished, all the boys erupted with clapping...encouraging Tim and, perhaps unknowingly, praising Jesus for preaching through Tim!

Ever since Tim's sermon, other boys are speaking from the pulpit. You are welcome any Tuesday at 7 pm to encourage the boys and be blessed. Here are some suggestions I shared with Tim a few days before his sermon...which are applicable to all of us anytime. ☺

- Stand tall and proud as you realize how special you are to be representing Jesus as He speaks through your personality.
- Trust that it is God giving you the desire to share from your heart, and trust that He will show you words to speak through Scriptures.
- Thank God and everyone, silently or out loud, for being so gracious for giving you the opportunity to share your heart.
- It is ok to feel nervous and to feel like you are not saying things right. Jesus promises to show His strength through your weaknesses.
- It is ok to get confused or to forget what to say. Admit to the listeners you forgot or got confused. Honesty ministers to people.
- Hold your head up as high as possible when you read from the Bible so people will be able to hear you and to see your shining face.
- Talk louder than usual so boys in the back can hear. Your message from God is so special and everyone needs to hear it.
- When you are not reading from the Bible or notes, look around at the people in their eyes, showing them you really care for them.
- You don't have to make people feel guilty through your message. Simply share your heart and entrust the hearts of others to God.

More nurturing on the back!

JESUS PREACHING THROUGH ANOTHER LITTLE BOY

I had a special time spending the day with my mother on a journey back to Laurens, SC, our home in 1959-1960. We walked around the town square, visited the building where I took dance lessons with my two sisters (I think I may have been forced 😊), had lunch at the Hummingbird Café, wandered around a vacant lot where our house used to be, examined the hill where I put my sister inside a tire and rolled her down into the road to inadvertently cause a multi-car pile-up 😱, visited Mama's 2nd cousin, and visited the church my father pastored. Mama told me of a talk we had on the front porch swing when I was 4 years old...she said I told her I wanted to be a preacher when I grew up, but that I couldn't learn all those big words dad knows! Well, I am almost grown up now 😊, and I have learned that I don't need big words to preach, I only need a big Savior! Following are some recent opportunities this little boy has had to preach.

Horse Shoe Baptist Church

I led a Wednesday night service for 15 people at this church in NC. I enlisted two adult students from Christ Life Ministries to share their testimonies...the first time for both to do so. What they said was great, and how they said it was so beautiful. And what made this service even more special to me is that Joy's improved health allowed her to attend to experience the service with me.

Midway Community Church

I shared my testimony from Galatians 2:20 during a GraceLife Conference for about 100 people in Anderson, SC. Pastor Butch Morrison and Conference Leader Dale Brooks were so gracious to me. Pastor Butch attended a GraceLife Conference I led in Simpsonville, SC in June. Dale is with Grace Life International in Charlotte, NC where I did my counselor training internship two months in 2000.

Christ Life Ministries

A friend found me an office in Simpsonville, SC on the town square for discipling near my home. I have used it once so far to minister to a husband and wife. I have recently discipled four people in Hendersonville, NC, including a precious retired pastor and his wife. I also helped teach a GraceLife Conference to a pastor and his father-in-law in Hendersonville; this pastor called the conference "so refreshing."

First Baptist Church Atlanta

I was recently asked permission by the counseling department at this church to use the "Transforming Grace" write-up from my May/June 2005 newsletter as a hand-out for the church's Sunday Schools. I believe with all my heart that the Lord's presence, power, and passion can be manifested through the written word as well as the spoken word.



Here is a photo from March 1960 of the church my father pastored and a photo of the same church in August 2005. I hope to preach at this church one day, not just as nostalgia, but as an opportunity to share my heart. I am still a shy little boy, but I cannot contain the message that has been planted in my heart. I am willing to "preach" this message any time I am given the opportunity.

In the photo to the right is my mama walking down the steps pretending to hold her little boy's hand! That's actually a vivid picture of what discipleship is all about...being willing to come along-side someone, to lovingly take their hand, to walk with them through anything, and to then witness Christ preciously preach healing words to their heart through you. There is not a seminary in the world better than my mother.

GOSPEL SEEDS

Enclosed are two summary tables I've been pondering for a long time. I started these tables to emphasize Christ, not heaven, as the centerpiece of the gospel...and to emphasize Christ, not man's decisions, as the present living and motivating thrust of the gospel. However, I learned that I can't put God and His gospel in a box. No matter how well I organize truths that have been placed in my own heart, people are not transformed by understanding, but only by divine revelation. Pastor Adrian Rogers notes, "No one has ever been saved by a Plan of Salvation, but only by the Man of Salvation (Jesus)." So, I humbly share these tables not as a box, but as packets of living seeds. I hope the seed truths will be planted in the hearts of some readers, or will affirm what God has already planted. Then, in God's perfect timing, I trust Him to lovingly break the hardened surfaces around our hearts for the fruit of free life to burst forth to nourish a starving world.

A special thanks to Frank Friedmann (pastor of Grace Life Fellowship in Baton Rouge, LA, www.livinginrace.com) for the truth of "The Great Gasp" used in the tables.

SEEDS OF THE GOSPEL REVEALED (TABLE 1)

Phrase	Key Word	Sentence and Paragraph	Scripture
1. The Great I AM	Holiness	God is holy. God is separate from creation. "Who is like You, O LORD, glorious in holiness" (Exodus 15:11)? God needs nothing for Himself because in God is life (John 5:26). Jesus is the glory of God (Hebrews 1:3). God is in the eternal NOW...He is the great I AM. Jesus was God in the eternal beginning (John 1:1). And Jesus claimed to be I AM in the Gospel of John seven times.	<i>God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. You shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14).</i>
2. The Great Creation	Love	God created man out of His pure love. God IS pure love (1 John 4:8). In creation, God is the great loving Initiator...He did not have to create. Man was created not to logically understand this love, but to simply receive God's love and revel in it. Deep down, everyone sees God's loving hand in creation (Romans 1:20). Everything was created by, through, and for Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:16). Man was created to live immersed in God's love.	<i>God created man, male and female, in His own image...then God blessed them (Genesis 1:27-28a).</i>
3. The Great Gasp	separation	Man chose to live separate from God who is the source of life. Man fell for the temptation to seek "love" from a source other than God. Like a fish gasps when taken out of water in which he is designed to live, man gasped spiritually when he chose to live outside of God's love in which he is designed to live...and man has been gasping for true life ever since...always looking for love in all the wrong places...always setting standards to achieve in futile attempts to find "life"! Everyone inherits this separation from God and true life.	<i>Both Adam and Eve took the fruit and ate, then the eyes of both of them were opened (the great gasp), and they knew that they were naked (Genesis 3:6-7).</i>
4. The Great Birth	☆ Incarnation	Jesus was given to us through birth to reveal true life to us. 700 years before Jesus was born, this was written: "Behold, the virgin shall bear a Son named Immanuel (meaning <i>God with us</i>)" (Isaiah 7:14). Jesus was God the Word and "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory" (John 1:1, 14). Jesus is the only person ever born not gasping for life. Jesus is <u>the</u> life (John 14:6). Jesus was given to us for a time through the manger in order to give His life to us eternally through the cross. In Jesus, holy God was born the pure Lamb.	<i>For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace...upon the throne of His kingdom forever (Isaiah 9:6, 7).</i>
5. The Great Death	substitution	Jesus was given for us through death to reveal true love to us. Jesus lovingly chose to gasp and die in our place for two reasons: (1) to take upon Himself the responsibility for our sins (takes away our punishment), and (2) to take upon Himself our old sinful, selfish hearts so that He could take them to the grave (takes away the source of our sins). The pure Lamb of God willingly became sin for us and was sacrificed for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).	<i>Jesus said, "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" (John 3:16).</i>
6. The Great Re-birth (Resurrection)	Victory!!!	Jesus was given to us through the resurrection to unite His life with us. The resurrection testifies of God's acceptance of Christ's sacrifice for us. The Christian has been baptized (united) with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. The old sinful heart of the Christian has been crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6) and the Christian has a new heart (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Christian realizes that Christ IS his or her victory (1 Corinthians 15:57)!	<i>Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him (Romans 6:8).</i>
The Greatest Sight	revelation!	God reveals the gospel to us. If left to our own, we would never see the gospel. God in grace "transfers us from the power of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son Jesus" (Colossians 1:13). The gospel is not a set of truths to believe...it is a life to live. The gospel is not about Jesus...the gospel IS Jesus...His very life given to you. When Christ is revealed in you, you can grow in the light of the truths in Table 2.	<i>I neither received the gospel from man, nor was I taught it, but the gospel came through the revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:12).</i>

SEEDS OF THE GOSPEL REALIZED (TABLE 2)

Phrase	Key Word	Sentence and Paragraph	Scripture
1. The Greatest Position	I-identity	<p>You are in Christ (the source of your identity). A person is either born IN Adam or re-born IN Christ, and there is no IN between. By God's grace, you have been transferred out of Adam and INTO Christ (Colossians 1:13)! Eternal life is not about time, it IS Christ's life (1 John 5:11-13, 20). Therefore, your new identity is no longer rooted in your own sinful past, but in the eternal life of Christ! You are a new creation, in a new kingdom with Christ your King (2 Corinthians 5:17)!</p>	<p><i>For as <u>in</u> Adam all die, even so <u>in</u> Christ all shall be made a live (1 Corinthians 15:22).</i></p>
2. The Greatest Promise	<i>Life</i>	<p>Christ is in you (the source of your life). Your greatest need is life. Your new identity is IN Christ, and this identity is manifested as Christ lives IN and through you. You are righteous, not based on anything you have ever done or could ever do, but solely based on Christ in you (1 Corinthians 1:30). His righteousness is your righteousness... a gift received, not achieved. He is the source of your life. Christ is the promise IN you to reveal true life to you.</p>	<p><i>For all the promises of God in Christ are Yes, and in Christ Amen, to the glory of God through us. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ is God, who also has given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (2 Corinthians 1:20-22).</i></p>
3. The Greatest Purpose	* * <i>Glory</i> * *	<p>Christ living through you is your purpose, not you living for Christ. God's greatest purpose for you is not for you to serve Him, but to glorify Him. Jesus is the glory of God, the very outshining of God (Hebrews 1:3). To glorify God is to realize and to trust Christ is already and forever shining through you. Any service you perform is a result of, not the cause of, Christ living through you in all of His glory!</p>	<p><i>Thus says the Lord, "Everyone who is called by My name...I have created for My glory" (Isaiah 43:7)...and God willed to make known to us, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).</i></p>
4. The Greatest Perversion	flesh	<p>The temptation to imitate life is still present. "Flesh" is old coping habits you developed from gasping to get love and life from worldly sources apart from God. Flesh is sin that can look obviously bad <u>and</u> morally good. Although a Christian receives a new heart, the old flesh habits remain. Satan tempts you in your mind to use flesh habits to imitate life...Satan's ploy is to steal God's glory. However, God lovingly breaks you from the flesh to reveal your true life in Christ. Jesus promises, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in your weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).</p>	<p><i>I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent (Satan) deceived Eve (in the Garden of Eden) by his craftiness, so your minds (the minds of Christians) may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3).</i></p>
5. The Greatest Party	r-e-l-a-t-i-o-n-s-h-i-p	<p>You are built up through relationships. God places His children into the body of His dear Son. We nurture each other through the life of Christ who is the Head of His body. We build each other up in the living truths on Tables 1 and 2 through genuine relationships in Christ. We celebrate the life of Christ in each other!</p>	<p><i>For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...let all things be done for edification (1 Corinthians 12:13, 14:26b).</i></p>
6. The Greatest Parade	<i>Fragrance</i>	<p>You are one with Christ in His victory parade! We testify to the world of God's glory and grace! The resurrected Christ is leading us in His victory parade! He is the fragrance through your life everywhere you go. You can now live confidently FROM victory, not striving FOR victory. This does not mean that you will not be overwhelmed by circumstances nor rejected by others. Your victory trail will indeed be marked with tears at times, but your victory is always Jesus Christ Himself IN you through all circumstances, even when your feelings appear to deny this truth. Always stand tall in Christ as a trophy of God's grace (1 Peter 5:12)!</p>	<p><i>Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place (2 Corinthians 2:14).</i></p>