

Exactly How Rich Are You?

The church often talks about God's grace in terms of salvation—as it should. On our own, no one makes the grade that earns or qualifies him or her for heaven.

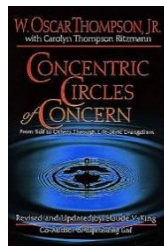
- Forgiveness comes through God's grace.
- Freedom from our past comes through God's grace.
- Eternal life comes through God's grace.

But let's not stop there. The gospel of grace is not limited to matters of salvation. God's grace extends to all areas of life! It is through God's grace that I can make it through the day. It is by God's grace that I can face the challenges of the day without losing my cool—or losing my mind. Christ is the one who holds all things together in this universe (Col. 1:17), and by His grace that applies to my life!

In His brief message to the church in Smyrna, Jesus reminded them that, even though outwardly they knew affliction and poverty, they were rich (Rev. 2:9). The riches come through that relationship with Christ. We are rich in what matters; we are rich in God's grace.

Catch Jesus' words: "I know your affliction and poverty, but you are rich" (Rev. 2:9). The affliction and poverty were not absent; they experienced God's goodness and grace right in the middle of their adversity!

I heard Oscar Thompson speak during his last year of life. He was dying from cancer, and he talked about the grace God had given him for what he was undergoing—and what he said was later added as an epilogue to his most well-known book, *Concentric Circles of Concern*.



"In 1976 ... I experienced excruciating pain in my right hip.... Exploratory surgery was performed on the hip.

"After surgery I was advised that an inoperable malignant tumor had grown out of the bone. A bone scan later revealed that the malignancy had metastasized and spread to my foot, knee, hip, rib, shoulder, and cranium.

"After the doctor left my room that night, a deep, sweet peace from him who is our peace surged within me. It was simply inexplicable and ineffable. I reached for my New Testament on the nightstand and said, 'Father, if I am not going to live, I want to count. I need a word from you.' There surfaced in my mind a passage of Scripture that I had memorized years before. *'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may*

be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God' (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

"'Oh, Father, I understand. You are going to send me through the valley so that I can comfort others with your comfort when they walk there.'

"Then came that inner nudge that said, 'Read on.' Verses 8 through 11 revealed this promise to my heart: *'We were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, ... you also joining in helping us through your prayers, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed upon us through the prayers of many.'*

"I put down the Testament, rejoiced in the Lord, and later slipped into a peaceful, refreshing sleep. Was I rejoicing because I felt I would live? No! I was rejoicing because it really did not matter. My life was under his control. I rejoiced because of a wonderful awareness of his love. Verse after verse that I had memorized began to surface. First John 4:18 exploded in my consciousness: *'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.'*

"I knew that nothing could come into my life without God's permission. If it came with his permission, then I knew that it surely came with his grace to deal with it.

"The joy of living is permitting God to do through us whatever he has in mind for each day. Most people's lives are crucified between two thieves, yesterday and tomorrow. God can only give forgiving grace for yesterday. He stores no provision of grace for tomorrow. Tragically, most of us live in yesterday and tomorrow, in that devastating land of 'What if?' God has adequate grace to deal with yesterday if it is put in his hands. **But his grace is poured out one day at a time.** The person who has not learned this will never live victoriously. He will always be vulnerable to circumstances.

"In other words, I learned that God does not give dying grace on non-dying days."

God gives us the grace we need for today. As His children, we never lack His grace. We are truly rich.