



FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD

Justification by Faith



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There are several articles I have referred directly to in this essay more so than other references. A lot of this I simply refer to the books mentioned, almost like a book report. But I have tried to provide references to everything I say. So, the first article was written by Charles Hodge (1707 to 1878), an American Presbyterian theologian (Calvinistic) who taught at Princeton for most of his life. He wrote commentaries on Romans, Ephesians, 1st & 2nd Corinthians and on Systematic Theology. So I will deal with justification, Demands of the Law and the righteousness of Christ. The second article also by Charles Hodge deals with the meaning of justification. But this article deals with faith in Jesus Christ. Why is it faith; you have to come to a decision of who Jesus is in your life. Is he just a person or prophet or is he the Son of the Living God? I've also included my testimony explaining my relationship with God and what that really means to me. Out of these eight thousand words, my authorship only extends to perhaps six of those eight thousand. I am just trying to give credit where it is due.

‘How can a person be just with God!’ This is a most interesting and yet difficult question. It is difficult to explain without get technical in theological speech, almost pushing aside the spiritualise. The author relates justice with the knowledge of right and wrong which has been written on our hearts. This is of the nature of a Divine law, having its authority and sanction, and by it the heathen are to be judged in the last day. The author goes on to mention the doctrine of justification which simple put, we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ. But the author connects this promise of life to the obedience to the law and this obedience in turn is called righteousness. So if anyone is righteousness before God, he is thus justified by Grace. The author states that the law demands righteousness and hence to be righteous before God, and to be justified, mean the same thing. The doers of the law shall be justified. Yet, justification is not of works. Do these two sentences contradict each other? The author states, all who look to the law for justification must be condemned yet people will be dealt with on the principles of strict law. The author quotes Paul as saying, ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one’ (Romans 3:10-12).

‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.’ His acceptance was by faith and not by works. The author continues his comparison of works and faith by saying that the law condemns all sin, it condemns us, and justification by the law is,

therefore, impossible. Yet, I know that without works, often faith simply dries up to be no more. This is seen over and over again in people's lives. Using terms like being sold out for God; on fire for God being an active rather than a passive Christian, all are signs of a living faith that continues to grow. A growing faith continues whereas a passive faith also continues to pass.

In the second part of the first article, it is entitled, 'the demands of the law are satisfied by what Christ has done.' Obedience to the law can not satisfy the demands of the law. Romans 6:14 says that we are not under the Law, but under grace. We are free to embrace another different method of obtaining acceptance with God. Before faith came we were kept under the law. But the apostle argues, 'therefore shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.' The law has not been voided through faith. The author affirms that the law isn't abrogated, for the Bible says that the wages of sin is still death. In 1st Cor. 1:23 & 24, the Gospel of the grace of God is a scandal to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks; but, to those that are called, the power of God and the wisdom of God. For Christ came and obeyed the law perfectly and brought in everlasting righteousness and those who are in Him are said to be righteous before God, not having their own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ (Phil 3:9). We are redeemed from the curse of the law by Christ enduring the curse for us (Gal. 3:13). Christ was the final offering for us. He replaced the offerings in the Old Testament. A sacrifice was made in the Old Testament to atone for our sins and to reconcile us back to God, but Christ's sacrifice was but once and enough for us. Thus the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us from all sin (1 Jn. 1:7). This blood was the means of our own atonement so our salvation is often ascribed to the blood of Christ. Thus we have been reconciled to God by the death of His son, Jesus Christ. Christ was God yet a man in every sense. He was a king, our Saviour and a Priest in every respect and finally Jesus was the Son of God.

In part three, there is the righteousness of Christ which first looks at the practical effects of this doctrine on us. The author reconfirms that that we are under a law that demands perfect obedience, yet all have sinned but Christ has redeemed us from the law by being made under it and the perfect righteousness of Christ is presented for our justification before God. So justification is a sentence of life pronounced upon righteousness which is not our own righteousness but it is the righteousness of Christ. The Jews rejected this righteousness which was then offered to the Gentiles who attained it in faith. The righteousness from obedience to the law could not be attained was replaced by the

righteousness through Jesus Christ which was a gift of God. Again, the author repeats that we are now justified through the redemption in Christ; we are justified by his blood, by his obedience and He has become our righteousness. We have been made righteous before God because of Christ. Christ died because God loved us and in believing this we will not die but live forever. Because we are unworthy of this, it is called grace. This is the mystery of redemption. We are justified by grace; saved by grace. The plan of salvation had its origin in the unmerited kindness of God not because we were worthy of His love or His salvation. Yet, in Romans 10:12 & 13 says that for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. The apostles preached this message as it was the only way the people could be delivered from sin. There was no other ways to experience true love, obedience and real peace in a person's life. This illustrates the kindness of God like a kind Father. This brought us out of slavery and raise from such a low estate to become the sons of God. The author concludes by saying that the obedience which the Law demands is called righteousness and those who render that obedience are called righteous but we are not saved by this obedience to the law.

People imagine that their good deeds will be compared with their evil deeds, and they will be rewarded or punished as the one or the other preponderates, or that the sins of one part of life may be atoned for the good works of another. But this isn't correct. The Muslim thinks like this. They constantly live a life of balancing their bad deeds with their good deeds. The Law of God extends to the most secret exercises of the heart. It condemns whatever is in its nature evil. The problem here is the lack of understanding of spirituality. It's so easy to think in terms of works because it's more black and white. But Christian spirituality requires a love affair with Jesus which in turn requires a complete commitment to Jesus. This is why people find it so easy to revert to good works as being salvation.

We have discussed justification by faith. It covers God's plan for us and why He sent His son, Jesus Christ that we may believe in Him for the forgiveness of our sins. Salvation is in Jesus and we are saved by faith alone through His grace. Even though I understand it; I believe that the author was very unclear in his presentation. If the author is saying that Grace does not negate the law; I certainly agree with this.

Grace is one of the primary doctrines of the Bible, however it is either asserted or assumed that we are still under the law of God. This is true of all classes of men, whether they enjoy a Divine revelation or not. Everything which God has revealed as a rule of duty enters into the constitution of the law which binds those to whom that revelation is given, and

by which they are to be ultimately judged.’ But these paragraphs reeks of the idea of putting Christians back under the Pharisaic Law which simply could not save the Pharisees and neither will it save the Muslims who live to a law of their own, non-biblical and in many ways just simply evil in the way they sometimes live it. Jesus made it plain that we’re saved by grace, alone. Know that we now come under the law of Jesus which is seasoned by Grace. Know that justification is not of works. The presentation of this argument causes more confusion in understanding the differences between law and grace. But I think this may be typical of Calvinist thinking and very unhealthy thinking it is. The benefits are plain enough; to read the various scriptures the author uses; some out of context and some to back up his own words. I’m not sure what to recommend in regards to these articles.

My testimony will be given to provide addition points on justification by faith. I came to know Christ personally many years ago. I grew up in an environment removed from any religiosity, much like many people today. So, my experience of salvation was quite dramatic.

It was my fourth year serving in the United States Navy aboard a ship known as the USS Austin (now de-commissioned). I was a sailor and a sinner through and through. I became really tired of my sinful life and went to my Chaplain who just happened to be a keen Christian. He gave me a Bible and told me first to read the New Testament and for me to come back to him after I had finished. I read through the first three Gospels and then accepted Christ as my Saviour.

It was dramatic in the sense that I felt forgiven for all my sins and they were immediately lifted from me. I changed over night. The Bible taught me to pray and to talk to God through Jesus Christ. I told God at that time that I didn’t want religion but reality in my walk with Him, and afterwards I felt a tiny voice inside me say, ‘If you completely give yourself to me I will not only give you life, but life abundantly’. This alone confirmed the reality of who Jesus Christ was to be in my life.

I eventually shared what had happened to me with the ship’s Chaplain. I felt that I had to confess my new found faith with everyone so they knew the new person I now was. One Sunday, out at sea, during Christian services, the Chaplain allowed me to stand and declare my new found faith in Christ to an immediate group of several hundred marines and sailors. Of course, word got around to officers and enlisted men I had dealings with. There were immediate jokes and criticism which continued until my four-year Navy contract came to an end six months later.

Over the years, listening to God has sometimes been difficult, and sometimes very easy. Sometimes, when things don't go so well, it's usually due to my own desires conflicting with God's desires and, of course, I have made many mistakes. However, among many important things, God has taught me to be a missionary, no matter what situation I find myself in. And another thing: as long as I consider God in my daily walk, He's always with me. When I fail, and I do, God is always there to pick me up. God's love and desire for my life have never changed. He has never failed that promise of giving me abundant life; I have indeed experienced it.

So, after leaving the Navy, I went to Bible College. I stopped my studies and was accepted on a single short-term mission trip to Europe for the summer. Those two months ended up being two years. During that time, my travel and missionary work first took me to Europe, then the Middle East, and eventually to India, where I lived with an Indian Christian missionary team for six months. I preached to crowds of thousands of Hindus and Muslims alike. Later, I ended up in Afghanistan where I met my New Zealand wife. Many years later, joining another mission, we were off to Egypt and after that to southern Arabia.

God continues to speak to me in terms of confirmation through His Word and sometimes directly. My missionary endeavours continue in various ways, for example, in writing this National Certificate in Christian Studies and this unit standard. Yes, from the point of closing my eyes in that bunk bed on board a naval ship, asking Christ to do a miracle in my life, until today, I've served God as a missionary. God has allowed me to work in five different countries and study three different languages. I've been able to travel to over fifty different countries and serve God in many different capacities. Amongst these, God has given me the strength to finish my degree, several teaching certificates and diplomas, and a Master of Linguistics.

I know that with Christ in your life, you have the potential to live an incredible Christian life; so full and so vibrant. Nothing in this world can even come close to matching what you can be in Jesus Christ.

The idea of a 'call' is a very Biblical idea, however I consider a call in broader terms than most. As a Christian, I believe that we are all called to serve Jesus. God called various people in the Bible for various purposes. God called Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, and many others. He called Abraham to establish a great nation and Moses as a leader and speaker for

God's own people. Jesus called the twelve disciples to follow him and then He sent them out. They were evangelists. The Holy Spirit called Saul and Barnabas to preach the Word.

A common Christian understanding of God's calling is sometimes thought to be a decision to enter into a full-time Christian service such as being a priest, preacher, Christian worker, or missionary, and perhaps a feeling that God's calling is only for those most saintly people who are committed to prayer, sacrifice and service. Yes, there is truth in this, but God's calling applies to much wider applications than this. It's really using the vocation as a purpose to serve God. I believe that it is going all out for God.

One must understand that there are calls, and then there are calls within calls. God's call in a person's life is first to follow Him and to be what He wants that person to be. So God wants you, and all people, to be committed and dedicated to following Jesus Christ. The task is to follow Christ's teachings, to accept Him as your Saviour, to love Him and worship Him. This is the greatest call and if you have not yet answered this call, you must first do so before God can use you in other things. All people who accept this call, accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour. In this sense, a decision to accept Jesus Christ is a decision to accept the call. So God's main call for any Christian is in regards to a relationship of close fellowship with Jesus. God says in John 4 verse 6, "I (Jesus) am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." The Greek word for 'called' means, 'called them to Himself, first to a love and obedience of which God will provide power and whatever else it takes to get the job done'.

However, in theological discussions, the word 'vocation' is not used in reference to the professional trade one pursues for the sake of pursuing employment. Vocation refers to the invitation God has given to all people to become His children through Christ's work. This vocation, or calling, does not come to people because they deserve it; it comes strictly as a result of God's grace (2 Tim. 1:9). However, it is up to people themselves to decide whether they will accept and act upon this vocation or calling. You may be interested in becoming a church member, becoming an elder, serving on a missions committee, teaching a Bible class, or many other things. All of these are callings worthy of consideration. There are so many tasks that we can get involved in. This is what this unit is about: understanding what specifically God would have you do. If you have already started to think about your future in terms of actively serving God in your workplace or in part- or full-time ministry, then possibly the Holy Spirit has starting dealing with you. In deciding to become a church member, elder, or serving on a missions committee, you have accepted a call.

God's calling involves an understanding of Biblical principles of commitment, dedication and obedience and the calling and gifts which a person already has, often go together. The Spirit of God uses the Word (the Bible) to speak to us and challenge us. Sometimes He uses a prophetic word spoken in church or a Bible verse which we've read. Sometimes He speaks directly to us, or through dreams or an overall confirmation that we are proceeding in the right direction. Above all, God wants us to rely on Him; to believe and trust. This is faith and you'll see later in this course that you can do little without this faith.

In some ways, choices which we have already made in life may influence our decisions. For example, if we have already studied to become a doctor, teacher, carpenter, builder, policeman, etc, this could be the vocation or area of ministry that God would want you to be involved in. Your ministry could be where you already work! God can use you in any situation for his glory to help others to come to know Jesus Christ as their Saviour. However, if you are thinking beyond that context, or at this particular point you don't yet have a vocation, then God may already be speaking to you about a certain type of training. Remember there are callings within callings. If you are thinking about further training or making a major decision in your life, a good plan is to start moving into the realm of the spiritual: praying and trusting God for guidance. Start with smaller things in your life and watch and see how God opens situations or closes situations for you.

To help you move into the realm of the spiritual, start reading your Bible on a regular basis. Most times God speaks to us through His Word by making a certain verse be of special interest to you. However, you'll want to be careful not to get your guidance from people; but by all means, talk to those you trust, and pray together. Learn from others through their experience. Get experience by getting involved in your local church. Become responsible over something to gain some leadership experience. Participate in prayer and Bible study as part of your walk with God. Get a close friend or co-leader to pray with regularly. Learn to deal with conflict positively in forgiveness and prayer with an open heart.

Also, know that there's always more than one way, which may not be necessarily 'your way'. Know that God works in the ordinary for the most part and often his will is revealed in the ordinary. 'Ordinary' means your daily life. Don't be surprised, though, if God chooses to work in the supernatural. It can happen.

Sometimes, you need be aware that a vocation is not so much a 'what' as a 'whom'. To whom and for whom do you wish to give your heart and life, and to serve?

God is a relational being. The Bible reveals that God desires to be in relationship with people, and it is through Jesus that a person's relationship with God is transformed into a healthy and productive one. Having a healthy relationship with God and with other people is always a primary characteristic of God's call.

God's call will always have, at its heart, God's desire to see everyone living in a healthy relationship with him. A person can have a healthy relationship with God because he forgives them, and changes them to reflect more and more of his character the longer they follow him. The belief that Christ's death on the cross removes a person's wrong, and that his resurrection power helps people to live as he intended, is always central to God's call. All of the various gifts that a person may have, and all of the tasks that they may feel called to do, will always reflect this idea of reconciliation, (i.e. being in healthy relationship), if it is God's call that they are responding to.

God is not a master clone maker. He calls different people to different tasks and in different ways. There is a consistent theme, however, irrespective of how he calls, and what he calls us to. That theme is that he wants us to be reconciled to him and to each other. He calls us to be more and more like Jesus because Jesus lived a life of perfect love. God knows that people will fulfill their potential only when love is their primary motivation. He knows that friendships, families, communities and whole societies only work effectively we people learn to love each other. This is not the same as being in love, or even emotionally involved with other people. It is primarily about choosing not to pursue our own interests and pursuing God's interests and the well-being of others instead. The reality is, of course, that to love as Jesus loved, a person must allow Jesus to live through them. A famous modern theologian, Miroslav Volf, puts it this way:

"Because God has made us to reflect God's own triune being, our human tasks are not first of all to do as God does – and certainly not to make ourselves as God is – but to let ourselves be indwelt by God and to celebrate and proclaim what God has done, is doing, and will do." (Miroslav Volf, "God's Life in Trinity", Fortress Minneapolis, 2006, p6)

This is the essence of God's call. It is far more than a call to model ourselves on Jesus as though he was a great moral teacher. There is this aspect to it, but it is only part of the story. It is far more than a call to do certain tasks or have certain jobs, either inside or outside the formal church structure. Again, there is an aspect of doing tasks that is involved, but that is always a secondary element. God's call is a call to *live* in a certain way. One

characteristic of that “certain way of living” is God’s heart for reconciliation, or being in healthy relationship with those around us. There are two aspects to this: first, the reconciliation of ourselves and other people to God and, secondly, the reconciliation of people to each other.

In Galatians 3:28 the apostle Paul writes: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”. This is where racism was annulled and done away with. What Paul is saying in the passage from which this quote is taken is that the differences between people aren’t important. Those who follow Jesus have a different calling – to live out a life of love toward each other. The apostle John put it this way in 1 John 3:11: “This is the message you heard from the beginning: we should love one another”. The self giving love of Jesus Christ which inevitably led him to his death on the cross is both the statement of how much God loves each person, and God’s statement of how much he expects everyone to love each other. God never calls a person to a big ministry that will glorify them. He calls a person to a life of big service to others.

A characteristic of God’s call to serve is that it ought to lead people to live in right relationships with those around them. Inevitably this will involve reconciling differences, putting right past wrongs, and forgiving each other daily. God calls everyone to express this at a personal level. That doesn’t mean to say that God calls us to always be at peace with everybody. Every psychologist knows that to do the best for people whose lives need some adjustment sometimes they need to be challenged. Having constructive friction in a relationship can be a healthy thing provided it’s in the right dose. Jesus himself was not at peace with a lot of people, but he was never in dispute with them over his own selfish interests, and he forgave rather than held grudges. As well as this general call that applies to everyone who is a follower of Jesus, God calls many people to serve him at the level of the community in which they live, or to be a force for good in their country, or even internationally.

God’s call to a ministry of reconciliation may be out-worked in completely different ways. For example, in the years after the end of apartheid Archbishop Desmond Tutu expressed God’s call through his work with the Truth and Justice Commission in South Africa. Similarly, Mother Teresa had an important ministry in reconciling people to God and each other by tackling issues of poverty and sickness in the slums of Calcutta. William Wilberforce experienced God’s call as a politician in Britain two centuries ago, and ended up ensuring the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire. Billy Graham, the American

evangelist, experienced God's call to bring the message of reconciliation to more people than any other person in the history of the church. Each of these people had a different calling and a different type of ministry, but they are united in serving the same Christ and having a ministry of reconciliation. Often this was expressed in ways that were seen as radical in terms of the church of their own day, and the call on these people's lives was frequently expressed more outside of the church than inside it. There will be many other examples of this in your own faith community. There will be business people, health professionals, social workers, teachers, plumbers, builders, and shop workers all of whom have just as much potential to live out God's call within their daily lives as any person who is involved in the professions we typically associate with church ministry.

The Promises of God: "... but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (Mark 8:35). I am just not sure how many western Christians understand this, if many at all. But this basic truth comes with a radical promise. It asks the question 'Is there any other purpose in life than to give one's all to Jesus?' Of the different aspects of a person's call, they must deal with this first. Within it is a call for total love, commitment and self-sacrifice. Who else could make such a statement and give such a promise? Jesus says in John 6:48, "I am the bread of life". In John 8:12, again He says, "I am the light of the world"; and finally in John 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life." These are not only statements, but promises to be accepted and believed. As a result of believing, there is the promise of life!

Jesus said, "Come unto me, all [ye] that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28). Where else can a person get this rest? Not only do we have rest, but also life; and this comes in the form of access to God, eternal life, our names being written in the Book of Life and a victorious life in Jesus Christ. This continues with yet another promise: nothing can separate us from that love, that rest and that life in Jesus (Romans 8:35-39).

Look at what happened to those in the Bible who trusted in God's promises: "¹⁷By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten [son] ... ¹⁹Accounting (believing) that God [was] able to raise [him] up, even from the dead ..." (Hebrews 11: 17, 19).

"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph. By faith, when he died, Joseph made mention of the departing of the children of Israel (from Egypt), and gave commands

concerning his bones”. (Hebrews 11: 20-22). By faith Moses “forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11: 7).

Read the rest of Hebrews 11 to see all the other examples from the Old Testament of how those who trusted in God’s promises were blessed. In the New Testament too, there are countless examples of those who trusted in God and answered His call: Paul, Peter, Luke, John, and the list goes on.

One thing we can see from this, promises are based on faith. The Book of Acts summarises the promises in the Old Testament as being fulfilled with the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus came with power. He was crucified; then rose from the dead. He now reigns by the power of God. He will come again to judge and restore all things for the purpose of God. Lastly, God has promised us a way from any temptation we are faced with, along with the promise that He will meet our every need. This means food, clothing, shelter, companionship, love and salvation. His promises also state that all things work together for good to those who love and serve God faithfully (Romans 8: 28).

These promises are not just for the so-called ‘spiritual’, but for all those who follow Christ. They are for you! These promises are for those who serve God in the workplace. They are for any Christian considering doing any task, ministry or vocation. These promises are for the church worker unlocking the church for Sunday services. These promises are for the Christian School teacher; for the missionary doctors serving in hospitals overseas; for the car mechanics in their workplace or serving in full-time missionary work. They are for the Christian English teachers teaching English in the Middle East, China, Asia or South America. They are for the Bible teachers teaching in Bible schools and ministers pastoring churches. You can take these promises as a foundation for your calling and stand on that foundation in the face of any difficulty, worry or concern you may have.

God’s Grace: The Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary defines ‘grace’ as a favour or kindness without regard to the worth or merit of the one who receives it, and in spite of what a person deserves. According to *Smith’s Bible Dictionary* the ‘Covenant of Grace’ is God’s promise to save those on the condition of their believing in Christ and receiving Him as their Saviour. So this Covenant of Grace is between God and those who follow Him.

Grace describes God’s blessings and love regardless of the state a person is in. However, grace should never be taken lightly, as if we deserve it. Grace is received only through repentance, forgiveness and faith; And if we are truthful with ourselves we deserve

nothing but judgement from God because of our sins. Fortunately, however, God has long established a Covenant of Grace in our lives. Thinking that we deserve God's grace only leads to pride, and pride leads us away from God. That Covenant of Grace was confirmed in the person of Jesus Christ, a perfect example of God's grace.

Paul has a lot to say about grace in the Book of Ephesians. Ephesians is a book showing a summary of the Christian's life and God's plan for the believer. Ephesians 2:8–9 says: "...for by grace are you saved through faith, and not of yourselves; it is a gift of God: not of works, lest any person should boast". A further example of God's grace is Paul himself. Paul says that it was Jesus who called him and gave him his ministry. Paul's life was a testimony of God's grace. Remember, before Jesus intervened in Paul's life, he went about persecuting Christians.

In Ephesians 4:1–6, Paul tells us that we should walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called. Here, Paul relates a calling to being a privilege. When we receive God's grace, it will also bring peace, as this is an attribute of grace (along with humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, self-control, forgiveness, not responding to provocation, and mercy). This is what we begin to experience when we receive His grace in our lives. So God's grace will automatically demand these things of us.

In Ephesians 4:7–16, Paul also links this grace to spiritual gifts. Some of these include: leading people to Jesus, prophets, teachers, preachers, apostles, pastors, and disciplining. He says that all of us have been given a particular gift. We have already touched on some of these points in the form of tasks, ministries or vocations, which will be covered in more detail later in the course.

Paul is linking our service to God, in whatever task, ministry or vocation we are, to the fact that we will have a special grace in what we do, as it is also a gifting of God. In this you can see how God's role in grace plays such an important part of a person's calling. The very basic requirements needed by the person who is called, is God's grace and love.

As already mentioned, those who have already accepted God's call to salvation are the ones privy to this grace. We serve God out of love so that others may experience what we have already experienced. How else can one serve God and have that needed peace, humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, self-control, mercy and forgiveness of others? The above attributes of grace also provide us with a picture of how Jesus lived His life, as an example of the way He wants us to live as we serve in whatever situation we find ourselves.

God's Presence: Among the gifts given to us, the Holy Spirit stands out as the greatest. Once we have committed ourselves to God, His Spirit takes up residence in us forever. We have power from God living in us. The Spirit of God is our Helper, Comforter and Guide.

His presence in us helps us to understand the word of God. He leads us in the way we should go in all spiritual things. He affirms to us all truths: Christ's deity, Son-ship, incarnation, Messiah-ship, His suffering, death, and resurrection. He provides us with gifts to function within our calling. The side effects of the Holy Spirit in our lives are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control. This aspect of God's role provides us with power to go about God's work in this world because we know He is always with us.

God's Faithfulness: When we talk to one another about being faithful, it usually has to do with keeping our word; what we say is what we will do. This is the same with God's faithfulness. God is faithful to do what He says He will do, and this relates directly to His promises.

In our calling, we all hope to somehow repeat what great men and women of the Bible have done. God's faithfulness has provided us with an inner rest, knowing that He is with us in everything that He has called us to do. We can be assured that God will do what He says He will do. If we are called to be a Bible teacher in a small remote town in the middle of nowhere, then God is faithful and we can trust in Him for all things.

God's faithfulness is part of His grace, given to us because of our decision to follow Christ. God's faithfulness means that His character is consistent. We can be convinced that God cares for us. He knows our every sorrow and trial in our life. In Psalms 46:1, 2, it says that God is our refuge and strength and help in times of trouble. Therefore we don't have to fear, even if the earth is removed and the mountains crash into the sea. In His faithfulness we have strength and we can stand on that in whatever situation we find ourselves in our calling.

Initiation of the Call: It would be great if decisions we have to take presented themselves with answers in the form of an e-mail received and marked, 'Your Answer: Clear and Simple'. However, we know that making decisions is usually very different to this, and understanding one's calling is no different. Our calling, as well as any other decision-making, is a process or journey we must go through. As we pray and seek God, our path will be marked with signposts directing us to those places God wants to take us to. Only afterwards

we see that these are signposts of His guiding. Our journey involves the initiation of the call, discernment of the call, and its confirmation.

Our call is usually initiated with an interest in serving God in some capacity. This interest may be sparked by a Bible verse such as Roman 10:14-15, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? 15And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”. This verse has inspired many to take up service for Jesus Christ.

We must remember that the church is the primary framework under which we serve God. The ultimate purpose to your call is to win people to Christ and integrate them into the life of the church. That framework is made for strengthening the spiritual life of Christians and works to fulfil the great commission to go into all the world. Begin to share your interests, hopes and even fears with your home group, your pastor and your friends, so that they can start praying alongside you. This sharing helps develop interests and hopes into a vision. Also at this stage of your journey, the church provides opportunities for various tasks and ministries for you to initially experience. The church provides a way to show your accountability.

In some churches the initial part of your calling may involve some kind of official form to fill out. Your journey could be officially recognised and processes could be more formalised for you to go through. Sometimes this sort of thing is quite frightening but there are advantages to it. It can be a ready-made process that provides you with a set direction within the church framework.

Discernment: Above all, you must follow your own heart in your journey; but how do we know we are hearing God’s voice and not the voice of our own desires? It could even be the devil trying to lead us astray. First of all, God usually calls us into something that we enjoy doing and have already experienced or even trained in. Part of your calling may involve getting further training. God often uses our occupation to place us into ministry.

This discernment is helped along by others praying and seeking God, and those who God leads to have agreement with us in the direction we take. The discernment stage draws you nearer to God as you will be challenged to seek God even more through prayer, reading God’s Word, and sharing what God has been saying to you.

Part of this discernment could involve, for example, that you are an accountant and enjoy this, and there's a need for bookkeeping help in the church. So this type of opportunity quickly moves you into the confirmation stage of your calling. This could be one of those signposts that God has put in your path. Of course, you should investigate various opportunities of service. If your vision is to serve overseas, the pastor will encourage you to share this with the mission's committee and have them start praying with you. You may need to share your vision with a particular mission group. Your home group, the pastor, the mission committee and/or the mission agency provide focused support and encouragement that you need. I remind you here of the idea of calls within calls.

With those churches requiring a more official process; discernment can be helped along with interviews, discussions, official forms to fill out, and even recommended studies that one must complete.

Confirmation: Confirmation concerns those around you being in agreement with your vision and the place you want to serve. They have been praying with you and come to know you, along with your calling. They have seen and acknowledge how God has been directing you. They have come to see your commitment to God, your attitude toward working with others, and the accountability you've shown. Confirmation comes from those who have been praying with you. It can come from the pastor, elders, and mission committee, who stand beside you in prayer and support. They believe God has indeed confirmed this calling. Confirmation can also come by being accepted into training that is needed to fulfil your vision or into a mission agency. More officially, the church may require you to be ordained and receive a license to preach. Other requirements could involve theology training from a particular school.

Individual Gifts and Enjoyments: The Bible provides us with information on this topic under various terms such as skills, abilities, gifts and talents. There is the gift of salvation which God has given us. There are gifts of grace, healing, working of miracles, tongues, prophecy, discernment, interpretation, apostles, teachers, help, government, prayer, evangelism, pastors, wisdom, understanding and knowledge. I think there is too much made of this sometimes, but I guess people need to be reassured that they can do the work God has called them to do.

Many of the above have to do with the gifts of the Spirit and are more miraculous in nature. These include the gifts of grace, healing, miracles, tongues, prophecy, discernment, and interpretation. Many of them have to do with the more practical side of serving God.

Look at these gifts: grace, teachers, help, government, pastors, healing, understanding and knowledge. Of course some of these overlap as they are both spiritual and practical in nature, namely grace and pastors.

The gifts of the Spirit can be used by anyone who has that particular gift. Clearly, different people have different gifts. Coming to understand your spiritual gifts may take time; ask God to show you. Do you enjoy talking to people?; explaining the Bible to people?; working with computers?; Working as a mechanic?; writing?; learning languages?; making friends?

Your Spiritual Life: First of all, let me assure you that you do not have to be ‘super-spiritual’ to serve God, but that there are certain aspects of your relationship with Christ that you need to be aware of.

1. Salvation. God wants you and all people to be committed and dedicated to following Jesus Christ. God’s main call for any Christian is in regards to a relationship of close fellowship with Jesus.

2. Commitment, dedication and obedience. God’s calling involves an understanding of Biblical principles of commitment, dedication and obedience; a calling and gifts that a person already has, often go together.

3. Self-sacrifice. We are all called to total love, commitment and self-sacrifice.

4. Meeting our needs. God has promised us a way from any temptation we are faced with, along with the promise that He will meet our every need. His promises also state that all things work together for good of those who love and serve God faithfully. This does not necessarily mean a comfortable salary; it could mean trusting in God for your finances.

5. Grace. Grace describes God’s blessings and love regardless of the state a person is in. However, grace should never be taken lightly; as if we deserve it. Grace is received only through repentance, forgiveness and faith. The attributes of grace are peace, humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, self-control, mercy, and forgiveness. We have grace in our lives because God has given it to us.

6. Holy Spirit. Among the gifts given to us, the Holy Spirit stands out as the greatest.

7. God’s Faithfulness. God’s faithfulness is part of His grace, given to us because of our decision to follow Christ. God’s faithfulness means that His character is consistent. We can be convinced that God cares for us.

Weaknesses and Frailties: We may suffer physical ills, mental ills, emotional problems, relationship problems, lack of money and the list goes on. Paul certainly suffered.

He was whipped, beaten, shipwrecked, stoned and left for dead, imprisoned and eventually beheaded. He also constantly wrestled with his ‘thorn in the flesh’, which he asked God to remove. However, God told Paul that His grace was sufficient for him and that His strength would be made perfect in Paul’s weakness. So, God’s strength is best seen and fulfilled in our very weaknesses and frailties!

I know it’s hard to understand, but our suffering and brokenness often enables us to do what God wants us to do. Our suffering causes us to draw closer to God. It’s our suffering that gives us a compassion for others that suffer. Paul said that we should be content in whatever situation we find ourselves.

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I know it’s hard to understand, but our suffering and brokenness often enable us to do what God wants us to do. When we are in the position, we realize that others need support and encouragement and love like we need it. Our suffering causes us to draw closer to God. It’s our suffering that gives us a compassion for others that suffer. Paul said that we should be content in whatever situation we find ourselves.

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