

WHEN GOD'S GRACE LIFTS...

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If you are God-called, you are who you are by the Grace of God. If you are God-called you are what you are by the Grace of God. If you are God-called, you are where you are by the Grace of God.

We are saved by the Grace of God. We are kept by the Grace of God. We are called to service by the Grace of God. We are enabled to serve by God's Grace-Gifts.

So what do you do when the Grace of God begins to lift off you in a particular situation or place of service?

Most of us who have dedicated our lives to God's service are functioning in the situation we're in by God's grace and His grace alone. We may be living in what to others seem to be abnormal circumstances, but to us it seems perfectly normal. We may be operating way outside our skill level or comfort zone, but the grace of God in which we are living and functioning makes it seem as if it is the most reasonable thing. God gives grace for a sense of peace and normality in the most unusual situations and circumstances. ***We function daily in those situations and it seems normal for a long time.***

But then we begin to notice something is changing. It's like what happens inside the engine of a car. A car engine is subjected to incredible stresses and extremes of temperature that can produce friction between the metal parts of the engine. In order to carry away the heat and prevent damaging friction, the engine is lubricated by oil that is constantly circulated around and between the moving parts. As long as the oil is fresh and the oil level is full, the engine can operate smoothly for many thousands of miles. But if the oil level drops too low or the oil becomes contaminated, friction develops, heat builds up, and the engine can be severely damaged in just a few minutes.

Like the car engine, we may be ticking along; little or no friction, temperature normal, life is sweet. Then suddenly we find our attitude begins to deteriorate. Little things that we have taken as normal and acceptable begin to really grate on us. We become critical of people. We lose the motivation to keep going. ***We become irritable and negative and it seems like it only takes the littlest thing to set us off.***

In this mode we can become disagreeable at home, negative with friends, and we may lose vision and momentum in ministry. As we look at our responsibilities and as we try to look forward to the things that we need to be doing it's as if we simply "can't be bothered!"

Depending on our personality and character traits, we may tend to withdraw and become depressed and isolated or we may attempt to increase our level of activity and involvement by sheer force of will in an attempt to “jump start” ourselves.

If we are in leadership ministry at a time like this, we know we mustn't let others, especially those we lead or those we are accountable to, know of our struggle, so we may attempt to hide it. This becomes very much like wrestling with an alligator and trying to tie it up and stuff it into a bag without letting anyone notice what's going on.

At this point we are in an increasingly difficult and potentially dangerous situation. If we continue to try to hide our struggles from those around us, we risk damage to ourselves, our families, and those we are called to serve. If we come forward and try to explain what we're going through and how we're feeling to our people, our co-leaders, or our supervisor (whatever form that role takes in our accountability structure) we may be perceived as weak or unstable or “Just take a couple of days off and pull yourself together!”

When we begin to feel frustrated, lose vision, and become irritable, we need to take time to determine what is going on:

1. **Is there sin in my life** that I'm not dealing with that is causing me to feel this way?
2. **Am I overloaded** with responsibilities and activities and feeling the strain of it?
3. **Is there a problem or conflict** with someone that needs to be resolved?
4. **Is this a test** of my integrity, stamina, or perseverance?
5. **Is it time for a change** due to God's Grace being lifted off me to live and function and serve in this situation?

If it is sin, repent, confess, and deal with it. (1 John 1:9-10)

If it is schedule or responsibility overload, take stock and pace yourself. See if there are activities others can help with. See if there are responsibilities others can assume.

If it is a relationship conflict, take the necessary steps to resolve it. Whether it requires conciliation or confrontation - deal with it.

If it is a test of integrity and responsibility, be faithful, fulfill your commitments.

But if it is due to the lifting of God's Grace for service in the place or situation in which you are serving then you may be facing a decision with long-term consequences for you and others around you. *It is important that we properly handle and respond to the lifting of God's Grace.*

A word of caution: Don't use the "lifting of God's Grace" as an excuse for failing to persevere under difficult circumstances, for failing to deal with difficulties, for failing to work through a difficult relationship.

Some possible steps of action when we find God's Grace is lifting:

1. **Don't panic.** The Grace of God brought you into this place of service, the Grace of God has kept you in this place of service, the Grace of God will take you into your next place or level of service.
2. **Begin to talk to God about how you are feeling.** Be honest with God and honest with yourself. Listen to yourself in prayer. Try to distinguish between your feelings about how things are and "how things actually are!" Don't allow yourself to see everything as negative and useless. Ask God for direction. Ask God for strength. Ask God to help you preserve your integrity and a measure of dignity! Ask God for help to avoid doing anything stupid.
3. **Begin to talk to your spouse or if you are single, to a trusted friend about how you are feeling.** Again, be honest about it. Don't make too much or too little of things. Listen to yourself as you talk; are you whining?; are you angry with someone?; are you feeling guilty about something?; are you disappointed in something that has failed or not met your expectations?; are you feeling betrayed or let down by someone?
4. **Bring yourself to the point where you are willing to "put it all on the altar" of sacrifice to the will and purpose of God for your life.** Be willing to offer up to Him your position, your sense of achievement, your security, your ambitions. He may take it from you or He may give it back to you, but in any case, He will accept your willing sacrifice.
5. **Try to take some time to get perspective on things.** If you can go away for a few days to a quiet place to think and pray, do it. Take a mini-retreat with your spouse and talk and pray about how you're feeling. If you can't get away, take a couple of half-days, put the answer machine on, and talk and pray. If you can lighten your work load for a while, do it. But don't just go along trying to do "business as usual" if all the oil is draining out of the engine. The heat and the friction will soon do some damage!
6. **This is a good time to do some journaling.** Write your feelings, your concerns, your fears. Write your hopes, your dreams, your burdens, and your ambitions. Write your ideas: "Some things I would really like to do if time, money, and location were not an issue.." If you have kept a journal, spend some time looking back to see if there is a pattern in the development of how you are feeling.

7. **If you have been given words of counsel or encouragement, if trusted people have given you words of prophecy or insight, go over those things again.** If you have them on tape, listen to them now. If you made notes about them, go over the notes. If you remember the person speaking to you but can't remember much of what was said, phone them and ask them if they remember what they shared with you. In all of this, be active, not passive. Seek God's will, listen for God's voice, watch for God's hand.
8. **Get some advice or counsel from trusted friends or peers in ministry or from people whose character and wisdom you respect.** But don't expect someone else to answer all your questions or make your decisions for you. Be careful about talking too much or too soon to those you are leading. You may be struggling, but you are still their leader. Don't undermine their confidence or throw them into a panic.
9. **When the Grace of God begins to lift in a particular situation or ministry responsibility, we still have to finish well.** Don't do or say things that will hurt others or make it hard for others to trust you. Don't "drop the ball." It is important that we find the strength to carry out our responsibilities until we can release them in a mature way. It is important that we don't begin to tear down what we have been labouring to build up. It is important that we fulfill our commitments.
10. **Prepare for God to lead you on.** Be willing to move on if that is what God requires. Be willing to let go of your security. It may be painful. It may require that you step completely out of your comfort zone. It may require great sacrifice. But it will keep you in God's will, it will keep you growing and maturing. And it will keep you under the Grace of God for life and service.

When the Grace of God begins to lift, we need to act quickly to determine the cause, to examine our hearts and attitudes, to communicate with trusted friends, and to begin to look for the Grace of God to lead us forward.

Don't move too fast and fail to fulfill your commitments and responsibilities. Don't move too slowly and allow your attitude to deteriorate and damage your reputation and relationships.

Remember that it is by God's Grace that we are who we are, where we are, and doing what we are doing.