

St. Paul's Herald

September 2025

LETTER FROM PASTOR

When I was younger, I liked to build things, especially with Lego bricks. I enjoyed building cars, boats, trucks, as well as buildings. With Lego, there were all sorts of ways to design various structures that were only limited by one's imagination. For me, being the child that I was, there was 1 limitation that was self-imposed. In fact, I'm not exactly sure when I came to know this phrase, but in my adult years my mother reminded me that I used to regularly as a child when building with Lego. That phrase was 'structurally sound'. For whatever reason, I decided as a kid, my Lego buildings needed to be structurally sound. Stability was important for my Lego creations. An unstable Lego building would just collapse and be ruined, which was not acceptable.

As I reflect on my days as a child, the desire for something to be 'structurally sound' may have more significance than it at first may seem. In fact, the need for 'structural soundness', or stability as adults might call it, is by design from God. God created us to need structure and stability in our lives. The problem is our lives often look anything but structured and stable. Whether it be hectic family schedules, pressures of work, health concerns, or a host of other issues that demand our attention, finding stability in it all is not easy. Far too often we try and fill our need for stability with things that aren't stable. Like the foolish man in Jesus' parable in Matthew 7:24-27, we build our lives on unstable sand making them 'un-structurally sound'. It's not that we even do it intentionally; but when we prioritize things or people we deem important over Jesus, the foundation of our lives is being laid the wrong place. Brick by brick, or better said, decision by decision, we build our lives on the unstable base

of that which will do us no good when the storms of life come.

As sinful human-beings living in an ever-varying world, stability and strong foundation that we need cannot be found in the changeable. This is where Jesus stands out. "Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever" the writer of Hebrews tells us (Heb. 13:8). This means Jesus does not change but remains constant amid all the shifting that takes place in the world. Jesus is the rock on which we can build the foundation of our lives when everything else feels like it is in motion like blown sand in a storm.

Storms are bound to happen because of sin and the brokenness of our world. Only God knows when a storm in your life will take place or what it will look like. It might be a small storm that does minimal harm or a large storm that causes your life to be shaken to its core. Whatever happens, making Jesus and His Words the foundation of your life will allow you to weather that storm. Let the words of Psalm 18:2 be a daily prayer for the way you live your life: "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold." When the devil, the world, and your own sinful nature wreaks havoc on what you hold dear, know that Jesus Christ is the rock on which you can stand firm, the foundation on which your life is 'structurally sound'. So, build the firm foundation for your life on Jesus Christ by trusting in Him, obeying His words, and prioritizing Him above all else. May the attitude of your life be, "on Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand" (Lutheran Service Book 575).

In Christ,

Pastor Josh

CONNECTING TO GRACE

Grace is the wonderful free gift of God that we and all sinners need. Unfortunately, the concept of grace is often misunderstood. People like the idea of grace in theory, but don't know how and where it should be used in practice. From a Christian standpoint, God's grace is the gift of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation that was won by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some have turned the word G.R.A.C.E. into an acronym meaning "God's riches at Christ's expense" as a way to remember what Christ has done for us. The acronym G.R.A.C.E. can be helpful for teaching others and reminding ourselves of God's grace, but that is not all that grace means or encompasses for the lives of those in need. A view of grace like this, if left to stand on its own, can give a false picture of God's true intention for the grace He bestows through His Son Jesus Christ.

Life is fragile:
handle with
Grace

An example of why something like G.R.A.C.E. can give a false understanding of the true depth of God's grace in Christ may

help. People know that when they are sick, they often need medicine to help them get better. From a Christian viewpoint, the sickness is sin that all human-beings have been born with. It is a fatal disease that has only one cure. The message of forgiveness of sins and life eternal as God's gift to all who believe in Jesus is the remedy. This cure of God's grace is applied to all who have faith in Jesus. While this is all true from a Biblical perspective, it can give the impression that grace in Jesus is medicine that one simply takes to fix their life of sin. In a more extreme way of thinking, it is something 'taken' *once* to cure your sin. The problem is that your sinful nature will continue to rear its ugly head causing you to feel sick all over again. You could go back and get some more grace to treat your symptoms, but that is not how the medicine of God's grace works best.

God's grace is designed to be 'taken' regularly - that is multiple times throughout the day. It's not just a pill that you take on occasion when you get really sick. God's grace should be sought after like fruits and vegetables in your diet. Fruits and vegetables can not only help you when you are sick, but they provide essential vitamins and nutrients to prevent you from getting sick. Proper amounts of fruits and vegetables in your diet can lead to overall better health. The same is true for God's grace. When you 'take' or are connected to God's grace regularly, it can have a similar compounding effect as fruits and vegetables do on your body.

In John 1:16, we are told "from [Jesus'] fullness we [receive], grace upon grace". Put simply, Jesus' grace is given in abundant, endless amounts because that is what our sin-weary body and soul needs. God wants each of us to have His grace through Jesus Christ frequently, but He will not force us, just as a good doctor does not force medicine on someone. God wants us to continually seek out His abundant grace to live as He intends. We do this individually by reading, memorizing, reflecting, and mediating on His Words of life in Holy Scripture. We also do this corporately through regular worship attendance where we receive a steady diet of grace through Word and Sacrament together with fellow believers.

Acronyms like G.R.A.C.E can be helpful, but they only give a piece of the true grace that God lavishes on those who believe. Why would you want just a bit of grace when Jesus offers it to you freely in endless amounts? You cannot truly know the depth of God's grace in Christ Jesus until you daily live in it and by it. Seek the lasting cure for your sin-laden self and live in the grace of God today!

