

2 Peter 3:17-18 Finishing Strong

At the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, the last of the marathon runners were being carried off the field to first aid stations about an hour after the winner had crossed the finish line.

There were just a few spectators remaining in the stands when they suddenly heard the sound of sirens and police whistles.

All eyes turned to the gate to see John Stephen Akhwari, wearing the colors of Tanzania, limping into the stadium.

His leg was bloodied and bandaged from a bad fall. He hobbled around the track past the finish line as the crowd rose and applauded as if he were the winner.

Someone later asked him why he had not quit, in view of his injury and the fact that he had no chance of winning a medal.

He replied, “My country did not send me 7,000 miles to start the race. They sent me 7,000 miles to finish it.”

It has been said that it is not how you start the race that matters the most/

A)But it is how you finish the race – that is what counts

B)The same is true in the Christian life –

C) Peter is writing to believers that he wants to see Finish well

1)Christ didn't give His life for you just to start the Christian life.

D)He gave His life so that you would finish it and finish it STRONG

In Ch 1 Peter told us how we have been supplied by Jesus with everything we need to run well

A)Given us all things that pertain to life and godliness

B)In Ch 2 he told us what we need to watch out for as we run – the false teachers –

1)who want to trip us up along the way.

C)And then in Ch 3 he told us what our focus needs to be on as we run –

1)the reality that Jesus is coming back soon.

D)We need to be ready – focused – not distracted

1)so that when he comes we would be found by him in peace.

As Peter concludes this letter he gives us three things to keep in mind that are meant to help us FINISH THE RACE Strong V.17-18

¹⁷You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; ¹⁸but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen.

The 3 G's of finishing strong

A)Guarding, growing, and glorifying!

B)There is a progression between the three terms. If you guard yourself from spiritual error,

1)you will not fall from your own steadfastness and thus will grow in your relationship with Christ.

C)And if you grow in Christ, you will glorify Him with your life, which is your chief purpose.

#1 Guarding ourselves

¹⁷You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand, {Knowing that false teachers are lurking – knowing that Jesus is coming and we want to be ready. *beware* {Be on Guard *lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked;*

In November 1976 the first Rocky Movie came out and I became a huge fan – all except for Rocky 5

A)After seeing that first one – I was so inspired –

B) I decided that I was going to start running early in the morning- thing is I hated running **but inspired**

C)I actually had a set of old gray school sweats like Rocky wore in the movie –

1)I got up really early next morning – sweats on black beanie

D)Headed out for my Run before the sun even came up

E)This was before Walkman's – obviously before Cell phones –

1)so the only sound track to listen to was the one in my head.....

Started out strong - I had a great spring in my step

A)Everything was perfect until I hit the park – still dark – I couldn't really see – the park / the path..

B)It was then I heard that sound – several dogs barking –

1)It hit me there is a pack of dogs or Coyotes loose in the park –

2)Sounded like they were headed in my direction.

C)What did I do ?– I turned around and got out of there – ran home –

1)Jumped back in bed – went back to sleep

D)Next time – I was going to need a different strategy – different time or different route

1)To avoid being eaten by this vicious pack of dogs

That is Peter's idea here – Knowing the enemy is out to trip us up –

A)We need to Beware – we need to be on guard.

B)We need to pay attention to how we are running and where we are running

C)Not just running aimlessly in other words – but we are focused on the goal.

1)We are aware of the schemes of the enemy – we are aware of the lies of the false teachers

D)We are going to be on Guard so that we stay steadfast in the race

#1 Be on Guard - #2 Grow

A)The Christian life is not meant to be a lot of starts and stops –

B)It is not a sprint but it is a long distance run –

1)We need to be committed – for the long haul

C)The Christian life is never meant to be stagnate. – We are always meant to be growing in the Lord

After my Hip replacement surgery in 2018 I had the privilege of working with a personal trainer. –

A)He was a Really sharp guy – Being an athlete – I have always worked out – my whole life –

B)But I had never worked with a trainer

C)This is what I discovered - He pushed me in ways that I would never push myself –

1)the goal was to always be growing and improving in my sets and reps and exercises

D)The Christian life is meant to be the same way:

1)Always growing – never standing still – never content with – status quo

And We have a Spiritual trainer – the Holy Spirit

A)He has a goal - Roman 8:29 to transform into the image of Jesus - Come complete in Christ

B) That is the goal – not becoming a better version of ourselves –

1)But being transformed to become more and more like Jesus

C)So we need to always be growing – moving forward in our faith. Going deeper into Jesus

1)Becoming more like Jesus

D)Peter says here - there is an area that we need to continue to grow in V.18

¹⁸but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

E)Growing in Grace!!!!

Paul the apostle also emphasized this idea of growing in Grace he told his young protégé Timothy – Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus 2 Timothy 2:1

A)In fact the Last Phrase in the entire Bible ends on this note of Grace as well /

Rev.22: 21 The Grace of our Lord Jesus be with you all – Amen !!!

B)The Word Grace – appears 137 times in the pages of Scripture

C) Grace is a major theme in Scripture and a key to the Christian life

What is Grace ? God's Unmerited, undeserved, unearned Favor

A) Grace is God giving and blessing / not because of what you **are doing** but **in spite** of what you are doing or have done

B) Grace is receiving Unmerited Favor/ Unearned Blessing / Undeserved kindness from the Lord

C) Acrostic – **G.R.A.C.E.** – God's riches at Christ's Expense

1) God's Resources at Christ's Expense

D) In other words all of the blessings & Riches of God

1) Everything you need to function successfully in the Christian life come through the conduit of God's grace

So Peter wants us to be growing in grace.

A) I want us to consider 3 aspects of grace that we need to be growing in as followers of Jesus

B) 1st is Saving grace:

*For **by grace** you have been saved through faith, and that **not of yourselves**; it is the **gift of God**, ⁹**not of works**, lest anyone **should boast**. Ephesians 2:8-9*

C) We are saved by grace and there is no reason for boasting about our salvation

1) because salvation is purely THE work of God.

God did for us what we could never do for ourselves!

A) In His Grace - He sent His Son to Die.....

B) He sends the Spirit to Convict & Draw – **all we have to do is Respond**

C) So we are sitting here today – **SAVED** – we are going to Heaven – for one reason only – God's Grace

1) He extended to us – Undeserved / Unmerited / Unearned Favor

D) When we get to heaven none of us are going to be saying – You should have seen what I did to get here.

1) We will be thanking God for His grace.

E) But it is important that we grow in our understanding of Saving grace

1) There is nothing we can do or need to do to add....

See after we are saved we can fall into this trap of thinking - there is something that I need to do to earn God's favor. To be loved by God

A) PBA Mentality

B) If I just read the Bible enough – or pray enough – or _____ God is going to love me more.

1) PBA – treadmill – once on it is hard to get off

C) God's love for you doesn't waver –

Listen Christian Disciplines are wonderful for growing in your understanding of Jesus

A) Growing in your relationship with Jesus – all of which adds to your being transformed by Jesus.

B) But Christian Discipline doesn't affect your FAVOR with God

1) Rob read 5 chapters of Leviticus today I am going to really bless him!

C) Rob forgot to pray for the lost – 3 days in a row – I am going to make his car break down.

1) That is not how God operates

D) Not like Santa – always checking who is being naughty or Nice

When I am growing in my understanding of Saving Grace –

A) I am reminded – I am at Favor with God – simply because – I am IN CHRIST

B) HE SEES ME IN HIS SON! – He loves me period

C) He sees me as His son or he sees you ladies as his daughter –

1) he loves you and he is with you and he is for you.

D) Your performance doesn't affect his love for you!

So we need to be constantly growing in our understanding of Saving grace

A)to avoid getting sidetracked or tripped up **and thinking that we now need to add something to the finished work of Christ**

B)Galatia – Circumcision – Accursed – cut... off

C)JESUS didn't say on the Cross – Almost – half way – Finished

D)So we are growing in our knowledge of Saving grace – Completeness of it

We also need to be growing in Sustaining Grace

A)In 1 Peter 5:12 – **Peter called it the Grace in which we stand**

B)Peter learned this the hard way. –

1)You see Peter was what I would call a can do guy. – I can do it – I've got this

C)He tried to serve Jesus in his own strength and stand for Jesus in his own strength –

1)Failed miserably

On the night that Jesus was going to be arrested and go to the Cross –

A)Jesus told his disciples that all of them would forsake him that night

B)Peter boasted – not me.... Losers – I am ready to die for you.

C)You know the story that night Peter denied that he even knew Jesus 3 times

D)It has been said that when a man gets to the end of himself – he gets to the beginning of God

That night Peter came to the end of himself – he came to realize –

A)I can't follow Jesus and serve Jesus in my own strength

B)Peter was stripped of his pride – which was Key

C)He would write in 1 Peter 5:5 **be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."**

D)Peter came to realize - The only way that I am going to be able to stand is through his grace –

1)I stand through His favor – and through his resources being supplied to my life.

E)It is through His grace that we stand and that it why we need to always be growing in grace

A lot of Christians are up and down and all around in their walks – like a roller coaster –

A)Going great one moment – Upside down the next

B)But the Lord wants us to be steadfast – immovable – abounding in the Lord

1)He wants us to stand strong

C)Paul wrote these words emphasizing the call to stand in Ephesians 6

*¹⁰ Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to **stand** against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to **withstand** in the evil day, and having done all, **to stand**.¹⁴ **Stand therefore***

Sustaining Grace is about Dependency – It is recognizing – my strength comes from the Lord

A)I stand in the power of His might

B)It starts with admitting I can't stand on my own.

1)Daily humbling myself

C)If we are going to be the Husbands, the wife, parent, servant, Christian witness

1)We are called to be it is only going to happen as we depend upon the grace of God

D)God has made available to us what we need to stand strong in the battle

1)Stand strong against temptation – His Grace

Unfortunately there are a lot of Christians today who are not standing in Grace

A)In fact we live in a Christian Culture today where people use the idea of grace as an excuse to not stand

B)I know people who have used the idea of God's grace to leave a marriage because they are not happy

C)God wants me to be happy – I am not happy –
1)so I am going to file for divorce – even though they have no biblical grounds to do so.

D)God is gracious and wants me to be happy

Or People use the grace of God as a excuse to continue struggling in sinful behavior

A)Engaging in sexual immorality of pornography

B)God understands my struggle and he is gracious and will forgive me

C)People today even use the idea of the grace of God to show tolerance toward sinful behavior

1)things like those who are engaged in Homosexuality/ adultery

D)God is gracious – he understands those people and their struggle – he will accept them anyway.

Listen it is true that God is gracious and compassionate and he loves sinners –

A)why he sent his son Jesus – rescue sinners – to deliver from sinful behavior and bondage

B)But Grace is never ever a license for sin!

C)I will just ask for forgiveness – that is a miss use and understanding of grace

Here are verses a lot of Christians ignore about Grace: Titus 2:11-14

¹¹ For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

The Grace of God is always teaching us – moving us in the direction of what it means to live righteously –

A)To deny ungodliness – that which goes against God's will – **To turn away from worldly lust**

B)That is the Work of our trainer the Holy Spirit
1)who is always seeking to move us in the direction of becoming more like Jesus

C)Jesus is more interested in your Holiness than your happiness

1)because he knows that holiness leads to happiness

D)Happy are the people whose God is the Lord – THE LORD

¹¹ For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, **we should live soberly, righteously, and godly** in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works. Titus 2:11-14

D)The grace of God is teaching us and training us concerning what it looks like to live righteously

1)and stand for truth – as we await our Lord's return.

E)So we need to continue to grow in Sustaining Grace – that Grace in which we STAND!!

One more -we need to continue to grow in Sufficient Grace

A)Paul wrote about this in 2 Cor 12 – A time of trial in his life a difficulty that just wouldn't go away –

B)Thorn in the flesh – a messenger of Satan to buffet him – prayed 3 times Lord please take this away

⁹ And JESUS said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Sufficient Grace is when I realize and remember that His power is made perfect in my weakness.

A)It is His sufficient Grace that equips me to step out of my comfort zones and take steps of faith –

B)And allow God to use me – In ways I could have never imagined.

C) I used to say things like – I could never do that – or God would never use me in that way.

1) Being a Pastor was the farthest thing from my mind

D) The men I looked up to who were Pastors – were so gifted – and articulate and smart –

1) AND I thought - I am nothing like that.

God said: I am not looking for ability – I am looking for availability

A) Until I was 25 I had never traveled outside of the USA – except Mexico once when I was 11 years old

B) To date God has taken me to 27 countries around the world – A Pastor to Pastors -

1) He has allowed me to encourage and equip other Pastors around the world

C) More than I could have ever dreamed

Knowing his grace is sufficient and his power is made perfect in weakness –

A) Encourages us to be willing to take risk for the Lord - **Lets just see what the Lord might want to do**

B) Paul said - Our sufficiency isn't in ourselves it is in the Lord –

1) I can do whatever he asks me to do

C) Sometimes people ask me if I get nervous before teaching – I really don't get nervous

1) But I am always DESPERATE – Lord please show up – I Can't do this without you

D) So we need to grow in His sufficient grace – the grace that allows us to be used by God

E) We do that by answering the call – no excuses

Notice Peter says that we are to grow in grace and Knowledge of Jesus

A) Growing in grace is the key to growing in Knowledge

B) The word Knowledge here is knowledge by experience – Experiencing Jesus

C) It is as we walk in Grace – and stand in Grace – and serve in Grace

D) Jesus shows up – and we experience him in fresh ways.

James talked about Manifold trials –

A) manifold = many colors – our trials come in many different colors

B) The more you seek to be used by the Lord the more trials you will experience –

1) comes with the territory

C) James talked about our Manifold trials but Peter spoke of the Manifold grace of God 1 Peter 4:10

D) Trials come in many colors – but there is a color of God's grace for every trial, test, challenge we face

E) Jesus shows up and reveals himself in each one of those difficult situations

He shows up and reveals the Sufficiency of His grace every time we answer the call of God for our lives

A) Every time we take a step of faith and step out of comfort zones and say – **ok Lord here I am - I am available - you can use me**

B) Through that experience we grow in the Knowledge of Jesus

And as we grow in Grace – the third G happens – Jesus is glorified in and through our life.

A) That is the goal – friends - We exist to bring Him glory

B) So the 3 G's of finishing Strong – Guard ourselves – to remain steadfast

C) Grow in Grace – Saving, Sustaining, The Sufficiency of his grace

D) Jesus will be glorified in and through your life.

As we wrap up today. – Celebrate Communion

A) Celebrating the Salvation that comes from God's grace – Gave his Son

B) Never experienced Saving grace – today – open your heart embrace Jesus – Cross

1) Put your faith in him – today is the day

Maybe you are here today - perhaps you have been using grace as a license

A)An excuse for sinful behavior – you need to repent of that today –

**B)Lord – I want to stand in your Sustaining grace
Be done with this**

C)Maybe you are here today – you have been trying to function in your own strength -

D)Lord – I want to lean on your Sufficient grace

**Maybe you have fallen into that trap –
Performance Based Attitude**

A)The Lord wants you to embrace today – IT IS FINISHED

B)YOU ARE IN CHRIST – LOVED AND ACCEPTED BY God

C)Walk in that – rest in that –

D)Let that be your motivation for everything that you do –

E)Grow and be transformed today – more like Jesus