

After Receiving Grace

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“After” is a commonly used preposition. Though this word may sometimes precede another term it still means “after”. A familiar term we often hear, “after/post modern era,” refers to the time after the modern period. Recently, people use a term “after/post pandemic era,” to refer to the time after the pandemic, or the time when the pandemic is about to be over. In both cases, people tend to make some kind of adjustments to the previous era. In the post modern time, people tend to go against modernism. Likewise, in the post pandemic era people may reverse some pandemic behaviors.

This year's annual theme is "The Abundance of Grace 2022". Indeed, in 2022 each one of us has experienced much grace. After experiencing these graces, each of us faces the question of how we should respond to these graces and/or how we should live "after" receiving these graces.

The words of the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 12, are a good reminder.

Structurally, Isaiah chapters 6 through 12 are one small unit. Biblical interpreter, Alec Motyer, summarizes this unit as follows:

1. Personal atonement and commission (6:1-13)
2. The fall and recovery of Judah (7:1-9:7)
3. The fall and recovery of Israel (9:8-11:16)
4. Personal salvation, praises, and proclamation (12:1-6)

Chapter 6 records the experience of the prophets who encounter God, being purified, and sent. Chapters 7:1-9:7, in the words of Motyer, describe the dark time of Judah and the light time or redemption that will follow. Chapter 9:8-11, is the dark time and light time or redemption of Israel. Chapter 12 is a description of dark time and their following light time redemption experiences. The description in this chapter is also how each of us should respond after receiving grace.

Chapter 12 is divided into two parts by the two short phrases “You will say in that day...” and “And you will say in that day”. The first part is from verse 1 to verse 3.

1. *You will say in that day: “I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me.*
2. *“Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.”*
3. *With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.*

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Here Isaiah records the experience of grace of salvation. The first is thanks. "I want to thank you", and the reason for the thanks is stated. True gratitude must not be empty and vague, but grounded on solid reasons. Second, it is proclamation. We bravely witness to all those who could hear and see our testimony. We invite and draw people's attention to the verse that: "*Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.*" We are preaching the works and attributes of God. We make the works of God known to others. Third, in verse 3 this kind of thanksgiving and preaching will definitely help the whole group to happily draw water from the fountain of salvation, so that the whole community can receive salvation. We proclaim to the whole group: "*With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.*"

The second part begins with verse 4:

4. *And you will say in that day "Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted.*
5. *"Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously, let this be made known in all the earth.*
6. *Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."*

This part continues the arrangement of the first part. First is thanks, "Give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name." The willing and loud cheer is worship and thanks to God. Second is proclamation: "make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted." The pattern is repeated in verse 5, with thanksgiving and praise: "Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously." Then preaching and spreading of the news, "let this be made known in all the earth." Finally, we make a proclamation to the entire group: "Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel." We must appeal to the whole community so that we can all experience and understand the supreme, holiness, and marvelousness of the Holy One of Israel. The whole community can be built up.

So, the content of these two parts of the scripture can be arranged like this:

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| (Opening) | 1 You will say in that day: |
| (Thanks) | "I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me. |
| (Preaching) | 2 Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation." |
| (Declaration) | 3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. |
| (Opening) | 4 And you will say in that day: |
| (Thanks) | "Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name,, |
| (Proclamation) | make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted. |
| (Thanks) | 5 "Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously, |
| (Proclamation) | let this be made known in all the earth. |

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(Declaration) Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

After receiving grace and great salvation, man's response should have three components:

1. Thank God,
2. Preach God's deeds, and
3. Proclaim your experiences to others to build up the community.

When we experience grace, we must give thanks to God. A grateful heart is an indispensable response for everyone who experiences God's grace. Often, as time goes by, we experience more and more grace but feel less grateful because we are taking grace for granted. People rarely have gratitude for things that are taken for granted, just like sunshine, rain, air and earth. Ask the Lord to help us experience grace with a thankful heart.

After experiencing grace, we must also preach God and share the good news. Preaching and sharing the works of God can take different forms. Sharing of words and a joyful pattern of life are both wonderful testimonies. But the important but increasingly lacking point is people's perception of grace and the experience of faith. The current trend of individualism in our society influences our belief system. People see faith as personal experience that are private and should not be shared. However, the Christian faith has always been a community faith. We need to recognize and overcome individualism in faith. After receiving grace, instead of waiting to experience another grace, or to become a spiritual "master of the world", share and spread the deeds of God.

This will naturally bring out the third component, which is the influence, appeal, and build-up of the community group. After receiving grace, we must bear witness so that the whole community can experience together what God has done. The whole community is to be built up by the works of God. Are salvation and grace for one man only? Building a community is an indispensable life for everyone.

The application is the same in our big family of ACBC. In 2022, we experience the fullness of grace. Therefore, after experiencing these graces, let us thank God, preach God, and build up our community. Let us not forget the grace of God and always thank God with our real actions. Respond to God by praying, reading the Bible and doing devotional every day, attending meetings timely and attentively and responding to God with willingness to serve and care. We must also keep preaching God's words and influence others with our lives and services. Finally, let us also be mindful of our spiritual community, calling and building our community to experience the grace of God together.

After receiving grace, move on!