

Stewardship as Counterculture: Stewards of Grace

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[0 : 00] Well, welcome to Church of the Advent. Welcome back if you're returning. Especially welcome if this is your first time.

I know many of us were potentially traveling this past week, and we still have a lot of people on the road, so we'll pray for their safe return and navigation through the inevitable traffic that they will face today.

We celebrated Thanksgiving this past week in this country, and it's a time, hopefully, amid all of the travel and stress and logistics, where we had a moment to reflect on things we're thankful for.

And that's an appropriate thing to be thinking about as we open God's Word together this evening, because we are coming to the end of a series that we started a few weeks back on stewardship.

And gratitude is a very important, very central idea when you talk about stewardship, because this series has been an exploration of the truth that God actually owns everything.

[1 : 02] And anything that we have in our lives is something that has been entrusted to us by God to be used in ways that reflect His heart. And so we've been exploring that.

We talked about what it means to steward the world and creation. We talked about what it means to steward our time, to steward our bodies, to steward our wealth and privilege. We've looked at this through a number of different lenses.

And tonight, it culminates in a topic that I think draws a lot of these themes together. And so we're going to draw together a lot of the things that we've talked about over the last few weeks.

We see this realm of stewardship in 1 Peter 4, verse 10, which is going to be our focus. Peter says this, As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

So this is our final topic of stewardship, the stewardship of grace. And we'll see three things looking at 1 Peter 4, 7 through 10. We'll see first, what does this mean?

[2 : 06] What does it mean to be a steward of grace? It's a little more esoteric than wealth or time. What does it mean? Why is it so difficult to do?

And then lastly, how do we do it well? What does faithful stewardship look like when it comes to grace? Let's pray. Our Father, thank you. As we have perhaps said thank you for many things this week, chiefly we thank you for your presence among us, that we can gather in a building like this on a Sunday night and know that regardless of how distracted or torn or spread thin we might feel, that you are fully present here.

Lord, we crave and we hunger for your voice. We thirst for your word. We pray that you would speak to us, Lord. We pray this in your Son's holy name.

Amen. So stewardship of grace, what does that even mean? 1 Peter 4, chapter 4, verses 7 through 10 is a summary passage.

It's summarizing the Christian life. This book is about Christians. It's a letter from Peter to Christians who were living in the diaspora, the dispersed body of Christ, living all around the known world in places that are either indifferent or maybe even hostile to the Christian faith.

[3 : 32] And this is a pastoral letter of encouragement. This is how you should live. And he's laid out the gospel, the beauty of our salvation in Jesus. He's then talked about what it means to face suffering and to grow up into salvation.

And now as we get to chapter 4, he's giving us a vision of the Christian life. Verse 7 says, the end of all things is near. In other words, he's saying, until Jesus comes again, this is how we should live. And then he lays it out. And he says that above all, Christians must love one another. We must love one another.

What's important to note is that when we think of love, we think of a feeling. Like I feel love for my wife, for my kids, or my friends. But when he talks about love, he's talking about something that is active, a verb.

Love one another. And then he defines what that means. Okay, what does that love look like, expressed? And he gives us two things. Show hospitality, which we've talked about a number of times in our church.

[4 : 36] And then the second thing, is he says that we are to use the gifts of grace that we've been given to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

So hospitality and then stewardship of grace. And I think the two are connected. I'll show you a little bit later why I think hospitality, how that figures in here.

But what I want to talk about now is the fact that when we talk about God's grace and stewarding that grace, we're not just talking about the grace that enables us to be saved.

God's grace that comes through Jesus that saves sinners and reconciles them to God. That's the beginning, but there's more to it. God's grace is actually that which enables us to grow and to mature and the term is to be sanctified, to become more like Jesus.

His grace coming into our lives is what enables that to happen in the power of the Spirit. And so what Peter is saying is that when God pours his grace into his church, he does it through individual Christians.

[5 : 45] He pours his grace through us into one another's lives. We're all made stewards of this grace. And that happens in the form of gifts, spiritual gifts.

So if you're a follower of Jesus, if you've been baptized, you have spiritual gifts. You are in many ways, and these gifts in you are like channels of grace.

Or to use a different image, when Jesus wants to shine the light of his presence into his church, just as a light shines through a prism and white light will be refracted into all manner of hue, so Jesus shines the light of his presence through his church.

And each person is like a facet of that prism. And that light shines in a slightly different hue. So when God wants to shine his grace, pour his grace, it happens through our spiritual gifts.

And Peter speaks in generalities. He says, you know, there's essentially two categories of gifts. He says there are those who speak, speaking gifts, and those who serve, serving gifts.

[6 : 55] And they work together. If you look at other places like Romans chapter 12, or 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and 13 and 14, Ephesians chapter 4, you see some of the more specific gifts listed out.

These aren't exhaustive lists, but they give us some specific examples of what spiritual gifts we're talking about. So speaking gifts might include prophecy, right, applying God's word in ways that pierce hearts and expose sin.

That's a speaking gift. You might have a gift of teaching, or of exhortation. Exhortation is sort of strong encouragement, or encouragement, right?

These are speaking gifts. Right alongside those, there are serving gifts, like service, like healing, like giving.

We're all called to give, but some people are extraordinarily gifted. They're extraordinarily generous, and their gifts bear much fruit. It's a spiritual gift. The gift of mercy.

[7 : 57] These are service-oriented gifts. But the point that I want to dwell on with you for just a few minutes is this, that God has designed His community, communities like ours, to be interdependent, where each person both needs and is needed.

Interdependent communities. And being a loving community means being an interdependent community. That's what Peter's saying. So there's a couple of implications just to push this into the realm of our lives a little deeper.

First implication is this. You need other Christians in your life. You need Christians in your life. And I'm not just talking about Christians' friends that you see once or twice a week.

I'm talking about spiritual friendships. People who, with whom you have an explicit understanding that you desire to be used by God in their life.

And you desire them to be used in your life to grow. That you have committed to not just being friends but seeking one another's growth and maturity in Christ.

[9 : 13] You need those kind of people in your life. And if what Peter says is true, it means that as we read over the list of spiritual gifts, normally we read over the list of spiritual gifts and the main

question at least in my mind is I wonder which ones I have.

And that's kind of human nature. Maybe I have this. Maybe I have this. And that's really important. We'll talk about that in just a little while. But there's another way to read the list of gifts.

And that is it's a list of needs. It's a list of things that I need. Right? So this means that as I look down the list of spiritual gifts, I realize I need people to teach me things that I don't know.

I need people with the gift of teaching in my life. I need people with the gift of wisdom to share wisdom that I may lack. I need people with the gift of prophecy who can speak prophetically into my life and pierce my heart and expose sin.

I need people to exhort me at times. To encourage me at times. I need people sometimes to serve me. to pray for me to be healed.

[10:21] To show me mercy. It's a list of needs. Does that make you uncomfortable at all? Just the idea that you would need things like that from people.

And I think for most of us it's hard to really admit. To acknowledge, yeah, there are times when I just don't know. There are times when I have no idea what to do. There are times when I need to be called out. There are times when I need to be taken care of.

There are times when I need people to pray for my healing. I think it's human nature and especially in our culture to spend most of our time convincing people that we don't need anything. You know, most of my time I want people to know that I've kind of got it together.

That I'm kind of good. I don't, you're, you know, I don't really need anything. Things are fine in my life. And I think that's because we live in a culture that rewards autonomy and rewards self-sufficiency.

I mean, what does it mean to be an adult in our culture? A lot of people in this room are, you know, sort of transitioning or kind of in what might be called early adulthood. What does that mean?

[11:27] I mean, what's the goal of being an adult? What is adulting all about? It's self-sufficiency, isn't it? I mean, isn't being an adult really just not needing anything anymore? You no longer need parental support.

You no longer, you kind of can do it all yourself. I mean, that's essentially, I think, how we think about it. So the idea that I would need anything is pretty uncomfortable. But what we need to understand is that Peter is totally shattering that whole idea of self-sufficiency.

And one implication of what he's saying is unless there are other believers pouring grace into your life, your growth is going to be stunted. It's going to be stunted.

So that's the first thing. You need other Christians in your life. The second point I want to make is that other Christians need you in their life. You know, other Christians need you in their life.

There are specific ways that God's, if you're here and you're a Christian, there are specific ways that God's grace is meant to flow through you, through your personality, through your quirks, all the things that make you you.

[12:32] So there are needs in this church that only you are able to meet. And there are hands that only you can hold and spaces and roles that only you can fill. And it's very important to understand that, that when you look around this room, every single person who's here, if you're here, chances are you're not just randomly here, that you're here because God has given you as a gift, that he looked at the church and saw the needs and said, this person would fit very well here.

They have gifts that are needed by this community. There are no accidents in God's kingdom. So we need other Christians in our lives, other Christians need us in their lives.

And this is what it means to be a steward of God's grace. God's grace pours through us into one another's lives. Now, it's all well and good, nice and clear.

Why is it so hard to do? What is the major challenge? And I think that there are a number of ways we could go, a number of reasons why it's hard, but I just really want to focus on what I think is a core challenge of interdependence and why you don't often see this happening well in churches.

And that's this fact, that the whole idea that we need other people to pour grace into our lives, and more to the point, the whole idea that we need to change or that we need to grow or that we need to transform runs completely against our culture.

[13:58] We live in a culture that has been termed more and more the age of authenticity. I don't know if you've heard this term, but here's what Jonathan Grant, here's how he defines it. Modern authenticity encourages us to create our own beliefs and morality.

The only rule being that they must resonate with who we feel we really are. The worst thing we can do is to conform to some moral code that is imposed on us from the outside, by society, our parents, the church, or whoever else.

It is deemed to be self-evident that any such imposition would undermine our unique identity. So this is the culture that we live in, that I have a moral obligation to be true to what I feel on the inside and to express that, and the less polluted it is by outside influence, the more authentic and the more true it is.

So why would I let you speak into my life and pollute my sense of self? I need to keep myself clear of all of that, right? And think about the stories that we tell, the movies that come out these days. I mean, really, the only remaining hero narrative in our culture is the narrative of the person who has the courage to be themselves no matter what.

[15:15] You know, that's the hero story that we like to tell. I mean, virtually every movie that I watched with my kids over Thanksgiving was that story. Just swap out different animals or creatures, but that's essentially the story that was being told over and over and over.

And so one of the worst crimes that you can possibly commit in our culture is to question or challenge someone else's choices. That is the unpardonable sin in our culture is to challenge or question or push back somebody else's lifestyle choices.

You just don't do it. There was a Barna study that came out where they made this statement and they wanted people to agree or disagree. And here's the statement. People should not criticize someone else's lifestyle choices.

Eighty-nine percent of U.S. adults agreed with that. Right? So the overwhelming majority of people would agree with that statement. You should not ever criticize other people's lifestyle choices.

That's not surprising.

What may be a little more surprising is that 76% of Christians agreed with that. Right? So the vast majority of people, both secular and Christian, agree with that statement.

[16:26] And so this sentiment that love means, you know, if you really love someone, you should affirm them exactly as they are, that's how the thinking goes. That's what love looks like in our culture.

And so what we need to see is that when you look at 1 Peter 4 and when you compare the two, you realize that we are dealing with two completely opposite definitions of love.

They're two diametrically opposed ways of defining love and they coexist. Right? The culture of authenticity says, this is who I am and if you truly love me, then you will affirm and accept me exactly as I am.

That's what love means. 1 Peter, by contrast, says, this is who I am and if you truly love me, you will use your gifts of grace to speak into my life, to challenge me, to expose sin, to exhort me, to encourage me so that I can grow and transform and mature and become more like Jesus.

You see, they could not be more opposite one another. And so someone, you know, I know you might be hearing this and thinking, what's the big deal? Well, the thing is, as a result, the church is deeply confused over what it means to love people well.

[17:49] I think right here in our church, there's a lot of confusion. I think there are a lot of people who really want to be loving, but I think that we're very confused as to what that actually looks like on the ground.

So you have someone making decisions and, I don't know, they're making decisions that are hurting their relationship with God and hurting their relationships with other people and maybe even hurting themselves.

That's essentially what sin is. It's doing things that hurt those relationships. Right? And they're making these decisions and, you know, you see this from time to time where there'll be somebody making these decisions and they're literally surrounded by Christians.

They're surrounded by Christians. You know, they're in small groups and, you know, and all of the people around them are concerned. And all of those people are talking to one another about how concerned they are, but nobody dares say anything to the person in question.

And so, and then, you know, and you say, well, you know, don't you think you should say something if you're so concerned? Shouldn't you maybe sit down and have a conversation and people say, well, you know, I just really think what they need is, I just want to be supportive right now.

[18:57] Well, I just don't know if it's my place. You know, I just think that they need to know that they're loved no matter what. And on it goes. And, and I think that all of this reflects a deep

confusion about what love actually looks like.

It reflects actually the culture of authenticity. Loving someone, supporting them means never questioning them. So someone says, okay, well, okay, I get that, but what's the big deal? And maybe you're here and you're listening and you're not really sure if you buy the whole grace, Jesus, gospel thing. And you say, well, if I'm not a Christian, then what does it matter? And I would say, even if you don't buy all of that, it still doesn't work.

There's still a serious flaw with this way of thinking about relationships. And here's the flaw. Here's the problem with the culture of authenticity. When you say, this is who I am, you must affirm and accept me exactly as I am.

When that's what you say to people, what you really have is openness without vulnerability. You have openness without vulnerability. And that makes real relationships completely impossible.

[20 : 05] Because you're being open, you're saying, this is who I am, I'm being totally honest about who I am. But you're not allowing that person to have any meaningful impact on your life.

And that's the vulnerability piece. And if you're open and yet you're not vulnerable, it's not openness that makes relationships possible, real relationships, it's vulnerability. Because vulnerability is the core of intimacy.

And so you can be open, but if you're not vulnerable, there's no chance for intimacy. And so it may feel like you're intimate, but if there's no possibility that anybody can actually impact you or change you, then there's really no intimacy.

You're really not asking for a friend, you're asking for a yes man, you're asking for somebody to come along and rubber stamp your life. And so instead of building a relationship on intimacy, you're actually building it on an ultimatum.

And ultimatums really aren't good for relationships. It doesn't work. Right? So I think this is one reason why so many people these days, especially in a place like D.C.

[21 : 14] where this way of thinking is so prevalent, there's a lot of loneliness out there. A lot of people with a lot of friends who are still lonely. And I think part of it is because we like the idea of openness, but we don't like the idea of vulnerability.

And so we're alone. There's no intimacy there. And this attitude, by the way, not only makes relationships with other people impossible, but if you come to God and you say, well, I believe that God is a God of love, and I believe that if God is truly loving, then God should accept me and affirm me exactly as I am.

You're not going to have a relationship with any God other than the God of your own imagination. It makes a relationship with God utterly impossible. So the gospel offers us a better way, and that's what we're going to spend the rest of our time looking at.

How to be faithful as stewards of grace, and that begins with understanding the gospel. It begins with, first thing we have to do to be stewards of grace is to recognize that we need grace.

Right? So before I pour grace into the lives of others, I need it myself. By the way, every week, this is why when we come up for communion, we come up and say Dan is celebrating communion.

[22 : 27] The first thing Dan does after he sits everybody down is he takes a bite of the bread himself, and then he takes a drink from the cup, and then he'll give me, if I'm helping, assisting with distribution, he will give me the bread and the wine, and then we give it to the chalice bearers, and then we come and we begin to give it to all of you.

Why? It's because we need to receive before we can give. That's what that's meant to model. We're only able to give what we've received. And so the first thing we need to do is to recognize that we need grace. You know, Jesus said in the Gospels, those who are well have no need for a physician. I came to call not the righteous, but sinners. So in order to receive God's grace, you have to recognize that you need it. You have to ask for it. God's grace, which means, first of all, admitting that we're hopelessly addicted to self and idols, that we are powerless over sin in our lives.

It means coming to Jesus and admitting that we need the free grace that he offers to become free and whole. And then it means turning our will and our lives over to him, saying, please take this, take me, and change me, transform me.

And you know, that's what happens. It's essentially giving Jesus a blank check to the rest of your life and saying, here's a blank check. Whatever you call me to do from this point forward, I will do it.

[23 : 47] I have no idea what that's going to be, but I'm saying yes now. So whatever it is that comes down the road, I say yes. That's what it means. And you know that Jesus is going to then

begin to work in your life to change and to transform you, using other people to do that.

But we have to receive God's grace. And then once that happens, then we have to recognize the purpose of grace to begin with. That ultimately, this is not about us.

And Peter makes this abundantly clear. Who's it about? Well, he says, in order that in everything, God might be glorified through Jesus. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. So that's why he's saying faithful stewards of grace, you know, when you speak, speak oracles of God. When you serve, serve with the strength that God provides.

Lest you ever, for a moment, forget and think that it's about you. Because in fact, it's not. You know, the essence of sin is essentially that we're all addicted to self. We want it to be about us.

[24 : 53] We want it to be about us. We're kind of self-aholics, you know. That's our addiction. And Peter says, no, it's not about you. And so when you do bear fruit and when you are stewarding grace and you see other people grow as a result, don't take credit.

Recognize that it's God who provides grace. That we're merely the stewards. Right? So it's not about you. Recognize the purpose is to glorify God. So the first couple of things, to be stewards of grace, we recognize that we need grace.

We recognize the purpose of grace to glorify God. Number three, recognize and use your own gifts of grace. recognize and use your gifts.

I don't know what they are. But you can discover what they are. You know, there are lots of inventories out there that you can take to discern your spiritual gifts. We did one a year ago when we had a retreat on this topic for this very reason.

But by far, a better way is to sit down with people, Christian brothers and sisters who know you, and to begin to ask them to prayerfully help you discern what your gifts are. You know, where do you bear fruit?

[26 : 00] Where, when you're doing your thing, where do you see fruit and growth and flourishing happen? Where do your natural inclinations meet fruitfulness when you're being faithful to Jesus?

And prayerfully discern what those are. And then, once you begin to know them, use them. That's the key. You have to use them.

They're meant to be used for the life of the church. Sometimes, using your gifts, sometimes that means that you're going to get to serve people and take them food and encourage them and pray for them to heal and pat them on the back and help them get up and say it's going to be okay and dust them off and help them down the road.

Sometimes, though, it's going to mean having hard conversations. Sometimes, using your gifts and being a faithful steward of grace means that you have to sit down and you have to speak prophetically into somebody's life.

You have to exhort them in things that they don't want to hear. You have to challenge and question and nobody enjoys those conversations.

[27 : 11] But I just want to say this as strongly as I can. Don't avoid hard conversations. If we are a church that avoids hard conversations, we will not be stewarding grace.

Our growth will be stunted. I'll give a big caveat. I can't believe I'm quoting Tim Ferriss, but here it goes. Sort of a self-styled guru.

Somebody described him the Tony Robbins for people under 45 and I guess that's probably true. He says, a person's success in life can usually be measured by the number of uncomfortable conversations he or she is willing to have.

That's a pretty bold statement because I think most of us avoid hard conversations. We just put them off, put them off, put them off, put them off, and avoid them altogether. And he says, a person's success hinges largely on their willingness to do that.

I think 1 Peter 4 would amend that slightly to say the sincerity of a person's love is measured largely by their willingness to have hard conversations.

[28 : 11] You know, Proverbs 27.6, I love it. It says, faithful are the wounds of a friend, profuse are the kisses of an enemy. And that is absolutely brilliant wisdom.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend. You know, faithful friends are friends who are willing to say things that might wound you or offend you or hurt you.

That's what love looks like, right? So faithful friends might say, I notice that when we go out, every time we go out, you know, we all have a couple of drinks and then you just don't ever seem to stop. You have three, four, five, and I never, I don't know what happens to you after that.

We all go home, but you always kind of stay out. What's going on? Faithful friends say, you know, ever since you've been dating that person, you've just started to change and you're more distant and I'm just, you know, I'm not seeing you around as much and what's going on? You know, that's a faithful friend is somebody who's willing to sit down and say, you know, I'm not sure this decision is having the best influence on your family. You're on the road a lot. You and your wife seem really distant.

[29 : 13] Do you guys get any time together? I'm concerned. Can we talk about it? Notice that that it's not saying, I'm condemning your choices. It's not coming at somebody with an attitude of condemnation.

Remember, the overarching ethic is one of love. Right? But what this does look like is the posture that you should have is not condemnation, but it is curiosity. I'm curious.

Tell me more. Help me understand this decision because there are a lot of people that are concerned about this decision. Can you help me understand your thinking? How does this decision resonate with your relationship with Jesus? Do you feel like your relationship with Jesus is stronger as a result of this?

If not, then why are you doing it? That's curiosity. It's just, help me understand. Let me in. Do we have vulnerability or not? That's what it looks like. And by the way, you're also being curious because, remember, it's not about you.

It's about how God might use this relationship. It's how God has designed us to be faithful stewards of grace. And so, if God's grace is trying to break into this person's life, you're curious.

[30 : 14] How's that going to happen? What is God doing in you right now? Can we talk about that? Faithful are the wounds of a friend. This is going to hurt, but it's because I love you and because God's grace is trying to be poured into your life.

What's that look like? Profuse are the kisses of an enemy. If all someone does is affirm you and build you up and no matter what, I just want you to be happy and you do what you think is best and you're going to make great decisions and I'm not, that's not really a friend, right?

Because that's not actually loving you. If I'm just affirming, affirming, affirming, affirming, it's not really about you, I'm loving me because I don't want to have to stress about it, I don't want to have to think about it, I don't want to lose sleep over it, I've got too much going on in my life, I don't have the time and energy to really get into this with you.

So hey, just whatever makes you happy, I've got this thing over here. That's not friendship. Profuse are the kisses of an enemy. By the way, I said earlier, I think there's a connection with hospitality. I think there's no coincidence here that Peter says show hospitality and then steward your spiritual gifts, which means sometimes, many times, having hard conversations like this.

[31 : 25] Because these kinds of conversations should always take place in the context of hospitality, right? If you're going to have a conversation like this with somebody, it should be in your living room, you know, with some food that you've prepared, right?

That's where this is meant to happen, that's where loving relationships play out. So you need to recognize your gifts and use them, even if it means doing uncomfortable things, because you actually love your brothers and sisters.

And then lastly, number four, recognize grace when it comes to you. Right? So don't just be willing to have the hard conversations, receive them when they come into your life. You know, sometimes grace comes in the form of gentle encouragement, praise God, wonderful times.

But other times, it comes in the form of a hard conversation, somebody being willing to challenge you. And you know, over the years, I've seen this play out again and again and again. Somebody will come into our community and they make friends and they're great and for maybe several years, they're active and involved and every time you ask them how's it going, they say, oh, everything's great, totally fine.

I'm totally fine, everything's great and they're like a star. You know, they just got it all together. And then something happens, crisis, bottom drops out and all of a sudden, their sin gets exposed, their brokenness gets exposed, the need gets exposed, the fact that they don't have it all together and they're actually kind of a mess, all that comes out and maybe a few people learn about it, right?

[32 : 50] And in that moment, when you're sitting there and all of a sudden, you're just, your crap is just out there, every single human being on the planet wants to run and hide. Ever since Genesis chapter 3, that's what human beings have been doing.

The moment we get caught, the moment God comes along and says, what have you been doing? We run and we hide, right? That's human nature. And so, many people, when they finally get exposed, will do just that and they'll go and they'll start to fade away. They come less and less and less. They start kind of dropping out of their small group. Their kind of friends see them less or they'll start being more selective about who they talk to and they'll start cutting some people out and talking to other people. And then eventually, people say, you know, I just think it's time for a fresh start. I think I just need to go to another church and I just need a fresh start. So, time in my life where I'm just looking, I just need a change, you know?

And, you know, I mean, call me cynical and I am. I'm a cynic and it's something I need to repent of. But, so I'll admit that. But a lot of times when I hear that, I think, what you're really saying is you want to go to a place where people don't know you so you can continue to try to convince people that you've got it all together.

[34 : 00] You can buy a few more years of hiding behind that facade. So, so, so some people do leave, you know? And that's okay because, again, it's not about us. It's about God working His grace in His way.

So, they still belong to God, right? So, it doesn't depend on us. But I will tell you that sometimes, miraculously, people stay. They stay.

They get exposed and all their crap is out there and people, you know, people start to surround them and start to step into their life and they want to run but they say, no, I'm just going to stay. And it's like staying on the operating table. And God is this surgeon and He's starting to go to work and they're freaking out and they're scared but then they begin to look around and they begin to realize. Look at this community that God in His infinite wisdom has surrounded me with. Well, here's a person who can pray for me to heal and here's a person who has faith beyond anything that I've ever seen and here's a person who's going to show up late at night to do my laundry to make sure I have something to wear to work and here's somebody who's going to bring me food and here's somebody who's going to organize a prayer chain so that people are praying for me around the clock and here's somebody who can actually counsel me and help me work through this and here's somebody who's going to speak and teach God's Word in a whole new way and all of a sudden you begin to realize God actually knows what He's doing.

He's on to something because all that time that it was great and you were coming and everything was fine and you're, you know, coming to church every Sunday and leading small groups and everything's great, all that time your growth had really plateaued.

[35 : 29] You know, growth in the Christian life isn't just like this. At least in my life you kind of go along, go along, go along and it's in those crisis moments, right? The Bible calls time, you know, not chronos time but kairos time.

It's this divinely appointed moment where the bottom drops out of your life and you stay on the surgeon's table and you stay under the knife and you trust the community around you. Those are the times that you grow.

Those are the times that you grow. So every now and then people stay and they grow. I can tell you from my own life that my growth has happened not when I was cruising along, not when people were encouraging me or complimenting me or telling me ways that, you know, things that I want to hear.

Almost exclusively, whatever growth I've experienced in my life, I've experienced when people have called me out, called me to the mat, challenged me, or they've been there when something got exposed in my life that I needed to deal with.

That's when it happens. So this is what it means to be stewards of grace. It means loving each other and serving each other with our gifts as an interdependent community.

[36 : 46] And we do this all because Jesus was willing to love us and serve us by giving us the ultimate gift of his own life, which is what makes all of this possible. Heavenly Father,