

2 Peter 1: 2 – 11, 19.
(New Revised Standard Version Bible)

2 May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

3 His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. ⁴Thus He has given us, through these things, His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature. ⁵For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, ⁶and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, ⁷and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. ⁸For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹For anyone who lacks these things is short-sighted and blind, and is forgetful of the cleansing of past sins. ¹⁰Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble. ¹¹For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.

19 So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

1 Corinthians 6: 19 - 20.
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¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

Cliff Notes: Grace Through Faith

Loving and guiding Lord, may You work through me today, and may my words touch the hearts, minds, and souls of Your people in this faith family with Your message. A-men.

My dear brothers and sisters, the two New Testament scripture readings today speak strongly to me about Grace. Grace through Faith. That is my topic for this morning. God knows: I'm not a graceful man. But today, I believe I can say something important about grace, anyway; a grace that can only be granted by God.

Grace can be seen in many forms: the grace of a champion ice skater, the grace of a charismatic speaker, the grace of a loving mother, the grace of a caring nurse, the grace of a teacher motivated by her students, and the grace of a divinely inspired pastor...

This last May, I spent two weeks on a business trip to South Korea, and came to experience a people who are full of grace. I worked closely with the Korean prime contractors from Samsung, members of the Royal Korean Air Force, and members of the U. S. Air Force at the Osan Air Base while helping to integrate the newly delivered upgrade to the Korean air defense system. The Osan Air Base, located about 35 miles south of the demilitarized zone, occupies a large plot of land in South Korea, yet it's considered to be California land. The Osan Air Base is a U.S. air base, and the United States and Korean Air Forces work in a close partnership there.

The second Saturday we were there, Derek (my American colleague) and I took an hour-and-a-half subway ride to Seoul, which was probably only 20 miles away from the airbase as the crow flies. We'd planned to take a tour bus to see the city and then meet with Seon Tae Kim, who was my counterpart on the Samsung software engineering team. It was a very rainy day, so the tour wasn't quite as fun as it would've otherwise been – we couldn't see out the fogged up windows in the bus. But we did visit the Deoksugung Palace and the National Museum of Korea. We met Seon at 4 PM at a subway stop, and he hailed a cab to take us to his house, which was a condo on the bottom floor of a sky-rise apartment complex. When we arrived at his home, Seon told us that we should think of their home as the home of kings, because they were going to treat us like kings. His wife, who'd taken the name Elizabeth during their visits to America, treated us to many courses of fancy Korean food. Seon's eleven-year-old son, Charles, had been born in America when Seon and Elizabeth had been in America in the nineteen-nineties. At that time, Seon and I had also worked closely together on the Korean Air Defense System. We all ate heartily, and enjoyed each other's company. And Charles and Derek played with Legos. It was a blessed visit, and when we left, Seon and Charles escorted us on the subways and made sure we got on the train that would take us back to the hotel.

On Wednesday evening of my last week in Korea, the Samsung engineers and Korean officers that I'd worked so closely with over the last year-and-a-half took Derek and me out for dinner and a small party at a Chinese restaurant close to the air base. There were several purposes for this gathering. They wanted to thank us for our support of their so very important project; they wanted to say "Good Bye" but not forever; they wanted to have fun; and they wanted to honor

us. After the many course meal, Major Moon, the senior officer at the gathering, gave a heartfelt speech about how important our contributions had been, about how we would be bonded for life by the relationships we'd formed, and about how grateful they were. Major Moon also mentioned that the Korean people are continuously grateful for the American support during the Korean war and mindful of the American lives lost then. After his speech, the Koreans all turned to me. When I didn't respond right away, Seon Tae Kim, who I'd become so close to, turned to me and explained that it was Korean custom that I be honored by responding to Major Moon's words of thanks by having the last word. I was overwhelmed with emotions, and spoke some words. I mentioned how much the experience has meant to me; how grateful I was to have had the opportunity to work with them all; how I was blessed to be able to experience Korean culture first hand; how I prayed for continued success and happiness for each of them and their families; and how I knew the bonds we'd formed would never be broken. I know my words didn't do the situation justice; I just pray my emotions, noted by the huskiness in my voice and the wetness in my eyes, would be felt by my Korean friends.

Us Americans could learn a lot from the honoring, caring, grace demonstrated by Asian cultures. Now let me contrast this Korean grace with something else.

In early 2004, Pastor Terry asked me to fill in for her on a Sunday in April. Some of you may remember the stories I told then from the pulpit - stories of my egotistical show-off friend named Cliff - he had fallen away from the Christian faith that his parents had instilled in him as a child. Because he was a show-off, Cliff had put his family through numerous instances of nearly-fatal injuries - injuries caused by his own actions. And he wouldn't admit to the fact that he was impacting those who love him at least as much as he was impacting himself. I won't retell those stories now, but I will say that Cliff eventually realized that even though he had fallen away from his Lord, his Lord had NOT fallen away from him. Cliff reclaimed his faith, and his eyes were opened in oh so many blessed ways.

So now I'm going to use my friend Cliff the egotistical show-off to illustrate some contrasts in grace.

One recent Sunday, Cliff and his wife were riding their motorcycles on their favorite twisty mountain road. "That road is like skiing on a motorcycle!" he has exclaimed many times. Two days prior, he had picked his bike up from the shop where it had spent three months getting its engine hopped up.

So this ride on his favorite road had been playing through his mind for some time, and even though he was breaking in a new top-end and couldn't rev the engine out, Cliff attacked the corners with exuberance. The exhaust howl was music to his ears. The flowing asphalt called to him. He left his wife behind as he clawed his way up the mountain. He foot pegs scraped the pavement in the corner apexes, and his rear tire protested as it explored the limits of traction in hard-throttle full-lean corner exits. He was careful to leave a little in reserve to account for the unexpected, but since he knew this road and his motorcycle so well, he believed that his reserve was past most riders' limits.

Cliff was about three-quarters of the way up the mountain, and in a state of adrenaline-laced bliss, when he came up behind a group of slower riders. All of a sudden, his source of joy was severely limited, and he began to look for passing opportunities. He looked ahead through trees and past corners, in an attempt to determine whether there was any oncoming traffic lurking behind blind corners. He made a quick pass of the rear-most rider as they exited a corner. All the time, he gathered what he could from glimpses of the road ahead. He came upon a section with some shallow left-right-left zigs and a couple of dips. It provided a short segment of road that would give him plenty of time to pass the next rider - - as long as no one emerged from the subsequent blind corner. He made an instantaneous decision – he convinced himself that no one would emerge from that corner because he had seen no one approaching in the small gaps that he'd been observing. And he'd been very observant - - Hadn't he?

So as he crested a shallow rise in the middle of a right-hand zig, Cliff grabbed a handful of throttle and lunged into the opposite lane... ..Just as a Jeep emerged from the blind corner right in front of him! He was then forced to make another instantaneous decision. He had three choices: 1. Swerve quickly back into the lane from which he'd come – and possibly take out the biker he was passing; 2. Go straight into the front grill of the oncoming Jeep at a speed differential of over 80 miles-per-hour; or 3. Go straight off the opposite side of the road. Cliff chose option three. He veered to the left, barely missing the Jeep, and grabbed his brakes hard as he headed off the road at a 45 degree angle.

Cliff next remembers coming to while lying in silty, weedy dirt. His body and mind were numb as he breathed in a cloud of fine, airborne dust. He slowly sat up, and was confused for several moments. Then he suddenly recalled the implications of the last thing he remembered: approaching a foot-high paved berm along the shoulder of the road at a 45 degree angle and a speed of fifty miles and hour! His eyes darted around, barely noticing a parked Jeep, looking past a young couple hovering over him with concerned expressions, and finally finding with tunnel-vision the only object he cared about at that instant. Cliff leapt to his feet and stumbled over to his motorcycle, lying on its side in the dirt. The right side of his bike was facing upward, and appeared unscathed. But he panicked as he thought about what the other side must look like. He stooped down to right his steed, and found that his body, despite another surge of adrenaline, would not cooperate. Cliff then remembered that there were others present. Again, his eyes searched rapidly, and zoomed in on the young man from the Jeep.

“Can you help me pick it up?” he implored. Dirt fell off Cliff's motorcycle as they lifted it together. Through a thick, dazed, mental fog, he automatically inventoried the damage in an instant. He saw that the fancy carbon-fiber radiator shroud was shredded. The left-side number plate was gouged and cracked. The expensive left side exhaust canister was scraped and dented. The headlight cowl and front fender bore ugly scratches. The shift lever was bent. He thanked the young man and sat on his motorcycle. The handlebars were still straight. The left mirror was turned and slightly bent, but not broken.

Cliff just sat there on his motorcycle in a daze. The concerned young couple probably asked him questions about whether he was hurt, but he was in a daze. The next thing he remembers when

recalling this incident, was his wife riding up and coming to a stop, while he was still sitting on his motorcycle off to the opposite side of the road, still in a daze. The Jeep was still parked; the young couple still hovered with concern.

“Hi!” she greeted cheerily. Cliff remained silent. The clean side of his motorcycle and leathers was facing her – she had no idea what had just happened.

“How’s it going?” she asked. Cliff still remained silent - - his mind registered her presence, and his ears heard her question, but he had no frame of reference with which to answer her. “Are you OK?” This question was laced with concern. Still Cliff could not form the context for an answer through the fog...

Within a few minutes, Cliff’s concussed brain started to function better. The young couple was told that he was alright and thanked for their concern (at least he hopes they were thanked – he still doesn’t recall many of the details). And he rode his scarred motorcycle cautiously down the mountain and home.

His injuries were minor: sore ribs on his left side, some bruises, and a sore neck and back. You might wonder how Cliff survived such a crash with only superficial injuries. I can tell you that he has walked away from many other brushes with death. Cliff might tell you that he knows how to fall. His wife might mention that he has quick reactions. Me... I believe that, for some reason known only by God, that Cliff has been blessed with some very busy guardian angels. That doesn’t mean that I think he can count on continued angelic intervention – these angels *must* be getting tired of this particular job by now!

Cliff, once again, had cheated near-certain death. Once again, it had been due to poor decision-making on his part. Once again, his Lord had spared him death, or even serious injury. And once again, it had a profound impact on his loving family. The difference between this death-cheating experience and those of his younger years, was that this time Cliff had his Christian faith.

But his faith didn’t make the experience any easier on his loved ones, however. The day after the incident, his wife’s disgust began to simmer and then boil. She was grateful that he had survived so well, but she was horrified that he’d put himself in that situation.

Cliff’s faith did not provide him with the grace he needed to avoid this incident – our Lord lets us make our own decisions. And if we’re not continuously rooted in faith, we can let our lust govern our actions instead of letting our actions be guided by our God-given grace.

Now, it’s confession time. Those of you who were here when I stood at the pulpit in April of 2004 already know that my egotistical show-off friend named Cliff is really me. Yes, it was me who made that incredibly stupid decision! Earlier this year, I let the Cliff in me govern my actions instead of allowing myself to be grounded in the guiding Spirit of my Lord. It tore me up to see the anguish that my lack of judgment had caused to two of the most important women in my life. My wife had previously been completely comfortable with my rides on Glendora

Mountain Road – Yes I rode it significantly faster than she did, but she knew that I was also careful and attentive. Well, she had believed that until this incident. Then she lost faith in my judgment.

My mother, across the United States, had known about our love of that mountain road, and I now think it has always made her just a little uncomfortable to hear about it. But after hearing about this accident, she couldn't bear to think about what might happen should I miss a corner on the edge of the mountain. One morning a couple of days after the accident, I received an e-mail from my Mom. In it, she explained how she had not slept all night in grief and agony. She told me that she had been mourning me as if I had lost my life on Glendora Mountain Road. Her agony made me sob with sorrow – I, too, was then in agony! I called her and we cried together over the phone.

In the face of the distress I caused my family, I reacted with repentance; I asked my Lord for forgiveness; I apologized to my loved ones. I did what I could to convince my mother and my wife that this was an isolated incident of extremely poor judgment that wouldn't be repeated. So while I had allowed my lust for speed to overshadow any faith-rooted grace I may have had on Glendora Mountain Road on that day, I tried to fix things by focusing on my Savior and praying that my family be healed from the pain I'd caused them once again.

In admitting this incident to you, I've confessed some painful and compromising things. I do this through grace – a grace that is not my own – a grace that you, as my beloved faith family, enable in me – a grace whose source is my Lord.

I've got one more example of faith-based grace that I'd like to relate to you. The world of Freestyle Motocross is one in which motorcycle riders navigate a field of huge ramp-to-ramp jumps, launching one trick-laden jump after another to be judged for the most incredible set of tricks. The take-off and landing ramps in these competitions are spaced from 60 to 120 feet apart, and the competitors not only jump these distances, but they do insane things while in the air. They let go of the handlebars; they launch their bodies completely away from their motorcycles and then find a way to get back to the motorcycles before landing; they sometimes land without holding on to the handlebars; they do back flips; and, incredibly, they combine back flips with other stunts.

About six months ago, Jeremy Lusk, one of the best in this crazy sport, got paid to go to San Jose, Costa Rica and compete against a slate of lesser-known riders. When he got to Ricardo Saprissa Stadium, he found less-than-ideal conditions. There were high winds whipping through the stadium; and wind is an enemy to these high-flying athletes. Injuries are no stranger to Freestyle Motocross participants; their sport leaves no room for error, since error is certain to lead to severe consequences upon landing.

So despite the poor conditions, Jeremy Lusk participated. During his run, Jeremy hit one of the 100-foot ramps throwing his weight backwards and gunning the throttle, launching into a huge Superman back-flip. While upside down with the bike, he let go of the handlebars, grabbed the seat, and extended his body straight back into the horizontal Superman position. He then pulled himself back to the handlebars in preparation for the landing. This was a trick he'd thrown

countless times before. But while in the air this time, the wind caught him and the motorcycle, and impeded the rotation of his back flip. His motorcycle hit the dirt, nose down in a vertical position, and he was driven into the ground head-first.

There was an inadequate staff of medical personnel on-site to handle his serious injuries, and he was eventually taken to an overloaded hospital where multiple patients shared beds with uncleaned and bloody sheets, where there were holes in splattered walls, and the floors were filthy. Jeremy Lusk did not survive.

I know what you're thinking: "Leave it to Steve to weave extreme sports into a sermon." "What," you might ask, "does this story have to do with faith-bound grace?" Well, I'll tell you. Just days before Jeremy Lusk went to Costa Rica, he got a new tattoo. This tattoo, displayed prominently across his chest, said, "In God's Hands."

When he had this tattoo applied, did Jeremy Lusk plan on dying in his next Freestyle Motocross competition? Of course not. Before his death, no one had ever died in this exceedingly dangerous sport. Did Jeremy have a premonition? Probably not. He just felt an inescapable drive to proclaim his faith to the world so that others might also find redemption, and love, and grace through his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Last Sunday's **Los Angeles Times** had an article about this year's running of the X-Games in Los Angeles. Many of this year's winning extreme-sport athletes dedicated their performances to Jeremy Lusk, who won the gold medal in the Freestyle Moto-X event at last year's X-Games. And according to the **Times**, "Not in any X Games prior – and there have been 14 others – have devout beliefs become so evident among athletes, and so openly discussed." Now that, I believe, says something about a soft-spoken and unassuming athlete who died with a tattoo on his chest – it says something about grace through faith.

Let me now re-read today's Scripture passage from **The Second Letter of Peter**.

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May it be so for all of us. A-men.