**Finding Christ’s Grace Throughout the Scriptures**

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 As a child I enjoyed playing the game of hide and seek. One of my siblings would be “it” and would count while the rest of us hid. Then my sister or brother would seek us until we were found. One day I hid so well that my siblings could not find me by searching the usual places. They did not know where or how to look, so they finally gave up and moved on to another game. There I was, waiting to be found; but no one was seeking me!

Many truths lie within the scriptures and, like a well-hidden child, are just waiting to be found. No wonder the Savior taught, “Seek, and ye shall find.” [[1]](#endnote-1) Sometimes the seeking requires new directions and new methods. For me, grace is one of those doctrines that has always been there in the scriptures, but I only started to find it when I began seeking it with a more specific focus and greater care.

In the Bible Dictionary we are instructed, “The main idea of [grace] is divine means of help or strength, given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ. . . . Grace is enabling power.”[[2]](#endnote-2) In *True to the Faith*, we are taught,

In addition to needing grace for your ultimate salvation, you need this enabling power every day of your life. As you draw near to your Heavenly Father in diligence, humility, and meekness, He will uplift and strengthen you through His grace. . . . Reliance upon His grace enables you to progress and grow in righteousness.[[3]](#endnote-3)

The specific word *grace* appears in 37 verses in the Old Testament, 122 verses in the New Testament, 28 verses in the Book of Mormon, 25 verses in the Doctrine and Covenants, and seven verses in the Pearl of Great Price. In addition to these direct references, there are many more indirect references—a little harder to find, but perhaps just as instructive. These include the parable of the talents, Lehi’s dream of the tree of life, and the institution of the sacrament among the faithful in ancient America. Each scriptural account focuses on the absolute necessity of Christ’s grace and the choice we must make to accept this unearned gift and apply it in our lives.

**Parable of the Talents**

 During Christ’s three-year ministry, He taught many vital eternal truths through parables. Teaching in parables made the stories relatable, the images clear, and the lessons memorable. Parables also ensured that meaning could be gathered on different levels depending on the spiritual maturity and understanding of each listener.

Christ’s parable of the talents details the experiences of three servants who received gifts from their Lord: “For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one.” [[4]](#endnote-4)

The servants who received five and two used the gifts they had been given, increased their holdings, and showed growth. The servant who received one hid the gift. When the Lord returned, He was pleased with the first two servants for expanding or enhancing what they had been given. He was not greatly concerned with how much their talents had grown or whose had grown the most, only that what He had given had been utilized and added upon.[[5]](#endnote-5) When the servant who received one talent reported that his talent remained unchanged, the Lord called him “wicked and slothful.”[[6]](#endnote-6) The servant had been given a gift, as had the others, but this man had neglected to use it.

I had always viewed this parable as applying only to abilities (i.e., our use of the word *talent)* or money (use of the word *talent* as coinage in the time of Christ). I saw it as a story about three men who learn the importance of developing their God-given capacities or investing wisely with the money they had received. With either interpretation, two servants doubled what they had received while the third hid what he was given. Two were honored, and one was chastised by the Lord. This was the way I viewed the parable until I began seeking the message of grace.

Perhaps the talents represent the Lord’s gift of grace. Perhaps the Lord was more concerned with strengthening servants than with multiplying talents. From this view, maybe *wicked* and *slothful* were not harsh words spoken in anger, but realistic descriptions of attributes the third servant could and should have changed. Whereas once I heard the words as a rebuke from the Lord, I now hear Him making a mournful commentary. The servant had been given a gift but had neglected to use it.[[7]](#endnote-7) The Lord had given him all he needed, but with it he chose to do nothing.

We know that wickedness is willful disobedience to God’s word—to be wicked is to make choices contrary to what God advises and commands us to do. Slothfulness is laziness. We may not willfully fight against God, but we may ignore Him or choose to delay our obedience. To overcome both, God has provided us with a Savior in our fallen world. Through His grace we can be cleansed from our wickedness and transformed from our slothfulness. Our hands can be made clean and our hearts can be made pure through His sacrifice.[[8]](#endnote-8) In this way, God and Christ shape us to become more like them.

I no longer see the parable of the talents as applying only to capacity or money, but rather as counsel on chances and opportunities. The Lord’s mission is not to double His investment, but to improve those in whom He has invested. It is to “bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”[[9]](#endnote-9) The Lord has all power and capacity. He does not need His servants’ abilities or money. He needs their will. He created the entire world for one purpose: to prepare its inhabitants for eternal life—the quality of life that He leads. Because of Jesus Christ’s Atonement, we have chances to make amends, repent, try again, and be better. We do not earn these chances any more than the servants in the parable earned their talents. These opportunities are gifts given to us by a loving Father and Savior who ask us to simply use them.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf has taught, “Those who diligently seek to learn of Christ will eventually come to know Him.”[[10]](#endnote-10) As we turn to Christ and depend on His divine help—His grace—we are able to overcome fear and insecurity. As we stretch outside our comfort zones, make mistakes, and pass through trials, we come to humbly rely on our Savior and develop the attributes that would make us “meek as a child.”[[11]](#endnote-11) Christlike attributes are not evidence of innocence or ignorance, but rather of experience and growth.

In the parable, the talents were obviously given according to the servants’ abilities; the Lord did not give more or expect more than each man could handle. Perhaps the Lord was discouraged at the third servant’s unwillingness to even try. Had he depended on the Lord’s grace, surely he could have become “good and faithful” like the others,[[12]](#endnote-12) despite having less in the accounting of the world. In the parable, the Lord told the first two servants, “I will make thee ruler[s] over many things.”[[13]](#endnote-13) Because the words were spoken after the reckoning, we assume their crowning as rulers happened after the servants had entered into the joy of their Lord.

However, if we look at the parable another way, perhaps the Lord had been preparing the faithful servants to be rulers from the beginning. Perhaps the slothful servant was not allowed to enter into joy with the others not because he was being punished or held back, but because he was unprepared. The term *ruler* may not have been a prize or title the servants were given as much as a description of who—through God’s grace—they had become.

The title *CEO* may sound glamorous or desirable, but can such a job be given to someone who is unprepared for the day-to-day tasks and responsibilities that would accompany the title? To one lacking background and experience, such a job would be overwhelming. Bestowing such a title and position on someone who had not prepared for it would be more of a curse than a blessing.

The Lord cannot give more grace to those who reject what He has already offered. Only to those who receive the Lord’s gift of grace can more grace be given. In the parable we read, “For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance.”[[14]](#endnote-14) As the Lord said on a different occasion, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”[[15]](#endnote-15) But one who will not receive cannot experience abundance.

**Lehi’s Dream**

Six hundred years before the coming of Christ, the prophet Lehi had a dream in which he saw a large tree. He made his way to it; partook of its pure, sweet fruit; and beckoned to his family to join him and partake as well. His wife, Nephi, and Sam came immediately, but Laman and Lemuel would not approach the tree.[[16]](#endnote-16) As the dream was later interpreted, we know the tree represents God’s love.[[17]](#endnote-17) Elder Jeffrey R. Holland explained, “Christ is portrayed as the source of eternal life and joy, the living evidence of divine love, and the means whereby God will fulfill his covenant with the house of Israel and indeed the entire family of man, returning them all to their eternal promises.”[[18]](#endnote-18) As Christ is the source, the fruit symbolizes eternal life: “And I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen.”[[19]](#endnote-19)

I had always read of Lehi’s dream thinking only of a difficult journey leading to a wonderful destination. I saw it as a prophet guiding his family (and all of us) away from the wickedness of the world toward the joy of feeling God’s love and experiencing the reward of ultimately receiving eternal life. I only interpreted the vision this way until I began seeking a message of grace.

Perhaps the dream details the change we can expect through Christ’s grace. Eternal life is the life God and Christ live. In preparation for it we are given opportunities to change and improve—to live life on a new level. We make promises with God to live within the bounds that He has set and to learn to love what He loves, not just so we can have what He has, but also so that we can be what He is.

To this end we make covenants in holy buildings known as temples. The temple is all about change. We change from street clothes to white clothes and advance from room to room, symbolically from earth to heaven. As I think about grace, the symbol of the tree of life takes on an additional meaning. In my mind the tree becomes a temple—not the end of the journey, but a station that helps us on our way. The temple is where we feel God’s love and prepare for eternal life; it is where we receive His grace as we learn the patterns needed for eternity. As the tree becomes a symbol of the temple, the fruit becomes a symbol of the endowment. The word *endowment* means gift. It is not “taken out,” but received. Truly it is a sweet gift that exceeds all whiteness. Receiving the endowment means that we are receiving Christ and His atoning sacrifice. As we make sacred covenants, hands are outstretched—like Christ’s grace—to help us live those covenants.

Former BYU President Cecil O. Samuelson said to the student body, “Because of the necessity of agency and choice, we must be the one to grasp, figuratively or literally, the extended hand. It is that outreached hand that we call grace.”[[20]](#endnote-20) The outstretched hand represents a chance, an opportunity. We must still choose to receive the gift—to grasp the outstretched hand. The offered gift does little good if we do not choose to accept it. Then we remain unchanged. By taking the hand that is extended we are changed forever. Brad Wilcox has written, “[Christ’s] grace does not just correct; it endows. It does not just cleanse and console; it transforms—and not just in a narrow way from smoker to nonsmoker, drinker to nondrinker, but from unholy to holy, from justified to sanctified, from human to divine.”[[21]](#endnote-21)

In Lehi’s dream those who reached the tree of life held firmly to the iron rod. The rod is interpreted in 1 Nephi 11:25 to be “the word of God.” Most think this “word” refers to the scriptures or the words of the living prophets. This is accurate; but when I started seeking the doctrine of grace in the scriptures, another interpretation became meaningful. Brent L. Top provided a new perspective in his book *When You Can’t Do It Alone.*[[22]](#endnote-22)He related the verse in the Book of Mormon to John 1:14: “And the Word was made flesh.” In terms of this scripture, grasping the iron rod is like grasping the arm of Jesus Christ. Truly, the only way any of us can make it to the temple and ultimately to eternal life is by holding on to the Savior and being infused with His power.[[23]](#endnote-23) The Savior Himself has promised, “I the Lord God will hold thy right hand.”[[24]](#endnote-24)

In his dream, Lehi had cause to rejoice for his third and fourth sons, Nephi and Sam. Both remained faithful and partook of the gift of eternal life. His two oldest sons, Laman and Lemuel, did not accept the gift and chose instead to remain on a downward trajectory. Lehi’s great sense of urgency caused him to plead with his oldest sons to choose to accept Christ’s grace, which would lead them to eternal life.[[25]](#endnote-25) Many loving parents experience similar heartache as they gather in the temple with some but not all of their children. For those who choose not to lift their eyes, even the brightest and whitest of lights cannot lead them. For those who choose not to open their mouths, even the sweetest of fruits cannot nourish them. Temple doors do not keep people out; they welcome all those who are prepared to enter and receive the gifts of temple ordinances and covenants.

**Sacrament in America**

The Book of Mormon tells of Christ’s visit to the new world after His death and resurrection in the old. To the people of Jerusalem, Christ spoke of His “other sheep that are not of this fold.”[[26]](#endnote-26) The Book of Mormon tells of how the Good Shepherd visited and ministered to these “other sheep.” He taught, healed, performed miracles, and established His church. He called righteous men as His 12 disciples, and He instituted the sacrament as He had in the Holy Land. He introduced the sacred emblems: the bread representing His body and the water representing His blood.

I had always thought of the sacrament as a two-way promise. By partaking, disciples promise to remember the Lord’s sacrifice and keep His commandments. God promises to forgive them and send His Spirit. I understood this simply as an exchange until I began seeking the doctrine of grace.

Perhaps the sacrament involves a relationship rather than just a contract. Perhaps we are not just earning Christ’s forgiveness by promising to keep His commandments, but are receiving His enabling power to make it possible for us to keep the covenants we renew. By partaking of the sacrament we are not just forgiven, but strengthened. We are not just made worthy to receive His Spirit, but are sanctified by it. Ann N. Madsen, speaking of a concept she learned from President Henry B. Eyring, explained, “Covenant keeping is not a cold business deal but a warm relationship, bound by love.”[[27]](#endnote-27)

Christ had instituted and explained the sacrament in the old world,[[28]](#endnote-28) but in the new world He added that those participating in the ordinance could be *filled.*[[29]](#endnote-29) Could this not also be read as *fulfilled*? What could be more fulfilling than a relationship with God and Christ? Christ said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”[[30]](#endnote-30) Without a relationship with Christ, our homes and our lives are desolate—deserted, barren, empty. With that relationship, we are filled—fulfilled, complete, satisfied. Elder David A. Bednar has taught “making and keeping sacred covenants yokes us to and with the Lord Jesus Christ.”[[31]](#endnote-31)

In a discourse Elder Holland mentioned a type of open-eyed discipleship that does not vary with circumstance. Rather than hiding our membership or being ashamed of it, he urged that we actively participate—not just in the Church, but also in a relationship with Jesus Christ. He projected something the Lord might say to him at the end of his life: “Jeffrey . . . I know you weren’t always successful . . . with your own sins or the circumstances of others, but I believe you honestly tried. I believe in your heart you truly loved me.”[[32]](#endnote-32) Christ’s grace is an offering of love, and as we try to follow His commandments we are showing him our love and gratitude. Just as Christ changed water into wine[[33]](#endnote-33) and changed a few loaves into bread enough for thousands,[[34]](#endnote-34) He can change us as we come to Him with a willing heart and abide in a covenant relationship with Him.

Christ offers this opportunity freely, but it must be freely received.[[35]](#endnote-35) The disciples in ancient America could have rejected the emblems. The relationship could have been severed. The people could have gone unfulfilled. The same option is available to us today. Brad Wilcox has written, “For members of Christ’s Church, the bread of the sacrament represents Christ’s body, the water His blood. But without us, those blessed emblems merely sit in trays. We must pick them up and put them inside. We must internalize Jesus’ offering.”[[36]](#endnote-36)

**Indirect Lessons on Grace**

When I was a child I liked to play hide and seek. I would hide, and my siblings would seek me. But one day I hid too well, and they didn’t know where to look; I waited and waited, but the game couldn’t be completed. Many truths are waiting in the scriptures for us to find them, but we don’t know where to look for some of them. A good deal of time may pass before we are able to locate what we need to complete the progression we seek.

As I began to seek the doctrine of grace in the scriptures, I found many direct references in ways I had earlier learned to seek. But as I have sought in less anticipated places, I have found many indirect references that have helped me better understand my total dependence on Christ and my relationship with Him and with God.

The parable of the talents, Lehi’s dream of the tree of life, and the institution of the sacrament in ancient America—to me these are all indirect lessons on grace. Each includes a gift and the possibility for some to reject or neglect it. In the parable of the talents, perhaps the third servant felt too weak or unworthy to accept the opportunity and responsibility to use his talent to improve. In the vision of the Tree of Life, Laman and Lemuel openly rejected the opportunity to change their course and partake of the sacred fruit, preferring the easier route to the great and spacious building. As Christ introduced the sacrament in the Americas, disciples were taught that partaking of these emblems would fill them—not physically, perhaps, but fulfill them spiritually as they entered into a covenant relationship with Christ.

Like the first two servants in the parable of the talents, we can accept the opportunities God gives us to improve ourselves and prepare for even greater blessings. Like Nephi and Sam in Lehi’s dream, we can grasp the extended arm of the Savior until we become more like Him and prepare to live as He lives. Like the disciples in ancient America, we can repent when we make mistakes, accept forgiveness, and be filled with the sanctifying power of the Spirit. Instead of considering our covenants as a contract, we can understand them as part of a relationship. With God nothing is impossible.[[37]](#endnote-37)

Of course the examples I have shared are not the only possible interpretations of these scriptures. Every scripture story can have multiple meanings according to the seeker’s need. We learn numerous lessons at different ages and stages of our lives. As I focused on Christ’s Atonement and grace, I was amazed at the insights and perspectives I was able to find. Where once I read only of abilities, monetary units, trees, fruit, emblems, and contracts, I now see grace—a grace that saves us, changes us, and sustains us as long as the transformation process requires.

**Abstract**

Scriptures contain direct references to grace, but they also include indirect references. The parable of the talents, Lehi’s dream of the tree of life, and the institution of the sacrament in ancient America can be viewed as indirect lessons on grace. Like the first two servants in the parable of the talents, we can accept the opportunities God gives us to improve and prepare for even greater blessings. Like Nephi and Sam in Lehi’s dream, we can grasp the extended arm of the Savior until we become more like Him and prepare to live as He lives. Like the disciples in ancient America, we can repent when we make mistakes, accept forgiveness, and be filled with the sanctifying power of the Spirit. Instead of considering our covenants as a contract, we can understand them as part of a relationship.

1. 1 Matthew 7:7 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Bible Dictionary, 697 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *True to the Faith,* 78 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Matthew 25:14-15 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. see Matthew 25:16-23 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Matthew 25:26 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. 7 see 1 Timothy 4:14 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. see Alma 5:27 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. see Moses 1:39 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Waiting on the Road to Damascus.” *Ensign,* May 2011, 70. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. see Mosiah 3:19 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Matthew 25:23 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Matthew 25:21, 23 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Matthew 25:29 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. John 10:10 [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. see 1 Nephi 8 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. see 1 Nephi 11:22 [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant.* Salt Lake City: Deseret Book 1997, 162. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. 1 Nephi 8:11 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Cecil O. Samuelson, “Be Ye Therefore Perfect.” *Speeches.* Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, September 6, 2011. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Brad Wilcox, *The Continuous Conversion.* Salt Lake City: Deseret Book 2013, 96. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. see Brent L. Top, *When You Can’t Do It Alone.* Salt Lake City: Deseret Book 2008, 111-114. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. see Philippians 4:13 [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Isaiah 41:13 [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. see 1 Nephi 8:37 [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. John 10:6 [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. see Truman G. Madsen and Ann N. Madsen, “House of Glory, House of Light, House of Love,” in Truman G. Madsen, *The Temple: Where Heaven Meets Earth.* Salt Lake City: Deseret Book 2008, 69. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Luke 22:19-20 [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. see 3 Nephi 18:4, 9 [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Matthew 23:37-38 [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. David A. Bednar, “Bear Up Their Burdens With Ease.” *Ensign,* May 2014, 88. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Israel, Israel, God is Calling.” *Speeches.* St. George, UT: Dixie State College Institute, September 27, 2012. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. John 2:9 [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Mark 6:31 [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. see Doctrine and Covenants 88:33 [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Brad Wilcox, *The Continuous Atonement.* Salt Lake City: Deseret Book 2009, 38. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Luke 1:37

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