

Grace That Is Not In Vain

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. (1 Cor. 15:10)

The Scripture anticipates growth on the part of believers in response to grace (cf. 1 Cor. 13:11; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 3:17-19; 4:7, 13; 2 Peter 3:18). Interestingly, David and Vera Mace, founders of the Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment, over 50 years ago identified a commitment to growth, coupled with good communication and conflict resolution skills, as the major factor keeping couples together and happily married. Karen and Ron Flowers (1992) tell the story of their special experience learning from the famous, then elderly, pair. Pitched together during the war years in a ministry for Christian young people in Britain, the two had established respect for each other long before love blossomed. But even then they had found each other difficult. David was the epitome of structure and organization, while Vera was much less regimented. Even more than a decade into their retirement and well past their fiftieth wedding anniversary, she still muttered under her breath with a half smile of resignation when he insisted on precisely timing the activities of the marriage enrichment group they were leading.

Theirs had not been an easy marriage. Differences that at first attracted had become like burrs that created festering sores under constant pressure and friction. Stubbornness and anger had reared up between them, forcing them apart despite their desire to become one flesh. Determined, however, to grow toward intimacy throughout all the seasons of their lives together, they were still dialoguing with fervor into their eighties. Etched indelibly on the minds of the couples then present is the vision of a thin, balding husband leaning close and shouting tenderly into the face of his snowy-haired, nearly deaf beloved, both earnestly struggling to understand each other and to grow together in love literally until death did them part.

For group discussion:

1. What is it about God's grace that encourages growth?
2. Why do you think it was so important to Paul that God's grace produce growth in His life?
3. What encouragement do you find in the experiences of couples like David and Vera Mace?
4. Why do you think a commitment to growth was identified as such a significant factor in keeping marriages together?
5. What are some of the barriers to growth that confront married couples?
6. How is your experience together in a marriage support group contributing to marital growth?

For couple dialogue:

1. In response to God's grace, some personal areas in which I would like to grow which affect our relationship are . . .
2. Growth in our relationship which gives me courage for the future . . .
3. Areas in our relationship in which we have made progress but further growth is needed . . .
4. My commitment to you to grow together toward intimacy for the rest of our lives together . . .

References

Flowers, R & K. (1992). *Love Aflame*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.