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The Book of Galatians Series
Galatians

How To Get Off the Performance Treadmill

As we move forward into the study of the book of Galatians, the Apostle Paul wants us to see that grace is to saturate the whole way that we think about our relationship with God, the motives behind why we do certain things, the way we relate to other people. Part of the difficulty we have with the notion of grace, that God gives us something freely, is that we are taught from the time we are little that there is no such thing as a free lunch. There are always strings attached. Ok? What's the catch? If the deal is too good to be free, it's probably a con. Every so often we get a glimpse of grace. Those moments are really memorable—when someone does give us a free lunch; when there are no strings attached, when there is no con.

When Marlene and I were first married we were 20 years old and bought our first car. We bought the car from my parents and emptied our bank accounts in order to buy it. But we needed one and so we spent just about everything we had to purchase this car. We drove the car back from New York to Cleveland where we were going to school and had it a week. We used to park it on the street in front of our apartment. One evening about 3:00 a.m., I hear this pounding at our door. I threw on my robe and ran to the door. There was this guy standing there. He said, "You own that Cougar that is in front of the house?" I said, "Yeah, what's going on?" He said, "Well, you may want to come outside. Someone just totaled your car. It is in the next door neighbor's yard. Firemen are spraying water in the gas tank to keep it from exploding."

So I quickly got dressed and ran outside. There was our week old car that we had exhausted our savings account for, with the backend basically against the steering wheel. It was totally smashed to bits. It was sitting in the neighbor's yard and firemen were filling it with water.

Apparently, what had occurred was that this drug-using driver of a camper trailer drove down our narrow street in this little Italian section of Cleveland. He drove down our street hitting cars from one side of the street to the other, back and forth, until he finally came to our car and just totaled it. He then drove off with a hole in his radiator, falling asleep behind the wheel a few blocks away.

We are 20 years old with no money, no car, and no nothing, other than God. Well, Marlene and I got a glimpse of grace at age 20. We had a Christian friend who was going to become a missionary in the Arab world. He and his wife were headed off to finish up some graduate work in world missions. They came over to our house to say goodbye. And while he was saying goodbye, he was saying, "By the way, we have a little gift for you." He gave us a little greeting card. I said, "Oh that's nice." He said, "Well, look inside." I opened up the card and a set of car keys fell out. Marlene and I stared at that set of car keys that were

lying on the table and he began to describe, "Well, you know, you are going to need to sign this and go to the title office and buy new license plates. You will probably want to do that in the next couple of days. God bless you guys. See ya."

We were in such total shock that when he left, Marlene and I stared at each other and said, "Did he just do what we think he did? Did our friend just give us a car?" And not only did he give us a car, but he and his wife had two cars and our friend gave us the better car. No strings attached. He didn't ask for anything in return – a sheer gift.

I said last week that Paul frequently repeats himself, particularly in the book of Galatians, regarding the message of grace alone and faith alone as the way that a Christian is made right with God. As an act of sheer grace, God determines to let you off the hook, to not hold you responsible for your sins. As a sheer gift, God chooses to place your sins on His son, Jesus, so that you can be set free. No matter how many times we hear the message of grace, we don't get it. And Paul has to repeat it over and over again.

If I was God, I would get frustrated saying the same thing over and over again. I know I do with my kids. If I have to say the same thing more than once to them, it is a big problem for me. Yet, how many times does God have to say, "Listen, you don't have to do a thing in order to be acceptable to me. You don't have to work. You don't have to try to be religious. You don't have to smile all the time. You don't have to get straight A's on your exams. You don't have to feel guilty when you say "no" to someone's request or when you can't meet everyone's needs. You don't have to be the world's leading expert in theology. You don't have to know every verse in the Bible. It is OK to not know certain things. I still accept you. It is OK to not do certain things. I still accept you. It is OK to have weaknesses in your life, I still accept you. It is OK to struggle with certain things, I still accept you. All you have to do is trust in me. I am gracious.

But many of us, to one degree or another, are on a performance treadmill. I think of a woman, let's call her Peggy, who suffered a bout of severe clinical depression. So severe, in fact, that she attempted suicide. She went to several therapists to discover the roots of her clinical depression. It turned out that Peggy spent virtually every waking hour working. Raising four kids wasn't enough. She was always doing special favors and projects for her neighbors and for other people at church. She also felt a responsibility to care for her aging parents. Every waking minute was spent cooking meals, wiping runny noses, cleaning houses, running a carpool, getting involved in the PTA at school, because that is what a good parent needed to do. She was out every afternoon running the kids around to music lessons, then visiting her parents in the evening. She found it impossible to ever break and spend time alone with God. Or spend time resting or taking a walk or sitting and reading a book for the sheer pleasure of it. Meeting everyone's needs was a compulsion for Peggy. So many people were depending on her.

Performance treadmill. You can see it in folks who feel the need to please everyone around them. I have to keep working to gain the approval of my husband, my parents, my kids, my boss, and the church. The performance

treadmill. You can see it in folks who always must be recognized for their contribution.

I think of a couple, Bill and Lori, who are involved in a church here in town. They are incredibly dedicated. Both Bill and Lori were involved in leadership positions in the church. Both taught Sunday School. He was involved in the Men's program and she was involved in the Women's program. One of their kids was in a leadership position in the youth group. They were constantly doing things at the church. One day they decided to leave. Why did they leave? Because they didn't feel appreciated for their hard work. When their Pastor investigated, it turned out that they had left three previous churches for the same reason.

Performance treadmill, where people do things in a local church, not because they have experienced God's grace and out of that grace and joy they want to share their experiences with others. But because they want to be appreciated, they want approval from church leaders. They have to be noticed.

You can see the performance treadmill whenever someone is resentful of Christian service. Whenever you do some kind of Christian service that causes you to be resentful, you always have to look at the root of that and say, "What is my motive here? Why am I so resentful?"

You know, I occasionally have shared with my darling wife, "Honey, if you resent it, don't do it. And if you do it, don't resent it."

Resentment is a great indicator that we are on a performance treadmill. So is compulsiveness. I think of students who compulsively have to be at the very top of their class in every subject. They are compulsively studying late at night and are setting the alarm for 4:00 a.m. after dropping off to sleep at 2:00 a.m. in order to get up and put the finishing touches on the paper or on a speech. They are saying to themselves, "Well, you know, I am just trying to be excellent for God." But there is something deeper and more sinister at work. The Christian may not understand grace. Perhaps they have been trained by observing their parents, that extreme achievement to the point of exhaustion is the only way to really be acceptable.

You see, the performance trap is competitiveness. The constant drive to perform and do well, but also to do better than someone else. There is no shame in trying to do great work or a great job. But when you can't stop competing, when games by little children or friends are tests of your worth, when you always have to be a step above another person, the secret delight that we have in saying that we did better on an exam than our best friend did, and that our co-workers new house is not nearly as nice as ours. That people prefer our teaching to someone else's teaching or our singing to someone else's singing. It is all rooted in a faulty grip on God's grace.

Do any of you recognize these kinds of symptoms in your life? Exhausting activity that leads to depression and burnout, an inability to say "no" to people or demands. Constantly having to please others? Resentment over having to do certain activities after you have said "yes?" A pride and constant advertisement of your accomplishments in order to be noticed by others? Extreme compulsiveness in your approach to school or work, that many other people have

teased you about and suggested to you that you are a workaholic. Competitiveness? Where you always have to be first?

I don't know if you know anyone with these kinds of symptoms, but I do. I see that person in the mirror every morning when I am shaving. Today, from the book of Galatians, we are going to see "How to Get Off the Performance Treadmill." Let's pray.

The apostle Paul writes in Galatians 3:1, "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you. Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law or by believing what you have heard? Are you so foolish after beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing if it really was for nothing? Does God give his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law or because you believe what you have heard?"

Let's remember what the issue was. Paul was a church planting missionary. After he left his new church plants, some false teachers entered the churches and began to undermine the apostle Paul's original message to these new believers. These false teachers, known as the Judaizers, said yes it is right and good that you trust in Jesus. You certainly need to believe in Christ and his death on the cross. But that is not enough to be saved. In addition to Christ, you also must be circumcised according to the Jewish law. And you also have to eat certain foods. You have to observe the laws of Kashrus – the Jewish food cleanliness laws. You can't eat pork, shrimp, clams, and lobster. Christ alone is not enough. We need Christ plus obedience to various laws in order to be saved.

The apostle Paul begins his argument by saying, "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?" That phrase, bewitched, literally means who has cast an evil spell over you? We are going to see as we proceed in this series on Galatians that there is a demonic power that is behind performance orientations and legalism. Part of the struggle that we have with grace that for some of us is so hard to lay hold of is there is a demonic power opposing us. Counselors will tell you that when they sit down with some people and try to talk them out of people pleasing, or exhausting endless work, or compulsive activity, and they remind the people of God's love for them and the fact that you don't have to sing for your supper and God's acceptance is free, the words just seem to bounce off this invisible force field. There is a demonic power that casts a spell and opposes our grasp on grace. As we will see in Galatians 4, this demonic power needs to be broken before a person can receive grace.

Now Paul asks six rhetorical questions in challenging the notion that we add something to Christ and his finished work on the cross in order to be acceptable to God. He asks these rhetorical questions to challenge our performance orientation and get us off the treadmill. The first question that Paul would ask of us is, "How do you understand your Christian experience?" I want you to note something here. The apostle Paul argues against a performance orientation here not primarily based on theology, but on the experience of the Galatian believers. He is essentially saying, "Look back at your own life experiences, how

you received the Spirit, how you began with the Spirit, how God gave you His Spirit. I want you to reflect on these powerful past experiences and ask yourself whether those powerful experiences came to you because you were performing so well or simply because of God's grace." The apostle Paul is clearly arguing from the basis of the Galatians own experience of the Spirit in trying to show the foolishness, the utter incongruity of what these Judaizers were saying and what the Galatians had already experienced. In fact, in v. 4 he uses the word "experience" very plainly, although it was unfortunately translated in the NIV, "Have you suffered so much for nothing?" While the Greek word "paschal" can often mean suffering, which is a negative experience. In this context, I believe with the Galatians that he is talking about positive experiences. Have you experienced so much for nothing?

There is a great tendency, friends, to denigrate the role of powerful experiences in communicating to us the truth of God's operating principles in the world. Many of you have been trained to disregard powerful experiences. You have been told that you can't learn anything about God's grace, what's true and what's not, from experiences. The only way we can gain the truth is through academic theology.

There is an enormous blind spot in many church circles to Paul's frequent appeal to powerful experiences in underlining one of his arguments. Just this week I was amazed as I read Christian commentaries by otherwise sound biblical expositors on this text. Only one out of five picked up on the fact that Paul's argument was based on experience. Several of the commentators said that Paul was departing from the main line of his argument as he began to touch on the Holy Spirit, that this was some sort of an aside, rather than central to Paul's understanding of the gospel. One of the commentators said that this text is a confusing departure from the main course of Paul's argument.

This is no departure. This is not an aside. Paul is not engaging in a little parenthetical discussion here. Paul understands that one of the main ways that truth gets communicated to our souls and particularly the truth of grace so that we get blasted off the performance treadmill is through powerful experiences.

We have been taught, however, that experience is not to be considered. Experience is not to be trusted. The only valid way to reason is from theology, but not from experiences. I must quickly say, so that you understand where I am coming from, that I believe that our spiritual experiences must be read in light of biblical truth. We need both experience and biblical truth. There is an old little saying that goes, "With the scripture alone you dry up; with the Spirit alone you blow up; but with the Bible and the Spirit, you grow up." I am deeply pastorally concerned for folks who have never experienced any kind of powerful touch from the Holy Spirit. And some of you have been warned against powerful experiences. It seems sometimes for many people the distance between head and heart, that 12" drop, might as well be a million-mile drop. So many folks go through their Christian life as head Christians. They understand the truth, but they have never really felt it in their hearts.

Paul not only has no problem with powerful experiences, he argues from them as indicators of God's way of relating to us. Consider how many times Paul

refers to his conversion experience. How do we know God's grace? How did he change his view of Christ? It wasn't through reading or through argument. How did Paul change from a Pharisee of Pharisees to a preacher of grace? He had a powerful life changing experience that got him off of the performance treadmill.

I remember the day of my wedding. The week before had been absolutely awful. Our families thought that Marlene and I were too young to get married. Both our families were not Christian and so were opposed to our Christian wedding ceremony. I had to entertain all of my relatives who came in from out of town. Most of them were concerned about what was being provided for them rather than the fact that my wedding day was a special day for me. I got to my wedding exhausted, drained, tense, and anxious. But when I stood up front and saw my beautiful bride coming down the aisle, I experienced the wonderful grace of God. God's presence came on me. I remember this supernatural peace and this extraordinary feeling that God was really pleased with what I was doing. And that what was going on at that moment was His great gift to me because He loved me.

Have you ever felt God's supernatural peace? His extraordinary pleasure at a moment when you weren't looking for it and it seemed like your world was a swirl and what you should have been feeling was fear or exhaustion?

I talked with a dear woman the other day that was diagnosed with breast cancer a few years ago. She, of course, was very anxious about the diagnosis. She was really full of fear and concern as she faced a series of chemo treatments. But she said, "Rich, God was so good to me on the day of my first treatment. I've had lots and lots of ups and downs and fears and turmoil. I got sick and I threw up and lost my hair. But on the day of that first treatment, I felt His supernatural presence and peace and I knew that God was with me and would be with me however wild the ride was going to be. His presence with me wasn't just a promise or just words on a page. It wasn't just words on a page. I wasn't arguing myself into it – He really visited me in my room by my spirit.

How do you know the Christian life is based on grace and not your performance? Not your constant nervous activity and feelings of falling short and people pleasing and what somebody thinks of you at a certain moment. How do you know that faith alone in Christ alone is enough?

Paul says in v. 2, "I want you to think back on your conversion. I would like to learn one thing from you. Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law or by believing what you heard?" Tell me about your conversion experience. Did you feel a change when God entered your life?

I have talked to hundreds and hundreds of people about their conversion experiences. And the wonderful thing is that most people really do feel something. They haven't just been convinced of a cover argument. God has actually touched the person. People ascribe a feeling of lightness, like this burden has fallen off of them. They say, "Rich, this great weight came off of me when Christ came in." They feel light inside where it used to be dark. They feel peace where they always used to be anxious and worried. They feel forgiven. They describe warmth in their hearts. They feel this warmth. They have heard the story of Jesus' death over and over again and they knew it by rote. But when

they turned to Christ in simple trust and rested on Him alone as their entire sufficiency before God, they said their hearts felt warmed. How did those feelings come? Because you worked them up? Because at the moment of your conversion, you were so good and so together and so healthy that, of course God chose to meet you?

Let me ask you a personal question. Do you have a story to tell about your own conversion experience that convinces you of God's grace? Do you have a story to tell of God's incredible mercy to you, not something that you argued yourself into, but His felt mercy? Paul is saying that if you do, look back at that. God was teaching you some of His operating principles. He operates by freely giving and not by our earning it. If you don't, you need to examine the very roots of your Christian life. Has Christ really come into you? Is there something broken inside that keeps Christianity at a head level and you can't make that 12" drop?

In ministering to people pastorally, I have often come upon folks who have because of the way they were raised in a non-touching rather sterile unaffectionate environment, they find it difficult to open themselves up to the Father's love. But as we pray and yield our family experiences to God and that obstacle of the past gets rolled away, often the person is able to receive. On occasion a person needs to renounce faulty teaching, which denigrated experience. They feel like I might be violating something if I am to feel God's presence. They get right up to the edge and then shrink back. "I am afraid. I was taught that this was all wrong."

Paul has no problem with arguing from his own experience of Christianity of our own conversion experience. He appeals to charismatic experiences in v. 5. "Does God give you a Spirit and work miracles among you because you perform, because you observe the law, or because you believe what you have heard?" Can you look back not only on your conversion experience to discern God's grace, but can you look back on other powerful experiences with the Holy Spirit? Perhaps the many times you were used by God to express spiritual gifts. Perhaps the times when God filled you to overflowing with the Holy Spirit so that you thought you were going to explode. When you had a feeling of great joy or God's great love. Paul understands that these things anchor us. Friend, not an argument about God's love or an argument that brings us assurance, but the witness of the Spirit – the experience of God's love being poured out on our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). How did these experiences come? Because you deserved them based on your worthiness at the time or simply because of God's grace? What did you think at the time?

In concluding this section, I want to say that I don't believe we make enough use in the church of the argument of experience in pastoring people, especially people who are making serious mistakes or are involved in serious sins. Let me give you an example. Let's take a single guy who was raised in a Christian family. He came to Christ in a dramatic way in High School. He was a leader in the youth group. He really loved God. And then he goes away to college and enjoys a couple of years of fellowship. But after two years of fighting the battle against the sin and the flesh, he announces that he wants to move into his

girlfriend's apartment. He announces that he wants to participate in the beer parties on campus. He wants to live a life that is morally checked.

Or take a woman who says, "I am tired of the hassle of my marriage. Counseling doesn't seem to be working. My husband's not changing. I am really unhappy and unfulfilled. I am going to seek a divorce."

I think very often when we talk with people making serious mistakes we do not follow Paul's example enough of pointing them back to their own Christian experiences. I am in no way saying that we don't share with the person who is erring God's unchanging Word. That we don't warn them sternly from the Word of God regarding the final end of living a disobedient life. That we don't challenge them from God's Word regarding how much God hates divorce or impurity. But another tact to take is, the tact of reminding a person of how much joy they felt when they were first converted, the extraordinary peace that came into their lives, and the experience of feeling God's pleasure. The garbage that they did say they escaped from and how much they hated their former way of life. The sickening feeling that comes in the morning after you have disobeyed God the night before, or the utter futility of living life without God's presence. Friends, a call to remember our experience of God is often what grabs people and makes them change.

Paul goes on to ask, "How do you understand Christian growth?" v. 3, "Are you so foolish after beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal through human effort?"

Many people understand grace at the beginning of their Christian life. They say yes, it was all God. It was all His Spirit. It is all what He did. But now that I am a Christian, I don't live by grace anymore. I don't live by the power of the Spirit. Now it is up to me. I need to take it from here. For too many, there is great joy in Christian conversion and then great drudgery in the Christian life. They understood that the way in is faith, but they think the way on is human effort. Paul in v. 3 is saying something very profound. He is saying the way in *is* the way on. If you want to know how to grow in your Christian life, you have to examine the roots of your Christian life. How did you get in in the first place? That is how you are going to move on in your growth. The way in is the way on.

Now there is, I want to quickly point out, a difference between the way in and the way on. Conversion is essentially a passive process. Conversion is essentially something God does to you. The Spirit of God works in your heart sovereignly. You receive the benefits of the cross by faith. A person is essentially passive in conversion. You receive the gift of salvation and you are saved.

Christian growth demands activity. We need to make use of means of grace to grow. God gives these various channels. They are like pipes through which he pumps grace to us. He pours grace through the channels of our prayers. He pours grace through the channel of our Bible reading. He pours grace through fellowship with other Christians. He pours grace through our Christian service. There is an active activity in Christian growth that is not present in Christian conversion. But the similarities between the beginning of the Christian life and

the sustaining of the Christian life far outweigh any differences, so that it is appropriate to say essentially that the way in is the way on.

You say, "Rich, what are the similarities?"

Well, one similarity between conversion and growth is that we always come to God as permanent bankrupts. A few weeks ago I gave you the little illustration between being a temporary bankrupt and being a permanent bankrupt. I said that there are two kinds of bankruptcy. There is a temporary bankruptcy that is called Chapter 11 Reorganization, in which people seek some relief from the bankruptcy court temporarily when they can't pay their bills. They bring in new management. They reorganize the company. They spin out unprofitable divisions. And then they go back into business as an on-going concern. That is Chapter 11 Bankruptcy. They just seek relief for a temporary period of time from the pressure of paying their debts.

But then there is permanent bankruptcy, Chapter 7, which is liquidation. The company goes out of business. They shut off the lights and close the door. They hang out a sign, "out of business." If you called that company in the future, you are going to find that the phone line has been disconnected.

We come before God initially recognizing our need and our spiritual bankruptcy. We realize that we have nothing with which to merit any favor from God; that God owes us nothing, that we are screw-ups, that our lives are out of control, and that they are unmanageable and that we need to be saved. But you know, 20 years into the process and you come before God with the same attitude, today after 20 years of prayers I am still a screw up. My life without you is still unmanageable. This very day if you don't come through, I am bankrupted. See, we always want to say instead, "Now I've arrived, that problem I struggled with is done forever. I no longer am in danger of falling back on my face. I no longer am desperately in need of God's grace to be whole and holy.

You say, "Rich, how do you back up scripturally that after 20 years you are still bankrupt, especially after there have been changes in your life and you have morally improved and you are no longer doing a lot of the bad things you used to do?"

I want you to hear the apostle Paul's own testimony of his growth in 1 Timothy 1. The apostle Paul said this about himself after walking more intimately with Christ than virtually any man in history. He walked next to God for 35 years or so when he wrote these words. "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst." He doesn't say, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I used to be the worst." Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am currently one of the worst. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and my present perception is that I remain the worst. I still am spiritually bankrupt. I began the Christian life with an awesome realization of my sinfulness, my desperate need. I was a beggar in need of bread. I was a sick person in need of healing. I was a sinner in need of forgiveness. And this very day the apostle Paul says I am still a beggar in need of bread. I am still a sick person in need of healing. And I still am a sinner in need of forgiveness. I have

not arrived. If God doesn't give me today's portion of grace for today's problems, I'm doomed.

How do you get off the performance treadmill? You understand that the same need that drove you to Christ is still in your life. You are bankrupt and not only do you have the same need, but the same faith that justified you is the same faith that sanctified you. In other words, the faith that saved you is also the faith that you need to grow. I don't know if you realize this, friends, but you grow by faith just as you were saved by faith.

You say, "Rich, make this practical for me. What do you mean that I grow by faith?"

Well, you take any sin pattern in your life and the way you are going to move forward is exercising faith. Take for example the problem of anxiety. Let's say life events just regularly make you anxious. Your spouse is late for dinner and the only thought you have is that they are lying somewhere under a Mack truck. You have an exam coming up in a few days and the only thought you have is that you are certainly going to fail it. You are going to be thrown out of school and you will spend the rest of your life picking up pop cans on the side of the highway to make a living. You have to make a speech in front of a class or in front of a group and the only thought you have is how absolutely stupid everyone will think you are; how you will forget your whole talk. You regularly struggle with anxiety about your health, your bills, your kids, and the country. What is the one way forward?

Faith. Jesus says in Matthew 6:25, "For this reason I say to you do not be anxious for your life." And in verse 27, "Which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span?" In v. 31, "Do not be anxious saying what shall we eat." And then he goes on and says, "Do not be anxious for tomorrow."

What is the way out? Faith. If God sowed and raised the grass of the field, which is alive today, and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith? The way you fight anxieties is by exercising faith in God's promises. See, to be saved you have to believe in God's promise that anyone who comes to Jesus trusting in Him and His death on the cross and surrendering control to Him as Lord will be saved. And the same issue of faith, the same exercise of faith in God's promises liberates us from anxiety.

Do you believe in God's promise to provide for you? It is a fight. Do you believe that God will not give you more testing in a day than you can handle in that day? It is a fight. Do you believe that God will supply all of your needs as he promises to in Philippians 4:6? It is a fight. Do you believe in God's promise of care for you? Just as you had to believe in God's promise of salvation to start the Christian life, you have to believe in God's promise of provision and goodness in overcoming anxiety.

Let's say your problem is lust. You can overcome lust by faith. By faith, you have to believe that God is enough for you in this moment. That your fundamental need is not sexual, it is God. By faith, you have to believe that denying yourself something in the moment is worth it. That God will in the future, although you don't feel it now, but in the future God will give you peace that you

otherwise wouldn't have if you give into lust. By faith you believe that in the future God is going to give you a sense of his pleasure. By faith, you look forward and believe that God in the future is going to give you more spiritual power and presence, if you kill lust.

Every sin in our life is battled through by faith. You start the Christian life and continue the Christian life the same way. And it is the same grace. You were saved by grace and you grow by grace.

You say, "Rich, we don't grow by grace. We grow by our activity. We grow by praying. We grow by Bible reading."

I said at the outset that these are just means of grace, they are channels of grace. But you don't rely on the activity; you rely on the grace you are getting through the activity. Prayer, Bible reading, and fellowship – these are pipes through which God pumps water to your soul.

How do you get off the performance treadmill? You understand the process of Christian growth.

Finally, I think we get off the performance treadmill by understanding God's generosity. How do you understand God's generosity? Verse 5, the apostle Paul says, "Does God give you a Spirit and work miracles among you. Because you observe the law? Because you believe what you heard?"

The NIV, here again, is unfortunately translated. In v. 5 where the NIV says, "Does God give you his Spirit?" It literally should read, "Does God richly supply you with his Spirit and work miracles among you?"

Richly supply. Now it is very clear that Paul just assumed that all the churches he planted would be charismatic in the best sense of the word. That they would be places of spiritual experience and places that would often see signs and wonders and spiritual gifts flowing. Paul could not have imagined a non-charismatic church because in his mind the Spirit was richly supplied and miracles were happening in the church.

And the tense of the verbs here are very important. Paul uses the present tense when he says, "Does God give" or "Does God richly supply you". It is present tense. And to work miracles, he uses the present tense for work. The present tense in the Greek means a continuous activity. God supplied the Spirit in the past to you, but he continues to richly supply the Spirit. He did miracles among you in the past, the apostle Paul says, when I was there, but he continues to work miracles among you even in my absence.

Paul's churches were charismatic. The church at Thessalonica experienced prophecies and needed to test the prophetic and sift through it. Hold onto what was good and toss out what wasn't. The Corinthian church experienced spiritual gifts and so did the church at Ephesus. So did the Church in Rome.

Normal Christianity is filled with spiritual experiences and normal Christianity is filled with the rich supply of the Holy Spirit and signs and wonders, healings, deliverances, prophetic words, speaking in tongues.

What does all of this have to do with getting off the performance treadmill? Well, frankly, I think that much of our performance orientation is rooted in our fundamental view that God is stingy. That God is like Ebenezer Scrooge and that unless we beg, work and sweat, and get on our faces and chew the carpet,

fast for 40 days, God just won't give. He has to have His arm bent behind His back and His fingers pried open before He gives us anything. Part of Satan's bewitching of the church, part of the evil spell that he casts over people's minds is the continual lie that God is stingy, rather than abundantly gracious and extravagantly generous. And so you need to take over control or beg, and strive and sweat to get God to do anything.

Satan's very first temptation of mankind was based on the questioning of the goodness and generosity of God. Is God really good? If God is really good, would He deny you the fruit from that one tree that you want? Is God really good? If God is really good, why is He withholding from you the one pleasure that you really want? The one relationship you really desire? The one thing you have been asking for? So many folks have a poverty mentality before God that keeps them in chains and keeps them on this performance treadmill.

I read a story of a slave whose master died and left him an inheritance of \$50,000, which after the Civil War was an enormous sum of money. The slave was notified of his inheritance and told that the money was deposited in an account in the bank. After weeks went by the banker contacted the slave and explained to him that he had \$50,000 available to him in the account. Why wasn't he coming and collecting any of his money? The slave had no comprehension of what \$50,000 was. He finally said to the banker, "Well, sir, do you think I can have 50 cents to buy a sack of cornmeal?"

That is the way most Christians live before God. They have no comprehension of the super abundance of grace, the extraordinary generosity of God. We have no idea that we can ask God for enormous things without singing for our supper and performing and begging. But one of the main messages that God has communicated to us through the Bible is "I am generous. It is my nature to give."

Beginning way back in the book of Genesis, God put Adam and Eve in the Garden. Now many of us think that the main thing that was going on in the Garden was that God hung a sign around a really desirable tree and said, "Look at it, but don't eat it." That the Garden was a place of denial, of stinginess, of rules. But the Bible says that God put in the Garden all kinds of trees that were delightful to see and delightful to eat. The Garden of Eden was a display of the enormous generosity of God. Have you ever walked through a huge fruit market in the summer time and smelled the sweetness of the cantaloupes and melons and the peaches, plums and berries? Have you seen the huge strawberries? Well multiply that by a thousand fold and you will have a sense of the generosity of God – what they were looking at when they walked around the Garden.

God was generous in the Fall. He provided coverings for Adam and Eve. When you listen to Jesus describe God, he virtually always describes Him as extravagantly generous. Fear not, little children, it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. It gives God pleasure to give you stuff.

Jesus said, let me tell you what your Father in heaven is like. I know Him. He is the prodigal Father, the extravagant one, who just pours out forgiveness on the undeserving, who gives gifts to people who don't in any way merit those gifts. Listen to what the apostle John says about Jesus, "Jesus is full of grace and

truth.” In John 1:16 he says, “From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.”

Jerry Bridges in his book, *Transforming Grace, Living Confidently in God's Unfailing Love* writes this, “The idea portrayed in v. 16 is analogous to the ocean waves crashing upon the beach. One wave has hardly disappeared before another arrives. They keep coming from an inexhaustible supply. So it is with the grace of God through Christ. Christ is full of grace and truth and it is from His inexhaustible fullness that we receive one blessing upon another.”

One of the commentators writes that the meaning of “from the fullness of His grace we receive one blessing after another” is this, “believers are constantly receiving grace in the place of grace.” One manifestation of unmerited favor of God is hardly gone when another arrives. It's grace upon grace. There is a reservoir that never stops.

I want you to picture yourself right now standing along the ocean shore of a beautiful beach. You are looking out at the ocean and watching wave after wave roll in. That is grace.

It was grace that began the Christian life and on its heels is another wave of grace and another wave of grace, daily supplies of grace, grace in times of trial, grace when you are down, grace when you are up, grace when you are doing good, grace when you are doing bad, grace when you are hurting, grace when you are happy, grace when you are excited, grace when you are depressed.

Do you understand the generosity of God? Listen to your prayers. First of all, do you pray a lot? Because if you don't pray a lot basically you think life is meant to be lived with your own resources, based on your own effort, with you managing your world with you on the performance treadmill. If you believe in the generosity of God, you are going to pray a lot and you are going to pray enormous prayers believing that you cannot ever ask God for too much. There is really no prayer that is too big for God. You can't out ask God's generosity. I don't say that everything we ask for, we get. But we don't get denied because God is too stingy, because his grace is not big enough to handle our prayers. Do you believe in God's generosity? Listen to your prayers.

Do you believe in God's generosity? Listen to your worship? Do you frequently want to burst forth in praise to God? Or is worship a drudgery? Boring? When you come here to church is it at the end of a week of experiencing generosity so that from the opening gun you are ready to explode. I have been feeling wave upon wave. Or I am so tired of running on the performance treadmill that I come to church and can barely have the words of the songs drip down my chin.

Do you believe in God's generosity? Look at your response to relational struggle, trial and difficulties? Are you cast into despair or do you say, “God's grace is going to be sufficient for this too.” Do you say I am in a situation that defies a human solution? Great, “Now God will get a shot at it.” God frequently puts us into places and circumstances that we can't figure our way out of. He frequently tests us that way. Not so that you say to yourself, “God is always sending me problems that He never sends anyone else. Bad things always happen to me because God hates me.”

God wants me to trust Him in the midst of everything that happens in my life. God wants to show you that He is absolutely trustworthy. That He is absolutely generous. That He is absolutely capable for any problem, for any one of your needs, for any situation, for any trouble. Paul is saying, "God is with you Galatians. God is with you, performance oriented, Christian. You can rely on Him."

I want to pray for two groups of you.

There are some of you who see the symptoms of running on the performance treadmill and have perhaps recognized it for years. There's exhaustion, compulsive activity, extreme need to excel at everything, resentment when you serve and people pleasing. God wants to take you off this demonic trap to bring you back to the beginning: Bible reading, faith, grace and God's generosity.

Others who identified with that 12-inch gap I spoke of, you feel like a head-Christian and you long for God's touch.