

The Greatest Grace

The greatest grace I ever received came during Marine Corps boot camp.

Shortly after starting boot camp, I was selected as **Guide** for the platoon. I was very proud of that. I also understood the responsibility that came with it. The Guide was expected to keep the platoon functioning properly and to set the standard. I worked diligently to keep that position and to make sure the platoon stayed squared away.

One of the worst things that could happen in boot camp was when someone left their rifle unlocked.

You would enter the squad bay and go to retrieve your rifle from the rack. If you reached for it and it wasn't there, your heart would sink immediately. That meant the **drill instructors** had your rifle.

Which meant a trip to **MOTO**.

MOTO was short for a **Motivation Period**.

As we marched around the depot, we would sometimes see MOTO taking place. Usually it was in a sandlot with trenches. The recruits there were not wearing utilities but sweatpants and sweatshirts. Five-gallon buckets would be placed in a circle, and eight or nine recruits would be inside that circle.

Surrounding them would be eight or nine drill instructors.

They were always screaming in their faces, spraying them with hoses. The recruits' job all day long was to endure verbal and physical punishment. They would pick up five-gallon buckets of sand and put them back down over and over. They would wallow in the sand while being sprayed with water.

Their skin would become raw and chafed. The weight of wet clothing and sand covering them added what felt like thirty pounds to their bodies.

It was a miserable, horrible scenario.

We could never look directly at it. As we marched by, our eyes were always fixed straight ahead. But out of the corner of your eye, in your peripheral vision, you could see enough to know exactly what was happening.

In my heart I was always thankful I never had to endure that.

And I could never understand why someone would be so stubborn, so defiant, or so careless that they would do something requiring a trip

to motivation.

Then one day, about six weeks into training, I came into the squad bay and went to retrieve my rifle. We were getting ready to go to drill.

I ran over to the rifle rack.

It was missing.

My heart sank. I cannot describe all the emotion that rushed through me at that moment. My mind immediately began racing.

How could this be? I know I locked the rifle.

About that time I heard the command:

"Guide! Get your sorry butt in here!"

I ran up to the duty hut, pounded three times on the bulkhead, and requested permission to enter.

When I stepped inside, the drill instructor held up the rifle.

"Is this your rifle?"

"Sir, yes sir!"

"But why do I have your rifle in my hand, you scummy recruit?"

"Sir, the Guide obviously made a mistake. He knows he locked the rifle and secured it, but apparently forgot to spin the lock, securing the lock so it could not be pulled open."

He looked at me for a moment. He knew I always tried hard and did my best to stay squared away.

Then he said something I did not expect.

"Well, you have a choice. You can go to MOTO tomorrow, or you can punish yourself. What do you want to do?"

"Sir, the Guide requests permission to punish himself, sir!"

"Get out of my face."

I snapped about face, ran out of the hatch, dropped in front of the hatch, and began doing push-ups and bending thrusts.

For the next three and a half hours I punished myself as efficiently as I possibly could.

A puddle of sweat formed beneath me. The rest of the platoon had gone out to drill while I remained there. I just continued to punish myself.

Finally, three and a half hours later, the drill instructor walked outside.

He looked down at me.

"Do you feel you were significantly punished?"

"Sir, the Guide does feel so, sir."

Then he said something I have never forgotten.

"You cannot afford mistakes in the Marine Corps. Mistakes cost lives. You can never take anything for granted."

That lesson stayed with me forever.

But the real lesson that day wasn't simply that I had to lock that rifle properly because lives depended on it.

The true lesson was about ****grace****.

I could have been sent to MOTO. My armband could have been ripped off at that very moment. Instead, they saw something in me. They saw effort. They saw someone trying.

And that effort earned me grace.

Some people might say, "How is that grace? You punished yourself. It was hard."

Yes, it was hard.

But I did not go to MOTO.

There are always consequences for mistakes. But by God's grace, ****He chooses the outcome****.

Grace is not a get-out-of-jail-free card.

Grace is when the Lord sees the condition of your heart. You messed up, but you are repentant and sorrowful. He knows whether your heart is right.

Never look at grace as something to slide by on or something you can count on to escape consequences.

Grace is something far more serious than that.

Grace is when you find favor in the Lord's eyes.

And when you receive it, you honor it, respect it, and never forget it.

Nuggets of Wisdom

- Responsibility means owning your mistakes without excuses.
- Effort matters. When people see sincere effort and an honest heart, mercy sometimes follows.
- Grace does not remove consequences. It changes the outcome of them.
- Never treat grace lightly. If you receive it, live in a way that proves you understood it.

Proverbs

Proverbs 3:3-4

"Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:
So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man."

Proverbs 28:13

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

Proverbs 16:6

"By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil."