

I. Introduction

- A. This quality called GRIT wears a thousand faces.
 - 1. It's the toughness of a fighter in the UFC.
 - 2. It's the warmth of a parent feeding a newborn in the cold, dark night.
 - 3. The rapture of an accomplished musician.
 - 4. The satisfaction of a hard working gardener.
 - 5. The determination of a lawyer arguing a case.
 - 6. The wrinkled nose of a child focused on catching a lizard.
- B. GRIT, toughness, moral fiber, nerve, resolve, bravery, tenacity, guts, steel... It's not the size of your muscles, it's the size of your heart.
- C. Life is beautiful. Life is good. Life offers wonders, and gifts, and pleasures, and joy.
- D. But life is hard too. Tough times come. And it takes tough people to face them. This fallen world is a morally broken pain machine. It's damaged by the fall. It's cursed. It's in a state of perpetual war. The powers of darkness fret and fume and stretch their tentacles into every part of society.
- E. There's a battle going on, and you're in the crosshairs. And that's rough, because, the human heart is a finely tuned hope machine.
- F. The world is a morally broken pain machine, and you, the little hope machine that could, are stuck inside it.
 - 1. You'll need this GRIT, this toughness, this steel in your backbone to not get defeated.
 - 2. You'll need this GRIT to stand tall and strong.
 - a) Welcome to our tenth and final part of our summer series called Grit. I'm really going to miss this journey with you.

II. G.R.I.T.

- A. G.R.I.T.
 - 1. *Grace Revealed In Trials*
 - 2. *G.R.I.T. is the spiritual toughness to face the tyrants that would steal your dominion and the faith to crush them with supernatural weapons of grace.*
- B. When our story began, the nation was at a low point. The Pain Machine was ascendant. Elijah, the burly mountain man, bursts on the scene out of nowhere.
- C. He faces down evil. He confronts the wicked King and Queen. Elijah takes his stand against the demons hiding behind carved statues of wood and stone, and declares there can be no compromise between light and darkness... one must drive out the other.
- D. All hell broke loose. Elijah went into hiding. The flying monkeys of Queen Jezebel scoured the parched earth for him. Elijah hid for three and a half years. He provided oil for a widow, and raised her son back from the dead.
- E. Then, in one of the most dramatic scenes in all of Scripture, he called for a contest of the gods on Mt. Carmel. God sent down fire from heaven, and did freely with a shrug what 450 priests of Baal couldn't do in a full day of dancing and self-sacrifice.
- F. And the heavens opened and the rain fell.
- G. And as high as his emotions flew that day is as low as they sank the next. Elijah was weary of the Pain Machine. He wanted to check out. He asked God to take his life.
 - 1. And God strengthened him.
 - 2. And God gave him help... Elijah received a helper named Elisha.
- H. And now, the school of GRIT would soon receive a new dean.
- I. For fourteen years (estimated), Elijah and Elisha travelled together. They built a college, with branches in many cities, called the School of the Prophets. They trained in theology and Scripture. They fanned the flames of love between the invisible Creator God of Heaven, and his followers here on earth.
- J. But now, his fuel has burned out. His GRIT has all been spent.
- K. So, somehow — we don't know how — God has sent word that Elijah's mission will soon be done. He's been summoned to heaven's headquarters to receive his everlasting reward.
- L. Elisha knows it. And word has spread... so everybody knows it.
- M. But they don't know when, and they don't know how, and that is where we pick up the story for today.
- N. Will you please think with me today on the topic Future Grace.

III. *And it came to pass, when the LORD was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they went down to Bethel. Now the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent!" (2 Kings 2:1-3, NKJV).*

- A. The opening sentence should come with a spoiler alert. It is a summary sentence. It's how the Old Testament likes to tell stories. Sum it up first, and then tell the story.
- B. So what is the story in a sentence?
 - 1. That God will take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind.
 - a) The word can mean a tornado, a hurricane, or a tempest. We have no detail yet, but we are given the end of the story at the beginning of the story.
- C. Elijah, and Elisha, however, do not yet know this. As readers, we know the end of the story. We know more than the characters in the story.
 - 1. And that is exactly the same for all our lives.
- D. And that is the first future grace lesson I want to lay out for us today.
 - 1. *1. Your journey toward future grace is already mapped out by God.*

- E. The end of your story has already been told, and it's incredible. You just don't know it yet. You're still on earth, slogging through swamps, finding what joy you can, living by faith, not by sight... You're still down here, rising above the Pain Machine.
- F. But God has already written the end of your story.
- G. It is glorious.
 - 1. It is you, being taken up to heaven when God sees fit, how God sees fit, and by whatever transportation vehicle he chooses.
 - 2. It is not random. It is not chance. We do not believe in luck or fate.
- H. We believe in a God who shepherds the cosmos, a Father who knows our name, a Savior who makes us fit for his presence, and a Spirit who makes us whole.
- I. Life will throw you twists and turns, but the destination is assured.
- J. Tomorrow might be a rough day, but if you have Jesus you're heading to a mind-blowingly rich eternity.
 - 1. And all your tomorrows serve a purpose for the sake of that eternity, but I'm getting ahead.
- K. So the summary sentence is a spoiler... God will take Elijah to heaven by a whirlwind.
- L. But now, Elijah has to travel. He suggests Elisha stay behind.
- M. Elisha, his best friend, and helper, and intern, and succession plan all rolled into one, refuses. He swears an oath. I will not leave you.
- N. They travel from Gilgal to Bethel.
- O. There, the seminary students crowd around them. One whispers to Elisha, you know God is taking Elijah away today.
- P. Elisha looks at him and says, (pardon my language, but it fits), "Shut up."
- IV. *Then Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they came to Jericho. Now the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho came to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" So he answered, "Yes, I know; keep silent!" (2 Kings 2:4, 5, NKJV).*
 - A. Does this sound familiar?
 - B. From Gilgal to Bethel, phase one. Now, from Bethel to Jericho, phase two.
 - C. This is the second time Elijah suggests Elisha stay behind. We don't know why. Maybe he doesn't want Elisha to see him die. He wants to spare is spiritual son that pain. Maybe God is giving them time to process.
 - D. Maybe Elijah just wants to be alone in those final hours.
 - E. Or maybe, just maybe, Elijah is testing Elisha. How independent are you? Are you ready to stand on your own two feet? Are you ready to face the world without me at your side?
 - F. The Bible doesn't say.
 - G. But Elisha won't let Elijah shake him off. This is the second time Elisha swears an oath to not leave Elijah's side. But he can't delay forever.
 - 1. 2. *Your journey toward future grace requires letting go of present grace.*
 - H. This letting go is painful.
 - 1. When Vern Retired
 - a) Last time, I told the story of how I became a pastor. Here's a little more of that story.
 - b) It was a December day, I was getting ready to go to work. I worked in a grocery store. I was a produce clerk — an expert at pulling moldy oranges out of the bag, and at picking out which pineapple was ripe (use your nose and smell them).
 - c) The phone rang. It was a man named Vern Benner. Vern ran the biggest Awana clubs in the country (clubs for boys and girls to teach them the Bible). We were friends. I attended a different church, where I ran Awana clubs on Tuesday. I was 20 years old, and wanted to learn how to do this better. So I had been visiting Vern's Awana clubs, and just tagging along and hanging out, and learning what I could learn.
 - d) Vern asked me to quit my job, and to come and work full time with him, and be his co-pastor, he said.
 - e) I had been wandering aimlessly while avoiding the whole pastor gig.
 - f) But finally I was ready and I said yes, and I became a pastor.
 - g) And I learned a lot, and God used me. But I always leaned on Vern. He was a mentor to me. A father figure to me. He and his wife, Ruth, took care of me when I was sick. They fed me when I was lonely.
 - h) I was a young, insecure, rookie pastor, and I needed Vern to show me the ropes.
 - i) What I didn't know was that I was Vern's succession plan.
 - j) A year after I started, Vern came to me and said, "Bill, I want you to know, I'm going to retire in a few months. I've already talked to the board, and you're going to replace me."
 - k) Inside, I felt panic.
 - l) But I also felt loss.
 - m) "I can't do this without you, Vern."
 - n) He just smiled.
 - o) "I'm not leaving you, I said."
 - p) "No," he said. "I'm leaving you. You're ready."
 - I. The journey of future grace involves letting go of present grace. I quit my high paying job, and went to work full time for \$125 per week.
 - 1. That letting go has a name: faith.
 - a) Because present grace can sometimes grow so comfortable, you stop being stretched. Stop being challenged.
 - b) And when you stop being challenged in the arena of present grace, something happens to your future:
 - (1) You stop expanding your capacity for eternal reward.

- J. Every tough time you face on earth, expands your capacity for grace in heaven. Future grace is a function of present grace, and present grace is a function of going beyond your human resources.
- V. *Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So the two of them went on. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood facing them at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. (2 Kings 2:6, 7, NKJV).*
- A. From Gilgal to Bethel, phase one. From Bethel to Jericho, phase two. From Jericho to the Jordan River, phase three.
 - B. Stay behind, Elisha.
 - C. No, Elijah. I will not leave you. I swear it.
 - D. Now, there's a crowd. Fifty men of the sons of the prophets. The whole seminary turns out. Elijah and Elisha are standing by the Jordan River. They love him. They will miss him.
 - E. Maybe they are curious. Maybe he's their hero and they're starstruck. Maybe they're just bored.
 - F. Our Scripture doesn't say, and I think that is wise.
 - G. Because there's a world watching you... and you don't live for what they think. You live for higher purposes than other people's opinion.
- VI. *Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. (2 Kings 2:8, NKJV).*
- A. A long, long time ago, the children of Israel crossed the Jordan river in exactly the same way.
 - B. And ever since Elijah did it, crossing the Jordan has been a phrase for winging your way to heaven.
 - 1. 3. *Your journey toward future grace anchors you to realities beyond this present age.*
 - C. This space-time continuum, this world of matter and energy, or physics and chemistry, this universe of innumerable planets and stars and galaxies is only a tiny fragment of the reality God has created.
 - D. There is another realm, and another continuum — a spiritual realm. One where the laws of this natural world can be suspended, and a river can be parted, at ravens can be commanded, and fire can fall from heaven.
 - E. There is a realm where God sits on his throne and angels do his bidding.
 - F. And in that realm, you have a home. You were made for that place. Your truest life is there.
 - 1. That is where your treasure is.
 - 2. That is where your wholeness is.
 - 3. That is where your future grace is piled up with pleasures to last forever.
 - G. How long is the timeline of your life?
 - 1. Seventy, eighty, ninety, a hundred years?
 - H. If that's all you can see, then every trial is an emergency. You are losing precious time, ticking away, wasted on hardship and pain.
 - I. But if you see a larger life, if you believe in a heavenly realm, then you have a timeline that stretches beyond the Jordan into a time where time stands still...
- VII. *And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." So he said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." (2 Kings 2:9, 10, NKJV).*
- A. What may I do for you before I am taken away from you? One last request, Elisha. What do you want from me?
 - B. Not money. Not power. Not title. Not prestige. Not possessions. Not fame. Not glory.
 - C. Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.
 - 1. Your heart for God.
 - 2. Times two.
 - a) 4. *Your journey toward future grace redefines what you value most.*
 - D. Jesus said, where your heart is, there your treasure will be also. He counseled you to not focus on laying up treasures on earth... but he said to lay up treasures in heaven.
 - E. Because that's the only treasure bankers can't repossess and politicians can't tax.
 - F. Elijah was so focused on future grace, he was ruined for the ordinary.
 - G. Elisha caught that same bug. I want to continue doing what you've been doing. But I want to build upon it. I want to do it better. I want a double portion, your heart for God times two.
 - H. And Elijah says the truth; what you ask is a hard thing.
 - I. Not hard to give, but hard to grow into.
 - J. Just look at the battle scars of any wounded warrior, in any profession, in any field, in any household... and ask what it took to develop that kind of courage, and maturity, and poise, and wisdom and grit.
 - K. Give me what you have, people say.
 - L. And anybody with an ounce of tested maturity and grit can only say, What you ask is a hard thing.
 - M. But it's a good thing too, Elisha. If you have the guts to stick with me, you have the guts to continue my mission.
- VIII. *Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. (2 Kings 2:11, NKJV).*
- A. You thought it was weird when the Jordan River parted. This is where it gets really weird.
 - B. But there's something huge here I never saw before.
 - C. Don't answer out loud, but what is it that takes Elijah up to heaven?
 - D. Before this week, I would say, chariots of fire with horses of fire. Elijah had a flash finish.
 - E. But look carefully at the verse. At the sentence itself. What is it that carries Elijah into heaven? Say it out loud.
 - 1. A *whirlwind* — which is exactly what the story said at the beginning.

- F. What do the chariots and horses of fire do here? Look at the verse.
 - 1. They *separate* Elijah from Elisha.
- G. The picture I've had since I was a kid is that chariots of fire come down from heaven, pick up Elijah, turn around, and head back to heaven. I've seen that in pictures. I've seen that in flannel-graphs. I've seen that in every kids book that has ever told this story.
- H. But what if that's not quite right?
- I. What if the chariots and horses of fire didn't come down from heaven to pick up Elijah? What if they didn't come down at all?
- J. What if they'd been with Elisha and Elijah all along. And now God, for a brief moment, lifts the veil that separates this visible realm from the invisible spiritual realm, and lets Elisha see the celestial host, the heavenly bodyguard, the fiery Secret Service that has been protecting him all along?
- K. And what if the real takeaway is that you've got an armed force from heaven's throne to protect your journey to future grace every step of the way?
- L. In case you scratch your head and think I'm making stuff up, peek ahead to 2 Kings 6. Because there, an army comes to get Elisha... to kill him. His servant freaks out. But Elisha says:
 - 1. *So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (2 Kings 6:16, 17, NKJV).*
- M. Those horses and chariots of fire weren't a temporary transportation squad.
 - 1. They were a permanent protection squad.
- N. And those same guardians are watching over you round the clock. (Check out Hebrews 1:14 and Matthew 18:10).
 - 1. *5. Your journey toward future grace is guarded by the power of God to maximize reward in heaven, and to bring you safely home at last.*
- O. What is GRIT?
 - 1. Grit is the ability to redefine pain from the standpoint of future grace.
 - 2. Grit is the willingness to reframe difficulties from the standpoint of future grace.
 - 3. Grit is the faith to repurpose heartbreak from the standpoint of future grace.
- P. Grit is the hard won, hard fought wisdom, maturity, and faith, to fast forward the story of your life, and to see the whole thing from the perspective of the final chapter.
- Q. Here's how that goes down:
 - 1. *Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18, NKJV).*
 - a) Therefore, we do not lose heart... that's grit.
 - b) Even though our outward man is perishing... the pain machine is grinding us up.
 - c) Yet the inward man is being renewed day by day... the hope machine still keeps going.
 - d) For our light affliction... sufferings, and trials, and hardships, and pain, and tears, and heartache, and loss, and dysfunction, and addiction, and illness, and death...
 - e) which is but for a moment... you can only call it light, and you can only call it for a moment if you are living with eternity in view.
 - f) is working for us a are more exceeding and eternal weight of glory... future grace on steroids. Rewards in heaven you would not have had if you had not gone through that trial on earth.
 - g) while we do not look at the things which are seen... we have adjusted the focus length of our lens to sharpen the focus beyond the horizon of time.
 - h) But on things which are not seen... the invisible realm, and the promises of eternal future grace where you will say, It was worth it all.
 - i) For the things which are seen are temporary... this realm and all its successes.
 - j) But the things which are not seen are eternal... the heavenly rewards of future grace.
- IX. Grit Basic Training
 - B. The chariots and angels of fire are there for you. They are not there to ward off difficulty and to give you victory every time you prayer.
 - 1. They are there to prevent you from giving up in times of difficulty.
 - C. Because they know, your trials produce a mountain of grace for you in heaven.
 - 1. Grit is the ability to redefine pain from the standpoint of future grace.
 - 2. Grit is the willingness to reframe difficulties from the standpoint of future grace.
 - 3. Grit is the faith to repurpose heartbreak from the standpoint of future grace.
 - D. A far more eternal and exceeding weight of glory.
 - 1. This fallen world is a morally broken pain machine.
 - 2. The human heart is a finely tuned hope machine.
 - 3. The whole of creation is God's all powerful grace machine, and the grace machine wins in the end.
 - E. There's your inheritance.
 - F. And there's where you find yourself.
 - G. And there's your true and lasting treasure.