

Grace Happens: Ultimate Grace **May 24, 2020**

Overarching theme: In 2020, FUMC will be a **Go** church!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasis in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

Letter to the Thessalonians:

The letter to the Thessalonians has widely been believed to be written by Paul due to style and content. It was written sometime around 51 A.D. The city of Thessalonica was a thriving seaport city on the north side of the Aegean Sea between the cities of Philippi and Berea. As a seaport city, it was a cultural and trade center, while being the largest city in Macedonia and the capital of its province. For background on Thessalonica, reference Acts 17:1-7 which describes Paul's association to the city and church. Paul's passage and association with the city was held suspect by the Jewish religious leaders. Paul's themes in the letter are centered around encouragement to be faithful to God and be watchful of Christ's return.

Reflect on this Scripture:

1 Thessalonians 5:14-24 (NRSV)

¹⁴ And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. ¹⁵ See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise the words of prophets, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²² abstain from every form of evil. ²³ May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

Questions to ponder about the passages:

What jumps out at you from these passages?

So, bottom line, what do you get out of these passages?

What are the activities Paul is encouraging the readers to do?

What are the activities Paul is encouraging the readers not to do?

What would you say the overarching principle Paul is trying to say?

What do you think "Do not quench the Spirit" means?

What do you think "but test everything" means?

Commentary:

For another week, we continue on our journey to learn about grace. For United Methodists and John Wesley, "Grace" and its forms are the hallmark of our theology. John Wesley outlined three aspects of grace in his sermon on "The Way of Salvation." The Book of Discipline 2016, Part III Doctrinal Standards, paragraph 102. Section 1, highlights the three aspects of grace in the salvation process. For the next several weeks, we will be focusing on these three aspects of grace: Prevenient, Justifying, and Sanctifying.

Three weeks ago, we focused on God's prevenient grace. The meaning of prevenient in Bing's online dictionary is "preceding in time or order; antecedent." The term prevenient comes from a Latin word that meant "to come before, to anticipate." Consequently, prevenient before the word "grace" means, a grace that comes before. You may ask, before what? Well, it is the grace of God, or the work of God, that acts in every person's life before a person even understands and accepts the reality of God's power working on their behalf.

Both of our scriptures from last week highlighted the idea that God was at work before we even knew it. In the Gospel of John, Jesus was described as one who was part of the Godhead from the beginning as the "Word." Christ did not just come into existence upon his earthly birth, but was from the beginning. God was already working in creation to the culmination of Christ Jesus' death and resurrection for the salvation of the world. The Gospel of John also describes Christ Jesus as a light. Jesus was the light that would enlighten all mankind to God's love, grace, and redemption.

In Ephesians, we find that we all were dead in our transgressions, or sin, before knowing God in Christ. The great thing is that God already started to work on our behalf, even though we were dead in our transgressions, to bring about a way that would lead us to salvation and into a relationship with the creator God. God's work in our lives that leads us to the door of salvation, before we understand it and accept it, is prevenient grace. Our transgressions separated us from God, but by accepting the work of God in Christ, we have forgiveness of our transgressions and a new relationship with God. The work of prevenient grace is stage one.

John Wesley used the image of the house of God to illustrate grace in the process of salvation. Before anyone can enter the house of God through the door to make residence, one must step on the porch, which is the place of God's prevenient grace. It is the place where God is at work before a person understands it. A place in which God is working to lead a person to the door of salvation, or committed relationship. It is the place where the light of Christ shines as a way to light the path to salvation. The light shines into the darkness of life as a beacon of God's love and grace.

Two weeks ago, we focused on God's Justifying Grace.

Continuing with our house of God illustration, God's grace works on people standing on the porch before they even know it, while having been attracted by the porch light of Christ shining in the darkness of mankind's self-centeredness, or sin. It is on the porch, while facing the door, that God's convicting grace works on the heart of the individual to want to change their self-centeredness, or sinful ways. It is at the door that the convicted person realizes the distance between God and him/herself cannot be crossed by personal performance, or adherence to a particular law. The person's relationship to God can only be made right, or repaired by accepting the gift of God's grace through Christ's death, and resurrection. What does that mean? Well, like Christ, we all must die to, or put away, the self-centeredness, or sin, that has led us away from God. In the act of Christ's death on the cross, he took all sin upon himself, so that sin would not reign over us any longer. In the power of the resurrection of Christ, a person is raised up into the newness of life with God in right relationship. Through the act of repentance, sin is forgiven, and relationship is restored as the person lives in the faith founded in what Christ did and will do. When one accepts what Christ has done and lives into it, that is the act of turning the knob on the door to walk into the house of God. The opening of the door to enter the house of God symbolizes God's Justifying Grace, or Pardoning Grace.

As you heard Pastor Tom say in the sermon:

"Convicting Grace opens our eyes to our selfishness and we then repent."

"That change of heart (repentance) can lead us to the door of grace in the house of salvation... Wesley called this Justifying Grace (or Pardoning Grace). In which we access the door through the faithfulness and forgiveness of Christ and stand inside the peace-filled house by his grace."

Last week, we focused on God's Sanctifying Grace.

Continuing with our house of God illustration, God's grace works on people as they enter into the house of God and take residence, through the rest of life, as a Christian. Living in the house of God and committing to regular spiritual activities helps people to draw closer to God and grow in God's righteous. You are not to grow in self-righteousness, which is ego-centric and performed out one's own

strength, but in God's righteousness that comes through our regular spiritual activities founded in God's Spirit in each of us. As a Christian, we spend a lifetime growing in grace as we love God and other people, while practicing the ways of Christ Jesus. Sanctifying, or Sanctification, in the New Testament is the Greek word, *hagiosmos*, which means to "set apart" as in sacredness to God service. It also can be described as "set apart" for holiness. So, when you walked through that door of justification, having experienced salvation in Christ, you then started a pilgrimage into growing in holiness for the rest of your life. Sanctification is the everyday process of maturing in the faith, or some say, moving toward perfection. However you want to say it, simply put, you and the Holy Spirit are the drivers in living more like Christ under the sanctifying grace of God's activity in developing maturity of faith.

The final question for us all is, "How are you going to willingly participate with the Holy Spirit to develop your maturity in the faith and practice as you live the rest of your life in the metaphoric house of God as a Christian?"

This week, we focus on God's Ultimate Grace.

Grace is a powerful thing in the lives of people who have faltered before God and others. Grace, and the forgiveness that comes through Christ in reconciling one's relationship to God and others, allows the release of guilt and the start of a new beginning. Grace, practiced in love and hope, changes lives for God in the midst of a counter-culture that can seek to damage, break, batter, and destroy the self-image and spirit of an individual. By attending to the spiritual practices found in scripture, for our purposes today, 1 Thessalonians, you can be helping people accept and live into the Ultimate Grace of God's dynamic work that spiritually saves the life of another person. John Wesley, encouraged his followers to Do No Harm, Do Good, and Practice the Ordinances. The ordinances would be praying, fasting, attending worship, and others. Practicing the ordinances helps you stay connected to God, but also helps foster the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells within you. That power, that I spoke of last week, gives you the strength to develop in God's righteousness. The ego is minimized, while God's power is maximized in you. So, when John Wesley encouraged people to Do No Harm, Do Good, and Practice the ordinances, he was encouraging Christ followers to tap into the ultimate grace of God's power through the holy spirit in order to be able to practice what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5. By doing this, as Paul wrote in verses 23-24, God will sanctify you entirely, you will be sound and blameless, and live in the grace of the God who is faithful to do as said.

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

In these passages, what is the main practical lesson you get from it?

How can we describe God's grace in these scriptures?

What do you see is God's ultimate grace?

What spiritual practices do you need to work on?

Out of what Paul wrote in the scriptures, what do you need to work on?

How can you foster the power of God Spirit in you?

How can you be known as an encourager?

Activity of for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week:
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NRSV) - "¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."
3. Focus on praying and giving thanks as you travel on your journey this week.