

John 1:14-18 - Experience Grace: Needing to be Near Jesus

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Amen. Turn with me, if you will, to John chapter 1. John 1 will be on the screen behind me or on page 886 of the Bible in the pew in front of you, if you want to follow along there.

The new year is a great time to examine some of your core commitments, isn't it? Some of the values that are foundational to who you are as a person or as a church as well.

It's an important thing for us corporately to do. As a church that seeks to see God's kingdom advanced, Southwood's particular mission statement is to experience and express grace.

If you've been here a little while, you've probably heard or read that somewhere. We tend to talk about it quite a bit. But it's only helpful to us if we actually know what we mean.

[1 : 08] It's cute to be able to say something like that, but if you don't know what you mean, when you say it, it doesn't help you very much, does it? I mentioned earlier that next weekend is our Express Grace Conference.

So the second half of Experience and Express Grace, we're going to talk a lot about next weekend to focus on what it means for us to share God's goodness with others, with those around us.

But I thought this morning we would look for a few minutes at what we mean when we say experience grace, the first part of the mission statement. Experience grace.

Is that something that happens in some kind of out-of-body, mountaintop experience? I have this experience of grace and I don't even know what happened. How often does it happen?

How would I know if I've experienced grace? What's it all about? And there are a lot of angles we could take on that, but this morning I want to look at John 1, beginning at verse 14.

[2 : 08] And we'll read a few verses here and then talk about the experience of God's grace together from this passage and a few others as well. God's holy word in John 1, where John has up to this point introduced the word of God, who has been with God since before time began.

And John says he is in fact truly God himself. Then in verse 14 he says this about the word. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness about him and cried out, This was he of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks before me because he was before me.

And from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God.

The only God who is at the Father's side, He has made him known. Will you pray with me? Father, our desire as we have rejoiced this morning in your love for us is that we would know you more.

[3 : 28] We want to know more of who you are and what you are like, of the things that you love and the desires you have for us. And we rejoice that Jesus is the one who has made you known to us.

Who has been the perfect image of God in the flesh. Who has made the Father we have not seen known to us. And so as we open your word this morning, would we see him clearly.

Would we know more of who you are and of what your heart is for us from your word. Would you teach us by your spirit, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

When I say kindness, whose face pops into your mind? Is there someone you know who oozes the sugary sweetness and you feel like when you've left a conversation with that person, you've just experienced the essence of kindness.

The kindest person I've ever met. What if I said prideful? Or stuck up? Or snooty? Would you have a different face come to mind? Does somebody else pop into your head?

[4 : 41] He's everything that's wrong with people who think that they're wonderful and amazing and drive me crazy. His face pops into my mind. The essence of pride and arrogance.

When we talk about grace, we don't merely mean an abstract theological concept. That something we would vaguely sense or experience in some unusual way.

Rather, we're talking about a person. The word become flesh. Jesus himself. Jesus is described here in verse 14 as full of grace and truth.

And he's so full of grace that from his fullness, the very essence of who he is and his character, overflows to us what? Grace upon grace.

Like they were just singing for us. From who Jesus is, that's what oozes out of him. Another version translates this verse. Grace upon grace. From the fullness of his grace, we have all received one blessing after another.

[5 : 47] One blessing after another. Grace upon grace from Jesus. In fact, the grace of God in the flesh, right? Where God gave his people the good gift of the law through Moses.

Grace upon grace. And then he sent in the very person of Jesus his grace again. Grace in the flesh. Grace is God's goodness and favor that we could never deserve or earn.

But that Jesus embodied and brought to us when he took on flesh. His coming to us brought grace to us. Grace. Grace. Grace. So grace then is a person.

It's a person who in the first chapter of John's gospel alone, if you just read through the rest of this chapter, we find out he did many things for us that we could never deserve or earn.

He brought light into our darkness. Made those of us who were God's enemies his children. That's grace. He accomplished what mankind had failed to do for centuries in living a life of obedience to God.

[6 : 53] And he also died for the sins of the world. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. That's grace. So when we talk about experiencing grace, it's not just some mystical intangible concept.

We're talking about being near Jesus. He himself is grace. And it overflows from him to us over and over.

Grace upon grace. And that's actually the idea that this passage has and that is in many other places in the Scripture. That we don't just need a quick exposure to Jesus.

A one-time dose of grace that fixes us forever. However, this passage and many others teach that we live all our lives in moment-by-moment dependence on the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

That's why we say our mission is to experience grace. That's where we start. Not that we would have a goal of one day, someday, maybe finally experiencing God's grace for the first time.

[8 : 04] But that every day, not just once, not once in the future, not once in the past, but every day present, I need to experience His amazing grace to me.

To be overwhelmed by the kindness and favor of God poured into my life in ways I could never earn or deserve. I need to be filled and fueled by the grace of Jesus.

By God's unending and undeserving love for me. That's what the Bible says it means to continue to live in Christ. Experiencing His grace.

And that seems pretty simple to say that experiencing grace is just be near Jesus and grace overflows into you. Just be near Jesus.

Why don't we find ourselves drinking from that fountain, so to speak, more regularly? Why is it not your experience and my experience that I'm constantly being filled up and fueled and driven and every thought shaped by the amazing love that God has for me in Jesus?

[9 : 18] Why is that not the way we live all the time? I think one primary reason is that we don't always feel and remember our need to be near Jesus.

Here's a definition for experiencing grace you can write down if you want. Constant needs constantly met in Christ. It's not real complicated.

I don't intend it to be profound. But think of people who clearly experience the grace of Jesus during His earthly ministry. Over and over again, these are people who have very clear needs that Jesus meets with His grace.

Think of blind Bartimaeus in Mark chapter 10 who stands by the side of the road and hears Jesus is coming down the road and cries out, Son of David, have mercy on me!

And Jesus stops and comes over and asks him, What do you want me to do for you? And the grace of Jesus overflows to Bartimaeus and he receives His sight, doesn't he?

[10:22] Think of the sinful woman in Luke 7 who's so aware of her need for forgiveness that she comes to be near Jesus and sit at His feet.

She does more than that. She pours expensive perfume on Him and wipes His feet with her hair as she cries over Him. And grace overflows to her as Jesus tells her what?

Your sins are forgiven. Think of the paralytic in Mark chapter 2. You may have heard the story in Sunday school. He's so desperate to be near Jesus that when he can't get in the house, what do his friends do for him?

They take him outside, they climb up, cut a hole in the roof and lower him down right in front of Jesus. And the grace of Jesus overflows to him and Jesus says, your sins are forgiven and He heals His body.

Constant needs, constantly met in Christ. All of these, and there are many others we could cite, all of these people are deeply aware of their need for Jesus, aren't they?

[11:28] They know that they need Him. They know they're desperate. A blind man, a sinful woman, a paralytic, desperate to be near Jesus.

So here's the point for us. You won't experience grace to meet your needs if you don't have any.

You won't experience grace to forgive your sin if you don't have any.

You won't experience grace for your failures if you don't have any. You won't experience grace to give direction in your confusion if you never have any. You won't experience grace to be sufficient in your weakness if you don't have any.

Do you regularly think of yourself as needy? Sinful? Confused? Weak?

Is that how you think of yourself? Is your relationship with God one in which you're constantly telling Him how much you need His direction? How much you need His strength for that day?

[12:41] How much you need His forgiveness for your sin? God have mercy on me, a sinner. Like the tax collector praying in the temple, crying out to God and Jesus says, that man went home in a right relationship with God.

That's how you relate to God. God have mercy on me, a sinner. I need your help. For many of us, that doesn't sound like our day in and day out relationship with God, does it?

Doesn't sound like your prayer life constantly crying out, God have mercy on me, a sinner. I need you so desperately. I'm weak. I'm needy. I'm confused. I need you.

For many of us, our day in, day out relationship with God is based on merit, worthiness, performance, strength. God was gracious to me once upon a time.

I talk about grace, but now I relate to God based on how well I'm doing. God, I'm a pretty good person. I mean, I'm better than the next guy, so I expect some pretty good things to happen.

[13:48] God, I thank you. I'm moral and not like this other guy or these people I read about. Sounds like the Pharisee praying opposite the tax collector who says those things and Jesus says of him he had a wrong kind of relationship with God.

He didn't know how to relate to God. He said, I'm more spiritual than they are. I'm more moral than she is. More faithful than he is.

And Jesus said, that's not how you relate to God. Quick side note and preview of next weekend and expressing grace.

When that's what our relationship with God is based on, that's what our relationship with others is based on too. Is he performing well enough to earn my favor today?

Is she worthy of my love today? And if you're not experiencing grace for needy, sinful, failing, confused, weak you, you'll have no grace and very little time for the needy, sinful failures in your life.

[15:00] For those who are confused and weak in your circles of influence. If none of that grace is being poured into you, none of it will be overflowing to anyone around you.

That's a preview of next weekend. It's a sad reality to imagine not having any grace for people like that in our lives. Nothing to pour through us and flow over into them in their great need.

But perhaps if you can imagine this morning even sadder than not having grace for others is that you will not merely have missed grace.

You will have missed Jesus. The grace of God expressed in a person. Jesus didn't come for the healthy who have no need of a doctor.

For the successful who have no need of His strength. For those who figured it out and have no need of His wisdom. For the put together who have no need of His help.

[16:03] Jesus came not for those. He came for those who are poor in spirit. Who don't think they can handle life on their own. Who know how desperately they need Him.

And that reality should be unsettling to those of us who largely are part of a strong and capable and successful culture. People in a church where we can look strong and capable and successful. And the reality is that it should shake us up a little bit. Because those aren't just my words trying to make you feel bad. Those are the words of Jesus about who He came for aren't they? It's not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick.

I've come not to call righteous but sinners. Jesus came for sinners. He came to save them. To rescue them.

For those who know they need to experience His grace. You and I need to be near Jesus. For today we need Him.

[17:08] For tomorrow we need Him. For parenting we need His patience. For engaging with co-workers we need His wisdom. For relationships we need His forgiveness.

For all of these things and many more we need to experience His grace. We need to be crying out to Him. Drawing near to Him in prayer, right?

That's moment by moment experiencing His grace. Seeking for God to give us His sustaining and directing grace for our lives. We ought to be regularly repenting.

Of our sin. Where we turn back and come near to Jesus and seek His forgiving grace. We need to be reading His word and talking about Him with our friends.

Having Him near us in every aspect of life. Every relationship we have so that His overflowing grace is our greatest joy. Our highest desire. The thing that we can't stop thinking and talking about.

[18:09] And that would be a really good sermon especially around New Year's wouldn't it? Be near Jesus more. Read the Bible. Pray.

Come to church. Have Jesus impact all of your life. And we should and all of those things are good. We need more time with Him.

We need to be near Jesus. But it's even better than that. Our hope is even better and more exciting than just you need to be with Jesus more although we do.

The good news is that Jesus comes to us. That's part of His overflowing grace. Is that Jesus actually comes to be near us. Have you forgotten Christmas already?

Isn't that what we just celebrated? What about verse 14? What does it say? The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

[19:11] Among needy, weak, failing people. Jesus said I will live there. I will come to them.

The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. He wanted to get so near to us that His grace would spill onto us so that we could experience His grace.

That's why He came. He wants to spill His grace onto you even more than you want to run and get it from Him. He came so that His grace would overflow to you.

In Memphis where I grew up there's this wonderful place called St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. You've probably heard of it. They treat their children who are suffering with cancer.

Children from all over the globe. In fact, one from our Southwood family just this past year that they took great care of. Every December there's a college football bowl game in Memphis called the Liberty Bowl.

[20:15] And so two teams come in, different teams each time, to play perhaps the biggest football game played in Memphis all year. And lots of kids are excited to go to the game. They want to go see their favorite players, see these two teams play football against each other.

And every year, ahead of the Liberty Bowl itself, those teams would visit St. Jude and they would bring the game to the kids who were too sick to come to the game themselves.

You'd always see in the paper every year a picture of the quarterback with his arm around a five-year-old bald-headed cancer patient from St. Jude. The guy who perhaps embodied the essence of football and all the excitement about this game that was coming to town in the mind of this kid actually coming to bring the experience of the Liberty Bowl into the hospital room of a young kid.

And that's what Jesus has done for us. Jesus, the embodiment of grace himself, has come to you and brought grace to your hospital room that you couldn't leave because you were too sick.

When you couldn't leave the shackles of what you've done, of the terrible things that rack your memories and you can't get away from them to come to Jesus, he came to you.

[21 : 44] Maybe for you it's the shackles of your own self-obsession. The success that you've experienced and you realize you only think about yourself and you can't get away from that to come and cry out to Jesus and Jesus comes to you.

This table reminds us that he didn't just do that once. That he is still coming to us. That he knows we still need him.

That he still needs to bring his grace to us. His grace is for you to experience again this morning. That's why he said we should do this so often.

Because we continue to need him. Because we continue to need to be filled up with his grace. We declare at this table that we are still not strong enough.

That we're still not smart enough. That we're still not successful enough on our own to come to Jesus. But we declare at the same time that he has come to us.

[22 : 50] And we taste as we come his grace for us again. We experience his grace again this morning. Constant needs to you and me.

Constantly met in Christ. Paul tells us of the words of institution that Jesus gave on the night he was betrayed.

He took bread and when he'd given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also he took the cup after supper saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death. until he comes.

This is not the table of Southwood or the Presbyterian church. This is the Lord's table. And Jesus has set it before us this morning so that we would taste and experience his grace again.

[23 : 56] And he invites he's the one extending the invitation to you to everyone who has truly trusted in him for their salvation. who's made a public profession of that faith by joining a church a body of Christ.

he invites you to come and to feast this morning. Come and eat. If you don't know him if you've never trusted Jesus for yourself don't come to this table don't come and proclaim outwardly something that's not true inwardly.

Instead we would love to invite you to come and to know Jesus himself. The one who would come toward you this morning. I'd ask you to consider are you this morning okay on your own?

Are you good enough? Strong enough? Wise enough? Capable enough to handle life on your own? Or do you need someone else?

Do you need the help of another? Someone who would come to you and offer himself for you? Do you need his grace? Perhaps this morning what it could be is a chance to realize that you can stop exhausting yourself trying to make God happy and for the first time know that someone else has done that for you that Jesus has done that in your place and you can come near to him and experience his grace in a person in Jesus himself nothing would make us more excited than to get to talk with you about him to tell you about his grace for you let's pray and then we'll come to this table together father we thank you that you know our need we are needy people and so our hope and our joy is that our needs have been fully met in Jesus would this table be a reminder of that to us as we sit and meditate on our own need we equally and even more so see your abundant provision for that need through your son we ask in his name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org you