

“Experiencing Grace”

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- In just two weeks, Lord willing, we're going to start a sermon series through the Gospel of John, which will last a couple of weeks.
- It might be longer than that. So, I'm really excited about that to get an up-close look at the person of Jesus, his life and his death and his resurrection there in the Gospel of John.
- But before we start that, I want to take just a couple of weeks, two Sundays as we start a new ministry year to remember our mission, why we're here, what we're about.
- On the back of your bulletin each Sunday, we say, Southwood exists to experience and express grace in relationships that impact eternity.
- [1 : 1 1] Now, that's a bold statement to say that what we're about every day, here and now, impacts eternity. But we believe the Bible tells us that.
- And that mission, that thing that we're about is to experience and express grace. To taste the sweetness of living with God ourselves, having relationship with him, and to share a taste of that goodness with all sorts of other people around us every day.
- This should be happening all the time in our lives personally, our life together as a church family, breathing in grace, breathing out grace.
- Experience and express. I want you to try it with me this morning, okay? Group activity. Breathe in. Breathe out.
- Now, instead of breathing out, I want you to try something. I want you to just blow out like you're trying to knock over the person in front of you, okay?
- [2 : 2 3] One, two, three. Keep blowing. What happens pretty quickly? You run out of air, don't you?
- You... Nothing else there? It's ineffective. You feel empty. And I want you to remember that feeling because that same thing will happen to us spiritually.
- If you think you're just going to go be a good person, or if you're just going to be a church that does great things in the community, but you quit actively breathing in God's grace, pretty soon you're empty.
- You're blowing out, but not very much, and it's certainly not God's grace. It is vital that we continue breathing in, that we continue experiencing as well as expressing God's grace.
- God's grace. So we're going to talk today about the breathing in, the experience of God's grace, and next Sunday about the breathing out, okay? Easy enough?
- [3 : 3 5] We're going to look at a lot of different passages in God's word this morning. Why don't we stop and ask him to speak his word to our hearts before we look at it together?
- Father, our prayer this morning is that we would hear your voice. We want to be about our Father's mission, not something we've made up for ourselves.

Not only that, God, we want to do it your way, in your strength, not ours. So we need your help every hour.

And this one especially. For the glory of Jesus, by the power of your Spirit, help speak to us. Change us, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. When you breathe in, there's this constant two-step process that's happening in your body without you even having to think about it.

[4 : 41] Your body recognizes, need oxygen, right? Air. Need for oxygen met. Just like that. All the time.

Oh, I need oxygen. There's oxygen. I'm okay. And over and over again, that happens. That same process of having the need be recognized and then the need be met is how we constantly experience grace.

We become aware of our need for it. And just as quickly then we find Jesus there as the one who meets that need. I want us to see that grace and the way we experience it in three ways, three parts of life this morning.

The first one's really important. It's the one we've largely been celebrating already throughout this service. Grace. Grace. That God's grace is greater than all our sin.

Grace for yesterday. For all our failures. All our mistakes. All our sin. It is possible that you've actually been in church many times and have never heard the actual good news of Jesus.

[5 : 58] Because you may have only heard religion. Religion says here's how you must live to get in with God. To be in his family. To have a relationship with him.

Y'all, the Bible tells better news than religion. Okay, I want to make sure if you've never grasped that before that you hear it this morning. It says we were made to live with God and to live like God.

But it's also honest that we're all failures. We don't do that, do we? We live the way we want so often. We are born in sin and we choose to sin.

And Romans 6 says the wages of sin is death. That's what we have earned from God. We need help, don't we?

Ephesians 2 says, in fact, we are dead in our trespasses and sins. Trouble. But, but Jesus meets our need.

[7 : 04] The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Back in Ephesians 2, but God, because of his great mercy, this incredible love that he has, even when we were dead, he loves us, he made us alive together with Christ.

By grace, you have been saved. One easy definition of grace to remember is God's riches at Christ's expense.

Jesus pays our wages. Jesus pays our wages. Death. Death.

And the unending riches of God, greater than you can imagine, are dumped freely on people who don't deserve them, could never earn enough to pay for them.

God gives life, eternal life, restored relationship with the creator king to people who could never earn it. Experiencing grace means coming to realize first how much I need to be rescued.

[8 : 21] And then right alongside that, how completely Jesus rescues me. How big my sin is, bigger than I could deal with, and how much bigger my savior is.

It's not too big for him. That's experiencing grace. Let me picture it for you this morning. It's like this. Imagine I have a book called The Life of Will.

It's a big book. I'm getting old. And there's a lot of things in here to read about, things I've done. It's really a book about all of the things I've done that I shouldn't have thought, or that I shouldn't have said, or that I should never have acted that way.

And it's also got a bunch of ways that I did think that I was supposed to think this way, and talk that way, and do that thing, and I didn't. I failed to do them.

Well, let's just read a few of them. Preached a sermon too long. Never done that. But neglected his family for his own comfort.

[9 : 34] Stretched the truth to make himself look good. Those were this week, by the way, so watch out for the sermon. We're not going to read the whole book this morning.

That's not what this is about. But there is a problem. Can you imagine if there was a book like this for you, with your name and picture on the front of it? What do I need in a book like this?

I need good things. Don't I? Almost everyone agrees that in our lives, in the book of our lives, the good needs to outweigh the bad. Right?

I mean, what I need to do is that I need to start writing shorter chapters of bad things and longer chapters of good things, people would say. Religion says to that problem of good things.

That the solution is that Jesus, or in another religion, someone else, tells me how to be a better person. Even helps me to be a better person so that I write enough good chapters that things finally balance out and God says will is good enough.

[10 : 45] That's the message of religion. Y'all, that's not grace. That's not freedom from performance, but that's pressure to perform.

That's not the good news of Jesus, is it? Grace brings you into relationship with Jesus.

You see your need, and then it's not Jesus tells me how to be a better person. It's Jesus is the better person.

There's a second book, you see. It's called The Life of Jesus. Y'all like object lessons like this, right? Nod your head, yeah, do object lessons.

The Life of Jesus. I just want to read you a few parts of it. What are some of the things he did? Jesus obeyed his parents. Jesus loved his enemies.

[11 : 48] Jesus gave his life for his friends. Jesus was tempted to sin, and he quoted scripture and obeyed his father. All of this perfect living.

A whole book full of the life of Jesus, all the way to the cross where he gives his life. The good news of the gospel is that these two books, your life and all the ways you've failed, and Jesus' life and all the ways he succeeded, see, they actually get a cover swap.

Second Corinthians chapter 5, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.

Jesus, who had never sinned at all, sees our book. He knows our need.

He understands that death is coming to us because of this, and he goes to the cross and stands in our place to pay for everything we've ever done or failed to do.

[13 : 04] But then keep reading. That in him, in Jesus, we might become the righteousness of God.

That the perfect record of Jesus, you remember all those amazing things he did in this book? He says, I'm going to give you that record.

I'm going to give Will, the one I died on the cross for, the record of all of those things I've done, so that he can stand righteous before God, so that he can be welcomed into God's family and loved.

Jesus is the better person, right? Not me. And he rescues me and then transforms me to make me perfect forever. Guess how much that costs you to swap the covers on those books?

Nothing. All of that is for free. We pay nothing. Jesus pays a lot, doesn't he? We say Jesus paid it all. We offer nothing but our need, and Jesus meets it completely.

[14 : 17] That's why we sing, nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. Jesus is all we have, right?

But he is all we need. Amen? If you realize that this morning, you sing just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou bidst me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

It's by grace we have been saved through faith. It's a gift. Not something we work for. Remember those words Derek read from Ephesians 2?

That's why we sing amazing grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. Oh, my need. God is so great.

I can't even imagine making up for all of it. I once was lost, but by grace now I'm found. Was blind, but now I see.

[15 : 22] Friend, nothing could be more needful, more important, more exciting this morning than for you to experience God's grace to you personally in Jesus.

Grace means that you don't have to run home and get cleaned up and come back. No, actually it means that God cleans you up himself. He says, come, I will clean you and I will welcome you into my family forever.

You just trust him that he does that for you. It's as simple as it is free. As much as it costs Jesus, it is entirely free to you.

By the way, if it weren't, it wouldn't be grace. Jesus, the one who meets your deepest need invites you to come to him this morning.

I plead with you, don't miss out on Jesus one more day. He's done it all. You don't have to wait. Come and trust him this morning. In fact, that is the call for every single person in here today.

[16 : 37] It doesn't matter if you've ever met Jesus before or not. That is what we all need, isn't it? More of Jesus, more of grace. Do you need that? I do. You see, that's the beauty of experiencing grace.

Experiencing grace is not a one-time experience. If that's the way you think about it, we need to change that. That's why it's where our mission starts every day. Grace for today.

Just as our bodies were designed always to need oxygen, our souls were designed always to need grace. We never get over our need for Jesus.

Many mornings I run down a beautiful greenway near our house. It's lined with these gorgeous trees and they're all so full of life.

But since the storm a couple of weeks ago, it's a little bit different view. I run down this beautiful greenway, but those green trees are now surrounded by very brown branches on the ground all around them.

[17 : 47] They were just such vibrant, strong, full of life branches. But what happened? You know what happened. They got blown away from the trunk and they dried up fast.

There's nothing green about them anymore after just a couple of weeks. See, those branches were never designed to be disconnected from the tree, were they? See, Jesus says the same about you and me.

It's not that Jesus says, hey, I rescued you, so stop being so needy and go out there and get on with living your life for me. That's not what he says.

Jesus says, I rescued you, so you never leave my side. Look at John chapter 15. Listen to this. He says, abide in me and I in you.

Keep staying connected to me. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

[18 : 52] I am the vine. You are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he's thrown away like a branch and withers.

That's what happens. Jesus is saying, you see this. You know this. These are people who are around trees all the time. They knew what a vine was and what branches were. Here's what happens when you disconnect them. It doesn't go well for the branches, does it?

In fact, apart from him, you can do nothing. You have no life in you. See, it's not just Jesus meeting our needs once, is it? Experiencing grace means constant needs.

Constantly met in Christ. Just constant needs all the time. Constantly met in Christ. I want you to think for just a minute of all the people in the Bible.

I couldn't list them all, but I'm going to give you a few. People who see their need, all sorts of different kinds of needs, and then what happens almost as quickly as they see their need for some of them is they see Jesus meet their need.

[19 : 56] Insufficient disciples who think, how will we feed 5,000 plus people with five loaves and two fish?

Come to Jesus with that, and they pick up the leftovers, don't they? A sinful woman who knows she's unworthy pours out all that she has on Jesus, who alone welcomes her.

A paralyzed man who's so desperate for help that his friends cut a hole in a roof, gets to Jesus and receives forgiveness of sin and healing of his body.

A thirsty woman who asks for a drink, receives from Jesus, who she didn't even know, living water.

A blind beggar who is ignored and shushed by others cries for Jesus, and he sees. A bleeding woman who reaches out for Jesus is restored physically and socially for the rest of her life by one touch.

[21 : 09] A desperate father who throws himself at Jesus' feet, receives his dying daughter restored to him. Grieving sisters who bemoan that if Jesus had been there, their brother would never have died.

Tell Jesus that. And they see Jesus raise Lazarus back to life. And of course there's a dying thief who knows that death on a cross is what he deserves.

And he is granted the gift of eternal life in his last breaths by the man on the middle cross. Friends, this is the way we are to live every day.

Always needing Jesus. Every need, every breath, we need his grace. I tell you that because I have lived many years of my life saying that I believe in the good news of Jesus and of grace.

But honestly thinking that I don't need grace anymore. I got that once and now it's on me. May that never be the way that we live.

[22 : 29] We have to acknowledge our needs like these people in the Bible. You won't experience grace to meet your needs if you don't have any. You won't experience grace to forgive your sins and your failures if you don't have any.

You won't experience grace to give you strength and weakness or direction and confusion if you don't have any. The good news is you do. I just stopped to think of the things I knew from this week of people in this room.

Situations of need. Needing to experience Jesus' grace just this week. When your heart is drifting distant from God, it's grace that draws you back.

And it's grace that assures you of your welcome home. When the new kid at school wants to sit next to you and it's not cool and your friends don't want him to.

It's grace that helps you embrace someone who's undeserving just like you. When you're facing a health crisis that you never imagined.

[23 : 39] And you never knew what it would be like. It's grace that enables you not to despair. But to have hope in the gracious good shepherd who's with you.

When you're feeling weak before a temptation that if you're honest just feels like an addiction to you. You can't put the phone down or the food down or the drink down. And you're doing it again.

It's grace. His grace that is sufficient for you. His power that shows up and is perfect in your weakness when you're sure you can't stand.

When you're treated unfairly at work. It's grace you need to forgive. And to rest in God's plan, not yours. When you're feeling inadequate for the task that you're called to.

You're afraid you're going to fail again. It's grace that whispers you're not on your own. When anxiety and stress are controlling you.

[24 : 46] It's the grace of God that frees you to trust. As a result leads you into peace and rest. When your marriage is hard.

It's grace that empowers you to endure. And it's grace that brings undeserved love again. When you're feeling alone.

And unloved. It's grace that reminds you of the huge price. That the God of the universe paid to have you as his own.

As his beloved. We are a needy people. But we have a need meeting Savior.

For all of them. What's your situation? Where's your need today? Maybe I didn't name yours. Ran out of time.

[25 : 48] But my God will meet all your needs. Every need of yours. According to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

And you say. But I don't deserve him to pastor. That's why it's called grace. He does it anyway. And we get to taste that.

And we get to share that for free. But that's next week. And we're going to talk more about that. But for now. Scottish pastor Andrew Murray reminds us. Jesus drew us by his grace.

When he said come. And Jesus keeps us by his grace. When he says abide. The grace to come. And the grace to abide.

Are alike from him alone. What that means is that our mission. Is not independently strong. Living for Jesus.

[26 : 48] That's not it. It is desperately dependent. Living with Jesus. Praying for his help. Longing to be directed by his word.

Thirsty to gather. To worship together. Because my heart needs redirection. Eager to share with others of him. Because he's my only hope. I'm that desperate. Desperately dependent.

So that what happens when you live desperately dependent. Is that Jesus gets bigger in your eyes. Jesus is more glorious to your heart. Jesus is more gracious to you.

Every day. That you walk with him like that. You do know that we still sing. Some of you have been Christians. 70 and 80 and 90 years.

And you still sing. Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to thy cross I cling. Right? Naked you dress me. Helpless you grace me.

[27 : 48] Foul. Dirty. Wash me clean again in the fountain of Jesus blood. Just as I used to be. Without one plea.

No, no, no. Just as I am. Without one plea. Except that I finally got my act together. God you need to know it. No, no, no, no. Just as I am.

Without one plea. But that thy blood was shed for me. And that by grace you bid me come. To thee. Friend, grace is still amazing.

Every day. It is amazing grace that is with you through many dangers, toils, and snares. Because Jesus will your shield and portion be as long as life endures.

You don't have to look for anything else to protect you. For anyone else to be your sufficiency. Grace will lead you safely home.

[28 : 49] We better get there. Speaking of grace, bringing us home. The grace of God to us in Jesus is so amazing.

It is so boundless and endless that there's not only grace for the sins and the failures of all your yesterdays. All of them, he can take them.

There's not only grace for the countless physical, spiritual, emotional, relational needs we face today. And that is a lot.

But also grace for all our tomorrows. In fact, this is going to be shorter but maybe more exciting. I don't think it's unbiblical to say that perhaps Jesus and grace may get more amazing.

May blow our minds more in eternity than they do already. Back to Ephesians chapter 2. By grace you have been saved and seated with Jesus in the heavenly places so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

[30 : 09] You realize by now I think that grace can't be separated from Jesus, don't you? You've heard me say that before. You can't separate grace and Jesus. It's because we are seated with him in heaven that we get God's grace eternally dumped on us.

Peter tells us this is the grace we are to set our hope fully on right now. Nothing else but the grace that is to be given us at the revelation of Jesus.

When we see him, I'm never again going to lose sight of the one who meets all of my needs the way that I do sometimes right now. There's going to come a day when I never lose sight of him again.

See, this grace is really the same grace that we talked about from the first day we met Jesus and had our sins washed in his blood. Covered by his perfect, righteous life that we get to have as our own.

Because we don't make ourselves fit for heaven, do we? Can you imagine? A place of perfection, of holiness, of glory. Can you get yourself ready for that place?

[31 : 24] The multicolored multitude around the throne of heaven. They're clothed in pure white robes because they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb.

We are totally wrapped in Jesus. Completely covered by him. Not just once, but forever. You never get uncovered from his righteous robes.

Friends, you understand that part of the glory of heaven will be that we still sing, Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. We will cast our crowns before the throne in a humble and needy and grateful acknowledgement that there is one king.

That there is one originally righteous person. That there is one perfect savior, the spotless Lamb who was slain.

And with overflowing joy, we're going to run through the pearly gates and sing, Just as I am, without one plea, except thy blood was shed for me. And that thou bidst me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come.

[32 : 39] I come. I see you. You're glorious. You are reigning. You are loving me. And I come. I come. And throughout eternity, the song of the redeemed will be of God's amazing grace.

When we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun. Breathe in.

Breathe deeply. His grace is and always will be sufficient. Pray with me. O God of grace, You have imputed my sin to my substitute And have imputed his righteousness to my soul, Clothing me with a bridegroom's robe, Decking me with jewels of holiness.

But in my Christian walk, I am still in rags. My best prayers are stained with sin. My penitential tears are so much impurity. My confessions of wrong are so many aggravations of sin.

My receiving the spirit is tainted with selfishness. I need to repent of my repentance. I need my tears to be washed.

[34 : 06] I have no robe to bring to cover my sins. No loom to weave my own righteousness. I am always standing clothed in filthy garments. And by grace, I'm always receiving change of raiment.

For you always justify the ungodly. I am always going into the far country And always returning home as a prodigal. Always saying, Father, forgive me.

And you are always bringing forth the best robe. Every morning let me wear it. Every evening return in it. Go out to the day's work in it.

Be married in it. Be wound in death in it. Stand before the great white throne in it. Enter heaven in it shining as the sun. Grant me, Father, never to lose sight Of the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

The exceeding righteousness of salvation. The exceeding glory of Christ. The exceeding beauty of holiness. The exceeding wonder of grace.

[35 : 17] Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. Catch your image below. And also loving our own future. I hope for a future where you can nicht balance for the way of God.

Focus on the Lukács■ Massive ■■■■■■ for this judgment there. What message shall we embrace on the way of God? To be involved and should have received on it. The exceeding peace with logros. I hope that the purpose is going on. You may say that you should have received on it..

The exceeding beauty. What message shall we tie from him? The expected of you once again. For rounds to conduct serves on your own birth altar.