

Extraordinary Grace for Ordinary Life

Titus 2:11-15

Introduction: Grace as a word is easy enough to define (a free gift; unmerited favor), but as a concept or rule of life, it radically invades our normal senses. Grace is what moves us from worshippers of self to worshippers of God. Grace allows us to respond by faith to the reality of our sin and the love of God. Grace finds satisfaction for sin in the work of Christ, not in self-effort. Grace motivates us live for God's glory, and sees personal failure as a way to magnify the goodness and power of Christ. Kent Hughes talked about grace in this way.

*"Grace is not some abstract doctrine or theological construct. Grace comes as Christ does. Grace is as personal as He is. In fact, Christ is grace. The unmerited favor of God is what Jesus is about, but it is also who He is. We should thus see grace as a personal actions by a personal God who saved us from our helpless condition out of pure love."*¹

This is always good to review, but even more so in light of looking forward to the New Year. It does not take long to see that most of us, believer and unbeliever, use this time of year to examine the past and plan for the future. This is an exceptionally good practice that we should engage in often throughout the year. There is a noticeable difference in motivation, however, in this evaluative and planning endeavor.

For those who do not know Christ, the past can only be forgotten (which is impossible) or made better by future action or redoubled effort. Failure to accomplish, circumstances out of our control, or not finding the outcomes we hoped for mean wasted time or effort, and maybe the best we can do is glean some wisdom and move forward. This is a cycle that will never find true satisfaction but will always look back in regret, never being able to achieve enough to fill the void that only Christ can fill.

This is the greatness of grace. Grace looks at past failures as opportunities to glorify God. It means we no longer try to make up for mistakes (nor force others to do so), but realize that Christ has made payment for them. We realize that grace motivates us differently, not trying to gain acceptance from God but simply trying to please a Father who already love and accepts us infinitely. Grace means we *desire* for much, to move beyond the path of least resistance, to pray large, specific, Scripture saturated prayers and actually anticipate God answering them.

So we take time to **look back**, asking questions of remembrance: *What is the greatest lesson we learned? What did God teach me about Himself? What was the biggest triumph? What was the best decision? Who are 3 people who had the greatest impact on you?*

So that we can **look forward**: *Who are you committed to loving and serving this year? What do you hope to learn? What is an area that you know needs to change? What are 3 goals for 2016?*

Its good to carve out a few hours and reflect on the past and plan for this next year. In reflecting on the past, we are able to *celebrate successes, learn from mistakes, and be aware of things unfinished.*

This morning we will look at how God's extraordinary grace motivates us to work hard, to plan, and expect much from and in or life with Christ. This is far greater than New Year's resolutions, but a great time to think through these things.

Grace in the Past: Bringing Salvation

¹ Kent Hughes, "1 & 2 Timothy and Titus." p. 339.

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God has appeared, **bringing salvation for all people**

- **A Look Back:** *our story*

Titus 3:3-7 *For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.* ⁴ **But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,** ⁵ **he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,** ⁶ *whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,* ⁷ **so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**

One of the best and often forgotten areas of our life is our past story of the life giving grace we received when we realized we were forgiven for the first time. Notice that as Paul gave commands (3:1-2), he reminded the church to look back at their condition before salvation, and what grace accomplished in our life. This was not an exercise in manipulation or forced servitude (Jesus did it all - now pay Him back), it was a reminder of the ability that we now have to obey that we once failed to possess. The height and breadth of our salvation cannot be measured, and causes us to be sober, careful, and attentive in life. Life for us is no longer some meaningless, meandering existence but one that started with death and ends in life.

Reviewing our story should be something we do often, and we have an opportunity once a week as we gather to worship together. We sing gospel saturated songs that remind us what we are saved from, how we are saved, and what we are saved to. This not only gains us perspective in present struggles but changes how we view others.

- **A Look Forward:** *our resolution*

The reality is that God's grace has appeared, is now seen in the work of Jesus Christ and extended by those whom He has saved. His grace is to extend and is available for all people, for every kind of person, for all tribes, tongues, and nations. How do we grow in our desire and effectiveness?

Pray for 5 - I usually don't like gimmicks or tricks, but I also know myself well enough that if I don't have goals, I don't hit much. I'm going to work toward, both in my personal life, *praying for 5* unsaved friends or family members that I have regular contact with. I'm going to encourage my family to pray for these 5 for 5 days during the week, with the understanding that where my prayer is, my heart and mind run, and anticipate God working on the hearts of these 5, as well as giving opportunities to share the goodness of the gospel. If we have 500 people here praying for 5 people (even with hopeful overlap), it means we are praying for thousands of people for God to reveal the gospel to.

Interact - Prayer necessitates that we are willing to interact personally with those that we pray for. This interaction may already be going on, or we may need to prayerfully consider some creative ways to spend time with, or may simply need boldness to actually share the gospel in its entirety.

Consider - A greater involvement in the mission of this church, both locally and around the globe. This means uncomfortable, loving, hard, consistent, persistent, committed interaction with each other as we strive to reach those outside. It means we consider ways to stay connected with missionaries by communication, prayer, and even giving. This means more of a *personal investment* in people, and impartation of the gospel in real people's lives, but also doing it *together with those from this church*.

Grace in the Present: *Training Obedience*

Titus 2:12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,

Notice that the *grace of God has appeared*, not only "bringing", but also "**training**". This word means to instruct or teach, but also to grow and advance toward a goal. Especially in the beginning of January, we resolve to greater discipline, either more of some things (reading, serving, etc), or less (eating, iphone usage, Facebook, etc.). These things tend to not only be things that are tangible, they reveal where our **true values stand**. Paul says that it is God's grace that motivates us and allows this type of training.

- **What we say "no" and "yes" to**

2 Timothy 2:21-22 *Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.* ²² *So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*

Renounce Ungodly actions and desires - Notice that because of God's grace we are able, for the first time, to say no to both **actions** that are sinful, but also **desires** that fall short of His glory. We not only resist, we renounce, saying "no" definitively sin in all form. Training ourselves in this means that we **identify** those areas of life that not only move us down a path of overt sin, but those things that cause our desires to wander. This means that we may say "no" to something that is not inherently sinful, but dulls our affections to God and thus is not helpful in our training. This is so important because a **pure church is a useful, ready, and effective church**. We will miss opportunities to glorify God when we let sin linger or allow our hearts to harden.

Stay Self-Controlled - One of the great lessons of adulthood that we learn is that nothing great is achieved easily, and success, no matter ones definition, only comes when we are disciplined to work hard to attain it. Self Control is a fruit of the Spirit, which means the source of our control is really a Spirit filled control (Galatians 5:23). Self-control comes when we are yielded to the Spirit for a greater goal than our own comfort.

Train for righteousness

1 Timothy 4:6-8 If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. ⁷ Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. **Rather train yourself for godliness;** ⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

Putting this together, we are able to train, to be disciplined, to live upright and godly lives in this present age. Again, what we **value highly** is what we discipline ourselves for. When we make a decision to eat and exercise consistently, its amazing how much time we find to go to the gym, or how early we are willing to get up. When there is a possibility of promotion or greater paychecks, we find time to study for tests, or free up time from sleep and family to work. If reading a book a month, starting a new hobby, or building a new cabinet is the valued goal, we are able to say no to other things to accomplish these. Paul said that these are not bad nor wrong, they are simply NOT ULTIMATE. What would be different about our mindset, joy, perspective, wisdom, and maturity if we committed the same effort and discipline in training for godliness?

- **Resolutions for training**

To be honest, I've usually avoided pushing a "Read the Bible in a Year" plan, mostly because I'm a pragmatist when it comes to this, knowing that one size does not fit all. We never want to make a spiritual discipline like Bible reading as an external evaluation of godliness (success is if I finish, anything less is failure, which is rubbish). We already over-compare ourselves and measure by un-Biblical standards, so I didn't want to heap on to that mindset. Well, I'm ready to confess my lack of wisdom. We need to read the Bible. We need to be saturated in it, to swim in its comforting waters, to drink from the refreshing grace it gives. I don't need Barna research to tell me that there is an incongruous relationship between those claiming to follow Christ and those who neglect the word (though Barna has confirmed this through a Lifeway study - 90% who attend church and agree with the statement "I desire to please and honor Jesus in all that I do", but only 19% read their Bible everyday). I know by knowing my own life, understanding the pressures and stresses of a busy life, and observing our culture, even this church culture. So I'm calling all of us, myself included, to humble ourselves by God's grace to inundate ourselves with Scripture this year.

Read, Study, and Meditate on God's Word:

What does the Bible say the benefits are:

1 Peter 2:1-3 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation- ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Joshua 1:8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. **For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.**

Psalms 1:1-3 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, or stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night

He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does He prospers.

A friend of mine named David Gunderson wrote this about our intake of God's Word for the New Year (if you have an opportunity, read the whole post. Its worth your time).

"When I reflect on God's repeated revelation that we prosper when we keep his Word, my many goals and diverse ambitions come into focus. I begin to see clearly that the value I place on Scripture this year (functionally, not theoretically) is the main upstream issue in my life. Most of my other desires, whether they be concrete goals or far-off dreams, are downstream issues.

*So if I trust the one who speaks from heaven, I know that the best thing I can put my time into this year is reading, studying, memorizing, meditating on, and obeying God's Word. The beautiful thing is that God's Word, when put first, does not exclude everything else. God's Word, when put first, orders, orients, proportions, and saturates everything else."*²

² <http://davidagundersen.com/2016/01/01/how-to-prosper-in-all-of-life-the-main-thing-you-need-to-do-in-2016/>

If you are looking for ideas for Bible reading, check out this blog by Justin Taylor. It gives one and two year plans, those that go chronologically, straight through, and others that take some from Old and New every day. There are some that are only 5 days a week, and others that are for audio listeners (those that think you've read a book by listening to it - I know who you are)

<http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2015/12/28/reading-the-whole-bible-in-2016-an-faq/>

<http://www.ligonier.org/blog/bible-reading-plans/>

If our value is following Christ, to know Him, to deny self, to experience an eternal perspective while tasting of joy in all circumstances, to train our lives toward godliness, to denounce ungodliness, to grow in our love for Christ and others, we MUST be people who love, read, meditate, study, think about, pray through, and apply God's Word.

Grace in the Future: *Waiting for Jesus*

Titus 2:13-15 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.¹⁵ Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

There are two important aspects to see about grace in the future. One, **waiting** is not passive, but active anticipation. Waiting does not mean sitting on our hands, just like setting our mind on heaven does not mean checking out of life here, it actually entails quite the opposite. Waiting means preparing ourselves for His glorious appearance. Two, the hope that we have and the God that is returning are both framed **personally**, they are "ours". There are so many things we do and participate in corporately, but this type of anticipation comes down to an individual discipline.

- **A Glorious Appearing**

- **Jesus Gave Himself to redeem us**

Jesus redeemed us, meaning He bought us back from sinful judgment and wrath by paying for it all by His substitutionary death.

- **Jesus Purified us for His own possession**

Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Jesus did the work of purifying us, and continues to do so. He does this because He owns us, purchasing us by His blood.

- **Jesus Freed us to be zealous for good work**

This then becomes our motivation to work harder than all others, because we know who our work is for, what it entails, the purpose behind it, and the ultimate end.

- **Resolutions for readiness**

○ **Be Watchful**

Mark 13:32-37 "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. ³⁵ Therefore stay awake- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning- ³⁶ lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

○ **Devote and Avoid**

Titus 3:8-9 The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. ⁹ But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

○ **Resist by Sobriety**

1 Peter 5:8-9 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

Closing Questions:

- **What are some realistic yet audacious goals for 2016 that can only be accomplished by God's grace?**
- **What holds you back from prayer and Bible reading? What needs to change?**
- **What aspects of God's grace are the hardest to understand? What are aspects that we cling to?**