**Prevenient Grace Talk**

**New-Ark Emmaus Men’s Walk #45, October 2015**

I am a father of two lovely young ladies who are now 13 and 11 years old. Several years ago when Abby, our oldest, was 4 she and I made an innocent trip to the grocery store. As it was there at the store there was more than the normal busy-ness of the day. The rush of customers and stocking boys was on because there was the threat of snow in the air. Have you noticed that more people go to the grocery store when they hear it is going to snow a bit.

The place was busy with a frenetic pace of movement. There was noise everywhere. Distractions all over. People moving and shopping. People jockeying for position in the check out lines. People hunting for that last loaf of bread or gallon of milk as if they will not be able to leave their homes for weeks.

As Abby and I journeyed through to pick up our one item dog food, (because it was going to snow), I got a little distracted by all the hubbub. I was fascinated by all the commotion and the rush, just because of a little fear of snow…anyway, I was distracted by all the commotion and focused on getting to the back of the building to get the dog food.

Well, I made it back to the dog food section, there in the back of the store, it was quiet back there, apparently there’s not such a pet food emergency in snowstorms. But I made it back there and began to search for the bag I was looking for and suddenly realized that I was the only one in that aisle when there should have been two. I had entered the building with my 4-year-old daughter Abby, but she was no longer with me.

Imagine my horror and panic as I tried to think about where she could be. I began to search frantically and persistently for her. Looking for her in every nook and cranny as I approached, up and down every aisle. Faster and faster, harder and harder I looked. I could not help but think what horror she must be experiencing apart from me in all that commotion of the store. I could not help but think she must be crying and worried sick that we were apart, that she must be scared beyond belief.

As I looked and looked through the crowds of people I saw a faint shadow of a little girl’s body off in the distance. I began to move towards her, jockeying around the crowds of people, moving towards her, quicker and quicker, then as I approached she did not notice me because she had her back toward me. I got closer and recognized the familiar figure of my beloved daughter Abby. When I finally reached her I put my hand on her shoulder. She turned and looked at me, smiled her pretty smile and said, “Oh, there you are daddy, I’ve been looking all over for you.”

In her innocent mind, Abby had assumed that she had done all the work in locating me, yet, she was the one had been even more distracted, separated herself from me in favor of a colorful toy or something that had caught her attention, she departed from me. Then as I frantically searched for her and finally found her, she thought she had found me, while I had been looking for her all along.

**\*The title of this talk is Prevenient Grace and my name is \*Dave Warner.**

Prevenient Grace. It sounds like a very church-y kind of term doesn’t it? Let’s explore a working definition of Prevenient Grace. First of all, let’s talk about **\***grace.

**\*Definition of Grace: from the Greek “charis” which means gift**

Grace is very simply a gift. A free gift that cannot be earned or deserved. Just like when you receive a Christmas gift you have not done anything to earn it or deserve it you just receive it. Well, unless you believe in Santa Clause who keeps a Nice List and a Naughty List and then you do or don’t do things so you can receive your gift. God is not a cosmic Santa Claus, God gives you the gift freely. You cannot earn it or deserve it. It is a gift.

All grace is God’s grace, but it comes in many forms and fashions. God’s grace is revealed to us in different ways and God has different kinds of grace for each person as you will discover on your journey this weekend. But this morning, we are talking about **\***Prevenient grace.

Prevenient. **\*Prevenient Grace is God's grace in our lives from conception to conversion**

Prevenient means that which comes before. You can understand prevenient by the prefix “pre” pre-venient. Pre, goes before. Goes before what? Its God’s grace that is working within us even before we ever know and recognize that God is working. God is working before we ever know that God is there.

Prevenient Grace is how God works in our lives from the time we are born up until the time we accept Jesus as our Savior. From that time on God works in us a different types of grace but before that time it is all prevenient.

We often assume that when we accept Jesus as our Savior that we have done the work, that we have accepted, that perhaps even we have gone on a journey to find God. But the reality is that God has preveniently worked an act of grace in us to call us and lead us to God. Remember my daughter in the story? When I finally found her she looked at me and commented as if she was the one who had been looking for me. But in reality I had been searching for her all along.

* + - **\*Wooing us Revelation 22:17**

Wooing us, inviting us to join God in His work and plan for the salvation of the world. God is not one to guilt us into loving Him or force us to love Him, he woos us. And the second is similar:

* + - **\*Drawing us John 6:44-47**

God draws us, we are not forced to join God, but we are drawn to God and we do not come on our own. My daughter happily joined me in an embrace as I drew her back to me once I finally found her.

* + - **\*Pursuing us Romans 5:8**

While we were still sinners Jesus died for us. How much more pursuing can God get? God pursued us before we ever even aware of God! Before we ever knew or understood God’s grace and while we were still off wandering in our paths of destruction, God loved us so much to send His Son, Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.

* + - **\*Empowering us Romans 5:6**

Empowering us by giving us strength over things which we can not conquer on our own. God helps us to conquer the areas in our life which need discipline.

All of this is necessary so that we can have a relationship with God.

**\*We are created for a relationship with God**

My daughter and I have a great relationship. You know how they say some kids are a chip off the old block? Well, that’s me and my daughter Abby. We are tight. Even when she was 4 and we were in that busy store. But yet we still got separated. As it turned out, she had separated herself from me due to her distraction by a fancy toy. That was really it, but her distraction caused a separation between her and me and set a course of action that would put me as pursuing her from that point on. Now, granted, I had gotten little distracted myself – which God never does – but she had left my side and I failed to notice. God notices, but God will allow it simply because he gives us a choice. God does not want you to leave His side because…

We are created for a relationship with God. At the beginning of time as we know it, as recorded in Genesis 1, God created the world and said it was good. God created us, God created humanity, God created all that we see and that we are. God created us in the image of God. God created us with uniqueness and with love. We are created in His image and God is love, so that means that we can love and we can be loved.

God is love, but God is also spirit and we are spiritual beings, we are innately hard-wired for God. Our deepest, most essential part of our being longs for God and belongs to God.

Everything as God created it was good. Perfect even! Perfection of God’s creation was the plan all along. God created Adam and Eve and all humanity to be in a perfect love relationship with Himself. That was the intent and the plan, but God also gave us choice. God designed it so that creation is not forced to do return love back to God. God gave Adam and Eve the choice to remain in that relationship. We were meant for good, for perfection, but as the popular saying goes, all good things must come to an end, right?

**\*The Bad News of Sin**

Adam and Eve made some choices that were not honoring to themselves or to God. They got a little distracted. Adam and Eve took their attention away from the one thing they should’ve been focused on, God. They wanted to check out some toys, they wanted to see what some other things were like, so they got a little distracted. In short, they succumbed to temptation. They had all kinds of choices and possibilities, but the one thing they could not do, they did.

We’re all guys here, so we can blame Eve right? Women make us do all kinds of things that we wish hadn’t done. Amen? No, we can’t blame anybody but ourselves. That’s the thing about sin. We can’t blame anybody but ourselves because God created us to have a perfect love relationship with Him and our choices, our actions cause the separation. Adam and Eve’s actions separated themselves from God. They separated themselves from that which they were created for – a relationship with God.

We do the same thing. It is we who move away by our own action.

**\*The Bad News of Sin is Preceded by the Good News of Our Origin in God**

Even though Adam & Eve's choices brought loss and disorder, God provided for them. In fact, before they ever even sinned God provided for Adam and Eve. He provided for them by creating in them the longing and the desire to be in relationship with God. So the bad news of sin is PRECEDED by the Good News of the intent of that perfect relationship with God.

God provided for them before they ever even sinned by programming and hard-wiring Adam and Eve for a relationship with God. Before you ever sinned, God loved you. Before you ever had a relationship with God, God loved you. Before you ever even encountered God, God loved you. God loved you from before the day God created you. He goes before you to love you. He goes before you to give that gift of grace. It’s Prevenient. It works before you ever even know of it.

We all continue to make bad choices, yet God provides for us. The problem of Adam and Eve continues until today but the Good News of God through Jesus Christ continues through until today as well. There is an old hymn called Grace Greater Than Our Sin that tells us that no matter how great our sin is, and we can sin a lot, God’s grace is greater than all of our sin. Think of that, no matter how much we sin, no matter how heaped up our personal pile of sin is, our national pile of sin, our sin throughout the world, God’s grace is still greater than all of it!

Because God grace greater than all our sin, God continues to pursue us, woo us, draw us and bring us to God, no matter how little we deserve it or fail to earn it. Because of God’s grace…

**\*God continues to offer us a relationship**

God is continually looking for us, searching for us, wooing us, drawing us to Himself, offering us a relationship. The truth is that God wants us more than we want Him. God has more interest in us that we do in Him. God is not distracted as I was in that busy store, God is totally focused on the relationship with His beloved. We are the ones who are distracted by a lot of things this life offers which cause a separation between us and God.

God has a love for us that is bigger than any distraction or sin that causes a separation between us. It is greater than all our sin. God’s love is the strongest love because it is a covenantal love.

**\*Covenantal love is strongest relationship in Bible – Noah, Abraham, Moses and David**

A covenant is a binding agreement, a promise, but stronger than a promise because you can break a promise. Covenantal love is God’s binding agreement that God will love his people if only they make him their God. God made covenants with lots of people – Noah, Abraham, Moses and David are just a few examples.

Throughout the Old Testament we can see God establishing a covenant with the Hebrew people and the Hebrew people getting distracting and wandering away. This pattern is repeated multiple times in the Old Testament. God would share His love with the people, the people would respond, but in time, get distracting by the culture around them, they would wander away, suffer the consequences, and the Prophets would call them back to their special relationship with God. And over the next couple hundred years they would do it again. That covenantal love was imperfect because it required and imperfect sacrifice, a sacrifice of sheep or burnt offerings by human hands. And there was no way for the sacrifice to be perfect until God sent his perfect and precious Son, Jesus.

**\*Jesus offers a new relationship of love and grace**

The gift of God’s Son, Jesus, to die for our sins is the sign of the continued pursuit of God to be in relationship with His people. Jesus adds a new twist to it. Jesus’ love is a divine love, Jesus shows us that God’s love seeks us out and is everlasting. The love of God will never fail.

What we have to remember in all of this, that **\*It is** **God who seeks us.** God is looking for us, God is on the hunt for you. What you have been distracted by? There are plenty of distractions in our culture? What has distracted you and caused you to put the distance between you and God.

Trust God enough to know that He is looking for you. God is on the prowl. It is comforting for me to know that God is looking for me because it helps me overcome my brokenness and alienation. I cause the rift, but God has already repaired it, God is just waiting for me to realize it.

You might be saying to yourself, well this is all great, but how do I know Prevenient Grace is really working? **\*How Can I Experience Prevenient Grace?**

* **\*Events in life – positive and negative**

There are circumstances in life that you can sense God is working. Especially when you look back on your life, viewing it from the rear view mirror you can see how God has worked in various situations to preveniently apply grace in your life.

* **\*Care and sacrifice of others**

Watching others sacrifice and give grace to others, or even more so experience it for yourself when people come to support you and love you and give to you, you can experience God’s prevenient grace.

* **\*Body of believers**

The body of believers, the church, when it is working well, when things are going as God designed it in the church, grace abounds!

* **\*Holy Spirit awakening us**

The Holy Spirit works within us to call us to God, to lead us into grace, to seek us out and draw us into a relationship with God.

* **\*Through us to others**

Don’t forget that you are a vehicle that God can use to speak to someone else, leave yourself open to what God may have for you.

John Wesley described Prevenient Grace as a porch. Think of it, when God invites you into His house, the house of Salvation, the first thing you do when you go to anyone’s house is you go to the porch. Before you ever go in, you are there on the porch. God has invited you, you have to get to the porch.

As a remember an event from my early adulthood I can see Prevenient Grace very clearly applied through my grandfather.

**\***During the summers when I was in college I worked for an excavating company. Those summers were filled with hard work on long hot days. As it happened, we were working over an hour away and we had a long drive home in heavy traffic and I was hot and I was tired and I was filthy dirty and muddy. So dirty in fact, that I wore very little clothing on the way home. When I got home, I had one goal on my mind: get a shower and get to the Hartford Fair where I knew I could eat some food and see my girl. I made one mistake in my quest though, I checked the phone messages.

On the message was my dear sweet grandfather, my most favorite person in the whole world. He had called to say that his band was playing at the fair that night and they were short a bass player and could I play. I looked at the clock, I had 15 minutes to get there. So, I went. The whole time thinking about my goal: getting some food and seeing my girlfriend. Well, we completed our concert and wouldn’t you know they wanted an encore, which is funny since we weren’t very good. So we played a few more songs, then my dear sweet grandfather, my favorite person in the whole world asked me to help him carry his instruments back to his vehicle. Well, I couldn’t say no to him, so we started out carrying all these instruments clear across the fairground because he didn’t park in the exhibitors lot, or in the handicap lot, so we started walking. We walked so far that we got to my pride and joy, my pick up truck clear in the back of the lot. By then he realized that he had forgotten where he parked. So we walked back and forth. Finally, as it was getting dark and I had not had dinner yet and I was pretty sure my girlfriend was waiting on me somewhere, I suggested that we put the instruments in my truck and drive to find his vehicle.

So we drove up and down and up and down the aisles and as we approached the front of the lot there was a truck headed toward me and moved to the right to avoid him, not knowing that I was about to hit a trailer and boy did I hit that trailer! So, I jumped out and checked and sure enough there was a scratch and a dent right down the side of it. I got back into the truck and Grandpa says, “Is it scratched?” I didn’t respond.

We pulled up by the barn where we could see it better and my friends and my girlfriend all gathered around to see the damage and Grandpa gets out and innocently asks again, “Is it scratched?” At that moment I unloaded a whole day’s worth of frustration and anger and stress on my poor, unsuspecting, dear, sweet grandfather whom I dearly love. On top of that I added a couple year’s worth of foul language that I had learned working at the excavating company. This is the man I admire and love and respect the most in the whole world. And I really profanely cursed him out in a most terrible way.

At that moment I could no longer see myself walking around looking for his vehicle so I drove him home. It was a very quiet ride home. Very quiet.

The next morning I went to his house to sheepishly ask forgiveness. I didn’t even make it up the steps, he met me on the porch. He was already there. He had already forgiven me. In fact, he acted as if it had never happened except to suggest that he pay for the damages. I thought I was going to have a long hard road ahead of me to repair the relationship I so desperately needed with my grandfather. I assumed that I had done so much damage to our relationship that it was irreparable. What I found was that there was nothing I could do or say to fix it. My grandfather forgave me simply because he loved me. He loved me unconditionally. He sought me out on the porch with forgiveness, and invited me into his house with love. It was up to me to accept it.

There are plenty of distractions in our culture that keep us from following God closely. There are plenty of other things to do. There is plenty of commotion that will keep us from being focused on God. There is a real possibility that we may get so distracted to the point of sin, the point of separating ourselves from God. But rest assured that God’s Prevenient Grace, the grace that goes before us is already at work in your life. God is there behind you waiting for you to feel the tap on your shoulder and for you to turn around and say, “Oh, there you are daddy, I’ve been looking all over for you.”

**\**De Colores!***