

## SANCTIFYING GRACE

### Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*some  
missin  
words*

Evelyn Christenson is a minister's wife. One Saturday she came into the sanctuary of the church and watched the elderly hard-of-hearing janitor at work. He was using a sweeper under the pews, but was still having a struggle picking up the little pieces of paper. Suddenly, Evelyn came to her senses and figured out why—he had forgotten to plug in the sweeper.

I gave my life to Christ at the age of twelve. I expected to be made perfect immediately. This new found perfection lasted sort of three days until I lost my temper with my father's request that I do my chores. It was then I decided being a Christian was just too hard.

I went on to try to achieve in life by myself. I was chosen as “Most Likely to Succeed” as I graduated high school, but by the time I was a sophomore in college I had succeeded in losing a part-time restaurant job because of my temper and in the love-life department, I managed to land under house arrest.

So, with the mess I had made of my life because of my stubbornness and bad choices, I gave my life back to God.

Fortunately, this time my pastor told me I would not reach perfection immediately. The Christian walk is a growing experience. But he also promised me that the Holy Spirit would help me grow. It was like someone told me to plug in the sweeper!

I can say that over thirty-five years later, I am still growing in the Lord and it is exciting. This grace thing is the wonderful way Christ means us to live. It is the grace we call, “sanctifying grace”.

The name of this talk is “Sanctifying Grace” and my name is Sharon Hausman.

So now we are at the end of our weekend. Are you beginning to learn the new depths of what you are singing when you sing, “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound....?”

All grace is God’s grace. We experience the one grace of God in many different ways as we continue on our spiritual journey.

John Sellers shared with us that Prevenient Grace is God’s activity from the moment of our conception to the moment we say “yes” to a relationship to God and beyond.

Chris Santiago shared with us that Justifying Grace is the gift of God by which we accept for our selves the relationship God offers us through Jesus Christ.

Jeff showed us that the Means of Grace help us celebrate and strengthen our relationship with God.

Shawn Morris has shared that even when we face those Obstacles to Grace in our attitudes and actions that hinder our relationship with God and our neighbor, that through the cross, Jesus Christ has overcome every obstacle.

**Sanctifying Grace is the gift of God providing the desire and power to grow in our relationship with God—forever.**

Just as physical birth begins the physical process of growth and maturity, so spiritual birth begins the process of spiritual growth toward maturity. We can say every day, and in every life experience as a Christian, we are growing in grace.

**Sanctifying Grace is the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit working in and through the heart and life of every believer.**

Grace begins as God's active love toward each of us and the world which God has created. We are so important that he came to us in Jesus so we could see how his love is meant to be lived toward God and others. When we respond to this is grace, our lives will be changed in love by action.

**Sanctifying Grace is the process of opening ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit coming alive in us.**

Sanctifying grace is God's divine energy transforming our hearts and lives. I think this is best explained in John 15 <sup>1-8</sup> when Jesus says,

*"I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing...If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.*

Paul goes on to write in Galatians 5:22-23, *"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."*

If we can think of our lives as fruit branches, bearing excellent fruit for Jesus, our one true vine—maybe we can understand the power we have to live with the rest of our lives.

Let's use the word 'RIPEN to think of how our lives can grow in the Holy Spirit wherever we are. To help us grow God's Holy Spirit is at work:

### **Restoring our relationship with God and others.**

We cannot earn God's love by changing our ways. Rather we change our ways because God loves us and gives us the grace to make a fresh start, day by day, hour by hour.

When we become Christians, Paul tells us in Romans 8:15-17 that we receive God's Spirit "bearing witness with our spirit" that we are beloved children of God. Our knowledge of our identity as children of God forms the foundation for all other relationships.

When we say someone is restored to health, that means the medicines and the doctor's orders are working together to bring us back to health. Before we accepted Jesus we were sick because of sin. Christ restored our spiritual lives, rerouted our direction heavenward, and became our hope. Another meaning of the Greek word for "salvation" is "healing". The Spirit lets us know that God is filling our hearts with himself and we are becoming again who we were created to be.

I grew up in Sunday School and Church, because my parents not only sent us there, but took us there. All week I could get up at 6:30 a.m. to go to school, but I could think of more reasons not to get up at 8:30 a.m. to make 9:30 a.m. worship. After I accepted Christ as my Savior, I began to find that I want to be with others in worship and study and pray. The more people I get to know here, the less time I'll have to take meeting all my Christian family in heaven. Relationships that I would be tempted to avoid have really changed my life for the better because we struggle with the Christian life together.

The Holy Spirit is restoring our relationship with God and others because God is:

**Imparting new life, new light, new strength, and a new heart in each of us.**

Sanctifying grace is the process by which the righteousness of Christ becomes a part of us and we experience a change of heart. Day by day we become more like Christ in our attitudes and actions. The more we know Jesus, the more we want to be like him. Having been born again through justifying grace, we grow and mature spiritually through the work of sanctifying grace.

My mother worked hard at being a good church person and raising her family correctly as we were growing up. It was only when she became a newborn Christian at the age of 40 that she could share how unhappy she had been trying to please God, because she had just found out that God loved her regardless. She inspires me by her early rising to pray and study the Bible. She quietly lives her faith with new vitality each day—and she's willing and wanting to know more.



God's love through the Holy Spirit is restoring our relationship with God and others. As His Holy Spirit grows in us, new life, and a new heart is imparted into our lives. That is because the Spirit is:

**Perfecting us in the image of God and the likeness of Jesus Christ.**

Conversion is a process. It happens once, but not all at once. It is a lifelong process of dying to what is evil and rising to what is good and true—that is Christ in us. We are going to discover we have particular gifts of the Spirit are given to us to help us grow and to build up the body of Christ. None of us can do everything (especially not the preacher), but every one of us has some God-given gift to share with others.

I think immediately of Megan from one of the congregations I have served. Megan is a young lady with Down's Syndrome—yet she is the heart of that congregation. If anyone is sick, Meg stands and calls the congregation to pray for that person. At the end of the service, whoever is on her mind is brought to the altar by Megan herself and some of us pray with her together.

Megan claps and raises her hands when the rest of us frozen chosen keep our noses in the hymnbook when we are “praising” God. So often I have thought—I want to be like Megan when I grow up.

Jesus has said, *‘unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’* (Matthew 18:3) A child is always learning—and God thinks that is perfect. Unless they have been brutalized, a child will accept almost anyone as a person worthy to be loved. For the sake of the world, God wants us to come back to that perfection.

Perfecting involves pruning (John 15:2). The Bible tells us that every vine and fruit tree requires pruning, and so do we. A life in grace is a life in process, and some of this process is painful.

I had a special friend early in my ministry who I thought might be someone who would be in my life for the rest of it—then he died suddenly of a heart attack at 33 years. For six months following Wayne's death, I preached every Sunday—but I was upset with God. This experience with someone I loved dying made me face my faith in a whole new way. I went to funerals that I didn't have to preach and sat crying for myself. After about six months, God gave me the image that he was the one on a trapeze holding the one swinging in the air—and even though I was tempted to let go—God never let go of me. And I came through.

A few years later, I married Fritz Hausman, and for two years we were happily married—then he went to work one day and had a heart attack on his way to work. At his death, I was in pain—but I was able to handle it better this time, because I knew God was holding on.

I believe God has taken me through these losses to let me really know how to help others when they lose those special folks. My security has been pruned—so is from other people, my security, and love is from the God who has given me special people as a gift and it's up to me to treat them that way. God has also taught me about the fellowship of widows and widowers who keep living for God and helping each other to come through to live again.

Christian perfection is both instantaneous and progressive. The Greek word for “perfect” can also be translated as “mature or complete.” To be perfected in love is both God's call and God's promise when you are in Christ, God sees you as perfect, mature, and complete today and yet you will continue to grow in grace and be more like Christ next month.

**Sanctifying grace is the doctrine of “the more.” God has more love, more power, more peace, and more joy in store for us.**

The means of grace are means of growth. Sanctifying grace is our deepest joy and our greatest good in all our relationships.

I come with a lot of rough edges. I have a temper and I can get obsessively focused on things that don't matter in eternity. I love watching Dancing with the Stars, Top Chef, Project Runway and American Idol—and when I can, I vote. A few weeks ago I admitted that I voted for Bo Byce instead of Carrie Underwood. Someone said, “Isn't it good that 'Jesus took the wheel'?”

God gives me more joy when I teach and then live the life Christ has given for me. When I first became a Christian, I tried to live the Christian life on my own steam—there was not a lot of joy. One day, my sister said that I had almost seemed freer in spirit before I became a Christian.

Reading the Bible and remembering Jesus' teachings on joy, I decided that night that only God was going to instruct me as I read the Bible and prayed. Direction might come from other people, but I was living for the joy of the Lord. It's a lot more fun as well as powerful.

The Holy Spirit is working within us by:

**Equipping us to do the work of Christ in the world—to be the hands and feet of Christ.**

Sanctifying grace is the work of the Holy Spirit empowering us to see and serve Christ in the least and lost where we live in our world. When we read Matthew 25:31-40, Jesus tells us the ones who please God are the ones who are feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and the prisoner—these are all essential activities of a Christian. But we will do these things when we see the face of Jesus in the face of the one who needs us.

The power Mother Teresa always had was that she could see Jesus in the dying of India.

The Holy Spirit equips us with gifts for ministry. There are many places in scripture that speak to these possible gifts. Read Romans 12 or I Corinthians 12 or Ephesians 4. Every person is gifted, and every gift is needed if the whole will of God is to be accomplished.

The Holy Spirit equips us to obey the Great Commandment, *“to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul, and with all our mind...love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Matthew 22:37, 39)

John Wesley always believed a Christian believer could expect to be perfected in love, because we are that loved by God and given power by his Holy Spirit to love others.

Jesus' last words to his disciples as he ascended into heaven was that we might : *“Go...and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-19). And surely I am with you always Jesus promises, even to the end of the age.”*

Finally, I want to add the Holy Spirit is:

**Nudging us to keep on trusting God in every new experience that comes our way.**

The Newsboys is a group that appeal to the youth. They have a great song about the Holy Spirit:

It's just a spirit thing  
It's just a holy nudge  
It's like a circuit judge in the brain  
It's just a spirit thing  
It's here to guard my heart  
It's just a little hard to explain.

When I heard those words, my heart jumped for joy—that is what the Holy Spirit at work in my life is about. The Spirit nudges me to keep growing; the Spirit guards us and helps us to make God's choices.



As we trust in God's love at work daily in our lives, we see God's spiritual fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control RIPEN in our lives.

How do we grow in sanctifying grace? Growth in grace is a natural process. Jesus told us that a life in grace is as natural as the life of a branch connected to a healthy vine (John 15:1-12)

We abide in Christ (prayer). Through prayer and worship we open ourselves to God; we are rooted and grounded in love and intimately connected to Christ (John 15:4).

Christ's word abides in us through study. In study we give our minds to God and grow in the mind of Christ (John 15:7, 10; Philippians 2:5-8)

We bear much fruit for God's glory in action. In Christian Action we give our hands to God and participate in the work of Christ (John 15:8)

We open our hearts to receive grace as a gift.

We share grace in the body of Christ. Through participation in the gathered community and small accountability groups, we receive strength and nurture—just as a branch does from the vine (John 15:5). We come alive in Christ (Eph. 2:5), learn the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:1-12), and help one another remain rooted and grounded in God's love. (Ephesians 3:14-19)

We respond by full participation in the mission of Christ in the world.

In her book, "Who Put the Cucumbers in my Garden?", Patricia Wilson tells of a Bible Study she attended one evening. The Bible teacher chose Song of Solomon for the study, and as he seemed to drone on, she found herself scanning the whole book. Somewhere around the fourth chapter, she found this verse. *"Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."*

What a wonderful thought the gardener in her thought as she continued to finish Song of Solomon and move on to Isaiah. There is chapter 1:8, she read, “And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged.”

“A garden of cucumbers?” Her ever-vivid imagination brought forth a picture of cucumbers—nasty, prickly things...hidden under hairy vines, overgrown and pungent, disaster for the indigestion-prone, and apt to prove bitter on the tongue. It was a far cry from the spice garden a few chapters before.

Patricia said she’s rather be a spice garden, but she had a sinking feeling that the cucumber garden was a more accurate description of her life. Often she was prickly—and liked it that way. Her life was filled with vines tying her to material things of this world for her security. She thought she was quite capable of causing indigestion with a “holier-than-thou” attitude at a drop of a platitude. Often it was easier to be bitter and forgiving and blaming no one.

A garden of cucumbers...Patricia was sad she came to that Bible study. Then she realized something. The wind of the Holy Spirit could just as easily blow across a garden of cucumbers, but the sweet odor of the Holy Spirit: the frankincense of prayer, the myrrh of faith, and the sweet spice of hope. Where Patricia could only see cucumbers, God had a spice garden. All it needed was the Holy wind—the Holy Spirit to release it.

Our lives often seem to be cucumber gardens, but they can produce the fruit of the Spirit, simply by us asking the Holy Spirit to blow upon our lives—our own cucumber gardens.

Patricia added that she didn't find out much about the Song of Solomon that night, but she did receive a whole new insight into her life as a Christian.

Let yourself keep experiencing Sanctifying grace. Let the Holy Spirit blow across your life even as you are and see what wonderful changes God will give you to experience.

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