**Sanctifying Grace**

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Please turn to page 48 in your worship book and join me in the Prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Gentlemen, please be seated.

Arrested by the Nazis along with the rest of her family for hiding Jews in their Holland home during the Holocaust, this lady was imprisoned and eventually sent to the Ravensbruck concentration camp along with her beloved sister, Betsie, who perished there just days before Corrie ten Boom's own release on December 31, 1944. Corrie then went on to travel widely as a missionary, preaching God's forgiveness and the need for reconciliation. It was in a church in Munich, Germany after she had just finished teaching that God forgives which has a prior condition that we forgive those who have injured us. It was there that she saw that face she would never forget. The face of the guard in the concentration camp who watched as Corrie and her sister and the other women prisoners walked by him in shame, naked. Corrie prayed to herself that he wouldn’t come to her after the service and wondered whether he remembered her. She then looked up and he was making his way toward her against the others. Seeing his face again brought back a rush of memories of the horrors of Ravensbruck. And now he was right in front of Corrie saying, "You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk. I was a guard in there.”

Corrie thought, “Good, you don’t remember me.”

"But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein, ..." his hand came out, ... "will you forgive me?"

“God,” Corrie prayed, “you forgive me daily. I know you have forgiven him, but God I know I should but I can’t. Betsie died in that place — could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?”

It could not have been but seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to Corrie it seemed hours as she wrestled with the most difficult thing she ever had to do.

"Jesus, help me! I can’t do this on my own. Give me your forgiveness," she prayed silently and then woodenly, mechanically, thrust her hand into the one stretched out to her. And as she did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in her shoulder, raced down her arm, sprang into their joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood her whole being, bringing tears to her eyes.

"I forgive you, brother!" she cried. "With all my heart!"

For a long moment they grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. She had never known God's love so intensely as she did then. Now that is grace. Grace that gives both the desire and the power to grow relationships. Grace that imparts to us the very mind, heart, and hands of Christ so we can love our neighbor as ourselves.

The title of this talk is Sanctifying Grace and my name is Rick Stuhmer.

During the course of the last two days, you’ve heard talks on Prevenient Grace, Justifying Grace, the Means of Grace, Obstacles to Grace, and now I’m talking about Sanctifying Grace. Though there are five talks, all grace is God’s grace. Yes, all grace is God’s grace. We experience the one grace of God in many different ways as we continue on our spiritual journey. Let’s review those ways we’ve learned, thus far, about how we experience that grace. On Friday, Dave Warner, talked about Prevenient Grace. Remember that Prevenient grace is God’s activity in our lives, whether we realize or not, from the moment of conception to the moment we say yes to God, and beyond. It is God’s wooing us—trying to win our hearts. Fred Kinne shared later that day that Justifying Grace is the gift of God by which we accept for ourselves the relationship God offers through Christ. On Saturday morning, Keith Taylor gave that long talk with the break in the middle. He talked about all kinds of means that God uses to make himself real to us. These means of grace help us celebrate and strengthen our relationship with God. Then later Saturday, we learned about those things that trip us up on our walk in grace. Those obstacles to grace, shared by Dail Parrish, are attitudes and actions that hinder our relationship with God and with our neighbor. Through the cross, Jesus Christ has overcome every obstacle and with our firm reliance on him we can too. We all experience the grace of God differently according to our needs at various stages of our spiritual journeys.

So, what is Sanctifying Grace? Sanctifying Grace is the gift of God providing both the desire and the power to grow in our relationship with God — forever. Let me repeat that Sanctifying Grace is the gift of God providing both the desire and the power to grow in our relationship with God — forever. It produces both the desire and the power to give God our undivided attention—our whole heart—and our entire life. All of us in this room were born. And ever since we were delivered and spanked to take our first breath, we’ve been growing. Some of us have stopped growing vertically, but continue to grow around. Just as our physical birth began our physical process of growth and maturity, so spiritual birth begins the process of spiritual growth toward maturity. In theological terms, justifying grace precedes sanctifying grace or in easier terms, when we are born again, saved, converted, we begin to grow in grace. Sanctifying grace is growth in grace. Sanctifying grace is growth in grace. This growth in grace is the work of the Holy Spirit perfecting in us what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. Our participation in this relationship with God is made possible by prevenient grace and made real by justifying grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Sanctifying Grace is the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit working in and through the heart and life of every believer. The Holy Spirit works in our lives to recreate us in the image of God. That image of God in us is to have love reigning in our hearts alone as a result of God’s grace. First, Grace is God’s active love—toward me. Grace is God’s active love—toward me. Second, Grace is God’s love in action—toward others and toward the world God created. Grace is God’s love in action—toward others and toward the world God created. Third, our response to grace involves both love and action. Our response to grace involves both love and action. This means our response is both vertical, with God, and horizontal, with people and his creation.

Sanctifying Grace is the process of opening ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us. This work of the Holy Spirit is that divine energy transforming our heart and life. As we are transformed, others will see the love of God working in and through us. It makes us ripe for glory.

As I talk about what each letter of ripe, R - I - P - E, stands for, I will be referencing a lot of scripture. Don’t panic if you don’t get them written down as I talk. You’ll get them later on paper. But keep taking notes since you wont get those.

The R stands for restoring our relationship with God and others. 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, minute by minute, and even second by second. Did you get that? We change not to earn God’s love. We can never do that. It just won’t work. We change because God loves us and gives us the grace to do so.

This change is God’s working in us. In Romans 8:15-17, Paul tells us that we receive God’s Spirit which “bears witness with our spirit” that we are beloved children of God. It is this knowledge of our identity as children of God which forms the foundation for all other relationships. When we’ve been loved unconditionally, how can we love any other way? Knowing whose we are changes who we are. Knowing whose we are changes who we are.

In medical terms, one could say restoration is the process of spiritual growth and the recovery of our health, since we were once sick with sin. When we think of recovery of health, we usually think of physical sicknesses, but soul sickness, though possibly manifested physically, deals with all we are as a person—our thoughts, our emotions, our actions, and our history of wrongs and hurts.

It was July 7, 1967. Four young girls were playing inside as their mom prepared dinner for their dad who was just leaving work to come home to the loves of his life. It was a normal July afternoon with the sun still high in the sky. Mom had dinner ready. Dad was late. He should have been here by now. Then a sheriff car pulled up and the deputy got out and walked to the door. After she answered the door, he asked her who she was and then shared that her husband had just been killed when a drunk driver crossed the center line and hit his vehicle head on. The mother was devastated and was medicated for the hurt. The girls were told about their dad and that he wouldn’t be coming home. They were 2, 4, 8, and 14 at the time. The three youngest seemed to be handling it ok. They’re kids. They’ll be alright. They seem to take it all in stride and the mom found another husband to provide for the family in about a year. The step dad was never allowed to bond with the mom’s four daughters. Dad was forgotten as life went on. Or so it seemed.

Thirty years later, now 34, the four year old had questions about her dad and wanted to meet her dad’s family and began grieving over the loss. This was grief postponed and grief postponed is grief made harder. She also found it hard to accept love from others. Then her husband, two sons, and she experienced a house fire that damaged all their belongings beyond restoration though the house was not destroyed. This loss made the grief over her not knowing her dad worse. All those years of denied emotions were unearthed. She began to see a counselor, who helped her work through grief but the pain persisted and the resistance to love continued because of the hurt she still felt surrounding the tragic losses in her life. For her, love hurt.

In November 2003, she came on a Women’s Walk though she thought another time would be better. On Thursday, she was starting to get a severe cold. She pushed through Friday with prayer and started to feel better. On Saturday, when she walked down that hall to candlelight and turned into the sanctuary, she wanted to turn and run, but she couldn’t. There were others behind her. The love was too much. So overwhelming that she felt weak-kneed. She didn’t deserve it. She walked through in a state of shock, crying all the way. She didn’t even hug me, her husband and couldn’t eat the ice cream afterwards because of the tears. She didn’t know what was happening then, but later testified that she was healed of damaged emotions. Her relationships have changed and she can now readily receive love. My wife, Dolores, experienced God’s healing—not physically, but emotionally. Talk about restoring relationships with God and others. It’s amazing!

I stands for imparting new life, new light, new strength, and a new heart. Imparting new life, new light, new strength, and a new heart. Justifying Grace is the moment when the righteousness of God is imputed to us. This means we are declared “not guilty” because of all that Christ did for us on the cross. We experience a change in relationship or a change of status. Sanctifying grace is the process by which the righteousness of Christ is imparted to us. It becomes a part of us, and we experience a change of heart and action. This is real change in our lives. Day by day we become more like Christ in our attitudes and actions. This was Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians, and is my prayer for you and probably should be our prayer for each other, which we find in the third chapter of Ephesians, verses 14-19. “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

Having been born again through justifying grace, we grow and mature spiritually through the work of sanctifying grace. When I was born in Dayton, Ohio to Ed and Sue Stuhmer, I took the family name of Stuhmer. Not only that, I looked like a Stuhmer kid. When my mom pushed me through the grocery in my dad’s hometown in upstate New York, the people looked in the stroller and said to her, “You must be Eddie’s wife. That’s a Stuhmer baby if I ever saw one.” As I grew up, I picked up more than my Dad’s looks. In 2001, when my dad was hanging in the balance between life and death, I started to notice the mannerisms that I had picked up over the years from my dad. This struck closer to home in October of 2004 during the visitation after my Dad’s death, when someone close to both my dad and I said, “I see a lot of your dad in you.” The longer we live with someone, the more we become like them. As we grow and mature, we live into those characteristics that are imparted to us. They become our own. Let’s hear that again. As we grow and mature, we live into those characteristics that are imparted to us. They become our own.

P is for perfecting us in the image of God and the likeness of Jesus Christ. 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 which is Christ in us. Dietrich Bonhoeffer would say it is the process whereby we exchange cheap grace for costly grace; in other words, we leave our comfortable place in the pew to actively take up the cross of authentic discipleship. Our focus shifts from being self-directed to being led by the Spirit of God. The gifts of the Spirit as Paul discusses them in the 12th through 14th chapters of 1 Corinthians are given to help us grow and to build up the body of Christ. As we mature, our life displays certain qualities known as the fruit of the Spirit as found in Galatians 5:22-23. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” In order to bear much of this fruit, John 15:2 tells us that perfecting involves pruning. Perfecting involves pruning. The Bible tells us that every vine and fruit tree requires pruning in order to produce the best crop. So do we. A life in grace is a life in process, and some of the process is painful.

A few years back, my then thirteen-year-old cousin invited me to play Farmville. I became his neighbor and then set out to grow the biggest and best farm. I was moving right along and spending more and more time to attend to my crops and farm. It was addictive. Then God confronted me asking me whether he called me to harvest virtual fruit or real fruit? Ouch! That hurt. He made his point and Farmville was pruned from my life.

Christian perfection is both instantaneous and progressive. The Greek word for perfect can also be translated as “mature or complete.” Just as a person can be mature or complete as a five-year-old, the same person years later can be quite different and still be a mature or complete fifteen-year-old, or a mature twenty-five-year-old, or sixty-five-year-old and so on. To be perfected in love is both God’s call and God’s promise. To be perfected in love is both God’s call and God’s promise. In Christ you can be perfect, mature, and complete today and 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. We can experience “the more” through the means of grace. The means of grace are means of growth. Our growth in grace, sanctifying grace, is our deepest joy and our greatest good in all our relationships.

E is for equipping us to do the work of Christ in the world—to be the hands and feet of Christ. 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 the lost of our city, state, and world. Listen to Jesus’ words from Matthew 25:31-40. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' and the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'” Feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and the prisoner are all essential activities of a Christian.

In order to accomplish these essential activities, the Holy Spirit equips us with gifts for ministry as discussed in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and Romans 12:6-8. The Holy Spirit equips us with gifts for ministry. Every person is gifted, and every gift is needed if the whole will of God is to be accomplished. The Holy Spirit also gifts us to obey the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. The Holy Spirit also gifts us to obey the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. The Great Commandment is found in Matthew 22:37-39, and is this, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . love your neighbor as yourself.” You’ll find the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and it is this, “Go . . . and make disciples of all nations.”

How do we grow in sanctifying grace? Growth 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 in John 15:1-12. Christ is the vine and we are the branches. We abide in Christ as in John 15:4 through piety. Through prayer and worship we open ourselves to God. We are rooted and grounded in love and intimately connected to Christ. In John 15:7, Jesus says Christ’s words abide in us. This happens through study. In study we give our minds over to God and grow in the mind of Christ as discussed in Philippians 2:5-8. Jesus says we bear much fruit for God’s glory in John 15:8. This is Christian action. In Christian action we give our hands to God and participate in the work of Christ. These works include those works of mercy such as providing food, water, and clothing as we heard in story of the sheep and the goats earlier. They also include works of justice as in Luke 4:18 such as release to the captives and freedom to the oppressed.

We open our hearts to receive grace as a gift. Romans 5:5 says, “God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” We do not earn it or deserve God’s love; we simply open our hearts to receive it. We do not earn it or deserve God’s love; we simply open our hearts to receive it.

We then share grace in the body of Christ which is community. Through participation in gathered community and small accountability groups, we receive strength and nurture—just as a branch does from the vine. We come alive in Christ, learn the mind of Christ, and help one another remain rooted and grounded in God’s love. We also respond by full participation in the mission of Christ in the world.

For three days we have prayed for the Holy Spirit to come and fill us with the fire of love. We have learned that:

God wants a relationship with us even more than we want a relationship with God. God’s role in sanctifying grace is to fill us with the Holy Spirit and fire. Our role is to open our hearts and walk in the Spirit with Christ day by day.

Small groups are an important means of sanctifying grace for disciples—from the time Jesus called the first disciples to this very day. Small groups are an essential means of grace. In Emmaus, small accountability groups are called group reunions. Group reunions are the Emmaus community’s primary means of support on the journey toward spiritual maturity.

Remember that stool with the three legs of piety or your spiritual life, study, and Christian action. Since each leg is essential for growth in grace, these are the areas in which we hold one another accountable. Later on you will receive a card and detailed teaching that will help you, but don’t anticipate. These small accountability groups not only show us where we have room to grow but in them, we encourage and challenge one another to do better. These small groups are wonderful means of support on our journey and an important means of sanctifying grace.

De Colores!