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Please turn to Page 48 in your Purple Worship Book and join me in The Prayer to the Holy Spirit. *[Read prayer from worship book.]* Please be seated.

*[A story of an angry teen at church camp.]*

The title of this talk is Justifying Grace and my name is Fred Kinne.

*JUSTIFYING GRACE is God offering us a relationship of unconditional love.* I believe that Godcreated each one of us and offers us a relationship of unconditional love and grace.

According to Genesis chapter 1 God created the heavens and the earth and everything on the earth (including Adam and Eve, the first humans). It took him six day to create all that is and on the seventh day he rested. At the end of each day he looked at what he created and said it was good. I take that to mean God was pleased with all of his creation including those first two humans.

God put those two humans in the Garden of Eden because he wanted relationship with them. However they made the choice to disobey God and ate fruit from the tree of knowledge. God then sent them out of the Garden of Eden and into the rest of creation to fend for themselves. As we read the rest of the Bible stories we learn that God has been pursuing humans ever since because he loves them and wants relationship with them.

*From this we learn that wrong choices separate us from God.* When we make a wrong choice we are like the Prodigal son who chose to take his inheritance and move to a foreign land (away from his father) so he could party. However, when the money ran out and a famine hit that land, the son found himself working on a pig farm. He decided that he would be better off on his father’s farm as a slave than where he was. He decides to return to his father and beg forgiveness. However, the father sees him coming, rushes out to meet him and orders new clothes and a banquet in celebration of his sons return.

This story is important because it reminds us of the relationship God wants to have with each of us. I want to remind you of some important points.

*Because we are created in God’s image for a relationship with Him, NOTHING else will satisfy us.* Not money nor position nor power nor prestige. NOTHING will satisfy us but God.

T*he central theme of Scripture is God calling us back into relationship for which we were created.* The Old Testament stories tell of God calling the Israelites back into relationship.The NewTestament stories tell of God calling all people (Jews and Gentiles) into relationship.

Jesus called people to accept the relationship God offers. *Matthew 11:28* records Jesus saying, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Or in *Luke 19:1-10* we find the story of Zacchaeus the tax collector whom Jesus dines with. That story ends with Jesus saying that Zacchaeus and his family had received salvation. In verse 10 Jesus says, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

*God offers each of us a personal relationship of self-giving love, not rules and laws.* For an understanding of this we turn to *John’s first letter 12:7-12* where we find:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

*God has made the offer; but we must accept it.*

Justifying grace is at work in the moment we say yes to that relationship.

*Once we accept God’s offer and justifying grace begins to work; it changes everything.*

The Prodigal son experienced it in the father’s gracious welcome home.

We can too, when we accept God’s offer for ourselves.

Just like in courtship, the acceptance changes everything.

*Now comes a most important point. You cannot earn this offer.* If you are waiting until you feel good enough to be in relationship with God, Don’t. It doesn’t work that way. *Our response is an act of faith.* God offers; we, in faith, accept.

*Salvation is instantaneous and continuous*. After you accept God’s offer you will be able to say:

*I was saved by grace; I am saved by grace; I will be saved by grace. [FRED: Repeat these.]*

This saying “yes” to God’s offer is known by several titles: Salvation, healing, conversion, having one’s sins forgiven, being born again. They are all ways of saying that someone has accepted God’s offer and are a new person.

*Justifying Grace comes as the result of Jesus going to the cross.*

What we need to understand is that Jesus gave his life to show God’s love for us. Paul points that out in *Romans 5:6-8*:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

[FRED: Have Pilgrims draw a cross.]

Jesus’ sacrifice restores our relationship with God – the vertical.

Jesus’ sacrifice restores our relationship with others – the horizontal.

*Conversion continues as we say “yes” to Jesus every day as we:*

*Understand ourselves better* through living our lives in the light of Jesus’ teachings.

*Acknowledge our need for Christ* when we run into situations where we are not sure what to do.

*Understand God better* by watching for His presence and his guidance.

*Seek God’s will in our lives* when we turn to Him for help with difficult decisions.

*Practice essential spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, meditation, and obedience to the conversion of our will to His.*

We have learned that God has always been active in our lives. Once we say “Yes” to God’s offer we will begin to recognize *God’s activity and our response.*

*Justifying grace is a double acceptance.* *God said, “yes” to us in creation, and at the cross.* You can find evidence of that in *Romans 5:6-11*. Look that up and read it. *We say, “Yes” to the relationship God offers in Jesus.*

God addresses our intellect and we respond in faith. Much of what you know about God before this moment came to you from another person (friend or pastor) or from reading the Bible. That is God addressing your intellect. You respond to that in faith. You are here because God wants relationship with you and you responded in faith.

Faith is a reasonable response to God’s self-revelation. In *Romans 12:2* we find: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Another passage you may want to read is *Ephesians 4:17-24.*

*God appeals to our will, by grace we are free to choose.* That means we are free to accept or reject God’s offer, as an act of our will. However, this is the offer that Jesus makes in *Revelation 3:20*: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”

The faith I speak of is an act of trust and self-denial; we take up the cross and follow a crucified Lord. *Matthew speaks to this in 16:24-26* where Jesus says that those who want to “save his life” must “deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Read that passage for the full message.

When we respond to God’s offer, *God touches our hearts. We respond with love and enthusiasm.* We no longer need to rely only on feelings or trust our emotions.

*God calls us to be disciples of Jesus Christ.* As a disciple of Jesus Christ we are asked to reach out to others. As we do that *we need to remember that Saving faith is the foundation of good works, not the result*. In *John 14:15-17* we find Jesus speaking saying that if you love Him you will obey what he commands and he will send the Spirit of truth to you. It is His assurance that you will go forth as his disciple alone. Please read that passage.

The disciples experienced God’s grace and invites us to do the same. In *Acts 3:1-8* we find the story of Peter healing a crippled beggar by calling on the name of Jesus Christ. Read that passage for the full story.

Every believer’s mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus commanded that in the Great Commission found in *Matthew 28:18-20,*

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The spiritual disciplines (I mentioned earlier) are a faith response to justifying grace, as we use them to become more like Jesus.

God has walked with that angry teen and led him into being a minister of Jesus Christ. I invite you to say “yes” to God’s offer and see where he leads you.

One aspect of Prevenient grace moving us to justifying grace is other Christians loving acts. This is known as *Agape*. *Agape is a Greek word for unconditional love*, which is always a gift, not merited.

*You are experiencing Agape as you are sitting here this weekend.*

One example of the Emmaus community giving Agape love are these letters. [FRED: share 2 or 3.]

De Colores.