**Sanctifying Grace – Jeff Belt**

**<SLIDE 1><SLIDE 2>**It seems like a good part of my life has been spent cleaning up after people. I spent time cleaning up after my two sisters. While I was in college I worked at a food processing plant. There I was on the sanitation crew that cleaned up after production. When I got married and children began to come, yes you’ve guessed it; I picked up and cleaned up after them.

As a pastor some of my time is in helping people clean up the messes in their lives.

I know the value of things being in order and I must admit that I am happiest when my world is orderly and clean. Over time I have mellowed and relaxed when these things do not fall in the order that I wish they would fall. Since I met Christ I have become more aware of the unkemptness of my own life and the fact that I do not have the power to bring about the change that is necessary for my life to be pure and clean and orderly. When Christ came into my life He showed me that He was more concerned with my internal life than my external life. And when I invited the Holy Spirit to come into my life He began the process of cleaning up my life almost like the Clean Sweep Team comes into a person’s home and brings order to it.

**<SLIDE 3>**This talk is Sanctifying Grace and my name is **<TRANSITION>** Jeff Belt

You have heard a number of grace talks this weekend, and I am here to remind you that **<SLIDE 4>** all grace is God’s grace. You need to know this so please write this down; all grace is God’s grace.

This grace that you and I experience in various ways is still all the same grace that comes from God as we continue on our spiritual journey.

You heard in the **<TRANSITION>** prevenient grace talk given by Bill Koppert that it is God’s activity from the moment of your conception to the moment you say yes to God and into the future.

In the **<TRANSITION>** justifying grace talk given by Matt Van Winkle you heard that it is the gift of God by which you accept for yourself the relationship God offers through Christ.

In the **<TRANSITION>** means of grace talk I shared with you that God uses these various means to help you celebrate and strengthen your relationship with God.

In the **<TRANSITION>** obstacles to grace talk, Tom Snyder shared with you that there are attitudes and actions that hinder your relationship with God and with others. But through the cross, Jesus Christ, has overcome every obstacle.

Please write this next point down. And I will go slowly so that you can follow. It will also be on the power point screen.

**<SLIDE 5>** Sanctifying grace is **<TRANSITION>** the gift of God providing both the desire and the power to grow in our relationship with God forever.

Our lives begin at the time of our conception and continue on with our birth. As we grow we go through a process of maturity. The same is true in our spiritual life. Our new life spiritually begins at the moment of our conversion, when we embrace God’s justifying grace. And just as we grow physically and mature in the natural life, so do we in our spiritual life. This growth spiritually is fostered by God sanctifying grace.

Sanctifying grace is the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit working in and through the heart and life of every believer. When God’s grace is working in the life of the believer the Holy Spirit begins the process of transforming the old into the new person. We essentially become more and more like Jesus Christ through God’s sanctifying grace.

The next point that you will want to write down is

**<SLIDE 6>** Sanctifying grace is **<TRANSITION>** the process of opening ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us.

The work of sanctification or the process of growing in grace for me personally is like a good house cleaning. When we invite Christ into our lives he takes ownership of our lives, our house, and He sends the Holy Spirit to begin the process of replacing our old nature with His nature or the nature of Christ. He also gives us the power to bring about this change.

It is almost like you invite a cleaning service to come into your home and clean it from top to bottom and giving it a new coat of paint and completely overhauling the inside of your house. Making it a place where Christ would be honored to live and live out of.

Another way that we can look at the process of being sanctified by God’s sanctifying grace is seen in the picture of the **<SLIDE 7>** ripening grapes. As God works in our lives He brings about a ripening process in our lives and prepares us to experience His glory.

Let us look at the word Ripe and taking each letter let us see how God makes us ripe for His glory.

First the letter R : **<TRANSITION>**This R represents the restoring of our relationship with both God and other people.

We must remember that there is nothing we can do to earn God’s love by simply changing our behavior. First of all we do not want to change our behavior and even if we did we do not have the power to bring about this change. It is because God has started the restoring process of restoring our relationship with Him that we can and want to change our behavior and begin each day new and fresh in His sight.

How we know our relationship with God has been restored is seen when the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we belong to God and are now His child. (Romans 8:15-17) It is our knowledge of our identity as children of God that forms the foundation for all other relationships;

Perhaps the greatest illustration of God bringing about restoration of our relationship with Him is seen in the story that Jesus told of the Prodigal Son.

Please note that the son who goes away from his father is still his son. He still belongs to him. And when he hits his lowest point, after he has squander his inheritance, when he is feeding the pigs and has nothing to eat himself. He suddenly realizes that his father still loves him. He realizes how foolish he has been. He is even willing to be a hired hand on his father’s estate. And so he goes back home and guess who is eagerly waiting for him with open arms, his father.

And once he returns home the relationship with his father is restored. This is my story and it is yours as well.

The I in Ripe represent the new life, new heart, and new strength that are imparted **<TRANSITION>**into our lives.

When God justifies us it means that moment when we accept his gift of salvation and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us. This means that you and I are declared not guilty because of what Christ did for us when he died on the cross. We experience a change of status from being guilty to being not guilty. We experience the change from being lost and now found, blind and now can see, dead and not alive.

Sanctifying grace is the process by which the righteousness of Christ is imparted to us. It literally becomes a part of us and we experience a change of heart. Paul in Ephesians 3:14-19 speaks about how we day by day become more like Christ in our attitudes and actions.

And we grow and mature spiritually through the work of God’s grace that sanctifies us from glory to glory.

One of my favorite poems is entitled “The Touch of the Master’s Hand”. Listen to this wonderful poem.

Read the Touch of the Master’s Hand.

It was the touch of the master’s hand that brought about the change in the violin and it is the imparted righteousness of Christ into our lives, the touch of the master’s scarred hands in our lives that brought about this change as well.

The third letter in our Ripe Acrostic is the letter P God is in the process of perfecting **<TRANSITION>** us in His image and likeness as we become more and more like Jesus Christ.

The conversion that we experience in our spiritual lives is a process. It does happen once, but not all at once. It is a lifelong process of dying to what is evil in our old nature and allowing the new nature to rise up and take control of our lives. The apostle Paul speaks of the importance of dying daily in order to obtain the nature of Christ.

As a believer matures his/her life begins to display certain qualities known as the fruit of the Spirit. This fruit or the byproduct of allowing Christ to live in us fully is found in Galatians 5:22-23. These same qualities were in Jesus love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

As God perfects our lives He also takes us through times when He has to prune us. Just like we have to prune back a bush or tree in order to make it grow in a certain way or produce the kind of fruit that it was meant to produce, so does God have to prune us in order to produce the fruit of the Spirit that He wants in our lives. In John 15:2 Jesus tells us that every branch, that’s you and me, that does not bear fruit, God prunes so that it will produce even more fruit. I need to be right up front with you to tell you that as you grow in God’s grace the process of this growth is often painful. Just like as we grow from a boy to a young man and on to a man it can be very painful at times.

This whole process of perfecting in the Christian life is both instant and progressive. When I speak of being perfect the Scriptures show it to be mature and complete. To be perfected in love, which is God’s desire for each of us; it is both His call and promise. It is His desire that today you can be perfect, mature and complete but also that you grow in grace and be more like Christ each day that you live.

Our last letter in Ripe is the letter E. And this word is so important. God’s sanctifying grace is equipping **<TRANSITION>** us to do the work of Christ in the world to literally be the hands and feet of Christ.

God’s grace that sanctifies us is the work of the Holy Spirit empowering us to see and serve Christ in the least of these in our communities, state, nation and around the world. This is told to us in Matthew 25:31-40

So to be the hands and feet of Christ means we are to feed the hungry, both physically and spiritually, give water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit the prisoner.

It is important to know that God by the Holy Spirit equips us gives us gifts for ministry in order to strengthen the Body of Christ and serve the world. Every believer is gifted and every gift needs to be utilized if the whole will of God is to be accomplished.

Finally the Holy Spirit equips us to obey the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

In Matthew 22:37-38 Jesus tells us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

And in Matthew 28:18-19 Jesus tells us to go into all the world and make disciples of him baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Last point that I want to share with you this morning concerning sanctifying grace is in the form of a question and the question is: **<SLIDE 8>** How do we grow in sanctifying grace?

You need to know that **<TRANSITION>** growth in grace is a natural process.

Jesus told us that a life in grace is as natural as the life of a branch that is connected to a healthy vine. And as long as the branch stays in the vine it will grow and produce much fruit. This is found in John 15:1-2.

One of the best ways we can stay connected to Christ is through **<TRANSITION>** prayer. It is through prayer and worship we open ourselves to God’s presence. And we become rooted and grounded in His love and intimately connected to Christ. John 15:4

Another way we can grow in grace is through **<TRANSITION>** study. For it is those times of study that we give our minds to God and by doing this we begin to develop the mind of Christ.

A third way in which we grow in grace is by our **<TRANSITION>** actions. In Christian action we give ourselves to service to God through works of mercy such as providing food, water and clothing. This is shown to us in Matthew 25:35. We can also act through works of justice where we stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves.

Growth in grace is not only a natural process but **<TRANSITION>** we grow as we open our hearts to receive it as a gift. God constantly desires us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And as we stay filled with the Spirit we can experience more and more growth in this grace.

**<SLIDE 9>** We grow in grace also as we **<TRANSITION>**are connected to the body of Christ. **<TRANSITION>** Through participation in gathered community and in small accountability groups, we receive the strength and nurture, just as a branch does from the vine .In John 15:5 Jesus tells us the importance of once again staying in the vine, this is our direct relationship to Christ.

**<SLIDE 10>**

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

God desires a relationship with us even more than we want a relationship with Him.

God’s role in sanctifying grace is to fill us with the Holy Spirit and fire. And our role is open our hearts and walk in the Spirit with Christ day by day.

One of the most important ways that you will continue grow in grace and be filled with the Spirit is in a small group. Small groups are an important means of sanctifying grace for the disciple. From the time that Jesus called the first disciples to this very day, small groups are an essential means of grace.

In the Emmaus Community small accountability groups are called group reunions or share groups. When we meet with a small group we follow the order on the group reunion card which you will find on your table. Please take a card now and look at it with me as we introduce you to this essential means of God’s sanctifying grace.

Group reunions are the Emmaus Community’s life blood and primary means of support on the journey towards spiritual maturity.

Continue to have a great walk in God’s Spirit.

**<SLIDE 11>** De Colores