Encouraging Grace

Sixth in the summer 2019 series “Amazing Grace”

# Scripture: 2 Thess. 2:13-17

# Key Thought**:** God's grace gives us tremendous encouragement.

# Intro:

This summer we have been working through a series of sermons on God’s “Amazing Grace.” As I was studying for this week, I came across another great definition of divine grace.

Grace is “that eternal principle of God’s character that causes Him to bestow His goodness and love and salvation on the undeserving.” (Paul R. Van Gorder in “Enemies of Grace” pamphlet c. 1985 Radio Bible Class p. 2)

Because our God is by nature a “grace giver,” to use Pastor David Jeremiah’s phrase, we have every reason to be encouraged. This morning I would like to talk about how God’s grace encourages us along our journey.

# Encouraged by grace to begin our Christian walk

## Encouraged because God has called us

God’s encouragement begins with his convicting and calling grace. At first, we may not consider this an encouragement. We may not welcome the temporary discomfort of spiritual conviction concerning our sins and misdeeds and our neglect of God. But when we have responded to God’s loving overtures of kindness, how glad we are for God’s first encouragements.

John Wesley, founder of Methodism wrote;

Salvation begins with what is usually termed preventing grace; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against them. All these implies some tendency toward life; some degree of salvation; the beginning of a deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God. Salvation is carried on by convincing grace, usually in Scripture termed repentance; which brings a larger measure of self-knowledge, and a further deliverance from the heart of stone. Afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation, whereby ‘through grace’ we ‘are saved by faith.’ (John Wesley in sermon 128 titled Free Grace)

## Encouraged because God has chosen us

Here in Second Thessalonians 2:13, Paul uses a different metaphor about the beginning of our faith journey but for the same purpose – to encourage us. Paul encourages us to remember that we are chosen.

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14 NIV

This is not the only place in Scripture where this language metaphor is used. Consider the words of Peter at the beginning of his first letter.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood; grace and peace be yours in abundance. 1 Peter 1:1, 2 NIV

Both Peter and Paul mention this idea of choosing–not to suggest that someone else was not chosen and therefore would be lost, as some theologies have suggested–but rather for the purpose of helping us to feel special, included, privileged, and eligible for the healing results of God’s gracious choices.

## Encouraged by God’s purposes in our call

What is the result of being chosen according to these passages? Here in second Thessalonians, the ultimate result of the ‘sanctifying work of the spirit’ is that we ‘might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ More about that in a moment. Compare in 1 Peter where the ultimate result of this same sanctifying work of the spirit is ‘obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.’

The apostle Paul wrote more about God’s ultimate intentions,

 “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” Ro 8:29 NIV

In summary, we have been called and chosen in order to become Christlike. What a great privilege. We can be encouraged just to know that God has high and holy purposes for our spiritual lives.

# Encouraged by grace to continue our Christian walk

## We serve the God of encouragement

But this realization is also frightening. For all of us, who have any spiritual sensitivity at all, know how far from Christlike we are. Paul set the standard high when he wrote;

 “God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.” 1 Th 4:7 NIV

So, when we think about the gap between where we are and where we know God wants us to be, that can be very discouraging. All of us get discouraged sometimes.

Did you see the great picture that was on the news of the two second grade boys? One boy, Connor, who is white, is autistic and was having a frightening beginning to his first day back to school. He was crying and withdrawn and had gotten separated from his aide. Christian, who is black, knew him from last year though they had not been friends. Christian reached out and took his hand. This brought just the encouragement that Connor needed. They went into school together holding hands. Later Connor reported that he had a great day. Now Christian and Connor eat together every day.

Encouragement is powerful. God does not want us to be discouraged, he wants us to keep progressing. I think this is one reason why the apostles in their letters were always trying to encourage the people to whom they wrote. As one of the professors that I knew when I was in seminary wrote;

“No matter where we are in our spiritual life, we got there by grace and we can go on in grace. The Wesleyan equation is this: ‘Grace plus response equals growth’”
J. Steven Harper, Asbury Herald Vol. 111 #4 p. 7

Did you know that the Bible describes our God as the God of encouragement?

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus… Rom 15:5 ESV

You could translate this either as the “God who is characterized by being encouraging.” Or as the “God who is the source of encouragement.” The newest NIV combines these ideas and writes, “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement…”

In our text today we find the same truth about God’s nature and desire as Paul prays a benediction over his readers.

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. 2 Thess. 2:16-17 NIV

God is always at work in our lives and one key way he is at work is to encourage us.

In 1995 I had the privilege of visiting Mt. Rushmore with my family. While there I saw a picture of the mountain which was taken before the sculpture was made. I read about the sculptor, Gutzon Borglum. When Gutzon Borglum saw the mountain before the work began, in his mind’s eye, he could see the faces of the four presidents in the mountain. Now I confess, I saw that earlier picture of the mountain and even knowing what the completed work looks like, and being right there and looking at it, I could not see how he could see the picture of the presidents in the mountain before he started. But that is the genius of the sculptor.

In the same way we cannot see the image that God is completing in us. We know what it is supposed to look like - like Christ. But we are not the master sculptor - He is. He sees a beautiful form in each one of us, - he saw it before the beginning of time, and he elected us to be conformed to the image of his Son. And he is going to get the job done! His goal is that others will see Jesus in us.

## How does God encourage us?

Yesterday, I was not feeling very much like working, but God encouraged me through a song that my son-in-law sent me by text message. It led to me downloading an app that enabled me to listen to another song that encouraged me as well. I got right up and started at my work. God knew what I needed.

God has so many ways of encouraging us. Here are ten such ideas for starters. As you can see, they are varied. God uses many different ways to help us.

1. A Scripture verse we have memorized comes to mind
2. A friend calls or texts with an uplifting message or suggestion
3. We pick up something to read and it seems to have a message just for us
4. Our daily Bible reading
5. Something at the weekly services at church is especially uplifting
6. We receive an answer to prayer
7. A nature moment lifts our thoughts to God
8. Just the right Christian song comes to mind or plays on our app or radio
9. You get positive feedback from a work of service you did
10. Someone you have been encouraging or teaching does well
11. **A Scripture verse we have memorized comes to mind.**
12. **A friend calls or texts with an uplifting message or suggestion.**
13. **We pick up something to read and it seems to have a message just for us.**
14. **Our daily Bible reading is extra meaningful.**
15. **Something at the weekly services at church is especially uplifting.**
16. **We receive an answer to prayer.**
17. **A nature moment lifts our thoughts to God.**
18. **Just the right Christian song comes to mind or plays on our app or radio.**
19. **You get positive feedback from a work of service you did.**
20. **Someone you have been encouraging or teaching does well.**

# Encouraged that God will bring our lives to a heavenly conclusion

Finally, we need to remember that the encouragement or our heavenly Father has an ultimate goal. According to Paul in our text today,

[God] called you …, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thess 2:14 NIV

In the text that we had last week, Paul said that we are all waiting for the

“…the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ...” Titus 2:13 NIV

In his high priestly prayer for all believers, Jesus prayed:

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. John 17:24 NIV

So, God has a goal for you and for me. God’s goal is to help us be ready for the day when we see Jesus.

God’s Holy Word encourages us toward this goal.

“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy” Jude 24 NIV

And God will not give up working with us toward his goal. As Paul wrote:

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Phil 1:6 NIV

**Be encouraged because God, the greatest encourager of all, is at work in your life today!**

# Conclusion

Story Grace Givers p. 85 This story shows how God used a 13-year-old boy to encourage a man seeking to get back on his feet. God will certainly encourage you too.