Grace for Your Journey

Last in the series, “Amazing Grace” 2019

# Scripture: Heb. 4:1-16; Jude 17-25

# Key Thought: Three simple actions help us to continue confidently on our spiritual journey.

# Intro:

“We pray like we live, and we live like we pray”
(Wesley Oden, college pastor at Houghton, NY)

If we can pray with confidence and faith, then we also tend to live our daily lives with confidence in God and faith that God is at work. But if our minds are full of anxiety, then our living becomes tentative.

George Mueller was an Englishman who became famous for two things. First, he lived in the era when many children were left as orphans because of the death of their parents. George Mueller ran multiple orphanages to care for such children. Second, George Mueller was a man of incredible faith in God. He had developed this faith because he had a policy of asking only God for help in caring for the orphans. All his supplies and funds came to the orphanages in answer to prayer.

One story goes that later in life when his reputation as a man of faith was established he was in demand as a speaker on both sides of the Atlantic. He was on his way by ship to an appointment in the new world when the ship was caught in a fog and could not proceed. Mueller was in danger of missing his appointment. He went to see the Captain who explained why he could not proceed. Mueller asked if they could go into the stateroom and pray. The Captain agreed. After Mueller prayed, the Captain started to pray but Mueller interrupted him. “Never mind,” he said, “First of all, you don’t believe that God can or will do anything and second, I believe he already has. Look outside.” They stepped out of the stateroom and the fog was gone.

George Mueller also said,

“The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith, and the beginning of true faith is end of anxiety.”

That statement reflects a biblical attitude. The Apostle Paul wrote,

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phil 4:6-7 NIV

I have to be honest, at this time in my life and in the history of the Methodist church, I find the instruction of this verse to be an increasing challenge. Maybe there are circumstances in your life that create anxiety too. Life has its moments.

So how do we find grace for our journey when tensions rise and anxiety mounts?

What actions and attitudes will help us to draw on the resources available to us because of God’s generous and abounding favor toward the followers of his Son? The passage in Hebrews that is our text today gives us three simple ways.

Simple is good!

# Believe (Heb. 4:3, 14)

## Hebrews 4 is about “believing.”

Hebrews 4 is about the rest of faith. The key idea is that when we believe in Jesus and what he has done for us by his death on the cross, then our hearts are at rest in God’s promises. After explaining the availability of a soul rest, the writer declares;

Now we who have believed enter that rest. Heb 4:3

And he further encourages his readers to keep believing.

Since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. Heb 4:14

## Believing is a choice

But we need to remember that becoming a follower of Jesus and continuing as a disciple of Jesus is a cooperative venture. The Holy Spirit is faithful to do his part, which is called prevenient grace. God’s Spirit calls us and then sends more grace as we continue; but it is our part to believe. The knowledge we acquire; the inputs and influences around us either facilitate our believing or work against it. Yet those things also are part of both our choices and God’s prevenient actions.

We all know people, even ministers who were formerly active Christians, and now do not profess to believe. The Bible warns us against such “falling away” (1 Tim. 4:1; Luke 8:13). Consider part of the explanation that Jesus gave for the parable of the sower.

“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. Luke 8:11-13 NIV

Believing is not just a choice we make once when we decide to follow Jesus, to ask his forgiveness for our sins and become a child of God.

## Believing is a continuing choice

Believing in Jesus is a continuing choice that we put into action by our acts of devotion each day and each week.

That is why the writer of Hebrews tells us to:

“Hold firmly to the faith we profess. Heb 4:14 NIV

We would say simply, “Keep believing!” Remember Jeremiah who in the darkest days of his life as he grieved for the destruction of Jerusalem penned the assurance that has helped so many through the centuries.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lam 3:22-23 NRSV

# Approach (Heb. 4:16)

## The idea of approach is enriched by OT analogy

The second action that I see in this chapter that we need to take in order to find grace for our journey is also a simple one. Yet it is one we resist because we want to do everything in our own strength and power. But the writer urges us:

Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence Heb 4:16 NIV

To approach the throne of grace is simply to pray. But the writer of Hebrews strengthens our view of prayer in many ways. He uses the Old Testament priestly system as a picture of what Jesus has done to help us understand Jesus’ work. Then he explains to us how what Jesus has done helps us as we pray.

### The high priest brought the perfect sacrifice to the perfect place

When someone in the Old Testament times came to pray, they could only do so because the high priest had made the yearly sacrifice of atonement in the Most Holy Place, where the Ark was, where the Mercy Seat, the ark’s cover, was. Having a faithful high priest who had attended to his duties was key for the worshipper. The writer of Hebrews pictures Jesus as our High Priest, who once for all has entered, not an earthly sanctuary, but heaven itself, presenting himself before God’s throne having made the perfect sacrifice for all people for all time, the sacrifice of himself. A perfect atonement has been made for us and opened the way for us to approach God.

### The high priest was a go between

In addition, the role of the Old Testament priest was to serve as somewhat of an intermediary, representing the worshipper to God and representing God to the worshipper. To fill this role well, such priests needed to be as set apart for the service of God and yet they needed to come from the people of Israel so that they could identify with the people. There needed to be a connection in each direction, vertically to God and horizontally to the worshipper.

The writer of Hebrews points out that Jesus fills both roles more perfectly than an earthly priest ever could have. He has a perfect connection to God because he is God’s Son and is himself divine. And he has a perfect connection to us because he was born of Mary and lived for a while among us, becoming subject even to death itself. So the writer concludes:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence. Heb 4:14-16 NIV

### Jesus has made our situation perfect

Our situation is perfect! We can approach the throne of grace because the help of Jesus our intercessor is available!

## Other admonitions to approach

Think of other great passages which also urge us simply to come to God in prayer, to put away our pride in doing things ourselves and come to God.

The prophet Isaiah used the verb, “Seek.” He reminded us that as we seek God, we will find his favor, his grace.

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.
 Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts.
Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will freely pardon. Isa 55:6-7 NIV

Jesus urged us to pray with the verb, “Come.” His theme of finding rest for our souls is the same as here in Hebrews 4.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matt 11:28-30 NIV

# Receive (Heb. 4:16; Jude 24)

## When we believe and approach then we receive

The Good News this morning is in the third verb in the series which is found in Hebrews 4:16. When we keep believing; when we approach the throne of grace to ask for God’s help; then we receive! God hears our prayers.

Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Heb 4:16 NIV

## We receive abundant grace, amazing grace!

And what do we receive? We receive grace! What is grace? Let’s define it again. I think of grace as God’s abundant favor freely given to us because of Christ.

Grace ≡ God’s abundant favor freely given us because of Christ

What kind of grace is it? It is grace to help us; grace for what we need! Many people like to think of prayer as something that changes us. Well, that is certainly true, it does. Often, that is the thing that is needed most, a change in our heart, a change in our attitude, a change in our decisions. But God is also able and willing to send changes in circumstances in answer to prayer in order to meet the needs of his praying people. Prayer is appointed, not just for bringing psychological and emotional strength and healing, but also for getting answers of other kinds. Moses prayed for the forgiveness of Israel’s sins, but he also prayed for food for the people and for the defeat of his enemies. Elijah prayed for fire from heaven and for rain, but then he needed comfort and assurance from God in the quiet place. Solomon prayed for wisdom to rule. Hezekiah prayed for healing. Peter and John prayed for the healing of the blind man at the temple entrance. The early church prayed for courage to continue to preach Jesus amid persecution. Paul prayed for his readers to grow in love. He also talked to
God about the safety of those on the boat with him in the storm.

There are all kinds of prayers we can pray for ourselves and for others. God’s grace can give us answers to them all according to our needs. The steps for us to take that are given to us in today’s passage are simple: Believe, Approach, Receive!

# Conclusion

A time of prayer.