

West Valley
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Way Truth Life: A Journey of Grace¹ Saving Grace

Good morning church family, both here in the Worship Center and online. My name is Dan, and I am the youth pastor here. I am very excited to be with you this morning as we continue our series Way, Truth, Life.

This morning's focus is on saving grace, and I wanted to begin our time together by talking about transformations. Transformations of people, places, and things. I love a good, heart-warming transformation story, someone making positive changes in their life. The first week of our series, Pastor Mike talked about John Newton, the slave ship captain, turned worship song writer, penning the song "Amazing Grace". And I think we're all familiar with the show Fixer Upper, the transformation of run-down houses into amazing family homes. There are so many transformation stories, there is even a movie series titled "Transformers"! Robots that transform into vehicles, and back.

We are talking about a permanent transformation this morning though, no going back from where we are headed.

Our scripture passage today highlights transformation, people serving God instead of themselves. Please stand in the honor of the reading of God's word:

As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord, I want to see," he replied. Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he

¹ This series borrows heavily from, and is indebted to:

- David A. Busic, *Way, Truth, Life: Discipleship as a Journey of Grace* (The Foundry Publishing, KC, MO 2021)

came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 18:35-19:10)

Two people with some incredible transformation stories, first a blind man receiving sight and then a man with a troubled past being redeemed, both men touched by Jesus in transformative way. Not in an Auto Bot sense, no going back to being blind or self-centered for these two, only forward with Jesus.

And that is our call, forward with Jesus. We are called to leave our old lives behind and to follow Jesus. But let's talk about that old life for a second, let's talk about what is separating us from God.

That's right, sin. Sin is what separates us from God. Sin is the old life we want to leave behind, we should strive to leave behind. Sure, it may pop up in our new life, but our call is to push forward and leave it behind.

Let's define sin. Dr. Busic does just that in the chapter we are in this week in his book "Way, Truth, Life".

Sin is rebellion, "a voluntary transgression of a known law of God."-John Wesley. Sin is willful disobedience. (Busic pg. 58)

1 John 3:4 tells us:

"Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness." (1 John 3:4)

This verse isn't just about breaking the law, but also the attitude behind the action. We are talking about knowing what God says, doing the direct opposite.

For example, it's one thing to speed without knowing the speed limit. Long stretches of highway driving make me nervous sometimes. I've been on some stretches without seeing a posted speed limit for miles. Just not sure what the speed limit is. If I get stopped for speeding, it's still speeding, regardless of my intention. Knowing the speed limit, however, is a little different.

Can anyone tell me the speed limit on Tieton from 40th to 2nd Avenue is? Yes, thank you, you've provided the posted speed limit, now, can you tell me what we as a community have said the speed limit is? Hey, this is point of confession for me. Just the other day someone said they saw me driving on Tieton, and my eyes got a little wide as I asked well which section of Tieton. Seeing the posted sign and blowing it off as if we know better is the attitude we are talking about here, when we see what God has said is good and do the

opposite, thinking we know better, that is sin, that is rebelling against something God has told us to do.

Dr. Busic argues that sin is also enslavement. When we choose to live life our way over God's way, we start serving ourselves and our own desires rather than God and God's desires.

We start making justifications, rationalizations as to why serving ourselves over serving God just makes sense, first at small things and then it gets easier to justify the bigger things and continue to serve ourselves.

In his book, Busic states that "until our nature changes, we are going to love sin more than we love God because we are enslaved to sin-in bondage to its power." (Busic pg. 61) And no amount of good intentions or hard work, no humanistic moralism, is going to liberate us completely. (Busic pg. 61) We cannot break free alone, we cannot release ourselves from the bondage of sin through our own good deeds or our own positivity, we need a grace we cannot fully comprehend.

Sin is also estrangement. Sin isn't just breaking God's law, it also damages our relationship with God, sin separates people from God and each other. (Busic pg. 62)

We know that God is love and God wants a relationship with us. Sin doesn't interrupt that love for us, but it does interrupt the relationship we have with God.

We've all experienced hurt in relationships, right? Fights between friends or spouses, being wronged by someone we love and trust, that really hurts. What is it like for God, when we damage our relationship, when we sin, when we take up the attitude of, I know more than you.

We actually have a description of what happens, how God reacts, in the story of the first sin, "The Fall" as it is called. God created the earth and in it the most beautiful garden you've ever seen, full of everything you would ever need. Then God creates Adam and Eve, and tasks them with taking care of the garden, and they form a partnership, a relationship, with God and each other. They make a choice, they want to see if they can make a better way than God can, they want to decide how to live for themselves, so they eat from a tree God has told them not to.

The relationship with God is broken, the relationship between Adam and Eve is also broken. This broke God's heart, as God felt the relationship break, it was different now. And in pure heartache, God calls out. This isn't a playful question, a manipulation, or rhetorical. I had the opportunity to take a class in seminary on Genesis, with Dr. Phillip Colson. We came to this very part of Genesis, when he had a classmate get up and close the door, because he didn't want to disturb the other classes while properly describing what was happening in this passage of scripture. Dr. Colson was clear, God's heart was broken, the relationship with creation was now broken, and God called out in pain "WHERE ARE YOU", what have you done. God didn't need help locating them physically, God was mourning the

loss of their relationship, as humanity turned their back on their creator and said, we know better than you. We became estranged from God, and remain estranged from God in our enslavement to sin, in our choosing our way over God's way.

Are you getting the picture here? The gravity of the situation? What sin brings, the rebellion, enslavement, and estrangement? Sin is serious, and no amount of "Hey, I go to church every once in a while" or "Well, at least I haven't killed anyone", no amount of moralism, good intentions, or justification is enough to pull you out of sin, to save you. There is no halfway or turning back.

We can't earn our way back into a relationship, we needed something out of this world, something so profound, something beyond our limited understanding, we needed saving grace.

God loves us so much, and wants to be in a relationship with us, and was willing to do the illogical, unthinkable, to make sure there was a way back, and that is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's son.

Dr. Busic calls this "supreme, self-giving love." (Busic pg. 63) Citing Romans 5:8:

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

While we were still sinning, Christ died anyway:

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

God's amazing love, God's amazing grace is what saves us, not our own righteousness, but God's righteousness living in us, through Christ's sacrifice.

Not us, but God:

"In this love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent his son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:10)

And THAT is saving grace, that while we were still sinners, still declaring that we knew better, Jesus was dying on a cross, in order to make a permanent relationship with God possible.

If we can't earn or create or own saving grace, how to partake in it? We receive it, as God freely gives it. We receive it through repentance. Teens, what's repentance? Two parts, when we stop living for ourselves, recognize that we have been doing so and ask for forgiveness for our sins, and then live the way Jesus taught us to live.

So, how does saving grace work? Ephesians 2:1-10: spells it out nicely for us:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh^[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:1-10)

We are saved by grace, which leads to faith, which produces good works, in that order. There is no shuffling the order, do not swap grace and works, it is not works that lead to grace and faith, it is grace that produces faith and inspires works.

Again, you cannot earn this saving grace, it is a gift freely given to us by a God that loves us and a son who captured that love and covered it in flesh and then sacrificed that flesh so that we may be with that love in this life and in the next.

We are saved by God’s grace, which then leads to faith. Busic states that “Faith is essentially an awareness of and response to the who has awakened us”. (Busic pg. 68) Faith is an awareness of God and God’s love.

That faith, that awareness of God’s love produces good works. Good works flow out of our faith. Once we receive God’s gift of grace, and are inspired by that love in faith, it is only natural to act on that love, that gift. Good works is acting on that grace and our faith. God’s love is so great that we cannot keep it to ourselves, nor were we meant to.

Works are an understanding of that grace and an example of our faith. We are called to know Jesus and live like Jesus, live the way Jesus lived, love the people Jesus loved the way Jesus loved them. If we truly cling to Jesus and are transformed by him, then we have no choice but to continue his work.

The good works are a proof of our transformation, an example of what it means to be a Christian, we demonstrate our connection to Christ by our love for others, why? Because it is how Jesus lived. Busic states that “We are saved by grace, but if there isn’t something actually happening in our concrete character and existing behavior, then it’s not real faith.” (Busic pg. 69) We’ve all heard James chapter 2, faith without works is...is what? Dead, that’s right, faith without works is dead. Receiving and understanding saving grace, the love of Christ, without a transformation, a dedication to living as Christ, acting like Christ, is moot, invalid, incomprehensible.

Just like the two men from our passage, when we encounter Jesus, we are transformed, leaving the old life behind, and living a new life with Jesus. Baptism is a reminder of this transformation, and a declaration of this transformation. That's why we talk about baptism so often, we believe that you are to be baptized as soon as possible after you accept Christ, to declare yourself dead to sin and alive in Christ, that our old life went down into the grave with Christ and we were, and will be again, risen with Christ in our new life.

When we encounter God's love, when we accept God's give of saving grace, our lives are transformed. We are no longer living for ourselves, but for Christ who lives in us, and that call to live as Christ is lifelong. Please, please, make sure you are here next week, I'd love to dive deeper into what that means, but I'm going to have to leave you with a cliff hanger on that one.

Prayer

Benediction

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Friends, may you go and live these words.