

“THE MEANS OF GRACE”
Luke 18:1-8, 2 Timothy 3:14-17, James 1:5, 5:13-18
October 14 & 15, 2023

“The story is told of a man who went on a voyage. He had been longing for so long to go on this voyage. It was a cruise and it cost him all he had. He packed himself peanut butter and jelly sandwiches because he knew he wouldn’t be able to afford to buy anything on the cruise.

“It was a weeklong cruise and he planned to eat his peanut butter and jelly sandwiches the whole time for the length of the trip. As he finally embarked upon his long-awaited vacation, he was excited about the upcoming fun although it included the same meal day in and day out.

“At first, he was fine with his chosen fare, but after a while, he began to notice all the food available to the other travelers. People were gorging themselves on beef, ham, turkey, chicken and vegetables. He saw people having room service. He thought to himself, ‘Lord have mercy. I am here with peanut butter and jelly and these people are eating all of this!’

“One day he saw one of the porters coming by with a big plate of food and the man asked how much would it cost just to get a little meal? The porter with the plate stared at the man. The man continued to explain that he only had enough money for his ticket, didn’t bring enough for the meals, but now thought he would like to try something small. With disbelief, the porter told the man that the meals were included in the price of the ticket.

“There are a lot of Christians today eating spiritual peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, wondering why they can’t enjoy a megameal. They look around at other Christians who seem to be victorious, seem to be ‘on top,’ or seem to be eating spiritual steak and potatoes, and wonder why they are limited to peanut butter, jelly, and bread. What that man on the cruise ship didn’t understand is what far too many Christians don’t understand, and that is the principle of grace.

“When Jesus went through the heavens and was seated on the right-hand side of the Father, as you profess your faith in Him as your Savior, you are given a ticket to join Him on the voyage to eternal life. All the meals are included in that ticket. All the help you need is in that ticket. All the enablement

you need is in that ticket. All the strength you need is in that ticket. Leave the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches alone and avail yourself of the provisions of God that are in the ticket you have as being a follower of Jesus Christ. Keep in mind, however, that the tickets are only dispensed at the throne of grace”¹ by God who gives them to His children.

The benefits of having the ticket come to you as you participate in the means of grace. Just sitting in your cabin, trying to provide for yourself causes you to miss out on so much of God’s goodness granted through His grace. We have to become active in accepting God’s grace, and participating in the means of grace. So today I want to help you to learn what the means of grace are so that you can begin practicing them and then enjoy them within your life.

The means of grace enable you to find all of the benefits in your life as you prepare for and begin your journey with Jesus into eternal life. The tickets are given for you to enjoy now in this life, as well as the life that comes after we finish our journey here on this earth. The means of grace disclose to you all of the benefits that you have available, not only to prepare, but to enjoy, this marvelous journey with Jesus.

The means of grace are those activities that you become a part of that help you grow in your faith in Jesus. The **First Means of Grace** is reading and studying the Bible. Reading and studying the Bible is key for us to come to know who God is and to see what He has done for us throughout the ages and history of mankind. The Bible is the account of how humanity has benefitted by God’s interaction in our lives. It tells how much God loves us and how He desires to bless us.

The Bible gives us examples of the lives of those who have faithfully followed God’s Word, implementing His laws and commandments into their lives to live in a way that brings honor and glory to Him. It tells of the blessings they have received, the deliverances they have gotten from their enemies, and it tells of the many ways that God provided abundantly for them, even in the midst of difficult times. It is a marvelous account of God showering His blessings on those who follow Him.

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations and Quotes*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 143-4, #432)

The Bible also gives us examples of those who have refused to follow God's Word, those who have refused to obey His laws and commands and have gone off on their own journey of life without God to guide and direct them. (That's the peanut butter and jelly folks.) They decided that they did not need God because they had positions of power or they lived in areas that were abundant in all that they needed for life. They were ones who decided that the Lord God Almighty was not enough, so they turned to man-made gods of stone, or wood, or metal. Then they made up their own laws to govern themselves and they lived completely opposite of how the Lord God Almighty desired them to live. We are told of their sad, and often violent, endings as God allowed them to be captured and occupied by other people groups.

The Bible also tells us of how gracious God is in providing a way for us to come out of rebellion against Him, so that He might bless us and provide for us again. We hear of great forgiveness and mercy given to those who repented of their ways and once again sought out the Lord God Almighty to be their God, the One they would follow with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. We hear some magnificent transformation accounts of people being saved because they turned to the Lord God for help. We hear marvelous workings of the Lord for those who return to Him. And we observe wondrous things that God grants to those who give up on trying to do things on their own and begin to rely upon the power and strength and wisdom of the Lord our God.

The Bible is a wondrous history book granting us a look at how God finally provides a way for us to gain eternal life with Him. This account is of God offering us His only begotten Son, to come live with us, help us to see the need for God in our lives, and then release us from the penalty of our rebellion against God. The Son of God, Jesus, then offered Himself as the great sacrifice that brings us back into God's presence when we put our trust and faith in Him. We heard about that last week.

But though the Bible is a history book, all of its lessons are applicable for us today, since we, as humans, repeat the same mistakes and fall for the same deceptions that cause us to fall away from God. The Bible has all of the answers that we need to live life abundantly and faithfully so that God can bless

us, and provide for us, and protect us in all our ways. We hear in Psalm 119:105, “*Your Word [O Lord] is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.*” God delights to show us His will and His way as we read and study the Scriptures in the Bible.

In fact, Paul challenged his disciple, Timothy, to continue to seek God’s truth found in the Scriptures so that he could be a good leader of the people. Paul clearly relates the truth about the Scriptures when he says, “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Since it is God’s Word, it is always beneficial for us to read it and study it and even memorize it so that we might have it active in our lives, and live in ways that bring honor and glory to the Lord our God.

So to read and study the Bible is not just for those who are Sunday school teachers, or Bible study leaders, or pastors or seminary professors. The Word of God is for all people to learn about God and find His will and His way in their lives. Reading and studying the Bible is the means of grace that enables us to know and love God.

The **Second Means of Grace** is ministering to others. That means that we look beyond ourselves, to see the needs of others, and to reach out to help them in any way that we can. God has blessed us in so many ways, and His delight is for us to touch the hearts and lives of those around us just like we’ve been touched. We are then called to use our gifts and graces, our abilities and our resources, to be a blessing to those around us so that they might come to love the Lord even deeper through our ministering to them.

It’s like a “father who took his boys to the fair. He went to the ticket booth and bought a roll of tickets and dispensed them to his sons. Then one of his sons saw a school friend and brought him over to introduce him to his father. The school friend went over to the father, introduced himself, and then asked for a ticket!

“The father held back the tickets and said, ‘I’m sorry, I can’t give you a ticket. I need to hang on

to them to give rides to my sons today.’ But his son said, ‘That’s OK, Dad, I don’t mind sharing. You can give it to him.’ When the father heard the son give his okay, the father dispensed the ticket for the ride to the young man in the name of his son.

“When you come to God the Father, He looks at His Son for His OK. Why? Because the gift of the ‘ticket’ is dependent on the Son. This is what we call grace.”² All those who claim the Son of God as their Messiah and Savior have access to the tickets of the Lord God. But they only come through the Son. Without Jesus, there is no life; with Jesus we have access to so much more life.

And that’s what God intends for us to do with those around us. As we see the needs of those who are hurting, or are lost, or are grieving, or are just lonely, **we** are called upon to be in ministry to them so that they might also experience the grace of God. By serving others, by ministering to them through the abundance that God has given to us, we put our faith into action, and the Word of God becomes alive in us. That lets people around us see the Word of Truth because God’s Word is living through us.

But a big question before us today is this, “Can we really be professing Christians if we are not in ministry touching the lives of those around us in some way?” If we profess to be a follower of Jesus Christ, it is expected that we share His love and grace with others, and that happens as we support and encourage and minister to them. Can we be silent, incognito Christians? I would say that those who are ashamed of living their faith in Jesus Christ and have no compassion for those around them, really are not followers of Jesus. I know we can debate that issue for a long time, but listen to this.

The apostle James has something to say about living our faith. He says, “*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have*

² (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, pg. 140, #420)

deeds. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith **by my deeds**” (James 2:14-18).

You see, Jesus expects us to live our faith by serving others in whatever way is necessary. It is vital then that we put feet on our faith and demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ and the grace of God through ministry to others. We must be willing to serve, and in so doing, we are blessed with God’s grace.

The **Third Means of Grace** is worship. John Piper describes worship in three different ways. First he says, “True worship is a valuing or a treasuring of God above all things.”³ That means our hearts are firmly focused on God being the #1 place in our lives. Then, as we have God as most important to us in our hearts, then we can outwardly express that love of God through activities that demonstrate our affection for Him. We have to first identify the inner devotion to God before any outward expression is valuable. Jesus said it best in Matthew 15:8–9: “*This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me; in vain do they worship Me.*” There has to be an inner treasuring of God before the outward expression of worship is meaningful.

Jesus also tells us in John 4:23-24, “*The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.*” So our hearts must be ready to worship God before our bodies show up to worship God. There has to be a true desire for worship in our lives before worship is meaningful. Just the act of showing up here on a Saturday or Sunday is not enough. Your heart has to be in it to make it worthwhile.

Second, John Piper says “Right worship, good worship, pleasing worship depends on a right mental grasp of the way God really is.” This means that true worship is based on a right understanding of God’s nature, and it is a right valuing of God’s worth. It is our recognizing God’s full importance in our lives and putting the supreme value of God on display by gathering with others to truly worship Him as the Lord God Almighty. It is demonstrating the worth of God in our lives.

³ (<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-worship>)

Third, John Piper says, “The inner essence of worship is the response of the heart to the knowledge of the mind when the mind is rightly understanding God and the heart is rightly valuing God.” So worship is the heart guiding the mind to recognize God as the most important person in our lives, above anything and anyone else. Worship starts in the heart, and that knowledge of who God is influences the mind, and then the mind drives the body. If our hearts are not truly into respecting and honoring God for who He is, our minds will do whatever the heart tells it to do, thereby driving the actions of our lives.

Fourth, John Piper explains, “We worship God authentically when we know him truly and treasure him duly.” Worship then becomes visible in two different ways; one is through acts of repentance and praise in worship settings or small groups: the other is acts of love through serving others. Our lives become influenced by our heart’s knowledge of who God is, so we make God important within us as we live our daily lives. Worship is the expression of God’s grace within us.

The **Fourth Means of Grace**, is habitual prayer. We heard Jesus’ parable of the widow changing the heart of the unjust judge by her constant presence before him (Luke 18:1-8). This gives us the example of how we are to pray to God - not that God is an unjust judge who needs to have His mind changed, but that He desires **us** to continually be present before Him so that He might delight in meeting our needs. As we come before the Lord God with adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication, He sees that our hearts are in tune with His will and His ways and God then begins to answer us.

Prayer is not so much to change God’s mind, but to change our hearts into thinking and living according to God’s ways. Listen to the way that James states it. This is James 1:5, and then James 5:13-18. (READ James 1:5, 5:13-18).

Prayer recognizes that we are not able to adequately live in a way that honors and glorifies God. Prayer helps us to see that we are not the all in all for ourselves, but we need help beyond this physical existence to really live. Prayer is our communication to the Lord God, both giving Him honor and respect that He deserves, and seeking His help and guidance for our lives.

So James tells us to pray when we are in trouble. He tells us to rejoice in God when everything is going well. We are to pray for each other when we are sick so that God might understand our desire and bring about our very best as He answers us. We are to pray for forgiveness, letting God know that we understand our rebellion against His ways. We are to pray earnestly so that our faithfulness might be shown.

Prayer is the means of God's grace becoming active in our lives. "The need for grace is the problem of sin and the problem of sin cannot be solved by the efforts of man. Nothing you can do on your own can cancel out the problem of sin. Crushing five million oranges still won't give you an apple."⁴ Prayer gets us beyond our own selves, to recognize the need for God to be active in our lives to guide us and direct us and then bless us as we are faithful to Him.

As we pray earnestly, God delights to answer us so that He might do mighty and amazing things. But in the event that God does not answer us in the way that we pray does not mean He has not heard your prayers. So often we pray what I call "key-hole prayers," prayers that are so focused on one thing that we don't see the great work of God in the big picture of life. Yet God is working so marvelously in so many ways that if we get stuck on only one thing, we miss out on all the rest that God has for us and is doing through us.

Reading and studying the Bible, ministering to others, worship, and prayer, then, are the means that help us to see the grace of God, and as we seek the Lord through these activities, He is delighted to draw us close to Him and enable us to find His work in us. So if you are finding yourself limited in your life in some way, start using these means of grace, and grow close to the Lord our God. Let's pray.

Father, we are so dependent upon ourselves that we miss the many blessings You have for us. Give us the courage to begin practicing the means of grace so that we might come to know You more and love You deeper. Help us to find Your call in our lives to live in Your grace so that others might see Your love for them through us. Give us the courage to evaluate our lives and find where we are lacking, and then begin to practice the means to grace. Give us a heart for Your Word. Call us to service. Build our lives through worship. Summon our hearts to turn to You regularly in prayer. Open our hearts and minds to see Your great love for us as we experience Your grace. Draw us close to You each and every day. This we pray in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

⁴ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations*, pg. 141, #428)