

## Healing Grace

One of the things I've learned in life is that no one just sails through life. We all have problems, struggles and hurts - every one of us. Today, I want us to look at God's healing grace and how God heals the emotional, mental and spiritual wounds of our lives. Psalm 147:1,3 says, *"Praise the Lord! How good to sing praises to our God! How delightful and how fitting! He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds."* Many of us have wounds that need to be healed.

How does God heal these wounds? God does it in many ways, but one important way is by making us new - by renewing our lives. And God does that by changing the way we think. By changing how we see God, how we see ourselves and by how we view the pain in our lives. Romans 12 says, *"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think."* To change our lives, to take us beyond the limitations, the behaviors and customs of this world which wound us and prevent us from getting well, you've got to let God change the way you think.

If you think of yourself as a loser in this world, you're going to tend to be a loser in life. If you think of yourself as a victim in this world, you're more likely to repeat pattern that can put you into situations where you're more likely to be victimized. If you don't think of yourself as a creative person, you won't create much in life. If you see yourself as a failure, you're going to tend to make what you think about yourself true. Our beliefs influence and affect our behaviors. The way we think determines the way that we are likely to act.

The major problem with that is that some of your beliefs are dead wrong - false, erroneous, mistaken. That's true of every single one of us. Most of your other ideas are distorted - partly true but poorly thought out or including misconceptions. You picked up all kinds of beliefs growing up. Because it was some adult or someone you thought was important who said it to you, you tended to accept it. You believed them and you're still acting on some beliefs even though they're not true. Beyond that, you've learned all kinds of falsehoods from our culture - things that we accept as true in our society, that just aren't. Things that may seem to work in this world, but not in God's kingdom. And besides all of that, you've managed to come up with some wrong ideas of your own - just because we're all limited in our experience and our abilities to reason. You've had plenty of thoughts that are limited and flawed.

Remember those old fun houses where they had warped mirrors that would give you a distorted picture of yourself - bigger, skinnier, taller, parts of your body out of proportion? Well, growing up, the people around you were your mirrors. You tended to accept what they said as truth. If they said, "You'll never be able to do that" or "You'll never amount to anything" you tended to believe it at some level - even if you consciously rejected it. You filed it in your mind and it influences your thoughts and actions.

No human is perfect, including the people who taught you or passed onto you all kinds of wrong things, and because their view was flawed, their image of you was erroneous, even some of the good things they said about you were incorrect.

So that's why we're going to look at how God changes our minds and helps us not only see God in a new light but see ourselves in a new light. What I want to do is have all of us work on discovering God's view - to look at ourselves as God looks at us. We can trust the validity of God's viewpoint. Hebrews 4:13-16 says, *"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable. So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most."* Christ has made God's grace abundantly available.

I want to look at several things that are true because of God's grace. If you take these truths to heart and act on this information, you'll begin to be freed from some of the wounds that have hurt you in life and this will be a life-changing day.

Because of God's grace, **1. I am Called and Accepted** - God has called you out of the darkness of this world to be part of the family, one of God's people. 1 Peter 2:9 says, *"...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."* That's good because most of us spend our entire lives trying to be accepted by others. We want to be acceptable to our parents, our peers, our enemies, people we envy, even to total strangers. Most of us don't realize that the drive to be accepted is behind many of the things we do in life. It influences the way you dress, the

car you drive, the kind of house you live in, the work you choose the way you decorate and many other things. And people do all kinds of crazy things just to feel accepted.

Remember when you were a kid, someone would dare someone to do something stupid they did it because they wanted to fit in; to be accepted. Some people as adults also think that if they do certain things, then everyone will love and accept them. I'm sorry, but that doesn't work. Even if you were perfect, some people would reject you. Jesus was perfect, and he was despised and rejected by many people.

But the issue is settled when we accept God's grace. Romans 15:7 says, "*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*" It's talking about how we treat others, but notice the premise there: It says, "*Christ accepted you.*" It's happened. It doesn't say, "Christ will accept you if you're perfect." It doesn't say, "Christ will accept you if you perform the rituals of church life properly." It doesn't say, "Christ will accept you if you dress properly." It's based on God's grace, not on your performance. God accepted you just as you are because of God's grace.

Remember as a kid at recess or after school when two kids would be made captains and they got to pick their teams one by one. You would really want to get chosen and you'd be thinking, "Don't let me be the last one chosen!" Being chosen does self esteem a whole lot of good. Well, the Bible says you were chosen by God. You are acceptable by God's grace.

Some of us grew up with un-pleasable parents. No matter what we did, it wasn't good enough. If we got C's, they wanted B's. B's, they wanted A's. A's, they wanted straight A's. Straight A's they wanted extra-curricular activities we were excellent at. No matter what we did we couldn't get the approval and acceptance that all of us crave.

Some adults are still trying to earn that acceptance. In the back of their mind they're still hearing things like, "You're never going to amount to anything." And they're still reacting to those words rather than responding to God.

Let's be frank: if you didn't get people's acceptance or approval as a child, you'll probably never get enough now. But let me say something more important: You don't need it to be happy. There are now 7.22 billion people in the world. There are plenty of people who will accept you, love you and not judge you by a standard no one could live up to. People will accept you and God accepts you. Psalm 27:10 says, "*Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close.*" If God accepts me and you don't, that's your problem and your act of disobedience, because the Bible says, "*Accept one another just as Christ accepted you.*"

But God doesn't leave it there. God says **2. I Am Valuable and Loved** - I am valuable because of God's grace. I'm worth something. How much do you think you're worth? I'm not talking about net worth. I'm talking about self worth. Net worth and self worth have nothing to do with one another. Your value has no relationship to your valuables.

How do you judge the value of a person? How do you judge the value of anything? Two things determine value: who owns it and what's someone willing to pay for it. Those two things create value. If something is owned by a celebrity or was owned by a historic figure it's far more valuable than if it's owned by one of us. A car owned by Elvis would sell for more than your car. A sweater worn by Babe Ruth is more valuable than my old one. How about a bed owned by George Washington? The fact is, who the owner is adds value to what would otherwise be more common.

So, who do you belong to? 1 John 4:4 says, "*...you belong to God, my dear children.*" Imagine your value. Everyone is created by God but not everyone belongs to God. Only those who choose to give themselves to God through faith in Christ. If you've done that, you belong to God. That means you're not just valuable, you're priceless.

The other thing that determines value is what someone's willing to pay for it. We said this recently - your house is only worth what people are willing to pay for it. You may have paid \$250,000 for your house. But if no one's willing to pay more than \$200,000, guess what it's worth? That got a lot of people in trouble in 2008 when the housing market crashed. Things are only worth what someone will pay for them.

How much was paid for you? 1 Corinthians 7 says, "*God paid a high price for you, so don't be enslaved by the world.*" During the centuries of American slavery, there were few ways for African Americans to gain any semblance of freedom. One way that could work to some extent was slave redemption. That meant buying a slave's freedom - basically buying the person so you could free them. This generally meant buying a slave in the South and bringing them north or even taking them to Canada because it was basically impossible for free African Americans to live in

the South. Slave redemption was not very common in America. The most well known redeemed slave is probably Frederick Douglass.

The price paid to free that person was very high. but the greatest price ever paid to free someone was when Jesus Christ paid for your sins and bought your freedom. God exchanged God's own son for you. God said, "You're valuable enough that I'll die for you." That's how valuable you are. If you want to know your value, don't look at your bank account, look at the cross. If people say, "You're worthless. You don't amount to much," they're dead wrong. God says you matter so much that Jesus gave his life for you.

But not only am I valuable, I am loved. That sure feels good when you've had a broken heart. When you've been rejected and don't feel all that lovable. When someone rejects you, you feel second-rate. "No one loves me! I'm a nobody; unlovable! I'm not loved by anyone." You're wrong. Isaiah 54:10 says, *"For the mountains may move and the hills disappear, but even then my faithful love for you will remain. My covenant of blessing will never be broken, says the Lord, who has mercy on you"* God's love for you will never end.

There are two things that make God's love different from human love: First, God's love is consistent. God's not changing his mind. God doesn't have bad hair days. We live with inconsistent love because we live with human beings. We're all inconsistent and that inconsistent love produces insecure people. God's love for you will never end.

Second, God's love is unconditional. It's not based on performance; on you measuring up. We may try to give unconditional love to people; to our children, to our spouses. But we can't do it because we're imperfect. We grow up with conditional love and we give it to others.

But God loves you! No conditions or qualifiers. You don't ever have to ask, "I wonder if God loves me today? Will God love me tomorrow... next week? Did I do enough right things?" God's love doesn't depend on your performance. That's grace. Even when I don't feel it, God still loves me.

The Bible says because of God's grace, **3. I Am Forgiven and Growing.** That's good because I need forgiveness a lot! I get it wrong; I make mistakes all the time. But God's grace makes me forgivable and that's healing.

Did you read about the guy going up to his cabin in Sullivan County. On the way driving up there, he ran out of gas. He got out of his car but he forgot to put the brake on and so the car rolled back, off the road and over the embankment. So he started walking up to his cabin. On the way up the mountain, one of those really bad thunderstorms came in and he got completely drenched. He's shivering to the bone and knows he's going to get pneumonia. He's feeling lower and lower. Finally he saw his cabin and as he's watching, lightning struck it and it caught on fire. He began to cry out, "Why me, God? Why me?" And all of a sudden this voice comes down from heaven, "Because you just tick me off!"

I told that joke because some people really feel that way about God. They're believers and yet anytime anything goes wrong in life they think, "God's getting even with me. He knows that stupid thing that I did." Anything that goes wrong in your life gets attributed to God retaliating.

Does God really do that with his children? No. God is the one who forgives your sins, and God will not hold your sins against you. It's not based on your deserving it. It's based on God being a forgiving God. Acts 10:43 says, *"...everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name."* If you have believed in Jesus you've received the grace of Christ Paul proclaimed in Acts 13:38 on his first missionary journey, *"Brothers, listen! We are here to proclaim that through this man Jesus there is forgiveness for your sins."* Romans 4:5 tells us it's not because of what we do - it says, *"...people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners."* Romans 8:1-3 says, *"So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death... ..God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins."* There is no condemnation if you belong to Jesus.

A pastor in Fresno California told about a woman in his church who's a whiner. She whines and is cranky all the time. Every week she tells him about something she's feeling guilty about. "Pastor, this week God really convicted me about..." and she names whatever she feels bad about that week. This happened week after week, after church. One day he asked her, "Does God ever say anything nice to you?"

I want to ask you that question. Does God ever say anything nice to you? If **all** you hear is God saying, "Not good enough! You blew it again." That's probably not God. You're probably playing old recordings of things people said to

you in the past. You've taken an imperfect parent or other person and projected them onto God and tried to make God into the image of that unpleasable person. That's wrong. God says, "I've wiped it out. When you come to Christ, you're forgiven."

Ephesians 1:4 says, *"Through what Christ would do for us, God decided to make us holy in His eyes, without a single fault we stand before Him covered with His love."* If you don't accept the grace of God, you're not covered with his love. But when you say, "Jesus Christ, I accept what you did for me on the cross and I want you to be number one in my life," you are covered with his love.

God knows every stupid thing you ever did and what you're capable of doing. And God still loves you and still cares about you. God's a gracious God.

When Jesus died on the cross, which sins did he die for? He died for all of them. He's already paid for them all. They're covered. God doesn't go around trying to get even, trying to get revenge, trying to get back at his children. All the punishment we deserve was paid for on the cross. If Jesus paid your punishment, you don't have to pay for it yourself.

The Bible says there is going to be a judgment day for those who have not accepted the grace of God and either rejected God or basically said, "I'm going to work my way to my concept of heaven." But here's the good news. If you've accepted the grace of God into your life, you get a pass on that day. You get to skip that part.

Now all this forgiveness doesn't mean God's happy to leave you the way you were when you accepted Christ, or the way you are right now. God intends for you to always be growing, always changing. Just because God forgives and accepts you as you are doesn't mean it's in your or anyone else's best interest for you to stay that way. God wants you to constantly be growing in maturity; growing in Christ.

Ephesians 12:12-13 talks about the responsibilities of pastors and other church leaders it says, *"Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ."* If you know that you've measured up to the full and complete standard of Christ, then you can stop growing and stop changing - you're done!

But if you're not quite up to the full and complete standard of Christ yet, you still have a ways to go. And if you're not new to the church and you haven't taken the Crosstraining seminars yet, you're not only failing in your own responsibility, you're blocking me in fulfilling MY responsibility to equip you to do God's work and build up the church.

It's not only the forgiveness that heals our souls, helps to heal us emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Our growth in maturity is healing as well. Forgiveness and growth go together; they're part of the same process. When you deny growth, you're denying the forgiveness that makes it possible; you're limiting God's grace. 2 Peter 3:18 says, *"...you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. All glory to him, both now and forever!"*

God says with Christ in my life **4. I Am Capable and Enlisted** - It doesn't matter what other people say, the Bible says with Christ I am capable; I am able! Philippians 4:13 says, *"I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength."*

Study after study shows a wave of low self esteem in our culture. No wonder. Look at the way we live. We do whatever we want to do; whatever makes us comfortable. We try to be our own god. Of course we're going to have low self esteem. We make things a priority in our life that shouldn't be.

Anytime anything besides God is the priority in your life, you're going to have insecurity. If you base your security on how much money you've got, that can be taken away. If you base your security on your status and your image, you can lose them. If you base your security in life on how good looking you are, eventually you're not as hot as you used to be. If you base it on anything or anyone in life except Christ, you can lose it all. To have security you need something that can never be taken from you. There's only one thing that fits that bill. A relationship with God's Son, Jesus. Then, you could lose everything else, but still have your security.

I've known a lot of very successful people. I've noticed that even highly successful people tend to have a gnawing feeling that they're not doing well enough. It's a gnawing sense that no matter how much you've achieved, no matter what house, car, job or whatever you have, inside you're still insecure. Why? Because you're counting on the wrong things and listening to the wrong voices.

You are one of God's people now. That means something. 1 Peter 2:10 says, *"Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."*

Some of us have had major hurts in life and have carried scars, wounds and rejection in our hearts for years. God hurts with you. And there's a church family here that cares about it. You can be healed of a broken heart by the grace of God and the power of Jesus Christ - the one who calls you to be part of his family. In 1 Corinthians 1:2 Paul wrote to the church, *"I am writing to ... you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus, just as he did for all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours."*

Study after study has shown that self esteem, self-worth, tends to be defined by what you think the most important people in your life think about you. To a large degree the way you see yourself and feel about yourself is determined by what you think the most important person in your life thinks about you. So I want to suggest you make Jesus Christ the most important person in your life. He says you're called, accepted, valuable, loved, forgiven, growing, capable and enlisted. Bottom line: who are you going to believe? Will you believe what someone else says or what God says. It's your choice. You can look at yourself through the mirror of the world and your experience, which is imperfect and distorted or you can hold your life up to the mirror of God's Word and love and believe what God says by God's grace.

When you begin to see yourself as God sees you, you'll begin to be freed from the pain of rejection and healed of whatever hurts you because of what the world has thrown at you. You'll begin to heal because it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks if God says you're one of God's children.

Let's pray.