



**The Necessity of Grace**  
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**Lenten Message**  
**Prairie Hills District Superintendent**

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***“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”***

Hello, I’m Randy Cross, superintendent of the Prairie Hills District here in the Dakotas Conference. It’s my privilege and pleasure to present this week’s video. In this fourth week of Lent, let’s talk about Grace. Adam Hamilton, in his book, *Revival*, states that the scripture I just quoted may have been the Apostle Paul’s most important contribution to the Christian faith. I’d have to agree! When we think about it, the presence of God’s grace in our theology moves our faith into an incredibly deep relationship with the God of the universe, a relationship not based on adherence to a set of laws, obedience to a creed – but it is the acceptance of a gift, and the desire to live out that gift in gratitude throughout our lives.

Adam does a nice job of helping us to understand the two meanings of the word “grace” which are held in the Greek word *charis*. He tells us that *charis* means an act of kindness, giving selfless love that is completely undeserved by the one receiving that love, and without any expectation that the love will be repaid. Grace is a quality of God’s character, Adam says, whereby God loves, blesses and forgives humanity. It is also that work of the Spirit that draws us to God, restores us and helps us grow into what God has first created us to be.

Today, if you don’t mind, let’s use you as the subject of our discussion of grace. Let’s go ahead and make some assumptions about you:

1. Your existence on this earth is an act of God’s generosity and love. Your birth and life came as a result of God’s grace (that love and blessing) that creates everything, and you happen to be

part of it. Of course you know that means that woven into your very being is God’s love, and creative power. We start there. Your life is a gift.

2. You also are a sinner. We have to admit it – even created in such a wonderful way; you have the tendency (as do we all) to “stray from the path” or to go where you just ought not to go. In the Lord’s Prayer, many of us pray about those “trespasses” that we have committed, which is a pretty descriptive word for our sin – we have wandered, walked away from the life path that God intends for us, and we continue to do so. How can someone who wanders away from where God wants him or her to be and live, who wants to stand separate from God, fit into this wonderful creation? Truth is, they can’t. We can’t. You can’t. Grace is still needed.
3. You are so cherished by God, that God will do everything possible to bring you back to God. Adam uses the words, “wooing, beckoning, drawing” to describe the essential form of grace known as *prevenient grace*. It is the grace that literally “comes before” our actions of returning to God. God reaches out to you, even before, like the prodigal child, you come to your senses and reach out to God to be restored.
4. You have the opportunity to say yes to God. Once you hear God’s call to you, and you respond, and ask to be delivered from the wandering, the trespassing that marks your life, then God’s *justifying grace* reconciles, redeems – makes straight and correct once again your relationship with God. You actually have the gift of being able to give your life back to God, and to experience what can only be known as a new birth – you start again – you become that new creation, because of God’s grace flowing through your life – that love and blessing of gathering and accepting.
5. Yes, God has called you, you have been reconciled to God – a new relationship between God and you has been birthed, but you aren’t perfect. Sorry. “Being saved” is not the end of the story – it is really the beginning. Now, you have the

opportunity in your new life to better understand and live out the plan and purpose for your life that God has established for you. You have the invitation to become mature, to become what God has always hoped you would be. You are offered the third form of grace known to our faith: *sanctifying grace*. It is the expression of grace that transforms us into fully loving, fully giving children of God. You truly do learn how to love God with all that you are, and how to love your neighbor as you love yourself! You begin to more fully reflect the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life – your bearing, your mind, your actions all move closer to radiating holy love in all that you do. “Sanctification” means “holy making” – that is what sanctifying grace does to you in your life – it makes you more holy.

6. You are also given many different gifts to move along that journey. John Wesley called them “means of grace,” which are simply activities you can do which “open the channels” of grace more fully into your heart. Things like prayer, scripture reading, sharing in the Lord’s supper, fasting, abstinence and others, like being involved in mission and ministry, meditation and spending time in conversation with others about this new life and walking that journey of faith. The key to the means of grace being effective in your life? Adam, like many others, says that the key is paying attention. Listen. Be aware. Instead of coming with your own ideas of what is best, pay attention to what is happening around you, and within you. Allow God’s Spirit to speak to you, move in you, grow a mature spirit that wants to see God more clearly, love God more dearly and follow God more nearly, day by day.

These were John Wesley’s teachings to the new followers in the faith known as Methodists. As Wesley experienced the grace of Christ in his own life, he was also filled with an urgency to share this grace and call to as many people as possible. He challenged and preached and taught and did everything he could to bring the folks of 18<sup>th</sup> Century England into the awareness of God’s powerful grace and claim on them. As I said, he felt an urgency to do this, because he knew how critical to the core of our existence this faith in Jesus Christ is. He knew it was

important to teach and to gather folks into small groups to share the ongoing work of growing into the likeness of Christ, of becoming more mature and what God had made them to be, like Ephesians said.

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***I’d leave you with this question for your own life: how urgent is it for you, to ensure that those persons around you know the love and grace of God in Jesus Christ? If grace is at the core of your life, and it makes any difference to how you live and how you come to expect your eternal life to be enjoyed, what will you do to live passionately, offering that grace to others on God’s behalf? How might you reach another person in order to share what you know about this critically important part of your existence? About this gift from God? That’s the challenge we face in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. It is up to us to offer the invitation, the call, and to live with that same urgency to be sure that others know the grace of the One who has made us, who has loved us, who has saved us, and who is creating holy hearts within us. That’s the blessing and call of this week of Lent. God bless you on your journey!***

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