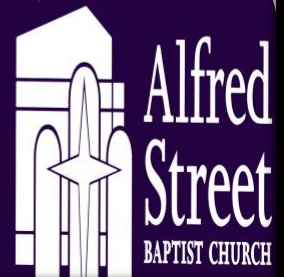


#SCANDALOFGRACE | #WEAREALFREDSTREET

FEBRUARY 11/12
2 CORINTHIANS 12: 7-10

THE
SCANDAL
of Grace

A SERMON BY
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Date: February 11 and 12, 2023
Preacher: Rev. Dr. R. Ty Jones
Sermon Title: The Scandal of Grace
Scripture: II Corinthians 12:7-10 (English Standard Version)

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

SERMON SUMMARY

Rev. Dr. Ty Jones reminds us that the God we love and serve has “two hands.” With one hand, God dispenses grace, and with the other, the discipline necessary to help us grow. We find examples of this throughout the Bible. With one hand, God bestows favor on Saul’s grandson Mephibosheth (II Samuel 9:7), David (I Samuel 16:6-13), and Moses (Exodus 2:1-6); and in this weekend’s text, with the other hand, God inflicts Paul with a thorn. Rev Jones asks if we are willing to grasp **both** hands of God, the one that dispenses favor **and** the one that delivers discipline. Even as we contemplate our answer, our preacher encourages us to believe **we can and should** take God by both hands, accepting blessing and discipline from God as is necessary for our lives.

Though we do not know the specifics of Paul’s thorn, we know its purpose: to keep Paul from becoming conceited. God’s discipline helps us keep on track and prevents us from becoming conceited or growing distant from God. God’s discipline is good for us, and when we beg God to take the disciplining thorns away, there are times when God will say no or not answer us. In those moments, like Paul, we turn to God’s promise that His grace is sufficient. This grace was sufficient for Paul and for Jesus, who from the Garden of Gethsemane asked that his thorn, the cup of death, be taken away. And this grace is sufficient for you and me, for in weakness, our strength is made perfect through this grace. Like Paul, you and I must strive to be content, even happy, amid discipline. God’s grace is always with us, and we will be made strong by God’s sufficient, amazing grace.

KEY POINTS

1. The very same favor and grace that gives you the things you may want can place aggravation and agitation in your life.
2. We are called to grip both hands of God’s extension of grace.
3. You can’t have a high elevation and clear connection simultaneously. To be able to hear God, you can’t think too highly of yourself.
4. The grace that has already been given to you is enough, and grace is the bridge that lets us know that Jesus is still there. We have grace because Jesus conquered the Cross.
5. God’s power is made fully present when we are weak.

Village Members and Facilitators,
The Curriculum Team does not expect you to cover all the questions.
We ask facilitators to choose the best questions for your Village from each section.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU QUESTIONS

1. “I brought you into this world . . . “ What were the favorite maxims of your household as a child? What are the maxims you often quote as an adult?

2. Rev. Jones shared how his father was the provider and disciplinarian. He called his father “two-handed.” When thinking about your childhood, were there times when you didn’t understand “the notion of a two-handed parent”?

INTO THE BIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Rev. Jones mentions several scriptures where God’s mercy is extended (e.g., Exodus 2:1- 3, I Samuel 16: 3 - 6, II Samuel 9:1-9). After reading these texts, how do you define mercy? How is mercy different from grace?

2. The story of (the Old Testament) Joseph culminates with him telling his brothers, “What you intended for evil, God intended for good” (Genesis 50:20). Please name any other Biblical stories that you know that start out with someone attempting evil, and in the end, the act served the good?

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What do you do when you have continuously prayed for God to remove the divine thorn from your life, and either God does not answer or says no? How did God’s answer, or lack thereof, impact your relationship with God?

2. If you are willing, please share an experience of God’s discipline in your life that shaped you in positive and productive ways, even though it hurt.

3. In our sermonic text, Jesus tells Paul, “My grace is sufficient.” Think about the word, *sufficient*. Is sufficient grace different from abundant grace? Why might Jesus offer sufficient grace but not abundant grace?
4. When life is challenging, we learn in this sermon that there are two ways to lighten the burden. We can diminish the weight, or we can increase our strength. When you are burdened, what ways have you discovered to diminish the weight or increase available strength?
5. Rev. Jones provides that when we are high and lifted up, in the clouds of our lives, it is sometimes hard for us to hear God. When things are going very well for you, does the frequency or structure of your prayer shift? Is there anything you might want to change about your good-day prayers?

“CAN I PUSH IT?” QUESTIONS?

1. Some Christians believe that all personal suffering is redemptive and should be endured as a sign of faith. This mindset can lead to people being abused. What do you believe about the role of suffering? When should it be endured, and when should it be alleviated?
2. The world is suffering. We have seen wars, famine, earthquakes, and violence on an unprecedented scale. What is the role of Christians and the church as an institution when we see suffering in the world? How do we reconcile with the “other hand” of God in these moments?

ACTIVITY

1. Think of a thorn in your life and honestly and transparently complete this sentence, ‘**God, when this thorn presses my flesh, I . . .**’ Are you satisfied with your answer? Is there an answer you wish you could have written? If so, note what that answer is and pray that you achieve that position when your thorn next presses into your flesh.
2. This sermon focuses on grace both as discipline and provision. What other scriptures speak to you of grace? Please list three to five essential scriptures that address the concept of grace.

SPIRIT WORK

God dispenses discipline and favor. Make a list of up to five past experiences of God's discipline in your life and five past experiences of God's favor. Write God a letter describing in one paragraph what the discipline taught you and in another paragraph what the favor taught you. After you write the letter, judge whether you learned more from the discipline or the favor.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Within the structure of Village, there are various affinity groups. Each week the team creates questions specifically for the individual groups. However, any village may draw from the questions listed below if the Spirit so moves.

For Married Couples

1. Quoting Joseph from Genesis 50, Rev. Jones reminds us that even evil can be used for good. Has adversity ever entered your marriage that, in the end, proved to be for good? What did that experience teach you about facing future adversities? Did this experience change your relationship with your spouse?
2. Both Jesus and Paul asked God to take away their suffering, but God refused. Have you ever heard a "no" from God in your marriage? How did it affect you? Were you able to accept it?

For Young Adults

1. Paul was given a thorn to keep him from being conceited. What are the characteristics in your life that God attempts to keep you from by acts of discipline? How has God disciplined you to help you move away from those behaviors?
2. Rev. Jones tells the story of Sergeant First Class Cory Remsburg. In that story, he describes Cory's father helping him to stand. Who has helped you to stand? What have you learned from this individual?

For Parents

1. Rev. Jones acknowledges that he was confused by his "two-handed daddy". As a parent, how do you both bless and discipline your child/children in a manner that helps them understand both acts as extensions of love and grace?

2. The sermon tells us that sometimes God chooses not to relieve suffering but to strengthen us to withstand it. Please share when this statement held true for you as a parent. How did the strengthening impact you? How did you apply that strength to future situations?

For Seniors

1. Describe a season in your life when you were weak or powerless in one way, yet in a different way, you were strong.
2. Rev. Jones said, “sometimes God places discomfort in our lives so that it will keep us on track.” How was the thorn in Paul’s flesh beneficial to him? How has God’s divine discomfort helped keep you on track?

For Women

1. Please share a situation where you experienced the two hands of God. How did that situation affect your relationship with God?
2. The sermon tells us the word *perfect* is not a reference to something being blemish-free but instead means “to be fully present”. Does this definition of *perfect* impact how you view yourself and those around you?

For Men

1. Paul talks about being weak, and by God’s grace in his weakness, he is made strong. Sometimes, men are not encouraged to acknowledge weakness. Is there a positive role for weakness in the life of a man? If so, what are those roles, and how do they assist you in developing your faith?
2. Who in your life has been a positive example of delivering both the grace of discipline and provision? What did you learn from them? Have you been able to model this behavior in your life for others?

For Returning Citizens

1. Have you ever had a “thorn” to bear? How did it shape you? Did it help your relationship with God?

2. We do not like to hear the word “no.” Is there a time in your life when no was unwelcomed but turned out to be a blessing? What did you learn from this experience?

For Differently-Abled Persons/People

1. Weakness is in the eye of the beholder. People who are weak in one way may be incredibly strong in another. How has your different ability weakened you and/or strengthened you?

2. Rev. Jones tells the story of Sergeant First Class Cory Remsburg. In that story, he describes Cory’s father helping him to stand. Who has helped you to stand? What have you learned from this individual?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. **Grace:** For a deeper understanding of grace. Please see the Bible Project video by going to this URL.
 - a. <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/character-of-god-grace/>

2. **Paul’s Thorn:** For an excursus (a detailed discussion of a particular point) on Paul’s thorn, please see the contribution from Blue Letter Bible’s Bible Study by going to this URL.
 - a. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/thorn.cfm>

3. **Cory Remsburg:** To learn more about Sergeant First Class Cory Remsburg, please go to the following URL.
 - a. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/hero-saluted-at-state-of-the-union-faces-toughest-battle-yet/>