

Text: Matt 3.17
St Stephen's

March 10/11, 2007
Sat/Sun

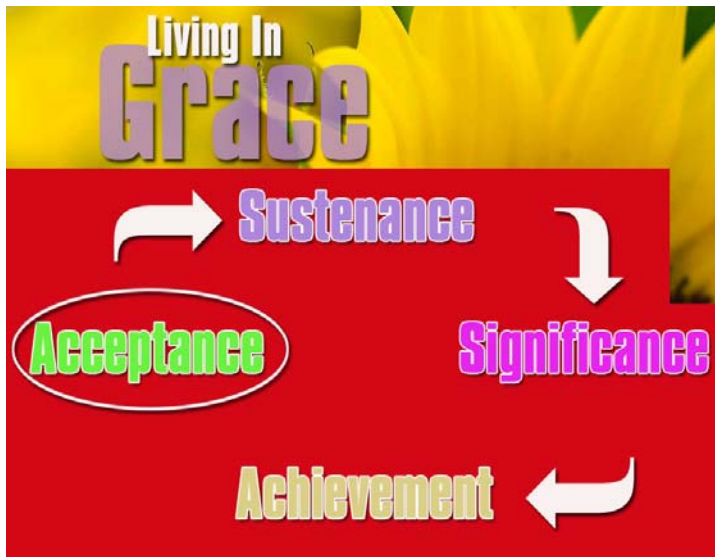
Living in Grace

In Lent this year, we are offering a series of weekend messages and midweek forums that focus on the message of God's grace. Grace is God's "**One Way Love**" His "gift love" - Unearned, undeserved, without beginning, without change, without limit, without end.

This one way love of God is the **central message** of the Bible. And it is the key to a transformed heart. You cannot push or bulldoze people into Christlikeness with criticism and condemnation, but you can love them there with God's one way love, his grace love, his gift love. Only grace can unlock and transform the rebellion of the heart. The way I said it a couple of weeks ago: *"The law produces what it prohibits, but grace grows what it gives."*

During these weekends of Lent we are looking at **grace in the life of Jesus**. In successive weeks we will be looking at various incidents from his life – last week Bill spoke about a **grace miracle** (he touched me), next week a **grace encounter** with a woman in trouble, the week after that a **grace teaching** – Jesus was full of grace and always ministered from that grace.

Today we are going to **look at the pattern of a life of grace**. If you look at the life of Jesus there is a definite pattern. A friend, **Anne Long**, studied the life of Jesus to try and understand how he lived. She drew from the work of others and put it all together in a pattern called **the Cycle of Grace**. Many of my thoughts today are what she taught me. I have given you a copy of the cycle of grace that we drew up. Take a look at it.



This is the pattern of grace in Jesus' life. It starts on the left in the circle called "**Acceptance**"

Living in grace always **starts with the accepting love of God**, and then it grows from that love. When Jesus was **a young boy** we are told that "*the grace of God was upon him.*" (Luk 2.40). Grace was the seedbed of his life, and he grew in that garden. Remember how, **at his baptism**, he heard the words '*You are my much-loved son. With you I am well pleased.*' That is a snapshot of the grace Jesus knew all his life, even before his life on earth. He was much loved by the one way grace love of the Father. Later on in his ministry at his **transfiguration** he heard the Father again, "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!*" (Matthew 17:5) That's grace. Do you remember when Jesus **raised Lazarus** from the dead? He prayed, '*Father, thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me.*' He always knew the open ears and open heart of the Father.

From the earliest days of his life, through his years of ministry, Jesus knew and constantly experienced the fact that he was his Father's beloved son.

Now look at the **top** of my diagram.

"Sustenance" Because he knew he was beloved, he knew he would always be **sustained by grace** for the ministry his Father had sent him to carry out. So He **depended** on his Father for everything. His

dependence on his Father was **total**. He said, *"I always do what I see my Father doing. I always say what I hear my Father speaking..."* So he would **listen, and look and ask**. Did he need love and patience? He would listen, and look - and ask the Father and it would be given. What about healing power or authority over demons and death – or just the right word at the right time? He would listen, and look - and ask the Father and it would be given. Everything he needed for the work he had to do would be given. That is the way it is with 'one way love'.

Significance

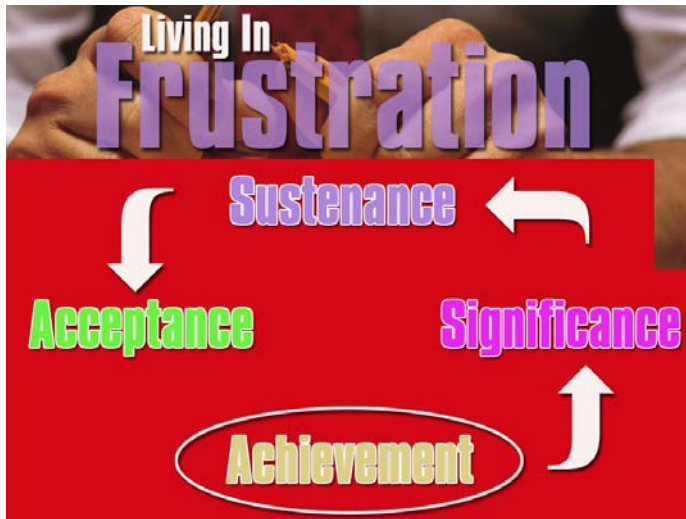
As you move around this cycle to the right, that grace-love forms the foundation of our significance and our **identity**. Grace reforms who you are and how you think of yourself. It quiets that **critical condemning voice** inside you. Living out of his Father's grace love, Jesus quietly and deeply knew who he was – or '**whose**' he was. Do you remember when he said, *"the Father and I are one"*? **When you know 'whose' you are, you know 'who' you are.** Jesus knew his own significance and identity.

Achievement

Look at the bottom of the cycle. Out of this grace love came the achievement of his life. For Jesus achievement was about living in **obedience to his Father**. His achievement was unparalleled. He taught like no one ever had taught, he confronted evil, he set people free from bondage, he challenged legalism, ate with the outcasts, gave hope to the broken hearted, and gave himself on the Cross, dying for us so that we might be set free from our sins. All of this grew from grace...

His entire ministry was about **drawing others into this cycle of grace**-people with very real bondage. Zaccheus (who hated his people and his country and loved money), the Samaritan woman (married to five men and living with a sixth), Peter (denied him 3 times) – all of them left at the chance to live in grace. The **result** of living like this is peace and Christlikeness and a life worth living. Still today he draws people into this cycle of grace. Anyone can just come right in by simply yielding your life to Jesus. But if we're realistic, **few of us live like this. Why not?**

Because most of us are more familiar with a different cycle, the **Cycle of Frustration**.



This is the Cycle of Frustration, some people call it the **Cycle of Law**. It has the same four stations on it as the cycle of grace, but it has a **different starting point, and a different direction**. It runs the circle **in reverse**.

It **starts at the bottom with your achievement**, and from your achievement you draw your significance and your identity. You **earn** your identity. Does this sound familiar?

It is why we incessantly **compare** our credentials, our lifestyles, our careers and our accomplishments with those of everyone else. Put a bunch of men in a room at a cocktail party and they will sort themselves out on the achievement scale within an hour. Women do it, too! (30 pastors on retreat in Pasadena)

As you continue around this cycle, you reinforce this way of life by **feeding it, sustaining it**, often in very neurotic ways. We can be driven to accumulate **possessions**- a bigger house or car. We may succumb to an **addiction**- drink, TV, work, sex, drugs, food. Often what feeds us turns out to be nothing but junk food, poison.

Then moving around to the left, your **acceptance** before people and

before God is based on what you have **earned** through your achievements. Again, 'earned' is the operative word. It is very shallow, very superficial.

The **result** of living like this is frustration and Pharisee-likeness and ineffectiveness. You never change on the inside. You get judgmental of others because they can't keep up – or because they get ahead!

Some of us **live most of our days in this cycle of frustration**. If that is you, if you have been going the wrong way around in life, that can change. You can live in the cycle of grace, you can! The door is open and you can step right in and head the other way.

Many of us are living in both of these circles at the same time. We believe in grace, we really do. We have faith in Jesus, but **we revert**. All the time, we maddeningly revert! That does not have to be the story of your life. It does not.

I want to make one suggestion to you about living a life of grace.

1) Start Every Day in His Grace

Look again at the "Cycle of Grace". This is a pattern of your life. It was for Jesus. It is also a pattern for your days. It was for Jesus...

One of the best things you can do is to get up in the morning and start with grace. Jesus often did just that. You get up in the morning & take 10 minutes for grace. You open your Bible and read a passage and you listen to what God speaks to you. You remember – he will help you remember - "He loves me!" You discover...

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;*
Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)

You pray for the help you need for the day ahead, and grace moments like this set the course for the day ahead.

You pray and read the Bible – and he often whispers to you... *"My Beloved Son/Daughter – I am pleased with you..."*
every time we secretly lean on him through the day – he whispers...
"My Beloved Son/Daughter – I am pleased with you..."

You go through the day and again and again you can hear his voice, in moments that are little and large –
it might be the warm smile of a stranger, the cool breeze on a hot day, the cheering comment of a friend – behind it the unmistakable whisper of the Father... "Beloved"
Jesus caught the sound in the rise of the sun, the nourishment of the rain, the beauty of the field flowers and the birds of the air...

The unmistakable grace love of the Father... "Beloved"