**September 17, 2023 Romans 8:22-30**

 ***Activating God’s Grace for God’s Mission***

**Scripture:** Romans 8:22-30 NRSV

 *(22)We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; (23)and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (24)For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? (25)But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (26) Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. (27)And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (28)We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. (29)For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. (30)And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

**Notes:**

1. God begins forming us into a Christlike ***character***,
	1. Christlikeness is God’s ***goal*** for us.
	2. God makes us like Christ so we can ***minister*** to others.
		1. Philippians 2:12-13 “ *(12)Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; (13) for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure*.”
	3. God calls us to ***work*** ***out*** what God is ***working*** ***on*** in us.
		1. In Hebrews 6:1-3 “ *(1)Therefore let us go on toward perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God, (2)instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. (3)And we will do this, if God permits.*”
2. God requires our ***participation***.
	1. We grow a mature faith through ***daily*** practices.
	2. Seek God’s direction, ***building*** our growing faith.
		1. 2 Peter 1:3-8, “*(3)Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4)and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, (5)who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (6)In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, (7)so that the genuineness of your faith--being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (8)Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy…*”
	3. God works to ***Mature*** our faith.
3. We are called to participate in God’s ***Means*** of ***Grace***.
	1. The means of grace are the many ways God ***reaches*** us.
	2. ***Instituted*** means of grace,
	3. ***Prudential*** means of grace.
	4. We also participate through ***discipline*** and ***service***.
4. How can we practice ***Growth***?
	1. Build Christlike ***character*** one decision at a time
	2. ***Listen*** to God in silence and solitude.
	3. ***Submit*** to God’s Word to guide our decisions.
	4. God’s grace grants us new ***freedom***.
5. Allow God to develop in us a Christlike ***character***,
	1. Spiritual victory comes from a personal ***relationship*** with God,
	2. Participate in the ***transforming*** power of God.
	3. ***Change*** in this world begins within each one of us.
	4. Renew your ***relationship*** with Jesus Christ.

**Script:**

Have you ever tasted something so good that you just wanted to eat it every day from the time you get up until you go to bed at night? I remember that I went through spells of binging on different foods. A few months ago when the doctor told me that I needed to restrict the number of carbs I ate, I began to eat a lot of popcorn. But popcorn without butter and salt is boring. So I shopped around until I found a butter flavoring that had no carbs and of course, salt has no carbs, so I was set. Then after a few months the desire faded away and I was off to my next snack of choice, Pork Rinds, then Beef Jerky sticks. What I soon found was that I was trying to find something with a flavor that I desired to eat nonstop.

We all run into similar trends in our own lives. For some it is with friends, we have a set of friends that we seem to be with constantly, then suddenly for some reason, maybe they found a new set of friends or perhaps you did; but now you don’t spend nearly as much time with them as you once did. For others it is with activities, I have this knack of going to the gym and begin to make progress getting into shape and soon I find myself putting it off; either because I have a bunch of appointments to go to, or I am on vacation and cannot get to the gym. Either way I find myself, postponing the gym for something else. And Like I mentioned before it may be the types of foods you are eating.

Serving God can be much the same way. We find at first that it is such an exhilaration that we just have to be there. Soon the novelty wears off and we begin to slack off. But if nothing draws us back into the service of the church we may find ourselves skipping services for some other activity. In our passage today we hear Paul sending a message to the Romans about our desires and the will of God. Join me in the reading of our passage today found in Romans 8:22-30.

*(22)We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; (23)and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (24)For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? (25)But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (26) Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. (27)And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (28)We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. (29)For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. (30)And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. Romans 8:22-30 NRSV*

So we have discussed over the past few weeks in this series the significance of God’s grace at work in our lives. We may quickly remember God’s seeking grace that called to us and came to us when we were lost in sin, not knowing the offer of forgiveness. It was this prevenient grace that drew us to him and to an understanding of the promise of salvation offered to all who will respond. When we responded in repentance, turning away from our sinful past and turning to Christ for salvation that we received his saving grace. It was this saving grace that made us his children, adopted into this family of God.

After experiencing this saving grace, we began to learn and study what it means to be a child of God. We soon come to another critical time in our life where we may need to submit to the father again, turning our life and our decisions over to the Holy Spirit. This sanctifying grace helps us realize our full reliance on the triune God for direction, comfort and strength in our day-to-day walk. God’s sanctifying grace cleanses our hearts from self-centeredness and fills us with the presence of the Holy Spirit in a deeper way.

But wait; there’s more. God’s grace continues to work with us, each and every daily, transforming us into the image of his Son, Jesus Christ; as it says in verse 29 today, *“(29)For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.”* Our cooperation with God’s grace is no more a burden, than wanting to be in the presence of the ones you love the most. If you think about it that way, if you were to be able to spend every day with a close friend who would it be. Bernard of Clairvaux said it well: “*Once God’s sweetness has been tasted, it draws us to the pure love of God more than our needs compel us to love him. Thus we begin to say, “We now love God, not for our necessity, for we ourselves have tasted and know how sweet the Lord is.”[[1]](#footnote-0)*” I once stated that there is no place I would rather be on a Sunday morning than with my church family in worship to my Savior. In fact I believe I stated it this way, “I can’t not come.” If I cannot be here with you, I will be online or on the television searching for some form of worship and study, even if I am watching reruns from our covid years on my computer

So how does God do it, how does he transform us into being in the likeness of Jesus? God begins forming us into a Christlike character, the moment we accept His saving grace; and I may even speculate that it begins when we are first experiencing the prevenient grace, for if our hearts are not changed, we may never accept the gift of grace he offers. God’s work in us, the work that transforms us, is the process of us being conformed to Christ for the sake of others.

It is the goal of our father in heaven that we look more like Christ each and every day; Christlikeness is God’s goal for us. Why you might ask, would he want us to look more like Christ when he made each of us unique and special. We are not talking about outward appearances here. We are talking about our attitudes and the way we act. He makes us more like Christ so we can minister to others who need him.

In Philippians 2:12-13 Paul writes, “ *(12)Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; (13) for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure*.” God is calling to each one of us to come and work with him. In so, God calls us to work out what God is working on in us. God’s work in us is a miracle of grace; how else can we be transformed from the hateful sinner we once were into the person kneeling at His feet. God does his part. We must cooperate with him in our daily lives; we must do our part.

In Hebrews 6:1-3 The writer states, “ *(1)Therefore let us go on toward perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God, (2)instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. (3)And we will do this, if God permits.*” God requires our participation. As we walk with the Lord, as we study His ways and His word, we begin to mature spiritually. We grow a mature faith through daily choices and practices. We may not see it immediately, but eventually others will, and some may even comment about it to you, making you aware of the change that is happening in you. We are so busy working towards His kingdom we do not take the time to see the growth. This is what happens when we seek God’s help and direction in building on the solid foundation of our growing faith.

Peter writes in 2 Peter 1:3-8, “*(3)Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4)and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, (5)who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (6)In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, (7)so that the genuineness of your faith--being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (8)Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy…*” It may not happen immediately but, through time God works to Mature our faith. He gives us everything we need for a godly life. He gives us great and precious promises. He invites us to participate in his divine nature. We have the responsibility to add, develop, and grow all of the good qualities of Christian living.

We are called to participate in God’s Means of Grace. What are the Means of Grace? The means of grace are the many and varied ways God reaches out to us with his grace. There are instituted means of grace, activities such as prayer, found in many forms; personal/ private, with a friend or family member, and also with a faith community/corporate prayer. Some other means of Grace are through searching the Scriptures, participating in the Lord’s Supper, spiritual disciplines such as fasting, and even participating in Christian conferences (meeting in small groups for fellowship and nurture)

Then there are the Prudential means of grace. Doing no harm to ourselves or others. We do this by refraining from swearing, drunkenness, extravagant dress, self-indulgence, useless diversions, miserliness, and so on. Doing good; caring for people’s bodies, ours and others; especially the poor, the sick, and the distressed; caring for people’s souls by instruction, exhortation, and reproof. And finally by attending to all the ordinances of God, the services that are offered to you and for you.

We are also called to participate through other additional practices. Things like our discipline; discipline of our bodies (control all desires and weight); discipline of our speech (no gossip, shady humor, cursing). And what about our moods, I admit I struggle with this, but we need to learn to control the highs and lows of mood swings; and avoid materialism and consumerism). We also participate through our service. Get involved in meeting the needs of our community, hurting humanity. Get involved in discipleship for the next generation of the church. And finally we are able to participate through suffering; use suffering to grow in character and learn obedience, make up what is lacking in Christ’s suffering.

How can we practice Growth? We build Christlike character one decision at a time by choosing to do the right thing, the honest thing, the Godly thing, and the true thing. We find ways to unplug from technology and a busy schedule so we can learn to listen to God in silence and solitude. We quiet ourselves and allow Christ to draw us into his heart as we listen for his voice. We learn to develop eyes to see Christ as he crosses our paths throughout the day. We realize that spiritual growth does not happen through individual effort alone; we invite a trusted friend and our faith community to speak into our lives as directed by the Holy Spirit. We submit to the authority of Scripture and allow God’s written Word to guide our daily decisions. We realize that God’s grace working in us is not a restriction but grants us new freedom to celebrate life in him as we delight and enjoy his will for our lives.

How are we able to become more like Christ? We must allow God to develop in us a Christlike character, we must participate in God’s means of grace, and we must practice; practicing growth. We engage in these exercises in order to be conformed to the image of God’s Son, as we referenced in Romans 8:29. Make no mistake, these spiritual exercises do not offer a magic formula to spiritual victory. Spiritual victory comes from a personal relationship with God, a fellowship with God on a day-by-day, hour-by-hour, and moment-by-moment basis. It happens one choice at a time, one Bible reading at a time, one prayer at a time, one Christian book at a time, and one Christian song at a time. Just as our children grow daily in such small incremental ways that often go unnoticed, so our relationship with God grows in small ways as we enjoy our sacred romance with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

So I challenge you today, Begin and participate in the transforming power of God. Work alongside Him in the transformation of yourself into a Christlike believer. There are many who say they believe in Jesus. Many who say they believe in the Bible. Many say they believe in God. Even throughout scripture we find many who believe, but they do not do what is necessary to become what God desires of them. Participate in God’s means of grace, every time the opportunity arises, every time it is available. Become a practicing believer; practicing the growth that the Holy Spirit is leading you through, in order for you to become more like Christ.

The change that we are called to make in this world, is a change that begins within each one of us and continues to spread through you to others as we follow the Lord’s leading. Revival is the renewal of the spiritual fervor we felt when we were newly saved. As each of us travel this path, we have moments where we feel out of sync, bored with the repetitiveness, and burned out from the responsibility of all we are called to do; I encourage you, to maintain your spiritual well being. Renew your relationship with the one who loved you first, with Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

1. . Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Love of God*, quoted in *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups*, ed. Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 41-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)