

**Nearer Heaven in 2007
Depending upon Grace in Our Efforts**

Intro: As we have studied together this year the theme Daily Godly Living we have considered several areas where we need to focus our efforts. We've considered:

Cultivating Intimacy with Our God (Jan. 7th)
Glorifying God in Our Work (Jan 14th)
Showing Mercy to Our Neighbor (Jan 21st)
Growing Closer to Our Brethren (Jan 28th)
Being Content in Our Circumstances (Feb. 4th)
Modeling Excellence in Our Relationships (Feb. 11th)
Exercising Caution in Our Speech (Feb. 18th)
Remaining Faithful in Our Suffering (Feb 25th)

I appreciate your response to the challenges of this series and I hope that it is helping us all to become godlier day by day.

Have you found yourself feeling inadequate? Falling short? Disappointed by the sincere efforts to “try” to do better? Perhaps it would be helpful to remember another important element of daily godly living:

Does the Bible teach that success in godly living is wholly the work of human effort, of trying harder and harder? Does it make sense that disciples who could not on their own earn righteousness by works could after conversion muster within themselves the strength to live above sin? The evidence of the Scripture points in another direction. We must...

Depend upon grace for strength to live a fruitful life

Jesus taught that a fruitful life was the result of abiding in Him.

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. (John 15:4-5)

The genius of the gospel is that what the Law could not produce through human effort God can accomplish through the strength and power of His grace working in us.

Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited. (Hebrews 13:9)

Paul attributed his amazing success in evangelistic work not to his own teaching skills and determination, but to the Lord's grace working in him.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. (1 Corinthians 15:10)

These passages make it clear that living a righteous life is not the result of merely trying harder; instead it is the result of trusting in God's power

to transforms us into what He wills. In this way, He is glorified by our efforts.

Depend upon grace for strength to overcome life's painful moments

Paul found himself confronted with a painful circumstance that he called "a thorn in the flesh". He prayed for God to take it away; but instead God offered Paul another solution:

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Instead of expecting Paul to muster the strength to handle the problem on His own, God urged Paul to embrace his weakness and depend upon God's grace instead.

Could it be that we are often overcome by our problems because we think we are supposed to "handle it" rather than put it in God's hands and let His grace provide the strength to overcome life's painful events?

Depend upon grace to defeat temptation

Temptation and sin are clearly taught to be the result of personal desire and choice; however overcoming temptation requires that we depend upon God's help. Consider this exhortation from the Hebrew writer:

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

In the moment of temptation we may think that all we need to do is just bolster our determination not to do wrong. The Hebrew writer indicates a different course. Come confidently to God's throne and ask Him to help you through the temptation.

Jesus urged his disciples:

"Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41)

It sounds like God wants us to depend upon grace in our temptations.

Depend upon grace for forgiveness in failure

Even though we may rely upon divine strength, we may not always trust totally in His power and in moments of separation and weakness we may sin against the Lord. Even here, we must depend upon the grace of God for forgiveness; forgiveness for the disciple who sins is made available only through the grace of God!

Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. (Acts 3:43)

Paul and Barnabas wanted these disciples to continue to appropriate the same grace that had forgiven them. Moreover, when we abandon our faith in Christ, we lose access to the only source of forgiveness we have.

How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:29).

Ironically Satan sometimes defeats us not only before sin by the temptation, but after sin by causing us to turn away from the grace available to us. He tells us that we are condemned and that God will not forgive and that the church will not forgive. Yet the Scripture are clear that God's grace is available to those who repent.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Conclusion: Sometimes when we hear sermons about becoming better we become guilty and burdened because we feel inadequate and disappointing to God. It is in such times that we need to remember that God is not expecting us to earn righteousness by being perfect, but by experiencing the life-changing transformation of his grace. This is the good news of the gospel:

For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17)