

St. Matthew AME Church
Orange, New Jersey
Rev. Melvin E. Wilson, Pastor/Teacher

Women's Bible Study Fellowship

Fall Series: "God's Grace Is Sufficient "

But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. "
II Corinthians 12:9

Session II: " Because of God's Grace, I Am Free to Be Me"

"But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain;" I Corinthians 15:10a

I. Scripture Background Review

We don't know what Paul's thorn in the flesh was, because he doesn't tell us. (II Corinthians 12:7-8) Some have suggested that it was malaria, epilepsy, or a disease of the eyes. Whatever the case, it was a chronic debilitating problem which at times kept him from working. This thorn was a hindrance to his ministry, and he prayed for its removal, but God refused. Paul was a very self-sufficient person, so this thorn must have been difficult for him. It kept Paul humble, reminded him of the need for constant contact with God, and benefited those around him as they saw God at work in his life.

- Although God did not remove Paul's physical affliction, he promised to demonstrate His power in Paul.
- The fact that God's power is displayed in weakness should give us courage. Our weakness not only helps develop Christian character, it also deepens our worship, because in admitting our weakness, we affirm God's strength.
- When we are strong in abilities or resources, we are tempted to do God's work on our own, and that can lead to pride. When we are weak, allowing God to fill us with His power, then we are stronger than we could ever be on our own.

II. Review of Session I: "It Won't Run Out "

" And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed."
II Corinthians 9:8

- Grace is God's inexhaustible supply of goodness by which He does for us what we could never do for ourselves.
- There is no such thing as insufficient grace. The Bible says that God's grace is so inexhaustible, so awesome in its supply, it never runs out.
- We can't earn God's grace, we don't deserve it, but God has made it abundantly available.
- If Christians need to grasp any truth, it is grace. Grace is not well understood today because the word has been used so flippant or without a proper understanding of what's involved in it.
- One reason most people have problems understanding grace is that they have a misconception about God. Because people do not see God as a holy God, they don't see where they need His grace. They expect to wake up tomorrow morning the way they did this morning, because that's just part of the deal. But many people were here yesterday and aren't here today.
- Grace means God doesn't have to do anything.
- God is totally sufficient and in need of nothing. Grace means that all you are and all you have come because God chooses to give it, not because you can demand it or deserve it.

III. Session II: "Because of God's Grace, I Am Free to Be Me"

"But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain;" I Corinthians 15:10a

- Paul gave the grace of God all the credit for the change in his life. He was a changed man, forgiven, cleansed and full of love when he use to be full of hate. He knew this was not his own accomplishment, but it was the work of the grace of God in him.
- The grace that saves us also changes us. Grace changed Paul. You can't receive the grace of God without being changed by it. The changes don't come all at once, and the changes are not complete until we pass to the next life.
- Grace, by definition is given freely. But how we receive grace will help determine how effective the gift of grace is.
- Grace isn't given because of any works, past, present or promised, yet it is given to encourage work, not to say work is not necessary. God doesn't want us to receive His grace and become passive.
- Paul knew that God gives His grace, we work hard, and the work of God is done.
- If we neglect to do God's work, God's grace doesn't accomplish all that it might, and is therefore given in vain.
- This session is designed to help you embrace your unique-self and live authentically and that you will find freedom from comparing yourself to others and trying to please people in an unhealthy way.
- One of the best gifts, we can give ourselves is to accept yourself and believe that God created you, with His own hand in your mother's womb. "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you." Jeremiah 1:5a NKJV
- All of God's works are wonderfully made. Marvelous are thy works; And that my soul knoweth right well." Psalm 139:14 KJV

IV. "It Really Starts with Love"

- Learning to accept and love ourselves is the pathway to authenticity, because if we reject ourselves and refuse God's love for us, we will not be free to be ourselves.
 - No one will love everything they do, but we should all love who God has made us to be.
 - The Holy Spirit fills us with God's love and He wants us to let that love flow through us back to God and out to others.
 - If we have not received God's love, we have no love to give to anyone else, because no matter how much we want to love people, we cannot give away what we do not have.
- "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." I John 4:8 ESV

"THERE IS POWER IN HIS LOVE"

• God wants us to have confidence in His unconditional love for us. We are mistaken if we think that disliking or hating ourselves is an expression of humility, because it is not. Knowing and abiding in God's love makes us powerful.

" and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us." Ephesians 3:19-20 KJV

- Knowing and living in the love of God makes us powerful because it sets us free from self-doubt and enables us to trust God to do great things in us and through us.
- It also liberates us from caring too much about what other people think about us and allows us to seek to please God alone, instead of trying to please other people.
- Knowing and living in the love of God makes us feel strong and able to follow our hearts, express ourselves, and live the lives God intends for us. It helps us focus on what is right about us, not what is wrong with us.
- When we live with the awareness that God loves us, and when we love ourselves, there's no limit to what God can do through us or to the enjoyment we can find in our lives.

V. Learning to be at peace with yourself

- We have to be at peace with ourselves.

" Let Him search for peace ...and seek it eagerly. " I Peter 3:11

- Peace with God is the foundation for peace with everyone and yourself.

We should not merely desire peaceful relations with God, with our brothers/sisters and with yourself, but pursue, go after them.

• To pursue peace is to do whatever it takes to maintain peace in our lives. It means not always getting our way or having the last word in an argument. It requires us to trust God with the people in our lives instead of trying to force them to be what we want them to be. But it's all worth it, because it brings peace, and peace is one of the most valuable qualities we can have.

• " Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all." II Thessalonians 3:16 KJV

• You can't get along with anyone else until you get along with you. Eleanor Roosevelt rightly observed, " Before we can make friends with anyone else, we must first make friends with ourselves."

• Enjoying life and enjoying other people begins with knowing who God says you are and loving yourself in a balanced way.

• Don't compare yourself to others.

• Comparing and competing with other people puts you on a fast track to losing your peace and joy.

• There is such freedom in learning to be happy with who you are without being jealous of someone else's skills and achievements.

• Accept other people just the way they are, not the way you want them to be.

• We all have areas in which we truly need to change, but only God can change us. The best gift we can give to others is to pray for them and accept them as they are.

• We may need to confront certain bad behaviors in them, but if we constantly find fault with others, then we need to look at our own attitude, instead of their behavior.

• To have peace, we must trust God even when things don't make sense. It is one sure way to enjoy your life and experience more peace than ever before.

VI. Self-Rejection Leads to People Pleasing

• When we reject ourselves, we assume other people will reject us too. When we struggle with self-rejection, we don't wait to find out how people will treat us, but we proactively think and believe they will reject us.

• If we fear that people will reject us, we lose our authenticity by trying to please them in order to gain their acceptance. This sets up a cycle that continues until we break it.

• If God- who is perfect, loves and accepts you, there is no reason for us not to do likewise. We usually determine whether or not we are lovable based on how we feel, but our feelings are always changing. Therefore, we cannot trust our feelings to represent the truth. God and His Word are truth and it is impossible for Him to lie. We can completely depend on God.

GOD'S WORD SAYS:

- You are the apple of His eye. Zechariah 2:8
- You are chosen by Him. I Corinthians 9:27, John 15:16
- He will never reject you when you come to Him. John 6:37
 - His love is everlasting. Jeremiah 31:3
- You are special, a chosen people, a royal possession. I Peter 2:9
 - You have gifts, skills, and talents. I Peter 4:10
- You are made right with Him through Jesus Christ. II Corinthians 5:21

DON'T YOU WANT TO BE YOUR TRUE SELF?

- DO YOU BELIEVE GOD LOVES YOU?
- DO YOU LOVE AND ACCEPT YOURSELF?
- ARE YOU A PEOPLE PLEASER?
- ARE YOU AT PEACE WITH YOURSELF?
- DO YOU FEAR REJECTION?
- DO YOU COMPARE YOURSELF WITH OTHERS?

" BY THE GRACE OF GOD, YOU ARE FREE TO BE YOU"