

Living by Grace: A Fresh Start for Your Faith

As we step into a new year, there's something almost electric in the air. Gym memberships spike by 30%. Diet plans fly off the shelves at 40% higher rates. The Bible app, with its billion-plus subscribers worldwide, sees record usage as people enthusiastically sign up for reading-through-the-Bible plans.

There's permission in January—permission to believe things can actually be different this time.

But here's a sobering reality: more than half of people who identify as born-again, Bible-believing, church-attending Christians say they feel stuck or stagnant in their spiritual life. Recent polling shows a 17-percentage-point drop over the last decade in the number of people who say their faith is actually meaningful and impactful in their everyday life.

Faith has become familiar but not formational.

If that resonates with you, if you're ready for a genuine reset in your relationship with God, there's good news. The message of grace—true, unfiltered, transformative grace—has the power to refire a faith that's grown cold.

The Gospel That Changes Everything

The Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians stands as the first recorded letter in the New Testament, and it carries an urgent message about what needs to be prioritized to transform our faith into a deeper, more meaningful, dynamic day-to-day relationship with the Lord.

Paul himself knew something about transformation. He was once a religious zealot, a fundamentalist so devoted to his interpretation of truth that he persecuted Christians, even endorsing their assassination. But then he encountered the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus, and everything changed. The persecutor became the pioneer, called to bring the gospel to non-Jewish circles.

His message to the Galatian churches was simple yet profound: "May God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace."

Grace and peace. Not just peace—the Hebrew shalom, that familiar greeting invoking God's best for someone's life—but grace too. Grace, that word meaning to provoke joy by giving a gift. Grace, meaning to give something without the person having earned it. Grace, the signature word Paul used to encapsulate God's entire salvation activity.

As Ephesians 2:8 declares: "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you cannot take credit for this. It is the gift from God."

The Rescue Mission

But here's where it gets even better. God's plan of salvation isn't just about securing us a home in heaven after we die. That's wonderful—that's the big payoff at the end. But there's another feature built into salvation: rescue from this evil age we live in right now.

Romans 12:1-2 explains it clearly: "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world. Instead, let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."

The world constantly pressures us to adopt its values, its ideas, its actions. It's 24/7 coercion to live life the world's way. But salvation means deliverance from that requirement. You don't have to be conformed by that pressure. You've been rescued so you don't have to live your life the way the world says you must.

That's worth celebrating: "All glory to God forever and ever. Amen."

The Dangerous Distortion

But something was threatening the Galatian believers. A group called the Judaizers—people who identified as Christians but insisted that non-Jewish believers must obey Old Testament ceremonial and social laws—were spreading a dangerous message: Jesus plus the law.

They weren't opposed to Jesus. They were down with Jesus. But it was Jesus plus something else. Jesus plus rule-keeping. Jesus plus performance. Jesus plus earning your way.

And here's what that formula does: it makes you nervous. Anxious. Fear-motivated. You'll run on empty in your spiritual life.

If you deviate from the gospel of grace and begin obligating yourself to live according to certain rules in order to be fully made right with God, you'll never experience the freedom and power that Christ offers.

When Jesus hung on the cross and said, "It is finished," He meant it. There was nothing else required for us to be fully accepted by God other than what Jesus has done for us.

Three Focal Points for Living by Grace

How we think about grace makes the biggest difference in where our spiritual life goes from here. Living by grace requires a changed mindset. Here are three practical points of focus:

1. Grace Standing: Confidence in Your Acceptance

Personal declaration: "I am fully accepted by God because of Christ."

There is nothing else required for you to do or to be in order to have full acceptance by God. Whether you go to church, whether you tithe, whether you struggle with certain sins—none of that affects your standing with God.

Think of it like parenting. Your child is your child, period. There's nothing that can change that standing. Sure, there are things kids do that are pleasing or displeasing, but those fluctuations make no comment on the standing of your child.

In Christ, your standing is secure. Your obedience or disobedience doesn't change it.

2. Grace Guidance: Led by the Spirit

Personal declaration: "I am led by Christ's Spirit within me."

At salvation, the Holy Spirit was given to you. He lives within you and becomes your guide for everyday life. You don't need a New Testament form of Old Testament law to guide you because you have the Holy Spirit to lead you.

The Old Testament contained over 600 laws covering the nitty-gritty details of life—what to eat, what fabrics to wear, even what to do when an ax head falls off its handle. But in New Testament life, while Scripture provides commands, it's the Spirit who provides direction and inspiration for how to live them out.

You don't need someone to give you an action list of dos and don'ts. The Spirit will lead you. He'll inspire you how to walk in truth and grace according to Scripture.

3. Grace Strength: Depending on Christ's Ability

Personal declaration: "I depend on Christ's ability rather than my own."

This is perhaps the most important truth to grasp. Many believers accept salvation by grace but then somehow leave that behind and go forward living life in their own strength. We trust God to save us by grace but don't think He's sufficient enough to help us live by grace.

For too many, Jesus just kind of shadows our life, following us around instead of living His life through us. But Galatians 2:20 teaches us differently: "The life I now live, I live with Christ living His life through me."

Here's the thing: when you live by grace and listen for the Holy Spirit's leading, He will always prompt you to do things that are challenging and difficult. Just because we don't need a legalistic rule book doesn't mean God doesn't have weighty expectations for our lives.

The Spirit might say, "You need to forgive them." And you'll think, "Them? They wronged me!" But Christ can forgive through you.

The Spirit might prompt you to be kind to that person at work who really gets on your nerves. That's hard. They don't deserve it. But Christ can be kind through you.

The Spirit might tell you it's time to take another step in breaking free from addiction. That's incredibly difficult. But the one who breaks every chain lives in you.

The Spirit might lead you to sacrificial generosity beyond your comfort zone. How could you ever do that? Because the one who gives everything lives in you and can give through you.

The Power of Dependency

You must learn to live everyday life, moment by moment, with a high degree of dependency on Jesus. His asks are often greater than your ability. But He is enough.

As Philippians 4:13 promises: "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."

This new year, don't settle for a Sunday faith. Follow Jesus Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Adopt a new mindset. You don't have to be conformed to this world. You've been rescued from that coercion.

Allow a new way of thinking to dominate your thoughts so you might live the life that's good and pleasing to God—a life lived by grace. When challenges come, when the path gets difficult, remember: you don't walk in your own strength. Jesus walks with you, and His strength is sufficient for anything and everything He places on your path.

Grace standing. Grace guidance. Grace strength.

This is the life Jesus died to give you. Not just a ticket to heaven someday, but transformation and freedom today. That's the gospel that changes everything.

Scripture References from the Sermon

Directly Cited or Referenced:

1. **Galatians 1:1** - Paul's apostolic authority
2. **Galatians 1:2** - Letter to the churches of Galatia
3. **Galatians 1:3** - Grace and peace greeting
4. **Galatians 1:4** - Jesus gave his life for our sins
5. **Galatians 1:5** - Doxology
6. **Galatians 1:6-8** - Warning against false gospel
7. **Galatians 2:20** - Christ living through believers
8. **Ephesians 2:8** - Saved by grace through faith
9. **Romans 12:2** - Don't conform to the world; be transformed
10. **Philippians 4:13** - I can do all things through Christ
11. **Acts 13-14** - Paul's missionary journey to Galatia

Alluded to or Thematically Referenced:

12. **John 19:30** - "It is finished" (Jesus on the cross)
13. **Acts 9:1-19** - Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus
14. **Galatians 5:16-25** - Walk by the Spirit, not the flesh (theme discussed)
15. **2 Corinthians 12:9** - God's grace is sufficient (theme of grace strength)
16. **John 14:26** - Holy Spirit as guide
17. **Romans 8:14** - Led by the Spirit of God
18. **Colossians 1:13** - Rescued from the domain of darkness

Suggested Verses for Main Themes:

- **Grace Standing:** Romans 5:1-2, Romans 8:1, Ephesians 1:6
- **Grace Guidance:** Galatians 5:18, John 16:13, Romans 8:26-27
- **Grace Strength:** 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Isaiah 40:29-31, Psalm 46:1
- **Living by Grace vs. Law:** Galatians 3:1-5, Galatians 5:1, Romans 6:14