

May 7, 2023

I've Got Questions: Week 4

Question: How many of you have a habit, something you wished you didn't do, but you can't seem to break it?

At some point you just prayed out to God, "God, would you please help me STOP, help this go away." Maybe you prayed, maybe you made a promise, and maybe you DID stop for a little while... but then unfortunately you fell back into the very thing you didn't want to do.

Insight: So what's going wrong whenever you want to break a habit, or you want to change a behavior, but you just can't seem to do it?

I would suggest that in most cases there are a lot of US that have the right INTENTIONS, but we have the WRONG STRATEGY!

Why is it so difficult to change or break a bad habit?

I. There are Practical reasons.

- Why do I always eat the wrong food?
- Why do I oversleep every morning?

II. There might be Emotional reasons.

A lot of us have emotional wounds, we have some baggage, we have some unresolved issues that often lead us to coping in unhealthy ways.

III. There could be Relational reasons.

In other words, it's really, really hard to get healthy when we're surrounded by unhealthy people! It's hard to have the right mindset if all we do is interact with people with the wrong mindset.

But I want to challenge all of us today that at the heart of the issue, almost every time I would argue there is a spiritual challenge. And the struggle is, you're trying to meet a Spiritual Need with something besides God.

More times than not, we're focusing on the Poison of Religion, while forgetting the Power of Grace.

A. What is the Poison of Religion?

We can define "religion" as our attempt to earn God's approval by following all the rules.

Titus 2:11-13 (NIV)

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope...

B. So what is Grace?

The Greek word that's translated as Grace is the word Charis. It means the unmerited, goodwill and favor of God. And the good news is, it's always a GIFT!

It's the grace of God that Changes us, but we need to understand that the same GRACE that saves you, is also the same GRACE that sustains you!

What does our verse say?

It TEACHES us to say NO to ungodliness.

What enables you to say NO is not your Grit, it's GRACE!

IV. How God actually changes us by His Grace.

A. What is the focus of religion?

The focus of religion is always Outward. It's an outward effort to somehow be right with God. But Jesus talked about how dangerous and ineffective an OUTWARD focused life is.

Matthew 23:25-26 (NIV)

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean."

B. Grace works INSIDE of us.

Ephesians 3:16 (NIV)

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being...

One day a friend of mine said, "Hey, how do you like to please God? What do you mean?"

And then he said, "One of the ways you can actually please God is to understand He already loves you, and you can just respond to his love by CHOOSING what's best for what He calls the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

If you simply change your behavior, but don't change your heart, what happens? The behavior comes back. And that's why so many people don't change, because real and lasting change is a reflection of God's grace on the inside.

Religion says, try harder. If it's gotta be, it's up to me. You need to do better, you need to stop, but Grace says trust more, abide more, devote more. In other words, I'm not trying in my power, but I'm relying on God's power.

We're coming to the point of the message that for some of you would be the moment of truth. When you decide, I don't want to pretend anymore. I don't wanna fake it anymore. I want to be honest, transparent. I wanna be different. But the only way you can really

do it is when you're secure in the Grace of God. And then you have the courage to say, I need help!

How do you know if you have a problem? If more than one person has told you you have a problem, you have a problem!

If there's a secret that you've been carrying, a shame that you've been hiding, chances are you have a problem. And this is your moment.

Romans 5:20 (NIV)

"... But where sin increased, GRACE increased all the more."

And the good news is his GRACE is always enough.

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS WEEK 4

- 1.) How many struggle with challenging habits? Discuss either victory or failure you've had with them over the years. Why?
- 2.) Do your struggles tend to fall more in the practical, emotional, or relational categories? Why?
- 3.) What helped you more to learn the difference between outward and inward efforts to help break habits?
- 4.) Habits are still tough, but living in grace is better! How do you need to do that more?
- 5.) Can the group pray over your certain struggles believing with you for victory? We're only as strong as we are honest!