

Amazing Grace II:  
*Why Be Good?*  
October 6, 2013

**PRELUDE – Love the Lord  
Worship Songs – Today / I Will Follow**

**Feature – “A Good Man”**

Good morning everyone.

I'm sure you've come to realize by now that *someone* here at NHCC likes country music. And, every once in a while, that *someone* does a little bit of arm-twisting and convinces the band to do a country song like the one we just heard ... because one of the things this *someone* likes about country music is how it addresses real life issues (such as how you should live your

life every day) and how it often encourages values-oriented thinking and living that reflects the kind of values-oriented thinking and living that is encouraged in the scripture.

That probably makes it clear – if it wasn't already – that the “someone” who likes country music is me.

And I asked the band to do that song this morning because I truly hope that you want to be a good man or, as the case may be, a good woman. I hope that one of your goals is to leave a legacy – to live such an excellent life of love, compassion, humility and wisdom that others, at the end of your life, will say “he was a good man” or “she was a good woman.” And I hope you will think of your day-to-day attitudes

and decisions with that end in mind.

But more than that, I hope that you will never ever for a moment think that “being good” in your time on this earth is what justifies you before God. I hope that, even though it’s true that the love and acceptance of others must sometimes be earned (as the song said) – I hope that you will never ever for a moment think that God’s love and acceptance works the same way. I hope that you will never ever for a moment think that you must live in such a way as to earn His favor or to keep His favor.

If you’re new to NHCC or haven’t been here in the last month, that was the point of the last four weeks – part one of this “Amazing Grace” series. Because of what

Jesus did on the cross and in His resurrection, you and I do not need to do anything – ever – to gain his approval. *God has already done everything for us even though we do not deserve it and could never earn it. And He offers it to us with no strings attached.* We don't need to clean up our act beforehand or even *promise to try* to clean up our act afterward in return for his grace.

All we need to do is believe.

**As the Apostle Paul wrote ...**

*God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about*

*it. For we are God's  
masterpiece. Ephesians  
2:8-10a (NLT)*

God does it all. We do nothing other than believing that Jesus died for us and rose again. That's it. This is the overwhelming testimony of the New Testament. This is the Gospel. This is the good news.

<<End slide set 1>>

**Video – “Life in 6 Words” (5 min)**

<<Begin slide set 2>>

Isn't that awesome? Not just the presentation but the message itself. That's really good news.

## **The Downside of Moving On**

And I have to tell you that after spending

the past four weeks doing this “deep dive” into the gospel of grace, my heart is overflowing with gratitude to God in a way that it has not for quite a long time. I have been overwhelmed by the magnitude of His loving-kindness. I think some of you have experienced the same thing.

And because of that, I have to tell you that I am a little bit nervous about moving on to part II of this series. I’m a little bit nervous about moving on to the implications of grace for everyday life because I’m not convinced we do that very well.

Here’s what I mean by that (and I’ve seen this happen to myself and to a lot of other believers-in-Jesus as well so it’s not just

me). Those of us who are Christians – those who have come to believe that, in His death Jesus took all of our sin into Himself and, in His resurrection, put all of His righteousness into us; those of us who are Christians so often see the gospel *merely as the starting point* in our relationship with God. We see the good news of God’s grace as “what gets us into the Kingdom” but then we need to move on from there. We need grow up and move on to what we consider to be the “deeper things” like obeying God, like trying to discover and do His will, and becoming the kind of person He wants us to be.

And that’s *not* unreasonable because that *is* what God intends for us who have received His grace. That passage we’ve

read each week from Ephesians chapter two – after Paul says we are saved by grace through our faith in Jesus and after it says that we are God’s masterpiece – goes on to say ...

*He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

*Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)*

**In a letter to one of his pastoral interns, Paul expands on that idea when he writes:**

*The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. It trains us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in*

*the present age, as we wait  
for the happy fulfillment of  
our hope in the glorious  
appearing of our great God  
and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

*Titus 2:11-13 (NET)*

*He gave himself for us to set  
us free from every kind of  
lawlessness and to purify  
for himself a people who  
are truly his, who are eager  
to do good. Titus  
2:14 (NET)*

The grace of God is designed not just to save us but also to change us.

**To say it another way, the desire to live according to God's will is a by-product of receiving His grace.**

God plants the seed of salvation in us and that root will naturally begin to produce

the fruit of a life pleasing to Him.

And most churches are very clear about this in their teaching. We pastors spend a lot of time focusing on what comes *after* a person comes to the point of receiving the grace offered in Christ. I know because that's the way I've preached for almost 20 years.

But, unfortunately, there's a very bad side-effect to this methodology – and I'll be a bit vulnerable and describe it in personal terms. The more I learn about obeying God and doing his will and growing and changing, the more I come to realize I *don't* obey God like I should, I *don't* pursue knowing and doing His will in my life like I should. Sometimes, it feels like I'm actually becoming *less* of the

person He wants me to be instead of more.

And because I am so focused on all those things I should be thinking and feeling and doing as *a result of grace ... and failing at them*, I start feeling like a loser. I realize that in this life, I will *never* be the person I am supposed to be. I start thinking that maybe I'm not even saved in the first place or maybe – in spite of the clear truth that it's impossible, which we looked at in the past two weeks – I've lost my salvation. And then I find myself thinking, "What's the use? Why bother? This is just too hard." And distance grows between me and God. I don't think He's that happy with me and I'm not that crazy about Him.

Some of you can relate to that, I'm sure.

And then I get this thought – and I'm sure some of you get it as well: “Well, Rick, you just need to stop playing at Christianity. You need to get serious about being a Christian. You need be more committed. Stop whining and buckle down. Take up your cross daily and follow Jesus.”

And that's what I do. For a while. Until I fail again ... and again ... and again.

**It's a “crazy cycle” of failure ...  
followed by discouragement ...  
followed by commitment to do better  
... followed by failure ... followed by ...  
and on and on it goes.**

And what has hit me like a ton of bricks in part one of this series, of this deep dive into “grace” – and the reason I am

nervous about moving on – is that this is what happens when you think of grace as merely the starting point of your relationship with God.

But that is not the way God had designed it. Grace is meant to be the ongoing foundation of everything. Everything – and I mean everything – in the life of a believer is meant to flow from the reality and pure joy of that gift; of that experience. As author J. D. Greear puts it:

“The gospel is not just the diving board off of which we jump into the pool of Christianity ... it is the pool that we swim in each and every day.”<sup>i</sup>

And I know this sounds so simple and foundational that some of you are

thinking “Gosh, Rick, you’re a *pastor* and you didn’t know *that?*”

Well, yes, I *did* know that. But what happened to me (and what has happened to some of you as well) is that I lost sight of it. I got distracted with all the other good and important things that are part of living life as a follower of Jesus and they became the focus. Trying to please God became the focus instead of rejoicing in the fact that God was already pleased with me because of my faith Jesus.

But this past month of preparing for and teaching these messages has convinced me that what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews wrote to a group of Christians who were failing and discouraged and not very excited about

their relationship with Christ is true.

**He told them:**

*We must pay closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. Hebrews 2:1 (NET)*

Now, I've read that verse for many, many years and I've always thought of it as a warning. "Don't forget what God told you to do; don't forget what God has said about how you are to live or you're going to drift away from ... something (I don't know)."

But when you read the entire letter in context (and, remember, one of the things we learned last week is that context is

king, especially when reading these kinds of verses), it's obvious that's not what it means at all. What he is saying is "don't forget the grace that is yours" ... "don't rush past it" ... "don't leave it behind" ... because if you do rush past, if you do forget it ... Christianity will become *more about what you are doing for God than what God has done for you*. And that is death to your faith. It will put you in that crazy cycle we saw a few minutes ago. And you'll be miserable and, quite literally, good for nothing.

By the way this is exactly the same point that the Apostle Peter made in one of his letters to the churches for which he was responsible in the first century. (This is from 1 Peter chapter 1 for those who are interested).

## He writes ...

*By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. 1 Peter 1:3 (NLT)*

Don't miss this – we get power to live the life God wants from us because we have come to know Jesus. As I've said many times in recent months, *belonging comes before behavior*. You come to Jesus, simply believing that you are a sinner in need of a savior and that he is that savior who died for you and rose again and then

*God* takes responsibility for bringing about the changes that need to be made in you.

**Peter continues:**

*In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control ...*

*... and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.*

*1 Peter 1:5-7 (NLT)*

*The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:8 (NLT)*

Now, some of you after hearing that are thinking, “Wait a minute, Rick. That sounds like the *opposite* of what you were just saying. It *sounds* like Peter is saying that we *should* focus on all the things that come after we put our faith in Jesus. You start with faith and then you add this and then that and then this ... and then you become who and what God desires.”

Well, if you stop reading the passage at this point that *is* what it sounds like. But if you read the very next verse, it becomes

clear that is not what Peter is saying at all.

**He writes ...**

*But those who fail to  
develop in this way are ...*

... just playing at Christianity; they're not serious about their faith; not committed enough; not willing to take up their cross and follow Jesus daily.

No ... that is not what he says! He says that believers who fail to grow as they should are ...

*... shortsighted or blind,  
forgetting that they have  
been cleansed from their  
old sins.      2 Peter 1:9  
(NLT)*

They've lost sight of the grace given them in Jesus. They've not paid close enough attention to the good news of the gospel. They started out with it but have not made it the core of their life in Christ. And that's why they are not growing. That's why they are not useful to God. That's why they're drifting.

**Deficiencies and lack of growth in the Christian life are typically *not* caused by a lack of commitment; they are caused by a lack of understanding of and appreciation for grace.**

Grace is *that* powerful.

Unfortunately, this is *exactly the opposite* of what most followers of Jesus believe. A lot of upstanding, sincere, dedicated and well-meaning Christians worry that if we

start telling people that, if they accept Christ as their savior, they will be totally forgiven of every wrong thing – big or small – that they have ever done *PLUS* every wrong thing – big or small – that they *will do in the future*, they’ll just go wild doing whatever they want. They’ll “ask Jesus into their heart” and go running into the streets sinning left and right!

## **Why The Law Fails**

Of course, that’s what most people are *already* doing (sinning left and right) but, regardless, this is why so many Christians are so hesitant to fully embrace grace and all of its implications like I have over the past four weekends. We fear that, by focusing so much on free grace, there

won't be any incentive to be good or to follow Jesus like we sang about at the beginning of this service. I mean, why in the world would anyone do that if it doesn't make any difference in their eternal destiny?

This is why author Tullian Tchividjian writes that ...

“Attacks on morality typically come from *outside the church*, [while] attacks on grace typically come from *inside the church*. The reason is because somewhere along the way, we've come to believe that this whole enterprise is about behavioral modification, and grace just doesn't possess the teeth to scare us into changing ...”<sup>ii</sup>

In addition, he says, most of us wonder ...

“Is more grace really what this culture needs? That seems backward and counterintuitive. It seems [more] logical that the only way to ‘save’ licentious people is to show them more rules, to intensify the exhortations to behave.”<sup>iii</sup>

And that’s why the message of so many churches and well-meaning pastors is “accept the grace of Jesus and get busy following the rules ... or else.”

- You might fall from grace and lose your salvation (which again is not possible and, as we learned last week, is not what “falling from grace”

means, but it's often used as an exhortation to behave).

- Follow the rules or else you won't be rewarded by Jesus he returns
- Or else you won't be useful to God in spreading the gospel to others who haven't heard it
- Or else you will (probably) invite God's discipline on your life.

Now, to be sure there is truth in these statements (except for the first one). They're biblical and we need to pay attention them. But not as a primary focus and not at the expense of the loss of our primary attention on the good news about grace!

And that's because the law – the rules, the “or elses” – have no power to change a

person's heart.

Again, to quote Tchividjian (and by the way, we're going to have his book in our bookstore next week) ...

“The Law reveals sin but cannot remove it. It prescribes righteousness but is powerless to produce it. The Law is impotent—it has no creative power, it cannot inspire. It offers us nothing but condemnation and death. The Law apart from the Gospel can only crush; it can't cure.”<sup>iv</sup>

The best the law can do is to produce a begrudging fear-based obedience that eventually ends up producing even more sin. Over time, continued exhortations to

live up to God's standard of moral perfection will inspire a "why even try?" response. Moralism will produce immorality, not the other way around.<sup>v</sup>

**This is what the Apostle Paul was getting at in his letter to the Romans when he wrote ...**

*I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, "You must not covet." But sin used this command to arouse all kinds of covetous desires within me! ... When I learned the command not to covet, the power of sin came to life. Romans 7:8-9 (NLT)*

Now, to be clear, Paul was *not* arguing that God's law was bad. He was saying

that the law, by defining sin, told his sinful nature how to sin more. Our sinful nature wants to violate laws. If you give it a rule, it wants to break it. So, the law, by prohibiting certain things, makes us want to do them even more.<sup>vi</sup>

If you have little children I'm sure you've seen this in action. You tell them *not* to do something and when you turn your back, 90% of the time *that's what they do*. At least, that's how our kids were. They're going to test you.

And if you catch them, if you're a good parent, you'll enforce some kind of discipline to keep them from doing it again. And that will probably work in terms of modifying their behavior but it won't change their heart. It will not give

them an internal desire to do what is right simply because it *is* right.

And it works the same way in our spiritual lives. The law of God is not a long-term motivator for righteousness ... which brings us back to the question of the day: why be good? What is the motivation? I mean if all fear of judgment is gone, if there really is no permanent and eternal “or else” waiting out there, what’s the incentive to learn the way of Jesus and follow it?

Well, there are several that are mentioned in the New Testament, by Jesus himself.

- Jesus said that those who heard his teaching and followed it were wise, like a person who built his house on

a rock instead of sand. They would be able to stand strong when the storms of life hit.

- Jesus promised *repeatedly* that He would generously reward those who served him in this life.
- Jesus also said those who represented Him well would experience the joy of bringing his light to others.

And all of those are great but all of them are conditional. They are things we can try to do or try to attain but could still fail. And if we do them apart from grace, we'll just get into that crazy cycle we talked about earlier.

## Why Grace “Works”

Fortunately, however, none of those are the primary incentive for those who have been saved by Jesus to obey Him. That incentive is found in a passage from the Gospel of Luke chapter 7 beginning in verse 36 which says ...

*One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat.*

*When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell*

*on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them.*

*When the Pharisee who had invited [Jesus] saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!"*

*Then Jesus answered his thoughts. "Simon," he said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you."*

*"Go ahead, Teacher," Simon replied. Luke 7:36-40 (NLT)*

**Then Jesus told him this story:**

*"A man loaned money to*

*two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?” Luke 7:41-42 (NLT)*

*Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt.”*

*“That’s right,” Jesus said.  
Luke 7:43 (NLT)*

*Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn’t offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them*

*with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume."*

*Luke 7:44-46 (NLT)*

*"I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love."*

*Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven."*

*Luke 7:47-48 (NLT)*

Why did Simon do so little for Jesus? Because in his mind, as an upstanding Pharisee and keeper of the Law of Moses, he only had maybe “just a little” to be forgiven of – if anything at all – and therefore, he only loved Jesus a little. Little need for forgiveness – little need of grace – produced only a little love and very little action.

Correspondingly, what was the motivation behind the “immoral” woman’s astounding acts of affection and generosity and servitude? Why was she doing all of those things? Because, Jesus said, she had been “forgiven much” and therefore she “loved much.” A great amount of gratitude for the great amount of grace she had received produced much love which produced much action ...

which is exactly what Jesus said it would do.

**As Jesus told his disciples:**

*If you love me, you will  
obey my commandments.  
John 14:15 (NET)*

“It’s what will happen naturally,” Jesus says. “You won’t have to force it. I won’t have to threaten you with ‘or else.’ If you love me, you’ll naturally want to do what I say.”

And this is why it is so important to remain rooted in God’s grace. The motivation to do what is good and right *for Him* comes from being moved by what He has already done *for us* though we did not and do not deserve it. That kind of

love *for* us inspires love *in* us and action *from* us.

Grace produces love and love produces action.

## **A Vivid Illustration**

As I was preparing for this message, I came across a vivid illustration of this in an event that took place just a couple of years ago, when Robert Downey, Jr. (aka “Iron Man”) received the 2011 American Cinematheque award. Downey was allowed to choose who would present him with the award, and to the surprise of everyone, he invited his long-time friend Mel Gibson to do the honors.

Now, I’m sure that you are aware of

Gibson's troubles in recent years.

- Arrested for drunk driving in 2006, during which he was recorded making racist and anti-Semitic remarks.
- Public infidelity and a high-profile divorce in 2009
- Berating his new girlfriend in the foulest manner imaginable – again, recorded and posted on the internet – in 2010.

And now, a little more than a year after that final incident, as “pariah numero uno” in Tinseltown, he’s asked by Downey to present the award.

Of course, Downey himself was no stranger to scandal. In the 1990s, he

became something of punch line himself as someone notoriously unable to kick an addiction to drugs and alcohol. Arrest after arrest, relapse after relapse – people both in Hollywood and elsewhere began to think of him less as an actor and more as a junkie. Professionally, he became a liability— even those who wanted to work with him couldn't because insurance companies wouldn't underwrite a film if he were part of the cast.

Slowly, however, with the help of some good friends, Downey got sober, and his career eventually got back on track. In 2008, he was cast as Iron Man, and the rest— as they say— is history. Today he is one of the most beloved and highest grossing actors in the business.

So on this particular night in 2011, Downey was at the very height of his popularity and Gibson was at the very bottom of his. And after receiving the award, with Gibson standing in the wings listening, Downey did something astounding and amazing.<sup>vii</sup>

I want to show you the clip of it which, unfortunately, isn't very high quality but it's good enough!

Let's watch.

<<End slide set 2>>

**Video – Robert Downey Jr. & Mel Gibson  
v2 (2)**

<<Begin slide set 3>>

Wow. Who says nothing good ever comes

out of Hollywood?

A great amount of gratitude for the great amount of grace Downey had once received from Gibson produced much love towards Gibson which produced an amazing and astounding action. For Downey to associate with Gibson in such a public manner – to *advocate* for him – meant putting his own reputation on the line.

There was no possible gain in doing what he did. It was simply the un-coerced act of a heart that had been touched by grace and by love; a direct line from the love he had been shown to the love he then showed.<sup>viii</sup>

**I'll quote Tchividjian one more time:**

“Grace inspires what the Law demands. The Law prescribes good works, but only grace can produce them. While the Law directs, the Gospel alone delivers. Gratitude, generosity, honesty, compassion, acts of mercy and self-sacrifice, these things spring unsummoned from a forgiven heart.”<sup>ix</sup>

## **Conclusion**

And this is why some of you have such a hard time obeying God or even wanting to: you have not received the once-and-for-all total forgiveness that God has already provided in Jesus. You have not been born from above and so you have no sense of gratitude towards him. You’re

like Simon at the dinner party. You *can't* obey much because you don't love much but you don't love much because you've not been forgiven much – actually, not at all.

And some of you have a hard time obeying God or even wanting to because, even though you *have* received Jesus and you *have* been born from above, you have forgotten how badly you were in need of saving. Or you've drifted away from the Gospel. You've lost sight of the fact that every day of your life is filled with sin at a level you can't even comprehend and the grace of God is continually covering you so that you receive far better than what you deserve.

And I don't say these things to shame or

condemn you. I say them to help you see what the problem is and free you to be who God wants you do be. You problem isn't a lack of commitment. It's not a lack of seriousness. It's a lack of appreciation and gratitude for what God has done in Jesus and is doing for you because of Him right this very moment.

<prayer>

**Feature – My Heart Is Filled / Getty**

## **CLOSING COMMENTS**

And I do hope that your heart will be more and more filled with thankfulness for God's grace because grace is what motivates us to love and obey God ... which means ... if we're going to grow in our ability to love and obey God, we need

to grow spiritual roots deep into God's grace.

But how do you do that? That's what we'll talk about next week.

See you then!

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Quoted by Tchividjian, Tullian (2013-10-01). *One Way Love: Inexhaustible Grace for an Exhausted World* (Kindle Locations 2478-2479). David C. Cook. Kindle Edition.

<sup>ii</sup> Tchividjian, Tullian, Kindle Locations 1413-1419.

<sup>iii</sup> Tchividjian, Kindle Locations 2164-2168

<sup>iv</sup> Tchividjian, Kindle Locations 2208-2210

<sup>v</sup> Tchividjian, Kindle Locations 2203-2205

<sup>vi</sup> Great exposition here: <http://www.gci.org/bible/rom7>

<sup>vii</sup> Tchividjian, Kindle Locations 1301-1312

<sup>viii</sup> Tchividjian, Kindle Locations 1336-1337

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<sup>ix</sup> Tchividjian, Kindle Locations 1494-1496.