

Sustaining Grace 1 Peter 5:10-11

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Several years ago, as engineers were building a new bridge over the East River in New York, they discovered a wrecked hull of a sunken metal ship.

Unfortunately, it lay where the center bridge supports were to be built. So, cranes were brought in to try and lift the ship out, but it wouldn't budge.

Then one of the engineers had an idea. At low tide, he had a barge brought in with cables which were fastened to the ship. As the tide came in, the barge gradually lifted the sunken ship.

It was then towed out into the ocean and sunk at a spot that wouldn't cause future problems.

There are times in our lives when we're like those cranes that tried to pull a wreck from the bottom of the sea. We just don't have enough strength to do it.

That's when we need to be connected to Jesus and allow His quiet gentle strength to lift and carry us. Only in Jesus do we have the strength we need.

Today we continue our series Amazing Grace. If you remember, last week I talked about saving grace; God's gift of salvation that we receive by faith in Jesus.

Today I want to talk about sustaining grace; the help we need to survive in this world in which we live.

Jesus told us in John 10:10 that He came to give us life, so we could have it to the fullest. Not just eternal life, but life here and now.

But how does the grace of God help us when we are weak? Peter explains this in 1 Peter 5:10-11:

“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.”

All the words that Peter uses here indicate strengthening. The word used for ‘*restore*’ is the Greek word *kat-ar-tid'-zo*. It means to prepare or make perfect.

The word for ‘*firm*’ is the Greek word *stay-rid'-zo* which means to make fast, establish. The word for ‘*steadfast*’ is the Greek word *sthen-o'-o* which means to lay a foundation or make stable.

All of these words explain God’s sustaining grace by telling us...

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First, that it keeps us grounded when we’re tempted. The moment you accepted the grace and gift of God you passed from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light.

You went from being property of the devil to being a child of God. That’s why the devil hates us. He’ll do everything in his power to crush us. That’s why Peter writes in 1 Peter 5:8:

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

The devil is constantly looking to destroy you. So, how do we stand against him? Well, it starts with being self-controlled and alert. In the Greek it says that we need to be sober and awake.

Being sober means that we're in control, that there's nothing else in our lives controlling us. To be awake means to be watchful, that we're alert and ready to act when danger comes.

Every day, as we're faced with a variety of moral choices, we have the ability to choose between right and wrong. These moral choices are called temptations.

Everybody is tempted! We'll never outgrow temptation. The Bible says even Jesus was tempted. In fact, He was tempted in all things, just like us, but He never sinned.

Now for the good news. If Jesus was tempted and never sinned, it means it's not a sin to be tempted. It's a sin to give in to temptation. Sometimes you may think, *"How could I even think of such a thing."*

Just because you thought something, that doesn't mean you're a bad person. You can't control all the thoughts that go through your mind, but you can control which thoughts on which you chose to dwell

You can't stop the birds from going over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.

Take -- sexual temptation, for example. God made men and women to be attracted to one another.

Feelings of attraction are not wrong unless you use them in a wrong way or apply them to a wrong person.

Many people misunderstand and confuse attraction with lust. They're not the same thing.

If you're a man walking down the road and see an attractive woman, it's not a sin to be attracted. That's not lust. The issue is what do you do with that attraction.

Lust is when you begin to dwell on the attraction. It's when you begin to entertain thoughts that are sinful. Instead of being the one in control and taking the thought captive, you just let it run around unchecked.

When you do that, instead of being alert and watchful, you put your mind on cruise control and let the thoughts take over. It's not a sin to be tempted. It's a sin to give in to temptation.

Years ago, Larry King interviewed Billy Graham. During the interview, they talked about different scandals that had affected the lives of several personalities.

Finally, Larry King asked him, *"You're 80 years old and you've been in the public limelight your entire life and you've never had a scandal. You have a history of integrity. How have you managed to never have a scandal in your life?"*

Billy Graham quoted 1 Corinthians 10:13, *"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."*

That's a wonderful promise. God will never allow more temptation in your life than you can handle. That's sustaining grace. There's always an escape route. There's always a way out.

This verse also says that temptation is COMMON. That means that everyone goes through the same thing.

That's good news! Why?? Because it means that whatever you're going through, there's someone else that's already been through it.

You don't have to go through temptation alone. Do you know the greatest way to handle temptation?

The greatest way to handle temptation is to have an accountability partner. Someone with whom you can share your struggles.

You may ask, "Why do I want to share my temptation with someone?" Well, the devil loves to come against us in the darkness.

Talking about your struggles with another person brings those struggles into the light. It exposes them and doing so, it disarms them.

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Next, the grace of God keeps us going when we're tired.

Sometimes the issue isn't temptation. It's just that you're tired. Life is exhausting. It requires a lot of strength. Life requires a lot of energy especially when you're going against the flow.

1 Corinthians 16:13 tells us to: *"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong."*

Paul's telling us that we must be alert and watchful. We're to be on our guard. We're to stand firm and be courageous and strong.

All these words require effort. When our culture is going one way and you're trying to do the right thing, it's tough.

It's tough being the only person in the office that doesn't want to be involved when someone starts telling dirty jokes. The more you try to do what's right, the more energy you must exert.

Galatians 6:9, *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”*

Paul’s telling us to not grow weary in doing good, because that’s what HAPPENS. It’s hard to go against the flow. It’s hard to live for Christ in a world controlled by the devil.

So how do we find the energy to live for Jesus in this fallen world? Philippians 2:13, *“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”*

I once heard a person say, *“It’s hard to be a Christian today!”* It’s not hard, it’s impossible. In and of ourselves, none of us has the strength. The only perfect person who ever lived was Jesus.

If we’re going to live a victorious Christian life, we have to understand that we can’t do it in our own strength. We need to rely on God’s power. The key to the Christian life is not trying, it’s trusting.

Do you know how many years it took Noah to build the ark? Commentators do not agree, some figure 120 years while others 70.

Regardless that they lived longer in those days, the point is that it took Noah years to build that ark.

So, how did he have the ability to keep on keeping on when he was tired? Surely, he must have gotten tired? Genesis 6:8 tell us, *“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.”*

The word for favor in Hebrew is GRACE. Noah understood God’s sustaining grace. Like Noah, God wants to give you His power to do what you need to do.

The Christian life is not a matter of willpower but a matter of God power.

God never asks us to do anything He hasn't first given us the power to do. Think for a moment about the greatness of God's power.

God made the sun. The sun produces more power in one single second than all the human race has used throughout all of history. The sun has enough energy to burn for thirty billion more years.

Yet God made the sun. He simply spoke it and the rest of the universe into existence. That's the kind of power He has.

How many stars are just in our universe? According to researchers there 70 sextillion – that means a 7 followed by 21 zeros. That is a lot of stars.

Psalms 147:3-5, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit."

How many grains of sand are there in the world? Some estimated that there are about seven quintillion – that means a 7 with 18 zeros behind it. That's also a big number, yet scriptures remind us...

Psalms 139:16-18, "Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you."

How many gallons of water are in the oceans? Again, someone has calculated that there are about 3.6 sextillion gallons. That is 3.6 followed by 21 zeros. A huge number, yet...

Psalms 33:6-7, *“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses.”*

God has infinite power. That’s why, when you need some of His power, just ask.

He’ll come to you and say, *“You need some power? I’ll give you the will and the power to handle your issue.”* God's power is unlimited. He never gets tired.

Genesis tells us that on the seventh day God rested. God didn’t rest because He was tired. He rested because He was finished. He was finished with creation.

God’s grace is a sustaining grace. Not just when we’re tempted and not just when we’re tired, God’s grace keeps us growing when we’re troubled.

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There’re going to be times in life when we face obstacles, problems, trials and adversities, that seem unsurmountable.

When they come, remember Jesus told us that, *“In the world you will have trouble.”* He said expect it; don't be surprised by it.

There’re problems that will hit us with such force that they knock us down; like the rug has been pulled out from under us and we fall hard.

There are some problems that are like a train wreck in slow motion. We see them coming and they’re relentless and ongoing.

Other problems, that are tough to handle, are the unfair ones. You didn't deserve it and have no control over it. You’re left asking yourself and God, “Why?” Why did it have to happen to me?

Perhaps the worst are the problems that aren't only undeserved, but they're unrelenting. Most of us can handle problems if we can see an end in sight, like a light at the end of the tunnel.

If I can see the problem is going to be over in six months or eight months, I can handle anything for that length of time or year or whatever.

But there are some things in your life that are going to continue to be a burden. Things that you'll live with the rest of your life.

There are some situations in life that are just part of our world, and all the wishing and praying isn't going to make them go away.

God knows we're weak. Jesus understands what it's like to go through trials, that's why He gives us the strength we need for each new day.

Isaiah 41:13-14, *"For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you. Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O little Israel, for I myself will help you," declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.*"

Charles Spurgeon told the story about a large sum of money that was given to a man named Rowland Hill to dispense to a poor pastor.

Thinking that the amount was too much to send all at once, Hill forwarded just a portion along with a note that said simply, *'More to follow.'*

In a few days, the man received another envelope containing the same amount and with the same message, *'More to follow.'*

At regular intervals, there came a third, and a fourth. In fact, they continued, along with those cheering words, until the entire sum had been received.

That's what the grace of God is like. It helps us each day. He gives us what we need for that day with the promise *'More to follow.'*

And then the next day, and then the next. Each day we have, like the manna in the desert, enough grace to sustain us.

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Conclusion

So how do we lay hold of and learn to rely on God's sustaining grace? First, we call out. We cry out to God for help.

As long as you pretend to be self-sufficient, you short circuit God's power in your life. You need to admit your inadequacy and say, "*God, I can't handle this!*" and cry out for God's help.

James 4:6, "*But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'*"

Who gets grace? The humble. Those who admit they can't do it on their own. You draw near to God and you cry out to God.

The Lord has more need of our weakness than of our strength. Our strength is often His rival; our weakness, His servant. When we draw on His resources, His glory shines bright.

Man's extremity is God's opportunity; man's security is Satan's opportunity. God's way is not to take His children out of trial, but to give them strength to bear up against it.

Another way to rely on God's sustaining grace is to comfort yourself with God's Word. We need to be students of God's word because the Bible is a source on ongoing strength.

Read it every day. Memorize it. Make sure you have a translation that you can understand.

Psalms 119:12-16, 28, "Praise be to you, O LORD; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word... My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word."

Our world tells us to look within when we have trials. That's not what I'm saying. People need to stop listening to the gospel according to Star Wars.

Remember in the first film, or Episode 4 now, when Obie-Wan Kenobi tells Luke Skywalker, as he's going through his crisis, *"The answers are within you, Luke. Look inside yourself."*

That's just not true. The answers are not within us until we place them there from God's Word.

When we get into trouble, we need to look to God for strength, not ourselves. Call out for God's help. Fill your mind with God's word.

There are thousands of promises that God has given us through His word. Lay hold of them. Use them. When you're going through a problem you can't fix, don't give up, look up!

Lastly, learn to call on others. That's the importance of small groups in a church. One of the primary ways that God sustains us through trials is through the church, through the ministry of others.

You need a support group. God never meant for us to go through life on our own. You need to accept support from God's people.

I'm reminded of Archimedes, the ancient Greek scientist who discovered the value of leverage.

Enamored with the ability his fulcrum, he proclaimed, "*Give me a long enough lever and a place to stand and I'll move the whole world.*"

It's not the size of the lever that saves us, but the size of our God.