

Well good morning Grace Hills.

Good morning.

Glad you guys made it here. Some of you have had just this great, fantastic week and wonderful morning and all of that, and then some of you have had some discouraging weeks. I know that because I keep having conversations and I know that a lot of us have walked through difficulty this week. I think there's an answer for that. One of the reasons why things get tough sometimes, especially if you have been coming to Grace Hills, you've been sort of working through a lot of what we've been talking about in this healing series, and you're trying to soak it up and absorb it and apply it, but then you wind up a little frustrated. You wind up kind of hitting some walls here and there and you're going, "I'm trying. I don't know what's going on."

I believe with everything in me that a healed and filled and empowered church is a threat to the Kingdom of Darkness, and so I think that the prince of the Kingdom of Darkness does everything he can to interrupt and throw a kink in things. So if that's where you are, if you walked in this morning feeling a little discouraged like, "I'm trying. I'm trying to soak it up. I'm trying to learn. I'm trying to do this well but I'm just frustrated", I'm going to pray for you right now as a church.

Let's just bow our heads, and Father I ask you to just clear our minds. Help us to focus on your word, on your son Jesus, on your Kingdom, to know and understand that the potential that is there is we discover redemption and forgiveness in the blood of Christ and we discover the full power of the Holy Spirit for our lives, and we discover the power, the truth of your word, that if all of that is at our disposal and we've given ourselves to those things we become a threat to the darkness that has a grip on this world. So I pray God you just clear the air this morning. Just help us to learn, to soak up, to believe you, to receive what you want to do in our lives today, to listen for you. God we love you and praise you and we ask it all in Jesus name. Amen.

We're about halfway through this healing series and I want to do something today to catch us up because I know that week one of being Grace Hills at this week we had a blizzard, and then the next two weeks we had spring break, and then another spring break, the spring break sandwich so to speak, and then we got one good week and then here we are kind of in the middle of this series and maybe you didn't get to tune in for the first few parts. And it's kind of one of those series that builds. It's a step by step kind of message series. So I want to sort of bring us up to speed about where we've been. Okay? About where we've been. We're going to talk in just a minute about how to be clean. That's the step that we're going to talk about today, the message that we're going to talk about and the attitude of Jesus that we'll dive into today is all about that, but I want to go back and review for just a minute just to prepare the way for what we're going to say today.

Back on week one we said this, "We are all broken. God is a healer and he offers His healing freely by grace to anyone willing to receive it by faith." So it was kind of like lay the foundation. We are all broken. We have all sinned. We've all blown it. We have all missed the mark and we are not born just naturally living out all of God's purposes for our lives. There's something wrong, something broken, and it's the presence of sin and the effects of sin. We also talked about God as a healer. It's just who He is. It's His nature. He's a redeemer. He's the one who repairs and fixes and grows us. So we just laid that foundation on week one.

Then on week two we said this, "Healing starts when we get real about our brokenness, our hurts, our habits and our hangups." In other words, step one of healing is just saying, "That's me. I'm not excluded from this. I'm brokenness. I have the signs of that in my life. I confess my sins. I know that I've been hurt. I know that I've hurt others. I know that those things are true." So it's owning it and getting real, and we can live a life where we don't acknowledge that. We can live a life where we fake it to make it and wear the mask, but it just doesn't work long-term. Okay? It doesn't work for eternity. It doesn't work long-term. It's not a workable strategy. I've got to get real to get healed. Okay?

Week three was this, healing continues as we get our story straight about who God is, who I am, and what my pain means. In other words, who God is needs to be informed by Scripture. Not by culture, not by emotions, not by my circumstances, but I need to know who God is according to his word, according to the Bible. So when the Bible says he is holy, he is good, he is loving, he is all powerful, he's all knowing, all those things are true about God. When the Bible says he's full of mercy, that we sometimes draw back and go, "Surely God wouldn't want me or forgive me", no. He's full of mercy and compassion and that's who He is.

I have to get my story straight about who I am, my identity, that I'm a child of God. That I'm not defined by my sin or my past or my brokenness. That when I receive Jesus I am defined as a child of God who struggles with sin, but I'm not defined by the sin. So I've got to get the story straight about all that and about what my pain means. Instead of interpreting my pain as I'm worthless or I'm hopeless or I'm helpless, that's not what my pain means. What my pain means instead is that God wants to grow me and teach me and use me, and that he can turn my biggest pain into a big ministry to other people. We kind of walked through that.

Then last week we said this, the secret to living on the pathway to healing and health growth is to give full control of your life to the Spirit of God. It's to acknowledge that me being in full control is what got me to where I am. Okay? If I'm in a broken place I acknowledge that's because I've been in control, so the best thing I can do is let go and let God have the wheel. Sorry, the song just you know. Sometimes he takes the wrong wheel. It's like the back left wheel and then you've got to learn a lot real quick, but we give God control of our lives.

Today we're going answer this question, how do I become clean? How do I become clean? Because I think that cleanness, cleansing, washing, is definitely an essential part of my healing, but it feels out of reach because for every single one of us in the room, it doesn't matter how we act, it doesn't matter what we present, deep inside every single one of us has walked through uncleanness. We've all got some dirt under our spiritual fingernails. Every last one of us.

I want you to think for a second about, physically speaking, the dirtiest day of your life that you can remember. Now you may have to go back to childhood for this, but just think about that day. For me, there's probably dirtier ones, but there's this one in particular that I remember feeling just filthy. I used to do roofing and roofs always needed replaced when it's 105 degrees outside. That's just the nature of things. So I was working on this roof and it was 100 degrees outside and we were up there. You try to get up there early in the morning but then you're up there throughout the day. And you take a break but then you get back up there, and your jeans are like two or three sizes larger by the end of the day, you've sweated all day long. Shingles are made of like tar and fiberglass and all these things that just get into your skin and your hands and so it's just all over you. I remember at the end of that day I'd been

hot, my hands were just really dirty from handling shingles all day, and I just remember desperately wanting to feel clean again.

We were staying in this little red cabin and it's got a little tiny shower, and you have to duck to get under it, and there was no hot water, and it was about this big, and it was the greatest feeling in the world to look down and just see the blackness run down the drain. Do you know what I'm talking about? Anyone else? You're like man this [inaudible 00:09:00] and never come back to this church again, but it's been a few years, I've taken several showers since then. It's just that feeling of having it washed away.

Spiritually I think we desperately need that in our lives. I need for that stuff to be washed away. The uncleanness that we collect as we live through this life whether we cause it or whether it's things that we've encountered that tend to make us feel that way. There are times when I just need to be clean. I just need to be clean again from the inside out. Now, the thing I want to acknowledge right up front is, this is not something we can do for ourselves. I don't believe that you can clean yourself up. If you've had the impression that for God to receive you, for you to go to church, for you to get close to Him, that you've got to clean things up so you can present yourself to him, it's never going to work. You're never going to get there, but when we allow Him and He gets involved, He has a means, He has a way, of cleansing us, of washing us, and that's what I want to dive into today.

How do I lean into the power and the ability of God to clean me up? Because let's face it, doing roofing or trash or plumbing or mud work or any of those kinds of things, those are just physical things and you can take a shower and they're fine, but the things I've walked through spiritually and emotionally and experientially, the times that I've walked through are the hardest times of my life, those things don't get washed away easily do they? They tend to hang with us. They tend to effect the way I think. They tend to effect the way I live. They effect my motives. They effect my relationships. They kind of carry over into all these different areas of my life, and at the end of the day I just desperately want to be clean. I just desperately want to be pure. There's not a single human being in the room today that started out life and made it to adulthood and here we are today and we've just always been super clean and pure. That just doesn't describe any of us.

Instead, we need to understand what is common to man, where we're all at, is we've all got some dirtiness. So here's what Jesus said in one of his beatitudes. In Matthew chapter 5, verse 8, Jesus said this, God blesses, "Blessed are those whose hearts are pure for they will see God". "Whose hearts are pure for they will see God." So Jesus is saying if you want to be happy, joy-filled, fulfilled and satisfied in life, if you want to experience the richness and the fullness of God's abundant blessing in your life, then you've got to be pure in heart. I looked in a bunch of different angles at that phrase, pure in heart, and it has to do with the mind. It has to do with the way we think. It has to do with how we process emotions. That we tend to think about the mind and the heart as two different things, but at the end of the day the way I think and the way I feel it all comes from my mind. It's all in my brain. It's all here. That's the way God designed me.

So Jesus says when you think and you feel, and your motives and your intentions, and what causes you to act, when all of that comes from a place of purity and cleanness you're in a position to be fully blessed by God. But I just said that none of us are there on our own. I just declared that. Every single beatitude we've looked at so far seems kind of paradoxical, right? Jesus said, blessed, happy, joy-filled, are those who are poor in spirit. Blessed, happy, joy-filled are those who mourn and grieve. These don't seem to make sense. None of the beatitudes make sense if you're just looking at them from a natural

perspective. I think we would kind of tend to look at Jesus and go, "Well, shouldn't we just be really positive? Shouldn't we just see the power of the good within us?", and that kind of thing. And Jesus is going, "No. Actually you're blessed when you acknowledge that you're spiritually bankrupt. You're blessed when you mourn and grieve over your sins and your failures. You're blessed when you acknowledge those things. You're blessed when you're hungry and thirsty to do the right thing for God. You're blessed when you are pure in heart," and yet all of us are at the same spot of not being entirely pure of heart on our own.

In other words, here we are again at the place of desperately needing God. He keeps bringing us back to that. He keeps bringing us back to this place of need, of acknowledging that on my own I can't do this. On my own, I can't control my life on my own, and it goes somewhere healthy. I can't ignore the problems and the weaknesses and the sins of my life. I can't ignore all of that. I have to own that. I have to grieve that. I have to acknowledge that He has everything, that I have nothing to give to Him on my own. That, spiritually speaking, I'm bankrupt and I'm dependent on His grace and on His goodness. He keeps bringing us back to this need for him.

Not only does he bring us back to the need for him, but he points to himself on repeat, and ultimately we find what we need in Him. When he says you're poor in spirit, well, how do I become rich in spirit? Through a relationship with Jesus. I'm mourning and I'm grieving, how do I get over the mourning and the grieving? I trust the healing power of Jesus. The pure in heart are blessed. I don't feel very pure in heart. I don't feel very clean. I've messed up and made a lot of mistakes. I've kind of tainted life, so to speak, how do you get over that? You come to Jesus because He's the redeemer and the cleanser and the healer, and that's what I want to dive into.

I want to go behind the scenes of this particular beatitude for a second and talk about how is it that Jesus, who knew it was impossible for us to become pure in heart on our own, how could he then say if you want to be blessed you have to be pure in heart. I want to use some other places in the New Testament, other places in Scripture, to kind of amplify how it is that he cleanses us. How it is that pure in heart is actually an achievable thing. Not on our own, not in our effort, not out of our lives, but when we look to Him and lean on Him and trust in Him, how cleanness and purity is a promise. That it's a guarantee. That it's something that I receive by His effort and by His grace.

I wanted to dive into that this morning. I'm going to give you three big realities about cleansing. Three big realities about how to be clean because I know that for a lot of us as I've talked this morning that maybe we've been thinking about the thing that we've hung onto since childhood, or teenagehood, or young adulthood, that we think has made us too unclean for God to want us, or too unclean to be loved by other people, or too unclean to be accepted within this thing we call the church. The thing that comes to our mind that rises to the surface as this is the thing that has made me impure, unclean, unacceptable, that that has somehow permanently disqualified me from the love the family of God.

We're going to just remove all of that this morning and acknowledge three dynamic truths that are kind of hard to understand until you see them all working together. The first one is this, three realities about cleansing. First, God has made you clean. Now I have to add a qualifier. I'm talking about when you have placed your trust and faith in Jesus. When you've received him as your Lord, as your Savior, when you've entered into a relationship with Him. When you have received what He did on the cross as the means of your salvation and redemption. When you've trusted in Him. When you've begun a relationship with Jesus he has made you clean.

Now, that phrase. I worded it and I capitalized 'has made' on purpose because I really want to emphasize the tense here. When the Bible, and the New Testament in the Greek language especially, uses a phrase like 'has made' it's written in a perfect tense. It's written in a way that says this is done and it has continuing implications forever. Okay? There's no going back. It has been completed. This completed work continues to have an effect ongoing. So the Scriptures, when you come across that phrase, 'He has declared you this' or 'He has done this', it's almost always in that kind of perfect tense that says He has done it, there's no undoing it, there's no going back in time and stopping it. No. It is done, and the doneness of it continues to effect you for the rest of your life and for all of eternity. So He has made you clean when you've trusted in Jesus and you have a relationship with Him. He has completely cleansed you.

Now, so far this almost seems a little scandalous because if you're like me and you've been a Christian for many, many years you can count up at least three or four things you've done wrong since then. Right? And I'm going, "He's made me clean, but I think I've gotten dirty again." Well, we'll come to that in a second, but I don't want to leave this yet. I want to nail this down, that even though it's hard to believe and hard to understand, and even though you and I both know we've messed up and made mistakes, we've sinned, we've willfully disobeyed at times, I've done all that. That Bible is still clear that He has made me clean. That somehow positionally, that as a child of God I'm just clean and I don't get it. I don't understand it. So let's dive into it a little bit.

In First Corinthians chapter 6, verses 9 through 11. I'm always hesitant to read passages that contain lists of sins because what some of us will do is we'll go, "I didn't see mine in there. I must be okay." So don't do that. Paul is actually trying to be comprehensive here. He's trying to let us know this is all of us. So he says, "Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the kingdom of God." Bam. There it is. Great, we are all hopeless. Right? We cannot do this. What does that mean? Maybe I escape. Maybe I'm not on the list. Maybe my sin isn't in here. So he goes, "Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or worship idols, or commit adultery, or male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people," none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. Now, again, if you just go, "I didn't see mine in there," it's in there. We'll have you come up on stage. We'll unpack it together.

His point is that when we do wrong, when we sin in any way, shape or form, we have disqualified ourselves from the Kingdom of God. I don't get to inherit Heaven on my own. I can't be good enough. I can't fix my life. I can't cleanse myself. No, I'm disqualified. Disqualified. Then he says, "Some of you were once like that, but you were cleansed," past tense. "You were cleansed." You were made holy. You were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God. You were made clean. You were made holy. You didn't make yourself holy. You didn't make yourself clean. You were made clean by an outside source. God got involved and made you clean, made you holy. How? On the basis of your relationship with Jesus Christ. He who died to take your sin and wash it away when you placed your faith in Him. He makes you clean. He has made you holy. You have a new position. You have a new status now. Clean. Clean.

Now, we'll deal with, in just a second, the things we've done since then that might be on your mind, or that you did this morning or last night or last week or in the months previous, but those things are on our mind right now, but I just want you to stay here for a second. This is a Scriptural, theological truth about all who have ever placed their faith in Jesus Christ. You have been made clean. You have been made holy, and let me just add in there to be very clear about this, this is not something that is exclusive

to God's people who are the insiders and everyone else has no chance. This is an invitation for any and all who will humble themselves and receive Christ.

In other words, this is not off limits to certain people. No. Jesus was clear. Anyone who comes to Him he will not cast out. So when you come to Jesus, and everyone can come to Jesus, that when you come to Him He has made you holy, clean, pure. He's given you a pure heart. Okay?

Now what do we do with all the stuff that I did yesterday, or in the last 10 minutes, or that fight I had on the way to church this morning, all those kinds. What do I do with those things? Well, here's the second big reality about cleansing, he is making you clean. He is making you clean. He has made you clean and He is making you clean. It's hard for us to understand but both of those things can be true at the same time. That he could declare that I am clean and holy forever and that's a miracle and an act of grace, and I don't understand it and it doesn't make sense to me, but it's there. It's in Scripture. He has declared me to be clean, and yet I know that I've got some stuff to work through still. I've still got some dirt to clear out. I've got some washing to go through still, and so the Scriptures address that aspect of cleansing as well. That when I came to know Jesus I'm cleansed by His blood, and I don't understand that entirely in my mind, but I acknowledge it. I receive it by faith. I've been cleansed. I've been made clean and yet I know I've messed up and I've gotten my garments dirty again. I know that.

So here's what the Scripture says about how he makes us clean. In First John chapter 1, verse 9, the Bible says, "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Now, let me unpack that a little bit because you've got to know this verse sounds like a redemption verse, like a salvation verse, but it's really not. It's written to believers. Okay? It's intended for Christians. So this verse is written to those who are already in the faith. They're already in the family of God. They've already made this initial declaration of this faith in Christ. They've been made holy, been made clean, and then he goes on to say, and continually speaking, if you confess your sins, if you have this openness and this honesty with God, and you're willing to share and bear all to Him, He will keep on cleansing you. You will continue to forgive you. He will continue to wash those things out of your life.

So there's a sense in which position I'm made holy. I'm seen as holy. I'm regarded as holy. But on a practical level day-by-day I don't feel very holy and I don't always act very holy, and so I've got some stuff to work through to align with who I've been made. Does that make sense? So when I was born again into God's family He made me pure and holy and clean. I'm a child of His and He washed it all away, but then in my life I still live on this planet, I still live in this body, I've still got this old me kind of hanging around, and I'm tempted in different directions and so I mess up and I get dirty again, and so I have to go through this process of confession and cleansing on a regular, daily, sometimes minute by moment basis. Right? In which I get clean again so that I can continue to look like and to be who I've been made to be, miraculously, by God.

So I'm born into God's family. I'm now a child of God. I'm declared holy and clean, and as I live my life day in, day out, and I mess up and I sin and I rebel and I make mistakes, and I go my own way and I take back control, and all those things, and I do things that are sinful, that are shameful and whatnot, that all of those things there's a cleansing for that that helps me to realign again with who He has saved me to be. With who I really am.

By the way, you need to understand who you really are as a Christian is not your sin. Who you really are, who God made you to be, who He saved you to be, who He regenerated you into, is a holy child of God.

So every time you confess and you work through something and you get healing, and you overcome something, every time that happens you're just becoming who you are. Some of you in this room, some of me, I've done this myself, that we continue to define myself with the label that matches my sin. Right? Well, I know I'm supposed to be a child of God, but I'm actually, and we fill in the blank. I'm someone that does this. I'm an alcoholic. I'm an abuser. We use these certain labels that come out of our sins.

In reality, those things are not who we are. Who we are is a child of God. We need to deal with behaviors and actions and sins that happen in the moment, but they don't define me. So He has made you clean and He will keep on cleaning you. So this verse says, "If we confess," and the word confess here literally means if we agree with God about our sin. If we agree with God about our sin. So if you come to me and go, "Hey, I know I'm doing this thing that the Bible clearly teaches against, but I just feel like it's okay," then as a pastor I can't say this, but I want to go, "Well, your feeling wrong." You know? The Bible declares it's a sin. And so confession is not just a matter of, "Aw, I did it again. I'll probably do it some more later. It's probably not a big deal." No, confession is like, "Here's me and my sin over here and there's this line, and there's God over there, and I am leaving this and I'm coming over here with God going, 'God I get it. I agree with you. That is not acceptable'." That's confession. I give this to you and I agree with you about it. Okay?

So if you confess your sins, you agree with God about the sin, He is faithful and just. That's who He is. Remember we've got to believe what the word says about God not just what we feel about God. So, again, if you come to me as a pastor, "I just don't feel like God wants me anymore," I would have to go, "You're feeling wrong." He does. He's faithful and just. It's who He is, and He will forgive us our sins. To forgive is I'm going to release you from the penalty, from the debt, and to purify us from all unrighteousness. That word 'purify' is a beautiful word. It comes from a Greek word [katharidzo 00:29:08]. Now I don't normally throw Greek words out there, but this one might sound familiar. Katharidzo.

Here's a really pleasant thought for you. Anyone ever been catheterized? You don't have to raise your hand. Do not raise a hand, but we get that word from this Greek root. Okay? So to remove ... Some of you just got a mental image. Sorry. But when you confess your sins to God he removes all those impurities from your life. You ever walk around just feeling stained? Stained? He is powerful enough to completely forgive and to cleanse and to wash thoroughly, to remove from our lives the impurities.

We get another English word from it. We get the word catharsis from this same Greek root. Emotionally and mentally catharsis is I've got all this pent up emotion, all this anger, all this bitterness, all this sadness, all this grief and it's just here. I don't know what to do with it, and then there comes this moment, maybe there's a trigger, maybe somebody asks, and it just comes out. We can't stop it. It's like the fire hydrant. Right? And all of that pent up anxiety just releases. That's catharsis. That's what he's talking about here. All of that impurity, all of that pent up stuff, all of the things that have kept you from walking with God, He removes. They're gone. And he's doing that daily.

If you want to live with a pure heart you've got to acknowledge and accept that you've been given a pure heart, but you also daily have to continue to receive this cleansing of your heart by confession, by keeping a short account, by the way, of what we need to confess. Because if I start hiding things and collecting things then the account gets longer. John Baker, founder of Celebrate Recovery, he often says you're only as sick as your secrets meaning the things that you hide, the things you cover up, the things

that you don't acknowledge before God or others, those are the things that will kill you. Those are the things that will take you down.

But when you expose it, bring it into the light, it loses its power. Okay? So we confess. We bring it into the light and He cleanses us, and it's available for me as a Christian every day, every moment. I can come to Him, I can agree with Him about my sin, and He will cleanse it from my life. He'll remove it. He'll wash me.

Here's the third reality, He will keep you clean. He will keep you clean. He declared you clean. That's in the past, it's done. It's true. He is making you clean daily, day in, day out in your relationship with God, in your walk with God and your fellowship with God, He is continuing to cleanse you every time you confess, every time you come clean, every time you talk about this, and He will keep you clean for all of eternity. He will make sure that at the end of your journey His promise is you're going to get there, you're going to achieve this. Now it's going to take a whole lifetime for you to get there. This daily cleansing, and this spiritual growth, and this learning to walk with Him, this becoming pure in heart so that He can bless us fully, but by the end of your journey here, when we graduate onto Heaven we are pure, we are clean, and He will make it so.

The Bible says in First Thessalonians Five, "Now may the God of Peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit, and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again". God will make this happen for He who calls you is faithful. I love how in every one of these passages it's the nature of God that makes these things true. It's not my ability to make it true. It's that God has said it. He's going to do it. God has said it. He's going to do it. So at the end of your walk, at the end of your journey, He is going to keep you the way He declared you when you received Him. He is going to use your life, and He is going to use your pain, and He's going to use your circumstances, He going to use everything about you to slowly grow you and conform you into the image of Jesus Christ.

In one way or another this purging fire, so to speak, I can walk through it in my life or I can deal with it at the end, and it's way better to walk through it now and deal with it early, and live a life on a pathway of healing, but by the end the Scripture is clear. He who called you is faithful to keep you clean and pure and holy and blameless. Now just hang on that word for a second.

Blameless, what does that look like? Can you imagine walking around in a life for which you're blameless. Now a lot of us think we're blameless. Right? We think we're blameless in moments of conflict. It's usually everyone else's fault. It's our spouse's fault. It's the other driver's fault. It's always someone else's fault why we're here, why we're in this predicament, but to truly be blameless is this miraculous declaration that God makes because he's faithful, because He's true to his nature, He's true to His word, He's true to His promises. He will do it. He'll do it.

Now, how does all this work because, again, we still haven't really dealt with the problem of God being holy and all-powerful and reigning in majesty, and me being here messing up. I can receive by faith that He's declared me holy, and I can follow the pattern of confession, and I can receive His cleansing day in and day out, and I can trust that someday I'll make it, but how do I deal with it right now? How do I get on this pathway today? Well, there's a big word you've got to learn in the Christian life. You've got to learn it on day one and you've got to keep learning it for the rest of your life. The more you learn and understand this word the more effective you become in living your life.

The Bible, let me just give you this big truth, you can only walk in healing to the degree to which you can receive and walk under God's what? Grace. You can only walk on a pathway of healing to the degree to which you can receive and live under God's grace. Now this is the part where it all gets difficult. Grace might seem easy, oh I'm forgiven it's easy. No. No, this is actually really tough for us. This is hard for us. I can't tell you how hard this is because of shame. Because here I am knowing what my sin has looked like. Knowing the things I wouldn't want to say on this stage, or if someone asked me, "Hey what's your deepest, darkest secret," I wouldn't want to share that. I know the shame that comes with that. Right? You and I know the shame that comes with that, and yet what He promises is grace.

So grace starts to almost seem scandalous to us, unfair to us. You know how children consider fairness, "He got three cookies. I am going to get my three cookies. Don't give me two." There's this inordinate sense of fairness in our kids. I'm just dealing with this personally and working it out right now, and we do that with God, and we almost come to God ... First of all, we look around at everybody else. Right? If we're still in the self-justifying phase I'll look around at what other people are doing and I'll go, "I'm not as bad as them. I'm not a terrorist. I'm not someone who's committed that or done that or been in that lifestyle, that's not me so God you should really be mad at them." When we finally get over that and repent of our pride because that's what we struggle with. Maybe we don't struggle with that, I struggle with pride if I'm still comparing and deciding I'm better than someone else.

If I can get over all of that and really start to own and acknowledge my sin, then it starts to seem so unfair that God would just let this go. It seems scandalous. I've messed up again God. I've blown it again. Have you ever said that in your mind? Or to someone else? I've blown it again. I can't believe I'm back here. I've blown it again. From our human perspective, because we're not always grace-filled. We're not always grace-filled toward others. We're not always grace-filled toward ourselves, and we transfer that over and we go, "Well, God must not always be grace-filled either. I mean, surely He cannot forgive me for the thousandth time. Surely He cannot work this out now that I've done it and I've already promised Him I wouldn't do it anymore. I've said it dozens of times and here I am again. This just seems wrong. This just seems scandalous."

What's the nature of grace? Take it or leave it, that's what grace is. Grace is God saying that in all of the sins of all of humanity I'm going to allow my son Jesus to die to pay the price that all of those sins incurred, and when you look to Him, when you look to Jesus, you're clean. When you rely on Him and place your faith in Him I'm going to declare you clean. "Well, that's not right God. I've made a lot of mistakes." Well, you're not God. It's not up to you. He is a God of truth and justice, and His justice was visited on Jesus on your behalf.

So when you see that His justice is fulfilled at the cross, and you receive Jesus, you receive grace and you're forgiven. When you're a Christian and you've messed up again and you come back to him, "God how can you forgive me again?" And He says, "Well, just confess it and watch because that's what I do. I'm faithful." And he does it again. You can only walk on a pathway of healing to the degree to which you learn to live under grace.

Now, let me close by explaining why this is so important. Because we are living in a culture obsessed with growth and self-improvement and discipline and doing better, and there's not anything wrong with those things in and of themselves. Discipline is good. Right? Getting better is good. So if you say, "I want to be a better dad." "I want to be a better husband." Awesome. "I want to be better at work." That's great. That's fantastic, but in my relationship with God that's just not how things work. It's not how

things work. So this is just not going to work the way you want it to work. Because what I want to do is to be sorry enough to earn his forgiveness, or do better enough to earn his forgiveness. Every time I try to do better enough, or be sorry enough, or go through penance and suffering enough, now that I feel bad enough about myself, now surely I've earned some favor from God. You have just gone around the whole concept of grace.

Grace literally means the undeserved favor of God. It's how He works. It's His rule of law. It's what He does. He ministers grace to us, and if you're willing to receive it, as scandalous as it might seem to you, the moment you say, "Okay, I'm confessing my sins and I'm asking Him to forgive me and to give me grace." When you start to receive that He gives it.

Now, let me just real quickly interrupt some trains of thought because some of you go, "Yeah, that's how we all got saved, and now we're working really hard again." No. No. Day in, day out, one step of growth at a time, it all occurs as you come to understand and embrace more grace, more grace in your life. It's the basis on which we live. When grace becomes your foundation, when you start to see and understand the grace of God and you start to see the power of God it'll change your life. It'll change your marriage. It'll change your parenting. It'll change your work life. It'll change how you drive through traffic because you'll start to understand that somebody just messed up. And what do we want to do, make them pay. Right? You call the cable company and they've messed up your bill and you want to make them pay. Okay? Somebody's done something to you you want to make them pay. That's fair. That's just. Making them pay is right. And God who is just, and fair, and right, and holy, he believes the very same thing.

Your sins got to be punished. It has to be dealt with. We can't ignore it. We can't overlook it. You messed up, God is going to deal with it. You know how He's going to deal with it? He lets His son take it. He lets His son take it because He loves you. His son dies and pays that penalty. When you receive Him and you come and you go, "Oh my goodness. I get it. I get it. It's not about my goodness is it? It's not about me earning my way is it? It's not about me getting bigger, better, stronger, faster, performing my way into His grace or earning His favor? It's not about me suffering and being sorry enough? It's about looking to Jesus. Trusting in Jesus." Then, as a Christian, looking to him again, trusting him over and over and over.

You can try to work hard at not sinning or you can have your mind blown by the very nature of the cross. When you see and understand that kind of grace and it's bigger and bigger in your life, I just want to make a guarantee to you. You will be more motivated to not sin by a gigantic vision of the cross than you ever will by the motivation of shame. When you learn to embrace God's grace because He's a gracious God, it is life changing.

Let's bow our heads. If you're in this room and you just got it. You just understood it. It's not about being good enough. It's not about earning your way. It's not about being clean and pure and holy on your own. It is about trusting Jesus, and you just realized that for the first time, I want to invite you to call out to God from your heart, "God I see it now. You're a God who is faithful and just. You do punish my sin. You allow Jesus to take it, and I receive Jesus as my Savior. I ask you to forgive me, to wash me, to cleanse me. Lord I love you. Coming to know you today I'm receiving your grace and I just want to depend on you for the rest of eternity."

Father, I pray for the Christian, the believer who's in this room. If you're here and you've been discouraged by repeating patterns of dirtiness and uncleanness, or if you're reflecting on a past filled with promiscuity, substance abuse, homosexuality, anything at all that you have wrestled with in the past, none of it is off-limits. There is cleansing for all of it if you just receive it.

God, I come to you again. I confess this thought. I confess this action. I confess this moment where I blocked you out. I did my own thing and I messed up again, God, and I just receive your grace, and it humbles me more than ever but I receive your grace. I ask you to forgive me, cleanse me, wash it, remove it from my life. Declare me clean. Make me clean. Father I pray that you just wash and cleanse us on this journey. Help us to bring it to light. If you're here and you're hiding, you're hiding, you've never told anybody about the thing you believe is making you unclean. First of all, if it's something someone else did to you it is not your fault. Some of you need to understand very clearly during this prayer time, if you were abused or taken advantage of in some way, that did not make you unclean. That is not your fault. You didn't choose it. You didn't invite it. You didn't allow it to happen. It is not your fault. But if you're here and you know that you've sinned in some way, that you chose to do something that made you unclean, there is grace for it. There is grace for it. Father remind us of that, in Jesus precious name. Amen.