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“God’s Grace is Tough Enough”

Ephesians 2

Small Group Plan

Consider this warning from contemporary writer Brennan Manning:

Though the Scriptures speak insistently of the divine initiative in the work of salvation, that by grace we are saved ... American spirituality still seems to start with self, not with God. Personal responsibility replaces personal response. We seem engrossed in our own efforts to grow in holiness. We talk about acquiring virtue, as if it were some kind of skill that can be acquired through personal effort, like good handwriting or a well-grooved golf swing ... The emphasis is always on what I do rather than on what God is doing in my life. In this macho approach God is reduced to a benign old spectator on the sidelines ... We become convinced that we can do a pretty good job of following Jesus if we just, once and for all, make up our minds and really buckle down to it. Well, if that’s all there is to Christian discipleship, then.... All we’re doing is transferring the legend of the self-made man from the economic sphere to the spiritual one.

— From *Lion and Lamb* by Brennan Manning

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- Did you grow up hearing about the “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps” viewpoint? Where did you hear it or see it?
- Why is the “self-man man” a legend and why is it a dangerous legend?

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

— SIN’S WORK AGAINST US —

Ephesians 2:1-3

¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are

disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

- What do each of these phrases mean?
 - “dead in your transgressions”
 - “followed the ways of the world”
 - “disobedient”
 - “gratifying the cravings”
 - “objects of wrath”
- How do they make you feel?
- Do you want to be around a person who fits this description? Explain.
- Is it difficult for you to picture yourself as that person? Explain.

— GOD’S LOVE FOR US —

Ephesians 2:4a

^{4a} But because of his great love for us.

- Why did God choose to be with the kind of people described in verses 1-3?
- Of all the expressions or definitions of God’s love that you have heard, which is the most powerful?
- Why does love overcome failure? How does love overcome failure?

— GOD’S GRACE IN US —

Ephesians 2:4b-5

^{4b} God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

- How would you define the phrase “rich in mercy”?
- How can “mercy” bring “life” to a “dead” spirit/soul/heart?

— GOD’S HONOR ON US —

Ephesians 2:6-7

⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

- How can God work in a “failed” life to speak to a “failed” world?
- How does “expressed ... kindness” define or illustrate grace?

— GOD’S HUMILITY WITHIN US —

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

- Explain the value of being God's example of grace to the world.
- But ... what is the danger of being God's "Billboard" of grace?
- How does religious "boasting" take place today? Where have you seen it?

— GOD'S TRANSFORMATION BEFORE US —

Ephesians 2:10

¹⁰ *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

- Why do some want God's grace, but not His transformation?
- How does God use the power and joy of his grace to shape and mold our character?

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- When did you first begin to understand God's grace?
- Who helped you see it's meaning? Or, what event occurred that made his grace clearer to you?
- Which is most difficult for you to accept, God's grace or God's transformation? Explain.
- How do you balance these two warnings?
 - Paul's warning that we are saved by grace and not by works (Eph. 2:8-9)
 - James' warning that faith without works is dead (James 2:26)
- Close by thanking God for His amazing grace.