

Everyday Grace

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[0:00] Philippians chapter 4, we're going to read the first nine verses as we prepare to hear God's word, or as you prepare to hear God's word.

Philippians chapter 4, verse 1, Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.

Or perhaps this is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends. I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.

Yes, and I ask you, loyal yoke fellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God.

[1:21] And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice, and the God of peace will be with you.

As we begin, I want to ask you a question. What do you see when you look at your neighbor? Not the person sitting next to you.

I'm talking about your neighbor in your neighborhood. What do you see? What do you think of? Do you see his messy yard? His bad language, his out-of-control kids, his loud music, his political beliefs.

Maybe it's that election sign in his yard that says he's on the other side. And then I ask, is that all you see? Is there anything else about him?

[2:42] Anything good about him? Anything good you can think of? What about his work ethic? Or maybe his devotion to his wife or devotion to her husband?

Maybe he'll help you out whenever you ask. Maybe you're afraid to ask, but you know what? He would help me out if I asked. Now, get into your car and drive to work.

When you're at work, what do you see there? An arrogant boss? Complaining customers?

Stupid computers that crash at just the wrong time? Programs that won't work? Lazy co-workers? Is that all you see when you go there?

Is that the whole picture? Is there no one there with any talent? Is there no one there that does anything good? Do your computers never work? Is your company completely worthless?

[3:49] Doing no good in the world to anyone? Anyone? One last stop. Let's go to the voting booth. I don't know if you pressed full ticket or whatever they call it.

Or not. Straight ticket. Does the other side have nothing good about it? Are they really evil incarnate?

That's how each side portrays the other side, isn't it? Doesn't seem like there's any sort of happy medium anymore. That's how they portray each other. That's how people feel sometimes. But is that true?

Is what you hear on talk radio the truth? The whole truth? And nothing but the truth? There's no good over there. That's how people talk and that's how people feel sometimes.

But is it true? Is that the whole picture? Are we missing something? Are we missing something of God's grace? That's the question I want you to go out of here thinking.

[4:55] Am I missing God's grace? Something of God's grace. Today, I want to talk to you about everywhere, everyone, everyday grace.

So it's everywhere, everyone, everyday grace. Now I have five points tonight. And the first one I'm calling tunnel vision. Tunnel vision.

When we were driving down to South Carolina on Interstate 40, there is a tunnel.

And the highway goes from six lanes down until they're all squeezed down into four. And you go through a mountain. It gets squeezed down. And so now, instead of the sky and the trees and everything else that is so beautiful down in Tennessee, wherever that is, North Carolina, all you see is the tunnel.

I think we can get a case of tunnel vision sometimes. Where we effectively block out so much of the truth, so much about other people.

[6:04] And so that's the first point that I want to talk about is tunnel vision. And I just want you to know, a lot of what I'm talking about today is found in a chapter of David Murray's book called The Happy Christian.

Pastor John and I and Aaron, we heard David Murray preach three or four times at a pastor's fraternal in Grand Rapids in March. And I loved his material so much, I picked up his book called The Happy Christian.

I really enjoyed it. But it was this chapter on everyday grace or everywhere grace that has really stuck with me lately. And it's stuck with me for a couple of reasons. One is a public reason and one is more personal to myself.

It stuck with me because of just the bruising and violent and mean-spirited election that we just went through. Both sides portrayed the other side in the worst possible way.

It was apocalyptic on both sides. They both have this horrible tunnel vision. Now the highlight of the three presidential debates was when the moderator, whoever the moderator was, asked them to say something nice about the other person.

[7:24] Do you remember that? Say something nice about that person over there. And it seems so out of left field. It seems so jarring. It seems so just not in the spirit of the whole election.

So say something good about him? Say something good about her? And you've got to just wonder what they were thinking as their brains are turning in their heads.

It was a good question, though. And it reminds us of a truth that because of God's grace, no one who is alive and on the earth and on their two feet are absolutely devoid of good.

We can get so easily caught up in thinking that way. We see people and we see situations in the worst possible ways.

And when we do, in the political scene, there's nothing but to attack and destroy. That can be the only, that is the only way that we can address ultimate, apocalyptic, only all evil.

[8:33] The only way we can engage it is to try to destroy it. There's no middle ground. It's just war. But that attitude that we see going on in our world is not the total truth.

It comes from a partial blindness. It comes from this tunnel vision that I'm talking about. And God has called us to do our politics as Christians according to the word of God, with the truth of the word of God.

And the truth of the word of God is that God gives gifts and graces and talents and even virtues to everyone.

There is something commendable because of God's grace in everyone and in every situation. Now, I saw that missing in the political commentary and the politics of our nation.

And that is a poison. It's a poison. And I don't want any of you to fall into it. I don't want any of you to miss something of God's goodness.

[9:33] Now, I said there was two reasons and that this chapter stuck with me so much or struck me so much. And the second was not something public. It was something more personal.

That was a national tunnel vision. Now, I want to talk about just a personal tunnel vision that I had that is probably something you can relate to. I noticed a few months ago or some time ago something about my parenting.

And it was just this, that I realized I'd been doing my parenting or my fathering looking mostly at the weaknesses and the failings and the sin of my own children.

And I had tunnel vision. And I got stuck on those problems. I got stuck in the hard places. So, I wasn't seeing my children's strengths, which by God's grace they have many.

And I wasn't seeing their virtues. By God's grace they have those too. All I saw and all I felt were the bad things. That's what my brain was wired to.

[10:42] And the more I was wired, the more I saw it. And the more I saw it, the more it just sort of reinforced itself. Now, what do you think that did to me? What does it do to a person when in their relationships they can't help but always notice all the bad things?

Well, it didn't help me out, that's for sure. I got really down and discouraged. And it was like every day all I saw was, here we go again. The same things again. Now, I know that you all face the same sorts of things.

I can share that with you because you, too, have fathers and mothers and children and brothers and sisters and coworkers and people in your life, relationships, where there are reoccurring problems and reoccurring sins.

And it can get to the point where that's all we see about that person. It goes into a tunnel vision where we just narrow down into the darkest things about the other person.

And when we can't see and when we don't see God's every day, everyone, everywhere grace, it just eventually kills us. It damages us.

[11:59] It poisons us. When we close our eyes and our hearts and our minds to the grace of God that's going on in that person's life, it might not be saving grace, but it's common grace.

It eventually just destroys us. It turns us into cranks. It takes away our joy. It takes away our hope. It can even take away our civility. It turns us into what we see out in the world, griping, complaining, cynical, hating, vilifying, tearing each other apart.

And that's a little of at least something of what was going on in Philippi. That's a long introduction.

And I want to just go now into Philippians chapter 4.

And he says, I plead. Paul says, I plead with Euodia. And I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. So he says, I want these two sisters to agree.

[13:05] And he dresses them face to face, one on one. He says, I want you to agree in the Lord. And then Paul goes on and he talks about how they're going to have peace. How they're going to be able to stand firm and quit from biting and destroying each other.

And he says, put your joy in the Lord. Don't settle your hearts on other people. Don't say, I can't be happy until Euodia agrees with me.

I can't be happy until she sees things the way I see things. Instead, rejoice in the Lord. Again, I say rejoice. So how do you have peace?

Let your gentleness be evident to all. This word gentleness is hard to describe because it's a beautiful Greek word that we really don't have sort of the English for.

It means a generous kindness. An open heartedness. I'm willing to be won over. It's this winsomeness.

[14:12] It's the idea that I'm not going to hold out until I get 100% of what I want. No, I'm easy to entreat. I'm generous relationally.

My toes aren't always getting stepped on. I'm not always getting offended. I see people as they are. I'm okay. Pray. And I'm not going to destroy the relationship for the sake of getting my way in the relationship.

He says, Don't be anxious, but pray. Now, this isn't just out in the middle of nowhere. These words are part of the situation of these arguments in this church.

So we can get anxious when we are in those hard situations. We can start to think if Syntyche doesn't change, she's going to ruin everything. She'll ruin everything.

What is that? That's tunnel vision that I'm talking about. She's going to destroy the church if she doesn't change. Instead of that kind of spirit, don't be anxious.

[15:15] Pray. The only cure for gripping anxiety is prayer and thanksgiving. And that's why Paul says, And when you do, the peace of God that surpasses understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

And then he says, And this is what I want you to focus on. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

Now, again, those things are wonderful. That whole list of things, of what we should think about, are wonderful as they just stand on their own. It's a good practice to be thinking about admirable and true and excellent praiseworthy things.

But this verse doesn't come without a context. It's attached to the very context that we're talking about, where Euodia and Syntyche are fighting with each other.

And they're threatening to bring down the whole church with them as they side up with each other, as they demonize each other. And that's why Paul has to say, you know, all of these people on both sides, their names are in the book of life.

[16 : 29] We can start to think, they're not saved. They don't agree with me. Paul says, no. They're Christians. And now what you need to start to do is start to see God's grace in them.

Start to see God's grace in Euodia. What had they been doing? Well, if Euodia and Syntyche were anything like us, they were probably starting to stare and see nothing, but the problems and the bad things and the sins of their sister.

So Euodia was having a hard time seeing anything good about Syntyche and vice versa. And that's why Syzykus, the loyal yoke fellow or the pastor there, he needs to step in and help them.

That's what they needed. They needed someone to challenge that tunnel vision, that blindness that they had. So Euodia, is it really true that there's nothing good about Syntyche?

There's nothing lovely about her. There's nothing true about her. There's nothing excellent in her.

There's nothing praiseworthy in her. They needed to have their eyes open, their hearts open, their minds open to see God's everyday, everywhere, grace in each other.

[17 : 51] No matter how bad it was, God's grace was still there. God's goodness and God's image were still there. On a basic level, and especially in this situation, in a saving level.

But, that's the danger. That's the tunnel vision that we can get into. Where, in life and in people, all we see is the sin, and all we see is the badness, but that isn't the whole truth.

And that kind of thinking robs God of his glory, because we are missing something of his work. You know that? We are missing something of what he is doing.

We are missing something of his goodness. We are missing something of what he's doing. And so, we're not only missing God and robbing God of his glory, we're damaging ourselves.

It destroys our relationships. And that's how you get into the situation of being hated and hating one another. So, that's our first point, tunnel vision.

[18 : 58] Now, what's the second? What's the cure? Secondly, here's the second point. What's the cure? What's the remedy? Well, here's the second point. God's everywhere, every one grace, is for all.

That's the first cure. It's for all. All. And when I say all, I mean all. All. Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, is true in all.

God's common grace is active in some way in all and for all. Regardless if you're a Christian or not. Regardless if you're a Muslim. Regardless if you're a criminal or not. It's in all and for all. You see it in the rain. God makes his sun rise on the evil and the good and he sends his rain on the just and the unjust.

That's grace. And it's all kinds of people experience it. All kinds of people experience it. Every year millions and millions of people go to the national parks.

[20 : 06] Some of you went this summer to some fabulous, wonderful national parks. But was it just Christians there that were standing there amazed at what they saw? When they went to Yellowstone, was it just the Christians who were saying, wow, this is great?

When you stood on the edge of the Grand Canyon, if you were an evolutionist, did you say, man, this is nothing? No. They're amazed.

They're struck with the beauty and the majesty of what God has done. They might not trace it back to the creator, but there it is.

They feel it. They feel the joy in seeing it. They feel the wonder in it. They feel the glory of it. And that's God's grace to them. God's love to them to put them in a world that is so beautiful and wonderful.

He gives them joy. He gives them wonder. But it's not just there. You can find God's everywhere, every day, every one, every day grace in even the worst situations in the worst places.

[21 : 11] There's nowhere you can go where you can escape it. in the beautiful and wonderful movie called Life is Beautiful.

You can see the grace of God in a concentration camp. Now, it's a fictional story. It's a movie about a Jewish man who falls in love with his wife in Italy a few years before the Second World War begins.

And they're married. They have a son together. but soon the whole family with their son who's about four gets taken away into a German concentration camp.

Now, the Germans take away so much from them. But they can't take away common grace. It's not stated but you just see it.

And so there they are a father and son in the camp and his wife is in another part of the camp. So dads, how do you handle that? How do you parent through that?

[22 : 18] What do you do? Well, the father tells his son that they're playing a game. All the prisoners are playing a game. And you get points by being quiet and not complaining about being hungry.

You get extra points if you hide quietly from the guards and the first one to a thousand points gets a tank. And so the game goes on and all the time the father does everything to protect and to cheer his son, to help his son.

Until the very end, the allies are about to come into the camp to free the camp and in the chaos the father says, now's our chance. We can break out and so we're going to go and find my wife and we're going to get out of here and escape as a family.

But as they're sneaking around a German officer spots him and the father's last thing that he does is he quickly tells his little boy to go hide in a box and he says, this is the last contest.

This is it. If you can be quiet and hide quietly, you'll win. You'll win the tank. And the German officer catches the father and decides to shoot him.

[23 : 28] And still in character, the father winks at his son and marches off in a silly way. And you hear gunshots coming from around the corner. The next day, the allies roll in and one of the soldiers finds the boy in the box and he puts the little boy up on top of a tank and drives him out of the camp.

It's a fictional story, but it's a true story. Because in the worst places, there's grace. There's love. There's compassion.

There's joy. Sometimes it is hard to see. Sometimes the evil is very thick and very dark and it seems like that's all that there is.

But the Apostle John says, Jesus gives light to every person who comes into the world. Even the most hardened criminals have an honor code. And you know, Al-Qaeda or ISIS operatives cook one another meals and share funny stories.

Pablo Escobar, who in the 80s and the 90s was the greatest, the biggest drug lord in the world. He made billions, not millions, billions of dollars selling drugs in this drug empire in Colombia.

[24 : 56] And his little daughter didn't know anything about her father's business. You can imagine she's five, six, seven, whatever, doesn't understand what's going on. But one day, little Manuela asked her father, how much a billion dollars was?

And responded, the value of your eyes, my princess. He loved her. He loved her. Now, it's only a trace, perhaps.

a trace of goodness, a trace of kindness, a trace of love. But there are traces everywhere. And sometimes it's more than a trace.

And if we can see it in the worst places and in the worst people, then we can surely see it in our neighbors and our coworkers. And surely we can see it on the other side, politically speaking.

And surely we can see it in our brothers and sisters. And we can see it in our families, in our parents, in our children. It's for all. It's for all.

[25 : 57] It's for every single person sitting in their chairs right now. And so look for it. Throw off that tunnel vision and start looking for God's everywhere, everyday grace.

That's our second point. Our third point is everywhere, everyone, grace is motivated by God's love. God's love. Common grace, everyone, everywhere, grace is motivated by God's love.

It comes from God's loving heart. Now some Christians, especially some Reformed Christians, have a hard time going that far. Going so far as to say that God loves everyone.

They have a hard time saying that. They don't want to talk about grace to them. They might call it restraining providence. As in, it's restraining.

It prevents people from being as bad as they could be. But they don't see anything positive in God's attitude towards unbelievers or his disposition to the unbelievers.

[27 : 04] It's only sort of a negative. Now, let me ask you, don't answer out loud. Does God love Hillary Clinton?

Does God love Donald Trump? Some Christians don't want to speak about God-loving unbelievers because they think it cheapens God's love.

How can God love someone that, those who are not Christians and perhaps may never become Christians? And when we say, well, if God doesn't love them, explain God's gifts to them.

Explain why Hillary Clinton is loyal to her friends even when it costs her. There's other things we could talk about. When we say, explain God's gifts to them.

Explain God's kindness to them. They will say, well, God is fattening them up for the slaughter. He's fattening up them, fattening them up like turkeys for Thanksgiving. The logic is impressive.

[28 : 12] God's going to destroy them and they're going to be judged and condemned even for the good things that he's given them. Isn't that what he's doing? The logic is impressive, but theology is wrong.

Now let me ask you, is that how Jesus calculates it? Is that how Jesus reasons it? God hates unbelievers and is fattening them up for judgment?

Is it just kindness to make the end worse? Is that what Jesus says? He calls it love. God loves them.

You've heard that it was said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you might be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

[29 : 16] And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not pagans even do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

What's God's perfection in that verse, in those verses? How is the Father different than so many other people? Jesus says he loves his enemies.

He loves. That's a long way from thinking God is fattening them up for slaughter. Now, he doesn't love them like he loves his own, but it's love nonetheless, and though it is lesser love than the love that sends his son to die for them and sends his son to take the punishment for them, it is lesser love, but it is not little love.

David Murray says, God loves the unsaved more than we have ever loved anyone. He says, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He pleads with them, choose life.

And if you weren't a Christian, that's God's heart to you. He says, I love you. Why would you die? Repent. Be saved. So how do I know that's his attitude?

[30 : 38] Well, the Bible says it. The facts prove it. You can look at his gifts. His gifts to them externally. His gifts to them internally.

He gives them parental love. He gives them patience and generosity. His love stirs up in their hearts a sense of right and wrong and kindness and empathy. It's love.

God's love is what is filling these people with everywhere, everyday grace. grace. So those are the first two remedies is we need to realize that it is for all, that God's heart is in it.

And here's number, point number four. We need to look for it. Look for it. Remember my question was at the very beginning, are we blind to it?

Are we missing it? Are we not seeing something of God's grace? Are we missing something of what God is doing? Are we missing something of the goodness that God has put in the world?

[31 : 41] Are we missing something of the goodness that God is doing in ordinary people's lives? Are we robbing God of his glory? See, all of that grace that he is pouring out is shouting that God is good, that God is kind.

And so, the question is, are we, do our, are our eyes open to it? Can we say with the psalmist, the earth is full of his unfailing love?

Psalms 33, 5. Or, the earth is filled with your love? Psalm 119, 64. Or, do we have tunnel vision? Are we seeing God's love out there?

Or, do we have tunnel vision? And so, my, the point here is, look for it. Use your eyes to look for God's grace. Look for, use your eyes to look for God's love.

Use your noses to smell it. Use your hands to fill it. Use your ears to hear it. Use your tongues to taste it. The earth is filled with your love.

[32 : 48] So, when is a good time to experience God's love? When is a good time to say, this is good? Well, breakfast is, lunch is, dinner is, driving is, sitting is, working is, they are full of God's

love.

So, look for it. Your food tastes good because God is good. They invented showers because God is good. They figured out how to make soft beds because God is good.

they figured out how to make musical instruments because God is good. They figured out how to make cars that can drive 70 miles an hour down the highway because God is good.

They learned how to make waterproof houses because God is good. They learned how to do medicine because God is good. So, look for it.

Look for it in others. You know, we can thank God that Bill Gates is using his vast wealth to fight malaria. Malaria kills millions of people every year, destroys families, creates orphans, it destroys economies, and I want to say, isn't it good that Mr. Gates is saying, I want to help.

[34 : 15] I want to help. It's not saving grace. It's still grace. Still God's goodness at work. We can look at it in our children. Our children are full of strengths.

They're full of God's grace and so look for it in them. And what about your spouse? Whatever is admirable, praiseworthy, excellent. Think about such things. Look for it in your brothers and sisters here.

You know what this place is? This place is just a treasure trove. So go on a treasure hunt. The church is the ground. Go looking for praiseworthy, true, excellent, admirable things in one another. Your brother and sister right beside you is full of things that are wonderful. So thank God for them and you don't have to be afraid to even tell them about it. Look for it in our politicians.

It's easy to say the world is ruined. It's terrible. There's no good. The whole thing is pointless. And I can certainly sympathize with that feeling. But it's not the whole picture.

[35 : 22] I'm not saying ignore the bad. I'm not saying ignore sin and its effects. I'm not saying don't mourn. Because but that can't be our whole response.

Because that's not the Bible's whole response. And so I'm not talking about sticking your head in the ground. Some sort of sticking your head in the ground optimism. I'm saying that cynicism and that despair that it's just everywhere is bad.

It's all bad. People are bad. It's just as much of a lie as that sticking your head in the ground optimism. It's missing God's grace. It's missing the beauty and the love that God is filling the earth with.

It's shining everywhere. And so look for it. Look for it. Thursday is Thanksgiving. There's no reason that any of us should be able to get from here to Wednesday without 300 good things to say that God has done in our lives.

Look for it. And finally point number five is this use it. Use it. What do I mean? You know one of the most powerful evangelistic tools that we have is one of the ways that we have an open door into any unbeliever's heart is this the goodness of God leads you to repentance.

[36 : 52] Maybe that's what we need to do in our evangelistic efforts. Maybe that's the tact. That's the direction that we need to take. Point God's goodness out to them. See the goodness of God God's great love for them is already showing it to them.

He's already doing it in their life. And God's goodness is meant to lead us all to repentance. To turn us back to God.

And so we aren't talking about turning to a God of hate and a God of cruelty. We're talking about turning back to a God who is good. And let me tell you about that good God. And you could just look in their lives and say this is all what God has done.

And it's goodness they've already experienced. It's a goodness they've already felt and seen. Now unbelief has blinded them to a lot of it. As it did us.

Their unbelief does cast a shadow over God's heart but the great truth is God has been good to them. God has been loving them. And his goodness is calling them home.

[38 : 02] His goodness is calling them back to the father's side. So what drew that prodigal son and Luke and Jesus' parable back to his home?

It was his father's goodness. He knew that at least he could probably get a job there. His father was a good guy. And so my question is have you come back?

Every single one of us has experienced God's goodness. God's God's calling you. He's calling you at breakfast.

He's calling you at lunch. He's calling you at dinner. He's calling you in every friend's smile. He's calling you in every night in your bed.

He's calling you in every good thing. The first snow. the doctor's visit. He's calling you. He's calling you.

[39 : 03] He's calling you. He's saying I love you. Come home. God's goodness is meant to lead us to repentance. So God is saying I love you. Turn away from your sin.

Come home. Well let's pray. Our Heavenly Father we do thank you. Thank you for your goodness to us. Thank you that you have filled the earth with your love.

And now I pray that you would give us eyes to see it. Give us a heart that would want to find it.

Sometimes it can be so easy to just be cynical, to be negative, to only see the bad side of things and those things are real.

But I pray that you would help us to begin to look for the good things. Begin to look for your love and your grace in our lives and other people's lives and how you've made us and how you've made the world.

And what you've allowed us to do. Give us eyes that are ready to see your goodness and quick then to say thank you and quick then to praise you for it. Lord you want your glorious grace to be praised.

[40 : 13] So I pray that you would set our hearts singing for your saving grace and set our hearts singing for your everyday, everywhere, everyone grace.

Lord that we might be a joyful people. A people that are feeding on your love hour to hour and day to day. that we might be a happy people. That we might commend ourselves to the world and bring you honor.

Pray that you would save any here who are lost. Make those good things in their lives to trip them up and to grab them and hold them. Don't let them escape your goodness and bring them salvation and grant them repentance.

Pray this in Jesus name. Amen.