“Sustaining Grace”, Good News About Grace - Part 3 of 7 – January 19, 2014 at SBC (2/1/08, BRBC)

 Philippians 1:6 & 1 Peter 5:12

Once every four years, . . . the eyes of the world, are on the Olympics. In order to get to the Olympics, . . . you have to have three things: speed, skill, . . and, most important of all, . . you have to have, . . **endurance**.

 If you don't make it, to the end of the race, . . . you're not going to win, . . . any medal.

The Bible tells us, that God always, . . finishes, what He starts. Always. Philippians 1:6 – *"God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work, . . . until, it is finally finished."* It doesn't say, God might, finish it, . . . it doesn't say, God hopes, to finish it. It says, God **will**, . . . finish it. What does, that mean?

It means, if you have really, given your life, to Jesus Christ, . . if you've opened yourself up to God, . . and said, "Christ, be number one, in my life," . . . you are going to make it, to heaven. There's no doubt, about it. Case closed. Done deal. Finished product. You are going, to make it, . . . across, the finish line.

Because, . . . it doesn't depend, . . . upon, your performance, . . . it depends upon, . . **God's sustaining grace**. The only question is, . . . how you finish, the race. You know, as well as I do, . . . that some people, finish a race, poorly, . . . while other people, finish a race, well.

I don't want to you, . . . to just, . . . get into heaven. I don't want to just, . . . get you to cross, . . . the finish line. My goal, is to help you, finish the race of life, well. I want you, to enjoy life, the abundant life, to figure out, what God made you for, and put you here for, and do it. God says, "I will help you, finish the race."

How can we be sure, we're going to finish? Because of, God's Sustaining Grace. God doesn't want, to just, . . . save you. Not just, saving grace, . . .but, He wants to sustain you, through life. He wants you, . . . to make it.

**\*\*\* What is, . . . Sustaining Grace?**

Sustaining Grace, is the power, to keep on going, **. . . when I feel like, . . . giving up**. Do you ever, need that? Sustaining Grace, is the power, to do the right thing, . . . when you don't feel like, doing the right thing.

There are many pitfalls, in the marathon race, . . . of life. We're going to talk about them, . . this morning. But, regardless, of what you go through, . . . no matter what you face, this new year, you can count on, God's Sustaining Grace, . . . being there.

1 Peter 5:11 – *"My purpose in writing, is to encourage you, and assure you, that the grace of God, is with you, no matter, what happens."* No matter, . . . what happens. No matter what happens, . . . God's Sustaining Grace, is going to, . . . be with you. It's going to, . . . be there.

\*\*\*\* There are three things in life, that can cause you to stumble, that can cause you, to get cast off to the side, of the race, that can cause you, . . . to not, finish well, in life. God's Sustaining Grace says, . . . I will help you, . . . in each, of those three situations.

**1. I can count on, God's Sustaining Grace, to help me, . . . keep on standing, . . . when, I'm tempted.**

Temptation is, the first thing, . . that, causes us, to stumble. 1 Peter 5:8 – *"Watch out for attacks, from the devil, your great enemy. He prowls around, like a roaring lion, looking for some victim, to devour.* [In other words, Satan wants to eat your lunch.] *Take a* ***firm stand****, against him.* ["firm stand"] *and, so be strong, in the faith."*

You may not realize this, but the moment you become a believer, . . . a battle starts, . . . in your life. You're no longer, . . . Satan's property. He's taken his hand off you, . . . and, now, . . . you're, in God's hands.

But, the enemy doesn't like that, and there's a battle for your life, every single day, of your life. You are faced, with moral choices. Am I going to do, . . . right or wrong? Good or bad? Am I going to be selfish, . . . or, am I going to be, . . . unselfish? Those moral choices, . . . are called, temptations.

The Bible says, . . . we are all, tempted. Everybody, is tempted. You will never, . . . outgrow, temptation. The Bible says, even Jesus, was tempted. It says, He was tempted, in all points, like we are, . . but, He never sinned.

The good news, is this: If Jesus was tempted, and He never sinned, . . . it means, it's not a sin, . . . to be tempted. It's a sin, . . . to give in, . . . to temptation. Some Christians, when they're tempted, "Oh, no! How could I have ever, thought that one!" Like I'm some evil, wicked, mean person, . . . because, a thought, went through my mind. You cannot control, all the thoughts, . . . that, go through your mind.

But, you can control, and you can choose, . . to not, dwell, on them. {You can't stop the birds, from flying over your head, but you can keep them, from building a nest, in your hair.} Satan gives you, . . . all kinds, of ideas. You don't have to feel intimidated, or embarrassed, or ashamed of that. He just puts those ideas, in your mind. It's when you, dwell on them, . . . when they, become wrong. They, . . . become, sin.

 But, it is not a sin, . . . to be tempted. It's a sin, . . . to give in, . . . to temptation.

Years ago, . . . Larry King, interviewed Billy Graham. He says, to Billy Graham, "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 the verse, 1 Corinthians 10:13 – *"The temptations, that you have, are the same ones, that all people have. But, you can, trust God. He will not let you, be tempted, more than you, can stand. When you are tempted, God will also give you, a way to escape. Then, you will be able, to stand it."*

This is a terrific, fantastic, . . promise. It says, that God will never, allow more temptation on you, than He puts in you, to bear it up. When you say, "I just couldn't, help myself", you're not telling, the truth. God says "I will provide, the Sustaining Grace, to always give you, a way of escape." It may mean, . . . turn the channel. It may mean, run out the door. It may mean, change the way, you're thinking. But, He will provide, a way, of escape.

This verse says, that God gives us the ability, to handle temptation, . . . and, He says, they're the same ones, that everybody has. We all have, the exact same, temptation. They're common, to human beings. The good news is, if temptations, . . . are common to man, . . . that means, . . . there are, . . . common solutions.

I've heard people say, "My situation, was unique. And, because it was, a unique circumstance, it must be ok, for me to bend the rules, a little bit, and kind of ignore, what God says, . . . because, God would understand, that in my situation, . . . this is a very unique pressure." God says, . . . no, it's not. You don't have, . . any unique temptations. They're the same, common temptations, all of us have. Don't use, that excuse. He says, "God will make, a way of escape." God's sustaining grace, . . helps me, stand firm, when I'm tempted.

**2. God's sustaining Grace, . . . helps me, keep standing, . . . when, I'm tired.**

Sometimes, I'm not, tempted. Sometimes, I'm just, . . . tired. Life is often, . . . exhausting. It requires, a lot of strength, a lot of energy, to live life, . . . especially, when you're trying, to do the right thing, . . . rather than, the easiest thing. There are a lot of people in life, that don't try to do the right thing, . . they just want to do, whatever's the easiest thing. That's no problem, at all. You can coast through life, if you always do, the easiest thing. But, when you're coasting, you're always, going downhill. You're always headed down, when you coast.

On the other hand, when you try to do the right thing, even though it's not, the easiest thing, . . . that, requires energy. That requires effort, strength. Many of you, are the only believer, where you work. It's tough.

Do you ever, get tired, . . of doing, what's right? Sure. Because, it's tough, moving against the flow, swimming upstream. When all the 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, when someone starts some dirty joke, and you don't want to be a part of it.

The more you try, to do what's right, . . the more energy, it's going to require. Yet, God says in, Galatians 6:9 – *"Let us not, grow weary, in doing right, for we will reap a harvest of blessing, if we do not give up."*

But, where do you get the power, to do the right thing . . when you don't feel like doing it, and you're dead tired. Sometimes, I don't want to, be nice to my family, . . I want to be cranky. Sometimes, I don't want to, be nice to a clerk, I want to be grouchy. Sometimes, I want to be rude, back to people, who are rude to me. Where do you get the energy, . . . to do, the right thing?

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 – *"It is God, who gives us the ability, to stand firm, for Christ. He has commissioned us, and He has identified us, as His own, by placing the Holy Spirit, in our hearts."* Circle "Holy Spirit", . . . and, "stand firm", . . . and, draw a line, . . . between them. Those two, . . . go together.

The key, to the ability, to not getting tired, and giving up, and doing the right thing, when you know it's the right thing to do, . . . is having the Holy Spirit, in your heart. It's He, who energizes you, not you, in your own power.

The reason, why some of you, are tired all the time, is because you are trying, to live the Christian life, . . . and, that, doesn't work. You're trying, . . . to be like Jesus. You're trying, to do good. You're trying, to keep the Ten Commandments. You're trying, to be a person, of integrity. You're trying, trying, . . and, you get, tired.

People say, "It's so hard, to be a Christian, today!" It's not, hard. It's, impossible! The only perfect person, who ever lived, . . . was Jesus Christ. He's the only one, who ever lived, . . . the Christian life, perfectly.

What you need to do, rather than try, to be like Jesus, . . let Jesus, be Jesus, in you. Let Jesus, be Jesus, through you. Stop trying, and trying, . . and just, start trusting, and trusting. The key, to the Christian life, is not trying, it's trusting. It's not, psych yourself up, work real hard, try to do your best, and perform, so God will smile at you. It's relax, trust, and let Christ, live through you. And, He will give you, the power, you need.

Probably, the man who was, the most persistent man ever, in the Bible, . . . was Moses. He had, . . . incredible endurance. How did he, keep on keeping on, in spite of the fact, that he spent forty years, wandering in the wilderness, . . . leading a bunch of spiritual babies, around the desert. How did he not, give up, . . . how did he not, get tired and quit. The Bible says, he had, . . . God's Sustaining Grace, in his life. That's how you keep on going, . . . when you're tired.

Do you know how many years, it took Noah, to build the ark? The Bible says, . . . 120 years. Can you imagine, waiting 120 years, . . for anything? In those days, they lived, a whole lot longer. But, the point is, Noah waited 120 years. How did he have the ability, to keep on keeping on, when he was tired? Surely, he must have gotten tired, building the ark. The Bible tells us, in Genesis 6, *"Noah found grace, . . . in the eyes, of the Lord."*

God wants to give you, . . . His power, to do it. To do, what you need, to do. To do what He’s called you to do, . . . for the building, . . . of His kingdom.

Philippians 2:13 – *"For God is at work, within you, giving you the will and the power, to achieve, His purpose."* Will and power. The Christian life, . . . is not a matter, of willpower -- your willpower. But, a matter of, God's will, and God's power, . . . in your life. (He gives us the “desire”, . . . to serve Him!)

When God gives you, the will, and the power, to do something, . . . you'll be able, to do it. God never asks you, to do something, . . . He doesn't give you the power, to do. I always say, “He never calls us, to do anything, that He doesn’t equip us, to do it.” Would you agree, that God has more power, than you? Obviously.

God made, . . . the sun. The sun produces, more power, in one single second, than all the human race, has used, throughout, all of history. More energy is produced, in one second, than we've used, throughout history. The sun, has enough energy, to burn, . . . for thirty billion, more years. Yet, . . . God made, . . . the sun.

That's, the kind of power, He's got. Then, He comes to you, and says, . . "You need, some power? I'll give you, the will, and the power, to handle it." Because, God's power is unlimited, . . . He never gets tired. When it says, about creation, that on the seventh day, God rested, it wasn't because He was tired, . . . it was because, He was finished. He had finished, . . . with creation. God says, "I will energize, those of you, who trust Me."

**3. God's Sustaining Grace, gives me the power, to keep going, . . . when I'm troubled.**

In other words, when I have problems, . . . when I have difficulties. Jesus said, *"In the world, . . . you will, have trouble."* He said, expect it, don't be surprised, . . don't be blown away, by it. You're going to, . . . have difficulties, . . . you're going to, have obstacles. You will have situations, . . . that, you cannot handle.

 He says, . . . "I will give you, . . . the power."

There are different kinds, . . . of trouble. There's the kind of trouble, that kind of blows you away, like a wind. There's the kind of trouble, that weighs you down, like a sack of potatoes. There's the kind of trouble, like the rug's pulled out, from beneath you.

But, the most difficult, kinds of trouble, to handle, are the troubles, the problems in life, . . . that are unplanned, unrelenting, and undeserved. There are some things, I bring on myself. "I made, the mess. I've got to, clean it up." I don't mind, handling problems, I created. That's just, par for the course. I did it. I have to, clean it up.

But, the most difficult problems in life, to handle, . . . are the unfair ones. You are, . . . an innocent party. What happened? You didn't, plan it. You don't feel like, . . . you deserved it. You didn't ask for it, or cause it. Those, are the ones, . . . that are hard to handle.

They're especially, hard to handle, when they're not only undeserved, . . . but, they are unrelenting. Most of us, can handle problems, . . . if we can see an end in sight, light at the end of the tunnel. If I can see the problem, is going to be over in six months, -- I can handle anything, for that length of time, or a year, or whatever.

But, there are some things, in your life, that harm you, . . . that are unsolvable, that you're going to live with, the rest of your life. And, nothing's ever, going to change that. There are some situations, in life, some handicaps, or disabilities, some background -- you're never going to be able, to change your background -- you grew up, in that background. There are some hurts, that all the wishing in the world, . . is not going to make them go away.

There are some things in life, . . . that, are unplanned, unrelenting, and undeserved. And, they hurt, . . the most. What do you do, . . . in those situations? You first, stop doing, the "If only, . . ." game. " If only, I had different parents, . . . If only, I had married somebody else, . . . If only, . . ." That, . . doesn't work. That, doesn't solve your problems, . . . and, it doesn't ease, your pain.

Instead, you need to, . . . focus, on Christ. Focus on, . . . His sustaining power. Isaiah 41:10 – *"Don't worry, because, I am with you. Don't be afraid, because I am your God. I will make you, strong. I will help you. I will support you, with My right hand, that saves you."*

Underline, all the things, . . . that, God has promised, to do for you: He says "I'm going to, be with you, . . . I'm going to, make you strong, . . . I will, help you, . . . I will, support you, . . . I will, save you." That, pretty much, . . . covers it all. Psalm 46:1 – *"God is our refuge, and strength, always ready to help, . . in times of trouble."* That's, how you get, . . . Sustaining Grace.

What do you do, when you can't fix, . . . an unfixable problem? What do you do, when you can't change, . . . an unchangeable circumstance? What do you do, when you can't control something, . . . that, hurts deeply, in your life? You throw yourself, . . . on the sustaining, . . . Grace of God.

Our culture, loves to teach us, . . . self reliance. We think, that we can handle, . . . anything. I know that, you're brought up, to think, "I am the master, . . . of my fate." That's a, bunch of hooey. It's just, . . . not true.

You cannot control, the major events, of your life. You didn't control, when you were born. You didn't control, . . . where you were born. You didn't choose, your parents. You don't know where, you're going to die. You don't know, most of the things, . . . that are going to happen, between now and then.

One day, you're going to wake up, to the realization of the fact, . . . that, there are limitations in your life, that you cannot control. One day, you wake up, and you realize, you are not God. And, you cannot control, everything that, happens around you. What do you do, when it hurts so bad, . . and, you can't change it?

\*\* You rely, on the Sustaining, Grace of God. How do, I get it? How do I get, that kind of grace, . . . to keep going, . . . in spite of, temptations, trials, tension, tiredness, and troubles? **You do, . . . four things:**

**1. Call out.** Cry out, . . . to God. Cry out, for **God's 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, you cry out, . . . for God's help.

James 4:6 & 8 says, *"God gives grace, to the humble."* Circle, "humble" So, give yourselves, . . . completely to God. *"Draw close to God, and God will draw, close to you."* Notice, . . 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.

Pray, . . to God. Pray, earnestly. Pray, fervently. Pray, passionately. Pray, with integrity. Pray, with emotion. Say, . . "God, it hurts! Help." God listens, to the tone, of your prayers. He knows, that you don't really, . . . want everything, . . . you ask for.

When I ask my kids, at Christmas, "What do, you want?" They say, "this" or "that" -- I don't write those down. But, when they say, "Dad, I really, really want this," that's the one, I write down. God does not answer, measly prayers, . . . where you just, mouthing the words, going through the motion, your heart's not in it. He wants you, to pray passionately, . . . fervently, to Him. If you want a good example, go read, . . . the book of Psalms. David did. Call out, . . . for God's help.

**2. Fill your mind, . . with God's Word.** This book, let it comfort you, let it strengthen you, let it fill you, let it soothe you, let it give you the energy you need, to keep going. Get into this book, every single day, of your life.

David prays, *"I am completely, discouraged. Revive me, . . .",* by watching TV? *"Revive me, . . by Your Word."* There is some advice, going around today, . . . that, I am so tired, of hearing. It is in every movie, every talk show, . . . every book. It is the standard, New Age answer, . . . to your problems.

"The answers, . . are **within you**. Look, inside yourself." Everybody's been spouting that, for 25 years, . . . like that's, the big answer. There's nothing new, about the New Age. All New Age is, . . . is old packaging, of old lies. They didn't work, a thousand years ago, . . . they don't work, today.

This one here -- "Look within yourself, when you're in trouble." That's, the problem! I looked within myself, and went, . . . Yuk! I didn't like, . . . what I saw. I got depressed, when I looked. I don't need, to look, . . . within myself. The answer is not, look within yourself. If it was, . . . you'd already, . . . be changed.

It doesn't work. You need to, . . look to God. He's the only One, who can change you. He's the only One, who can help you. He's the only One, . . . with sustaining strength. You need to look, . . . not, within you.

 You need to look, outside of yourself, . . . to the Creator, who made you. Because, the answers are not,

 . . . in you. The answers, . . . are in God. It doesn't work, . . . the other way.

**3. Accept support, . . . from God's people.** The Bible says, by helping each other, with your troubles, . . . you truly obey, the law of Christ. What is that law, *"Love your neighbor, . . as yourself."* The great commandment.

If you don't have, some strong Christian friends, mature believers, . . and, you're not in some small group, where you can have some feedback, and support, . . . when the crisis is on, . . . that’s not good. It is essential, for your physical, spiritual, and mental health. You need, . . a support system, you need a support group.

God never meant for you, to go through life, . . . on your own. You're not, . . a Lone Ranger. God intentionally, puts weaknesses, in our lives, . . . so we realize, . . . how much we, need each other. You're not going to make it, . . . on your own. You need to, accept support, . . . from God's people.

**4. Hold on to, . . . God's promises.** There are over 7000 of them, in the Bible, waiting to be claimed, waiting for you to grab onto. Here's one of them, Isaiah 40:29-31 – *"He gives strength, to the weary, and increases the power, of the weak. Even youth, grow tired. But, those who hope in the Lord, will renew, their strength. They will soar on wings, like eagles; they will run, and not grow weary; they will walk, and not faint."*

Keep your hope, . . . in the Lord. Even more than that, . . . keep your eyes focused, . . . on the hope, of heaven, . . . not just, on the here and now. Focus on, the hope of heaven.

2 Corinthians 4:18 – *"So, we don't look at the troubles, we can see right now; rather, we look forward, to what we have not, yet seen. For the troubles we see, will soon be over, but the joys to come, will last forever."*

In heaven, there's going to be, . . . no problems. In heaven, there's going to be, . . . no sorrow. In heaven, there's going to be, . . . no sadness, . . . no grief, . . . no messed up lives. Don't ever, . . . forget that.

Where do you need, God's Sustaining Grace, today? Where are you discouraged, and you feel like, giving up? Are you, being tempted? Being pounded, and can't get rid of, a temptation? Or, are you tired, and you say, "I don't think, I can put another foot, in front of the other." Or, are you under tension, in trials, and troubles, that you can't fix? No matter what you're going through, God's grace will sustain you, . . if you'll let it.

2 Corinthians 12:8-9 – *"I begged the Lord, three times, to take this problem, away from me. But, He said to me, `My grace, is enough, for you. When you are weak, . . . then My power, is made perfect, in you."*

When you're going through a problem, you can't fix, . . . don't give up, . . . look up!

“Sustaining Grace”, Good News About Grace - Part 3 of 7

Phil. 1:6 – *"God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished."*

1 Peter 5:12 – *"My purpose in writing is to encourage you and assure you that the grace of God is with you no matter what happens."*

\*\*\*\* GOD'S SUSTAINING GRACE:

1. HELPS ME KEEP STANDING \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1 Peter 5:8 – *"Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour. Take a firm stand against him, and be strong in your faith."*

1 Corinthians 10:13 – *"The temptations that you have are the same ones that all people have. But you can trust God. He will not let you be tempted more than you can stand. When you are tempted, God will also give you a way to escape. Then you will be able to stand it."*

2. IT HELPS ME KEEP STANDING \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 – *"It is God who gives us . . . the ability to stand firm for Christ. He has commissioned us, and He has identified us as His own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts . . ."*

Philippians 2:13 – *"For God is at work within you, giving you the will and the power to achieve His purpose."*

3. IT HELPS ME KEEP STANDING \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 41:10 – *"So don't worry, because I am with you. Don't be afraid, because I am your God. I will make you strong and will help you: I will support you with My right hand that saves you."*

Psalms 46:1 – *"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble."*

\*\*\*\* HOW TO RECEIVE GOD'S SUSTAINING GRACE:

1. CALL OUT FOR \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

James 4:6-8 – *"God gives grace to the humble. So give yourselves completely to God . . . Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you."*

2. FILL YOUR MIND \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Psalms 119:25 – *"I am . . . completely discouraged; revive me by Your Word."*

3. ACCEPT SUPPORT \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Galatians 6:2 – *"By helping each other with your troubles, you truly obey the law of Christ."*

4. HOLD ON \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 40:29-31 – *"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the week. Even youths grow tired . . . but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint."*

2 Corinthians 4:18 – *"So we don't look at the troubles we can see right now; rather, we look forward to what we have not yet seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever."*

2 Corinthians 12:8-9 – *"I begged the Lord three times to take this problem away from me. But He said to me, "My grace is enough for you. When you are weak, then My power is made perfect in you."*