

Everyday Gospel Encouragement

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[0 : 00] Please remain standing for the reading of God's Word. Good morning. We are so blessed in many ways as a church, aren't we?

All the children that we have in our church and the ministries that we get to partner with like Choices. Thank you, Michelle and DJ, for being here this morning. And as we look at the Word this morning, we're looking at Ephesians chapter 2, 1 to 10.

And the title of my sermon is Everyday Gospel Encouragement. That's what we need, every day. Let me just say a few words before we read the scripture.

You know, over the past couple of years, there have been a lot of circumstances that have tempted us to be discouraged, to grumble and to complain. Maybe like our spiritual forefathers in the wilderness, you remember?

Remember, they complained and grumbled against Moses and against God. It sort of feels like we've been in our own wilderness journey for the last year or two in some sense.

[1 : 07] And as we look to 2022, I think we need to pay attention to what the writer of Hebrews says as he reflected on those temptations in the wilderness. He says we should confidently boast in our hope in Christ and not be discouraged.

In chapter 3, verse 13, he says this, But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

So he says, don't put it off till tomorrow. You know, today, encourage one another. We need to be gospel encouragers and not just from on Sundays, you know, when we attend church, but all throughout the week and not just by the pastors and elders, but as each one of us depend on the Holy Spirit that God has given to us that we can encourage one another.

We need one another. We need the gospel and we need the gospel of one another with the promises of God. So we need everyday gospel encouragement. And Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, you know, we could go to a lot of places in scripture to look for gospel encouragement, but Ephesians is full of the gospel from start to finish.

And one writer, he says it may pack more gospel per square inch than any other book in the Bible. It's filled with gospel explanation and gospel application.

[2 : 30] So let's look at just a few verses from chapter two, verses one to 10 in Ephesians two, and we'll ask our heavenly father to encourage us with the blessings that we have in Christ.

How about we read this together? We'll read those 10 verses together. And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you have been saved, and raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

[4 : 18] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

These are the words of the Lord to encourage us today. Thanks be to God. Amen. And let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for your word again, that you have brought us together in this place

the political enemies of the president he pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice and he was sentenced to seven months in prison he was humbled and sent to prison and knowing that he was facing arrest while waiting for his trial a friend invited him to his home and introduced him to Jesus and to C.S. Lewis' book *Near Christianity* and Colson said he said I had an overwhelming sense that I was unclean and after leaving his friend's home he got into his car but he couldn't drive away for over an hour he said he just wept in his car calling out to God he said I didn't even know the right words to say I simply knew that I wanted him and I knew for certain that God who created the universe heard my cry so what a miracle that's gospel transformation that Chuck Colson experienced and that you have experienced if you put your faith and trust in him if you've never experienced

God's transforming grace he wants to do that same miracle in you in your heart that he did for Chuck Colson he wants to give you a deep desire to know him to understand that you are unclean apart from him to break your pride and your efforts at trying to be powerful and independent and successful and think that you're somehow in control of your own life and if you have been transformed by God's grace and you've been made alive in Christ then he wants you to continually grow in that knowledge in that understanding of how rich you are because of what he has done for you not because of anything that you have done but because of his mercy and grace he wants us to encourage one another daily in the gospel riches that we have in Christ what are some of those blessings that we have in Christ well in Romans Paul speaks of our redemption he speaks of our new life our eternal life he speaks of us having the love of God enjoying no condemnation having one body in Galatians he talks about our freedom in Christ our being justified in Christ having the blessings of sonship in Philippians he mentions the glorious riches that we have in Christ our heavenly reward in Corinthians he reminds us that we're a new creation we're sanctified we're declared righteous we've been reconciled we experience holiness in Ephesians

Paul emphasizes that we have the riches of his grace we have every spiritual blessing in Christ we have the resurrection we have the forgiveness of sins we're seated in heavenly places in Christ and these are just a few of the encouraging things the encouraging reminders of the rich blessings that you enjoy because you are in Christ because you have been transformed by the gospel and God wants you to continually communicate that to continually encourage be encouraged and to communicate gospel encouragement in your interaction with each other in your family with your children with your spouse with your co-workers with your small group with ministry partners everywhere and every day apply the gospel to every situation that you can think of he wants you to gospel one another when you face conflict in your marriage conflict in your church wherever conflict pops up in 2022

God wants you to encourage your own heart and your own mind with the gospel he wants you to preach to yourself on a regular basis the good news of the gospel when you're facing challenges like stress or debt or unemployment or underemployment or if you're facing grief or if you're facing fatigue or any other difficulties in your battles with sin and temptation in battles with doubt with weakness in your times of corporate worship when we come together in your private worship in all these areas he wants you to be encouraged with his gospel promises of how rich you are the treasures that you have discovered or that have been brought to you that your eyes have been opened to because you were dead now you're alive and he is putting on display in the New Testament all of these wonderful rich blessings that you have he wants us to encourage one another with these gospel promises in times of distress when it comes to a pandemic that doesn't seem to want to go away and we are tempted to grumble and complain when we're faced with social problems the evils of racism and poverty and abortion and any form of injustice

[16:23] God wants us to encourage one another daily as long as it's called today the writer of Hebrews says that none of us may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness so God loved you when you were spiritually dead and unlovable and that's that's really the past riches of his grace that's what you have experienced in your your story in your past if you put your faith and trust in him and there's ongoing riches of his grace right in the present every day you should encourage secondly you should encourage one another that God loves you every moment of every day more than you can imagine you can't understand how much God loves you R.C. Sproul once said his favorite word in all the Bible is the word that begins verse 4 in Ephesians chapter 2 with the word but but God being rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us but God on the one side of the but God he says is the wrath of God for sin you know we were by nature children of wrath living in the passions of our flesh but on the other side of that word on the other side is this rich mercy and

the great love with which God loves us and we never stop needing his mercy you didn't just need it back then in the past you need it every day in the present you need his love and grace every moment every day not just that one point in your life when you repented and trusted in Christ you need it every day more and more as the writer of Hebrews says to keep you from being hardened by the deceitfulness of your own sin by your own heart that tries to lie to you tries to deceive you into not thinking that God really loves you you really got to do something to please him you have to do something to merit his acceptance you deserved only his wrath and condemnation but instead he poured out blessing and honor and it's not because of anything you've done it's only by his grace that you've been saved verse 5 we sang about it this morning and then we read about it in Ephesians 2 verse 5 and again in verses 8 and 9 not your own doing

Paul says it's the gift of God not a result of work so that no one may boast so the grace of God that has come to you that came to Chuck Colson means that you got exactly the opposite of what you deserved and Paul says we've been saved by grace through faith so you came into this relationship with Christ by repentance and faith but it's also how you grow in Christ it's how you continually grow through times of repentance and times of believing again and setting your mind on new obedience and it's primarily about receiving from God without achieving something on your own this is where we get confused we often think that we need to do something we need to achieve something on our own we often think we need to work to even to increase our faith we say things sometimes like my faith is really weak right now as though we could do anything on our own to strengthen our faith it helps to remember

Jesus' response to the crowd you remember in John 6 they came to him and they said you know what do we need to do in order to do the works that God requires and Jesus said this is the work that God wants you to do believe in the one he has sent Jesus said believe believe in the one believe the gospel and after you believe and after you rest in Christ's work of what he has done on your behalf then believing effort can follow you can make effort in the Christian life believing effort not unbelieving effort as you trust him as you rest in what he has done for you the more you believe and rest and rejoice in what he has done the more you will want to respond in service to him the more you will want to be obedient to him the more you will want to know what it is he wants you to do I recall one time at a presbytery meeting we were at a presbytery meeting yesterday a few years back our church planting coordinator

Paul Hahn he asked the pastors and elders there to jot down some answers to a few questions on a three by five card so he could take those back to his team in Atlanta and pray specifically for the Tennessee Valley Presbytery pastors and elders and one of the questions he asked us was what's the greatest threat to your ministry so I had to think about that for a minute I hadn't been asked that question before and I thought about it and realized that I'm my own you know I'm the greatest threat my unbelief is the greatest threat to my ministry it's the greatest threat to my joy in relationships and it's your greatest threat that's the greatest danger is that you don't believe what God has said about you of his acceptance and his love and his grace in the gospel your unbelief of God's goodness to you in the gospel not believing that it really is good news and this gospel means good news

God wants you to be more connected to Christ every day this year in 2022 Jesus is the object of our faith and we receive our faith our faith from him you don't just have faith in some subjective way and call yourself a person of faith you know you have faith in a person right in a you have a focus on an objective historical human person and he is the object of our faith and he doesn't want us just to think in some subjective sense that we are people of faith he wants us to call his name to understand who it is that has given us the faith and who it is that continues to bless us with faith to believe and to trust in him he wants us to honor him not to honor faith you know he is the one who empowers your faith in connection to him and you don't increase your faith through trying to work harder and harder or by looking deep within for some kind of strength and determination you focus outside of yourself on that person of Jesus and your faith continues to be strengthened as you look to Jesus who the writer of Hebrews says is the author of our faith and he says he's the perfecter of our faith so he gives it to us and he perfects it he continually makes it stronger he is the one who helps us to believe and he commands us to believe and he says believe in the one that God has sent so don't compartmentalize your life you know into family and friends we're so tempted to do this career church politics but bring Christ's love and blessings of the gospel into every aspect of your life apply it everywhere when faced with anything that discourages you or gets you down you can ask yourself this question how can I apply what Christ has done for me in the gospel to this little

problem and in perspective it's usually a little problem right that our flesh tries to turn into a big problem and so we toss and turn and we lose sleep over it and we get in conflict over it parents you know with your children we can find ways when we're parenting our children to bring the good news of the gospel into our parenting you know how can you demonstrate the good news of forgiveness to your kids and maybe you can share with them specific ways that you need forgiveness from God and maybe you need forgiveness from them because often times we you know if we're sinners our disposition is to sin it makes sense that we're going to sin against our children and if they can understand as they grow up that my parents aren't

[25 : 13] Jesus they aren't perfect they need Jesus as much as I need Jesus and it's a great way to demonstrate the gospel in parenting just a practical way of connecting the work of Christ on the cross to what you're doing with your kids in your striving for justice for the oppressed and marginalized you know how can you make sure that you don't leave the gospel out of it you know the fact that God loves us and provided mercy and justice for sin is why we care about mercy and justice for others it's why we seek to provide justice and his love to the poor why we serve the poor it's because of the good news of the gospel that we want to help improve educational opportunities that we want to provide the dignity of work that we want to mentor elementary students why we want to have the Glenwood school why we want to help inner city youth young men and women and that we want to speak about issues of racism and other forms of prejudice it's because of the gospel it's because of the encouragement that we have in the gospel so let's not leave the gospel out of any of these issues or any of the practical everyday problems that we face in relationships in our homes the person who doesn't get the love of God who hasn't yet developed a heart of thankfulness for all that

Christ has done for him or her they won't be able to demonstrate that to anyone else to others you know if you don't recognize your own deep seated sinfulness and your need for his grace every moment then naturally you will find it hard to give grace to others you'll be quick to cancel and to judge and you'll be slow to embrace and to show mercy you know for example when word got out that Chuck Colson was converted in 1974 that he had a testimony of a changed life prominent newspapers and other media like Time and Newsweek they ridiculed him they claimed that his newfound faith was merely a strategy to try to reduce his prison sentence because he was waiting for trial and they needed an experience with grace to be able to give him some grace right we need God's supernatural grace especially in the world that we're living in today right that is becoming increasingly graceless it's hard to find grace out there but we are people of grace we are gospel people and we can be encouraged ourselves and we can encourage others with the gospel so we don't leave the gospel out of it let's encourage one another in the grace of the gospel in 2022 so we don't follow the world and end up being hardened our hearts being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin last point we can encourage one another that the more you embrace

God's love for you this week the more you'll want to love him and serve him next week and so on John Piper's definition of future grace he says future grace is God's power provision mercy and wisdom everything we need in order to do what he wants us to do five minutes five weeks five months five years and five thousand years from now so it's kind of like we build up the more we engage in gospel encouragement it kind of protects us from the deceitfulness of sin and so the more we engage in it the more we do it the better it the easier it is as you know the more we get it the more we give grace and understand the gospel and rejoice in the goodness of Christ for us the more he empowers us to be people of grace Paul is saying in verse 6 of chapter 2

God raised you up with Christ and seated you with God in heavenly places in Christ Jesus God made you alive in an intimate union with Christ and he raised you from the dead in union with Christ and he seated you in heavenly places with Christ next to the Father so how can this be since we're all still here we're all here on this earth well God has so secured your future eternal destiny that he wants you to see yourself as already with Christ in heaven reigning together with him seated next to the Father that helps put our earthly problems in perspective doesn't it seated with Christ next to the Father reigning with Christ because of the gospel because of what God has done all by himself not because of anything that we have done to merit it but because of his great love for us and Paul says for all eternity he goes on he says

God will be boasting in the coming ages he will show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us verse 7 he will be showing off his riches showing off the unbelievable and immeasurable riches of his grace and God can take credit right God can take credit all by himself

God can big up himself because he's a big God and because we don't have any reason to be proud God can put his the riches of his grace on display all he wants to and Paul was not willing to take any credit for himself for his working heart he saw his good works as just more evidence of God's kindness to him verse 10 he says for we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared or he ordained beforehand that we should walk in them if you ever question that go to

[31 : 40] Psalm 139 there's some verses in Psalm 39 I think 13 to 16 that just really are an encouragement to me about God's sovereign hand in your life that before a word is on your tongue right he knows it and every every part of your life is God knows and God has been directing and God that's how much he loves you that he looks back to things that you can't even remember that I can't remember but he was there he was orchestrating things to bring you to a place where you understand his love for you and you would relent and you would turn from being a son of disobedience to a child of the king a child of God you are a work of God you're chosen by him before the creation of the world Paul says that in Ephesians 1 verse 4 before the foundation of the world God knew you he chose you he was thinking about you he created you for holy living and for fruitful living for works of grace and justice and mercy for others for sharing the good news of his love in word and action and the more you embrace his grace for living the Christian life the more it will lead to renewal in your life week in and week out and the more you'll want to pursue holy living and the more you'll want to bring the riches of his grace to others who are in need others who are poor and need the riches that he offers

Chuck Colson he came to understand the past the present and the future grace of God he understood that he was saved by grace alone and he was ordained for good works as Paul says in verse 10 after his conversion at age 41 and his brief time in prison he went on to faithfully serve Jesus for another four decades almost and much of this time was spent in prisons in 2008 Colson said that the worst day of his life after Jesus was better than the best day before Jesus he said from that next morning after my conversion to this day I've never looked back I can honestly say that the worst day of the last 35 years has been better than the best day of the 41 years that preceded it and he said that's a pretty bold statement given my time in prison three major surgeries and two kids with cancer at the same time but it's absolutely true my worst day after Christ transformed me and has brought me into relationship with him has been better than the best day before that transformation before he rescued me from sin you see why

I like Chuck Colson he is such a living example of the gospel the power of the gospel to transform somebody from following as a son of disobedience a rebel and turning them into somebody who lives daily for the gospel and lives it out in their life we hear the good news and we often we know it in our heads but it's hard for it not to leak out of our hearts and minds from Sunday to Sunday we need it every day our formal theology doesn't always line up with our functional theology the way we live what we know and what we practice so it's good to get the gospel get a good gospel encouraging resource that you can read every day in your personal worship it's good to get together with a friend to encourage one another as you read and interact on his goodness to you if you don't like to read listen to an audio book or a podcast that points you to aspects of the good news that God has done for you in Christ maybe you can find something that will help you apply the gospel to your marriage or conflict or work you know there's tons of great resources out there

Paul Tripp has some great resources Tim Keller of course Elise Fitzpatrick is one of my favorite women theologians she has this book Give Them Grace Dazzling Your Kids with the Love of Jesus which is really a theology of parenting the grace of the gospel for your kids you can find some of these great gospel resources at my favorite publisher New Growth Press you can go there to their website and you'll find stuff for private worship for small group for your marriage for parenting for Sunday school teachers elders deacons deaconesses for children youth all kinds of great stuff that are published by New Growth Press you know why should we give gospel encouragement to one another in 2022 what will be the result at the end of the year as we look back Paul says it's increased joy you'll become more and more joyful as you're more and more rooted and established in love as the Holy Spirit gives you the power to grasp how high and wide and long and deep is the love of Christ for you that you may be filled with all the fullness of God

Ephesians 3 18 and because you're united to Christ and you have his spirit empowering you it can't help but transform you in an ongoing way from week to week and through you through that transformation in you it will transform others Chuck Colson's story is his greatest legacy you know

throughout the second half of his life he provided tons of gospel encouragement to prisoners and their families to members of Congress he challenged presidents and prime ministers he wrote gospel centered books he understood that the gospel is about heart change and neighborhood change and family change and social change and criminal justice change prison reform and world change in one interview he said I saw the world through the eyes of people who were disadvantaged and marginalized and rejected the outcasts of society the untouchables in American life and I decided if God put me there to live among them for seven months as I did then I would speak for them when I got out that's evidence of gospel transformation many people were skeptical at first when Colson said God had changed him but he walked he walked the talk in such a way that it was obvious that the gospel indeed has power to transform a life not just at the moment of conversion but every day ongoing for those 35 years or so after conversion it demonstrated in his life that he was continually being transformed by the gospel so let's be encouraged let's commit ourselves this year to everyday gospel encouragement of ourselves and of others as the writer of Hebrews says we should encourage one another every single day as long as it's today don't put it off so that none of us may be hindered by the deceitfulness of sin let's pray and thank him

[38 : 52] Father we thank you for your faithfulness oh Lord thank you for your unending love for us pray that you'll fill us up with faith and with gratitude and joy for all that you have done for all that you're doing in us every day for your people your church continue to encourage us with the good news through the preaching of the word and the gospel as we encourage one another as we seek to bring gospel hope to others hope to others who are in desperate need of the riches that we enjoy in Christ Jesus and it's in his name we pray Amen Please stand