

Grace Upon Grace (Sustaining Grace) – 2 Corinthians 12:9

If you were here with us last week, you'll recall we began a short series of messages looking into the grace of God. As a basis for these messages, I shared with you the words of John the Apostle who said this about Jesus in John 1:16: *For from his fullness we have all received, **grace upon grace**.* When we think of God's grace, it is important to view His unmerited favor in this manner; as something which flows continually from the Father through the Son and the Holy Spirit into the lives of people. I mentioned God's common grace as a portion of God's grace made available to all of humanity. Then we spent the remaining time together last week considering the benefits of His saving grace, which of course is the free gift that reconciles every sinner before God because of the work of Jesus on the cross. Today, we are going to investigate God's sustaining grace.

Let me begin by letting you know that sustaining grace is something engrained throughout the Bible and as part of God's character, sustaining grace is rooted in the hearts of every believer. When we make a statement such as, "God is at work in our lives," what we are referring to is His sustaining grace. Sustaining grace is divine support, strength, and comfort provided by God to believers, enabling them to walk in righteousness and to persevere in the faith. God walks and works with every Christian, every day, by helping us to endure trying times, to resist the enemy, to resist temptations, and to grow spiritually. Simply put: The sustaining grace of God is His divine involvement in the lives of His people. And, like all of God's graces, sustaining grace is also a gift from the Father intended for our benefit.

Now that we know what sustaining grace is, let's look at what the Bible has to say about it. Paul provides us with a great explanation for how God's power will help us in our weakest moments. **Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10.** Pay close attention to verses 9 and 10. These words give us comfort and hope to know when everything is unraveling and falling apart, Jesus is there. The Holy Spirit is there with you. He's holding you up, keeping you strong for the battle, providing wisdom and courage, reminding you that, His "grace is sufficient." Will you trust that today? Will you accept the sufficient grace of your Savior today?

Have you ever felt powerless and weak, like what Paul was teaching to the Corinthians? Sustaining grace also works to renew us, to empower us, and to strengthen us. Isaiah 40:29-31, speaks of God giving strength to the weary. **Read Isaiah 40:29-31.**

To experience God's grace, you must willingly welcome it into your life. Remember, it is available to you as a continual flow, direct from the source. Grace is so powerful, yet we often miss it because we do not recognize its availability. One of the most popular and most misquoted verses in the Bible comes also from Paul in his letter to the Philippians. I'm sure you'll recognize Philippians 4:13 when we read it, but I want to share with you the reason Paul said what he said. **Read Philippians 4:10-13.** You see, Paul wasn't giving us some magic formula for accomplishing great feats, or winning races, or doing great on a test. Philippians 4:13 was not meant to promise success or empowerment but was instead a statement of faith from Paul

confirming his need and subsequently, our need for relying on Jesus for strength and endurance as we walk through this life. Paul was simply pointing out that it was Jesus who helped in survive everything life through at him.

Another important function of God's sustaining grace is that of provision. Jesus teaches about this in His sermon on the mount. First, as part of His instruction on proper prayer, He says, "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" (**Matthew 6:11**) Do you view God as your true provider? This verse informs us that sustaining grace includes our daily reliance on God to provide for our needs. Notice, I didn't say, our wants. Sustaining grace provides for our needs, physically yes, but more importantly it provides for us spiritually. Look at what Jesus had to say just a short time later. **Read Matthew 6:25-34.** Do you truly trust God as your provider?

Finally, Jesus teaches us that living in this world brings tribulation. We will constantly face personal issues and struggles because we live in a world that chases after every sin imaginable. We know too that this world will eventually face additional hardships and trials. The more sin increases, and God decreases the more prevalent these things are going to be. It's just the facts. Now, if we crawl into a shell and try to avoid it, we'll spend a great deal of time missing some of the good things God has instore for us. Jesus also tells us that we shouldn't let these things get us down and discourage us. Why? Because, as He states, He has already "*overcome the world.*" (John 16:33) In like fashion, James informs us that God's sustaining grace is how He matures us and guides us as we wade into the messes of this world. Look with me at **James 1:2-4 and 12.**

These are just some of the examples given to us about God's sustaining grace. It's a grace made abundantly available to every believer. How do you get access? First, recognize your own limits. Accept that there are things you cannot navigate outside the power of God. Don't be embarrassed by it either because every single Christian has their limits also. God's sustaining grace can be accessed through a consistent prayer life, through regular reading and studying of the Word, through an attitude of humble servanthood, and through times of fellowship with other Christians. While there is no form of payment that will gain sustain grace, it calls for every believer to willingly pursue a life filled with gratitude, humility, generosity, servanthood, and trust in God's perfect timing and sustenance.