

God's Promise: Guidance

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Matthew 5:13-20

Today we will begin with grace. Grace is much more than something we say before a meal.

Grace is the space where we experience a restart, despite the clutter. Grace offers us a clean canvas, an empty document page, or an clear screen.

How can we understand this?

Imagine your life full of clutter. This is probably not be too difficult for most of us.

When we think of clutter we probably think of all the stuff that we have laying around the house — dirty laundry and dishes, piles of assorted and unsorted mail, diaper bags that smell, and muddy shoes that have left tracks across the kitchen floor. Maybe clutter includes tools that were used three weeks ago to repair the bathroom door and are still laying around, or hardwood floors that have dust bunnies in every corner. You know all of the physical stuff sitting

around. And what about the glove box in your car? — clutter!

The clutter is also the constant barrage of inputs that come at us, some of our own making and some that we have little or no control over. These could be emails, instant messages, notifications, phone calls, requests for our time and attention from the young children running around at our feet who are tugging at our pant legs. It could be Netflix shows or movies, podcasts, books, or radio programs. The clutter is all of the possible inputs of information that leave us without a chance to breathe.

Clutter is also all of the items on our schedules (even the worthwhile things) that keep us running — like soccer practices and dance classes, meetings at church or get togethers with friends — all that stuff. You know the routine — need I say more? Looking at our schedule has us regularly feel overwhelmed — clutter!

Clutter is also the stuff on the inside that clogs us up.

It is the stuff that we **haven't** done that we said we would do, or the stuff that was expected of us that hangs over us. There likely are

things in this category that even now have you feeling the weight. Clutter is the stuff that we **have** done that has hurt other people, hurt the world around us, or hurt ourselves and has left us feeling guilty.

Need I mention the financial pressures? Clutter!

Clutter is also the feelings of not being enough or having enough. We often experience this as fear. These feelings get in the way of us being available to take on any new thing in life because we fear we won't have what it takes to do the thing well.

Clutter is also the arrogant pride that covers up our insecurities. It has us project to the world that we are better or more important than others. This takes a lot of energy and takes up a lot of internal space.

Also, clutter is the emotional wound from a broken relationship with a close friend or former spouse. These feelings limit us because we don't want to experience the pain again, so we commit ourselves never to get into a close relationship ever again.

How many of you would say that you are addicted to doing — that

your value in life comes from being productive and getting stuff done? Clutter!

What else might be clutter in your life?

I invite you to think about one big kind of clutter in your life. Think about the space that clutter takes up in your heart, in your emotions, or in your physical space. Think about the weight of that clutter and the burden it is to keep it around. What is the cost of that clutter on your life?

Now, close your eyes and imagine that big clutter being completely removed. Imagine that without your diligent effort, without the taxing time of working hard to clean it up — imagine that clutter is simply gone.

What does it feel like?

This is God's grace. God, loves us just as we are in spite of all the clutter — and says that our lives inherently hold meaning and purpose regardless!

God, through grace amazingly offers us a new and fresh start every day — free of the clutter that has hindered our full expression and engagement in life.

We are full of value and cherished by God, not because of our own effort and work, but because of God's grace, that wipes clean and resets our cluttered up screen, or house, or inner life.

Whether or not we deserve it, we have received God's grace. Now the question is: What is our response? We probably have two basic options.

We can live in such a way that honors the incredible gift of grace that we have been given, and commit to live embodying those things that Jesus embodied, like love, justice, and forgiveness.

Or, we can choose to live in a way that denies the gift of grace. Now, a wishy-washy halfway commitment with only what is convenient simply is a choice to deny honoring the gift of grace.

Let's look at one of Jesus' teachings to see if it helps us here.

READ MATTHEW 5:13-20

You, my friends, are salt of the earth. You have been given an amazing job of making the world salty, adding in flavor and goodness. It also says that you were given grace to shine so that

all the world might see an example of God's love and praise God!

Jesus then talked about the law — how he didn't come to get rid of the law but to fulfill it. This almost feels like a separate teaching from the one about being salt and light in the world. However, passages that are right next to each other are often connected at a deeper level if we dig a little bit. I think this is one of those cases.

What was the law for these ancient Jewish people? The law was what gave them boundaries and a foundation for how they were to live. It gave them standards for how they were to relate with one another. It gave them an identity as God's people and worked to unify them under practices that were pleasing to God and helpful for the people to function as a community.

The things that Jesus said sometimes seemed contrary to the letter of the law and he was challenged on those points. When he was challenged, Jesus often clarified how his action was honoring the intent of the law and God's plan for humanity.

At one point, Jesus was teaching in a crowd and a lawyer wanted to test him by asking which was the

greatest commandment from the law. Jesus summarized the undergirding intent of the law, which was as important and relevant in the ancient days of Moses as it was in Jesus' day, and as it is in our world today. Jesus said,

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matt 22:37-40)

When we follow this way of life, we are embodying Jesus' teachings as well as all of the law from ancient times. This is what God desires of us. God does not wield a ruler with a tight grip poised to whack our knuckles when we are not obedient. Remember, God is about grace and forgiveness.

And God offers a promise to us as well. The promise is that God will not leave us to travel this difficult road alone. God promises guidance on this road forward in faith.

The guidance God offers shows up as personal inspiration through

meditation, prayer, through nature or other places. It also shows up through other people when we are gathered for Bible Study on Wednesday mornings, participate in the Ladies Lunch each monthly on Tuesdays, or each week on Tuesdays at the Men's Breakfast.

Guidance through the Holy Spirit is gifted us when we gather together to support our guests from the South Oakland Shelter, beginning one week from today.

God may even provide some guidance for your journey through the worship service here on Sunday morning.

These are all places that God provides us guidance through the ministries we have in this congregation.

God has called us to be united together as a community, sharpening one another, encouraging one another, and being with one another through the tough times.

God' designed us to be in community as we desire to grow and serve as an expression of our faith.

We live the way of Jesus not out of fear or obligation, but out of gratitude for the grace that has been given to us.

This is where the law of reciprocity works. Do you know that one? The law of reciprocity works when we receive something good, and rather than simply receiving it, we give something of value back. I think the principle from the movie *Pay It Forward* is exactly what Jesus had in mind for community. In the movie, when you received a gift, you don't give something back to the person who gave to you, but you give to someone else.

What better way to grow heaven on earth than to use the law of reciprocity to keep cycling the amazing power of love and grace in the world!