

SUSTAINING GRACE
Part 3 of Good News About Grace
Philippians 1:6
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The Bible tells us that God always finishes what he starts. Always. In Philippians 1:6 we read, ***"He who began a good work in you will continue to complete it..."*** That means God is never going to give up on anyone who has come to Christ for salvation. He's not going to get distracted or bored or too busy to finish the good work He has begun in you when you came to faith in Christ. He will keep you believing by his grace, his SUSTAINING GRACE.

What is SUSTAINING GRACE?

SUSTAINING GRACE is the power to keep on going when you feel like giving up. Sustaining grace gives you the power to do the right thing even when you don't feel like it. It enables you to keep on keeping on in your faith. God promises to sustain you in your faith and in your walk with Christ. 1st Peter 5:11 says, ***"My purpose in writing is to encourage you and assure you that the grace of God is with you no matter what happens."*** (1st Peter 5:11) No matter what happens, no matter what you go through, God's sustaining grace is always there to see you through and enable you to finish your walk with Christ that began the day you first believed.

Along the way, though, things can get tough. Life has a way of making it hard to keep on believing. There are experiences in life that cause you to stumble and fall in your faith; things that can knock you down, things that distract you from trusting in what Christ has done for you. The good news is that you can count on God's sustaining grace when you encounter these things. Let's look at three of the things.

FIRST, YOU CAN COUNT ON GOD'S SUSTAINING GRACE KEEP YOU RONG WHEN YOU ARE TEMPTED. Temptation is one of the things that cause us to stumble and fall in our walk with God. It's the devil who tempts us, not God. The Bible says, ***"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 so be strong in the faith."*** (1st Peter 5:8) By choosing Christ as your Lord and Savior, you became the devil's enemy and he has been trying to undermine your walk with Christ ever since. He is so ticked off that you placed your faith in Jesus Christ and he would like nothing less than to see you abandon that faith. Every day you face decisions between good and evil and Satan would like nothing less than to see you choose evil over good, selfishness over selflessness, wrong over right.

I have some bad news for you about temptation. You will never out grow temptation. It will always be with you in this life. Everybody is tempted. Even Jesus was tempted. The

good news is: if Jesus was tempted it means it is not a sin to be tempted, because Jesus lived his life completely without sinning. It's not a sin to be tempted. It's only a sin to give in to temptation. Martin Luther, the great Sixteenth Century Reformation leader, said temptation is like birds flying around us. He said, **"You can't stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair."** Temptation will always be with us but we don't have to give in to it. When we do it becomes sin.

One time Larry King was interviewing Billy Graham and they were talking about President Clinton and his sex scandals. Finally King said, to Graham, **"You're 80 years old and you've never had a scandal. You have a history of integrity. How have you managed to never have a scandal in your entire life?"** Billy Graham answered by quoting 1st 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."*** That's GOD'S SUSTAINING GRACE. God promises to us to keep you from turning temptation into sin if you will stay close to him, listen to him, and take the way out he offers.

SECOND, YOU CAN COUNT ON GOD'S SUSTAINING GRACE TO KEEP YOU STRONG WHEN YOU ARE TIRED— when you're worn out and exhausted. Life has a way of wearing you out. It requires a lot of energy to live life, especially if you're trying to do the right thing and make your life count rather than take the easy way out. You can coast through life, but remember: **when you're coasting, you're always going downhill.** You want to make your life count and be all that God created you to be then it will be an uphill climb. It can be exhausting trying to do the right thing, especially if everyone around you is just trying to coast through life. Let's face it, our culture has changed dramatically. It is no longer the norm to take the higher ground. The prevailing culture around us says it's cool to do whatever we want, whatever feels good. It can be exhausting to stand up for what's right rather than going along with the crowd. The Bible says, ***"Let us not grow weary in doing right for we will reap a harvest of blessing if we do not give up."*** (Galatians 6:9)

Where do we get the power and the strength to stand strong? The Bible says, ***"It is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He has commissioned us and He has identified us as His own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts."*** (2nd Cor. 1:21) Circle the words Holy Spirit in that verse and circle stand firm. Then draw a line between the two. Those two go together. The key to standing firm and not getting tired and giving up is having the Holy Spirit in your heart. The Holy Spirit renews us and strengthens us.

If you are trying to live the Christian life in your own strength, you'll be exhausted all the time. You'll be tempted to give up. You've got to let Jesus be Jesus in and through you by the power of the Holy Spirit. Stop trying so hard and start trusting Jesus to be in you

and work through you. The key to living the Christian life is not "trying" but "trusting." It's not about rallying all your strength to be like Christ. It's about resting in Christ and allowing Christ to work through you. It's about trusting in the promise that ***"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion."*** (Philippians 2:13) God is the one who works in your heart to make you more and more like Christ. The Christian life is not a "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" kind of thing. It's about God lifting you up, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to make you more like Christ.

THIRD, YOU CAN COUNT ON GOD'S SUSTAINING GRACE TO KEEP YOU STRONG WHEN YOU ARE TROUBLED. That's good news because you will experience all kinds of trouble as you go through life. Jesus warned us that it will not be easy being his followers. He said, ***"In this world you will have trouble."*** (John 16:33) But listen to the rest of the verse. He says, ***"But take heart! I have overcome the world."*** He's telling us that if we are walking with him, we will overcome the troubles we encounter as well.

Let me just mention three kinds of trouble you will face as you go through life. **First**, there's the kind of trouble that blows you away like a terrible wind. **Second**, there's the kind of trouble that weighs you down like a huge weight. **Third**, there's the kind of trouble that's like the rug being pulled out from underneath you, causing you to fall to the ground. The most difficult troubles to handle are those that are unplanned, unrelenting, and undeserved.

There are some troubles you bring on yourself and you have to accept the consequences and work your way out of them, like when you procrastinate or just make a bad decision. There are some troubles, though that you don't contribute to, like when you get rear ended by another driver who wasn't paying attention. You didn't undeserved the trouble that causes. The troubles that are the most difficult to handle are the ones that are unplanned, undeserved AND unrelenting. Most people can handle their troubles if they can see an end in sight, a light at the end of the tunnel. But the situation is unsolvable and you have to live the rest of your life with it, that's the most difficult to handle. I'm talking about a handicap or a disability or something in your background that isn't going to go away. There are some hurts that never go away—things that were unplanned, unrelenting and undeserved. Those are the things that hurt us the most.

What are we do to in those situations? One thing we must refuse to do is play the "IF ONLY" game. "If only I hadn't..." "If only I had..." Playing the "If only" game doesn't work. It doesn't solve your problems and it doesn't ease your pain. Instead you need to turn to the Lord and allow him to sustain you in your grief by the power of the Holy Spirit in you. Through the prophet Isaiah, God says, ***"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."*** (Isaiah 41:10) That is God's the promise of

sustaining grace. The writer of the Psalms testifies, ***"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble."*** (Psalm 46:1)

The secular culture around us loves to teach us self-reliance, to handle everything on our own. As Americans we're taught "I am the master of my own fate." That's a bunch of bologna. It's just not true. You cannot control the major events of your life. You didn't control when you were born or who you were born to, or where you were born. You don't know when you're going to die. You don't control most of the things that will happen to you in between. One day you wake up and you realize that fact, that there are limitations in your life you cannot control. That's called "the midlife crisis." You wake up and realize you are not the master of your fate. You can't control everything that happens to you. What do you do then? You rely on God's sustaining grace.

How do you do that? **HOW DO YOU RELY ON GOD'S SUSTAINING GRACE?**

You do four things:

FIRST, CALL OUT TO GOD. Cry out to God for help. As long as you pretend to be self sufficient you short circuit God's power in your life. You need to admit to God your inadequacy and say, "God, I can't handle this! Help me?" The Bible says, ***"God gives grace to the humble."*** Circle the word "humble" because that's the key to receiving God's sustaining grace. The verse continues, ***"God gives grace to the humble, so give yourselves completely to God... Draw near to him and he will draw near to you."*** (James 4:8-9) That's a wonderful promise.

SECOND, FILL YOUR MIND WITH GOD'S WORD. Let it comfort you. Let it strengthen you. Let it fill you with God's presence and sooth your soul. Let it give you the energy you need to keep on walking with Christ. Every single day read God's Word for it is the way to receive God's sustaining grace. Get a modern translation. If you're still trying to read the King James Version, you're missing out. We just don't talk that way anymore. It's too hard to understand. Get a modern translation that's not so hard to understand, and let God restore you with His Word. David prayed, ***"I am completely discouraged. Revive me by Your Word."*** (Psalm 119:25) Pray that prayer when you are hurting and let God fill you with hope and healing that comes from His Word.

There's some advise going around today that I'm so tired of hearing. It's in every movie, every talk show, and every secular self-help book. It's the standard New Age answer to all your problems. It started in the movie Star Wars over 25 years ago, where that great theologian, Obi-one-Kenobi says to young Luke Shywalker when he's going through a crisis, ***"The answers are within you, Luke. Look inside yourself."*** I want you to know, there is nothing new about the New Age movement. It's just a new packaging of the same old lies. Looking within yourself hasn't worked over the centuries and it's not going to work today. I

looked within myself and went "Yuk!" I didn't like what I saw and neither will you if you're honest. The answer is not to look within yourself, but to look within God's Word for the answers that will fill us with healing and hope.

This article appeared in the business section of a local newspaper. It reads: **"The Psychic Friends Network filed for bankruptcy. Their lawyer says, 'They apparently made some bad decisions due to some unforeseen circumstances.'"** People are paying big money for advice from psychics but they can't even help themselves.

THE THIRD THAT WILL BRING GOD'S SUSTAINING GRACE INTO YOUR LIFE IS TO ACCEPT SUPPORT FROM GOD'S PEOPLE. The Bible says, *"By helping each other with your troubles you truly obey the law of Christ."* (Galatians 6:2) What is law of Christ? —that you *"Love one another as I have loved you."* (John 13:34) That you: *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* (Mark 12:31) We are to be vehicles of God's grace to each other, helping each other through life. Don't be so proud that you never reach out for help from other believers. When you ask another believer for help, you are giving him or her opportunity to truly obey the law of Christ. And God will reward them for their obedience. God blesses those who bless others.

FINALLY, HOLD ON TO GOD'S PROMISES. Did you know there are over 7,000 promises in the Bible waiting for you to claim? They are there for you to take hold of and ask God to fulfill in your life. Like this one from the prophet Isaiah. It says, *"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."* (Isaiah 40:29-31)

The greatest promise God offers us is the promise of eternal life with Him in heaven. Keeping that promise in mind will enable us to live through the difficulties of this life with grace and dignity. The apostle Paul tells us *"...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."* (2nd Corinthians 4:18)