

“Compelling Grace” (2 Corinthians 5:11–21)(2.14.21)

2 Corinthians 5:11–21 (NIV84)

¹¹ Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. ¹² We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. ¹³ If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ **For Christ’s love compels us**, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“Compelling Grace”**

INTRODUCTION:

When Dwight L. Moody was ministering at his large Sunday School and church in Chicago, people often called him “Crazy Moody.” In the eyes of the unsaved world, Moody was “crazy” to have given up a successful business career to become a Sunday School worker and evangelist; but time has proved his decision to be a wise one. Today, we don’t know the names of the people who laughed at him, but we do know—and honor—the name of D.L. Moody.

Are you willing to be called a crazy Christian? Are you so moved by Jesus Christ’s love for you that what you do, what you say, and what you believe makes non-believers think you are crazy? Maybe the concept of becoming a new creation in Christ seems crazy because too few Christians live any differently than the world. As ambassadors for Christ, we represent the kingdom of God. Our message is to proclaim the impossible – reconciliation with a perfectly holy and righteous God **IS** possible because of Jesus’ crucifixion for our sin. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down;
fix in us thy humble dwelling;
all thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.

BODY:

Recently, I watched a video called REDEEMED BY GRACE. There were four testimonies shared. Here is the testimony of Tim Wessel. I believe you will see today’s scripture illustrated throughout this testimony.

“At 10 years old, his family moved into trailer park. All his friends and neighbors used drugs and alcohol. Tim thought it was wrong but began to do the same things at 12 years old. He was helping a disabled police officer who lived in the trailer park; but, stole from him to buy drugs and alcohol.

His mother yelled and screamed and threw him around the house. Tim wondered why none of the neighbors came to help when it was obvious that people could hear.

When his Mom had been a child, she was abused and neglected; so, she was placed by authorities in another home. There she was raped and Tim was conceived. Because she was pregnant, she was put out on the streets. She treated Tim the way she knew, badly – taking out her anger on him.

As early as he can remember she told him that he was the product of a rape. She said he was ugly and stupid; she was physically cruel too. She wrestled with her own demons, crying and screaming at night. When Tim was a year old, his mother married. The step-father would eventually adopt him. They had a child together. This child was his mom's everything, in stark contrast to the way she felt about Tim. She made it clear that Tim's brother was her child and he was not. She would say, "You make me sick. I can't stand to look at you. Why don't you run away? Why don't you kill yourself?" He felt his mother's misery was his fault.

His parents divorced. Tim felt terrible. He would get the shakes because of his drinking. He would drink in the morning before school to get rid of the shakes, but try not to drink so much that anyone would notice. Eventually, he was permanently expelled from school.

At an early age, he felt no hope and that his life was over. "What was the point?" He thought. He started getting high on drugs and alcohol all the time. He needed to start breaking into homes to get money to support his habits.

He met a girl, who he loved and he felt loved for the first time. She came from a home where her mother killed herself in the home and her father was a drug addict. The father was working a factory job someplace else and sending money home so this girl could take care of the other children.

Tim moved in with them and they "played house." He was working a midnight shift. Though they were both messed up, she seemed to love him anyway. One night he got off early and came home to discover her in bed with someone else.

Tim just left and went off and drank all day. That night he went back to the house. He kicked the door in and was yelling and screaming. Tim attacked her and her friend. The police came and he was violent with them too. After he put his hands on someone's throat, the police beat him badly.

After a really, really, ugly night, Tim went home to his mother and her second husband. Tim flipped over the fridge, threw TV sets, broke windows, going completely berserk. Looking back, he feels it was a cry for help, "Can't anyone see how broken I am?"

He was afraid that his mother was going to have him committed to a mental hospital or otherwise he would end up in jail. He had nowhere to go. He decided he was going to end his life. After making the decision, a peace came over him. "I won't hurt anymore. I won't hurt anyone else." What a sense of relief he felt.

Tim had guns and ammunition, but his mother had taken the ammunition away. He was getting ready to leave the house to get more ammunition, when he opened the front door and saw a man approaching up the side-walk. He was a pastor, going door-to-door trying to build his church and his youth group. Tim wondered was this God? Maybe, just maybe it was God saying, "I'm here. I know what you are going through. I do care and you are not alone." So he invited him in. Maybe he had something to say. Tim still had his plan in reserve.

The pastor opened up his Bible to explain the love of God. Tim could be forgiven of all the bad, bad things that he had done. They prayed together and spent the whole day together. He repented and embraced that promised love. Tim started going to the church.

A couple at the church had a horse farm. They gave Tim a job cleaning out the stables. He had a lot of time to think things through. In shoveling and moving manure in a wheelbarrow, Tim came to the realization that there were some things in his life that he needed to deal with.

That night, he went home and learned a friend was being questioned for crimes that Tim had committed. So, he went to the State Police and turned himself in. Though he was afraid, he realized he had to pay the consequences of his wrongdoing.

Tim was expecting to do prison time and the prosecutor was recommending twelve years. It seemed inevitable. The court case was going badly. When the judge asked him to speak, Tim said, "I turned myself in because I knew I had done wrong. I trust you to judge me fairly and that I will get what I deserve. I do want to say that I am a new creation. I have given my life to Christ."

He continued, "God loves me and has forgiven me. If you leave me on the streets, I promise to tell everyone what He has done for me. If you put me behind bars, I am going to tell them that their lives can be different too."

The judge rubbed his chin, and said, "No, I don't think you deserve to be in prison." He gave Tim five years' probation and convicted him of one felony. Tim went back home and went to probation once a month.

He decided to go back to school and get his GED. Then he got his Associates Degree with a 3.9 GPA. Then he went to university and got an accounting degree. While finishing the degree program, he learned that you cannot become a CPA (certified public accountant) with a misdemeanor charge on your record.

Tim had been doing invisible fence sales. He was in this elderly woman's home and he ends up sharing his testimony. She invited him back to dinner that night. Her husband was not happy to have a salesman at dinner. When Tim was finished sharing his testimony, the man had tears running down his face. It turns out the man was a judge and offered to help get Tim's record expunged. The judge had a Christian friend who was a lawyer. This friend, for a bargain basement price, did all the paperwork and Tim's whole record was delivered to him in large envelopes. His record had been wiped clean. He broke down and gave thanks to God.

Soon, Tim had a job with an accounting firm. Although he felt like an outsider, he worked his way up to a lower management position. At a staff meeting, men were sharing how they were going to build their business with parties and taking clients to strip clubs.

When Tim's turn came, his plan was to build his business through breakfasts and lunches with his Christian friends. Some of his co-workers laughed and mocked him. Soon his phone started ringing. Then the referrals started happening. At the end of the year Tim was being recognized for the most new business generated.

The Senior Pastor at the church Tim was attending came to him and said he had a position he wanted Tim to fill at the church. Tim wanted to take it but it was a considerable step back in pay and future pay. It had to be a family decision.

A friend of Tim's talked to him about the decision. This friend was not a Christian, didn't go to church, and didn't believe in dreams; but, he had twice had the same dream: He was in sitting in a church and Tim was the pastor. Then another friend called. He had just got back from a weekend men's conference and had received a strong message about Tim: "If you get a call to ministry, take it."

Tim became the Youth and Family pastor at his church. On his first day in his new office, he gets a call from an addict that had heard that Tim had battled drugs. Tim leads him to Christ over the phone. So, Tim became involved with Celebrate Recovery, a faith based program for those coping with all types of issues. He also had a whole group of high school students that he strongly identified with because of his experiences. Then he added prison ministry to his kingdom work.

His wife and family are a great joy to him. Tim forgave his mother and they have reconciled. She too has given her life to the Lord. She is an amazing grandmother.

The Redeemed by Grace Video was several years ago and has been shown around the world. A Korean pastor translated it into Korean and it is shared with people that need hope. A woman from New

Zealand contacted Tim through Facebook. She had conceived a child through rape and because of the video and their Facebook interaction, she decided to raise the child.

After sharing three other people's testimony on the video, Tim came back on. He shared what an amazing day it was when he had the privilege of baptizing his mother. They showed the video of her coming out of the water in the baptistery and she was hugging his neck.

Something happened that he could have never dreamed of: Tim was introduced to his biological father, the man who raped his mother, and his father's family. His father was in a hospital bed with a brain hemorrhage, facing the end of his life. His father had many regrets and pain. Tim had mixed emotions as he shared his story with his father. As he sat beside him, he encouraged his father to take God's hand as he faced the end of his life.

As Tim walked down the hospital hallway, his father's wife approached him and asked him to do the funeral service. A few days later, they took his father off life-support and he died. Tim called it an amazing privilege to stand beside someone he once hated and blamed and share that day as a son. He could not have imagined that God would give him such an amazing moment.

Later, Tim's mother joined him at a function at his church. The speaker started with, "On March 24th, 1968, the Bright Church of the Nazarene was born." Tim and his mother turned to each other and both started sobbing. That was also Tim's birthday.

God had a plan and purpose for Tim and his mother and keeps on using him in miraculous ways. Tim says, "When I tell my story, I am really telling the story of a God that loves us and sent His Son to redeem us." Throughout Tim's testimony, his voice often cracked as his emotions brought him close to tears. Tim's love for God was too evident to miss.

CONCLUSION:

Come, Almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return and never,
nevermore thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

The Wesleys built their theology and spirituality on the foundation of grace. In his sermon "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," John talks about two grand heads of doctrine. The first is grace as it pertains to the work of God *for us* in Jesus; the second is grace as it pertains to the work of God *in us* through the power of the Holy Spirit. John and Charles draw an intimate connection between this grace and the loving God known to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For the Wesleys, **grace is a relational term with which to talk about love**, a word that embraces the full image of God, creation, and humankind. This expansive understanding of love and grace links theology and practice—our thoughts about God and our actions. God's gracious love holds everything together and gives meaning and purpose to all created things. In his well-known hymn, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," Charles speaks of God as "pure, unbounded love." The goal of life is to be filled with this love.

The Wesleys understood the Christian life therefore, as a pilgrimage of "grace upon grace." The practice of Christianity begins in grace, grows in grace, and finds its ultimate completion in God's grace. Grace is God's unmerited love, restoring our relationship to God and renewing God's own image in our lives. Through grace, God leads us into a dance of joy, justice, and jubilee in which we seek to radiate God's love, participate in God's reign, and seek the restoration of all things in the Three-in-One God. Christian discipleship is, first and foremost, a grace-filled response to the free gift of God's all-sufficient grace.

My brothers and sisters, God's grace is the active agent of the Lord's love. Just imagine the ripple effect of the amazing grace shown to Pastor Tim Wessel. Our God breaks into our broken world and makes all things new.

Today, I call on you to be crazy Christians. Take your duty as an ambassador seriously. In response to Jesus' love, forgive someone. Make the first move. Because you have been reconciled to God, be a conduit of God's grace to others. Make the Lord's love known!

Amen and amen. Let us pray.