

Abounding Grace

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When I say words like "abounding" or "abundance," what images come to your mind? I realize if your breakfast is starting to wear off or maybe you didn't have a really solid one this morning, when I say those words you might start thinking about lunch, something like that, huh? Isn't that the way your honey makes it every Sunday noon? I hope I haven't ruined your attention span or your diet but we all know what it's like to have an abundant meal, huh? Abundance. Absolutely. Or if you're starting to become a bit follically challenged, when I say abundance you might think of this guy, Troy Polamalu from the Pittsburgh Steelers. How would you like to have his shampoo budget, huh? There is some abundance for you for sure. By the way, when I was checking whether follically challenged was even a phrase, I came across this tip in the highly reliable online urban dictionary which actually used that phrase in this sentence which might encourage some here this morning and I quote, "The follically challenged look on today's men is quite widespread and aesthetically appealing to the fairer sex." So who needs abundance when you have a shiny dome appeal going on?

Now, back to abundance. You may think of food. You may think of hair. You might think of money. You might think of friends. You might think of time. You might think of success. But the one commonality is lots and lots of it, whatever it happens to be. You know, interestingly enough, the Bible uses this word as well in both the most negative ways imaginable and also the most positive. In fact, as soon as I said the word, some of you might have thought of this classic verse and maybe you even memorized it from the King James version which renders it like this, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." I would suggest to you that understanding that juxtaposition is very important for all sorts of reasons. For example, if you're a parent, helping your child come to grips with the first half of that statement is imperative to their growth and their development. I understand we live in a culture that can barely tolerate the concept or mentioning it but parenting without a proper understanding and focus on the centrality of sin is a recipe for rebellion and disaster. You just take that one to the bank for sure. Sin abounds. Also, understanding both aspects of this abundance is imperative as we try to understand our own motivation. What makes us tick? After all, why do we do what we do? Why do we struggle the way we struggle? God's word does not address and answer questions like that in a superficial way. It's not bland. It's not lifeless. It's not shallow. If we're going to let the word of God be our guide, it will turn up the sound system with volume on issues like that quickly if we have ears to hear what the Creator has to say.

The diagnosis is abundantly clear, it's abundantly comprehensive and it's abundantly bad. It just is.

I would suggest this juxtaposition also leads us to a very powerful and delicious answer. You see, if you're only a little hungry, then a fully stocked banquet table won't do much for you but if you're starving, if you're starving, an abundant Sunday brunch starts looking like mountains of freshly baked biscuits slathered in a waterfall of sausage gravy. Why? Well, the more extreme the condition, the more delightful the solution, huh? And please don't miss the central argument of this verse that I already quoted: in this particular case, the solution is not just equal to the problem, the solution is far larger than the size of the problem which is why some of the newer versions translate that same verse, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." And the reason for that difference is that in the original language, the verbs are actually different on purpose, message being: yes, the problem is great but, praise God, the solution is greater.

Now, here's what that means, taking marriage as a random but very important example, what does it mean that, "Where sin abounded grace abounded all the more?" Why is that so important? Well, let's say a husband and wife have tried making it work on their own wisdom and their own strength and maybe they've been trying to follow what they've observed in culture or some secular theorist but maybe they're 5 years into it and they're now bored with one another or estranged from one another, they are at each other's throats, maybe ready to throw in the towel. Do you realize that on the authority of the Scripture, if such persons are willing to accept Christ as Savior and Lord if they never have before, if they're willing to open God's word and let that lead them and that guide them to genuinely repent, not everybody is willing to do that, to genuinely change, not everybody is willing to do that, what they have to look forward to and here's what's critical to this discussion is not just getting their relationship back to what it was on their best day but getting it to a place that perhaps they've never experienced before. You see, sin may have increased but grace abounded much more. The problem is great but the solution is greater.

That's why Jay Adams titled originally what I think is one of if not his best book and it was originally called "More than Redemption." When the new publisher picked it up, he retitled it "A Theology of Christian Counseling," and as an aside, if you've not studied this book, I would strongly encourage you to do it. By far, it's the best practical theology book that I'm aware of and it's a good book to use in your small groups; it's a good book to use in accountability groups. We've had many, many leadership training classes go through it for sure. But I was always intrigued that they changed the title from "More than Redemption" to this more bland, "A Theology of Christian Counseling" because I wonder if the people that picked the title ever read the book. By the way, Jay never liked that new title either because the central point is what I'm alluding to this morning: where sin increased and we have to be honest and comprehensive about that diagnosis, where sin increased, grace did something better, grace did something bigger, grace abounded all the more, meaning it's possible for you and me to get to a place we've never been before because of God's abounding grace. That's what we want to talk about this morning.

Let me invite you now to open your Bible to Romans 5. That's on page 122 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning. Now, I probably need to clear this off the deck at this point because I know what some of you are worried about this morning. As a trained counselor, I can just read your mind and so you're wondering today: are we following the league rules around here? Well, please rest assured that every Sunday morning, our deacons test the pressure on each one of these sermons to be sure they contain the perfect amount of hot air because here at Faith Church, we would never want you to receive an underinflated sermon. We follow the rules around here. I hope that sets your mind at ease. Sorry, that was the best I could do.

Romans 5. I appreciate the great work that our pastors did last week on the early verses in this chapter. Aren't you glad for our pastoral staff? Very, very thankful for them. We want to try to pick up the logic now in the latter half of this chapter today and I probably need to practice just a bit of full disclosure here and that is that there is no question that the book of Romans is the most comprehensive treatment of Christian theology in all the New Testament. Paul is writing to men and women whom he assumed wanted a thorough explanation of what it means to have a relationship with God so this isn't like watching a video, I understand that and Paul could not have tweeted the book of Romans. And to complicate matters further, many Bible students consider what we're about to study the second half of Romans 5, to be the most challenging material in the entire book. Well, let's remember this: the Holy Spirit is here and if you have a personal relationship with God, the Holy Spirit resides inside of you and I'm thoroughly convinced of this, that even if you're relatively new to studying God's word, if you'll concentrate for our next few minutes together, you can get the main points and you can get the main points in a way that will help you walk away with practical applications for the way we live today and in the days ahead. So I'm encouraging you to strap in. I'm going to read verse-by-verse through this text. Grab what you can. I understand the logic gets a bit convoluted at times. Grab what you can and then we're going to break this important passage of Scripture down together and talk about 3 responses to the 2 kinds of abundance outlined in the word of God.

I'm in Romans 5, beginning in verse 12 where Paul said,

12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned - 13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a [note this] a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16 The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. 17 For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more

those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. 18 So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. 19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. 20 The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

I recognize there is a lot in that passage of Scripture before but let's organize the rest of our time around 3 responses to the 2 kinds of abundance in God's world. First of all, be horrified by the abundance of Adam's sin. You see, the overall argument in this passage, I realize there is a lot there but if you're in the habit of writing in your Bible, you certainly might want to underline the latter part of verse 14 and maybe even draw an arrow pointing to it but the point is, Adam's sin in the garden is a type of Christ's death on the cross. In fact, Paul says as much at the end of that verse, "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come." What a marvelous way to describe the Messiah, by the way. From the perspective of the Old Testament, what was Jesus? They were looking for him who was to come.

Now, how was Adam a type of Christ and what in the world does that even mean? Well, that one's fairly easy to answer. That's what we're going to try to do with this text, just break it down until it's a whole lot more understandable and then apply it to where we're living. That one's fairly easy to understand. How was Adam a type of Christ? Well, they are similar in that they demonstrate that one person's actions can have dramatic impact on a large group of others and we see that in our world today. That's not difficult to prove. A few terrorists commit heinous acts in the city of Paris and it affects millions, if not billions of people around the world. That was what John F. Kennedy meant when he went to Berlin and said in German, "I am a Berliner." What was his point? "What you are experiencing because of the Soviet Union's aggression in the early 60s, I even share as the President of the United States of America." In other words, no man is an island unto himself. We are impacted by the choices of others and the 2 persons' actions that principle applies to more than anyone else's would be Adam in the garden and Jesus on the cross and if we're thinking carefully, we'll be horrified by Adam's abundance where sin increased.

Now, let's back up the truck for a moment to be sure that we're thinking about this comprehensively. Think about even the argument of the book of Romans up to this point on that very issue. Why did they need to be reminded of the abundance of sin? Well, who were the recipients of the book of Romans? It's amazingly similar to the culture in which we live in 2 very important ways but many people have observed that if there is one silver lining to the fact that our country and many other first world countries are less impacted by and committed to biblical Christianity than ever before, if there is one silver lining to that, it's that the New Testament is so easy to relate to and apply because our culture is very similar to that of the first century church. How so? Well, 2 ways: one is

there were plenty of people who had denied the existence of God entirely. They prided themselves on their own wisdom and their own strength and their own beauty and they would have minimized the existence or problem of sin because for them, there was no authoritative or personal lawgiver or if there was any sin at all, it was someone else's further down the chain of society but theirs was either excused or in many cases even paraded which is why Paul in the early chapters of Romans spoke about those who knew God but, what? Glorified him not as God and when he got down to the end of that conversation, he said, "Just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over," there is where you never want to be, "God gave them over to a depraved mind to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness and wickedness and greed and evil, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful and although they know the ordinance of God that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same but," what? "They give hearty approval to those who practice them." Call that the polar opposite of being horrified by the abundance of Adam's sin which is why I encourage our church family to be very careful about your entertainment choices. Be very careful about the kind of people that you draw close to you as your companions lest you end up laughing at and being comfortable around the very tendencies and mentalities and choices the Scriptures suggest you should be horrified by regardless of what the secular culture around us would suggest.

Paul then turns to his Jewish readers who may have avoided some of the more blatant secular sinful habits but their pride in themselves on their birthright and their behavior and how that's going to earn a righteous stand before God. So in their minds, there might be some sinners out there but it wasn't them. That too, is very prevalent in our country for we have plenty of individuals in this town who believe that their own good deeds are more than enough to satisfy God and earn them a place in heaven someday. I'm doing this quickly for sake of time but Paul counters all of that in the book of Romans with plain words like, "As it is written, there is none righteous, not even one." Sin is abounding is his point, "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." You see, it comes down to a sin, a guppy sized problem or a whale sized problem and does it affect a few people or does it affect everyone including you?

Now, to be clear, Paul is not simply pointing his bony pharisaical finger at everybody else, right? If you know your Bible, you know he has no trouble talking about the enormity of his own sin. He told Timothy this, he said, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom you are, Timothy." No, "among whom," he said, "I am," chief, "foremost of all." He had no trouble standing in the front of the line of reasons to be horrified by the effect of the abundance of Adam's sin. In fact, though this is getting a bit ahead of ourselves, it was his honesty about the size of his sin that led him to amazement about the abundance of God's grace. Look for the juxtaposition in this passage, he said, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor," and he was all of those things. "Yet I was shown mercy because I acted

ignorantly in unbelief; and the," what? "The grace of our Lord was more than abundant." He understood how hungry he was and therefore he appreciated the size of the meal. "The grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus."

Well, take all that back into Romans 5. How does that play out in our key passage? How was the sin of Adam so abundant? Well, it was abundant because of its treachery. Adam is placed in a perfect environment, he's given a simple command to follow and he did what you and I would have done regardless of the nature of the command. Please don't ever think, "If the command had been don't eat a banana, he would have withstood it but it was that apple thing." No, apart from God's grace, it is impossible for any human being to live righteously.

It was abundant because of its scope. You see, it's just like the person on the computer network at your job who opened a tainted file and now everybody has the virus. You know who that guy is? Paul said, "Just as through one man sin entered into the world," think about the scope, "death spread to all men." Every human being has one common attribute: we're all born with a sin nature. Why do pigs love to lay in the mud? It's their nature. In fact, I actually saw one down in the Dominican Republic. It was funny. I was going by a field and there was a big old pig and he was in a big old mudhole and it was actually up to his belly in mud and I thought, "How interesting, I've seen pigs around the world and I've never seen a pig sitting over on a chair doing his nails." They are all exactly the same. They're all looking for the mud and they are slathering around in the mud, why? It's their nature. Why do horses love to run in the field? It's their nature. Why do you and I choose to sin? It is our nature. That is an inescapable fact and that is an overwhelming fact.

It's abundant because of its treachery. It's abundant because of its scope. It's abundant because of its affect. Think about how comprehensive this text and this issue is, death through sin. Death reigned. Did you notice the comprehensive and repeated use of the word "reign" in this text? Lord willing, we're going to talk about that more next week when we deal with verse 21. Death reigns. That's why some refer to death as the king of terrors. We all know what it is like for death to reign. We have some dear men and women in this church who are facing that either themselves or for their loved ones right now. In the very next chapter, Paul is going to say that, "The wages of sin is death." This is not a little problem, it's a big one. Think about the last casket you looked into. Think about the last diagnosis you waited for.

It's abundant because of its affect. Death through sin. Death reigned and then there is guilt. One of the most powerful yet instructive phrases in this entire text is verse 16, "for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation." What did Adam and Eve do after they disobeyed God? Did they feel clean or did they feel dirty? Did they feel proud or did they feel ashamed? Did they want to fellowship with their holy God or try to hide from his presence? Did they celebrate their choices with one another or begin a blame shifting argument? Condemnation and if we're honest this morning, we all know what that is like, that guilt, that condemnation. Why? Because

verse 18 says, "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to," what? "To all men."

The weight of that is enormous: spiritual death, physical death, the possibility of eternal death. "For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned." Sin is not something to laugh at. It's not something to cozy up to nor is it a small problem that can be easily solved by a little moralism or religiosity. We're talking about something that should horrify us because of its abundance which, I think, would lead us naturally to a question, huh? Regardless of where you are in your spiritual journey, would there be evidence that you agree with Paul's analysis here? Is there? That the problem of sin is powerful and enormous and it ought to horrify us.

Well, how is it that followers of Jesus Christ can be so open about that? How could Paul put into writing that he considered himself to be the chief of sinners? How was it that instead of running and minimizing and hiding and blaming, he faced that head-on? It's because, praise God, the other half of the text, be amazed by the abundance of God's grace. You see, as I said at the beginning, all of this was pointed out to be a type of him who was to come. John MacArthur explained in his great section in his commentary, "After describing the appalling sin and lostness of all mankind that Paul has revealed how Christ by his justifying death on the cross provided the way of salvation for everyone who comes to God in faith. The inevitable question that then arises is: how could what one man did at one time in history have such an absolute effect on mankind? The analogy of Adam and Christ is antithetical, it's an analogy of opposites. Because of Adam's sin, all men are condemned. Because of Christ's obedience, many are pardoned. Adam is therefore analogous to Christ only in regard to the common principle that what one man did affected countless others."

You see, the point is: look at what this man did, Adam in the garden. Look at the size of that pile and then hang your head because you know all too well what that pile has done to you and everybody else. But then turn around and look at what this man did, Jesus on the cross. Look at that pile of grace that is immeasurably larger. Where sin increased, grace overflowed and we can and we should be amazed. Why? Well, because it's free, that's why. In fact, let's count together how many times in these 2 verses is that principle of this being free or it being a gift or both is mentioned. Romans 5:15, "But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification." Do you think maybe the Lord is trying to get our attention there? Four times in 2 verses? And what do you think he wants us to be amazed by? His gift of grace is free to any person who chooses to accept it. You see, that's not generally the way things work, is it? You don't generally see the concepts of free and abundance together, do you? You can prove that by looking on your smart phone since several of you have been looking at that goofy thing even while I was trying to teach the Scriptures this morning because of your little addiction. Well, let's just learn a lesson from that thing. How do things work at the app

store, huh? Many of them are free, aren't they? Oh, download that baby for free unless you want what? Unless you want the premium version. So you can download Dropbox for free. Just download that baby until you try to use it for very long or very much and it runs out of memory. There is a solution for that, yeah, a solution that's other than free.

You see, there's a lesson here: something that's both free and simultaneously abundant is deliciously and uniquely divine. That's the way God's grace works. Not only for you if you've trusted Christ as Savior and Lord but it's available for many. That's one of Paul's primary reasons for developing this analogy. What was he trying to do in this comparison of the effect of Adam's action and the effects of Christ's action? Look how many people, there it is: for the many. Look how many people were affected by the sin of Adam. Look how many people can be rescued by the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. The free gift isn't like the transgression, "For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many." Don't you love that part of the verse? Abound to the many.

That's why if you are here this morning and you've never trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, we would encourage you to receive his abundant gift of grace right now. Please don't offend God by saying, "Well, I'm too far gone," or "I'm going to have to clean things up a little bit myself first and then come to him." Are you allowing the word of God to do its work in your heart and life this morning? Where your sin increased, God's grace did what? It increased all the more. I'm so glad, by the way, for the number of men and women who have already placed their faith and trust in Christ this calendar year. By God's grace, we are off to a marvelous start this ministry season, this new calendar year and I'm so thankful that we're not just talking about some theology from the book of Romans, we're seeing the lives of men and women transformed before our eyes, in some cases regarding their eternal destiny because they are coming to grips. You'll don't have to convince them about the awfulness of their sin. We all get if we're honest at all, unless we've seared our conscience completely, we get the condemnation that comes because of our sin. Maybe we could have diagnosed it correctly but we get the effect that when someone learns about God's abundant grace, that it abounded all the more, that his pile is bigger than any pile you can bring to the table and that it is actually a free gift that is accepted by faith, we're seeing men and woman come to understand what that means and we're seeing men and women run to the throne of grace to find mercy and help in their time of need. Aren't you glad for that? Aren't you glad that our God is a saving God whose grace is abundant? I'm so thankful for those who have already made that decision this year and if you have never made it, why not today? Why not today?

I'm also so glad to see that happening around the world. I've just come back from the Dominican Republic as I mentioned and I had a marvelous, marvelous time of ministry down there. God is blessing the Gospel in some incredible ways. This church where Newton Pena and his wife and their son, José. Newton is one of our seminary students and he is our contact there in the Dominican and we've said to their local church that if you would send a student here for 3 years, we would try to train him in everything that we know because we believe in trying to do mission's work, many times, through the established leadership in that place. Not always, but often, so we're providing training for

Newton and his wife and you're loving the fire out of them and going to send them back to minister in that place and so our contact is with their church but that church is becoming more and more of a leader in the country of the Dominican Republic. In fact, they had to stop taking registrations for the conference that pastor Brad and I spoke at last weekend. They were afraid that the balcony would collapse if they let anybody else up there. That's the effect of the Gospel of God's abundant grace.

And I had the opportunity, it's fascinating because people, I don't speak a whole lot of Spanish. I really don't. I don't speak English very well and so the whole idea of me speaking Spanish, that's not going to happen. So dear folks are trying to communicate to me and it's often broken but one young lady, when she came up to talk to me, I kind of recognized her and she began through a translator to tell me her story about how a year ago when I was there she had just started coming to the church and she had not yet trusted Christ and she had actually spoken to me about some of the challenges and difficulties that she was facing and they were severe and you could even read it on her face. I wish I had a before and after picture to show you today of what she looked like a year ago and what she looked like today. And I wish I had a tape of what she said a year ago and what she was speaking about when I was there just a week ago, about the transforming, abundant grace of our God. It was not just in the words of her testimony, it was even apparent on the countenance of her face. And I'm suggesting to you that what Paul is saying in Romans chapter 5 is true and it's not only true in this country, it is true around the world. God's pile of grace is that big. We ought to be very, very thankful for it.

I think this ought to undergird our outreach efforts, huh? God's abundant grace abounds to the many. Well, that includes all the folks in your sphere of influence that have not yet trusted Christ. I kind of threw down the gauntlet before I went to the Dominican, that's kind of the way I am, offend a bunch of people and then leave the country. I challenged you to put before the Lord, asking him that he would give you an opportunity to bring another man or woman to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ this year. Why not, huh? I mean, what's your biggest goal for this year, buy a new couch? Seriously? Boring! Do you realize selfishness is plumb boring? I hope you want to get into what our redeeming God wants to accomplish this year in your sphere of influence. Why not ask him for that? Why not trust him for that? Why not work to that end? And if you would say, "Pastor Viars, you've obviously never been to my workplace because I mean, they are like way sinners where I work." Really? Pile pretty big, is it? Pile pretty big? What do you think God would say to that? It's that, "The pile I'm bringing to the table is a whole lot bigger and my pile is called grace and my pile is abounding." Where sin increased, believe me, God would say, "Where sin increased, my grace abounds all the more." Why not, why not put your redeeming, saving God to the test in your outreach efforts this year?

It erases guilt. On the one hand, the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification, but on the other hand, don't you love that? Christ's shed blood can provide forgiveness of sin and a new stand before him. That's one of the primary emphases of this text. "Much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness. So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation, even so

through one act of righteousness there resulted justification." Guilt is gone. That's why sin is not something we laugh at. It's not something we ignore. But if by finding grace there can be no more guilt, no more shame, no more condemnation, what an enormous gift and why wouldn't we appreciate the fire out of it and why wouldn't we want to give that gift to somebody else? You know what it's like when you finally nail the perfect gift. I don't know if you're like me but I'm like the worst gift giver in the world. If I offer you a gift, you'd probably just need to hang your head because it's probably going to be bad. I've never been good at that but every so often and not very often, I nail it. I get a good idea and it's the right one for that person. You know what I'm talking about? I love giving a gift like that. It doesn't happen very often but I love it when I finally nail one. Think about this: a person in your life who's weighed down with guilt and shame and condemnation. Why in the world if you had the opportunity to do so, would you not share with them the delightfulness of that gift? And one of the only answers that I can come up with would be, well, may be we don't understand the enormity of the problem and therefore we don't appreciate the comprehensive beauty of the solution.

It will allow life to reign. "For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ." I've been doing a lot of flying. You see these magazines advertising these drugs or pieces of fitness equipment that can reverse the aging cycle. Have you seen them? And it's amazing because you only have to exercise on this piece of equipment like 5 minutes a day and it will totally, they have the pictures. This is what this guy used to look like. You see that beer bellied old man? He bought this \$10,000 piece of fitness equipment and he exercised on it for 5 minutes a day for a month and look at that do dude, all buff and all that. Yeah, instead of dying, you're getting younger, huh? Do you realize spiritually speaking God's grace does that? That's the point of this text: you go from being dead to being spiritually alive. You can approach his throne of grace and receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need so death is no longer the king of terrors because you know that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. And as you remove these sinful tendencies from the relationships in your life, they become sweeter. They become more alive year after year after year. And now you have all these brothers and sisters in Christ because you're drinking at a common well of grace. Yes, sin increased but Christ's grace overflows.

So what do we do this? Well, be delighted by the wonderful possibilities of this abundance. We can be honest about the reality of our sin. You see, that's why Jesus taught in Matthew 5, you don't have to hide or blame shift. When there's a sin between you and another person that you've committed, run to that other person and admit it. Why? Because we honestly believe that the pile of God's grace is larger than the pile of our sin. Or when we need to confront somebody else who has sinned against us, you don't have to minimize it, you don't have to beat around the bush, you don't have to call it something else. Yeah, sometimes we have to confront another person because of their sin but not in some sort of condemnatory fashion. We're locking arms and we're running to the throne of grace. Let's get this handled. God's pile of grace is a whole lot bigger than our little pile of sin. Let's not let this estrange us. Let's not let this ruin our relationship. Let's not let this drive a wedge. In fact, it's possible that we can get this relationship to an

entirely better place than it's ever been. We're not trying to restore it to what it once was. It's more than redemption. It can actually get to a better place than it's ever been. Where sin abounded, God's grace abounded all the more.

We can also be authentic in our discussions of death. The longtime pastor of this church that many people, many of us so much appreciate even to this day, Pastor Goode, used to tell us as younger staff members, "Stop using phrases like 'passed away.'" I'm not saying we should never use that. We kind of use it from time to time around here but what he used to gently fuss at us about was, "Stop trying to minimize death." Death is as real as life. Call it what it is because we have an answer for death so we can be authentic in our discussions of this king of terrors.

And we can be hopeful in our attempts to change. "The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." And there is nothing about you that God would want to see you change that is apart or outside of the power of his grace and the reason we have a counseling ministry here and the reason we do all this training and all with this conference is because we believe in the abundance of God's grace.

Let's pray together, shall we?

Father in heaven, thank you for the opportunity to think about this great text. And Lord, thank you for trusting us with logic. Thank you for trusting us with words that we have to chew on hard. Lord, thank you for the beauty of the major points. We know all about how sin has abounded, we want to pause and praise you that you've got something far bigger. I pray that that would give us hope for ourselves and I pray that that would give us hope for our relationships. And Lord, thank you that today is not our best day. Thank you, Lord, that you're taking us to a far better place that's even more than redemption. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.