

Message – Prevenient Grace Emmaus Walk #164 Pastor Jeff Brace

Slide 1 Prayer to the Holy Spirit:

Please turn to page 48 in your Worship book and join me in the Prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen

Slide 2 *play clip from “Bruce Almighty”

Slide 3 What if I told you to stop praying? What if I told you to stop talking at God and take a good hard look at who God is before you say another word? We live in a world of instant communication. We update our Social Media status whenever anything happens in our lives. We Snapchat, we Tik Tok, or “Tweet” on “Xing ” Twitter is called X now, We post every few minutes and share with the world what we are having for dinner. Our relationship with God is no different; sometimes we do all the talking. And that’s OK. Because God can handle it.

That scene I played is from “Bruce Almighty” where Jim Carey who plays Bruce a frustrated Television News reporter, rages against God for not taking care of and fixing all the problems in the world, Until God appears to him in the form of Morgan Freeman, and tells Bruce if you think you can do it better... be my guest

That scene, I think illustrates how patient, how thoughtful, how caring God is. How much God Loves us.... Each one of us. It's like Crazy, Crazy Love...

Maybe if we stop talking for a moment and just ponder... Ponder how enormous God is...

In the bible, In Psalm 19, The Psalmist is writing of the enormity of God, How big God truly is...

Slide 4 *Heaven is declaring God's glory;*

the sky is proclaiming his handiwork.

2 One day gushes the news to the next,

and one night informs another what needs to be known.

We are just realizing now how truly big the universe is... God's handiwork....

We have an extremely powerful infrared telescope that is circling above us that is peering through the vastness of space, sending us images of some of God's handiwork.

The James Webb telescope is able to look back in time, kind of a unique feature of looking at light that is only reaching us now, but was first emitted thousands and thousands of years ago.

One of the first places that they steered this telescope to look at was this region... considered the oldest part of space.

Slide 5 *picture

Showing other galaxies that up till now the brightest were just fuzzy specks of light. I truly believe that God did that... Maybe to teach us How big God is. How about this one...

Slide 6 *picture

Doesn't it look like God's outstretched hand...

It is known as the Pillars of Creation, the dusty towers, clouds of space matter some 6,500 light-years away that is regarded as a birthplace of stars. So, yes, God is still creating!

That's amazing, isn't it? Why would God

Slide 7 create 350 billion galaxies that generations of people never knew existed? Perhaps it was to help us understand how truly awesome God is. But God didn't just create galaxies. If we look to the opening pages of the bible, In Genesis,

Slide 8 did you realize there are about 9 million species of animals on earth. One square mile of the Amazon rain forest contains over 3 thousand varieties of trees. We don't know for sure but

Slide 9 there are probably 50 trillion cells in the human body. All those things to demonstrate the glory of God. I don't know about you but when I look at the stars in the night sky, or like a few weeks ago; my wife Karen and I, our son Andrew, his wife Abby and their new addition to their family, June hiked through the dells and canyons of Mathieson State Park in Utica, Il not to far from where Karen and I live, even then, I stopped to think about the beauty in those canyons there and or even the complexities of our bodies... I stop.... and I worshiped God.

Slide 10 For me, there was a time in my life, not so long ago when I felt all alone. Sure, there were others around me most every day. I would have conversation and interactions with others, but somehow, I felt God was distant. Didn't care about little 'ol me, didn't have time for me...

Don't you think that some of us just forget... are too involved or absorbed in our day to day situations that we forget to look up, or out what's all around us.

Slide 11 There is a term that is called "Spiritual Amnesia" –We live in a state of spiritual amnesia. We forget about God... or run the danger to forget. We take a lot of things for granted... The why's... the how comes... and even the what if's... of God.

Slide 12 My name is Jeff Brace and the Title of my talk is Prevenient Grace.

This weekend, we will talk a lot about Grace, especially from that rowdy table back there. But, don't miss this... that this whole weekend is about God's Grace. God's love for each one of us.

Now God's Grace is one Grace but it has many facets... That are used to describe how we experience Grace in our lives. We use different words...

Prevenient... Justifying and Sanctifying Grace that relate to the various stages of each of our journeys of faith.

The nature of Grace is somewhat of a mystery... One grace, yet it is experienced in different ways.

Prevenient Grace is the Grace that is present with us throughout our lives.

SLIDE 13 It comes from the Latin word... Praevenire – "to come before" It is the Grace that is present from the time we are conceived to a time when we are converted to the life and relationship God offers us in Jesus Christ. Prevenient Grace is at work even when we are not aware of it.

Slide 14 It is the Love of God that woo's us....

You remember High School. The first person that caught your eye...
Hoping they would notice you... Then you had to step it up a little...
They used to call it wooing.... Trying to gain their attention.
Bridegroom courting their bride.....

Revelation 22:17 NRSV tells us

17 The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.'

And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.'

And let everyone who is thirsty come.

Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

The Love of God woo's us, God wooing us into a relationship with him.
It is also the will of God to draw us in

Slide 15 In the Gospel of John, the 6th chapter, verse 44-47

44 No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.

John 6:44-47 New Revised Standard Version

Slide 16 Prevenient grace is the desire of God pursuing us throughout our lives to bring us into friendship with God—a love that will never let us go.

Romans 5:8 New Revised Standard Version

8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Not when we had it all together.

Not when we were moral, looked a certain way and even smelled good

Not when we started to go to church

Not when we started acting the way Christians act.

Not even when we started believing

Paul says that while we were still sinners, God extended an offer of relationship towards us.

Doesn't it sound like stalking... God is stalking us?

Slide 17 But, unlike stalking.... God free's us so that we might have the opportunity to respond to God's offer of a relationship and to place our trust in Jesus Christ. It's our decision. Our choice....

1 John 4: 10, 19 New Revised Standard Version says it this way...

10 In this, is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

19 We love because he first loved us.

Slide 18 And not only that... God empowers us, giving us spiritual strength.

Romans 5:6 New Revised Standard Version

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Slide 19 To recap,

The Love of God Woos Us

And it's The Will of God Draws Us In

The Desire of God Pursues Us

But The Gift of God Frees Us

And it is the Activity of God That Empowers Us.

Slide 20 God created each of us... God created us... in God's image...
Imago Dei

The divine..... and the 50 trillion or so cells of each of us... God show's
Grace, Love a possibility of a relationship with God....

Slide 21

God desires a relationship with us... even more than we want a
relationship with God...

Jeremiah 31:3 New Revised Standard Version

3 the Lord appeared to him[a] from far away.[b]

I have loved you with an everlasting love;

therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

Because we were created in the image of God.... The deepest and most
essential part of us longs for that relationship with God.... We may not
know... or aware of it or feel it... but it's there... Those 50 trillion cells
are stamped with that relationship with God DNA....

St. Augustine, who was a theologian and philosopher and the bishop of Hippo Regius in North Africa in the 4th century.

Slide 22 Augustine said it best in his Confessions, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you [God].” Speaking of God.

The good news of our origin in God came before the bad news of human sin.

It took me a while to find it, but I finally found what I was looking for. That illustration... that masterpiece of the Garden...

Slide 23 Adam and Eve made wrong choices that resulted in them getting kicked out of the Garden and bring disorder to all creation. Yet God provides for them. Even each of us who have all made wrong choices that separate us from God and diminish our spiritual lives, yet God still provides for us.

God’s love and grace are greater than all our wrong choices.

God continues to offer relationship.

God desires a relationship with us even more than we want a relationship with God.

That is the nature of this relationship is that of covenant love.

You know what a covenant is, right?

Slide 24

We live in a world contract... Contract law...

A contract is when 2 parties make an agreement with one another... As long as each party is living up to their part of the agreement... everyone’s happy. One party doesn’t live up to their end of fulfilling the contract... null and void... no more contract...

But A covenant... 2 parties make an agreement, a promise.... When one party doesn't live up to their part... the other party keeps fulfilling their part of the covenant.

A covenant is the strongest form of relationship identified in the Bible. God made covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses and the Israelites, and David.

The prophets repeatedly called the Israelites back to a genuine relationship of love and obedience to God. They proclaimed God's promise to make a new covenant with the people.

Slide 25

Jerimiah was a major prophet. We know more about Jerimiah through scripture than any of the other prophets. He has been referred to as the "Crying Prophet". When God called Jerimiah, in chapter one, Jerimiah thinks he was too young, too inadequate. But God says, "I knew you and loved you first, I knew you even before you knew yourself. I have great plans for you, even if you don't think you can do them."

Scripture – Jerimiah 1:4 10

Slide 26

The Call of Jerimiah

4 The word of the Lord came to me, saying,

5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew[a] you,

before you were born I set you apart;

I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

6 "Alas, Sovereign Lord," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am too young."

7 But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.

Slide 27

8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord.

9 Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have put my words in your mouth. 10 See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

The last verse,

10 See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

To me that is the power of sin that is over us.... That we have to uproot it, tear it down... destroy it and even overthrow its rule over our lives.

We can't do it on our own... We need help

And we have that help from God... His gift to us.... His Grace.... His Love...

9 Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched Jerimiah's mouth and said, "I have put my words in your mouth.

To build and to plant....

Jesus offers us a new covenant and a new relationship with God. This relationship is one of love and grace. To build and to plant every where that it goes.

Slide 28 A divine love. That seeks us, woo us. An everlasting love. And that's a gift. "Charis, is the Greek word, grace, a gift of love.

God takes the initiative to seek us; it is not up to us to seek God.

We experience this divine initiative as grace.

Prevenient grace, that helps us overcome our brokenness and alienation.

Slide 29

Romans 5:6- New Revised Standard Version

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. 8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us

It's Crazy, Crazy isn't it...

Well a couple of weeks ago, our Son Andrew and Daughter n law Abbie came to see us and brought their new addition to their family which we got to meet for the very first time.

Slide 30

Meet June... Our Grand dog....

Isn't she cute....

She is still in her "puppy stage" but thank goodness she is potty trained.

How many of you have dogs?

She quickly discovered that we had squirrels in our backyard. One thing my wife is passionate about in God's creation is squirrels. We spend about \$15.00 a week on "Corn o Plenty" bricks that are made up of corn, seeds, and nuts. It's perfect for squirrels. We started out buying the suet bricks for birds to feed the birds but found that the squirrels

really like the peanut suet blocks. It was like crack and we soon found that the squirrels were addicted to them, and we were going through \$25 – 30 of these suet blocks. So, we switched to the bigger “Corn o Plenty” ones that are only \$6.50 apiece.

Well, June sat at our back patio door and salivated over those squirrels... She is part Lab and part Hound so that hunting instinct started to kick in and she was going nuts...

They must not have squirrels in Milwaukee where they live.

Well, I was cooking steak on the grill and went to open the patio door to turn the meat and thinking that my legs could block the opening from June getting out... nope off June went chasing those squirrels... through the hedge in the back... into the neighbor's yard.... Down the street... Our house was a mess... No and emotional mess... Andrew and I frantically went running after June... Abby is crying thinking June was going to get hit by a car...

We were finally able to coax June back to our house. Back safely inside the house. After dinner and Andrew and Abby and us talking about how June doesn't listen and hear her command to halt and how frustrated they were of what had happened. We went to the living room and Abby was sitting on the couch and June jumped up and laid next to Abby. June put her head on Abby's leg and just looked at her with those big brown eyes.

You know pets, especially dogs are my closest example of the kind of love that God has for each us. After a long frustrating day, you come home and open the door and there they are... excited to see you. I think that dogs are Pentecostal's. Full of the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit that speaks to us... our hearts... our minds. The Holy Spirit speaks to us.

It can be a song, a beautiful work of art... or a Beautiful Sunset... like this...

Slide 31

After a really difficult meeting where I was really frustrated of not seeing where God was in anyway present or part of it... God presented me with this incredible sunset while I was waiting to order some food in the drive thru of a Culvers.

Slide 32

John 16:13-15 New Revised Standard Version

13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Slide 33

Even through the care and sacrifice of others can embody God's love toward us.

And let us not forget the body of believers, the church. The church helps us experience God's grace and presence.

When we worship together that can be powerful. Our prayer, the sacraments, and even in a bible study or small groups.

God Through the Holy Spirit awakens our conscience and convinces us that we can never fix ourselves or earn our way into God's family. We can't do it on our own, we need help...

Slide 34

2 Corinthians 7:9-11 New Revised Standard Version

9 Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance; for you felt a godly grief, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. 10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death. 11 For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter.

Slide 35

God Through the Holy Spirit it's a love that woo's us, not forcing us.

But Draws us in. God deepest desire is to pursue us, never letting us go...

But the gift is that it free's us to respond for that relationship that God desperately wants with each of us. And through God, God empowers us, Not with Spiritual Amnesia, where we forget about God, but with Spiritual strength.

It's The prevenient grace of God.

And The critical question for each of us this weekend is, will we open our hearts to God and accept that relationship God offers us in Jesus Christ?

Slide 36

De Colores!