



Grace & Grit
Part 1 – Working Out Your Salvation
Pastor Ted Cunningham

So, we are starting a new series that takes us all the way up to Easter called *Grace & Grit*. My friend Victor Marx has a great statement. He says, “We are raising a generation that knows a lot about grace but very little about grit.” Today, we’re talking about *Working Out Your Salvation*. And to be clear up front, **we’re talking about working OUT not for your salvation.**

Now, in Branson, Missouri, we’re a town full of performers and I’m not talking about the people that get up on stage... Can I get an amen on that one right there? We’ve all been raised to perform. People pay you based on your performance. Raise your hand if you’ve ever gotten a raise at work based on your performance. Let me just see your hands. Okay, look at that.

How many of you have ever gotten a bonus because of your performance? And the people not raising their hand were in a union. No. we’re not starting all that. It is why union people get frustrated because everybody gets the same pay, “That guy’s a dead beat. I work circles around him.” But we are used to getting paid for the types of work we do, how well we work, how hard we work.

You get applause for your performances, right? You get up on stage, you deliver a good performance, and you get applause. Whether it’s a dance recital or you do this on the sports field or you score the basket, you get the applause.

I love to do this when food comes out at a restaurant. It drives my kids crazy, but when food shows up at the table, I applaud. I get very excited and the kids are like, “Dad, stop it.” I always like going, “I would like to see the manager.” That’s always my favorite thing. I always say it in that tone. You know nine times out of ten, this is not good news, but I’m bringing good news. I always love the manager to come over and then just speak a word of high value. They’re always like, “Hey, what do you want?” I’m like, “I don’t want anything, just to say great job.”

I do this with new restaurants in Branson because of the passion early on. People are all excited, doing their job, working really hard and I’m like, “Hey, don’t let it down for one minute. We want you open next year at this time.” Or I’ll say, “I want to see the cook right now.” The cook comes out wondering what I’m going to say about their cooking. I’ll applaud and say, “Great job.”

How many of you have received a service reward for your performance? You put 20 years in, you put 30 years in and here's a watch; way to go, you put the time in.

Now, on a very serious note, some of you have been loved based on your performance. You had a husband or wife that based on performance determined whether they gave you love. You had a mom or dad based on performance, they gave you love.

My mom... She was in the first service. She would always tell my brother and I, "If you go to prison, I will still be there for you." I have no idea what her plans were for us long term, but what was mom saying? "Whatever happens here (performance), you will always have this (love) from me." Some of you grew up in a church that taught you based on this (performance) determines whether or not God gives you this (love).

I think last week was such a blessing to have Joe White here at our church. As we spent some time here on Sunday and then we spent time together last week a little bit, we were talking about just how much we loved hanging around new believers, brand new believers who come to faith for the very first time. That excitement and that passion. We said what is it that we love so much? It's that excitement and that passion, that newfound faith in Jesus, and yet they don't know all the rules. There something refreshing about it. They don't know church etiquette. They don't know you shouldn't be sitting right there, you should be sitting over there. They don't know Christianese. They don't know the language. I'm not talking about scripture, I'm talking about the language that Christians have developed. They don't know that, but they are going full steam ahead.

This is why I love watching young children's sporting events. They are my favorite to go to. There is excitement and there is passion and there are no rules. And they don't even know what they're doing. They don't even know what sport they are in sometimes. I found two great videos. Look at this first one. And you've seen this if you've been to a t-ball game.

[video plays] He's just going to run around.

This next one is even better. I don't know if this is the first time for this young man to cross the plate, but he is a run batted in and he's going to do it his way. So, he comes home in slow motion. [video plays] He says, "I am not going to let this moment go to waste." Now watch, he's going to tell the coach, "Get your mitts off me. I am doing this my way. Back up coach." Number 4 is like get a move on; I am ready to play." Wait for it. Wait for it. Big finish!

There's something refreshing about that, isn't there? Just the passion. How many of you have been in a sport and maybe some of you in sports right now, the grind of the sports has gotten to you. You've forgotten about the fun, the game, and that newfound passion.

Two books that shaped me in formidable years of my life when I was in college were, "What's so Amazing About Grace" by Philip Yancey, and "The Grace Awakening" by Chuck Swindoll. I grew up in a church that taught a lot about performance and I grew up thinking that my performance determined

God's love for me. These books shaped my life. Phillip Yancey says something in *What's So Amazing About Grace*, that I think fits with what we're talking about.

He says, *"Having spent time around 'sinners' and also around purported saints, I have a hunch why Jesus spent so much time with the former group (sinners): I think he preferred their company. Because the sinners were honest about themselves and had no pretense (they weren't performing and they weren't pretending), Jesus could deal with them. In contrast, the saints put on airs, judged him, and sought to catch him in a moral trap. In the end it was the saints, not the sinners, who arrested Jesus."*

You see, we got to work. And we perform and we get a wage. There's nothing wrong with that. We put the time in or complete a task and we get an award. Many of you have received certificates throughout your schooling. There's nothing wrong with that. You compete in a competition and you get a prize. But what we're talking about and laying the foundation for this series today is grace. You can't earn it and you can't win it. You receive it by grace through faith. There are a lot of definition for grace, but this is the one that's always struck a chord with me and will continue through this series.

Grace is unmerited favor. You've also heard it as unearned favor or undeserved favor. The bottom line is this: For those of us in here who have placed faith in Christ alone and we are believers in Christ Jesus, we know this – I deserve death, but I've been given life.

You're like, "What did you do to get life?" Romans 6: 23 makes it very clear. **23 For the wages of sin is death...** What I deserve. **...but the gift of God...** This grace that we're talking about today in Ephesians 2. **...is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.** He is the source and the foundation of everything we're talking about today.

In Romans 3 in the New Living Translation... I love this. It says, **24 Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight.** But maybe you've grown up with this idea that your performance, what you do makes you right before God. Salvation is being made right before God because of Jesus and his works, not ours. **He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.**

In Ephesians 2 we read, **8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith...** So, grace comes to us as a free gift. This is how we are saved through faith. Faith is the channel, it is not the cause. I'll say that again. Faith is the channel, it is not the cause. We receive both as gifts. **...and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...** Some would say is the gift referring to faith or to grace? The gift of God is referring to salvation. Salvation that comes only through Christ Jesus. **...9 not by works...**

Today we're going to see we are not saved by works, but we are saved to do good works. That's the grit. That's allowing the works of Christ to flow through us as workmanship, as handiwork, as the new creation in Christ Jesus. But grace is a free gift **...so that no one can boast.** Follower of Jesus, the only one we are ever to boast in is Jesus Christ. He is the one we boast in at all times. I think this is where a shift for many will take place in theology, I hope. It is not about salvation in Jesus, "I'm now saved, and then the rest of it is up to me. Working out my salvation is up to me." Yes, there is human responsibility, but it's by grace you've been saved through faith. You are justified, declared righteous before God, and then it is his works through you, not your works.

Again, continuing to boast in Christ. **10 For we are God's handiwork...** Your translation may say *workmanship*. **...created in Christ Jesus to do good works...** We are saved by grace, not by works, but let the works be the overflow of Christ working in and through us. **...which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

I think it's one of the reasons I love pastoring in Branson. I have people ask me all the time, "Why Branson?" I believe because God has prepared in advance for me to be here. Some of you are like, "Okay, maybe I should settle in on that then." I hear it all the time. I hear people constantly unsettled where they are. You'll always be unsettled if it's about you. You'll always be unsettled if it's about you working out your life for you. But if you live in a place where you want Christ to be working through you, he's going to take you to some places you never thought you should be; you never dreamed you'd be. But I'm in Branson. I'm created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

2 Corinthians 5, puts it this way, **17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come...** And the works we're going to talk about today are the overflow of our salvation, not the source of it. **The old has gone, the new is here!**

Bottom line – In "The Grace Awakening," It's the most important take away from this book by Dr. Chuck Swindoll. He says, *"A theology that rests its salvation on one ounce of human performance is not good news, it is bad information. It is heresy."*

So, let's break this down. We know what salvation is. Salvation is by grace through faith and it comes to us because of Jesus and his works for us, not ours for him. So, we have to be very clear. Probably where I would say I hear... and I don't know about you, but I imagine you hear it as well. I hear some of the worst theology around this subject and around the source of our salvation at funerals. I hear people describing why this person is with the Lord and why this person is in heaven. There are times I just shake my head. If you've ever been to a funeral at Woodland Hills, you know I'm the last one to speak. That's very intentional. It has to be because so much bad theology is usually flowing out of people's emotions. So much bad theology is put up there, we have to stand up there and make sure we're clear because Jesus died and rose again, and I have placed faith in that and that is my salvation.

So, let's talk and be very clear what salvation is not. Since we know what it is, here is what it is not. You were not saved because you were loving and kind. Be loving and kind. Let this be the overflow of your salvation. We live in a culture... How many pictures do you see a week like this? Whoo-hoo! Love one another. Love all you want, but love does not bring salvation, Jesus brings salvation. Be loving and kind, but it won't save you.

How about this? I'm going to get in trouble, but we have to do it. You are not saved because you served your country in the military. I hear it all the time. I hear people will use the number of soldiers who died in war and then follow that by saying, "That's the same number of those who are now in heaven." So, you're saying all those people placed faith in Jesus? No, what the person is saying is because they died in service to their country, obviously heaven is their home. For by grace you are saved through faith. It is not of works. And dying in service to your country is a work.

You are not saved because you grew up in a Christian home. Your mom and dad love the Lord. Your mom and dad raised you to love the Lord. But being raised in a Christian home doesn't bring about some metamorphosis that just automatically turns you into a Christian. You have to make the decision to place faith alone in Christ alone.

You're not saved because you attend church. We're glad you're here today and if you're new to the faith or you're new to our church and just checking it out for the first time... This is going to be Christian cliché and I'm going to do it because it just stuck with me for 30 years, but I'm going to say it anyway. Just because you stand in a garage, that doesn't mean you are a car. Just because you sit in a church doesn't mean you are a Christian.

Let's go where angels dare to tread. You are not saved because you were baptized as a baby. By grace alone in Christ alone. By faith alone in Christ alone. It's a decision that you make to place faith in Jesus.

You are not saved because you give to the needy. I remember years ago a guy sitting down with me over a meal and he brought a check from his business. He was a brand-new believer in our town. We sat there at breakfast and he had that check sitting there the whole time. I could tell he was excited to give it and there was a little bit of the "You know if I could give it to you on one of those big checks they use when they present it to organization, I would, but I'm just going to keep it in this envelope." He started drilling me about what Amy and I give and how he wanted to know how much we give. As soon as I told him how much we give, everything in him sank. I was just able to make it clear to him that this is an overflow, but if you're giving this to impress somebody, keep it. You don't need to impress me. Let this be in overflow of what Christ is doing in your life. That's why Jesus says to give it quietly.

You are not saved because you lived a good life. You know I love country music. I love country music. I'll always love country music. And there are songs that I love. Don't abandon country music. If you want to be a good citizen, don't abandon country music. But be theologically astute. To hear a lyric in a song and go, "Good song. I like the tune. Keep going Brooks and Dunn; I love it. But not quite accurate." You'll hear it... and it's subtle. But be able to call it out so you can call it out to your kids. You can say, "I love this song; it's a great song. It's even called Believe." But there is a line in there that every time just works all over me. My kids are like, "Dad, you've told us a thousand times. Will you just listen to the music and stop teaching off of the music?"

"But if there has ever been anyone who deserves a ticket to the other side, it would be that sweet old man who looked me in the eyes and sang, "I raised my hand, bowed my head..." Your like, "Ted, come on; you're nit-picking." All I know is this: none of us deserve a ticket to the other side. None. None. It's a free gift. It's a gift that's been given to me. I deserve death. Some of you are like, "I'm so torn. Brooks and Dunn is my favorite group." Even they broke up. So, just think about the lyrics.

Grace says this... And after all of this, Chuck Swindoll puts it this way. *"Grace says you have nothing to give, nothing to earn, nothing to pay. You couldn't if you tried."*

And then if you ever want to know, it's now on the back cover of the book if you get the book "What's so Amazing about Grace." Sometimes you get a book and you're like, "I don't have to read any more.

Just what was on the back cover was everything I needed to know.” Now students, don’t listen to me on this one. “Ted said I only have to read the back cover.” No read what was assigned to you. But it’s like when I read “Purpose Driven Life.” I opened it and the very first sentence says, “It’s not about you.” I closed the book. I got everything out of that book I needed. It’s not about me.

On the back of this book... Now this was at a time in my life, I was 22 or 23 years old, coming out of a very heavily performance, behavior modification, do everything right so God will love you. You can imagine if that’s where you are reading this for the very first time. *“Grace means there is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I can do to make God love me less. It means that I, even I who deserve the opposite, am invited to take my place at the table in God’s family.”* – Phillip Yancey, *What So Amazing About Grace*.

Some of you have a script right now in your head of all the reasons why your performance will never measure up, of all the reasons why you're not good enough. And you listen to this voice... Every time an invitation is given at this church... Joe was here last week. Joe is one of our most passionate evangelists. Alex Himaya, when he’s here, he’s a passionate evangelist. Every time you hear that, there is something that holds you back because you just start listening to this script over and over again. “There is so much I need to do before I receive that.” “Ted, you have no idea what I have done. You have no idea the sins and the number of people I’ve been with and the number of offenses I’ve made toward my spouse and children.” But grace says, “I want you to bathe yourself in this – you're not too far gone.” Grace says, “It’s never too late.” Grace says, “You don’t need to pretend.” Grace says, “Stop working on it, stop working for it, and just receive it.” Just receive it.

Pastor Timothy Keller in New York City says this is what separates Christianity from all other religions. He says, *“Other religions say, ‘True religion is living a righteous life and giving it to God.’”* Clean myself up, do the right things, act the right way, perform. And when I’m done, I’ll bundle that up and that is my gift and salvation is mine. *“Christianity says, ‘No. The heart of our religion is Jesus has come and lived a righteous life and given it to us.’”* And you are declared righteous when you place faith alone in Christ alone.

So, what does it mean then to receive this and then work it out? That’s what we want to do in this series. Angela Duckworth is a psychologist, but she started her career as a managing consultant for a firm. At age 27, she left corporate life to teach 7th grade math to kids in the New York City Public Schools. I think about what a shift that must have been for her. She said, “When my students were not performing well, I had to ask myself the question of what’s the difference between my best students and my worst students? Why are some nailing this and some aren’t?”

We all can go back to 7th grade math. She said anybody can get it. I question that a little bit. Again, I don’t have a math brain. I struggled with math. You know I’ve confessed this many times. She said it’s ratios, it’s decimals, it’s parallelograms. She was convinced as a 7th grade teacher that anybody could do this. She said, “So I really set out on a mission to find out what the difference was between my high performing students and my low performing students.” When she presents this in her talks around the country, she says most would say it’s IQ. She says it has very little to do with IQ. It has everything to do with grit, sticking with it.

As I read it this week, I was thinking of my dad. I failed math my sophomore year in high school. We had substitute teachers all year and I just couldn't get it. I'll just be honest. I didn't put a ton of hard work into it either. I didn't do as well. And then I got that grade up to a D so we could celebrate my junior year. I graduated high school and when I went to college, you had to take one math class. I was like *you've got to be kidding me. I'll do French and Spanish. I'll do both if I don't have to take a math class. Don't make me take a math class.*

So, we go to college and my parents went to buy the books with me. My dad and mom are engineers, so let's just say they do have math brains. I'll never forget... I had to take precalculus my freshman year. I can still remember it. I don't have very many memories from college. I wish I did. Other than dating and marrying Amy – a lot of those good memories. But early on, freshman and sophomore year, I have this clear picture in my mind of on the second floor of the book store, my dad holding my stack of books. It was like an orange, precalculus book. I sat it on the top of the stack, and I was like *college may not work*. My dad didn't even realize he was doing it, but he spoke a blessing over me. He pictured a special future. He looked at it, he looked at me and simply said, "Ted, you can do this. You got this." I was like, "I don't think so. I can't do it. It's pre calculus."

That's why I tell the kids in our church all the time, "Don't worry about math; you're never going to use it." All the teachers are like, "You don't listen to pastor on that. That was a joke I'll explain it to you later. When he talks about the Bible, stick with that, but this is an illustration."

I don't want to brag. I got an A in math. I had to buy so many lunches for that professor... No. I didn't bribe my way into it. I had to work my tail off. And that's why Angela Duckworth went to West Point to figure out why some Cadets make it and some don't. She studied the National Spelling Bee to figure out how students excel in that. And in corporations. She said it comes down to the word grit, sticking it out. Here's how she defines it and then we're going to look at it from a biblical perspective. Grit – *"The ability to persevere in pursuing a future goal over a long period of time and not giving up... Do we need this after the last 12 months? It is having stamina. It's sticking with your future, day in, day out, not just for the week, not just for the month, but for years... We need to hear that. We know what our future is. Grit is sticking with it. ...and working really hard to make that future a reality. Grit is living life like it's a marathon, not a sprint."* – Angela Duckworth.

We need that grit. If you've ever been fly fishing down at the dam at Taney Como... I'm down there enough that about five or six times a year I see or hear someone fall in. And the waders fill up. From a mile away, you can know someone has fallen in because you hear a high-pitched squeal. I don't care how manly of a man you are, when your waders fill to the brim with 50-degree water... When the water is coming up, you hear it. It is bad. Do you know what grit it? You keep fishing. You don't go back to the car, take your waders off, and dry off. No! Grit keeps fishing. You're canoeing and your canoe tips over. Grit flips the canoe back over and you get back in and put your cooler in. That's grit. Grit is when a storm blows through your campsite and wipes out your settlement and everything is a mess. Grit is like we ain't going home, this is part of camping. Grit sticks with it.

Do you need grit as a parent? You go through intolerable seasons and stages with your children. Parents need grit. Marriage needs grit as you go through difficult season and stages together. Church members

need grit. “He offended me.” “Oh, I can’t believe she said that.” “I can’t believe he looked at me that way.” Have a little grit and stick it out. Do you know where you need grit? Keeping the Mr. in front of Potato Head. Can I get an amen on that one? With that, I’d like to take another offering. Make up for the bad results from the first one. I’m keeping Mr. and Mrs. Clause. I’m keeping Mickey and Minnie. Grit is saying...

Let’s go to Philippians 2. Working out is key here. **12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation** (sanctification)... How do you work out your salvation? That’s what I’m excited to explore for the next several weeks. We’re going to start next week with *How to be a Grace Giver*. I think it requires a lot of grit to give grace to those who are extra grace required. It takes a lot of grit to do that. ...**with fear and trembling...** With respect and high value. Working out your salvation.

Here’s the key. Please see this. This is why it’s highlighted. **13 ...for it is God who works in you...** Why? Because you are a new creation, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. This isn’t about now salvation is up to you. Yes, there is responsibility in it, but grit is living in a day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, second by second connected to the Savior, asking what do you have planned for me today?

Your marriage is going to only do one of two things. You're either deciding to experience high levels of marital satisfaction or you're drifting apart from that. It’s the same thing with your faith. You're either choosing Christ each day... you chose Christ, you placed faith in Christ when you were saved. Working out your salvation is continuing to choose him day after day after day.

I was on a call this morning with many friends, about a hundred guys, talking about infidelity and how to recover from an affair. I love the question – What are some of the guardrails a man can have in place to protect himself from an affair? Do you know what I said? Do you know what the easiest one is? Develop a deep friendship with your wife, close friendship. Build into that curiosity and fascination.

Do you want grit in the faith? Do you want to walk in the grace that has been poured out onto you? Stay close to the Savior. Walk in it. Because it is God who works in you. He didn’t save you by grace and then say, “Okay, you’re on your own, impress me.” No, he said, “You’re a new creation. You’re my handiwork. I have things that have been prepared in advance for you to do. Just stick with me. I’m going to take you on a great journey following life with me.” ...**to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.**

The bottom line is this. **We are working out, not for our salvation.** This is important. I think we lose sight of this when we talk about salvation and when we talk about grace. Working out your salvation does not mean the work of salvation has been transferred to you. It is still about abiding in Christ that daily, weekly, by the minute, by the second with Christ, fellowship with Christ.

We have two care pastors. I watch this in play in their life. They are just able to do ministry in a way they don’t know what a day is going to bring to them, but I know they are close to the Savior and they are able to do ministry, I mean the good works that flow out of them because they are just ready, and

willing, and able. We tend to believe though that there is something we've got to impress God with. We tend to believe that weakness makes us unlovable, but just the opposite is true with God.

In 2 Corinthians 2 Paul says, **8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.** This is the thorn in the flesh. Many debate on what the thorn in the flesh was. Most believe and teach that it is a physical ailment of some sort. He pleaded with the Lord. "I don't want this anymore." But he didn't take it away. And that's what some of you have been praying for a long time over the last year.

Instead, God says no. **9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** "I going to walk through this with you. You want to immediately be relieved from this difficult season, but trust me, my grace is sufficient." Listen, grace shines and is beautiful against the backdrop of difficulties and weakness and insults and persecution. I just think today too many Christians are just wanting our nation to make the Christian faith so easy. He says, "My grace is sufficient for you no matter what happens." I don't know about you, but my faith tends to grow in difficult times rather than in easy times. When I read the scripture, faith tends to grow under extreme persecution, not liberty. That's the Bible.

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses... We had two sermons last week on this stage. I don't know if you know that. Don Rooks brought it up to me and I thought it was a beautiful point. He said, "When Joe came out with no legs and the screen behind him simply said "A Deeper Walk with Jesus," that was the first message, and it was the only message I needed.

...so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. This is called the counseling office. People come in and ask, "How do I get people to stop treatment like this and how do I get them to stop saying this and how do I deal with this..." His grace is sufficient for you. Spending too much time trying to change people rather than enough time abiding in the Savior and knowing what brought you to faith in Christ will sustain your faith in Christ. **For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

So, here's the invitation today. We want to close with an invitation and it's simply spells out the word GRACE. We've been talking about **God's free gift** of grace that brings us salvation, unmerited favor. We don't want you to work for it anymore. We want you to stop thinking your goodness, your kindness, your service, your giving, your childhood, your baptism has saved you.

That today you would **receive it by faith.** Faith alone in Christ alone. Who is this invitation open to? **All are welcome,** every man, woman, boy, and girl. What do you need to do? "There are some things I need to get in order. Get the house in order." No. **Come as you are.** Don't think about all the things you're going to fix up and all the changes you need to make. Become His handiwork. Become a new creation in Christ Jesus, that workmanship. And let him work through you.

And the last one is **exchange your good works,** that you've been relying on for so long, **for his.**

God's gift

Received by faith

All are welcome

Come as you are

Exchange your good works for his

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that we thank you for this church, thank you for this morning. I thank you for the grace that so freely comes to us. We receive it. But not just receive it; let us walk in it each day. Let us extend it to each other. The hostility that we feel has been resting in church a little bit, not just this church, but around. There is just an uneasiness that seems to be going with a lot of believes today. I just pray they are able to rest in the grace that you have given and that they see themselves today as a new creation in Christ Jesus. And they walk and watch those works live out through them.

I pray for the one who has never placed faith in Jesus that today would be the day that they confess their sins, repent of their sins, repent of the good works that they've been relying on for their salvation. That they would confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead that they would be saved. We pray for that today.

It's in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.