

INSPIRED TEXT MESSAGES – Part 1

TEXT MESSAGE FROM PAUL

Dr. Derek Morris

- Preaching passage: Philemon
- Subject: What the text message was that the apostle Paul sent to Philemon
- Complement: show grace and love to Onesimus just as Jesus Christ has shown grace to you.
- Exegetical idea: The apostle Paul appealed to Philemon to show grace to his run away slave Onesimus just as Jesus Christ had shown grace to him.
- Preaching idea: **Since you have received grace from Jesus Christ, show grace to those around you!**
- Purpose: To encourage my hearers accept the grace that Jesus has for you and then show grace to those around you.

When I got my new Blackberry, I decided to try my hand as a text messenger. I thought it was a novel idea to send a short message from one cell phone to another, that is until I found out that Verizon was charging me about 30 cents per message. Fortunately the Hardesty family is on a flat-rate plan. Reina Hardesty, a 13 year-old girl from California, just set a record by sending 14, 528 text messages in one month! Her dad's phone bill was 440 pages long. That's about one message every two minutes that she was awake! She has already broken her record with over 18,000 text messages in one month—that's one text message every two minutes including the hours that she is asleep!

Modern text messaging or SMS, hasn't been around for that many years. It started in the early 90s. Originally, text messages were 160 characters or less,

including spaces. Today, I don't think that anyone is counting. Text messaging is a global phenomenon and growing exponentially every year. Verizon estimated that 144 billion text messages were sent by its customers in 2008.

The modern text-messaging craze gave us the idea for our new sermon series—Inspired Text Messages. We are going to examine some of the short text messages contained in the New Testament that are often overlooked: one from Paul, one from John, one from Jude, one from James, and one from Peter. We're going to ask three questions as we study each of these five text messages: Who? What? and So What? We'll look at the setting, discover the identity of the sender and the receiver—that's the who; we'll look at the content of the inspired text message—that's the what; and then we'll consider the significance of these text messages for our lives today—that's the So What?

There are more text messages, short letters, in the New Testament from the apostle Paul than any other author—one to Titus, two to Timothy, two to the Christians in Thessalonica, and so on. We have chosen to begin our series on Inspired Text Messages with a study of Paul's text message to Philemon. Hopefully you received a copy of Paul's text message when you came to church today. It's only 15 sentences long.

Let's start with the first 2 verses, as we ask our first question—Who? Who is the sender of this text message and who is the recipient? "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy *our* brother, To Philemon our beloved *friend* and fellow laborer,

to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.”

The author of the text message is well known to most of us. Paul, once Saul of Tarsus, an enemy of Jesus and all who followed Him, but now Paul the apostle, a devoted follower of Jesus. The description that Paul gives of himself helps us to date this text message. How does Paul describe himself? Not “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ,” which is how he often begins his letters, but “Paul a prisoner of Christ Jesus. “This text message is one of the prison epistles, written during Paul’s imprisonment in Rome, perhaps around 61 AD.

As we look to find the recipient or recipients of this text message we notice that there are 3 names mentioned in the opening sentences—Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus. It’s clear as we read this text message that Philemon is the primary recipient, which has led some Bible scholars to suggest that “our sister Apphia”, or “our beloved Apphia”, as it reads in some manuscripts, was actually Philemon’s wife. It might also be logical to conclude that Archippus is part of the Philemon family as well, perhaps their son. The Philemon family lived in Colossae, and Archippus is mentioned in Paul’s text message to the church in Colossae as one of the leaders of that Christian community. Notice at the end of verse 2 that a Christian church in Colossae meets in Philemon’s house.

Unlike today, this text message couldn’t be delivered to Philemon’s cell phone! There wasn’t even snail mail in the first century, at least not the kind of sophisticated postal service that we are accustomed to today. Any text message had

to be delivered by hand. The author, in this case the apostle Paul, either had to deliver the text message himself, or it had to be delivered by a servant or emissary. It appears that this text message to the Philemon family was delivered by a man named Onesimus. Most of us have never heard of Onesimus, but the Philemon family knew him well. We'll learn more about Onesimus and the rest of the story as we continue our study of Paul's inspired text message to the Philemon family.

Onesimus didn't make the trip from Rome to Colossae by himself. That was a journey that would take several months. It was safer if you had a travel companion. Onesimus travelled with a brother in Christ named Tychicus who was delivering a longer text message from Paul to all of the Christians in Colossae. Onesimus and Tychicus had both spent time with Paul in Rome and they travelled together back to Colossae, each delivering a text message from Paul. Someone might be thinking, "That's strange. Why didn't Paul just send two text messages with Tychicus? We'll find the answer to that question as we continue our study.

Well, we've answered our first question—Who? We've learned a little about the setting: a text message from Paul to the Philemon family in Colossae and the church in their home, hand delivered by a man named Onesimus. Now let's turn our attention to our second question—What? That is the text message all about? Paul continues in verses 3-8: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment

of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.”

This text message to the Philemon family begins with some very affirming and encouraging words, doesn't it? And Paul means every word he has written. But Paul also knows that Philemon and his family are facing a major challenge even as they are reading the first part of this text message because they have just reconnected with the person who delivered the text message—Onesimus!

Why are they facing such a challenge? Let's continue reading with verses 7-16. “Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ—I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me. I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary. For perhaps he departed for a while for this *purpose*, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.”

Did you figure out who Onesimus was? He was Philemon's runaway slave! The text message doesn't tell us how long it had been since Onesimus ran away from

his master's house in Colossae, but it was long enough to make it to Rome, eventually connect with Paul, come to faith in Christ, and agree to return with an inspired text message from Paul. You might infer from verse 18 that Onesimus not only ran away from his master's house, but he may have also taken some of the Philemon family's possessions when he left! Paul says to Philemon, "if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account."

How do you think Philemon is feeling as he reads Paul's text message? What thoughts are racing through his mind? The punishment for being a runaway slave, according to Roman law, was death. And Onesimus not only ran away; he took some of the family possessions with him! But Paul is appealing to Philemon to not only waive the death penalty, but to accept Onesimus as a beloved brother. Doesn't that sound outrageous? It certainly doesn't sound fair. No wonder Paul started out with some encouraging words! In fact, that was standard Greek and Roman rhetoric. Build rapport, persuade, and then move the heart! Paul has some persuading to do!

What is Paul's rationale for Philemon to receive his runaway slave as a brother? Let's continue reading verses 17-25. "If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. But if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account. I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay—not to mention that you owe me even your own self besides."

Paul brought Philemon the good news about Jesus Christ and Paul is saying, "We have all found a new life in Jesus Christ. We are all brothers in Christ Jesus! Since we have all been shown amazing grace by God, let's show grace to each other!

Verse 20: “Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord. Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.” In other words, when you think about how much grace God has shown to you, you show grace in abundance to your runaway slave Onesimus! “But meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.” Did Paul really think he would be able to visit Philemon again? I don’t know, but it certainly helped Philemon to focus on what Paul was saying. After all, Paul might stop by to check up on him!

It must not have been an easy decision for Philemon to accept Onesimus back. He had to give up the right to see justice measured out. He even had to give up the right to ever get his slave back! But when we think about how much grace God has shown to us, we must show grace to one another!

Paul closes his text message with some greetings: “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”

Did you notice that Mark was with Paul there in Rome? There was a time when Paul didn’t show much grace to Mark. Paul and Barnabas had taken John Mark with them on their first missionary journey, but Mark got homesick by the time they got to Perga in Pamphylia and he headed back to Jerusalem. When it was time for their second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to give John Mark a second chance. We find the story in Acts 15:37-40a. “.....”

Later the apostle Paul would regret that graceless behavior. After all, didn't the Lord Jesus give Saul a second chance? Didn't God show grace to Him? When Saul was struck down on the Damascus Road in his encounter with the Risen Christ, I'm sure that Saul thought he was a dead man, but Jesus showed grace to him. Jesus gave him another chance.

Paul has learned his lesson and he shares this truth in his inspired text message to Philemon: Since God has shown such grace to each one of us, let us show grace to each other!

I saw a beautiful example of showing grace during my recent meetings in Vancouver, WA. A couple planned to give their testimony on Friday evening. The husband had developed an inappropriate relationship with another woman and eventually left his wife with two children in their early teens. His wife decided to hold on to Jesus and claim His promises for new life. She was led to the story of The couple was separated for almost two years but now they have reunited! On Friday evening, the husband renewed his commitment to Christ through baptism with his wife standing by his side. While still in the baptistery, they renewed their marriage vows! What a snapshot of grace! But someone might say, "That's not fair! That scoundrel left his wife. He mistreated her." You're right. He didn't deserve such grace and neither do any of us. But God has shown such grace to us—we ought to show grace to each other.

You may not face a crisis of that magnitude this week, but someone may test your limits. A family member may be having a bad day, and human reasoning might

suggest that you “let them have it” but pause for a moment and remember that God has shown grace to you—show grace to those around you. Someone may cut you off in traffic on the way to work or on the way to the store and you may have an instant rise in blood pressure! But before you unleash a tirade of hostility remember that God has shown grace to you—show grace to those around you. Someone at work may be storming around like a bear with a sore foot. Her behavior may have more to do with her own family problems than anything you’ve done. Before you cut her off at the knees either verbally or silently in your head remember that God has shown grace to you—show grace to those around you.

That’s a take away lesson from Paul’s inspired text message to the Philemon family! God has shown grace to you—show grace to those around you.

INSPIRED TEXT MESSAGES – Part 2

TEXT MESSAGE FROM JOHN

Dr. Derek Morris

- Preaching passage: 2 John
- Subject: What the text message was that the presbyter sent to the chosen lady and her children
- Complement: love each other in the truth
- Exegetical idea: The presbyter encouraged the chosen lady and her children to walk in the truth in love.
- Preaching idea: Walk in love, and walk in the truth, like Jesus.
- Purpose: To remind my hearers that God wants us to walk in love and walk in the truth like Jesus and to encourage them to do so.

I got a text message during last week's sermon from someone sitting in the congregation. Just one word: "Hi!" He wanted me to know that text messaging really works, even in church! In part 1 of our series on Inspired Text Messages, we considered the text message that Paul, prisoner of Christ Jesus, sent to Philemon. You can hear that message by going to www.forestlakechurch.org and click on Visit the Sermon Archives. By the way, I had a chance to practice what I preached before the sun went down. Do you remember the key thought from part 1 of our Inspired Text Messages series? Since God has shown grace to you, show grace to each other!

Today we're going to examine the another inspired text message, which also happens to be the shortest book in the Bible—that is if you count the Psalms as one book rather than a collection of 150 text messages. Otherwise Psalm 117 with just two sentences is the shortest inspired text message of all!

The inspired text message that we are going to study today is found just

before the book of Revelation: it's called 2 John. We're going to ask the same 3 questions that we asked in part 1 of our series on Inspired Text Messages: Who? What? and So What? You should have received a copy of this inspired text message with your bulletin. It looks like this. (hold up handout).

Let's begin with our first question—Who? Who is the sender of this inspired text message and who is the recipient? We start our search for the answer to that question by reading verse 1. “The elder, to the chosen lady and her children...”

Who is “the elder” referenced at the beginning of this inspired text message? You say, “That's easy! At the top of the page in my Bible it says 2nd John—so the author is John.” You may be right about that! But remember that the header is not part of the original text. The earliest manuscripts of this inspired text message do have the following header: Johannes β, or 2nd John. While this header was supplied by a scribe at a later date, it indicates that the early Christian community recognized John the apostle as the author of this inspired text message—but he never specifically identifies himself.

This we do know—the author of 2nd John is the same person who wrote 3rd John. Both inspired text messages begin with the words “the elder.” They also have very similar language, especially in the closing comment: 2 John v.12 reads “I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face so that our joy may be complete.” 3 John v.13 is almost identical. So these two inspired text messages are almost certainly written by the same author, who identifies himself as “the elder.”

What caused the early Christian community to link “the elder,” the author of

the inspired text messages known as 2nd and 3rd John, with the apostle John? Nowhere in the gospel of John or in 1st John does the John refer to himself as “the elder.” Rather, John cryptically refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” However, the themes of love and truth found in 2nd and 3rd John are very prominent in all of the writings of the apostle John. The Gospel of John and 2 John also speak of a commandment to love. It is likely that the aged apostle John writes as one who is so well known in the Christian community that he does not even need to mention his name. He is simply “the elder”—a term not primarily referring to age but to standing in the Christian community. Even those who question John’s authorship of the inspired text message of 2 John recognize that this correspondence is strongly linked to John and suggest that 2nd and 3rd John, if not written by John, may have been written by one of John’s disciples.

What about “the chosen lady” to whom the inspired text message is sent? Who is she? Several suggestions have been made. Someone has suggested that Eklekta, the Greek word translated “chosen” is actually her name! In other words, “The Elder, to a lady named Eklekta!”—but this is highly unlikely because at the end of inspired text message “the children of her chosen (eklekta) sister send their greetings. They can’t all be named Eklekta! Others have suggested that this inspired text message was written to a woman named Kyria, the Greek word translated “lady.” That’s not impossible. Kyria was a woman’s name. Perhaps “the elder” wrote this inspired text message to an elect, or chosen, lady named Kyria.

A third suggestion, and in my opinion the one which makes the most sense is that this is an inspired text message sent not to an individual but rather to a local

Christian community, a local Christian church, a woman being the symbol of the church. We have many other examples of inspired text messages being sent to an entire Christian church, like Paul's inspired text messages to Theassalonians, or Philippians, or Colossians. The elder John's place of residence is not mentioned, but according to the testimony of early Church Fathers, the apostle John spent the closing years of his life with the Christian community in Ephesus. The "children of your chosen sister" who send their greetings at the conclusion of this inspired text message would be the members of the Christian community in Ephesus.

So we have tried to answer the Who? Question: the aged apostle John, or perhaps one of his disciples, to an unnamed Christian community.

What is the content of this inspired text message? Read the first three verses of this inspired text message with me, and listen for some key words: "The elder, to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth—and not I only, but also all who know the truth—because of the truth which lives in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love."

Did you hear some key words repeated over and over again? You're right! Truth and love. Whatever "the elder" is talking about, it has something to do with truth and love. Let's keep reading. Let's all read together, beginning with verse 4: "It has given me great joy to find some of your children in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the

beginning, his command is that you walk in love.”

There again we see truth and love linked together. Walk in the truth; walk in love. These words remind us of the teaching of the apostle John in another inspired text message—1 John. Listen to his testimony in 1 John 1:6: “If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.” And again in 1 John 2:4-6: “The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”

Doesn’t that remind you of the words of “the elder” in 2nd John? Walk in the truth and walk in love—truth and love inextricably linked together. Why is the aged apostle making such a strong point about love and truth being inextricably linked together? The answer is found in verses 7-11. “Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is a deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.”

Apparently, false teachers were coming to this Christian community promoting the idea that the Son of God never really became flesh. He just appeared to us. That heresy was called Docetism and it was prevalent at the end of the first

century AD when the aged apostle was writing this inspired text message. I'm sure that those false teachers weren't saying, "We need to hate God and hate each other!" No! They sounded good: "Let's just love God and love each other. We don't need to believe what the Scriptures teach. We don't need to take it literally that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.' Let's just love God and love each other!"

But "the elder" says, No! Those are deceivers, opposed to Christ. Don't even welcome such people into your house. Walking in love and walking in the truth go together. Don't ever separate the two. Those who love Jesus will walk in His truth. Those who walk in the truth will love each other.

John the elder concludes with these words: "I have much to write to you, but I'm running out of papyrus!" Well, not exactly, though some suggest that the brief text messages of 2nd John and 3rd John were about the length to fit on a standard sheet of papyrus. "I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete."

That reminds me of Paul's words in his inspired text message to Philemon: "Prepare a guest room for me." John the elder is intending to visit and see that his children are indeed walking in the truth and walking in love—truth and love, hand in hand.

What relevance does this inspired text message have for our lives today? Or to ask our 3rd question—So What? Well, let me ask you a question: Has anyone ever told you that we don't have to live in harmony with all of the teachings of God's Word anymore—we just have to love God and love each other? Has anyone ever

told you that we don't need to keep the commandments of God anymore—we just need to love?

Many years ago, when I was growing up as a young lad in the south of England, there were some slightly older young lads in Liverpool who became quite popular. Perhaps you've heard of them. They were called the Beatles. One of their early songs went like this: "All you need is love, all you need is love, all you need is love, love, love is all you need! Love, love, love, love is all you need." In one way, they were absolutely right, and in another way they were dead wrong. Love is all you need, as long as that love is guided by the truth. And the truth that "the elder John" is talking about is not an abstract concept. That truth is a Person! Jesus boldly declared in John 14:6, "I am the Way, I am the Truth, and I am the Life." And the apostle John declared in John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Love is all we need, as long as that love is guided by the truth as it is revealed in Jesus. Do you want a simple rule by which to live? Walk in love, guided by Jesus. Walk in love, guided by the truth of His Word. Walk in love, believing that Jesus is all He claimed to be. Walk in love like Jesus.

I'd like you to think for a moment about a story in the life of Jesus that illustrates walking in love and walking in the truth. If one comes to mind, you can either send me a text message or an e-mail: 407-488-4018 or dmorris@forestlakechurch.org, or you can use the old fashioned method and raise your hand!

Jesus with the children – Mark 10:13-16

Jesus with the woman caught in adultery – John 8:1-11

Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus – John 11

I heard a wonderful illustration a few months ago out here in the parking lot of walking in love like Jesus. I'm still trying to recall who told me the story, so if you're listening and it's you, call me or send me a text message! These are the details as I remember them. The setting was a women's prayer group. A young lady expressed her need for some reliable transportation and asked for prayer. The group prayed, asking for God's leading and blessing. While driving home, one of the older ladies in the group was struck by this brief thought. "It's your turn!" What did that mean? "It's your turn!" She was almost home when she remembered that as a young woman someone had shown love and care for her by providing a car for her for \$1. "OK, Lord, I get it! It's my turn!" The older lady made a u-turn and drove to the home of this young woman who had made the prayer request at the women's group just a few minutes earlier. She knocked on her door, smiled, and said, "I have a car that I want to sell you." "Oh, that's a beautiful car. I couldn't afford that car!" "Sure you could," the older lady replied. It's only \$1!"

That, my friends, is walking in love! That is walking in love like Jesus. You see, Jesus didn't just give us some reliable transportation for \$1. He gave us redemption, forgiveness of sins, cleansing, eternal life, as a free gift. I want to reflect that amazing love in the way that I live, don't you? The text message from "the elder" to the chosen lady and her children has one short powerful idea: walk in love and walk in the truth, like Jesus. Let's go and live like that!

INSPIRED TEXT MESSAGES – Part 3

TEXT MESSAGE FROM JAMES

Dr. Derek Morris

- Preaching passage: James 1:1, 2:14-26
- Subject: What the heart of the text message was that James sent to the twelve tribes scattered abroad
- Complement: how you live is evidence whether your faith is living or dead.
- Exegetical idea: James reminded the twelve tribes scattered abroad that how you live is evidence whether your faith is living or dead.
- Preaching idea: God wants you to have a living connection with Him.
- Purpose: To encourage my hearers to have a living connection with Jesus which will be seen in the way that they live.

A man of God, for whom I have the utmost respect, would have preferred us to omit a text message from James from our series on Inspired Text Messages. No, I'm not talking about Pastor Dany Hernandez! The man of God who would have omitted a text message from James was an apostate Augustian Friar named Martin Luther. The great Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, had a real problem with the text message that James sent to the twelve tribes scattered abroad. In fact, he referred to it as "an epistle of straw!"

Martin Luther was not alone in his suspicion of this text message from James. The church historian Eusebius, writing in the early 4th century placed this text message from James with the Antilegomena or the contested writings. Jerome gave a similar appraisal but noted that with time it had been universally accepted as part of the NT canon. Not until late in the 4th century was the text message from James formally listed as part of the 27 books that comprise the New Testament canon.

This is part 3 of our series on Inspired Text Messages. We have considered a text message from Paul to Philemon, reminding us that since God has shown grace to us, we ought to show grace to each other. We have examined a text message from John, the elder, warning us against deception and reminding us that walking in love and walking in the truth go hand in hand.

Today we're going to examine a text message from James—well actually, we're going to examine a portion of the text message from James—it was truncated due to size!

Let's start with James 1:1 as we ask our first question: Who? Who was the sender of this inspired text message and who was the recipient? At first glance the identity of the sender seems easy to find. What is the first word of this inspired text message? James. But then we have a follow-up question. Which James? The name Jacobos was very common in Palestine. We have several key followers of Jesus by that name: James, son of Zebedee, James son of Alphaeus, both disciples of Jesus, and James the brother of our Lord.

Whichever James this is writing the inspired text message, he is well known. He doesn't need to give his family lineage. His audience knows exactly who this is. So which James is it? We can eliminate James, son of Zebedee, the brother of John. According to Acts 12:2, this James was put to death with the sword by King Herod Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great. This occurred in around 44 AD.

Which of the two remaining James' was most widely known among the Jewish Christians. We find a clue in the testimony of Paul, recorded in Galatians

1:18-19. “.....” The leadership of James, the brother of our Lord, in the Christian community in Jerusalem is evidenced by this comment at the council in Jerusalem in 49 AD, recorded by Dr. Luke in Acts 15:12-13. “.....”

The leadership of James, the brother of our Lord, among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, and the fact that this inspired text message is sent to the twelve tribes scattered abroad has led many to conclude that the author of this text message is James, the brother of Jesus. James had already sent one inspired text message to the Gentile Christians. The contents of that inspired text message is found in Acts 15:23-29.

Now James, the brother of our Lord, sends an inspired text message to Jewish believers. If the author of this inspired text message is indeed James, the brother of our Lord, why doesn't he clearly say so at the beginning of his text message? He simply introduces himself as “James, of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ a servant, or a slave.” When Jesus was growing up in the home of Joseph, James, his older stepbrother, along with the other stepbrothers Joseph, Simon and Judas, was always trying to tell Jesus what to do. Even during the ministry of Jesus, the brothers of Jesus were trying to exercise their authority over Him. Only in the upper room, after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus to heaven, do we find James and the other stepbrothers of Jesus openly confessing their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

So now as James sends out an inspired text message he doesn't try to establish his authority. Rather, he emphasizes the authority of Jesus! James, a servant of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To whom is James sending this text message? “To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.” This inspired text message is clearly intended for a Jewish audience, and specifically for Jewish Christians. The word “scattered” is a technical term, the Diaspora. It refers to the dispersion of the Jewish people, particularly during the time of the exiles in the 8th century BC when the Assyrians deported the 10 northern tribes to various parts of their Assyrian empire and the exile in the 6th century BC when the Babylonians took captives from Judah in the south, including Daniel and his three friends and brought them as prisoners of war back to Babylon.

At the end of the 70 years of Babylonian captivity, many of the Jews chose not to return to Palestine. Jews also migrated south to Egypt and established colonies there. By the first century AD, when James was writing this inspired text message, the number of Jews in the Diaspora numbered about 4.5 million in about 150 Jewish colonies outside of Palestine. It was to these Jewish brothers, and particularly to Jewish Christians in those colonies, that James addressed his inspired text message.

Many types of greetings are recorded in Scripture: “God be gracious to you”, “The LORD be with you”, “Peace be to this house,” “Grace and peace to you.” James uses a more formal introduction: “Greetings!” No specific names are mentioned. No expressions of warm affection. Just “Greetings!” James was writing to a broad audience of Jewish believers, some of whom he knew and but many of whom he had never met.

It would take a series of messages to unpack the entire contents of this inspired text message that James, brother of our Lord, wrote to Jewish believers

around the world. However, today we are going to focus on a core portion of this inspired text message: James 2:14-26. “.....”

What is James saying here? Well let’s start by asserting what James is not saying? James is not saying that salvation is earned by our works. The other inspired text messages, particularly by Paul, are very clear on this point. Ephesians 2:8-9 “.....” And if that is clear enough for you, listen to the testimony of Paul to the Galatian Christians, recorded in Galatians 2:16-17, 21. “.....”

James does not contradict the clear teaching of Scripture. Salvation is not earned by our works. That is NOT what James is saying in the core teaching of his inspired text message. Then what is James saying? Simply this: Our works of righteousness, the way that we live as followers of Jesus, is evidence that we have a living faith! We can talk all we want to about faith, but if our lives contradict what we profess with our mouths, our faith is dead.

When James says in chapter 2:26, “faith without deeds is dead,” he means dead—not just less than ideal. Faith without deeds is dead! The word in the Greek translated “dead” is nekros, from which we get the English word necrotic. Dead! Decaying! Stinking! You can talk about faith all you want, but unless your life bears witness of your faith, you don’t have a living faith. You have a dead faith.

When I was teaching at Southern Adventist University, I had an experience that I will never forget. I came into my home one day, and there was a terrible odor. No, it wasn’t me! At least I didn’t think it was me. I smelled under my armpits. No.

I hadn't eaten anything that had upset my GI! No. It wasn't me, but the smell was almost unbearable. It seemed to be located in our rec room downstairs. My wife came downstairs and helped me with the search for the smell! You say, "Why would anyone want to search for the source of a bad odor?" We wanted to get that odor out of our house. We thought maybe someone had brought something stinky in on their shoes. We crawled around on our hands and knees, smelling the carpet. No! Finally I crawled over by an electrical outlet and inhaled through my nose! Arrghh! "I found it!" A necrotic electrical outlet. I went to get my screwdriver, and latex gloves, and a mask. I was prepared. When I took off the plate covering the electrical outlet, there was a mouse, at least the head of a mouse, its necrotic eyes staring at me! I almost vomited right there! The stench was unbearable. Some of you have already guessed that happened. The mouse was trying to get through the wall and nibbled on the hot wire. Zappo! Dead! And over time, stinking!

I won't go into all of the details of how hard it was to get that necrotic mouse out of my wall. You don't want to know. But when I read that faith without deeds is dead, I can still smell that necrotic mouse in my wall!

The So What? question seems to have a simple answer: Just as the Jewish Christians in the Diaspora needed a living faith, we also need a living faith. Dead faith stinks, like a white-washed tomb filled with dead men's bones. We need a living faith. A living faith in what? James tells us in his opening remark: a living faith in God in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And how do we have a living faith? By having a living connection with God

and with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. When you accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of all in your life, when you surrender completely to Him, everything changes. The way that you live bears witness that you have a living connection with Jesus. Your actions bear witness that you have a living faith.

This past weekend, my friend Will won a trophy in the FLEC 5K. Will, come up here and bring your trophy with you. Will, it wasn't that many months ago that you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and you confessed your faith in Jesus through baptism. How has your life changed since that day?

(Will shares his testimony)

You told me that before you committed your life to Jesus, you couldn't even run half a mile, even if your life depended on it. Now you're winning trophies. Now I have a question for you. Is Will earning his salvation by the way he is caring for his body as a temple of God's Spirit? No. What can we learn from the way that Will is caring for his body? That he has a living faith!

Will, have you sinned since you were baptized? Would you like to list the specific sins that you have committed? No, you don't need to tell us. You only need to tell Jesus. If you have a living connection with Jesus, if you have a living faith, and you mess up, what do you do? We find the answer in another inspired text message, written by the apostle John: "If we confess our sins....." 1 John 1:9

How does it feel to have a living faith, a living connection with Jesus?

I praise God that Will in growing in grace and in a knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I praise God that Will has a living faith. Aren't you thankful for that today!

God wants you to have a living connection with Him—a living connection with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit. God want you to have a living faith, and the way that you live, your works, will bear witness of that living faith.

Have you watched the Gospel of John on DVD yet? Have you loaded the Gospels onto your iPod? Did you get the NT on CD so that you can saturate your mind with the words of Jesus? Nurture that living connection with Jesus. Don't be preoccupied with your behavior. Focus on that living connection, that living faith. When the connection is there, your works, your behavior, your life will bear witness that you have a living faith!

INSPIRED TEXT MESSAGES – Part 4

TEXT MESSAGE FROM JUDE

Dr. Derek Morris

- Preaching passage: Jude
- Subject: What the heart of the text message was that Jude sent to those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ
- Complement: no matter what challenges they face, God is able to deliver them and to save them.
- Exegetical idea: Jude told those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ that no matter what challenges they face, God is able to deliver them and to save them.
- Preaching idea: God is able to carry you through!
- Purpose: To remind my hearers that God is able to deliver them and to save them.

More than 50 years ago, a young evangelist named Paul Paino was holding meetings in a rural community on the island of Jamaica. That's where he first heard a song that he would take with him for the rest of his life, a song that would impact the lives of millions of Christians around the world. It sounded like this: "He's able, He's able, I know He's able. I know my Lord is able to carry me through!" If you know it, sing along. "He's able, he's able, I know He's able, I know my Lord is able to carry me through. He healed the broken hearted and set the captive free. He made the lame to walk again and caused the blind to see. He's able, He's able, I know He's able, I know my Lord is able to carry me through." Paul Paino never discovered who wrote that song, but I'm fairly certain that the unnamed songwriter had also read the inspired text message that we are going to study today!

This is part 4 in our series on Inspired Text Messages. We have studied a text message from Paul to Philemon, and we learned that since God has shown such grace to us, we should show grace to one another! We studied a text message from the elder John to the chosen lady and her children and learned that walking in love and walking in the truth go hand in hand. Last time we studied a text message from James to the twelve tribes scattered abroad and we learned that God wants us to have a living faith that comes from a living connection with Him and changes everything.

Today we are going to study an inspired text message from Jude, and we'll discover that God is able, He's able to carry us through! I invite you to take the insert from your bulletin as we ask our first question: Who? Who is the author of this inspired text message, and who are the recipients? Let's take a look at the first part of verse 1. "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James." I understand why Jude would begin by saying that he is a servant of Jesus Christ but why would Jude mention his brother's name? Any ideas? Why would he say "a brother of James"? Apparently, his brother James was well known in the Christian community. For example, when the apostle John records the story of Andrew's first meeting with Jesus, he says in John 1:40, "Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus." And again in John 6:8, "Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up." When you have a very famous sibling, you might mention his name, you might mention her name!

So who is the famous "James" in the Christian community? You say, "We

studied about James, the brother of our Lord, in part 3 of this series on Inspired Text Messages! James, the brother of our Lord, was the leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem. Matthew tells us that James had a brother named Judas, which can be shortened to Jude. If that's the Jude, brother of James, who authored this inspired text message, then he was also a brother of our Lord—but Jude didn't need to say that. When he said, "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James" everyone in the Christian community knew who he was! This inspired text message was probably written between 50-60 AD. We'll discuss the dating of this text message a little more in part 5 of our series when we examine a text message from Peter.

This inspired text message from Jude, brother of our Lord, was intended for a general audience. Notice how Jude addresses the intended recipients of this inspired text message: "to those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ." I believe that the entire message of Jude is summed up right there! Loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ! Wasn't that the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane? John 17:11, 15 "Holy Father, protect them, keep them, by the power of Your name....My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." This inspired text message is sent from Jude, brother of our Lord, to those who have been called, that's the church, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ.

Verse 2. "Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance." What a wonderful greeting! I don't know much about Jude, but just from this greeting I want to meet him! Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance. That's a lot warmer than what his brother James said: "Greetings!" Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance!

What about our second question? What? What is the content of this inspired text message sent by Jude, the brother of our Lord, to all believers? Verse 3. “Dear friends,” or perhaps a better translation would be “dearly loved ones”—agapetoi, from the verb agapao and the noun agape—“Dearly loved ones.” Let’s keep reading in verse 3. “

Jude says, “I would prefer to just write to you about the salvation we share!” I’d like to just sing “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine, O what a foretaste of glory divine. Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of His Spirit, washed in His blood. This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.” But Jude is impressed by the Spirit of God to urge believers to “contend for the faith”. That’s a strong word—“contend”. Do we have any other translations? This verb is only used one time in the entire New Testament—right here. It’s the Greek verb *επαγωνιζομαι*. Doesn’t that sound intense to you? *επαγωνιζομαι* That sounds like the English word “agonize”.

Why do the saints need to “contend for the faith”? Let’s keep reading Jude’s inspired text message. Verse 4. “

Do you remember that John the elder reminded us that walking in love and walking in the truth go hand in hand? It sounds like Jude is aware of godless men who are also saying “all we need to do is love each other—we don’t need to walk in the truth as it is in Jesus.”

Jude continues: Verse 5-11. “

You might do some further study this afternoon. I’ve told you before that it’s important to know the great stories of the Bible. Read the Bible stories to your children. Read them for yourselves. Read

about the way of Cain. Read about Balaam's error. Read about the rebellion of Korah. They have one thing in common: they all wanted to go their own way rather than follow God's way.

Jude continues to describe these godless men who have come in to the Christian community. Verse 12-19 "....."

Such godless people were present in the Christian community in the 1st century, and such godless people are present even in the 21st century. They slip in among true followers of Jesus and try to lead people astray. What should we do? Jude gives us some solid counsel, inspired by the Spirit of God. Verse 20. "But dear friends, dearly loved ones,"

Practical counsel. Build yourselves up in your most holy faith—study God's Word for yourself, get involved in an interactive Bible study group, go to church where Jesus is lifted up and the Word of God is clearly taught—build yourselves up in your most holy faith. Pray in the Holy Spirit—we're studying about the ministry of the Holy Spirit at our House of Prayer every Wednesday evening. I was so blessed this past Wednesday evening. Showers of blessing fell as we prayed in the Holy Spirit. You can pray in the Holy Spirit at all times, in your personal devotions, in your family worship time, as you drive to work, as you wait on hold for the next phone call. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you eternal life—set the Lord always before you. Stay focused in the midst of all of the distractions of this world. Keep yourselves in God's love. Make your next DVD the Gospel of John rather than a Sci-Fi action movie. There are

so many distractions. Stay focused on the love of God. Verse 22-23 “Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.”

That’s some solid counsel, isn’t it? Read that again later today. Read it again this week. But don’t stop there. You might feel overwhelmed by the thought of what those godless people might try to do to you, dragging you away from your most holy faith.

Let’s read on, because we’ll discover that God is able, He’s able, I know He’s able, I know my Lord is able to carry me through!” Verse 24-25

“.....”

A year and 7 months ago, God worked a tremendous miracle in Kevin’s life. This church family had the privilege of being used by God to snatch Kevin from the fire. It’s been a journey since that Wednesday evening, 19 months ago, but Kevin has agreed to share his testimony today that God is able to carry us through.

Kevin, tell us about that Wednesday, 19 months ago when you came to the campus of the Forest Lake Church?

What are some experiences that you’ve been through that have demonstrated that God is able to keep you from falling?

What message would you give to those who are listening today?

That unknown songwriter in rural Jamaica spoke the truth, my friends. He’s able, He’s able, I know He’s able, I know my Lord is able to carry me through. He healed the broken hearted and set the captives free. He made the lame to walk

again and caused the blind to see. He's able, He's able, I know He's able, I know my Lord is able to carry me through.

Do you know that He's able? Have you experienced His keeping power in your life? Then praise Him today. Bless the name of Jesus today. Give thanks to our Father in Heaven today. Express your appreciation to the Holy Spirit today. Thank God that He is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy!

If you haven't yet experienced this truth in your own life, that God is able to carry you through, that God is able to keep you from falling, I urge you to cry out to Him today, cry out to the God who loves you, and just see what He will do.

Stay connected with a Christian community, build yourselves up in your most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit at all times, keep yourselves in the love of God, extend mercy and peace and love to those around you, and most of all rejoice that God is able to carry you through!

INSPIRED TEXT MESSAGES – Part 5

TEXT MESSAGE FROM PETER

Dr. Derek Morris

- Preaching passage: 2 Peter 1:1-2, 3:1-18
- Subject: What the heart of the text message was that Simon Peter sent to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.
- Complement: grow in grace as they wait for the certain return of Jesus.
- Exegetical idea: Simon Peter told those those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours to grow in grace as they wait for the certain return of Jesus.
- Preaching idea: God wants you to grow in grace while you wait for the certain return of Jesus in glory.
- Purpose: To remind my hearers that the return of Jesus is certain and that we should grow in grace as we wait for that blessed day.

It wouldn't be right to do a series on Inspired Text Messages and not include an inspired text message from Peter. After all, in spite of his fumbblings and failings, Peter is listed first on each of the lists of the 12 apostles. Peter was undoubtedly considered one of the pillars of the Christian church.

Two inspired text messages bear his name. We are going to look at the shorter one today—2 Peter. Do you remember the 3 questions that we are going to ask? Who? What? So What?

The answer to the "Who?" question seems obvious. The inspired text message which bears the heading 2 Peter starts with these words: "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ." By including both his proper name, Simon, and the name that was given to him by Jesus, Peter, the author seems to leave no doubt

as to his identity. He is Simon Peter, brother of Andrew, one of the 12 apostles. He points out in 2 Peter 3:1 that “this is my second letter to you” and he refers to another key leader in the Christian church, the apostle Paul, as “our dear brother Paul” 2 Peter 3:15.

So at first reading, the answer to the question who authored this inspired text message seems obvious: Simon Peter, one of the 12 apostles. But a number of Bible scholars challenge that assumption. Why, you might ask. Well, the vocabulary in 1 Peter and 2 Peter are drastically different. These two texts messages have only 100 words in common. 599 words are unique, either found only in one or only in the other. Now it’s true that the subject matter is different in each of these text messages, and so you should expect some different words, but only 100 common words when they are supposedly written by the same author? 2 Peter also includes 57 words that are only found in 2 Peter. We call those hapaxlegomena—single occurrence words. 32 of those 57 unique NT words don’t even occur in the LXX, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

But before you discard this text message as the work of Simon Peter, one of the 12 apostles, let me point out that both letters have the same greeting: “Grace and peace to you in abundance” (1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2). In both letters, God’s patience is the basis for His postponement of judgment. (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 3:9) While there are distinct differences in vocabulary between 1 Peter and 2 Peter, both text messages also includes the same words that are used rarely or not at all in other parts of the NT—words like godliness or virtue and manner of life. And both letters also encourages the reader to grow—“grow up in your salvation” 1 Peter 2:2 and to

“grow in grace.” 2 Peter 3:18

What about all the unique vocabulary? Certainly the topic is different, so you can expect some different words. Perhaps Peter did some extra reading in his old age and increased his vocabulary! More likely, he had the assistance of a scribe. Peter was inspired by the Holy Spirit to share a message with fellow Christians and it was certainly not inappropriate for him to utilize a scribe or a writing assistant to help him with that assignment.

Personally, I’m going to stick with Simon Peter, one of the 12 apostles as the author of this inspired text message. Who are the intended recipients of this second inspired text message from Peter? “Those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.” That includes all of us who have believed in Jesus and accepted Him as our personal Savior and Lord.

So we have answered the “Who?” question—Simon Peter, perhaps with a little scribal assistance, to every follower of Jesus. Let’s turn our attention to our second question: What? What is the content of this inspired text message. Well, if you read the whole text message, there are some similar themes to the text message sent by Jude. I’m convinced that Peter had access to Jude’s text message and reaffirmed some of Jude’s warnings about false teachers. The unique part of Peter’s text message that I want to focus on with you today begins in 2 Peter 3:1-4

“.....”

This text message was written a little more than 30 years after the death,

resurrection and ascension of Jesus to heaven. People were getting restless. “Where is the ‘coming’ He promised?” We ought to show some patience and mercy to those today who struggle because *we’ve* been waiting for almost 2000 years! Don’t be too hard on your friends who are skeptics. By the way, there is a difference between a skeptic and a scoffer. A skeptic is struggling with honest questions. A scoffer is an antagonist. Show patience and mercy toward those who are struggling with the apparent delay in the return of Jesus. If we’re honest with ourselves today, we would have to admit that most of us probably have times when we struggle with the apparent delay in the return of Jesus. I say “apparent delay” because there is no evidence that His return isn’t right on schedule. We are so time bound, but how does Peter describe the Lord’s relationship to time? 2 Peter 3:8

“.....” That’s not an equation—1 day = 1000 years. How do we know that? Because the next phrase says “a thousand years are like a day.” In other words, the Lord views “time” differently from the way that we view time. He is from everlasting to everlasting. His purposes know no haste and no delay. It’s true, in Peter’s day and in our day we’ll meet skeptics and even scoffers who say “where is this ‘coming’ He promised?”

How should we respond to that question? The same way that Peter responded in 2 Peter 3:10. “But the day of the Lord WILL COME.” Jesus spoke clearly about His return in glory on numerous occasions. He is either a lunatic, totally out of touch with reality, a malicious deceiver, presenting a message that he knows will never be fulfilled, or He is speaking the truth as Messiah, Son of God, Savior of the world.

I choose to believe the words of Jesus because I believe that Jesus was not a lunatic or a malicious deceiver. I believe that Jesus was who He claimed to be, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. And I believe that His words about His return in glory are true. “The day of the Lord will come,” Peter tells us. What does Peter mean when he says that the day of the Lord will come like a thief? Will the return of Jesus be secret? Some would answer “Yes!” There will be a secret rapture of the saints. But Jesus clearly taught Peter and the other disciples that “as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.” Matthew 24:27 That doesn’t sound secret. But in that same discourse, Jesus also speaks about his coming like a thief in the night. His coming is not secret, but it is a surprise—not that we are not expecting His return, but when it actually happens we will be surprised.

How many of you here believe that Jesus is going to return to this earth in glory? Many of you. How many of you would be surprised if he returned this week? Be honest now. Some of you might say, “Lord, I’m getting married in May! I’ll have to reschedule my wedding!” Or, “Lord, I’ll miss my graduation.” It’s OK. If Jesus returns this week, you won’t worry about what you’re missing. You’ll just be so happy that He’s here. Am I right? You’ll just be so happy that the dead in Christ are going to rise from their graves. Am I right? You’ll just be so happy that there will be no more death, no more pain, no more sickness. Am I right? Peter tells us, in spite of the scoffers, in spite of the apparent delay, the day of the Lord will come.

What about our 3rd question? So What? Peter answers that question for us! 2 Peter 3, beginning with verse 11. “.....”

Don't just try to stay out of trouble as you wait for the glorious return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. "Grow in grace." "Live holy and godly lives." "Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace in him." Are you trying to earn your way to heaven? No! But you want to honor your Lord and Savior.

While we wait for the certain return of Jesus in glory, God wants us to grow in grace. How do we do that? We'll what are the essential ingredients for growth? Here is where I need you to send me a text message! What are the essential ingredients for growth? Nutrition. Rest. A healthy environment. Manageable challenge.

We're growing another avocado tree. Where is this tree currently getting its nutrition? From the pit of the avocado fruit. How long will that source of nutrition be adequate? What needs to happen? It needs to sink its roots deep into the soil. To grow in grace, we need nutrition as well. Where do we get that nutrition? Reading God's Word. Attending a church that teaches the Word of God. Participating in a small group Bible study. Watching presentations on our church website! Downloading messages onto your iPod. If you are going to grow in grace while you are waiting for the certain return of Jesus in glory, you need nutrition.

What else do you need? A healthy environment. If I put this avocado tree in the oven, what would happen? It would die. If I started swinging a machete around just above ground level, what would happen? It would be cut down. In order for something to grow, it needs a healthy environment. In order to grow in grace, you need a healthy environment. What does a healthy environment look like? Send me

a text message in answer to that question. What does a healthy environment look like?

What else do you need for growth to occur? I put down that you need manageable challenge? The challenge of breaking through the seed and pushing up toward the sky helps this tender avocado tree to grow strong. But what would happen if I set the seed in concrete, or put a solid rock on top of it? The challenge would be too great. I've learned that we need manageable challenges to grow. Exercise your muscles, and they grow stronger. Exercise your mind and it grows stronger. No manageable challenge and you remain weak or even die.

In our spiritual lives, we need manageable challenges to grow in grace. What kind of manageable challenges might God allow to come our way? Send me a text message on that one? What manageable challenges might God allow to come our way as we grow in grace while waiting for the certain return of Jesus in glory?

In order for growth to occur, we also need rest. Do plants rest? I don't know the answer to that question. Do plants have a rest cycle as well as a growth cycle? We certainly need rest in order to grow in grace while we wait for the certain return of Jesus in glory. That is what Sabbath is all about—a precious gift of rest. And you can find moments of Sabbath rest all through the week! Take time to rest in God's love, rest in God's mercy, rest in God's grace. That's not being lazy. That's an essential ingredient if you want to grow in grace!

Nutrition, a healthy environment, manageable challenge, rest. God wants you to grow in grace while you wait for the certain return of Jesus in glory.

I've been blessed as I have become a friend and Christian brother of Bruce W. Johnson. Bruce and I met more than a year ago. I've seen him grow in grace in the past year, and I asked him if he would share just a brief testimony with us today.

Bruce: many have seen you singing in the choir. They probably didn't know that you were a Presbyterian elder from the Presbyterian church in Walla Walla, WA! How did you end up at the Forest Lake Church?

How have you grown in grace since you have been part of this church family?

What many of you don't know is that in just a few weeks Bruce is going to become a member here at Forest Lake Church by a profession of his faith in Jesus and his desire to live in harmony with the teachings of Jesus. Bruce, thank you for sharing your testimony today.

I'm thankful that Forest Lake Church can be a place where people can grow in grace as they wait for the certain return of Jesus in glory. I pray that you'll be proactive and find the nutrition that you need, find a healthy environment to grow, accept manageable challenges and take the rest that you need to Jesus.

Remember, God wants you to grow in grace while you wait for the return of Jesus in glory!