

'INTENTIONAL FAITHFULNESS: GRACE SHOULD'VE FIXED IT'

II Timothy 1:3-14

Intro

We live in a world of second guessing...so much so that the second guessing starts before the initial guessing has actually ensued, which I suppose makes it pre-emptive speculation, but why get bogged down in the details: I am sure that someone will be able to pick apart my hypothesis any moment now.

Seriously, and I know that this is a small sample size, but the way that people talk about sports, TV, movies, or politics has forever changed with the ability of the watcher to comment real-time, whether that be via twitter or their social media platform of choice. A play hasn't been completed, a scene is only halfway through, or a political position is hinted at and there are people who are firing off their perspective, which so very often shows up as some variation of, 'you know what you should've done?'

Quick question: how many of you have ever felt like you've been second guessed?

And then the flip side of that coin: how many of you have ever second guessed the actions, or even the intent of the actions, of someone else?

Exactly: it has become part of our norm, and even if it has always been normative in regard to how people respond one another, the speed and the volume at which that second guessing is delivered has most certainly increased. For too many people, those should've have become the guiderails of life.

And no, that is not said from a place of, 'well that sounds all right.'

The reason I make that statement is because those should've have us operating out of a place of deficit where we are always looking at what we or others are doing with a sense of skepticism, perpetually seeing how anything could have been done differently or, at the very least, wondering if there is a better way to have done something.

This second guessing is not the spirit of life that we are called to dwell in...and it is absolutely a reality that was experienced by so many whom we think of as being paragons of faithful living (we are about to hear Paul as he speaks with Timothy who is clearly struggling with some variation of second-guessing).

As you listen to Paul's words, ask yourself, what kind of Spirit is at work in your life? The scripture reads this way.

II Timothy 1:3-14

³ I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. ⁶For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; ⁷for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

⁸ Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us with a holy

calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. ¹¹For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, ¹²and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him. ¹³Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

II Corinthians 12:6-10

Intro

So it's all well and good to recognize Spirit led patterns that are in conflict with how we may be living...but that doesn't lead us to a reality where we are no longer being limited or guided by should've. We still need...healing that will empower us to step forward.

What we are about to hear is a moment when the theologian of the church (Paul) grants us the opportunity to see that he too struggled. As he describes that struggle he is also able to reveal that healing salve that enabled him to move beyond his should've.

Here's the long and the short: God's grace is enough. The scripture reads this way.

II Corinthians 12:6-10

If I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, ⁷even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. ⁸Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, ⁹but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

'Intentional Faithfulness: Grace Should've Fixed It'

I asked a diverse spectrum of our congregation whether or not they had ever felt second guessed, whether they had ever been should on. The looks that I received back (which screamed a silent, 'O yeah') spoke so much louder than the collective weight of their words.

As diverse a group as it was each and every one of us was able to recount more than a few times when that should've weight leaned on us mightily.

The most poignant example? A grown woman, who is very grounded in her faith, literally shuddered as she recalled the quote that her mom would roll out on her as a child: 'Good, better, best. Never let it rest. 'Til your good is better and your better is best.'

She literally shuddered.

As I heard those various reflections what ran through my head is that this shoulding is not tied to a particular generation, culture, or gender. It cuts through every possible demographic. It's a human thing. Each of us have experienced it, and I am comfortable surmising that all of us have participated in doing it to someone else.

And that level of unfortunate familiarity has left many of us operating from a place of perpetually feeling guilty because we are not meeting an expectation that has been set for us by someone else or our own expectation which, in reality, is an amalgamation of expectations that we perceive have been laid upon us...and now we carry them on our own.

Does anyone think that any of these wonderful suppositions fits nicely into the sort of life that is offered up by Jesus in John 10:10, 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full'?

Yeah, neither do I.

But the reality is that the should've, the second guessing, have become so prevalent, or at the very least so influential, for so many, that they end up becoming the road markings that we adhere to as we drive down our respective roads of life.

I have no problem admitting that there are times when those internal voices of critique can be a good thing.

But when those voices of critique become the dominant voice heard and responded to, then life has fallen out of balance and we are, to use the words that Paul used with Timothy, operating through a spirit of fear (of cowardice), instead of a 'spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline'.

But how do we start to move to a place where the should've become more limited, both in regard to how we hear and respond to them, and also more appropriately used in how we necessarily, especially in regard to accountability, levee them upon others?

As we look to scripture, which is intended to be the first and only rule for life, what we are reminded of in a myriad of ways, is what Paul heard from God in regard to the thorn in the flesh that he was unable to rid himself of: 'My grace is sufficient for you.'

Do you hear that?

Do you believe it?

Are you interested in at least beginning to believe it?

Because the unfortunate truth for so many who are counted amongst the populace of churchgoers, and even faithful believers, is that they know the promise, but, at best, they struggle to trust that the promise is for them.

Why?

I think it's at least in part because the should've are that loud.

And here comes the intentionality: we need to remind ourselves, we need to allow those around us to remind us, and we need to remind others, that the grace of God is sufficient to cover, heal, restore, all the should've that could ever be levied.

And yes, I totally appreciate that the step that we need to take to move beyond the regulated life that so many of us are living pretty much just showed up as a should've: I get it.

But if I'm able to hear a should've from God, I am going to give that critique more weight.

What guilt do you carry with you? In regard to what you have done throughout the history of your life, what guilt do you carry with you?

People of God, hear the truth of God: 'My grace is sufficient for you.' No more should've. Carry that guilt no more.

What guilt do you carry with you? In regard to the things that you have left undone, that you feel, or even know, you should have done: what guilt do you carry with you?

People of God, hear the truth of God: 'My grace is sufficient for you.' No more second guessing. Carry that guilt no more.

What guilt do you carry with you? In regard to the doubts that have shown up that have molded and shaped your life: what guilt do you carry with you?

People of God, hear the truth of God: 'My grace is sufficient for you.' Stop looking in the rear-view mirror and leave that guilt in your past and quit bringing it with you in your present because that ends up shaping your future. Carry that guilt no more.

Again, I totally get that is easier said than done...I get it. We started out two weeks ago with the reality of it taking, on average, 66 days to instill a new habit and as many as 254 days. I get it.

And that's why we need to allow that process of stepping further and further away from the should've of our life to become a regular part of our intentional faithfulness. God's grace is sufficient for you. Believe it...just a little bit more...right now...today...all throughout this week and beyond.

Put the should've down and intentional open yourself to faithfully receiving God's freely given grace.

God's grace is sufficient for you...it always will be.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy God, as we look at how people think and respond to one another we are able to see that second guessing, the should've of life, are guiding too many of our lives. That is why it is important to not only be reminded of the promise that Your grace is enough...but intentionally begin to breathe in and breathe out that reality, leaving the should've in the past. Lord, convict us, redeem us, empower us to know that Your grace will always be enough. Lord, let it be so! Amen.