

If Grace Finds A Willing Heart

by Carter Conlon

This sermon from Ephesians chapter 4 emphasizes the transformative power of grace when it finds a willing heart. It delves into the concept of grace being given to us according to Christ's gift, breaking the power of sin and offering eternal and abundant life through Jesus Christ. The message highlights the importance of being willing to receive God's grace and allowing Him to work in our lives to fulfill His purpose for us.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:7, John 3:16, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 7:24, Luke 5:12, Ephesians 1:17, Ephesians 1:20, Ephesians 2:1, John 10:10

Topics: "Transformative Grace", "Willingness to Receive"

Description

This sermon from Ephesians chapter 4 emphasizes the transformative power of grace when it finds a willing heart. It delves into the concept of grace being given to us according to Christ's gift, breaking the power of sin and offering eternal and abundant life through Jesus Christ. The message highlights the importance of being willing to receive God's grace and allowing Him to work in our lives to fulfill His purpose for us.

Transcript

Ephesians chapter 4, please, if you go there in your Bibles, Ephesians chapter 4, my message title is, If Grace Finds a Willing Heart. If Grace Finds a Willing Heart. Now, Father, I thank you with all of my heart, Lord, for the presence of your Holy Spirit in this service today.

I thank you, Lord, for this incredible ocean of your love for every soul of every person that you've gathered who are here with us in person or visiting online. Thank you for the incredible depth of your love that is deeper than our minds can understand it. Would you open our hearts, Lord, and make us willing to let you do the wonderful work that you are more than willing to do inside of us? Would you give me the ability to speak this word today? Would you touch me with your Holy Spirit? Would you override my frailties, O God, and speak to every heart that you've gathered in this house today? Lord, eternity is a very, very long time, and I pray, God, for everyone here in this house that we would all make the right choice to guarantee that our eternity will be spent with you where you are.

Father, I thank you for this with everything in my heart. I praise you and bless you for what you will do this day. In Jesus' name, amen.

Ephesians chapter 4, verses 7 and 8. But to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, he says, when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. Considering that we're celebrating Easter today and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it's so important for us to understand that the moment we're celebrating is a little bit more than just celebrating a dead man coming back to life, which is awesome in itself.

Thank God for that. But the Bible tells us what actually happened when Jesus Christ came back to life, that he broke the power of death. He broke the power of sin.

He destroyed the penalty of sin. He broke the cords that bind every man and woman born into this world to certain types of thinking and behaviors and limitations. He broke all the boundaries, all the barriers that keep us from becoming everything that we are destined to be in God.

He took our captivity captive, in other words, and then poured out gifts unto us. In verse 7, it says, to each one of us, grace was given. Now, grace, by definition, means unearned favor, something we didn't work for.

We can't earn it. We don't deserve it. It's simply just given to us by God.

It also implies that God was willing to give us an ability to do what we're called to do and to be what we are called to be as a person, to break the boundaries, in other words, to pour into us a newness of life, a new heart, a new strength, a new mind, a new future. Thank God for what happened on that cross. Thank God for what happened three days later, for it ushered a way into a new, full, eternal, and abundant life that can only come through Jesus Christ.

He says grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Now, Christ's gift to you and his gift to me that he longs to give us is firstly eternal life. God so loved the world, John said in his gospel, that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish, that means suffer an eternal death or separation from God, but have everlasting life.

That is God's gift to you. It's God's gift to me. We didn't earn it and we don't deserve it.

We can't work our way through to it. We can't do enough good deeds to make our way into the presence of God for eternity. God had to come, blood had to be shed, a sacrifice had to be made to pay the price for the wrong things that you and I have done, so that believing in Christ Jesus, that which separated us from God, which the Bible calls sin, could be washed away and we could be brought back into a right relationship with God and given the guarantee of eternal life.

Hallelujah. I saw a bumper sticker once that said eternal life, don't leave the world without it. Eternal life in heaven with God, eternal life, that means forever.

That means in a place where there's an explosive knowledge that comes into your mind, an ever increasing light, an ever increasing revelation of God, gifts and abilities that would stagger us if we knew what was in store for us. The Bible tells us that our minds can't even conceive what God has in store for us, what God has for us into eternity. Because of the sacrifice of Christ, where he paid the price for our wrong, that is now our future.

If we've opened our heart to that sacrifice and simply admitted that we can't get to heaven on our own, we believe that God sent his son to take our place on a cross to pay the price for the wrong that we do and

have done and will do. And confess with our mouths that he is now our Lord and our Savior. It's as simple as that.

If it's sincere, then the scripture tells us, Jesus himself said, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, saved, saved from an eternity that is darker and worse than anything that your mind can even imagine and brought into an eternity in light and life with God through his son, Jesus Christ, that is more wonderful than anything that your mind can even begin to imagine. Not only is his gift eternal life, but it's an abundant life on this earth. John chapter 10 and verse 10, Jesus said, the thief, that's being the devil, comes to steal and kill and destroy.

He comes to steal your family, comes to kill your future, comes to destroy your happiness. And he spends all day, every day doing that very thing. That's all he's assigned to do, steal, kill and destroy.

But Jesus said, but I have come that you may have life and you may have it more abundantly. Praise be to God. That's why the Bible says if anyone is in Christ, may I turn that around, if Christ is inside anyone, that person becomes a new creation.

The old things in your life pass away, they lose their hold, they might not go overnight, but they lose their right to dominate your future. Praise be to God and you become a new person in Christ. You have a new heart, you have a new home, you have a new future, you have a new mind.

Everything is new. By the measure of Christ's gift, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. In other words, the measure means his ability or willingness to pour out, combined with our ability or willingness to receive.

In the book of Ruth, there was a man who was called a kinsman redeemer. He was this man of incredible wealth, power, resource. And this young girl, Ruth, who really knew that she was in a bad situation, came to him one day and she went down to his feet and said, would you cover me? Would you provide for me? Would you protect me? Would you be my covering for the rest of my life? And it so stirred his heart and she found something in this kinsman redeemer, which is a type of Christ that he was so willing, so willing to cover her, so willing to become her husband as it was that not only did he pledge to do this for her, which of course Christ did when he went to the cross, but he told her, he said, go get your shawl and hold it out.

This was something she kept over her shoulders and held it out and he took measures of barley and he filled up her shawl with barley, which was the food substance of that particular day. And this is what the apostle Paul is talking about. God is willing to give us this incredible grace to become everything that he's destined us to be because of his gift of abundant life, as well as eternal life, according to his willingness to give it to us if we are willing to receive.

All she had to do was go get her shawl and hold it out. Everything else was up to him. All you and I have to do is open our hearts to God and say, Lord, I don't have anything to give to you, but a needy heart and a needy life.

But Lord, if you want to cover me and he looks and he says, I do with all my heart. In Ephesians chapter one and verse 17, listen to what Paul says that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. Paul's basically saying that God would open your eyes, that God would allow you to see verse 18.

He says, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling, that you may understand what you're called to be, that you may know what your life could be, that you may see a future that's deeper, richer, more powerful, more fulfilling than anything that your mind has even conceived that your life could be. Oh God, Paul says that your eyes could be opened. That's the cry of my heart too, as well for everyone in this house today, that we would see that we would understand what God has for us, that we would know his willingness to pour into us everything that is needed to become all that not only his heart, but our hearts have longed for, that you may know what is the hope of his calling and what are the riches, verse 18, chapter one, Ephesians, the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.

In other words, that you could see the treasure of what he won for you on the cross and what is the exceeding greatness of his power towards us who believe according to the working of his mighty power. First of all, that you may see him and what he bought for you. You may understand what your life is called to be and that you might see and understand the incredible power of God that is available to accomplish what God has called you to be, which he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in heavenly places.

Remember, when he was raised from the dead, he took your captivity, captive, and left gifts for you on the way to sitting at the right hand of almighty God. He took your captors, captive. He took depression, captive.

He took alcoholism, captive. He took gender confusion, captive. He took hopelessness, captive.

He took powerlessness, captive. He took it all, captive, and gave you gifts to become everything that he has called you to be. And all this happened when he raised him from the dead and seated him in his right hand in heavenly places, far above all principality, all power, all might, all dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but in that which is to come.

That's where your savior sits today. There's not a name that is above him or has more power than him or has the right to defy him. And he put all things under his feet, all things.

Everything is under the feet of Jesus, no matter what you're struggling with today or what you're afraid of in the future or what you're going through. I want you to know as a believer in Christ, that is under the feet of your savior. It is already conquered.

And he gave him, that is Christ, to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. That's where Paul starts, oh, that you could see who you are. Oh, that you could understand the heart of God towards you.

Oh, that you could see the power of God that is available to you to become everything that your heart and God's heart desire for your future and your eternity. And chapter 2, verse 1 says, and you he made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins. You were dead.

If you're a sinner today, you're dead. If you haven't come to Christ, you're dead. You think you're alive, but you're not alive.

You're dead. You're dead in measure according to what you could be and what God's plan is for your life, what your eternity can be and what your future can hold. In Luke chapter 5 and verse 12, let me just read these three verses to you.

Verse 12 to 14. It happened when he, that's Jesus, was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus, and he fell on his face and implored him saying, Lord, if you're willing, you can make me clean. Then he put out his hand and touched him saying, I am willing, be cleansed, and immediately the leprosy left him.

And he charged him to tell no one, but go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded. Now here's a man coming to Jesus. He knows he has this internal disease going on inside of his life that he, over which he has no control.

And he knows that day by day, hour by hour, it's gaining a stronger hold on him. Anybody ever felt that? Have you ever felt like something got a hold of your life? You never thought it was going to get a hold of you. It wouldn't be something you just started to toy with along your journey or just a little bit of depression that started to gnaw away at the edges of your mind.

And you never thought it would get the hold that it did until now it seems to permeate your whole inside. And you don't know what to do. And I'm sure this man didn't know what to do.

And his problem was so obvious that obviously a lot of his friends in the society at that time wanted nothing to do with him. But he heard of this man, Jesus, who seemed to be kind beyond kindness, like he'd never heard of it in his life. And maybe pressing through the crowd, I don't think he had to press through.

I think when they saw a leper come in, they just parted ways. And suddenly it's just Jesus and this very obviously afflicted man standing there. And he looks at him.

And I feel his voice is just almost like a whisper in the dust. It's like a plea, Lord, if you're willing, you can make me clean. Not knowing what's going to happen.

How is he going to respond to me? Is he going to reject me? Is he going to tell me to clean up my act and come back when I look better and try again? A lot of people have that impression about coming to the house of God. Don't even know why you're here. You feel so dirty inside.

Why would God ever have anything to do with me? The way I live, the way I think and what I do in public or in secret, whatever the case is, you don't feel like you can come through to God. And there'd be no shortage of people in that crowd telling him, what are you doing here? You don't belong here. Unclean.

Unclean. Go somewhere else. Go follow the ritual.

There's a ritual under the law that you have to follow and maybe just maybe following this set of rituals and laws, maybe you'll just get cleaned up enough and then you can approach the master. He would have thought maybe will Jesus simply ignore me and pass me by as he's blessing people all over the place, as he's healing those that are sick and delivering the afflicted. Will he touch my life or will he just walk away from me? Suddenly, Jesus looks at him and says, I'm willing.

And he does something amazing, he touches him. Now under the law of that time, the religious law of the day, if you touched a leper, you became a leper. Do you understand that? Everybody would live their life to avoid a leper.

And there are kinds of people that we live our lives to avoid, I guess, in society. Maybe you feel like you're one of those people that people around you just live to avoid. Maybe you have an explosive temper.

Maybe you drink so much that people can't trust you at a family gathering. Can't trust what you're going to say or what you're going to do. Maybe you're that kind of person that just starts to fight every time you walk into a family gathering and people are fed up with you.

They don't want to have any more to do with you. But suddenly there's this plea in your heart that says, God, if you want to, I'm willing. If you're willing, I'm willing to touch my life.

I know that there's nothing I can do to change my condition, but you seem to have power and compassion that nobody I've ever met in my lifetime has this kind of power or compassion. You can imagine the gasp in the crowd as Jesus reaches out and touches somebody nobody else would touch. He's not offended by your struggle.

He's not offended by your weakness. He's not offended by your duplicity, even if you're playing a religious game where you come to church on Sunday, but live a whole other kind of life outside of church. He's not offended by it.

But if you are willing, he's willing to touch you and to cleanse you and to change you not just for one day, but for the rest of your life. Thank God for his mercy. Then he says, go and show yourself to the priest.

In other words, go and show those who believe that healing can only come through human effort, steps and rituals and cleaning yourself up and all the other such like things. Go and show them that God has given you a miracle simply because he's good and his mercy endures forever. Just go and show them what God has done for you.

You don't have to tell them anything. Just show them. Just let your new life speak for itself.

You don't have to go to work and talk about church Sunday. Let God talk about what he's done in your life. Let him show them what he's done in your life.

Now this leper would have felt like all of us do from time to time. He felt that he was called to be more than his life had dealt him. You ever had that thought come into your heart? I had it for years as a young man.

Is this what my life is supposed to be? You know, you grow up with, as a child, you have such most do. Some of you were abused right out of the gate, so you can't even relate to this. But others weren't.

And as a child, you have a sense of optimism and life is just wonderful and you look at the lights and you just feel that there's something in your heart that says, I'm destined for something. I don't know what it is. And you set out to find it throughout your life only to discover one day that you have an inner disease of the soul eating away at your hope, eating away at your vision, your future.

It's something going on inside of you over which you have no control. It's a condition. The Bible clearly tells us in a spiritual sense that is common to every person.

Paul the Apostle talks about it in Romans chapter 7 in the New Testament. He said, I know what to do with my mind and my heart even embraces it. I know I should be a truthful person.

I know I should be kind. I know I shouldn't steal. I know I should be faithful in my relationships.

But there's a, and that's in my heart, I want to do right. But there's a law, he said, there's another power at work inside of me that is driving me to do the opposite to what I know is right. And he becomes so exasperated as he talks about the human condition in Romans chapter 7. He says, I delight actually, you know, I know there's some people here today, you actually in your heart, you delight in being here.

You delight in the songs. You delight in the camaraderie, 104 nations in one place, worshiping God, who else but God could do this. And you delight in your heart and there's, there's something inside of you that just so wants to be good.

How long do you think it's going to last without an inner power greater than yourself? Probably to the corner of Broadway and 51st after the service today. You won't get very far. You won't even get to the parking garage and a new law, another law inside that's, that's working against this inner desire to, to be what God called you to be.

It starts to work inside of you. And Paul finally says, who will deliver me from this body of death? This body that just seems to fight inside with this inner rot called sin that wants to destroy my marriage, my, my mind, my future, my morality, everything about me wants to, wants to pervert my speech. It just fights constantly against who I feel I'm created to be.

And suddenly the crowd parts and it's just that man and Jesus. And that's what happens to all of us at some point. You see, you can't get into heaven by just following the crowd.

It's a one-to-one encounter with the son of God. Before I came to Christ and when I was 24, I had no shortage of people telling me who Jesus is and what he did on the cross and all these voices, but suddenly all the voices become dim and there's only one voice. And that one voice is saying, Carter, do you believe or don't you? Do you want what I have for you? And I remember when I was first told that if anyone is in Christ, it becomes a new creation.

I remember thinking, is that possible? My temper was getting worse by the day. My drinking was starting to increase to the point where some of my friends were concerned about me. I started to lose heart for the future.

I was utterly selfish to the core of my being. I was destroying my own marriage. And suddenly this one voice is saying, who do you think I am? And I was confronted with that voice and I was confronted as I got into the word of God.

Do I believe or don't I believe? And I prayed a simple prayer on the side of the road, May 12th, 1978, 3.20 in the afternoon. I know it exactly because I was on the way to work and I pulled over and I said, oh God, if what my friend is telling me is the truth, then I open my heart and I ask you to come into my life and be my Lord and be my savior. I was praying the prayer of the leper, if you're willing, oh God, you can touch me.

If you're willing, you can cleanse me. If it's true what I've heard, and it was an if, but it was a sincere if, do you understand me? It was good enough for God. And it was at that moment I believed that the hand of God touched me and the victory that was won when God raised his son from the grave became mine.

My captivity was taken captive and giftings of God were poured into this human body to become that which God had called me to be. That is the miracle of the gospel. The gospel is not just another head trip.

A lot of religions are just rituals and head trips. That's all they are. It's smoke and mirrors.

There's no reality to it. But Christianity is one man being raised from the dead, raising another from the dead, raising another, raising another, raising another, raising another. And the Carter Conlon that existed for 24 years died on May 12th, 1978, and a new man was raised from the dead.

His captivity was taken captive by Christ and the ability that God was willing to give me to become everything that he called me to be began to grow in my heart. The Bible calls it born again by the spirit of God, changing as I beheld him, as I spent time in the word of God. Now some things pass really quickly.

You pass from death to life quickly. Some things in your character take a little more time, but they are all taken captive. They all lose their power to govern your present and to dictate your future.

Thank God for that with all my heart. Thank God. Thank God.

Lord, if you're willing, the man says, you can make me clean. If you're willing, Jesus said to him, I am willing, and he touched him. You know, the Bible says he's touched with the feelings of our struggles, not aloof from us.

He's not sitting on the throne with his arms folded going, oh, well, haven't saved anybody in a long time. I might as well save you. Remember Paul said that you would comprehend the love of God, that you would comprehend the passion in the heart of God that sent him to a cross to get you.

It's more than your mind can even begin to understand. Lord, if you're willing. And when he touched the leper, the hand of God poured out in fullness because he found a heart willing to receive what he wanted to give him.

Lord, if you're willing. I guess that's the cry of somebody's heart today as we read the scripture and says, according to, but to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore he says, when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men.

Grace is here today. God's hand is ready to heal, deliver, save, restore, give you a future. Is your heart open to receive? The title of this message was, if grace finds a willing heart.

If you've exhausted your search and it's finally brought you to the place you should have begun, God, who's been there all along, he's been waiting. We have an old hymn we used to sing years ago. When I was first saved in the church, he waited patiently in line.

He was there all the time. He was there all the time, waiting patiently in line, waiting for us to exhaust all the options, in the leper's case, all the physicians, all the rituals, everything until finally it's just a face-to-face with Jesus, with one question, if you're willing, you can make me clean, and one answer, I am willing, be cleansed. If you want to be free today, if you want a future, if you want a new life, if you want a new marriage, if you want a new heart, if you want to become everything that God has designed and destined you to be, if you felt for years that your life was meant to be more than what it's amounted to today, God put that thought in you.

Do you understand that? You were created in his image, so you instinctively know that your life is to be more than what it's become to this point. But if you are willing to receive, he is willing to give. So in a moment, we're going to stand, and if you would like the hand of God to touch your life, forgive your sin, and offer you not only an eternity, as wonderful as that is in heaven, but an abundant life, a full life, a meaningful life, a life that counts for something eternally on this earth.

And all you have to do is come forward and say, Lord, if you're willing to, you can make me clean, and you're going to find a savior that says, I am willing, sir, ma'am, young person, I'm willing, more than willing. The next thing you know, the hand of God will touch you and claim you for his own, and you watch what will happen in your future. Father, I thank you with all of my heart today, with all of my heart, God, for the incredible love that you have for every man, woman, and child in this house.

I ask you, Lord, for the grace for each one of us to open our hearts to you, and to say, Lord, I want to be clean, I want to be forgiven, I want to know that heaven will be my home, I want to live the life that you have for me for the rest of my days, and I thank you that you're not offended at my struggle, but you're willing to touch me in the midst of it. Father, I thank you for this, oh God, in Jesus' name. Thank you, Lord.

Thank you, God. Listen, everybody who's at this altar, you don't have to hide from God. You don't have to hide.

You don't have to hide your struggle, you don't have to hide your sin, you don't have to hide anything. He loves you with a love that is so deep your mind can't comprehend it. He knew we were in a mess, that's why he came to get us.

That's why he died, because we were in a mess, and he knew it, and we couldn't get out of our mess, and we couldn't change the way we do things, the way we think, we couldn't do it, so he had to come, and he had to pay the penalty for the wrong that we had done, so we could be restored to God, so now God can come back inside of us, and do inside of us what needs to be done. It's the beauty of the gospel. God literally raises you from the dead.

It's amazing. It's absolutely amazing. The only thing I would encourage you to do is go the whole distance.

Don't go halfway. If you won the lottery, first of all, you shouldn't be playing the lottery, but if you won it, you wouldn't go halfway to the bank, would you, with that ticket, right? You'd go the whole way, so in Christ, you really do win the spiritual lottery, because it's free, and the resources are unlimited, but don't go halfway to the spiritual bank. Go the whole way.

Say, Lord, I want you to touch me completely. I want you to do in my life what needs to be done, and I open my heart to it. I want you to lead me where I need to go, and I want you to help me to read the words you left to us in the Bible, and to understand it, and to believe it.

God, you have a promise for me that you'll give me a new song, a new heart, a new future, and gifts, which means things I don't have. He's going to do things in your life that you don't have right now, but He has. You watch.

You'll know it, and that when you first get saved, when you first come to Christ, when you look in the mirror, you're going to see another set of eyes looking back at yours inside of you. To me, that's what really, when I got, when I knew I was saved, that when I looked in the mirror, and it was like a different set of eyes looking up into that mirror. God promises that when you open your heart, He will actually come into your life in the third person of His Holy Spirit and be God inside of you and to you.

Pray this simple prayer with me, please, everybody here. Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for loving me. Thank you for dying on a cross and taking my death upon yourself so that I could live.

As you were raised from the dead, so too I will be raised from all the death of sin. Thank you for loving me that much. I believe that you died for me to make a way back to you, back to the life that you have for me.

I believe that with all of my heart. I believe that you are willing to touch me and give me freedom from all the things in my heart that have taken me captive. I believe that you have a new life for me, not only in heaven, but here on the earth.

So I open my heart to you. And I thank you for your willingness to save me, touch me, to heal me, to make me into a new person. And I thank you for this.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/u836XyEKr2E.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/carter-conlon/if-grace-finds-a-willing-heart/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net