

Our Roots

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- [0 : 0 0] And this morning's passage is an especially tricky passage. And before we read it together, just to get us thinking, I want to ask some questions.
- Firstly, really, what are your roots? What are your roots? I don't know if you've ever seen the kind of ancestry show on the BBC. Who do you think you are? Where celebrities go on it to kind of discover what their roots are.
- I watched an episode recently with the comedian Jack Whitehall, and he got all excited about one of his ancestors being from Birmingham. He was expecting, I think, to be descended from like a Peaky Blinder or at least some minor aristocrat or something.
- Instead, he discovered a man who had a taste for sleeping with prostitutes, who got syphilis, who gave it to his wife and who died in an asylum.
- What are your roots? One of my ancestors was the Bishop of London. I've always been quite proud of that fact. And as far as I can tell, he was a pretty good guy, preaching passionately, working hard for social change in the East End of London.
- [1 : 0 4] But I discovered a couple of years ago that he wasn't just straightforwardly a good guy. He was the Bishop of London during World War I, and he earned the nickname the belligerent bishop.
- Apparently, he would regularly use awful xenophobic language about ordinary German people. And he even promoted the idea that we should be bombing civilians, that that would be the best means of winning the war.
- What are your roots? If you're a Christian here today, I think it's also worth asking, what are your Christian roots? I mean, you can think about the person who told you about Jesus and who told them and who told them and so on.
- But go far enough back. And if you're a Christian here today, it's probably partly because of this guy called Charlemagne. You might have heard of Charlemagne. He was the first man to unite Western Europe and Central Europe, the kind of first guy to do that since the Roman Empire.
- And it was during his reign that the gospel was first brought to the shores of Britain. If you're here today and you're a Christian, you've got a lot to be grateful to this guy for.
- [2 : 1 0] Sounds like a pretty good guy. But really, things were very messy. In the year 782, more than 4,500 Saxons were massacred by Charlemagne for refusing to convert to Christianity.
- A bit like in our passage today, he had 18 children to seven different women. And those are our roots. If you're a Christian here today, it's also probably partly because of this guy, Oliver Cromwell.
- Again, you've probably heard of Cromwell. He was an important figure in the kind of continued reformation in Britain, challenging the assumptions of divine monarchy and encouraging evangelical, independent Protestantism.
- We've got a lot to be grateful to him for. Sounds pretty good. But again, in doing so, things were messy. In Ireland, October 1649, and apologies for the history lesson here.

But in October 1649, troops under Cromwell's command killed more than 3,000 people, including 1,500 civilians. As you can imagine, he was and in many places still is wildly unpopular.

[3 : 16] But these are our Christian roots. The Crusades, the 30 years war, transatlantic slavery, witch hunts, the Inquisition. It was Christians that did all of that.

These are our roots. In every century of Christian history, atrocity after atrocity has been committed. And we can discuss whether these people really were Christians.

I'm sure some of them weren't, but I'm equally sure that some of them really were. And either way, there's no denying it. If you're a Christian here today, these are our roots.

As we look down the ages and as we assess the behavior of individual Christians, maybe especially as we assess the behavior of the Christian church, as we assess our roots, we have to say, don't we, there is something deeply rotten there.

In fact, friends of mine have often told me that this is exactly why they're not Christians. Why they could never be Christians. Just look at all the bad stuff that Christians have done.

[4 : 14] And they're right. And, you know, I think it's actually much worse than that. Because those are our roots, but it's also true today, isn't it? Friends of mine, they look at history and they say that.

But for them, it's also the hypocrisy in the church. The hypocrisy of Christians. You know, they look at us and they just see that we don't look like anything like the Jesus that we say we follow.

And again, they're right, aren't they? They're right about me anyway. Nothing like Jesus. My friends know me well enough. If they've ever seen me behind the wheel of a car, as simple as that, they know that I can get very angry and that I'm extremely selfish.

And that in so many ways, I'm just like them. Do your friends know that about you? Maybe as you look around this morning, I guess it's possible that you feel like you're the dirtiest and rottenest person in this room.

And maybe you feel like if only they knew, they probably wouldn't have even let me in this morning. Let me tell you that the truth is the person sitting next to you probably feels exactly the same way.

[5 : 28] And if they don't, maybe you're here this morning and that's not you. And instead, you think you're doing pretty well, that you actually deserve to be here, that you deserve his grace, that you've done everything necessary for God to be kind to you.

Either way, whoever you are this morning, wherever you sit, I guess, on that spectrum, you need to know this. As we look at our rotten roots, we have to say that the Christian church could only possibly exist today by God's grace.

And as we look at our lives, we have to say the only way that it's going to continue is by God's grace, his utterly undeserved kindness to us.

God establishes his people by grace in spite of their mess. And God keeps his people by grace in spite of their mess. Grace is the way in.

And grace is the way on. We've been in this series in Genesis over the last couple of months when God's grace meets our mess.

[6 : 31] It's the story of Jacob. Just before we read our passage this morning, a little bit of context so that you know where we've got to in this story, if you haven't been here. We've seen that the key to understanding this story are God's promises to his people, especially the promises he makes through this family, the promises to Abraham.

We've just seen one of those with Ian and then to Abraham's son and then to Isaac's son, now to Jacob. So four things, really. Promises of a place to call home.

Promises of his presence with them. Promises of a glorious purpose that they would bless the nations. And then most importantly for us this morning, and as Ian has read, the promises that they would be a numerous people.

In Genesis chapter 15, we saw God's promise of that in that way to Abraham. In chapter 26, that promise is reaffirmed to Isaac. He says, I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky.

And that is a very unlikely promise. And not least because both Abraham and Isaac struggle to have children. But God does just enough to continue their family line. And the promise continues, as we saw just a couple of weeks ago in chapter 28, the promise to Jacob.

[7 : 44] All four elements were there. Place, presence, purpose, and people. Especially for today, your descendants will be like the dust of the earth. And so as we come to our reading this morning, that promise begins to be fulfilled.

But it's not exactly sunshine and roses. And so turn to Genesis chapter 29 with me. You'll find it on page 32 of the Pew Bibles. Genesis chapter 29.

We'll mostly be in chapter 30, actually, but we'll start in chapter 29. See with me how God's grace was at work, even in a massive, massive mess. So chapter 29 from verse 31.

When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive. But Rachel remained childless.

Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.

[8 : 49] She conceived again. And when she gave birth to a son, she said, Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too. So she named him Simeon.

Again, she conceived. And when she gave birth to a son, she said, Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons. So he was named Levi.

She conceived again. And when she gave birth to a son, she said, This time I will praise the Lord. So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children. When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister.

So she said to Jacob, Give me children or I'll die. Jacob became angry with her and said, Am I in the place of God? Who has kept you from having children?

Then she said, Here is Bilhah, my servant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me, and I too can build a family through her. So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife.

[9 : 55] Jacob slept with her and she became pregnant and bore him a son. Then Rachel said, God has vindicated me. He has listened to my plea and given me a son.

Because of this, she named him Dan. Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, I have had a great struggle with my sister and I have won.

So she named him Naphtali. When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son.

Then Leah said, What good fortune? So she named him Gad. Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. Then Leah said, How happy I am. The woman will call me happy.

So she named him Asher. During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, Please give me some of your son's mandrakes.

[10 : 57] But she said to her, Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too? Very well, Rachel said, He can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes.

So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. You must sleep with me, she said. I have hired you with my son's mandrakes.

So he slept with her that night. God listened to Leah and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. Then Leah said, God has rewarded me for giving my servant to my husband.

So she named him Issachar. Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. Then Leah said, God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor because I have borne him six sons.

So she named him Zebulun. Sometime later, she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah. Then God remembered Rachel. He listened to her and enabled her to conceive.

[12 : 02] She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, God has taken away my disgrace. She named him Joseph and said, May the Lord add to me another son.

Earlier this year, just a few months ago, I read that section of Genesis with Ben, Ben Vesa, a member here at the church. And we got to this passage literally the week before he married Cater. And so you can imagine how we felt as we read this chapter together.

But before we go any further, let's put ourselves in the shoes of the original readers, the people that this was written for. Let's ask how they were feeling as they read it or heard it read. Because this book, it was written by Moses for the Exodus generation.

So it's something like 500 years after the action, after Jacob. God has rescued this people out of slavery in Egypt and they're now in the desert. Notice how those promises that we talked about are going.

They don't have a place to call home. They certainly aren't fulfilling their purpose of nation blessing. They are going to have God's presence with them. That will be the tabernacle.

[13 : 11] But really only one man once a year will get access to that. But crucially, they have become numerous. From a family of around 70 people when they first went into Egypt, now over a million when they leave.

The people promise, in many ways, the people promise has been fulfilled. But it's actually not going very well. They're not having a great time in the desert. They might have been slaves in Egypt, but at least they were well fed.

At least they had a home. And we're told about their grumbling and their moaning and their infighting. We're told about their idol worship and their rebellion against God. And so as they hear this story about Jacob, as they hear about their roots, the beginnings, the genesis of their people, the message was this.

God established you as his people by grace in spite of their mess, in spite of your mess. And God will keep you by grace in spite of the mess.

It is the way in and it is the way on. And so here's the story. As we read it, did you see? It's sort of like a twisted competition. You've got Leah in one corner.

[14 : 27] You've got Rachel in the other corner. Two sisters, each competing for what the other sister has. Now have a look at verse 30 of chapter 29. We didn't read it just before our passage.

Back in verse 30, Jacob loved Rachel more than he loved Leah. Really that's instead of, in place of Leah. So Rachel is odds-on favorite in this competition for love.

But notice in verse 31, Leah may not be loved, but Rachel is childless. And we'll see in chapter one of verse, sorry, verse one of chapter 30, that that is what Rachel desperately wants.

Children. Leah wants love. Rachel wants children. Each competing, as we'll see, for what the other sister has. Competing really for their husband.

Both of them desiring happy families. And so the competition begins. The first point goes to Leah. See in verse 32, Leah became pregnant, gave birth to a son.

[15 : 34] She named him Reuben. One nil. And if you're not sure that this is a competition, and I'm just making that up, notice Reuben's name. You probably have a footnote in your Bible.

I think in the Pew Bible, it says that it means see a son. So Leah has struck the first blow. And this name is like a celebration.

And it's a celebration designed to kind of show off, to make sure that everyone knows and remembers that she is winning in this competition. Every time they speak about Reuben, it's look, a son.

Every time they call his name, look, a son. It's a celebration. Leah is winning. And yet in verse 32, can you hear her heartache?

Surely my husband will love me now. She desperately wants him to love her. She desperately wants happy families. And then immediately, verse 33, another son, two nil.

[16 : 33] Another in verse 34, three nil. She's definitely winning, but the heartache continues. Now at last, my husband will become attached to me. Verse 35, the sons keep coming.

It's four nil. And then at the end of chapter 29, then she stopped having children. Halftime in the baby making competition. And so Rachel is four nil down at halftime.

She goes in to have a chat with her husband in verse one of chapter 30. See what she says? Give me children or I'll die. Leah's desire for her husband's love is heartbreaking.

But so is this, isn't it? Rachel desperately wants children. She too desperately wants happy families. And Jacob's response is really good theology.

Not that sensitive, but good theology. Am I in the place of God? He recognizes that conception is ultimately in God's power. Obviously, man and woman need to do their thing and timing needs to be right and whatever else.

[17 : 37] But ultimately, whether a baby is produced is always a miracle. And so it's not my fault, says Jacob. Rachel isn't satisfied with that answer. And so she makes a substitution.

In comes Bilhah, her servant. Apparently, that was actually quite normal, kind of ancient practice for a servant to step in and give it a go when the couple aren't able to conceive. And the resulting child would actually legally belong to the one that they serve.

And that's exactly what happens. In fact, Bilhah has two sons. Score is 4-2. And notice again, if you're not convinced that this is a competition, have a look at verse eight of chapter 30.

What does Rachel say? I have had a struggle with my sister and I have won. She's very confident here that the comeback is on. But Leah, Leah remember, has stopped having children.

She sees that the substitution is quite a good tactic. So she subs in her servant, Zilpah. And Zilpah conceives twice as well. So it's 6-2. A time for another change of tactic then from Rachel, a kind of nutritional boost, a performance enhancer.

[18 : 44] In verse 14, Reuben heads out to get some mandrakes. That is, I think, as if to underline Leah's absolute dominance in this game. She brings out her son to help her have more sons.

See, in the ancient world, the mandrake plant was apparently good for fertility and probably superstition. Notice the text doesn't really deal with any of that, doesn't confirm whether that's true or not.

It doesn't tell us if mandrakes are a good thing or a bad thing. It just says, this is what the woman did. And it's a blunt reminder, I think, in the middle of this competition, as Leah and Rachel fight for their husband's love and his babies, as they fight for happy families, there's an awful irony here, as Leah uses Reuben in this way, that children are caught in the crossfire, that children are literally growing up in the mess of this awful competition.

And worse than that, because as Reuben gets some of the performance enhancer, Rachel makes this dreadful bargain with Leah. See in verse 15, give me the mandrakes and you can sleep with Jacob tonight.

She essentially sells a night of sex with Jacob in exchange for these performance enhancers. Notice how the author repeats that Leah has stopped having children.

[20 : 04] We get it at the end of chapter 29, as we've seen, but then again in verse 9 here. I think we can assume that she was probably too old to have kids, that nature had run its course. And so Rachel thinks it's safe enough letting her sleep with Jacob.

Rachel can then get the mandrakes, get the performance enhancer and have children. And her tactic just massively backfires. See in verse 16, Leah with the ultimate chat up line, you must sleep with me because I have hired you.

She's basically turned her husband into a sex slave. It's so grim. And then despite the repetition that she stopped having children, God gets to work and she has another child.

Seven, two. Somehow in verse 19, she's persuaded her husband back for another. Nine, two. And then she has a daughter in verse 21. Sorry, eight, two.

And then a daughter, nine, two in verse 21. It looks as though Leah has well and truly won this competition, doesn't it? And yet her heartache right at the end of the chapter is still there in verse 20.

[21 : 07] This time my husband will treat me with honor. Nine children later and still Leah is crying out for the love of her husband. And then finally, almost as a sort of consolation prize, Rachel does conceive herself for the first time in verse 23.

Final score, nine, three. It's quite a story, isn't it? And it's a strange competition. I think it's really hard to know who we're supposed to be rooting for here.

Because you can see how Moses is giving us clues all the way through what these people are like. Every character in this story is sinning and being sinned against as they fight for happy families.

And it is anything but just broken, messy relationships everywhere. If you've been wondering through all of this, why the Bible doesn't just explicitly condemn these things, why doesn't it make a comment on the fact that Jacob has more than one wife?

Or the fact that they're literally paying for sex or using wives' servants as sex slaves? I hope you can see that though the Bible doesn't explicitly condemn them, it is pretty clear.

[22 : 20] It has always been God's plan, right? From the first pages of the Bible in Genesis chapter 2, God's plan is that one man would marry one woman and that they would be together for life.

That was always God's plan. That remains God's plan today. And I don't think Moses needs to tell us that Jacob and Leah and Rachel aren't doing that. I don't think he needs to explicitly condemn it because the consequences of living out with God's plan are just really clear in this story, aren't they?

It's a mess. And the truth is, sin always leads to a mess. The more you ignore God's plan, the more you walk away from him.

You may get away with it for a while, but the more that you do that, the more of a mess you're going to end up in. It's what we see here, isn't it? And I think if we're honest, we all know that's true, even if it's just in small ways.

For that wilderness generation, the people that we said that Moses was writing this for, the application is really clear, isn't it? You have become a numerous people, but look at your roots.

[23 : 27] Look at how much of a mess it is. You need to know that God established his people by grace, not just in spite of, but in and through their mess. This is his wonderful, undeserved kindness.

If you can see that about your roots, then you will know that God will keep his people by grace in and through their mess. It is the way in and it is the way on.

Do you know, God is more active in this section that we've just looked at, more active here than in any other place in the story of Jacob. And so just two details quickly before we put the whole thing back together for ourselves.

See how God acts. See his grace to the people just in this story. Firstly, God hears his messy people and then we'll see that he also helps his messy people. So first, God hears his messy people.

And notice that both Leah and Rachel make statements about what they think God is doing in the midst of their competition. There are lots of examples of this. Here are a couple. In verse 32 of chapter 29, Leah says, the Lord has seen my misery.

[24 : 35] Again in verse 33, she says, the Lord heard that I am not loved. Rachel too does the same sort of thing in chapter 30, verse six. God has vindicated me.

He has listened to my plea. Leah again in verse 18, God has rewarded me for giving my servant to my husband. Over and over again, these two sisters make statements about what God is doing.

But I don't think we're supposed to take their word for it. In fact, I think we're probably supposed to be skeptical about what their theories about what God is up to are like. In their mess, I'm pretty sure God is not vindicating them.

And I certainly don't think God is rewarding them. But they are definitely right that God is working. I see in verse 17, Moses, the writer, he tells us in verse 17 that God listened to Leah and she became pregnant.

And in verse 22, he tells us, God remembered Rachel. He listened to her and enabled her to conceive. What can Moses possibly mean that God listened to these sisters?

[25 : 45] We don't see them pray. These sisters who had bought and sold their husband for sex, these sisters who had pawned off their own servants as sex slaves for their husband, these sisters who have been battling with one another for their husband's love and babies, these sisters, like I say, as far as we can tell, have not uttered a single prayer to their God.

And yet, how is God at work? He hears them. He hears their unspoken pleas to be loved. It's the only thing that Moses tells us that God is explicitly doing for them.

These unspoken pleas for family. And they may have sprung from the worst of motives and in the midst of the worst of messes. And yet we're told God hears them.

It's the utterly undeserved kindness of grace. The way in and the way on. And that is wonderful news for all of us in the room today.

And maybe you think you've got prayer sorted, that you would never pray with such twisted motives. Your life definitely isn't this messy. But if we're honest, certainly if I'm honest, my life can be pretty messy.

[27 : 02] Very often, my motives get twisted when I pray. As our hearts cry out, how wonderful then is this promise from Romans chapter 8.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

when our motives stink, when we pray completely the wrong thing, when we don't know what to pray, and despite all of our mess, this is the utterly undeserved kindness of God to us.

It's grace as God hears our deepest hearts cry. But not only does God hear, he also helps his messy people.

in verse 31 of chapter 29, right at the start of this competition, how is it that Leah is able to conceive? Not only does God see that Leah was not loved, but he also helps her, he enabled her as the language to conceive.

[28 : 12] And more than that, if you notice, who is that Leah gives birth to? In verse 34, she gives birth to a son called Levi, and in verse 35, to Judah.

If you know anything about the subsequent history of the tribes of Israel, Levi was the forerunner to the priestly tribe, Judah was the forerunner to the kingly tribe. You see what God does?

He takes Leah, the unloved and the unlovely, and he gets to work. And through her, he produces the priests and the kings of his people.

And wasn't that way of working just exemplified in Jesus? When God became man, who did he go towards?

Did he go towards the powerful? Did he go towards empire or kings? Did he go towards the religious elites? No, he relentlessly pursued and loved the unloved and the unlovely.

[29 : 15] The outcasts, the crippled, the sinners, he loved them. He had compassion on them. He heard them and he helped them. Can I just make a really quick and very specific application at this point?

Just to those in the room who wish that they could be parents. Maybe you've been trying for years. Maybe you have tried and it didn't work out and those days are well behind you.

Maybe you're single. Maybe you're attracted to people of the same sex. Maybe you suffer from a chronic illness. If that's you, if you desperately want a family and it isn't or it hasn't happened for you, let me firstly say how sorry I am.

And let me say, please don't feel like you can't mourn that here just because it's something that we can't see. As a church, we want to share in each other's pain like that, that you would find a family here.

And let me encourage you that God hears our cries in that. He doesn't say that you will definitely have children. He doesn't promise that. But he does have a plan and he does have a purpose for us and he does hear us and he does help us.

[30 : 34] God saw the unloved Leah and he saw the childless Rachel and he got to work. And God does continue to work in the world today.

Just a little bit broader, if you're here this morning and you feel like you've got very little to offer, if you feel unloved or if you know that if anyone really knew you, they couldn't possibly love you, that you wouldn't possibly be welcome in a place like this, you need to know this morning, Jesus really does know you.

And he knows exactly how you feel. And he also knows all the ways that you have rejected the God who created you. He knows the deepest and darkest cries and the deepest and darkest secrets of your heart.

And yet, by grace, he loves you. He doesn't promise that that means you'll have a totally trouble-free life or get all the things that you want. But he does promise that he hears his messy people and he promises that he will help his messy people.

He gives us everything that we need so that we might have the most wonderful gift of all, which is to know him. That is the totally undeserved kindness of our God.

[31 : 51] It's grace. And so just before we finish, let's go back to the original readers. this is what they needed to hear. As they stumbled about in the wilderness, convinced that they had got things really very badly wrong, they were sure that a return to the comfortable life of slavery in Egypt would be the solution.

But Moses would say to them, see how God has been gracious to you. Look at your roots. If you've tuned out now, please tune back in now just for the last few minutes.

This is really the key. See your roots and know that God established his people by grace in and through their mess.

And so know that God will keep his people in and through their mess only by his grace because grace is the way in and grace is the way on. And especially tune in now because that remains true for the Christian.

If you're here this morning and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, this is right at the heart of it all, it's grace. God's utterly undeserved kindness to us and it is the way in. As humans, we need to recognize we are not perfect.

[33 : 07] That is true as we think about our roots but it's true of us today. We have not lived the way that our creator intended us to live. And the world that we live in is a mess and we contribute to that mess in so many ways we just can't avoid it.

And actually there's also nothing we can do to clean it up. Truth is there are things that we've done, there are things that I've done that I know that I could never pay for.

And so the only way to be accepted by this God is for someone else to pay that price on my behalf. And his grace to you and to me is Jesus paying that price on our behalf.

That's the cross. Grace is the way in. But grace is also the way on. Right? Our roots, the bishop, Charlemagne, witch hunts and slavery, this has always been true.

For God's people to keep on being God's people, for the Christian church to have continued at all despite all of the mess is only by his wonderful grace to us.

[34 : 16] Anything good that the Christian church has done over the years, anything good that we have done here at Bruntsfield over the years, that is not us. It's only because God has done it by his grace and because we are privileged to be used by him in that.

It's true in the big picture like that, but it's also true individually for us as the world remains a mess. And again, as we continue to contribute to that mess, the message has always been that yes, grace is the way in, that Jesus died for you and now you're a Christian, but the message is not that you therefore need to start acting like it.

Instead, the message is that grace is also the way on. That each and every day, living in and contributing to a messy world, we continue to desperately need and rely on that grace in Jesus.

Being a Christian doesn't mean that we've been made perfect, but it means that by his grace, we continue to grow towards him. In Philippians chapter 3, Paul puts it like this, not that I have already obtained all this or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

You see what he's saying? It's not that he's already perfect, he's on a journey. He's straining toward what is ahead. He's heading in the right direction. This, Paul says, is what it means to be a mature Christian.

[35 : 53] Not that you are less sinful, though you are really growing in that sort of direction, but actually that you're more aware of your sin. I think it's true in conversations with some of you who have been Christians for a lot longer than I have.

The further on you get, the less sinful you actually are, the more you grow. And yet, the more sinful you actually feel. And as you experience that strange paradox, would you just let it drive you back to the cross?

For grace is the way in, but it is also the way on. And just very practically, last thing as we finish, one thing that all of us can do, what this means is that this church that we're part of, this family that we're part of, is the one place where we should be able to be most honest about our sin.

because it is and should be the one place where grace is readily and always available for it. You know, if a brother or a sister at church tells you about some sin in their life, what's the first thing that you're going to do?

Do you immediately tell them how foolish they are, how stupid they've been? Maybe more practically, you're going to try and find ways that you can help them to make sure that this doesn't happen again.

[37 : 22] There might actually be a place for both of those in time, but the first thing has got to be this. If someone comes to you and says, I've been messing up in this way, the first thing has got to be this.

Look to Jesus because here is grace for you. He loves you and we love you because grace is the way in, but it is also the way on.

These are your roots. God establishes his people by grace. God keeps his people by grace. It is the way in and it is the way on. We're going to sing together and so let me just invite the band up as we do that and as they come up, let me pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your grace to us in Jesus. Lord, we're so sorry for the mess of our lives and the ways that we contribute to the mess of the world.

Lord, we're so sorry for when we try and do things on our own steam, try and clean up our own act and Lord, I pray that for each of us this morning, if nothing else, we would know that in our sin there remains grace for us in Jesus, that in every area of our lives you would help us to repent, to turn to him, to look to the cross and to experience his grace, your grace for us in him.

[39 : 01] in Jesus' name, Amen.