

Your FAITH Is GOD's GIFT



BY PASTOR MARK JESKE



TIME OF
GRACE
MINISTRY

Your FAITH
Is **GOD's**
GIFT



TIME OF
GRACE
MINISTRY

Copyright © 2008 Time of Grace Ministry

Direct quotations from the
Bible (NIV) are printed in **bold**.

Do you love to golf? I do, but I get out only a handful of times each summer. At the level of play that I'm capable of, I don't work too hard at keeping score. I don't look at anybody else's scorecard, and I would never bet any money. But I have fun hacking away.

One of the things about golf that I love the most is a little feature named after an Irishman—the “mulligan.” Sometimes I take a mighty swing and hit a pathetic little grounder into the bushes. Behind my back I can hear suppressed laughter as people politely look away. It's considered rude to offer comments or suggestions when somebody has shanked a shot.

But there's one suggestion that's always welcome, and that is: “Go ahead, buddy, take a mulligan.” At my level of play, you get one or two mulligans per nine. They help to salve your crushed ego. You wind up, take that big swing, and you're looking out there for the ball to rise up majestically. Instead you find that you have hit one into where the rabbits live. But with a mulligan, you can tee up and try again. If you manage to get that second one out on the fairway, everything is fine again, and you can pretend that the last shot was really the only ball you hit.

Now in other sports—like basketball, for instance—there are unfortunately no mulligans. You never see a team saying, “Ha! That was a miserable brick you threw up there. Here, take another shot.” No, not a chance. No “do-overs” in basketball.

Here's a question for you. In the game of life, do you get mulligans from God or not? That's a complicated question, and I'm serious in asking you. Do you get do-overs from God? The answer is both yes and no.

I want to talk to you about that curious dilemma of second chances. And I can't think of a better time than right now to ponder the important questions of our existence: Does God like me? How do I know that for sure? Is my life pleasing to him, or is he disgusted with me? What's going to happen to me when I'm evaluated for the way in which I've spent my life? Can I look forward to evaluation day, or do I dread it with a sickening feeling in the pit of my stomach? Would I do anything to avoid the stressful contemplation of my face-to-face meeting with my Creator?

I'd like you to think about a little mini-letter in the Bible that was sent to one of seven churches of Asia Minor that surrounded the apostle John's home base in Ephesus. This little letter is in the book of Revelation. The letters in Revelation chapters two and three are like report cards that list how the seven churches were doing. Chapter three (verses 1-6) begins with a little postcard to the church at Sardis, which was in western Asia Minor. The Lord Jesus instructed his apostle John to write down a brief evaluation of how the congregation there was doing.

I think it was good for these churches to hear from the Lord himself and ask

themselves, “What would God think of us? How are we doing?” May I challenge you today to ask yourself the same question, “How am I doing?” Because when we Christians start getting sloppy, careless, smug, lazy, self-satisfied, or ritualized, we can lull ourselves into thinking that everything’s fine because our bodies are in the right place at the right time.

But you know what? Sitting in a church on Sunday morning doesn’t make you a believer any more than sitting for an hour in your garage makes you a car. The fact that you keep certain key observances during the year that touch on some of the great acts of God in human history, like the fact that you allow Christmas and Easter to affect your annual schedule, doesn’t mean anything whatsoever if your head and heart aren’t engaged. Motions are not the same thing as saving faith.

And I’ll tell you what. When we get sloppy, we need a wake-up call. Our faith is a *precious gift* from God, and it’s not something for us to toss aside or use when we want to. It’s life or death for you and me. It certainly was for the congregation at Sardis, a congregation the apostle John supervised.

Revelation chapter three begins, **“To the angel of the church in Sardis write . . .”** In the Greek language that John used, the word for “angel” as it’s used here refers to its first and original meaning, which is “messenger.” Sometimes that word refers to the invisible spirit-creatures who do

God’s bidding and carry his messages from heaven. In this case, it refers to the congregation’s ongoing messenger, the person who did the teaching and speaking as an educational leader in that place. It’s the rough equivalent of a pastor, as if to say, “To the pastor of the church at Sardis, write this, because I hold you responsible for the spiritual well-being of that place.”

“These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.” In chapter 1:20, John tells us that “seven stars” are the “angels,” or spiritual leaders, of the seven churches. May I add that it’s a wondrous comfort to all of us pastors to know that God is holding us.

“The seven spirits” is an unusual and striking way of referring to the Holy Spirit. There is only one Holy Spirit—there are not seven Spirits—so this clearly is a figure of speech in some way. Some people think it makes sense that this refers to the sevenfold spirit, that is, the spirit who gives seven gifts, who has seven ways to describe his wonderful identity and work. That sure makes sense. The prophetic language of Isaiah 11:2 lists seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit.

I think this simply means that each one of these seven churches had the Spirit of the Lord alive and living in it. It’s not only that the Lord Jesus was there, but the Holy Spirit was there too. I think the message is simply Jesus saying, “I’m the one who is giving to each of you seven churches the

gift of the Holy Spirit to teach you things you need to know; to build you up, encourage you, rebuke you when you're drifting, and to encourage you when you're down; to fill in the gaps and the blank spots in your head; to give you a full worldview; and to give you power and strength to live out that worldview."

He says, "**I know your deeds.**" If the Lord Jesus said that to you personally, would you smile and kind of swell up a little bit, would you cringe, or maybe do both? Honestly, in my weaker moments I would be afraid. If God sent me a personal Mark-o-gram and it said, "I know your deeds, Mark," I'd get a little smaller. I'd be nervous. I'd be more anxious than confident. How about you?

Here's what Jesus said to the Sardis congregation: "**I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive.**" This starts off well, doesn't it? "**But you are dead.**" "You think you're alive, but really you're dying. The way in which you're keeping score might make you think you're fine, but I see what's really going on. You all need reform." I hope you're listening—this could apply to you too.

Now he gives five commands, every one designed to shake people up—but not in a punitive way. This isn't judgment day yet; this is alertness therapy. "**Wake up!**" he says; "You're all sleepy." "**Strengthen what remains.**" "You're weak. Work out. Go to

the spiritual gym." "**Strengthen what remains and is about to die.**" "You're not dead yet, but you're weak. Look at yourselves. You're getting weaker and weaker."

"**I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.**" To be complete, individual believers need to understand at least three major things. One: you have to get the teaching straight. And if you don't, you're spiritually weak. Satan will use that gap in understanding to confuse your mind and mislead you.

Two: even if you understand God's Word correctly, it is imperative that you show love to other people. The attitude of a servant is an absolutely indispensable part of being a healthy believer. Jesus' own servant heart led him to work for us, suffer, die, and rise again. His example is our inspiration—in our better moments we want to be just like him.

If that's missing, if you are ignoring others, indifferent to how the people around you are doing, then all the right thinking in the world does not make you healthy. An attitude of lovelessness is a severe indictment of any believer, and it's time for you and me to slow down today and ask, "Lord, could you mean me?"

Three: an attitude of outreach and caring for people who don't yet know Christ as their Savior is absolutely crucial to your mission in life.

These three things—true faith, love, and an outreach attitude—are nonnegotiable items for a healthy believer and a healthy Christian organization. And in one or more of those areas, the Bible tells us that the church at Sardis was found grievously wanting.

Jesus was saying to them, “You think you’re strong, but you really aren’t.” What did he mean? Maybe the fire—their faith—was burning out. Maybe they had lost their loyalty to the Scriptures as their source of truth. Maybe their hearts had grown cold and their church, instead of being a hospital for broken and hurting people, was turning into a country club where only the achievers who had cleaned themselves up enough were allowed in the door. Maybe the riffraff knew this was no place for them.

Or maybe they had become so inwardly focused that they had lost interest in being salt and light to the rest of western Asia Minor. Maybe their mission passion had burned off and disappeared. Maybe they were becoming inwardly focused, too “me oriented.”

Whatever it was, the church in Sardis was sick. Wake up! **“Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.”** So here’s the sense in which there are no mulligans with God. On the day of

judgment, you can’t back away from the tee and say, “Whoa, that was a stinker, wasn’t it? Let me tee up again.”

On judgment day, there are no do-overs. You get one chance—just like at a PGA event where every camera is on you and you only get one crack at it. On judgment day, there are no mulligans. You can’t relive your life. You can’t remake your church. *Now* is the time to assess your life and get in tune with Jesus’ instruction.

Jesus’ warning was sobering. It is a sad fact that some people drift away from the Lord and no longer pay attention, even though they still keep going through the motions. But there *is* hope here, and I want to talk to you about that hope, because Jesus is talking to people, not to beat them down but to draw them back to him.

Repentance means you recognize your aching need every day. You confront the ways in which your life has not matched up to God’s holy ideals, the ways in which you have no right to say to God, “You owe me.” And that’s hard to do, isn’t it? It’s hard to admit. We all like to pretend, and there’s nobody we have lied to more often than to ourselves. We all know how to pretend and push uncomfortable thoughts to the backs of our minds.

“Repent. Wake up. Strengthen what remains. Remember what you have received and obey it.” But see, here’s where *our* hope comes from. Here’s the

sense in which there *are* mulligans. The people of Sardis were still alive. It was not judgment day yet. And it's not judgment day for us yet either. We do get do-overs as long as our hearts are still beating. Isn't that incredible?

And right now is the time for personal reformation for you and for me. We need to overhaul where we're at, to acknowledge our sin and our personal failures to match up to God's holy expectation.

But then, don't give way to amnesia. Don't try to put all the burden back on yourself. God may take you down a few notches, not to beat you down or make you feel worthless but so that you might find where your worth comes from.

“Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard” (i.e. the gospel message). Remember the gospel that your worth is built on. Remember the creative love and design that God put into your life. You were designed to be part of God's family; that is the purpose of your existence. Remember it now. Remember that the Father's fingerprints are all over your life. Your very body is a miracle of engineering and design carried out by God himself.

Remember the cross of Christ and the extravagantly expensive process he went through, not for his own sake but for yours. Everything that Christ has done—his perfect obedience, terrible sufferings, death, and triumphant resurrection—was

done with the sole purpose of enabling his house to be your house and of enabling you to count on his comfort and strength for the days of warfare in which you and I have to live. Remember that his verdict of “Not Guilty” rests on your head, that nothing can separate you from his everlasting love.

Remember the Holy Spirit, who steadily comes to you in quiet ways, like the splash of baptismal water, the sound of the Bible's talk on your ears, the sight of holy print on a page, the Body and the Blood to taste and enjoy, and the memory of wonderful spiritual songs and hymns in your heart. These are the subtle ways in which the mighty strength and wisdom of the Holy Spirit come to you. Grab and seize those promises. That is where you will find the strength to reform your own life so that you will hear words of praise, not words of rebuke from the Lord on judgment day.

There's time. There are a **“few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white.”** The purity of our clothes comes from the washing of the blood of Jesus. We all might wish to slide into the ego trip of thinking that we purified ourselves. Not so. Our holiness is God's gift. And the more we concentrate on God's wonderful gifts to us, the more we'll be inspired to live lives worthy of the uniforms we wear.

“He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white.” Permanently. “White” in this case symbolizes holiness and purity. “Overcoming” means that you realize you’re in a marathon and that you train and plan for the long run. The church in Sardis had started out fast, like a sprinter, but they began to struggle in the backstretch and were running out of gas. But it was not too late for them; there was still time. Isn’t that encouraging—that Jesus offered these rebukes, not to condemn them but to keep them from condemnation?

“I will never erase his name from the book of life.” There is no lack of faithfulness on Jesus’ part. He has one overriding goal for everything in your life; it is that you should live with him forever.

“I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.” Jesus might say to you right now, “If you live as though I don’t exist, you are daring me to act like you don’t exist when you must stand before the judgment seat of God. I want you so badly to be proud of me in the way that you live. I’m proud of you; be proud of me! I want the reunion to be spectacular when I see you face-to-face.”

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Are your ears working? Are you listening? The need for change is right now. It has always been true, and the need will be there years from

now because Satan will forever seek to put us to sleep, to lull us into ritualism, lovelessness, and “me first” thinking. He’ll lead us to think things like: “Once saved, always saved.” Or, “I was baptized once, so I’m in.” Or, “I’m a church member, so I’m pretty sure I get to go to heaven.” Or, “I do all kinds of charitable deeds in the community.” Or, “I sure am a lot better than _____” (fill in the blank with the most notorious sinner you can find).

Guess what? What matters is what’s in your heart and mind.

I invite you now to find the incredible security and joy that come from emptying yourself of pride and bragging. Let the law of God bring you low and make you nothing. But then let the grace of God lift you up, and let that be what you’re proud of. Let Christ’s sweet forgiveness be the operative power in your life, to trust with all your heart in your Savior Jesus; to love the people around you with all your heart, soul, and mind; and to share the Word with people who don’t as yet know it or get it.

Lord, give me ears that work, ears that listen to what you have to say to me every day.



STRAIGHT TALK. REAL HOPE.

“Go...and teach all nations.” This command from a resurrected Jesus Christ to his disciples over 2,000 years ago is the driving force behind *Time of Grace*, a multimedia, Christian outreach ministry dedicated to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with all people, especially those who have not heard it. Founded in May of 2001, *Time of Grace* primarily uses television to share the gospel with people across the country in an expanding number of markets. (See complete list on the following pages.)

Originating from St. Marcus Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, *Time of Grace* broadcasts a half-hour program each week featuring Pastor Mark Jeske. He presents Bible studies in terms that people can relate to and apply to their personal lives.

We hope you will watch *Time of Grace* if it is broadcast in your area. Or—visit our website at www.timeofgrace.org where you will find recent messages of Pastor Jeske. We have a variety of booklets, DVDs, or videos available. You also can contact us at **1-800-661-3311**.

God's Blessings!

BROADCAST SCHEDULE

WEDNESDAY, 5:00PM CT

Available nationwide on Direct TV Ch. 369, Dish Network Ch. 263 and some cable and regular broadcast stations. For a station in your area visit timeofgrace.org and click on the Daystar logo.

ARKANSAS

BELLA VISTA
Bella Vista Cable, Ch. 16
Sunday at 8:00am CT

FLORIDA

ORLANDO
WACX, Ch. 55
Sunday at 11:30am ET
WTGL, Ch. 45
Sunday at 9:30pm ET
Sunday at 4:30am ET

GAINESVILLE
WACX, Ch. 69
Sunday at 11:30am ET
TALLAHASSEE
WACX, Ch. 9
Sunday at 11:30am ET

ILLINOIS

CHICAGO
WJYS-TV, Ch. 62
Sunday at 10:30am CT

INDIANA

SOUTH BEND
WHME Le Sea, Ch. 46
Sunday at 10:30am

KANSAS

GREAT BEND/HAYS
KBDK FOX, Ch. 14
Sunday at 7:00am CT
SALINA
KAAS FOX, Ch. 18
Sunday at 7:00am CT

WICHITA
KSAS FOX, Ch. 24
Sunday at 7:00am CT

MICHIGAN

FLINT
WSMH FOX, Ch. 66
Sunday at 7:00am ET
MARQUETTE
WBUP ABC, Ch. 5-10
Sunday at 7:30am ET

ST. JOSEPH/BENTON HARBOR
WHME Le Sea, Ch. 46
Sunday at 10:30am

MINNESOTA

MINNEAPOLIS
KMSP FOX, Ch. 9
Sunday at 6:30am CT

NEW ULM
New Ulm Telcom Cable, Ch. 72
Sunday at 10:00am CT
Sunday at 7:00pm CT
Comcast Cable, Ch. 14
Sunday at 7:00pm CT

MISSOURI

ST. LOUIS
KTVI FOX, Ch. 2
Sunday at 7:30am CT

BROADCAST SCHEDULE *continued*

MONTANA

MISSOULA

Community Access, Ch. 7
Tuesday at 6:30pm MT
Sunday at 10:30am MT

NORTH CAROLINA

ASHEVILLE

Charter Cable, URTV Ch. 20
Sunday at 8:30am ET

TEXAS

AUSTIN

Austin Community Access, Ch. 11
Sunday at 7:00am CT

VIRGINIA

FAIRFAX

FCAC, Ch. 10
Wednesday at 11:00am ET

WASHINGTON, DC

WJLA ABC Ch. 7
Sunday at 7:30am ET

WISCONSIN

BARABOO

WRPQ, Ch. 43
Sunday at 8:00 CT

GREEN BAY

WGBA NBC, Ch. 26
Sunday at 6:30am CT
WACY, Ch. 32
Sunday at 7:30am CT

LA CROSSE

WKBT CBS, Ch. 8
Sunday at 7:00am CT

MADISON

WMSN FOX, Ch. 47
Sunday at 7:00am CT
WBUW CW, Ch. 57
Sunday at 8:30am CT

MILWAUKEE

WVTW CW, Ch. 18
Sunday at 8:00am CT

WAUSAU

WSAW CBS, Ch. 7
Sunday at 7:30am CT

WISCONSIN RAPIDS

WCTC Cable, Ch. 3
Charter Cable, Ch. 3
Sunday at 3:00pm CT

INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

AMERICAN FORCES NETWORK

Airs on rotation. See www.myafn.net for program times.

GRENADA, WEST INDIES

GBN Television
Sunday at 6:30pm

For a complete broadcast schedule, visit our website:
www.timeofgrace.org

- Always check your local listings.

TIME OF
GRACE

MINISTRY

P.O. BOX 301
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN 53201-0301

T 414.562.8463 OR 1.800.661.3311

F 414.562.8464

INFO@TIMEOFGRACE.ORG

WWW.TIMEOFGRACE.ORG