

Session 2 Take-Home: The Rescue We Could Not Stage

What We Found

God's saving initiative always comes **first**. Paul's words for what we were when Christ died for us: weak, ungodly, sinners, enemies (Rom 5:6-10). "While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." And the proof of the love is its timing: "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

God chose Israel not for size or merit, but out of his gratuitous love and his oath to the fathers: "It was not because you were more in number... but it is because the LORD loves you" (Deut 7:7-8). In Ezekiel 36:25-27 we counted the verbs: God does everything (clean water, a new heart, a new spirit, his own Spirit within), and the people's only contribution to the passage is the heart of stone. Jesus says the same: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (Jn 6:44); "apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5).

The prodigal son rehearsed a wage-earner's speech: "treat me as one of your hired servants." The father ran, embraced him, and never let him finish it (Lk 15:20-24). "God helps those who help themselves" is not in the Bible; the Bible says God helps those who cannot help themselves, and his help arrives first. Grace is favor, "the free and undeserved help that God gives us" (CCC 1996), and even our preparation to receive grace is itself grace (CCC 2001). None of this makes our response meaningless; grace creates the response. More on that soon.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Augustine of Hippo

Confessions, Book X, ch. 29

"Give what you command, and command what you will." God's commands are real, and the ability to keep them is itself God's gift, to be begged for rather than assumed. Augustine himself later recounted, in *On the Gift of Perseverance*, that this line infuriated Pelagius when he heard it read aloud: it conceded nothing to human self-sufficiency.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Ambrose of Milan

On Jacob and the Happy Life

The bishop who baptized St. Augustine teaches, in substance, that the Christian's boast is never his own innocence: he will not glory because he is righteous, but because he has been redeemed; not because he is free from sins, but because his sins are forgiven.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Act of Oblation to Merciful Love (1895)

St. Thérèse prays that in the evening of this life she will appear before God with "empty hands," asking him not to count her works, wanting to be clothed in his own justice. The hands that hold nothing can receive everything.

Live It This Week

Empty hands. Begin each day's prayer with thirty seconds of thanks for graces you did nothing to earn, before you ask for anything.

Catch the proverb. If you hear or think "God helps those who help themselves" this week, silently answer it with Romans 5:6.

One undeserved gift. Do something kind this week for someone who has not earned it and cannot repay it. Notice what that teaches you about how God loves.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

Romans 5:8 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: read Romans 6:1-14, and watch what Paul says happened to you.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001