**WALKING IN GOD’S GRACE**

**CLERGY TALK** **25 minutes**

**Note to speaker:**

*This talk is to remind the Participants that the joy of the Weekend will not automatically continue with them. It should help give them some tools to use once they return to the compound. Hopefully, it will encourage them to share Christian Fellowship on the compound which includes prayer-and-share grouping where permitted. The witness talk may be placed wherever it would be most effective. It is commonly inserted after the summary of the 3 legs of the stool, but some speakers may want to start or end with their witness. It's just important to understand that there are only 20 minutes for this talk.*

*In the speaker's witness talk he/she should incorporate the principles showing how Spirituality, Study and Christian Action allowed the speaker to overcome some of his/her obstacles to Grace. To be realistic we must acknowledge the journey is difficult and we always fall short. Remember the inmates live in a negative environment where acts of control and violence are common. This talk must be encouraging but not simplistic.)*

Prayer: Kairos Community Prayer, Page 11, FG

***Speaker introduces self, telling name, clergy, and giving the name of the talk.*** *This information should also be displayed on poster board, flip chart, or written on a chalk board.*

The name of this talk is *Walking in God’s Grace*, but we could very easily call it *Walking Your Talk.* In the *Obstacles to Accepting God’s Grace* talk, we were reminded of the struggles that you will encounter in the compound after we leave. You also heard that the choice to be obedient to the call of Christ is not an easy one, but it is the best one for all of us. God gives all of us the freedom to make our own choices. In Kairos we believe the decision to follow Christ is the best total solution for our lives.

Also, it seems most of you have had a pretty good time here this Weekend, and some of you don’t want it to end, right? But today the Weekend will end, and all of us will return to our respective worlds, some of us to the compound and some of us to the free world.

Brothers/sisters, I want to share with you that you’re not the first or the only ones who have had to face the reality of returning to the world and its challenges.

I. Remember in the Bible about the Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain top. The three disciples were so excited about seeing Jesus speaking with Moses and Elijah. So Peter asked Jesus if they could build three shelters and stay on top of the Mountain.

But Jesus told them that they had to go back down, to go back and face their world.

II. And so it is with us. We must go back down the mountain, down into the valley where the mud and the muck are. But guess what? Where there’s mud and muck is really the most fertile place for growth. Just think about that for a minute.This **mountain top** experience prepares us for **valley** duty.

It's important to know:

* We are human beings, and are subject to all the temptations that being human brings with it.
* We should make amends for our past without putting ourselves or others in further danger or potential injury. By admitting our mistakes and asking for forgiveness from those whom we’ve hurt, we can accept our relationship with God through His free gift of grace (Rom. 7:25). Being in unity with God's desire for our lives will give balance to our lives and the peace and happiness we all seek.

So, let’s focus on some tools that you can use to help you maintain a life favored by God while you are in the compound.

III. Principles of the 3-legged stool: For us to have a Friendship with God, it takes 3 factors to support it: In case you thought that this stool *(display 3-legged stool)* was a silly device to teach a simple lesson, think again.

1. Spirituality – the first leg

 1. Spirituality is a word about our personal journey, our walk to become Christ-like. We will never be as perfect as Christ, but we must all try to be a more spirit-filled people.

 2. When we talk about lovingGod, what do we mean? When we talk about loving

 each other, what do we mean? Many of us have a poor concept of love. In our

 lives many of us had very difficult Family experiences that were not loving.

 Sometimes love has been used to manipulate us as in “If you loved me you would

 do this or that”. In God's sense we should want the very best for ourselves and

 others. That doesn't mean the very best Rolex; it means we need to encourage

 each other to use our gifts to reach our highest potential as God's people.

 3. What are some of the practices that help us grow in our spirituality? Think of

 spirituality in a larger context – although we will speak about study and action

 separately, spirituality or personal holiness includes the results we receive from study and action:

* Daily prayer
* A daily devotion to God
* A spirit of self-examination
* Being in community with other Christians
* Quiet times for listening to the Holy Spirit
* Courage to stay diligent in our faith
* Going to any of the chapel services
* Reading our Bibles

 4. When we pray and meditate, we are having daily conversations with God; and a

 conversation means to **speak to** God and **listen to** Him. Don’t forget that the

 building and maintaining of our spirituality requires constant attention and work

 just like building and maintaining our muscles. If our spirituality is not nurtured

 daily, it will begin to die, just like a muscle without proper attention, will waste

 away.

1. DiscoveryThrough Study – the 2nd leg
	1. *Study* is the gateway for us to understand what it means to live a Christian life.
	2. Just like a microscope can be used to reveal the hidden teeming life in a drop of water, studying can aid you in discovering the nature of Jesus.
	3. As we read the Bible and other good Christian books we begin to understand our faith. We read about why He came, His death on the cross, His resurrection, and what that means for all of humanity.

 Here’s a list of the materials which might be helpful:

* Read the Bible. As mentioned earlier, it is not the only book; just the best one
* Attend the Chaplain’s services
* Ask the chaplain to get you into a good Bible study like Alpha or Crossroads Bible Institute: Form Bible study and discussion groups;
* Use the prison library to check out religious writings like Henri Nouwen, Max Lucado, Rick Warren, T.D. Jakes and other well-known Christian authors;
* Check out tapes, CD’s, DVD’s, etc. to aid your exploration;
1. Christian Action – the 3rd leg

 1. Action is motivated by and done through an unselfish desire to please and glorify

 Christ.

 2. You perform Christian action not because you are a nice person. Even non-

 Christians do that, but because your faith in Christ's word motivates your actions.

 3. God wants the best for His creation. God wants us to care for each other. The

 concept of Christian Action can be thought of as bringing yourself and others

 closer to Christ. In Kairos we say: **make a friend, be a friend, bring a friend to**

 **Christ**. Say it with me *(have Participants repeat phrase).*

 We should now realize the three-legged stool is really a very powerful spiritual tool.

In case you still haven’t fully understood how much God loves you and will be there for you in this compound, let me tell you this little story that happened on a hot summer day in Florida:

A young boy decided to go for a swim in a pond near his home. His mom would always tell him not to go to the pond without carefully looking around and making sure that ***she***knew that he was going into the water.

On this particular scorcher of a day, in a hurry to dive into the cool water, he dashed out the back door, leaving behind shoes, socks, and shirt. He swam toward the middle of the pond, not realizing that an alligator was swimming toward the shore, and him.

His mother was in the house gazing out the window. Her mouth dropped in horror as she saw the alligator and realized the two were swimming toward each other. In stark terror, she ran toward the water, screaming to her son as loudly as she could.

Hearing her cries, the little boy became alarmed and made a u-turn and began to swim frantically toward his mother. It was too late. Just as he reached her, the alligator reached him.

From the dock, the mother grabbed her baby boy by the arms just as the alligator snatched his legs. That began an incredible tug of war between the mother and the alligator. The alligator struggled and strained, but no way was the mother going to let go.

A farmer happened to drive by, heard her screams, raced from his truck with a gun, took aim, and shot and killed the alligator.

Remarkably, after weeks and weeks in the hospital, the little boy survived. His legs were extremely scarred and disfigured by the vicious attack of the alligator. But on his arms were deep gouges where his mother’s fingernails had dug into his flesh in her effort to hang on to her son.

The newspaper reporter who interviewed the boy asked if he would show his scars. The boy raised his pant legs. And then with obvious pride, he said to the reporter, “But look at my arms! I have great scars on my arms, too! I have them because my mom wouldn’t let go!”

Brothers/sisters, no matter where you go, no matter what you do, no matter what you’ve done, God will not let go!! The love of God that Jesus brought to the world now comes to us. **He will not let you go!**

So now, let’s focus on some additional tools that you can use to maintain a life favored by God no matter where you are:

IV. *(Here are some additional topics and phrases which may help the speaker make this a more effective talk.)*

1. **Being Christian calls for us to live in community**
	* We have a responsibility to nurture and participate in Christian community, in spite of the Pious Pete’s/Patti’s and the Holy Joe’s/Jane’s.
2. **Be a Positive and Encouraging Person**

* Everyday you will have opportunities to reach out to others, bringing God’s love to them, building them up and affirming them.

(3) **The Relational Nature of Christian Action**

* Your Christian Action may encourage or inspire others. It's easy to find fault especially in here, but your willingness to overlook a challenge or forgive an insult maybe the best testimony of your faith. The focus here is that your Christian action may motivate another to help some else; and what you thought was a sacrifice on your part comes back to you as a blessing.

 (4) **The Concept of Cheap Grace**

* There are some who may take Christ’s message and turn it into something that it was never meant to be. They may say, “Oh, I can go out and do anything I want to, no matter how bad or hurtful or unlawful it is, because I’m forgiven and I’ve got grace!” That kind of thinking is what some call “cheap grace”, and God’s free gift is not cheap. It came at a great price, and our response to God’s love can be costly to us, too. But again, it’s worth it.

 (5) **Struggle to hold onto your faith**

* You may find that next week you'll give into a typical human weakness, and you will. Someone may ask, "You really believe that Christian stuff? How come you’re not perfect?" Do not let someone make you doubt your faith. Remind yourself that you’ve changed and that you can choose what you value. You can also sit on the Friendship with God stool. When that happens, ask yourself: how am I doing with my Spirituality, my Study and my Action?

 (6) **Take a Moral inventory**

* Take an examination of conscience. This means to look inside yourself and consider your actions and motives

 (7) **It is not what happens to us but how we respond**

* *(Use the concept of “react v. respond” from the Choices talk to help reinforce the concept that choices determine the quality of our lives. Our choices define and determine our life in Christ.)*

 (8) **If we fail to plan, then we are planning to fail**

 (9) **Our ultimate goal is to become the best person we can be, to be the person God wants us to be**

 (10) **Be gentle with each other**

* Judgment and criticism drive people away from God and you. Remember 1000's of inmates have also started their 4th day.

 (11) **Keep God in your heart wherever you go**

 (12) **Remember who, whose and what you are**

Be armed with the fact that nothing can take God’s love away from you. Paul, in his letter to the Romans in Ch. 8:38, says, “*For I am convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of God: neither death nor life, neither angels nor earthly powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above or the world below – there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus, our Lord.”*

Think about this: what if someone on this team replaced you in here, in this institution, took your time so you could be free? How would you feel about that? *(Pause)* Well, men/ladies, that’s what Christ has done…not us, but Christ!

*(The following is an optional closing)*

Hear this quote from an anonymous pastor in Zimbabwe:

*We’re part of the fellowship of the unashamed,*

 *We have the Holy Spirit’s power,*

 *The decision has been made,*

 *We are His disciples.*

*We won’t look back,*

 *Let up,*

 *Slow down,*

 *Back away*

 *Or be still.*

*My past is redeemed,*

 *My present makes sense,*

 *My future is secure,*

 *And the victory is won.*

*I’m finished with low living,*

 *Sight walking,*

 *Colorless dreams,*

 *Tame vision,*

 *Worldly talking,*

 *Cheap giving,*

 *And dwarfed goals.*

*I no longer need preeminence,*

 *Prosperity,*

 *Position,*

 *Promotions,*

 *Plaudits,*

 *Or Popularity.*

*I don’t have to be right,*

 *I don’t have to be first,*

 *I don’t have to be tops,*

 *I don’t have to be recognized,*

 *I don’t have to be praised,*

 *I don’t have to be rewarded.*

*I now live by faith,*

 *I walk by patience,*

 *I’m uplifted by prayer,*

 *and labor with power.*

*My face is set,*

 *My goal is heaven,*

 *My way is narrow,*

 *And my road is rough.*

*My companions are few,*

 *My guide is reliable,*

 *My mission is clear.*

*I cannot be bought out,*

 *Turned back,*

 *Detoured,*

 *Compromised,*

 *or delayed.*

*I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice,*

 *Hesitate in the presence of the enemy,*

 *Pander at the pool of popularity,*

 *Or meander in the maze of mediocrity.*

*And I won’t let up,*

 *Give up,*

 *Or shut up,*

 *Until I’ve paid up,*

 *Prayed up,*

 *And stayed up. Amen.*

Remember what Paul said? “Nothing can separate us from the love of God.”

That’s not my truth, that’s not your truth, that’s not Catholic or Anglican truth, not Methodist truth, not Baptist truth, and not Protestant truth. What it is, is divine truth. And if it’s divine truth, it’s God’s truth. And if it’s God’s truth, then it is THE TRUTH –AMEN?

Please bow your heads for 2 minutes of silent meditation. *(Speaker walks away)*