

Women & More

Gift of the Giver

Lesson 9: **October 30, 2014**—*grace*

An integral component in gift-getting is the matter of *who* the ‘giver’ is, because often the value of a gift lies with the value we have placed on its ‘giver’. **And if the Giver is God, then the ‘gift’ is the Giver!** James 1:17 says: *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”*

Having established that, the next joyful element is the unwrapping of it. God is the ‘giver’ of all good and perfect gifts, and this lesson will concentrate on unwrapping God’s great gift of *grace*. 1 Peter 1:13 *“Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.”* Anne Lamott said, “I do not at all understand the mystery of grace—only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us.”

“True grace puts an end to all spiritual monopoly,” said Charles Spurgeon. God does all the work of grace! And in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer explained, “Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves...the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship.... Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock....

“It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.”

Grace is given to the unmerited and unworthy—that is us; by the Worthy—that is God! Grace is unmerited favor and cannot go from **unmerited us** to **merited God**. Grace can come to us from God, but we do not give God grace! He doesn’t need it! David is speaking in 1 Chronicles 29:14b and says, *“Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”* We need to see ourselves the way we really are next to Christ. Luke 14:11 *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”* And Romans 12:3b *“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”*

Charles Spurgeon said, “God will deny no blessings to the thoroughly humbled spirit. God’s grace is adequate regardless—‘My grace is sufficient!’ When grace has won the day the worldling seeks the world to come.” But he adds this warning: **“If the grace of God should leave the best Christian, there is enough of sin in his heart to make him the worst of transgressors.”**

Having received God's grace, ourselves, we will want all people to have it, and we will begin with our family, as Andrew did. John 1:41 tells us that when Jesus called Andrew to Himself, he immediately went and found his brother, Simon. "Simon Peter was worth ten Andrews so far as we can gather from sacred history," said Spurgeon. "And yet Andrew was instrumental in bringing him to Jesus. ...The more grace we have, the less we shall think of ourselves, for grace, like light, reveals our impurity. The excellences which we see in a believer are as much the work of God as the atonement itself. Thus is brought out very sweetly *in* the fullness of the grace of God."

"And shall there be a God in providence and not in grace? Shall the shell be ordained by wisdom and the kernel be left to blind chance? No; He knows the end from the beginning," said Spurgeon. "Nor is there one single grace of the Christian which, under God, will not be fostered and brought to perfection by holy knowledge. How important, then, is it that we should grow not only in grace, but in the 'knowledge' of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Titus 2:11-14 refers to at least three definitive stages of grace: "*For the **grace of God that brings salvation** has appeared to all men. ¹²It **teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,** ¹³while **we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,** ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*" Those stages include:

1. **redeeming grace**—"grace of God that brings salvation";
2. **reforming grace**, "*teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,*" and
3. **rewarding grace**—"we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."

I. God's gift of grace is the basis for our salvation: Ephesians 2:8-9 "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, **it is the gift of God**—not by works, so that no one can boast.*" 2 Corinthians 6:1-2—"As God's fellow workers **we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.** ²For he says (ref Isaiah 49:8), '*In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.*' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."

Someone has said that resisting God is an effective hindrance to grace. When God's grace is offered, we must consider that if Jesus Christ offers Himself and we resist or reject we stand in danger of that grace never being offered again. Spurgeon warns: "If Christ be anything, He must be everything." And of His church says, "He has emptied all His estate into the coffers of the Church, and hath all things common with His redeemed."

The **redeeming grace** of God—His spontaneous, Self-determined goodness—is involved in our salvation from start to finish: Philippians 1:6 “...*being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*”

1. He **remembers** man’s hopeless and sinful state;
2. He **reconciles** to the Father those who receive Him as Savior;
3. He **restores** the years that have been wasted—that the locusts have eaten;
4. He **reclaims** what has been lost; and
5. He **renews** a right spirit within me.
6. He **reasserts** his authority in my life;
7. He makes **reunion** possible—Joseph and Jacob in Genesis 46:29—and
8. He works ‘all things’ for the good of those who love Him! (Ref: Romans 8:28 when Joseph said to his brothers, “*You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.*”)

II. God’s gift of grace leads to forgiveness: Our forgiveness from God, yes, but our forgiveness of others! In her book, *The Search for My Son*, Vivian Churness tells about the abduction of her three year old son, Philip, by her husband in 1967. When he was found in 1983, the 16 year old told his mother, “My dad didn’t mean to hurt you.” Her ex-husband had died of AIDS. In a marvelous example of **reforming** grace, Churness told her interviewer, “God’s grace carried me though. See, the worst thing that could ever happen has already happened—Jesus Christ was crucified.” What **reforming** grace had been worked in her **redeemed** heart! Someone has said: “Life is 5 percent joy, 5 percent grief, and 90 percent maintenance.” And forgiveness falls into the hourly, daily and yearly maintenance category.

God does not overlook or excuse sin, but he grants forgiveness to the repentant. And He is our example, because extended forgiveness is gracious; it is grace! Luke 17:3-4 “*So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. 4If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.*” Matthew 18:15-16 “*If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. 17If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*” Unity that comes from agreement is described, and then what God will do. “Forgiveness should never be confused with glossing over the seriousness of a wrong,” Robert Jeffress warns. “The main reason most people feel guilty, is because they are guilty. While repentance and remorse are necessary to receive forgiveness, they are not prerequisites for granting forgiveness. Forgiveness is the obligation of the forgiven!”

III. God's gift of grace leads to faithfulness—ours: When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, he saw the grace of God at work. Acts 11:23 *“When he (Barnabas) arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.”* A familiar chorus by Fanny Crosby says it all: “Not to the strong is the battle, Not to the swift is the race; Yet **to the true and the faithful**, Victory is promised through grace.” Spurgeon again: *“Hitherto the Lord hath helped me, and He will help me still.”* Thus faith views each promise in connection with the promise giver, and, because she does so, can with assurance say, *‘Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.’*”

IV. God's gift of grace leads to blessing: “Understand this” warned Tony McAfee in his book *Divine Interruptions*, “Satan hates the blessing of God! If you seek God's hand of blessing in your life, and if you actually live a blessed life, Satan will indeed notice. He'll use every weapon in his arsenal to take that blessing away. He'll try to get you to take the blessing for granted. He'll even try to get you so excited about the blessing that you forget the *Blesser*.”

V. Raymond Edman said, “To have every natural delight: face, form, education, erudition, personality, position, achievement, and acclaim of others is to need the discipline of delight, that **every gift be acknowledged as from the Giver**, that every talent become a sacred trust, that every honor become a humbling of heart before Him, in order that He have all the glory.”

V. God's gift of grace leads to 'crosses': Francois Fenelon—“The faithful Giver of every good gift distributes them (crosses) to each of us with His own hand. Blessed be His name! Every cross He gives us is for our profit!” We've said it, no man on earth endured more 'crosses' than Job! And speaking of Job, McAfee notes: “He exalted God, and not what God gave him. When all the 'stuff' was gone, Job still exalted God.” Joseph Caryl says: “It is not only the grace, but the glory of a believer when he can stand and take affliction quietly.”

VI. God's gift of grace demands spiritual growth: Dr. Charles R. Solomon in his book *Handbook to Happiness* said, “It is certainly not God's will that we go for years or even a lifetime as a spiritual infant or adolescent. It is his desire that we go on to maturity.” Hebrews 6:1 *“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.”* How we live out the gracious life that God has given to us will matter to God, to others and to us. Beth Moore said, “One person can invite the favor of God to the benefit of many.” The prophet Jonah brought imminent peril to his shipmates while running from God; but the apostle Paul brought blessing, favor and grace to those shipwrecked with him. What made the difference? The answer is obedience to God. God loves it when we obey, but obedience is our choice.

► In a *VeggieTales* life-lesson episode, little Snoodle has been bullied by other bigger Snoodles and he makes an impassioned appeal to his Maker: “Can’t You make all Snoodles obey You?” And Maker replies to the little one, “A gift that’s demanded is no gift at all.”

Obedience to God will include walking in His **way** daily; speaking His **truth** faithfully, and living out the ‘grace’ **life** that God has planned for each believer. “Not I, Not to me, but to the grace of God which was with me! What have I that I did not receive from God alone?” asked Spurgeon. “Shall the insect of an hour glorify itself against the sun which warmed it into life?”

VII. God’s gift of grace will mean discipline for His children: Revelation 3:19-20 *“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. 20Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”* These verses are speaking specifically to the church of God in Laodicea—urging them to repent and grow spiritually. And it is speaking to God’s children everywhere. The Divine heart is running over with grace: Isaiah 30:18 *“Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!”*

Apart from grace, the only thing we can hope for from God is justice resulting in judgment. Grace is His to extend or not—we cannot obligate the Sovereign God to anything He has not obligated Himself to. He has said he will hear the repentant; and He has further said He will judge the unrepentant! Psalm 53:4 *“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.”* We can absolutely count on every word He has said: He has invited the whole world to believe on His Son!

Former pastor James Wilder said, “I don’t care what gift it is, unless it is Christ Jesus, it will leave you empty.” And he used Psalm 103:4-5 to explain that the life lived in relationship with God has meaning, because He keeps our lives from going to waste. *“...who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, swho satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”*

Our gracious-beyond-measure God is altogether worthy of everything—our praise, adoration worship, awe, love and respect—but no ‘grace’ is needed by Him! Romans 11:35-36 *“Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? 36For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”* Someone has so rightly said that **God and giving go together**, and that God’s gifts put man’s best dreams to shame. So we say with Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:15 *“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”*