

Spiritual Community

Grace-grounded Community

ISOLATION—part 3

May 1, 2022

DAY 1: Grace and the problem of sin

Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.

1. I still remember the first time I ever worked in children's Sunday school. I was twenty-four years old, single, no kids of my own. There were five kids in a large classroom. A hundred toys were within easy reach. What do you think happened next?
2. All five kids all had to have the same one toy. They were determined, they were adamant, they were complaining, they were whining when another child had the toy. There was grabbing and stealing.
3. They voiced "It's not fair." One cried, one pouted, and one felt quite superior. One was the group tattle tale. Every time I took the toy away from one and gave it to another to share, they all changed roles. One was mad. There was outrage. One wanted to get even.
4. Sin was ingrained in their human nature. Nobody had to teach those kids how to hoard, to gloat, to tempt, or complain. He came just as easy as breathing and with no thought.
5. What can possibly change human nature? Only something called "grace."
6. What is "grace?" I grew up believing "grace" was what you did before you ate dinner. You "said grace," meaning you prayed before you ate. As adults we use the word grace to describe someone who is poised. "Oh, she is just such a person of grace." I've heard Princess Di and Princess Kate spoken of in this fashion.
7. "Grace" is used over 150 times in the New Testament. Grace is something very different and far more wonderful than a prayer over a meal or someone's poise.

Grace is undeserved favor.

9. Grace is the experience of having really screwed up, and yet someone's attitude is not only still positive toward you, but they relate the same way to you, as if you'd never sinned against them.
10. What is your understanding of Christian grace?

DAY 2: The costliness of grace

1. Grace is far more than overlooking someone's flaws or sins. Grace is even more than forgiving someone. Grace is a costly gift that we give someone that doesn't deserve the gift.

2. Notice how the apostle Paul describes the grace of Jesus Christ.

*2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the **grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

a. Paul uses the metaphor of money to illustrate the sacrificial nature of grace. We know Jesus was not *monetarily* rich. He had no place to lay his head at night.

b. So, what does Paul mean when he says our Lord Jesus Christ was rich?

c. What does Paul mean when he says that Christ became *poor*?

d. Why did Christ become *poor*?

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

3. What strikes you about how we are to treat each other?

4. Paul goes on, in the very next verses, to tell us the standard of how we're to treat each other.

*⁵ **In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:** ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

5. What strikes you about the example of Christ on our behalf?

6. What thoughts go through your mind as you think about His example as the “why” and “how” of how we're to relate to people around us? (Also look back as Phil. 2:3-4)

7. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 3: The gospel of grace

1. A number of new churches were started in the area of Galatia, which is modern-day Turkey. Most of these churches were started with many Jews who converted to Christ. As Jews, they had wrongly assumed that salvation was a matter of keeping the Old Testament law, a salvation that was earned by “good behavior.” They came to Christ when they realized that no one can keep the Old Testament law, and that nobody can be good enough to be saved. They marveled at the grace of God for undeserving sinners!

2. However, after their salvation, they reverted back to “getting it right” in order to earn favor with God. That is not the gospel. When Paul hears this news, he writes the letter to the Galatian churches.

Galatians 1:6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel...

a. Paul calls them out as *deserting* Christ. Why?

b. They are not deserting Christ in the sense of giving up on Christianity. They are deserting Christ in the sense of living as Christians, with grace as the continuing bottom line of our faith.

c. As Christians we know that we came to Christ strictly because of grace, but having done that, it's very easy to live the Christian life as if it now depends on us. We must “try harder.” The metric we use to identify the foundation of our Christian life is not our efforts, our progress in the faith, our “getting it together,” or any such thing.

d. The bottom line of the Christian life is the same bottom line as when we first became Christians—grace! Notice how Paul addresses this in his letter to the church at Colossae.

Colossians 2:6-7 As therefore you received (PAST TENSE) Christ Jesus the Lord, so live (PRESENT TENSE) in Him, rooted and built up in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in Thanksgiving.

3. The “bottom-line” in many churches is “getting it right.

a. When we make that the metric we foolishly set ourselves up for (1) extra discouragement, (2) extra shame, and (3) extra pressure.

b. We also miss out on the experience and enjoyment of grace!!! We also assume that everyone else should also be “getting it right,” and in doing so we set ourselves up as judge and jury of our brothers and sisters. We will find ourselves dealing with critical attitudes, and the communication of un-acceptance as someone doesn't “measure up.”

4. The kind of community we need is grace-based, grace as the bottom line of Christianity. Only grace can permeate God's family in a way that builds strong and loving relationships.

5. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 4: Grace: why we worship

1. The apostle Paul was dealing with an issue that filled him with terrible aggravation. He called it “a messenger of Satan.” We don’t know if it was an illness or something else, but whatever it was Paul pleaded with God to remove it. God didn’t.

2. Instead, here is God’s response to Paul’s prayer.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

3. What strikes you most about that verse?

4. This “grace-principle” is one of the reasons why we worship God. He can meet us in any and every situation or crisis we face.

5. *Every* weakness we face is covered by grace, and strengthened by grace.

a. When we are fearful, He gives us peace.

b. When we are hurting, He comforts us.

c. When we feel like a failure, He redeems even our failures.

d. When we feel shame, He cleanses us.

e. When we feel lonely, He reminds us that He loves us more than anyone.

f. When we are empty, He satisfies us.

g. When we are hopeless, He anchors us in the promises of God that give us hope.

h. He is with us in every challenging relationship, to enable us to reflect Christ to anyone.

6. We worship in community because God is worthy of worship. But we also worship in community because these principles are taught, reinforced, and reminders that we need, not just from our pastors, but from one another!

Hebrews 3:13 But exhort one another daily, that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.

7. When listening to bible teachers, more is going on than just remembering or explaining truths. Teachers “carry” the truth in them and through them. If you are attentive, you sense the value the teacher places on the truth, and sense how to teacher lives out that truth. We don’t just learn cognitively, from one brain to another brain. We also learn relationally, from one heart to another heart, and from one example to another. This doesn’t just come from the professional clergy.

8. What strikes you about today’s devotional?

DAY 5: Grace: why we sing

- **Singing in community; I am not alone in any situation or trouble**

Psalm 100:1 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. ²Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. ³Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Psalm 100:4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. ⁵For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

1. When I was a young Christian at age twenty, I thought that we sang songs in church as sort of “filler,” prior to the message. The worship songs were sort of like the warm-up band at a concert before we got to the headliner band. I looked at the preacher as the headliner band.

2. Then, I discovered the book of Psalms. Psalms is the Old Testament songbook. When you read the book of Psalms you are reading lyrics. The psalms are not all the same thing. Different psalms point to different experiences of life.

a. Let’s say you are very confused about why bad people seem to prosper and seem to skate through life while your life is filled with difficulty and hardship. The psalmist, the worship director would say, “Sing Psalm 73.”

b. Now you can read Psalm 73 on your own and benefit greatly from it. But if you are singing Psalm 73 with seventy-five other people who also wonder why bad people seem to get by with bad while their life is filled with difficulty, you realize you are not alone! You are not a spiritual “loser.” Something in you is strengthened by community that is rooted in God’s Larger Story of hope, that enables us to endure difficulty with anticipation and hope.

3. Sometimes songs:

a. Stir our hearts because of difficulties we’re facing.

b. Encourage our ultimate hope in God.

c. Help us lament or grieve a loss.

d. Help, not just our heads, but our hearts to praise God for what He has done for us, or how He is changing us, or who He is.

e. Anchor us more deeply in a sometimes chaotic and uncertain life.

6. Songs speak the language not just of our heads but of our hearts. Music reaches down into commitments to deepen them, to strengthen us when we feel weak, evoke gratitude for the tremendous price that was paid that we might be forgiven, and deepen hope in our God who redeems everything.

7. I could sing by myself. There is a place for that in private worship. But when I sing in community we are affirming the truths of God not just to each other’s heads but to each other’s hearts. We are emboldened as we realize that no matter what challenge or difficulty we face, we do not face it along.

8. What strikes you from today’s devotional?