

Why Grace?

Part 1: Transformed Fruit!

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Full Text (for reading on your own)

Mourning

One of the things we want to do is rejoice with those who rejoice and also weep with those who weep. Rom 12:15 “*Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.*” It is key to do both. We had a major loss this past week as a church family.

She’s with the Lord. That’s the great equalizer.

But, that doesn’t take away the grieving. In times like these there are two sort of parallel railroad tracks and you have to keep a wheel on both of them. One is to grieve. You have to grieve. The other railroad track is who God is - the truth of who God is. You need to keep a wheel on both tracks.

They are separate tracks actually and the trouble people get into in times like these is when they let those two things encroach on each other. Some people who really know who God is and the reality of Heaven will tell themselves “I shouldn’t be grieving ... after all, she’s with the Lord and after all God’s good. He’s my Savior. He’s my Provider. He’s my Strong Tower.” And you will “truth” yourself out of grieving. That’s not helpful.

There is another ditch you can fall into. You grieve, but in your grief you get to the point that you forget who God is. The enemy will sow lies into that situation. All of a sudden you start thinking that God took someone before their time. He didn’t. It’s a big deal. Now, He can and will turn lemons into lemonade. That’s the reality, she’s with Him. However, His goodness has not changed this week.

So, any time you are in grief (Heaven forbid) you have to grieve - and you have to hold onto who God is. It’s both.

And then you can remind yourself of the reality of a believer’s current situation after they have passed. We love them and we want them to be OK and not knowing they are OK can also thwart the healing process. When we had a miscarriage in 2013 or so I had a vision of Heaven and heard my daughter say “daddy, I’m OK.” The Father had given me this promise from Isaiah 54 “all your children shall be taught of the Lord and great shall be the peace of your children.” He was saying

“will you let me take care of her?” Boy, that made a big difference for me - the reality of knowing she was going to have a better daddy than she was going to have here. That really helped me out.

Those are the three things to hold onto. God’s goodness never changes. Just because something happened, we don’t want to be getting into that place of confusion where we say “that tragedy must have been God’s will ...” That will create so many problems in our relationships with God down the road - because it’s not true. We can easily believe lies like that if we allow grief to override who we know God to be. Yet, we don’t want to shut grief down saying “well I know who God is and I know He’s good - why am I even grieving?”

You need to mourn. You need to hold onto who God is. And you need to remember where she is.

Everything can be redeemed. Anything you think is unredeemable has stepped out of a reality of who the Father is. Everything can be redeemed.

John 15 ... Pruning

John 15:1-2 says “*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He ~~takes away~~ (lifts up) ; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*”

There are two modes in the Christian life. One is where the Father (our Vinedresser) lifts us up so that we are not stuck in the dirt and much and mire but you are a lifted-up branch and then the washing of the water of the word (Heb. 10) and what He says about you washes that muck off and you start being a productive branch again. Jesus says this about His disciples in verse 3 “*You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.*” It’s His word that washes us off! It’s the word that causes our hearts to be sprinkled clean from an evil conscience so that we no longer walk around with condemnation (a consciousness of evil) but instead of righteousness. This causes us to step into a place of production in the Lord because we know who we are in Him - and we are connected to Him.

If you are bearing fruit, the Father will prune you. How much the pruning hurts depends on how much you’ve placed your identity in the fruit you just bore.

In the natural, pruning is done at the *place of connection*. Where’s there’s a junction in the branch is where you prune it back to - you prune back to a place of connection. When God prunes us He prunes us back to a place of strength. What’s our place of strength? The place of connection! With Who? Our place of connection with Jesus!

The Father is always pruning us back to that place of connection.

Pruning ... Pride and Humility

One visual of pride and humility can be seen in the pruning parable. Humility would be keeping your self back in the place of connection with Christ. Even as fruit is flowing out of you, your heart is leaning back into the Vine saying “this is where I abide.” Jesus said this “... *abide in Me, and My words abide in you ...*”

Pride is when we start to step out into the fruit saying “this fruit looks good! Look at me! This fruit IS me!” But you are not a human *doing*, you are a human *being*. You ABIDE - you BE in Christ and you do produce fruit. But if you get out here and say “this is my human DOING” when the Father says “I am going to reduce you to your place of strength, your connection with Me.” Now you will feel like you are squirming on the ground saying “this really hurt!” The only reason it hurt is because your identity had gotten out there in what got cut off!

Megan (my wife) was telling me the other day that one of the things I do really well is I am able to 180 to a new thought if someone gives me a more true thought. She was commenting on how she has noticed that I can generally do that very quickly. She then said “I notice for a lot of people it can be very hard for them to do that.” In other words, someone can give them the truth. They get the truth. But when they have the new truth they say “I know that’s right, but you know I’ve been thinking like this ... I’ve been doing it like this ...”

When she shared this with me, what bubbled out of my mouth (and there was no judgment on it) was this “Do you know what causes that? Pride.” How quickly any of us can adjust to the truth of God - how quickly I can adjust to a pruning - is determined by where we are standing on the pride/humility continuum.

I told you all last time that I had felt some “whiplash” before the last message because I only had 2 or 3 days to adjust to what He was saying. The only reason I felt “whiplash” on that pruning is because I was OUT IN THE FRUIT! Praise God I was able to adjust to and submit to what He was saying over a couple day period. But if I hadn’t gotten myself out in the fruit it would not have felt like “whiplash” at all. It would have been “snip” and I would have just said “OK!”

He’s wanting you to bear more fruit but you are only going to bear fruit out of your connection to Him. He also doesn’t want you to get your identity in what you do. God is NOT using you. He just wants to be with you. When you are with Him, you will bear fruit. “*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.*” (John 15:7)

Pruning will take care of your pride - if you let it.

Many Different Facets of the Gospel of Grace

Humility is a big deal as it relates to the gospel of grace. Who does God give grace to?

The humble!

After a couple years of being lead pastor and about 5 years of being associate pastor before that, I've come to believe that I think humility is the most important heart issue in the entire Kingdom. I think it is probably the most important message in the entire Kingdom. The reason I say that is because I think GRACE is the most important message in the entire Kingdom - I just know what's at the root of grace.

So from a pastoral perspective, if I could just let you into my thinking as I meet with people, humility is the issue.

Now, this is a bit circular because actually the grace message will cause you to receive the love of the Father, which will drive out pride - which will position you in humility. The answer for the humility issue isn't for me to say "be humble. Be humble! Be humble! Are you humble yet!?" That approach doesn't work.

The grace message - who you are in Christ, His love for you - will drive pride out.

The grace message IS the message of His love for you! *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16)
What sort of love did God love the world with? How does God love the world?

What's the nature of God's love for the world? How can we know what it looks like? If you want to know what the love of God looks like what message do you have to look at? Jesus being sent for us! Everything embodied in the Gospel of Christ is the perfect expression of the Father's love.

The message of grace is connected to EVERYTHING.

There are some revelations that I would categorize as "side street" revelations. For instance, if I taught on food sacrificed to idols we could probably button that up in one Sunday. That is a very valuable revelation that is definitely applicable beyond food, but is still more of a "side street" revelation. Grace, on the other hand, is like the interstate highway of revelations. Everything is flowing off of grace.

Hebrews 5 makes it clear: when believers need milk only - and can't handle solid food - it is because they do not yet have the word (or teaching) of righteousness. When you have the revelation that you are righteous by the blood of Jesus (in other words, the message of grace), it equips you for all other

meaty revelations. You have to get the message of grace in order to rightly divide the rest of the Word of God.

Grace is connected to everything. So, to the best of my ability, I am going to try to focus on certain elements of the message of grace on each Sunday. However, know that when I do that, it will be impossible to give a full picture of grace on any given Sunday.

The best I can do is to approach it like a diamond which has lots of beautiful facets. Regardless of which side you look at it from, the light catches the diamond and bounces back beautifully. All I am going to be doing is showing you different facets of grace. Some of these facets will be new. Some may be review. All of them are beautiful.

One *type* of facet is “what is grace?” Here are a few quick phrases about “what is grace.”

- Grace is God’s performance on our behalf whereas the law / works is our performance on God’s behalf.
- Grace is RECEIVE not ACHIEVE.
- Grace is my past, present, and future sins completely forgiven ONCE and for all.
- Perfect right standing with God regardless of how I feel about it.

Now those are just facets of ***what grace is***. And there are many more! And each of the 4 listed above becomes multiple teachings!

My goal today is to share 2 facets of ***what grace does***. The list above was about what grace IS, but what does grace do? Because what grace does for you will motivate you. It will answer the question “why grace?”

This series is going to be more of a teaching-type series. Welcome to class! Here’s the thing: when the accuser of the brethren starts coming after you and you are having condemning thoughts, or you’ve messed up ... you’ve got to have an ANCHOR to your soul. You don’t develop an anchor by having heard a nice thought or a good one-liner. You need more than a one-liner to develop an anchor to your soul. You need the Word of God and the Word from multiple facets. You have to develop the weightiness of that truth so that doctrine takes hold in your life so that even if the storms buffet you, it doesn’t throw you off course.

So I need to approach this series in a much more teacher-ly manner to accomplish what I want to see accomplished in you (and me).

Personal Testimony about GETTING Grace

Around January of 2010 I remember where I was in our new apartment (we had been married just about 6 months earlier) ... the Lord spoke to me very clearly and said “the work I’m about to do in you is going to be so great that no one can boast.” And those who have known me for years have commented to me on how much the Lord has grown me in the past 8-9 years.

Do you hear the language God used with me? He said the transformation is going to be so great that “no one can boast.” Where’s that phrase in scripture? Ephesians 2!

*“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, **lest anyone should boast.**” (Eph. 2:4-9)*

What God was speaking to me was “I’m about to do a radical transformation in your life and it is not going to come through your works.” He told me ahead of time what He was about to do.

Now concurrent to that time I was listening to some messages that I STILL remember:

- I was listening to Graham Cooke who was saying “if God poured all of His wrath out on Jesus ... how much does He have left for you?”
- Brad was doing a discipleship class for us and he was teaching out of Isaiah 54:9-10 “*For this is like the waters of Noah to Me; for as I have sworn That the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, so have I sworn That I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, But My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,*” says the Lord, who has mercy on you.” The covenant with Noah was UNCONDITIONAL! So God has sworn (unconditionally) that He will never again be angry with us! Nor will His covenant of peace be removed!
- Kris Vallotton had a message “Is your house haunted.” For years I was afraid to listen to it! Once I got up the gumption to listen to it I wished I had done so years before! The story line was some believers he knew had just bought an old house and they kept getting tormented by these evil spirits in this house they had just bought ... so they thought their house was haunted. He went there and cast the demons out. He realized then that many believers think is happening in their life. These people thought the house was haunted - not realizing the enemy was just tormenting them. Many believers think their inner most part is a sin nature (a haunted house) ... not realizing the enemy is just tormenting you through an evil

conscience. So Kris started teaching on how your OLD MAN IS DEAD! You do not have a sin nature any more! (Rom. 4-8) This is why you should not read the book of Romans in the NIV because it added the phrase “sin nature” which is nowhere in the Greek. The only phrase there is OLD MAN and your OLD MAN IS DEAD! You do NOT have a sin nature. If you are a born-again believer, your sin nature got crucified with Christ. It’s no longer that guy who lives! And since that old man got crucified and is dead, now you are no longer married to sin - so you can be married to Christ praise God!

So I was starting to receive revelation on just 3 facets of that diamond of the gospel of grace! I remember driving down the road in Westerville screaming at the top of my lungs as I listened to Kris Vallotton’s message. I was getting set free! “Wait, I’m not sinful at my core?!? I’m the righteousness of Christ Jesus at my core? And I’m just learning to let that out?” I had been trying to get sin out for years! You’ve got the seed of God inside of you and it is INCORRUPTIBLE!

These truths were starting to work together to tear down old religious thinking and release the freedom of Christ into my life.

I remember many personal prayer times in that era of my walk where I would start my prayer times like this “God, I know You’re not angry at me.” Why? Because Brad taught me Isaiah 54. Over time I started TO KNOW that God was not angry with me. He had sworn He would never be angry with me. So I could no longer have a relationship with God that was fearful of wrath from Him.

That will change your relationship with God!

Now, your daddy wasn’t that good. He did the best he knew how to discipline you (Heb. 12) but God is PERFECT! There’s never anger in it.

What Grace DID for me

So what did grace DO for me? Let me give you 3 testimonies from my time as a teacher. And I choose to share these because these are not from people at church or family that see how I am pressing into God. In other words these are not from people who may be apt to “see fruit” because they know I am working on the root. These testimonies are just from students.

From a Team Teacher

I had a team teacher. We were around each other multiple hours a day. We saw each other at our best and our worst. After I had taught with this team teacher for a year or two, I overheard her telling our secretary this “I don’t know what it is about Peter ... he’s unflappable.”

Why’s that a testimony? I had anxiety so bad that when I was first a believer and going to see a Christian counselor she said “you should probably go to the doctor and get OCD medication.” So

some of you that are struggling with anxiety, let me just tell you that the problem is fear. But perfect love casts out fear!

So you say “yea yea, I want to get the perfect love message! Give me the perfect love message!” That’s what I was just telling you before: it’s the grace message! Grace is the expression of His perfect love! You get the grace message, you get the perfect love, and the fear leaves.

I had been being riddled with anxiety - so anxious that nearly every social situation was awkward for me. I was driving myself nuts with anxiety and a Christian counselor who was knowing exactly what I was thinking said “you probably should get OCD medication.” That was someone who subscribes to prayer being the answer ... she was like “you need OCD medication.” Now I didn’t feel peace on it so I didn’t do it. Praise God ... the GOSPEL OF GRACE set me free from anxiety!

“I just try to walk past him”

This one is the best compliment I ever got teaching. This student’s mom talked to me one day and said “don’t tell him I said so ...” I said “what?” She told me “he told me that if he’s ever having a bad day he tries to walk past you in the hallway - it makes him feel better.”

Now, Megan knew me before I got saved because she led me to the Lord. (March 15, 2005!) I was melancholy and self-pitying. I was not real fun to be around! I was not a fun-guy!

You know how some people walk into the room and a cloud comes with them? The “Eeore spirit?” I don’t bring that up in a condemning way because I was there! That thing you are feeling from that person ... that’s condemnation.

Do this exercise in your imagination. Let’s say you are having a great time in the Lord at house church and someone out of condemnation just starts confessing all of these sins. You will feel heaviness come over the room. “Well the Spirit of the Lord was here!” Now you could minister to that persona and all that sort of thing. I’m just saying I’ve been in settings like that where condemnation and heaviness comes into the room.

Many people carry this cloud around them. It’s like the “Eeore spirit.” They are carrying this around. I personally had been so melancholy and filled with self-pity and condemnation ... such that to later on after having received the gospel of grace ... for a student to try to walk past me (not to hear my voice - just to try to walk past me) to feel the joy that was on me.

Joy instead of mourning! A garment of praise instead of a spirit of heaviness! That’s a transformation. But that transformation comes through the anointed One, Jesus Christ and the gospel of grace.

“I’ve never seen him upset about something and outgoing about it”

Another student had a senior year project where they needed to write an English paper about a teacher. This one student I understand wrote about me and the English teacher thought it was so nice she sent an excerpt from it to me.

This student said he had seen me for 4 years (I if I recall had me for 3 classes). It is 120 hours per class. So I think he spent 360 hours with me in class. He said *“I’ve never seen him upset about something and outgoing about it.”* He said he had never seen me express anger in 3 years of teaching high school students!

Do you know what causes anger to go? When condemnation goes! If God is angry with you, you will be angry with people. If God is not angry with you, you will not be angry with people. (Of course you may miss it sometimes but if you know that God’s not angry with you you will quickly right yourself and follow up with folks). So surely I wasn’t perfect but for a student to never remember me being angry!

How could I have not had a problem with anger? Because of Isaiah 54! I had gotten that my Father is not angry with me!

Do you want to an angry wife? As a husband, be angry with her. You will get that back. Do you want to see angry children? Be angry with them. God does not want to see His children angry because He’s not angry with us!

All of these three testimonies were through the gospel of grace!

Discerning your ISSUE from your ARROW

I mentioned before that I think humility is the biggest issue in the heart of believers because it drives the grace experience that they have - and the grace experience is driving everything else.

Let me just do some “mass pastoring” for a minute. Over the next 3 years probably every one of us is going to need this following encouragement (including me). So I could meet with each one of you individually or just share this key with you right now.

Sometimes in the next 3 years I can unfortunately assume that just like every other human on this earth that you are going to have some sort of an issue in your life that you want to change. Maybe it’s anxiety like I had. Maybe it’s “feeling down” a lot of the time. Maybe it’s how you manage people or don’t manage people. Maybe it’s how you have initiative or lack initiative to start a business. Maybe it’s how you are diligent with your work or are not diligent with your work. Maybe it’s how you treat your spouse or don’t treat your spouse. Maybe it’s how you parent your kids or don’t parent your kids.

Do you see what I am saying? You are going to have some issue in your life at some point. Some of you may have an issue right now - like me! So let me give you a mass pastoring lesson about issues and dealing with issues in our lives ...

The biggest thing Christians are struggling with is what the difference is between a target and an arrow.

We are good at identifying the issues in our life. That's the target.

"I've got a problem with anger with my kids." OK.

"No, I have a problem with anger with my kids." OK.

"Yea, see the thing is, I've got a problem with anger with my kids." Yea, I heard you.

"So I've been thinking a lot about this problem I have with my kids, where I get angry with them ... I don't like it." Yes, I know you don't.

"I've got a problem with anger with my kids."

Now, imagine you went to a Robin Hood style archery competition. Could you imagine the competing archers standing up here saying "look at that target. That target right there, it needs hit. I'm going to talk about the target. Maybe while I talk about the targets it will get itself hit. Targets, targets, targets!"

I know that sounds crazy but that's what most believers are doing most of the time. I'm giving you a pastoral lesson.

Most of the time when I meet with people (especially when they've not yet heard the gospel of grace) and they have issues in their life, they are talking about the target.

"I've got anxiety."

"I'm melancholy."

"I'm angry with my kids."

"My marriage isn't what it should be."

"I need a breakthrough in my career."

We tend to talk about the issue.

Wisdom is being able to know the difference between an arrow and a target. So my question for you is "what is the arrow that will actually pierce through the target?"

Let's look at 1 John 2:15-16 *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world."*

In the above scripture you can find 3 targets and 1 arrow. Can you find them?

What are the 3 targets / issues you see there:

- lust
- lust
- pride

Specifically we see

- lust of the flesh
- lust of the eyes
- pride of life

By the way, I think these phrases are FAR more generalizable than they may appear at the surface. I have a hunch that they are actually connected to the 3 temptations of Christ in the desert. And I believe that Jesus was tempted in every way while YET in the desert. I think somehow those 3 temptations equalled being tempted in every way. So when we see these three targets/issues listed in 1 John 2:15-16 I don't think these are 3 specific issues ... I think these are THE issues.

So if you have one or more of these issues, what is the scripture saying you are missing? What's right before it? *"the love of the Father."*

We see that we will have these issues going on to the extent that we don't have a revelation of the love of the Father. Woh!

Any of us will have these issues to the extent you don't have the love of the Father.

Note well ... I'm showing you the difference between an arrow and a target!

You have these targets ... and they are still standing up in your life, with no arrow through them, because you haven't been shooting arrows ... you've been talking about targets!

Most believers are living a will-powered life but God told me in 2010 "the work I'm about to do in you is going to be so great that no one can boast." He told me it was going to be a work of GRACE! GRACE IS YOUR ARROW! The love of the Father is your arrow! And what's the love of the Father expressed in? The gospel of grace!

I sit with believers. “I’ve got this problem” they say. I listen. Then I listen. And I listen. And I wonder if they want the solution.

Grace is the solution. The love of the Father is the solution.

Why is the New Testament so short?

God’s ways are not our ways. If you were leaving written instructions for billions of people who would live over a 2000 year period how many pages would you make your book?

Find Matthew chapter 1 in your bible, keep your finger there and now turn right to Revelation 22 and pinch the pages between. That’s the entire New Testament. What is it? 3/8 of an inch thick?!

In those few pieces of paper are all of the instruction written to believers for the next 2000 years. How is that possible?

Further ... consider this: about 90% of that New Testament is speaking about 1 thing: the new covenant / the gospel of grace.

The gospel of grace is God’s ordained transformational element in all of the world.

That’s it.

We tend to want it to be something else. It’s not something else.

The gospel of grace is THE ARROW to shoot through any target in your life or anybody else’s life!

Every testimony you could want is going to be through the gospel of grace.

Here I shared personal testimonies about “heart” stuff, but how do you pray for someone’s healing? Well you better know who you are in Christ! How do you trust God for financial abundance? You better know who you are in Christ or you’re not going to have any confidence with the promises!

All of that comes through the gospel of grace - through the love of the Father. They are one in the same.

Why Grace?

Why Grace? It changes the fruit of our lives. It is THE transformational agent in our lives. “I’m about to do a work in you so great that no one can boast. You can’t do this one in the strength of your flesh. I’m going to change you.”

As powerful as this is - that grace is Gods’ transformational element in your life - next time we are going to see how the Father loves the gospel of grace for another reason even more than it transforming your fruit ... and that’s that it transforms your connection with Him!