

“If You Want To Love Life You Have To Show Grace”

As I told you last week, before Connie and I took off for our vacation, I was planning a new series for the summer titled “*How to love life and see good days.*” We all want and need that. Many of us have felt it this year more than ever. The theme verse for the series is **1 Peter 3:8-12**, which was just read. I have several Scriptures in mind for this series, and I initially thought I would end with this, the theme passage. But then, this week, I felt drawn to start here. So we will.

This passage speaks to two impulses in human nature, and it tells us they are often pulling in opposite directions. The one impulse is the desire to love life and see good days. The other is the familiar human passion for payback. These two things are strong in human nature. Peter tells us that they work against each other. Peter says you can't go for payback and also a good life. Those two things will not ultimately be found together. ***If you want to love life, you have to show grace.*** It's right there in **verse 9**, *Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called,*

It's very clear verse 9 is telling us ...

I. WE NEED TO RESPOND TO EVIL WITH BLESSING.

But before we get to verse 9, we have verse 8 which says...

A. To offer blessing in response to evil, you have to begin within.

Verse 8, *Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.* There is what scholars call a Chiasm in this verse. That is a literary structure that forms an “X” pattern. Notice, the verse begins and ends with an emphasis on the mind, *unity of mind, and a humble mind.* With your mind, you have to prioritize unity and embrace humility. Then the second and second to last virtues are more in the realm of your feelings: *sympathy* and a *tender heart*. But the point of this kind of structure is that the thing in the center is the heart of it all. What does Peter put at the center? *Brotherly love!* That is one word in Greek, and it's gender-neutral. It describes the kind of bond and affection shared in a family. God wants his people to love each other like sisters and brothers.

Earlier in the book of **1 Peter**, **Peter** reminded these Christians that they were part of a very special spiritual family. As such, they shared a

relationship with Christ that gave them a unique calling and capacity for love. In **1 Peter 1:22-23**, He wrote: *Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, ²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.* The gospel has two very basic truths embedded in it. 1st.) You are a sinner. 2nd.) Despite your sin, you are loved and forgiven by Christ. If you are a sinner, then when you are mad or indifferent to others, you know that maybe you're wrong. After all, you are a sinner! Even if you are *not* wrong, you were loved by God when you *were* wrong. When you let your heart soak in the reality of God's love for you and the implications of that - there is power in that which enables you to love others for Christ sake and in that love to prioritize unity, embrace humility, retain a tender heart and respond to others with sympathy.

*You have to begin within. That's **verse 8**. Now, **verse 9**, building on that, tells us there are two sides to what we actually need to do. First, "Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling."*

B. We have to reject the impulse for payback.

1. The word "evil" is important. It is not only in **verse 9**. It is in every verse. **Verse 10** says, *keep your tongue from evil*. **Verse 11** says, *turn away from evil*. **Verse 12** says *the face of the Lord is against those who do evil*. This word describes something that is not just wrong in some technical sense but something that is damaging and destructive. One thing important to see here is that Peter is *not* talking about evil done by people out in the world but people in the church; brothers and sisters. The church is a fellowship of redeemed sinners. We have an adversary who accuses, slanders, and sows division. When you trust Jesus, you are born again. You have a new identity as a saint, a set apart and holy child of God. But indwelling sin and even evil are not eradicated. They can show up in you and others. We have to face that.

2. The word "reviling" is also a strong word. The Dictionary of Biblical Languages gives its foremost definition as *slander*. *Logos defines it as "abusive words, falsely spoken that damage a person's reputation."* This does not seem to be a word used for anyone who hurts your feelings foolishly or accidentally, that's bad enough, but these words describe one who intentionally uses words to harm you. The reason this definition is important is because saying, *even if* someone sets out to damage you with deliberate falsehoods. You do not get a pass for payback. You cannot do the same to them.

3. That does not mean you cannot confront or address evil when that is needed. The Bible talks about speaking the truth in love. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: *“Nothing is so cruel as the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin.”*¹ Sometimes the best way to bless someone is to tell them a hard truth they need to hear. There are times when it is right to meet evil with strength. But it is never right to meet evil with evil. Never! Republicans and Democrats were asked whether they agreed with this statement: *“Members of the opposition party are not just worse for politics. They are downright evil.”* Forty percent (4 out of 10) people agreed with that.² Our nation right now is strained by polarization, conflict, and tension. We need to contend for what is right, but we must never meet evil with evil.

So Peter starts there, but then he tells us to go farther...

C. We are called to respond to evil with blessing.

1. Verse 9, says, *Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.*

2. To strengthen this, Peter quotes the Old Testament Scriptures - Psalm 34. Verse 10 says, *For, “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; 11 let him turn away from evil - but notice here halfway through **verse 11** God says, and do good. That's positive! It is actively going after goodness. He then says, “let him seek peace and pursue it.”*

In the Bible, to *“bless someone”* is to sincerely pray for God's blessing on them and to do good things for them. He says, if you want to see good days, do good things. You are called to be blessed by God and to be a blessing to others for him. So, bless others, do good, seek peace because it is easily lost. Pursue peace because it is elusive.

3. That word pursue is a hunting term. It means to “pursue with intensity, determination, persistence.” If we take this seriously, it will not allow us to give up easily on a challenging problem or a difficult relationship. When we face things that are difficult with an obedience that comes from faith, that's when we are forced to grow deeper in our walk with God, our life in Christ, and our dependence on the Holy Spirit.

C.S. Lewis wrote some powerful words about our choices.

"Every time you make a choice, you are turning the central part of you, the part that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature."

Think about the choices we are all making every day in this present cultural and relational climate. People are so tired, worn down. We are not seeing people at their best. And we are maybe not at our best. So we have to keep making those godly choices. Keep turning from evil, and doing good and seeking peace, and pursuing it.

If you want to love life, you have to show grace. That means you respond to evil with blessing, and...

II. WE NEED TO RELY ON GOD IN EVERYTHING.

God is not indifferent or distant. **Verse 12:** *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."*

A. To show grace to people who treat you badly takes faith, and it tests faith.

In **verse 12**, Peter is still quoting David from **Psalm 34**. At the top of **Psalm 34** (what's called the superscription), it says the occasion for the Psalm was when David had *changed his behavior before Abimelech so that he drove him out and he went away*. So we know this Psalm was written during a season in David's life where his faith was tested.

This season of testing begins around **1 Samuel 20**. At this time, King Saul is still the king, but David has already been chosen by God to replace him. Saul, in his bitterness, wants to kill David, but Saul's son Jonathan warns David, and David flees with a few followers. A series of things take place during this season. David lies to a priest to get provisions, and later, when Saul finds out, he kills the priest and many of his family members. David knows that he is to blame. After this, he flees to Gath, where the heathen king is told that he is in the city. David is now afraid the king will kill him, so he acts insane, scribbling on the gates of the city and letting his saliva run down his beard. So the king says, this can't be the famous warrior David! Get him out of here.

So he escapes by pretending to be insane. There is another incident that takes place in this season in David's life that is worth mentioning. Once again, when David and his men need provisions, there is a man named Nabal who shows David such ingratitude and disrespect that David sets out to punish him. But on the way, David is met by Nabal's wife, Abigail. Abigail speaks wisdom. Abigail appeals to David to act like the king he was destined to be and to allow God to deal with his enemies. Abigail asked David to do what Peter is asking us to do: *live now in light of what God has promised you will be*. There had been times when David had acted in a God-honoring way. Twice he had spared Saul when he could have killed him. But there were other times when he had fallen short. David would have acted foolishly in taking revenge and seeking payback on Nabal had Abigail not intervened. He chose to listen, and God rewarded him.

One scholar suggests David, in **Psalm 34**, is looking at the whole season in his life. He thought he got what he wanted when he lied to the priest but did he have to lie? People were hurt. He escaped the king when he acted like a mad man. Was his safety dependent on his scheming, or would God have delivered him because of his grace? With Nabal, he impulsively went for payback. He was on his way to attack him, but Abigail's wisdom helped him see the truth of **verse 12**. *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*" Of course, we cannot say with certainty much of what was going on in the heart of David but what **Psalm 34** says he learned and what Peter quotes and applies to us. Is that God is always watching and listening, and he will care for us and bless us. To show grace to people who treat you badly takes faith, and it tests faith. Maybe that is one of the reasons it is so precious to God. It shows we are relying on him.

B. We have good reason to share grace and rely on God for justice.

Verse 12: *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.*

1. God is not distant or indifferent. The Heidelberg Catechism has a section on the Providence of God, the doctrine, or teaching that tells us God upholds and governs all things. In one section, it asks the question: (Q. 28) *What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by his providence?* It then offers this answer: *We can be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and*

with a view to the future, we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from his love; for all creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they cannot so much as move.

Illustration: There is an old story from the fourth century about a famous early Christian named Sisoës. He lived in the desert, and many people came to him for wisdom. One day a young man came to him who was angry at some injustice that had been done to him. He said, "I want revenge." Sisoës told him to let it go and leave it to God. But he said he couldn't do that until he got even. When Sisoës saw that the young man was bent on payback, he said, "Okay, brother, but let's pray." After a pause, he prayed: "*O God, apparently we no longer need you to take care of us since we can now avenge ourselves. From now on, we can manage our own lives without your help.*" Sometimes I wonder if we were to take our thinking, or maybe our habitual and unthinking, reactions and turn them into prayers. Maybe, I wonder if we would see more clearly what we are really doing? In the story, it was as the monk prayed like that that the young man realized his passion for payback really was a refusal to trust in God, and he repented. It is trust in God that enables us to be gracious with others, and choosing to be gracious with others forces us to trust more deeply in God. **1 Peter 2:22-23** says of Jesus; *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.* You have to entrust yourself to God.

2. When we choose to rely on God and show grace, God promises to bless us. Listen to How Jesus says it. **Luke 6:35-38** says, *But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. 36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. 38 "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; 38 give, and it will be given to you. Good measure pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."* It is not that our imperfect generosity earns God's blessing. It's just that God, as our gracious Father who wants us to love life and see good days, can not pour out his blessings on an ungracious life. God will not encourage our passion for payback or richly bless us while we indulge it. It's a pretty huge test of faith, isn't it? If you want to love life and see good days, choose this path, choose grace.

Conclusion

Everything begins with the grace God shows us. Grace, by definition, is not earned. It is a gift that you receive. The book of **1 Peter** is written to people who have already been accepted and given a new heart and a new hope because of grace. A crucial verse in the entire book of 1 Peter is **1 Peter 2:24-25**. *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds, you have been healed. 25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.* You can't show grace until you know grace. You have to receive it first and let it work from the inside.

How do you do that?

1.) Well, you have to admit that you have sinned against God, and you need for him to show you love and kindness that you do not deserve.

2.) You have to believe, as the verse we just read says. That He - Christ - *himself bore our sins in his body on the tree*. Your sins deserve condemnation, but God showed grace and mercy, and in Jesus, through the sacrifice of Jesus, God made a way for the just demands of righteousness to be satisfied and for sinful people to receive grace.

3.) You have to personally turn to him and trust in him. You receive God's grace by trusting in Jesus as your Savior.

4.) Then, as someone who has been given grace, if you want to love life, you share that grace. When you deprive others of grace, it distorts your personality. It does something to you. You can't think right. You can't feel right. You can't live right. You have to know that Jesus is right. Peter is right. ***If you want to love life, you have to show grace.***

Amen.

A Prayer for Receiving Christ

Almighty God, You have beautifully revealed your love in Jesus whose body was broken, whose blood was shed for our salvation. I confess my sins and admit my need for your saving grace. I have gone my own way and sinned against you. I turn to Christ, the bread of life and trust in him for my redemption. I believe he died on the cross to pay for my sins and rose again as Lord and Savior. I receive and rest on him alone for my salvation. Grant me the eternal life promised to all who come to him in faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Lord Jesus, My desire is to love life and see good days! Forgive the foolishness sinfulness into which I so often fall. Forgive the impulse to repay evil with evil, to offer payback instead of grace. Help me, by your Holy Spirit, to be so full of gratitude and trust that I gladly turn from evil to do good. Let me seek peace and pursue it. Let me always live in the knowledge that your eyes are on me and your ears hear my prayers. I ask in the name of my Savior, Jesus, Amen.

A Prayer for People who need Christ.

I pray not only for myself and the church but also for others who also need Christ. Please send your Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of the people you have placed in my life, to draw them to Jesus and make them kingdom laborers. I ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

¹ Life Together, p. 107

² https://www.dannyhayes.org/uploads/6/9/8/5/69858539/kalmoe_mason_ncapsa_2019_-_lethal_partisanship_-_final_lmedit.pdf