

Startled by Grace Part 11: “A House of Grace”

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What does it mean to live in a House of Grace? What does it look like? And what are the possibilities for Knoxville? **How might we...and the people of our city, be transformed by a House of Grace?**

There are startling, beautiful things about living in a House of Grace.

But before we get there, we'll need to build a foundation, so **let's dive into the Scriptures!**

If you have your Bibles, your “ibles” or devices of all kinds....turn {or scroll} with me to **2 Corinthians Chapter 12, Verse 8...**

This is the Apostle Paul, speaking about a “thorn in his flesh”...a source of torment, a struggle, a hardship...anybody in the room ever have any of those?

Yeah...me too. So this is Paul speaking about a conversation between himself and God about this “thorn” he's faced with in his life:

“...Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU, for my power is made perfect in weakness...””

Is it ok if I involve you in the preaching today? You don't have to do anything scary :-)

Just look at someone next to you and tell them: “Grace is enough.”

Now let's look at a couple more verses... **John Chapter 1, Verses 14 & 16...**

“...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. 16 For from his fullness we have all received,

GRACE UPON GRACE...

Next...Romans Chapter 5, Verse 19....

“...One man disobeyed God, and many became sinners. In the same way, one man obeyed God, and many will be made right. 20 The law came to make sin worse. But WHEN SIN GREW WORSE, GOD’S GRACE INCREASED. 21 Sin once used death to rule us, BUT GOD GAVE PEOPLE MORE OF HIS GRACE so that grace could rule by making people right with him. And this brings life forever through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Look at someone else next to you and tell them: “There’s always enough Grace”.

And last...Ephesians Chapter 2, Verse 18...

“...So you are no longer outsiders and strangers. You are citizens together with God’s people. You are also members of God’s family. 20 You are a building that is built on the apostles and prophets. They are the foundation. Christ Jesus himself is the most important stone in the building. 21 The whole building is held together by him. It rises to become a holy temple because it belongs to the Lord. 22 And because you belong to him, you too are being built together. You are being made into a house where God lives through his Spirit.”

Ok, let’s get REALLY crazy on this last one :-)...on the row in front of you, tap someone on the shoulder and tell them: “God is building a House of

Grace.”

...

The Information Age is appropriately named. And it's an amazing...and CRAZY era in which to live.

There has never been a time in human history when we've had more sheer *data* at our fingertips...

One of my favorite Bible teachers says **we have “infinity in our pockets”, aka the iPhone...**

You just keep scrolling, and the information goes on, and on, and on, and on....

Sometimes It's a bit like trying to drink from Niagara Falls. We come to the “fountain” of information hoping to be refreshed...and instead we walk away drenched, and still thirsty.

There's a difference between drinking something, and drowning in it, right?

And we find that maybe...an overabundance of information is not making life *easier*...it's actually making it HARDER.

Maybe I'm just getting old, but do any of you ever find yourself contemplating just rolling the car window down, and flinging your iPhone OUT???? :-)

Among the many fruits the information age bears is a multiplicity of opinion.

Worldviews abound.

In times past, the world {or at least our perceptions of it} was more easily comprehended...there were a few prevailing views at most. Now there are thousands...maybe even millions.

Sometimes it is hard to imagine a world more divided than the one we live in.

One of the great ironies of our era is the fact that rather than uniting humanity, it appears that the abundance of information has actually caused us to become more divergent.

We are the most connected, yet DISconnected society in the history of the world.

Our technology and the deluge of information allows us to remain separated from others...while passing judgment on them.

We have “knowledge”, but we don’t actually KNOW the people we have so much knowledge about.

So we live in pockets of reality; packets of data. Tribes of thought.

And we have little patience for those outside our particular packet.

Some of us are Democrats. Some of us are Republicans. Some of us don’t want to be either.

Some are followers of Jesus. Some follow other teachings. Some follow nothing; simply wandering at the whim of their emotions, and the newest packets of information.

Some think we should spend. Others think we should save.

Healthcare. Warfare. Security. Sexuality. Education. Safety. The Climate. Natural resources. Equality. Even Life itself.

All issues hotly debated.

And I’m not even scratching the surface.

As many issues as you can name, there are differing opinions about them...and if we’re honest...there is little love for those who hold a different opinion than we do.

We shake our heads and write them off.

We call them crazy. We demonize them. **We say they're "part of the problem"**.

Anybody else hate that phrase? Yeah, me too...

The PROBLEM is, we never stop to think that **maybe the PROBLEM is that we view PEOPLE as problems.**

And then... we walk away.

Back to our information packets. Back to our divided views. Back to our fractal existence, to shower ourselves in self-righteousness.

In the Information Age, we are experiencing an abundance of opinion, but a shortage of Grace. And the cracks in the fabric of society grow wider. The chasm between the hearts of humankind expands.

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I know...it's heavy right? "Thank you Jereme, for encouraging us SO MUCH this morning" :-)

"Appreciate that edifying start to your sermon, I feel great now" :-)

THANKFULLY, there is another way.

What if I told you that in the midst of an unforgiving, divided world, there is a way to live in peace...

Even with those we disagree with? Even with those who we think are wrong. Even those who have DONE wrong to us...

What if I told you there is a way for brokenness and division to be healed?

It's called Forgiveness, it's called Grace, It's the trailhead of the Way of

Jesus....and it is the doorway into the Kingdom of God.

Because God's Family lives in a House of Grace.

The past couple of months at The Calling, we've been in a study about the Lord's Prayer.

We wanted to dig into the question: "What would God want us to pray for?"

Well, it turns out Jesus actually answered that question, by giving us an amazing example or "template" for prayer.

And we discovered that The Lord's Prayer, when you really break it down, is actually a Prayer for God's Kingdom to come...for His Will to be done in earth as it is in Heaven.

It tells us what God's Will actually IS...and what His Kingdom looks like when that Will is done.

**“Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven....
SO — Give us this day our daily bread...
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory
forever.**

Do you see the context now? Jesus is telling us that:

When God's Kingdom comes, there is daily bread.

When God's Kingdom comes, we are forgiven...and WE forgive.

When God's Kingdom comes, we are delivered from evil...

So.....What is so important about Forgiveness, that Jesus would include it in His list of essential things to pray for?

I mean, there must be something important going on there, right? :-)

The first and most obvious thing Jesus is trying to teach us, is:

WE NEED TO BE FORGIVEN.

The words He uses in Matthew are “forgive us our debts”In Luke, He says “forgive us our sins”.

So we find Jesus using two different descriptive words to describe the same problem.

The word Jesus used for “debt” is describing a “piled up debt”.

Anybody ever been there? **More bills than paycheck? Like “oh no, we’re NEVER gonna be able to pay this off!!!”**

That’s the picture Jesus is painting here of the “debt” of sin...

Speaking of sin...the word he uses for that is “hah-mar-tee-ah”...

And it literally means “to miss the target”... “to make an error”.

Let’s be honest for a second...

Is there a single one of us in this room today who hasn’t “missed it” on

something every now and then?

Ever judged someone too harshly, and in the end they turned out to be ok after all? Yep...THAT was “missing the mark”.

Ever let someone down when they were counting on you?

Ever told a lie? Tweaked your tax return a bit? :-)

Maybe for you, it's more serious than that...maybe you've done major damage to someone by your actions...or maybe your in-actions...

Ever failed to make time for your husband or wife? Neglected something your kids needed?

Been angry when you should have been kind instead?

Been selfish rather than generous?

The list goes on and on and on and on... But you get the idea.

What I'm doing here is illustrating the idea we find in Scripture that ALL of us have sinned...all of us have “missed the target”, in some way or another...

And if we're reeeeeeeaaaaaalllllly honest...most of us do it in some way or another every single day.

And here's another key point....**WE USUALLY DON'T EVEN MEAN TO!!!!!!**

Now, **I don't have time this morning to do a full teaching on the Biblical paradigm of sin.**

You're Welcome :-)

But I do want to take just a second, to **dispel a myth about sin that really doesn't come from the Bible....instead it comes from Bible-Belt culture.**

I don't want to mess with your theology...I just want you to have RIGHT

theology :-)

So let's start with this: **Sin IS a big deal. And it's very real.** So real in fact, that the Bible actually describes it as a type of autonomous "force"...a "law", to use the words of Paul... The "law of sin".

Now, I know **we are a group of very diverse backgrounds...** some of us here were basically born onto a church pew, and to us the idea of sin is so familiar that it's not threatening at all {which - sidenote, is a very DANGEROUS state to find ourselves in}.....

But **to others of us, all this Bible stuff is less familiar...**you're just trying to wrap your head around this whole story of Jesus, His Death, Burial and Resurrection...and **what it all even MEANS.**

And maybe to you, the idea of sin is well....SCARY!!!!

It sounds like **this thing that everyone is guilty of...and that due to that fact, God is ANGRY.**

You may have heard a theology of sin that portrays God as "putting up with it"....but rest assured, those awful sinners...YOU awful sinners... will PAY in the end.... And the whole narrative usually wraps with the promise of JUDGMENT.

You've heard it said that sin is basically YOUR FAULT, and that God is not happy with you because of that fact.

You've heard people make a big, big, BIG deal out of sin...wait for it... USING FAULTY INFORMATION!!!!!!!

The fact is, the Bible doesn't teach the paradigm of sin that most of us have in our heads.

Instead, in **Romans Chapter 5, through Chapter 8, we find this beautiful, life-changing treatise on sin, redemption and the Love of God.**

I'd encourage you to read it...if you want to understand what the Bible REALLY teaches about sin, it's in this section.

But let me sum it up for you :-)

SIN IS NOT YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

In fact, sin is a “law”it is a dark force, at work AGAINST US...keeping us from the GOOD that we really WANT to do....and the GOD we were created to know.

It is a force that we are POWERLESS against on our own...which is why we need to be RESCUED from it by Someone who has ALL POWER... I think you know Who I'm talking about :-)

Listen to the words of Paul as he describes it: {Romans 7:18-25}

“...For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

You see what I'm talking about? The Bible teaches that sin is an enemy combatant, fighting against us in the battle for our souls.

Sin is not you, it's something warring AGAINST you! AND GOD IS NOT MAD AT YOU FOR THAT!!!!!!!!!!

In fact the opposite...He has rolled up His sleeves, and waded into the fight on your behalf...

He knew you couldn't beat sin, so He did it for you!!! He knew you'd have to pay the penalty for sin, so He paid it for you in advance!

He knew that only blood could atone for sin...so He gave His own.

He knew the wages of sin is death...so He went ahead and cashed that paycheck...

Listen carefully...GOD IS NOT WAITING TO JUDGE YOU FOR YOUR SIN — HE IS OFFERING TO FORGIVE YOU FOR IT!!!!!!

God is inviting you into a new life...God is inviting you to be part of His Family, to live in a House of Grace.

So how exactly does God feel about your sin? How does God feel about forgiving? For an example, we can turn to the parable of the Prodigal Son...

It's found in Luke Chapter 15, and in it, Jesus tells the story of a man who had two sons...the story of a House of Grace.

The youngest son asks for his inheritance BEFORE his father dies...which was a HUGE insult to his Father.

And **he takes his inheritance and leaves his family**, going off to a foreign place, and spending his fortune on "riotous" or "unsafe" living. Translated, he squandered it on selfish pleasures...

Can you believe this guy!?!? First the insult to his Father, then he just wastes what he's been given...

Talk about "missing the mark"! He's not even AIMING at it! :-)

Jesus uses an interesting phrase in the story here... "but when he came to himself".

When he realized his mistake...when he saw his shortcomings...when he realized he was missing the target...

The prodigal decides he will go back to his Father and....ASK FORGIVENESS!!!!

But he doesn't think he deserves to be FULLY forgiven. Instead he decides he'll ask to just become a servant in his father's house... "Just let me be hired help... because I'm not worthy to be your son anymore."

And so he heads back home...

And what is God's response when this gold-medalist of missing the mark realizes the error of his ways? **{You DO know the Father in the story is GOD right? :-}** And you and I are the sinful son? That's the story Jesus is telling....}

So how does God respond? Let's look at Luke 15:20 together....

"...And he arose and came to his father. But WHILE HE WAS STILL A LONG WAY OFF, HIS FATHER SAW HIM AND FELT COMPASSION, AND RAN AND EMBRACED HIM AND KISSED HIM. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate."

Now, what you have to understand in order to appreciate what's happening here, is that it was considered disgraceful for a patriarch to "run" in that culture.

People of consequence did not "run", it was considered "undignified".

So here is **this Father...who has been disgraced by his sons actions...**he dishonored him by taking his inheritance early, he dishonored him by spending it on meaningless junk...

Here is this Father who has been done wrong, disgraced by his son...and He is WAITING FOR HIM!

HE SAW HIM A 'LONG WAY OFF'.

You can imagine the Father, every day...same time, same place...as the sun sets on another day...just hoping, just wishing, just watching...for his son to come home.

And on THIS day, his heart LEAPS for joy as he sees the silhouette of his son on top of the ridge-line, as he heads down the path toward home...

And the Father RUNS to meet him!!!! Throwing dignity to the wind...forgetting the disgrace...forgetting the dishonor...all he wants is HIS SON!!!!!!

This is how God sees the "debt" of our sin....the heaped up pile of our mistakes...all the times we've "missed it".

HE FORGETS IT ALL...AND RUNS TO MEET US.

And welcomes us back to His House of Grace.

...

Now...over the years I've spent as a minister, I've found that **most of us—just like the Prodigal Son—don't fully grasp the Amazing Grace of our Heavenly Father.**

And we come to ourselves, we realize the error of our ways, we recognize the heaped up, hot mess of our debt, and we come to God and ask for His forgiveness.

And like the Prodigal Son, we only expect a bit of mercy...

“Maybe he’ll be willing to give me a place to sleep...and some food to eat.”

“Maybe I can just be a servant...”

“Maybe he’ll just let me hang around the fringes”

Some of you in this room may see yourselves, and God like that...

And you understand the mercy of God...that He’s willing to pay your debt, forgive your sin.

You get to go to heaven when you die, and you’re thankful for that, because you KNOW you don’t deserve it.

But that’s really all...and you think that **the things you could have been... SHOULD have been — well, those are gone forever.**

And **what you expect from God is a servant’s welcome, and a servant’s salary**...just a roof over your head, and something to keep you from starving.

All you ask is for a bit of mercy...but you need to understand that **GRACE goes far beyond mercy.**

Grace is not content for you to be ANYTHING less than EVERYTHING God created you to be.

Grace will never settle for you living in the barracks, while the family gathers in the house without you.

Grace cannot leave the traces of guilt and shame echoing in your heart late at night while you lie awake reliving your mistakes.

Grace teaches us that God doesn’t have any “2nd rate sons”...

You can’t come back to this Father and just be an employee...HE WON’T LET YOU!!!!

He’ll give you nothing less than His best, because His Grace is sufficient for the

worst sin you can perpetrate, and the most difficult struggles you can possibly encounter.

No matter what you've done...No matter what you're facing: GRACE. IS. ENOUGH.

Think you've "out-sinned" the perfect Plan of God for your life? Not a chance!!!!

Back to our opening Scriptures — That's what John was talking about when he said we have received "**Grace UPON Grace**".

The Law of the Old Testament was a Grace from God in that it provided people with the possibility to be forgiven from their sins, and to be servants of God.

But that wasn't enough for God...so He piled another dispensation on top of that...stacked Grace on top of Grace because:

GOD DOESN'T SEE YOU AS A SERVANT...HE SEES YOU AS A SON. HE SEES YOU AS A DAUGHTER.

And if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new!!!!

God is not content to allow you to be a shadow of what you COULD HAVE been, instead in His Grace, He is making you better than you ever WOULD HAVE been!!!!

Just when we think that the Grace of God is not enough for our predicament, that we have exhausted the supply...that's when Grace abounds all the more!

You want to know what happens when there's not enough Grace? GOD GIVES MORE GRACE!!!!

Ephesians 4 says that we are all given Grace according to the "Measure" of Christ's gift to us.

The Greek word used in that verse is “**Metron**” and it literally describes a **measuring stick**...

So the picture is that **Jesus has literally “measured out” Grace as a gift to us.**

That means that before you ever even missed the target, before you ever messed up...Jesus measured out sufficient Grace for you!

And this is why we can never exhaust the Grace of God for our lives...the exact amount of Grace that we need has ALREADY BEEN MEASURED OUT FOR US!!!

THERE’S ALWAYS ENOUGH GRACE.

And our Father sits on the Front Porch of Eternity, just watching for our return...

Tapping on the porch rail with a measuring stick He’s already used to portion out the Grace needed to restore us... just waiting to welcome us back into the House.

And I hope that if you’re here, and I’ve just described how you feel about your past...that God startles you with His Grace today.

Because in God’s House of Grace, you have no past...only a future.

...

Now, as amazing as all of that is...would you believe that it gets even better than that!!!??? :-)

As life-changing as being startled by the Grace of our Father is...**that’s only half of His plan for Grace in your life.**

And the second half is even better than the first — more difficult — but even more beautiful.

So take a mental step back with me to the Lord's Prayer again...

“Forgive us our debts” ...anybody remember the 2nd half of the verse?

“AS WE FORGIVE our debtors.”

Jesus is teaching us in the Lord's Prayer, that not only do we need to be forgiven...we also need to forgive.

In fact, He immediately follows the Lord's Prayer with this statement:

“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you.

But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins...” {Matt. 6:14-15}

You see...**Grace comes to us with a caveat.**

God's Grace toward us is endless...it's abounding and boundless...it's Grace UPON Grace.

But our ability to receive that Grace is conditioned on our willingness to give it to others.

This point is so important to Jesus, that He reiterates it again in Mark Chapter 11...again talking about prayer, Jesus says:

“...WHENEVER YOU STAND PRAYING, if you have anything against anyone, FORGIVE him, THAT YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN MAY ALSO FORGIVE YOU your trespasses.” {Mark 11:25}

So why is this idea so important to Jesus?

Why does He care so much about it that He tells us to forgive EVERY TIME WE

PRAY?

Because...

GRACE BRINGS US INTO GOD'S KINGDOM

God lives in a House of Grace...and Grace is the key that opens the door.

So **Back to where we started today...**

To the divided, fractured world we live in.

To all the differing opinions. All the ways in which we've been wronged.

All the ways in which we count others "wrong".

And it's probably safe to say that most of us here tonight want to see God's Kingdom come to this world.

We want to see HIS Will be done, rather than all the mess and dysfunction we see around us.

But if we're honest, it's not always easy to let go of our feelings toward others...

Oh, it's easy enough to ASK forgiveness...but it's a whole lot tougher to GIVE it...

It's easy to focus on "their sin"...to hang on to why someone is in the wrong.

But we forget that **the same Father who is looking out the windows of eternity, watching for you and me to come home...**

That same God is watching for the people who have sinned against US to come home.

Cheating spouses. Crooked business partners. Abusive parents. Terrorists.

The same Father is hoping THEY will come home just like you.

Just like me.

And the problem we're faced with is this.....

When I hang onto THEIR sin, that becomes MY sin...thus keeping me from being forgiven myself.

And here's the thing... THEY DON'T HAVE TO 'DESERVE' FORGIVENESS!!!!!! Jesus simply tells us to FORGIVE THEM ANYWAY...

Because He knows better than anyone....that NONE of us deserve to be forgiven.

But God's Grace is greater than what we deserve.

And when Jesus paid the price for sin...He paid the price for ALL SIN...even the ones perpetrated against you & me.

So World Peace is built right into the Lord's Prayer.

What if instead of bombs, we gave forgiveness?

What if we loved instead of fighting?

What if we FOLLOWED JESUS INTO FORGIVING THE UNFORGIVABLE?

No mistake about it... We are never more like our Lord than when we forgive the unforgivable.

Because that's how the Kingdom of Heaven comes to Earth!!!!

God Loves us enough to forgive us...and to command that we forgive EACH OTHER.

And WHAT IF WE WERE BRAVE ENOUGH TO GIVE GRACE TO PEOPLE

WHO DON'T DESERVE IT?

What if in the midst of our divided, fractured, opinionated Information Age, you and I could be a startling source of Grace?

Can you imagine how that would change the world!!!!???

How that would change KNOXVILLE???

How that would change your home???

What if in you, and in me, the people of our city found startling Grace?

What if we forgave their mistakes...even when they've undeniably done us wrong?

Imagine what could happen in their hearts if we looked past the points of disagreement and loved them anyway.

And what if the Grace we show others, becomes the path that leads them home to the Father, and opens the door for their new lives as Sons and Daughters of God?

Ultimately, that's what God wants more than anything else...for each and every one of us to find our home in the House of Grace.

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I'd like to end by giving you an opportunity to actually put this into practice.

So do this for me: **if you have a smart phone**, take it out right now, and open whatever app you use to take notes.

Or, if you are fighting the Information Age, and **DON'T** have a smart phone, just grab a pen and paper :-)

And I want you to write down two words:

First, write down “**Others**”. Then scroll down, or flip the paper over...and write “**Me**”.

So 1st...

•**Ask God to identify any unforgiveness you hold toward anyone.** Is there someone you need to forgive? And I want you to **write their name down under “Others”**.

Just take a few seconds, and let God show you who needs Grace from you.

Now, what do you need to forgive them of? What is their “debt”? Just summarize it in a couple of words, and write that down next to their name.

Now: **What would it look like for you to remove that debt?**

Do you need to call them? Send a text? Have a cup of coffee?

Or maybe it’s simpler than that...maybe you just need to walk across the room after service and talk to them :-)

Maybe you just need to acknowledge it in your own heart & mind, and release them from whatever they did to you.

But **whatever God speaks to your heart as a means of releasing or forgiving them**, just write that down...and now I challenge you to **DO IT before this week is over**.

GIVE GRACE TO THOSE WHO NEED IT FROM YOU.

Now **let’s symbolically begin that...if you’re ready to forgive that person, I want you to just delete their mistake...just erase it like it was never even there.**

2nd... Scroll down, or flip the page over...

•**Ask God to identify anything for which *you* need to be forgiven.** How have

you “missed the target”? What “debt” have you amassed? Once He shows you...once you clearly see your sin...write it down.

Now just take a moment...you don't have to raise your hand, you don't even have to pray out loud...but **ask Him to forgive you — to remove your debt, to erase your errors.**

ASK GOD FOR THE GRACE YOU NEED...HE'S ALREADY MEASURED OUT JUST THE RIGHT AMOUNT.

Now, **as a symbol of His Grace toward you, go ahead and delete YOUR mistakes...because that's exactly what Jesus has done.**

Let's close with prayer....

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